

[TEST TONE] Yeah, well--

Well, just look at me. Don't even worry about the camera, because we'll follow.

Hello. I'm Marilyn Goodman. With me is Wiera Goldman. She is a survivor. Thank you, Wiera, so much for participating in this important project.

You're welcome. It's a pleasure, being here. Only, the story I'm going to tell, it's not so pleasant.

Well, we'd like to begin with your present life. Can you tell us a little bit about what life is like today for you?

OK. I am a widow. I have two kids-- a son, 37, and a daughter, 36. She's married. I have two beautiful grandchildren.

I live alone in a house. I am self-supporting.

Do your children live in town?

Yes, my daughter lives here in Cleveland. My son is in Los Angeles.

You mentioned you're a widow. What kind of work did your husband do?

My husband was a custom tailor. We used to have a business on tailor. We were very successful, till he got sick on Parkinson disease. And I had to give up the business and take care on him. That was very hard for me, because that was another survival-- to start over again, to survive.

Now, we're going to go back a little bit. Can you tell us what life was like before the war? Let's go back to, let's say, 1938. Where were you living?

In 1938, I was living in Vilna, Poland.

And how old were you at about that time?

1938, I was about 17.

Were you still living at home?

Yes, I was living at home with my parents, with my sister and my brother. And--

Did anyone else live in your home?

No. This was my family. We were three kids.

OK, so did you have a boyfriend at that time?

Yes, I had a lot of friends, you know. And we had a big family. And in Europe, a family is even the third second cousins-- third generations. It's a family. We were very happy children, growing up in a nice home.

And your family-- would you say they were well-off or poor?

No, we weren't rich, but we were very comfortable living. My father was a salesman for the army, to buy food. And my mother never worked. And we lived a very comfortable life-- very comfortable life.

What was Vilna like? Was it big or small?

Well, Vilna was a beautiful, beautiful state. It was a culture one. It was in Jewish, Polish, and Lithuanian. A matter of fact, the rabbi, the [NON-ENGLISH], is knowing the Vilna [NON-ENGLISH]-- he was a very big man, a very big rabbi, who didn't survive. And I went to school.

What kind of school did you go to? Were they Jewish schools or a regular school?

I start in a Jewish kindergarten. And then I went-- it was, like, from-- from the government, a school--

Mhm? A public school.

--a public school, which I-- they taught us Polish. But when I came home, I spoke Yiddish-- but in school, Polish. I graduate. It was like high school. And I had beautiful friends. I grew up in a very nice atmosphere.

How religious was your family?

My family was religious, like Jewish people-- not extreme. Friday, before candle lighting, my father would throw away the cigarette, and he wouldn't light it till after Shabbos. We weren't allowed to write, sew-- anything. We respect our elderly, and this is the way I grew up.

Did Zionism or any other political organization play a part in the life of your family?

No. No, not exactly. But I start-- I belong to the Hashomer Hatzair.

And what was that?

This is like [PAUSES] the working party. You know? And I was a very active member.

I also belonged to a Girl Scout. I was a Girl Scout. And I tell my children, and they don't believe it. You, Grandma, you were a girl-- and I says, yes, I was. And I'm start to telling my grandchildren what Grandma was before.

Were there books in your home?

Yes. We had a lot of books. We had Jewish books. We had Polish books.

Like I said, Vilna was a very culture place. We didn't have television. We had radio. So we read a lot.

Were there theatres in your neighborhood?

Yes-- not in my neighborhood, not where I lived, but it was in town. It was Jewish theatres. It was Polish too. We had opera theater. We had movies. And I still see some of the movies they used to show in Europe and translate in Polish. It was English and Polish. You know?

So it was-- like I say, I grew up in a very good surrounding and respected. And like I say, it's a shame that my parents didn't survive and see the life the way I'm going on now. They never lived to see grandchildren, great-grandchildren.

How do you remember yourself in those days?

Before the war?

Right.

Well, I remember myself as a very shy girl, very good-hearted-- shared things with people.

Were you healthy?

Yes. I was healthy. Well, I went through some operations-- appendix and tonsils.

Did you have any special interests?

Yes, I liked sport very much. But when I finished high school-- I have a family. I had a big family from my mother's side in Brazil. And the first--

One of my uncles, my mother's oldest brother, went to Brazil before the war. And then he sent some papers for a sister and a husband and a daughter. And a month ago, I met my cousin, whom I haven't seen for 50 years, from Brazil. She came in here. When she left Brazil, she was three years old.

And I met her. She came for four hours, from New York, to meet me. You can imagine this-- unbelievable.

Yes, it must have been wonderful.

Unbelievable. I was supposed to go with my grandmother to Brazil. And they wrote us a letter, I shouldn't go higher to school. I should go to a trade school and learn a trade-- which, I signed up for three years-- sewing. Because it was very important, when I come to Brazil and I have a trade, then I can go to school but I have a trade. Meantime, I had a trade, and I didn't go to Brazil. My grandmother died.

Oh, is that why you didn't go to Brazil.

Yeah. And if I would go with my grandmother, my parents would come, and we would all be alive. But since my grandmother died, this was it.

I went to school for three years. I graduate in 1937. And-- excuse me-- and thanks to my sewing, I survived.

You feel that was an important--

Very important for me. It's too bad I couldn't save my sister.

Did you have any non-Jewish friends, in those days?

Yes. I had a lot of non-Jewish friends, because, on the street, neighbors. We were Orthodox, but my parents taught me that nationality doesn't mean a thing. We have to be friends.

I even used to go to church with my friends, to see a wedding. And my parents knew that I have my religion, and this is my friends, and nothing will hurt me.

One of my uncles married, and he opened a not-kosher butcher shop. We used to go there, and he used to give us all kind of things, and we would bring home. And my mother was-- no, you cannot bring it home.

So she couldn't help it. She made us a special place, with towels, with a knife. Here, you're not allowed to take it out. So this kind of parents, I had, you know? It was-- how should I say-- they didn't overdo. They weren't old-fashioned.

Very flexible.

And they believed in us. Let's put it this way-- especially me, because I was the oldest.

Do you remember anything about antisemitism in those days?

Oh, yes, a lot. [PAUSES] Nobody liked the Jews. But there was always one Jew who is exception for the Poles, you

know? But we have a lot of-- in a water, we have all kinds of fish. Certainly, it starts that they made pogroms on the Jews-- the Poles.

Do you remember any of these pogroms?

Yes, I do.

Like, what kinds of things would happen?

They would happen-- they would, like, say the Jews did something wrong, but they didn't. And then they start up to fight and demonstrate. And stores they would pick, that-- don't go to this store, because a Jew is there. But it didn't start till it was closer to the war, because the president we had, Pilsudski-- I don't know if you know the history from Poland-- he was the best president. To him, a nationality was not important-- a person. And when he died, this is the [NON-ENGLISH] start.

You know, we couldn't walk home late. I would let my friends just pass me the bridge and go home, because I was afraid, when they go back, the boys, the Polish boys, would beat them up. They used to have an expression-- excuse me-- [SPEAKING POLISH]. That means "against the Jews, the mens, but with the Jewish girls." You know? It was, in Polish, the expression is much, you know?

But sure, it was. But we had good Poles, too. But actually what we find out-- who our neighbors are when they put us in the ghetto.

Now, before we get to that, we're sort of at 1938. In 1939, what happened?

In 1939, well, the war had broke out already. And [PAUSES] the Russian came in. And when the Russian came in, they stayed for a while. You know, maybe they stayed for a year.

In the beginning, it wasn't hard for us, because we had freedom. I wasn't worried that my father was-- by the Russians, we were rich.

And when I finished school and I got my diploma, I went to work as a dressmaker by a cousin of mine who had a big place-- you know, a big, exclusive sewing. And I wanted to go into the union-- to the uni. They wouldn't take me in, because my father was self-employed. So I had to have protection, to take me in.

But we had a normal life-- you know-- didn't bother us with the Russians were there, because the only one they bothered-- the businesspeople-- they took away the business. They [PAUSES] took over right away-- they were the bosses in everything. The boss was a foreman already, and they were the bosses. Even the stores.

And they start to take out everything from Vilna. They were going with trucks, day and night, day and night, to take out to Russia. Because we had very exclusive things. You know?

A lot of American people asked me, did you have it in Vilna? I says, come on. You know, don't ask me stupid question. Did I have it in Vilna?

Did I have a switch to turn on a light? I said, what do you think? From where did I come-- from the moon?

First I went out to hang clothes. A neighbor comes out, and she said I have to clip it-- the clothes on the hanger. And I says, wait a minute. We don't hang like this. We hang upside down. She said, oh, yeah? I know you clip it, but do you had a switch?

Do you know what ice is? I said, sure. We put in ice and came out water. You know, it's like--

They didn't understand what kind of life you had--

It's like we would come from the moon.

OK, so when the Russians were there, things weren't too bad.

No, it wasn't too bad. As long as we didn't bother them, they didn't bother us. Let's put it this way. Then, you know, they gave Vilna to the Lithuanian. The Lithuanian came, and they took over, too, you know, like, put this one down, this one up. Then we had to go to school-- learn Lithuanian. It wasn't easy, but we did it.

Was the atmosphere different towards Jews at all then?

The same thing. It wasn't different. It was like-- you know, there is always a Pole who likes a Jew. He doesn't like it, you know? It's like-- it didn't bother me too much-- like to say this.

But the Lithuanian didn't stay too long, because they tore down the flag, the Lithuanian flag, from the city hall, and then they made a big pogrom. And matter of fact, my father was beat up too. And we were--

The Lithuanians made the pogrom.

Yes. Because-- you know--

And the flag--

--and the flag. And whom did they blame? The Jews, certainly. So the Russians came back, and they said, well, you cannot hold the city. We are here.

So they put up the Lithuanian flag and the Russian flag. And it was, like, in the banks were Russian-- you know, everything belonged already to the government. Nobody had anything to say. You know?

But we didn't feel nothing, till the real war broke out. And then the problem start.

When were you aware of the real problem?

When were we aware of the real problem? The war. The Germans.

So you heard about them before they got there.

Yeah, we heard already, before, but you know, we didn't believe it can happen to us. A matter of fact, my grandparents had a farm. of my mother's brother lived on the farm with a wife and two children. And we thought, if we go to the farm, we would have everything, because you didn't have enough food. Everything was on cards.

So my father had horses, and he took a horse and a big wagon, and we packed a lot of things to go on the farm and live in the country. They didn't let us go.

Who wouldn't let you go?

To pass the bridge-- the soldiers. Where are we going? They send us back. And it's good that we didn't go, because, when the Germans came, they took all the Jews out from the farms-- the men-- and they dig the grave and they killed them all. And they killed them even before the ghetto start.

Now, your grandfather was out on a farm--

No, my grandfather was dead already, and my grandmother was dead. That was my mother's brother, with a wife and two children. They still had the farm.

When did the Nazis enter Vilna?

The Nazis entered Vilna in September.

What happened, looking back, when they entered your town?

[SIGHS] When the Nazis came in, the first tanks who came in, [PAUSES] we were excited about it, because they were handsome guys. And we didn't know the trouble, what's going on. We didn't believe it.

Even-- I come back. Even when they bombed, the first time, Vilna, it was a Sunday, and everybody was at a soccer match. And we used to have exercise, you know, like, in case bombing or anything, that-- how to act. And when we heard the alarm, we thought it's for exercising, but it wasn't. It was the real-- the Germans, who start bombing Vilna. And this was the most horrible thing, for us, to hear right away how many people died and where to-- And this is the real war now. The Nazis are here. So when they came in, and when we saw them, it was like, they are human beings.

Right, you'd had other soldiers come before. You'd had the Russians--

The Russians, the Lithuanians. So they were handsome guys-- soldiers. And when they came in, we walked out and we said hello.

But my mother was telling us that she was in the First World War, and they were Germans too. But these Germans were different than these Germans OK?

And the first week was quiet. Nothing was going on-- you know, normal. And then it start. The first thing what they did-- they took away the men. They came in-- young boys. They wore the swastik thing. And right away, they became, like, Volksdeutsche. It's like they turned from Pole-- between the Pole and Germans. They are like a volk-- they are with the Germans, not with the Poles.

Young boys, 17 years old, came in, unexpected. And they took out all the mens-- as many as they could-- whoever was hidden, all right. My father was 41 years old. And they took him away.

So they came to your house--

Yes.

--fairly soon and took him away.

Took away as many men. And they took him to the jail. And somebody told us that they are taking out the men to work.

So I dressed up like a Polish girl-- a skirt, a blouse, you know, the-- and a cousin of mine-- her husband, they took her away, and she dressed up. We took a basket, like farmers. We passed a bridge, and they ask us where to go-- because where I lived, to go real in town we had to pass a bridge. Because [PAUSES] I forgot the name of the river. It will come to me back.

And we went to the jail-- to the street where the jail is-- to see a man-- my father. And she wanted to see her husband. Well, we didn't even recognize them anymore. They kept them for three days without food-- beaten up. And they killed them right to Ponary, where--

This is a name, Ponary, I don't know if you ever have somebody from Vilna will mention the name Ponary, what there, they killed them, and they there they killed a lot of Jews, on this place in Vilna. So when we came back, we said, this is it.

And you knew things were bad.

That's it. What can it be bad? We are women alone. But, before the war starts, like, my mother was-- they were baking bread and drying-- made, like, toasted bread and everything, in case it won't be food we will have it. And where did they hid it? Between the woods. Because in Europe, they burned the ovens with the woods.

So we had some big barns, and there we were hiding the food, that the-- if the Germans come, they shouldn't find. And the first thing what it start, right away, they closed us up. Till 3 o'clock, we could walk around-- do anything. They closed us up, right away. 3 o'clock, nobody could go out.

Then they put the star on us. Then we couldn't walk on the sidewalk. We had to walk on the street by the sidewalk.

And certainly, if you had the star, they knew you were a Jew. But many times I took off the star and walked on the-- but I had to be very careful. Even my Polish friends would point on me.

How disappointed I right away was in my Polish friends with whom I grew up. I couldn't believe it! That this, what they're going to do.

So when they closed us up, and we want it to be 3 o'clock-- they closed us up-- how can you just be, 3 o'clock, closed up? So we cut through from one house to the fences. And we used to get together in the evening, the young people, talking, and the parents together. You know, it's like family.

And then, suddenly, they used to come in, the Germans, at night and rape young girls. After they closed us up, they used to come, about 5, 6 o'clock, looking for young girls. We used to dress up like old ladies. We used to hide in the cellar.

Mine aunt, where she had a house, her cellar was under the dining-room table. And she had a big carpet. So when we heard noise, we ran to the cellar, they shouldn't find us.

One night, they knocked-- we had some dogs. They brought some meat for the dogs, and they put the dog in the place, you know, in the house. And they knocked on our door, to open them.

And we lived on the first floor. And my mother said, jump. Get out. And I jumped, and I went out in the bushes.

And my mother was a brave woman. And if she could do it-- they walked in, and they said, where's your older daughter? And my mother said, this is my two kids. I don't have any children.

Oh, yes, you have. And they wrecked the whole house. And they touched-- my sister was three years younger than me, and she said, don't touch the kid. If you want to touch, touch me. They were drunk, and they turned the house upside down, and they went away.

Did they leave her alone, though?

Yes, but they-- and I was crying, in the bushes, and I fall asleep. And in the morning, my mother start looking for me. And then I said, this is it. I want to go away.

I want to go to Russia. And my mother said no. And I said, please, let me go-- with all my friends.

So we packed, and we started going. But the Russians wouldn't let us cross the border. They said, if you are Communist, you fight there for your Communism. We weren't communists. We just wanted to go, you know.

And we always used to say, oh, it's so bad. It's so bad. So my grandma used to say, don't complain. It will get worse. What can it be worse? Don't complain.

By this time, did you know your father was dead? Or--

You know, they made up stories that they took them to work. I will come to the Seder. Then, in 1941, in September, they put us to the ghetto. How did they put us?

My uncle, who, when the young people, Germans, came to take out, somehow he was lucky. He hid under the bed, and they didn't insist where he is. And he still worked for the army. So one of the soldiers, he was the head of this-- a major or something. He said to my uncle--

He said, they're building up a ghetto for you, to put you in a ghetto. And my uncle said, no, it's impossible. He said, save as much as you can, because they will come in and in five minutes you have to leave the house.

So we saved as much as we could, and we give it away to the Polish neighbors. And they came in. In five minutes, we had to leave the house. So whatever we could grab, we grabbed. And they put us in the ghetto.

This ghetto was a Jewish place. All the street belonged to the Jews. They took all the Jews out. They killed them. They put us in. When we came into the ghetto, some of the houses-- it was like, how could you survive seeing that here is still the hot milk and here is still from a baby the bottle? And here is still the bed what the people went out.

They took them all to jail. And after this, they killed them and they made place for us to come in. And they still didn't have place for us to come in, so they had to make another ghetto.

So we had ghetto number 1, ghetto number 2. Then what they did-- they couldn't keep the two ghettos. They liquidate one. So whoever was lucky, they put in the big ghetto, where I was. And the other one, the rest, they killed.

So it's happened, when they were putting us to the ghettos, somehow my grandmother and my grandfather split. We didn't know how. So my grandmother was with us. My grandfather went to the other ghetto. So how should we get the grandfather there?

Somehow, we were lucky. We brought him back, and we were together. And then, in the ghettos, what it starts. They had too many people in the ghettos-- in this one ghetto, so they came out that, whoever man was taken away, if the wives with the children want to go, they are on a farm and they're working. Forget it.

And my cousin here, with three kids, we said, don't go. It's not true. She says, I want to go to my husband.

My mother wanted to go. I said, no way. You're not going. You're staying with us, because the father is not alive. Let them come with proofs, to show there is life.

They are dead! They were the first one they killed. Because they did it. That the women should be weak. You know?

And she went. Then they took away my grandfather and the grandmother. And this is the way how they used-- in the two years we were in the ghetto, that's the way they did.

When they took your grandmother and grandfather, did they take them somewhere?

Sure, they took them to Ponary, to be killed. Whoever they took out-- and most of the selection they used to do, either early in the morning, to surprise people, or in the middle of the night. They constantly made selection, selection, selection, you know, not to have too many, just--

They have to feed us. What they fed us, we wouldn't be alive today. But you know how a Jew is. He will always bring in something to the ghetto.

Were you able to leave the ghetto, at first, for work or for--

Well, yes. In the beginning, a matter of fact, I worked in a place where they made-- in the-- garments for the army. Because as being a dressmaker, they took me there, and I worked there. I didn't get paid, but I used to go out to work.

And-- excuse me-- each person wanted to go out from the ghetto, especially young people, to work. Because every time we came we came back, sometime we didn't find the people, because who was left? Older the people, whoever worked in the ghetto-- You know, in the ghetto, they had a city wall. They had-- if I say that, you know, like, I read an article in the Jewish news, that one of the people wrote that she was hidden on the Polish papers, and she had luxury-- baloney. It's a lie.

But, you know, [PAUSES] you can never kill a Jew. You always survive. So how bad it was-- we had a theater.

In the ghetto?

In the ghetto. We had boxing, in the ghetto. The day we leave, still we had a culture. OK? And we had-- They opened a beautiful restaurant. [LAUGHS] You know? It's just--

So they tried to make a life, even in the ghetto--

In the two years, we try to make the best can.

How would you describe the Jewish council, the Judenrat, in--

The Judenrat.

Right.

Well, [PAUSES] they worked for the Jews.

You felt that they did try to help the Jews.

Yes. Yes. They tried to help the Jews. But there was always the little one who didn't make it. You always had to have protection. Listen. You know, we have a state of Israel. And you can see what's going on there, too. So--

But the main Fuhrer from the ghetto was a Jew. He was a Lithuanian Jew. And he knew, every time, what's going to happen, but he couldn't protect. Because this was either you or them.

But, by the end, he said, take me, not them. And he gave his life for the people, but it didn't help. The life in the ghetto was, besides the other things, bad, very bad.

What about food? Was there a shortage?

Food was-- like I say, what they gave us, we couldn't survive. But they brought in. You know, you went to work. They brought in.

Some were lucky. They brought in. Some, they opened up, and they beat them up, and they took away the food. You know, somehow, you managed. I give you an example.

Before the war, I was a very fussy eater. God forbid-- if I find a carrot in chicken soup, I wouldn't eat it. Tomatoes, I couldn't smell-- and a lot of things, you know?

When they send me out to work, the first on a farm, from the ghetto, and I saw the way the girls are picking the carrots and wiping them off and eating, I says, how can they do it? Doesn't taste good.

They say, taste it! I taste it, and it was good. When I came home and I told my mother, guess what I ate-- a carrot-- she said, and you're still alive? You see, you're already--

Now what I'm teaching my grandchildren-- don't say you don't like it. Taste it! Grandma, we know it. I say, look what's going on-- how many kids are starving and dying. Grandma, don't tell us. We know it already. So this was the life in the ghetto.

Did you have any communication with the outside world?

Excuse me.

I mean, did you know about events happening in the world?

Well, personally, we heard. You know? But it was-- yes, in the ghetto, they had a contact with the outside, with the partisans. A matter of fact, I was ready to go out to the partisans. But they had, again, a liquidation [PAUSES] to take away people-- young people.

And we were hiding again. When everything was over, we were told that they went to the partisan. Then, when they start watching more the ghettos, because they didn't go out through the main entrance. They built-- they dig things, and they went out. Then, when they start to watch more the ghetto.

Then, like, most killing, what they used to do-- Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur--

On the Jewish holidays.

--Jewish holidays. That's to cut us off. Then they decide they still have too many Jews in the ghetto. They need more to kill, because it's too quiet.

They had yellow signs and pink signs. OK? The yellow signs were the married people with some children-- not too many. The pink signs was for single people. And they took out the people from the ghetto-- whoever worked, wherever they worked, they took them out, for three days. And whoever was left, without the signs, they took out and they killed.

Now, my brother and my mother hid for three days in a chimney. And they heard every time that the SS were running and looking. After three days, what they cleaned out, they brought us back who worked for the Germans.

We start to looking for my mother and brother. We found them in the chimney. One more day, they wouldn't make it. They were stiff. We had to cook water to warm their bodies up.

And this was before they liquidate the ghetto, because they didn't have already too many people, you know? Like I say, every time what they did was unexpectedly. We didn't expect it, but we had, like-- we knew that every day is a borrowed day for us.

Was there any organized resistance in the ghetto?

They started. But they weren't too much organized, because they were too little. Oh, yeah, they bombed. One section of the ghetto was bombed, destroyed-- by the Germans-- sure-- because they had-- you know, it's like the partisan. They had ammunition. They were organized but not like the Warsaw Ghetto. So when the Germans came in to take the people again-- boom-- they start to shoot on them.

So how many were they? So then the Nazis came in with the tanks. And this was before they liquidate the ghetto. And a week before the liquidate the ghetto, my cousin had a boyfriend in the police, and he always knew what's going to happen. And that was at night.

And I went to find out, to my cousin, what's going to be next. And they were digging there, and I fell down, and I cut my leg, here. And it was dark. We couldn't have light.

And when I came up, to show my mother what's happened, she fainted. It was completely in two pieces. I didn't even

feel the pain.

But somehow, I was lucky. Where we lived, downstairs was the police.

The Jewish police.

Yes. And I came down, and they took me on stretchers to the hospital. The Jewish hospital was in the ghetto. And they stitched me up. And how I survived with this leg-- I will tell you the story too. You know, this was short before they liquidate the ghetto.

So when we went out by the liquidation, they put us on a big stadium, you know, like--

--big stadium.

--big one, you know. Everybody there. It was cold, in September. And it was raining. You know? And everybody was there.

Going there, to the stadium, they hanged a young woman and two young men-- and we passed them by-- to show them that they were trying to run away. So if anybody of us is going to go, they would have the same death.

Being at the stadium, you know, the Germans, the SS, walked around, and they said, you know, I can save you. If you have gold or money, give it to me. We come later. We will take you away. You can go someplace else.

So people gave. They thought, no. Didn't help.

In the morning, they put us up in a line. And they made-- right and left. The men-- they put all the men separate. The men-- they send all the men for work.

My brother, who was nine years old, went with the men, with my cousins. And here, where they start-- left, right. So I was there and my sister and my mother.

So I said to my sister, I says, you go first, my mother between, and I will be the third. So my sister went through. My mother, they grabbed on the left to go. And I wanted to go with my mother. I didn't want to leave her alone.

But before I start, my mother said, look, girls, whoever it went to leave, don't hold hands. Don't ever hold hands. Just go, go the way it will be meant for you.

So when my sister went, and she saw that they're throwing my mother on the other side, she start to come back. They beat her up. They grabbed me away from my mother, and they beat me up. And they took away-- I never saw my mother again. This was the liquidation of the ghetto.

Did you know what happened to your mother?

No. I knew right away that they didn't take her for work.

Mhm. That they were going to kill her.

That's right. And they put us again on trains, to take us to Riga.

Now, when you--

This was '43. I was in the ghetto 1941-- excuse me. Excuse me. They took us-- then, when they put us on the train, we passed Ponary, where they killed the people. And they tried to maneuver the train to say Ponary, Ponary, Ponary, you know? And It was such a panicky. In the train they took us, it's like where they take the cattles or-- you know?

On this place, before they put us on the train, was a terrible tragedy. Whoever had small children couldn't come on the train. If you want to survive, leave your kids. [PAUSES] Some mothers did.

Was such a tragedy. The SS picked up the kids. Who is the mother? Here are your children. How can you leave the kids?

I will never forget this picture. They didn't-- believe me, there are plenty mothers here, sick, what they did it. In our compartment, where we were in the train, suddenly we hear a kid crying. A grandmother put the kid in a backpack. The kid didn't make any noise till the train stopped. It was unbelievable.

Now, here I'm in the train, beaten up, pain in my leg. Why didn't I go to my mother? Why didn't I die? Why do I-- I will die anyways. And I cried, and it was hurting.

I was lucky. There was a nurse who I knew very well, because I went to school with her sister. And she said to me, she said-- I said, help me. I can't stand it. You cut off my leg. And she had all the things, and she cleaned up my leg.

And for three days, we were on the train, till we came to Riga. Whatever we had, we ate. They stopped the train. They said, whoever wants to go out to make--

I didn't go. Whoever went, they wouldn't let come back. They killed them. You know, they did all-- and this was the Ukrainian already who did it. And the Germans and the Poles [PAUSES] in Gestapo.

So you came then to Riga, where you were at-- what-- a camp?

Yeah. Riga was-- Kaiserwald was a camp where everybody came in there, and they select you to go to work. You know? Before, I didn't know, but this what it was.

Coming down from the train to the camp, they select us again. There was a doctor, and he wanted to know if we are healthy or not. Well, here I have a bandaged leg. OK? And I come up, and he asked me-- the doctor, a Polish doctor-- he says, why is your leg bandaged? Are you hiding there something?

And I says, no, I can open it! Boy, if I opened it, I would go to the gas chamber right away. I was lucky.

So luck was an important factor--

Very much important.

I think that we're going to take a small break now, and then we will come back and hear more about Riga.

OK.

OK?