

I'm Sylvia Abrams. Today, we are interviewing Maurice Grunwald, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section. Mr. Grunwald, would you tell us a little bit about yourself, how old you are, and where you live today?

I am 70 years old, and I live in Cleveland in University Heights.

What kind of work did you do?

I used to work for name brand furniture. I was a salesman, furniture. Later on, I was managing warehouse for name brand.

OK. Are you married?

Yeah.

What's your wife's name, and does she work?

Elaine. She don't work.

And do you have any children?

Yeah, I have a son, which one is 35, and a daughter is 30, both born in Israel.

And where do they live today?

My son lives in Canton, and my daughter lives in Corpus Christi, Texas.

OK. We're going to go back in time to the time before World War II. Tell us where you were living and how old you were before the war.

I used to live in Slovakia, born in Slovakia in a small village, [PLACE NAME], that belonged to [INAUDIBLE] like [INAUDIBLE] Sabinov.

That was the name of the district.

District, yeah.

And my parents had a farm there. My father died very early. He came sick from the First World War, and my mother with my older brother, they managed the farm.

How many brothers and sisters were in your family?

I had three brothers and one sister.

How old were you at the time the war broke out?

The war broke out in--

1939.

1939. I was 25 years old.

Did you live in your small town, or you lived in-- grew up in a bigger city?

No. You see, in my village, there was a school. And my parents, they were very religious. They wouldn't let me go to a public school, as I was learning privately. I started to go to school in Presov in a Jewish public school then, in the fourth grade.

What was the distance between your village and Presov?

About 15 kilometers.

Did you live in Presov or did you live in--

I used to live in Presov for-- yeah, all mostly my life, like a younger boy and then later a teenager. I went to school there, Hebrew schools. And next, we privately-- you see, we learned the regular, like junior high school.

I want to go back to your village. How many people lived in the village?

There was a very small village.

Were there many Jews in the village?

No, my family alone.

You were the only Jewish family in the village.

Only Jewish family in the village. Yeah.

How big was the town of Presov?

What?

How big was the town of Presov?

The town of Presov, this time, used to be about 25,000.

And how many Jews were there?

Oh, it was a lot of Jewish families. I don't know exactly how many it was.

When you boarded in Presov to go to school, how often did you see your family back in the village?

Oh, I saw them. They came into town mostly every week or something.

I see.

For holidays, I went always home, you know?

How did your family make a living?

They were farmers, farming.

And you said your father passed away. How old were you when your father died?

I was about five years old.

Would you describe your family as poor or as comfortable?

I would describe it more poor like. They had pretty nice farm. Only you see, it's very hard to live on a farm in a country like this. You see, the Jewish holidays and, how you call, the Catholic holidays, you see, they couldn't work, you see, on the farm. My parents, they wouldn't let work on a Saturday or holiday, not even the Gentile people that were religious.

How did your family get along with the neighbors in the village?

Very good. Very good. No problems with the people in the village at all.

Could you describe what a typical day was like on the farm?

Working from early morning till late in the evening, very hard work.

Did you work on the farm at all yourself?

Not really. When I was 11 years old, I went to town, went to school. And next, I worked in a store, in a grocery store later on.

In the town, you worked in a grocery store.

In the town, yeah.

Was that while you were still in school?

No.

Or after you left?

After I left school.

Until what grade did you go to the school in the town?

You see that five elementary, you know, and three after-- three years. Not years, you see. Well, we went privately, too.

You told me you went to a Yeshiva Ketana?

Yeah, that's the Hebrew. That's the main school. That's where we learned mostly Jewish, you know, Hebrew and this, [NON-ENGLISH]. And just from 4:00 till 7:00 in the evening, we learned [NON-ENGLISH], the how you call it, like junior high.

You said your family was very religious, but the only Jewish family in the village. Where did you go to synagogue, and what do you remember about holidays?

Synagogue, you see, and the holidays, we went to another village, Turna, which one-- a few, but six villages came together, you know? And we had over there the prayers and everything like temple. There was a special room with Torah and everything. There was a farmer, you see, a rich farmer. And he supplied everything there.

So you went to this neighboring village for the holidays.

Neighboring village, 2 kilometer from our village.

Do you remember any particular special occasions and how the family celebrated them?

The holidays, they celebrated like usually. You see, like in every family, Jewish family, you see that was special something, usually always the holidays. You see, they were looking forward to the holidays.

How about politics? Was your family very aware of politics?

No, no politics at all. No politics.

What was the main language spoken in your home?

In my home was talking Slovak and German.

What other languages were also spoken?

That's all.

You told me that some people in the area knew Hungarian?

Yeah, only not my family. They went to Hungarian schools, and they forgot Hungarian.

I see.

Your family didn't speak Yiddish then.

Yeah, Yiddish, too.

They spoke Yiddish.

Yiddish, German, you see that's almost the same.

I see. What kind of books were in your home?

Books? German books they were reading.

Was there any entertainment at all in the village?

No.

How about in Presov?

In Presov, yeah.

What kind of entertainment was there?

It was movies and was a theater there, too. And usually, you see the Jewish kids, they came to Habima from Poland-- used to come over there. And we liked to go. We didn't have money to pay the [INAUDIBLE]. We tried to get in without money.

When you were going to the school in Presov, who did you live with?

I lived with an aunt, a sister from my mother. And my mother was supplying all the products and everything, you know? She brought every week in. But there was a poor family, too.

I see. So your aunt took you in so you could go to school there. You've given a nice picture of what the town was like and the village nearby. Let's talk a little bit about yourself personally and what you were like. What did you look like?

Listen, I was very religious still, but I was 15 years old. Later on, you see, when I started to work in the store and this, as I had friends, they weren't so religious. So I gave up, too, a lot of things.

Next, we were-- the town was very nice. There was, you see, special for the Jewish teenagers, and we came together in a place always. We were organized in a Zionist organization, the Maccabi. We came together always, almost every day in the evening and especially on weekends.

This was a club for teenagers.

Club for teenagers, yeah-- very, very nice. There were a lot of clubs, you see. Every organization had got their own places where they came together, like Hashomer Hatzair, Betar. Only in this Maccabi club, all the organization came together.

Is that the group you played soccer for?

Yeah.

You have a picture, don't you, of yourself playing soccer?

I have a picture where we played soccer. They were calling it Maccabi Presov.

That was the name of the team.

The name of the team, yeah. And we played once. We went even to Poland. We played in Poland in Jaslo.

Would you point out which one you are in the picture?

Yeah, here I am. Yes.

OK. About how tall were you?

I am 5' 4" what I remember always.

How old were you in that picture?

In this picture, I was about-- that was in '31-- about 18 years old.

OK. Were you healthy? You look healthy in the picture.

I never was sick, never in my life.

What was your outlook on life at that point?

You see, we were in the Maccabi Hatzair. That's the organization where we prepare ourselves to go to Israel. And later on, even I went, you see, on hakhsara. And I was working on a few places in Slovakia to prepare myself to go to Israel. Just something came up between the organization and me, between the time that I didn't went.

So you had thought during the 1930s that you would go to Israel.

To Israel. Yeah, we were organized, and we saw what's going, what's awaiting us, you know? That's the Nazis and Hitler in neighboring Germany, what was going on as we were preparing us to go in '36. And I went on hakhsara.

And hakhsara was when people--

Was preparing-- they were preparing us to go to Israel for the hard labor, you know, and live together a collective life. Just in '36, you see, when I was 21 years old, as I had to go in the Czechoslovakian army. And I lost contact with the organization.

So you were drafted into the Czechoslovakian army in 1936.

In 1936. And I was in the Czechoslovakian army till '39. You see, almost three years. They wouldn't let me while the mobilization was this time in '38.

And I had a job. You see, in the army, they wouldn't let me go when they started the demobilization. So I had to stay there.

So your plans had been to go to Israel, but you were drafted.

Yeah.

Into the army.

I'd just like to mention. You see, when I came out from the army, as the time started to be very-- how you call it? You see, the Slovaks took over the fascism, you know. And it was very hard for my parents and my this as I went home and I helped them out, you know?

Let's go through the details of those couple of years up to the outbreak of the war then. Your friends before you were drafted were then mostly Jewish friends from school in Presov.

That's right. Later on from the whole Slovakia, you see, in hakhshara I had friends.

So you knew all kinds of Jewish people who were Zionist, active.

Yeah, even from Bohemia, from Slovakia, from all kinds-- friends.

What kinds of things did you enjoy doing at that point in your life?

Was very nice life, you know? We used to live together, collective. We used to work hard and self-supporting. And it was a nice life. I liked it.

And you thought then that you would accomplish your plans to go to Israel.

Go to Israel.

When you were drafted into the Czechoslovakian army, what did you feel?

I didn't have a choice. I was a good soldier there, too, you see. You see, anything I did, I did it right. And I was very popular in the army, too. They send me to schools. They send me-- I went through all kinds of courses, you know?

What courses? What were you trained in?

Skiing, where we were sleeping even in snow outside, lakes. You see, the biggest mountain in Slovakia, Gerlachovsky-- you see, I was in a course, to go in the mountains. I don't know. I don't know how you pronounce this. I know in Slovak-- in the course. And I was on the highest mountain in Slovakia there with the army station.

So you learned how-- you learned how to do mountaineering then as part of this.

Mountaineering, yeah.

You had a lot of non-Jewish friends then in the army?

Yeah. Yeah, I had. And the funny part was there in the army, all the Sudeten Germans were the best friends with me, the Nazis, you know? And they knew I am Jew and everything, you see? And they got a package from home, and they opened to me. I was one Jew in the whole company there.

The only Jew in that company.

Yeah, and you see, I don't know, maybe that's have to do while I spoke German with them, you know? But they couldn't communicate with others. They didn't speak Slovak at all.

What do you remember about anti-Semitism in those days?

It was all over, anti-Semitism. Just, you know, that some of them, you see the biggest anti-Semite, sometime you see the Jew. You are different like the other one. You see, they look on you. You're not like the other Jews, you know?

That was the reaction toward you.

Reaction, yeah.

But you were in many situations where you were the only Jew.

Yeah, and I know, you see? I know, you see, a guy. I know he was a Nazi and everything, and he was a good friend with me, you see, even I ignored him.

Did you observe any plans to fight anti-Semitism in Slovakia at that time?

Yeah. Yeah, I was always a good Jew. I tell you a story what happened. You see, my captain in the company that I had, you see, when they were taking me to school-- unteroffiziere school-- He called me in the office, and he asked me all kind of questions.

And he asked me what kind nationality I am. You see, as I told him, Jewish, as he told me, don't exist the Jewish nationality-- Slovak, German, or Bohemian, you know? That's all. As I told him, I'm sorry, only I am a Zionist. You see, I want to go to Israel, and I feel I am Jewish. He threw me out from the office. You see, he was-- you see, this time didn't exist, you see? They didn't recognize Jewish nationality.

When the war began, when were you aware that there was a war?

The war began in '39. You see, when the Germans start to go through Slovakia to Poland-- over Poland, you know? Because everybody knew what's going on. You see, we saw the German soldiers with the, how you call, the munitions with cannons, with everything. They passed by us, and we knew something is cooking.

And you were still in the Czechoslovakian army.

No.

When were you demobilized?

In '39.

So you were demobilized before the war broke--

Before the war started. Yeah.

Were you demobilized because it was the end of your tour of duty?

No, before they didn't need-- yeah, the end of the tour of duty. And next, you see, I was a Jew anyway, you know?

So you were discharged because you were Jewish?

No, not really because I was Jewish. It was my end, this.

And when this-- so you were out of the Czechoslovakian army before World War II officially began.

That's right.

And where did you go then?

I went home.

And you went back to the village rather than to Presov?

To the village, yeah. No, I lived in Presov and in the village.

So you were going back and forth between Presov--

Back and forth, yeah. Took a bike, and I ride here and there, you know?

OK. What were you working as?

Next, I find myself a job, you know? I was working, like, stones for cemeteries, you know? I was working by a nice guy, you know? I find some guy, and that's what I was doing.

He was a stone cutter.

Hmm.

Was he training you ?

It's not really what usually-- you see, over there, they didn't make the real stone. They made from cement some stone, and there wasn't-- you didn't need some special-- how you call for it-- training.

Did you still have in your mind that you were going to go to Israel?

This time, no.

What were your plans for the future then when--

I had to stay home with my parents. I have to support them, my mother and my brothers, you know? I saw the time is very bad, you know? This anti-Semitism is very bad. Just I didn't have problem, you see. When they start to take people away, you see, and this, I was still walking around. Nobody bothered me, you see, like a Jew.

So let's take the time of the war. You're going back and forth between the village and Presov. You're aware there's a war going to start, because you see the German soldiers.

Not really. You see, not Czechoslovakia-- was only Poland. We knew it was going to start in Poland.



Was there any change in the way non-Jews acted toward you as the war broke out?

No.

So were there more open acts of anti-Semitism in your area as the war continued?

Well, some places, yeah. Some places, yeah-- not exactly in my village. Not exactly in my village.

Once the war actually started, how did your life change?

We were very depressed, you see, when the Germans started to go Poland in a few days-- in two weeks, I think or something. It was a very depressing time, was special for us Jews while we saw what's going on, what the Germans are acting and what they doing. It was very bad.

Was there much news of what was happening in Poland in the papers in your town?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. The propaganda was working very, very, very good for them, you know?

Did you and your family have any discussions about what you should do because of the war?

No, we didn't have. Well, we didn't know what to do. Nobody-- you see so many Jews over there, and nobody did nothing.

So at that point, did you feel there was going to be a future?

You see, we didn't think of it. We were still thinking this time was going on between England and Czechoslovakia and this, all kind that they're going to straighten out something. You see, nobody would believe that it's going to happen, such a thing what happened. Nobody was thinking about it.

When did actual changes happen in your town and where you were living? What year?

In '42.

So between '39 and '42 you were--

There was anti-Semitism, and everything was very hard for Jews, any places to do anything. Only still, you see, living was going on. Just next in '42, you know--

What happened in 1942?

1942, they started to work on it to take the Jews from Slovakia out, and take them for work to Poland. That's all. There was the propaganda working.

Who came into the town to announce that this was going to happen?

That was in the papers.

It was in the papers that Jews were going to be sent to Poland to work.

To Poland, yeah, to work.

So what changes happened to your family then?

Nothing. They couldn't do nothing. You see, that came next in '42, in May the 20th, nobody knew anything what's going to happen. There just came the order, pack by in the morning. Take this and this. There's so much you can take and everything leave. And they took us to the concentration place Sabinov.

Where was Sabinov located?

Sabinov was located in Slovakia. That was like a county from all the villages.

So all the Jews who were in these villages were taken to Sabinov.

All the Jews in these villages were taken to Sabinov. I don't have Sabinov here.

It was a little bit of a distance from where--

Yeah, it was a little bit of a distance, but 20 kilometer.

Mm-hmm.

20 kilometer. And they took all the Jews over there from all the villages, not only over my village, only very far from the whole county.

OK. When you were deported, who from your family was deported with you?

I forgot to tell you before. They were taking before girls. That was in March.

March of 1942.

Yeah, and they took my sister.

So she was deported before the rest of them.

Yeah, before the rest of them.

Do you know where she went, or you didn't know?

No. No, we didn't know where she went. They went to Auschwitz.

You found that out after the war.

After the war, yeah. On the next one, they took us. They brought us to Sabinov.

You were going to tell me--

We had to leave everything home.

Who went with you on this deportation? Who in your family?

My two brothers and my mother. I had an uncle and aunt.

So that was the group--

They were living with us.

And you were 20?

That was in '42.

So you were 27?

6 and then 27.

27 years old.

28.

How old were your brothers then?

My brothers were older. They were both old.

And your mother was about what age?

My mother was about 44.

How long were you in Sabinov, and what happened there?

One night.

Just?

Yeah. They put us in the school. We were sleeping on the floor. And the next day, they start to load us in boxcars.

Who were in charge there?

Was in charge the police.

These were Slovakian police.

Slovakian police, the gardist. You know, there was a special guard from the Slovaks.

But not Germans. Or were there Germans there?

No, not German.

They're all Slovaks.

All Slovakian, yeah. And even we were young. There were sick people, and people couldn't walk, as we had to carry them out, and we had to put them in the boxcars. And when the boxcars-- that's in the morning, start loading. When the boxcars was loaded, they locked up the boxcars, about close to 100 people in the boxcar. I don't know exactly how many. And no water, no toilet, nothing, just a hole cut out in the middle of the boxcar, you see? They use it for a toilet.

And, you see, usually if you had to go, we took something, a blanket or what holding all around you see. That's how. People were sitting, laying one over the other, one you see it. It's not enough room, not even to move in the boxcar.

And we came to Presov, the other town that's about 18 kilometers with the railroad. And we stayed there till the evening.

Did they open the boxcar to tell you where you were?

No. You see, usually they opened for me the boxcar while I was working. I was putting the sick people. And they locked up the boxcar when my family was, as I learned after the guard. And I told him, let me in in the car. He was screaming at me, what are you doing here? As I told him, my family is there. I said, let me in. That's why he opened the car, and I went in.

And from there we went to West Slovakia, Zilina they call it. And I don't know. I don't remember even how many days we used to, about three days in the boxcar. Nothing-- no food, nothing. And only we had food with us. You see, we could take something, some clothing, some food.

And from there, they send us to Poland. And the place where we came in in Poland, the name was Rejowiec. There was a ghetto. Jews used to leave the little houses, you see, a ghetto in Poland.

This was a small town that was--

I don't even what the town looked like. We never saw the town, just the ghetto.

They had taken one section and made it into a ghetto. Who was in the ghetto when you were all put in there?

Germans.

German Jews?

They took us-- no, no.

Germans?

Germans took us took us over in Zilina, and the, you see, the Slovak guard gave us up for the Germans.

So I just want to understand. You went from when you were deported-- so the Slovaks put everybody on the boxcars, and then when you got to--

Locked up, until we went in the West Slovakia.

And in West Slovakia, then the Germans--

Zilina, northwest.

Then the Germans took over being--

By the Polish border. The Germans took us over.

And the Slovaks went away then.

Yeah.

And were the Germans SS or regular soldiers?

SS.

SS.

SS.

And then the boxcars-- the transport continued.

Continued to go to Rejowiec.

Rejowiec. Now, Rejowiec was a ghetto.

Rejowiec-- that was in Poland, I don't know how far from Lublin. I know one thing that wasn't far from Chelm. If you heard Chelm, you see, everybody's making jokes about Chelm-- was in this neighborhood someplace.

And when we came over there, everybody had to jump out from the boxcar and go in the ghetto any place. You see, any place you find room, they put you in there.

How big was this ghetto? About how many people were there?

The whole transport was 1,000 people.

So your transport was 1,000 people.

1,000 people.

Was it an empty ghetto or were there Jews already there?

Empty. Nobody was there.

No one was there.

No one was there. The Polish people, they were out from there. No Polish people.

No Polish people, and no other Jews there. It was just this transport of Slovakian people were there.

Yeah.

And you just had to find a place to put yourself?

Anybody who goes in a room, any room you find room, you sit on the floor-- nothing, no beds, no furniture, no nothing.

The whole town had been-- all that stuff had been cleaned out.

Others were cleaned out, cleaned out.

And next, we slept over one night over there.

The next day, they came, the SS. And we had to stay in line, and they picked about 100 younger people. And they say they transferred. We have to walk probably about 40 kilometers or something. They picked us up in the morning, and we came on late afternoon in Rejowiec. It was a working camp.

So Rejowiec was a working camp, or there was a working--

No, Rejowiec was a-- we came to Siedlce. They took us, the other Polish village.

So in Siedlce there was a working camp.

A working camp, yeah.

And just the young men who were picked went.

Yeah, the people which won't be able to work. They picked us.

And so what happened to your family?

They stayed there, nothing. I don't know.

Did you ever see them again?

No, never more.

And when you went to leave, did your family realize that they might not ever see you again?

Nobody knew nothing. You see, you couldn't see what's going to happen or nothing. Nobody knew nothing what's going to happen.

When we came to Siedlce, there were some people from other places they came there, I don't know from where.

Also on transports and--

No, not transport. They just brought them in, you see. They're working people. I don't know from where they brought them over.

What nationalities were there?

Jews.

But what countries were they from?

Everything Slovak.

They're all Slovak.

All Slovak, you see? For example Presov-- there was from Sabinov just 18 kilometer, you know? And Presov, they went to a different place, Deblin. All over Poland there were-- all over were some camps.

But you didn't see any Polish Jews in these camps. They were just all Slovak Jews together.

Not Polish Jew, not this time. I didn't see Polish Jews. I saw later Polish Jews.

So all these work gangs were being made up of Slovak Jews who had been transported.

All Slovak Jews.

And they were picking the younger, stronger men.

The younger, stronger people for work. And we were starting to work on some kind of canalization. You know, were digging some so the water should be able to run down. And every day, you see, we went to work.

How long were you in this camp?

Until I ran away. That was from May to the end of October, beginning of November when I ran away.

So about six months. Would you tell us something about the conditions in the camp so we get a picture of it, like the

food and so on?

Very bad, no food.

What did you have to eat at all?

They give you maybe a piece of bread, like two fingers a day, and water-- hot water. Instead of coffee or tea, they give you water in the morning. And if a horse died someplace, they brought in the horse in the camp, and they cooked the meat. And if you were lucky, you got a soup with maybe one or two pieces of meat. You find there was a delicatessen, something.

What kind of sleeping conditions were there?

Sleeping condition was there. There was the whole barrack, you know? And wood-- nothing on the downstairs one and one upstairs. And people just were laying on the wood. There's no mattresses or something like that.

No blankets.

No blankets, no.

Were you issued a uniform?

No.

So you were still in the clothes that you'd been transported in.

In the clothes, yeah. You see, we were lucky. Some places they took away everything from the people. They didn't take anything away from us what we brought over. This way, there was a wire around the camp. It wasn't such a big camp. I don't know how many people, maybe about 300, 400 people there.

Who were the guards?

The guards were Ukrainian.

Ukrainians.

Yeah, they were running away from Russia, and they got the black uniform. They were worse, like the Germans.

Were there any Germans in charge of the camp?

Yeah, was in charge the commander, was German. And next was something else German, you know?

But most of the guards were Ukrainian.

Most of the guards were Ukrainian.

How did they treat the people in the camp?

You see, from this time till I was there, you see us. Every day we had to go up and Appell, you know? And they were counting if nobody is missing. Only sometimes, they hit somebody if it wasn't too fast, he didn't come early, or something, or he was hiding someplace.

Or when we find someplace food or something, we start to try to cook from us, make a little fire, and they catch us. They hit us. Only I cannot say they didn't kill nobody there or something like that.

Was there any contact with the local population?

Yeah. Yeah. The local population, not everybody. The population, sometimes they came to where the wires were. And you could talk to them or something, only if the guard didn't show you. If the guard see you, then it was, I don't know. They will kick you and hit you.

Only special like me, I was the sixth Jewish guy, which we had the special. thing. We were working not with the Jews. The Jews went on one path to work. And besides this was the other path, was working the Polish young people, which they had the privilege not to go to Germany to work, as they had to work there. Every day, you see, they came out to work. Excuse me.

They have to dig about 2 meters, this canalization. And next, they could go home, and that's all for a day. And we were six Jewish guys, which we were in charge to measure out and to clean up after them the was nicely made and everything. And if they brought us bread or some food, as we helped them a little bit, they could go home, you know?

So these were local Polish people who were doing their forced labor.

Labor.

And by this camp with the Jews.

Yeah, not by the Jews-- a separate, a different place.

But you six Jewish prisoners were in charge of what they were doing.

Were in charge of them so they dig it right to measure it out. And like I said, we got food, because we were better off like these guys in the camp. You see, they didn't have. We brought home food sometimes that we give to a friend. It was horrible in camp. People were falling away, dying of hunger.

Like I had-- a guy was sleeping beside me on the bench. In the morning, I tried to wake him up, and he's dead from hunger. You couldn't help it.

Did you have any particular special friends among the prisoners?

Yeah, sure. You make friends, you see? You make friends. Not only this, I have grown up on a farm, and I know all kinds of tricks. And for example, when we went to work, you see us. That was the whole line. Once, I put my stomach that I have to go. As it was, besides this was potatoes. As I went between the potatoes that I have to go, you see, on the side. And I had pants tied up here with a rope. And I went between the potato and start to dig potatoes and put them in my pants.

And this time, I was working in a forest. We were cutting wood for the camp. You see, cutting wood. And we made fire, and we were baking and eating potatoes. We weren't hungry.

So you were able to-- because you recognized that you could take these things out.

Yeah.

So in the six months, you did several kinds of work then.

Yeah, I did.

So you did the canalization with the Polish peasants, and then you were in a forest.



Yeah.

But you still kept coming back to the barracks to sleep.

Yeah, every day-- every day back to the barracks. Just one thing I'd like to mention. In the time when they brought the, how you call, wheat and everything, and they start to, I don't know, clean with machines. And from the village came some people, and they need some help. As they sent us also the farmer, shall we help him, you know?

And there was a funny part-- was this farmer a woman, and we worked for her, about four guys. And she was making us food to eat, you know, pierogies. That's such-- I don't know, with potatoes filled. And she brought a big plate of these pierogies and put it on the table. In two seconds, they disappeared, you know?

And she went, and she brought another one. And when we ate enough, as we started to put in our pocket. And the third one disappeared, and she couldn't figure out what happened. And that's hunger, you know?

Same thing happened in the camp. You got your two-- a piece of bread. If you would put this piece of bread down here, and you turn around, it disappear. When people hungry, like dogs they would steal it for you.

Did the local Polish people that you worked with like this, did they ask anything about the conditions or what was happening?

No.

Did they discuss it with you in any way?

No, no, they didn't discuss it. Nothing.

The village where the camp was by, was it a very small village?

We didn't see it. The village was on the side.

So the camp was far enough away.

Was far enough away from the village.

And this is in the Lublin district.

That was by Chelm.

It was by--

It was 10 kilometers from Chelm. That's what the people told us, 10 kilometers from Chelm.

Was there any religious observance in the camp?

Yeah.

What kind of things?

They could pray if somebody wants to pray. Only it's not shall they let you. Only if somebody was religious, he wouldn't eat the horse meat, as he didn't eat nothing.

And one thing was over there possible, you see. If you had a shirt or something, you could do through the-- with the Polish people. They brought you a bread, you see.

So you were able to trade with them through the fence.

To trade with them, only nobody shall see you. You see, you have to watch yourself. And the people have to watch themselves, too. Only there was a possibility.

When there were people over there, I know why they didn't have their shirt. They left everything home. They buried everything before they took them, as they didn't have nothing.

Now, what happened at the end of the six months to you?

End of the six months when I-- was before the six months in July. We didn't see it. We don't know, just what the people we work with, they told us the story.

The local Polish people you were working with.

The local Polish people we were working. Yeah, that's Rejewiec where the ghetto used to be. They took all the people, and they had to transfer them someplace. They told us to Krychow. And in the time, who couldn't run, who couldn't go, they shot on the road. People were lying, like [INAUDIBLE].

So the Polish people told you that they had shot a lot of people.

The Germans shot a lot of people. That's all what we know. We didn't know. As I saw what's going on-- and same thing. The big one from our camp, which one they couldn't work, and they couldn't go, you see, they took him one morning. It was the Appell, you see? And they pulled out all the people who couldn't work, put them aside, and the people-- same thing. The people told us they took them to Krakow. That was a vernichtungslager.

So a vernichtungslager is--

In Krakow.

--a death camp.

Yeah, a death camp. Yeah, they liquidate.

A liquidation camp.

Liquidation camp.

And Krakow was the name of a bigger town.

Yeah, I don't know what was Krakow.

But they just told you that was where they took him.

Yeah.

So people who were taken off the Appell, that's what-- the local population told you that's what happened to them.

Yeah, we went to work, and these people, that's what they told us. They took the people to Krakow.

And that they shoot them there.

We don't know.

They didn't even tell you that. They just said they take you there.

I know they told us it's a vernichtungslager, a liquidation camp, and they took them there.

So what did you decide to do?

We decided to-- if they have to kill me there, I said they kill me on my way, you see? And us three guys, we talked it over that we're going to run away. We made plans and everything.

We bargained with the Polish people. We gave them my jacket, and they gave me some torn up jacket, like the Polish people used to. And I run away. For me, it was very easy to run away. While I went in the main camp, and I fixed all what I have to dig, you know? And next, I put on my shoulder, and I start to walk over to the Polish people.

You put your shovel on your shoulder.

My shovel on the shoulder, and I walked. And the guard, he stopped me. Where are you going? So I told him, I'm working there. OK, go. And I went about a half a mile, half a kilometer, and I throw away the shovel and went in the forest.

So there was a lot of forests around this camp.

Yeah, forests. And I had to meet in the evening, in the forest, the other two guys.

You have a picture of the one man who you ran away with, don't you?

Yeah, I have the picture from my-- he is right now-- he came back, and he is a doctor. And he ran away from Czechoslovakia, and he is a doctor in Sweden. Here is the guy.

So the two of you and a third man ran away.

A third man we lost on the way. You see, in Poland, three guys, they would stop us right away, three guys going together. As usual, we always went two guys in front and one guy in the back.

And one day, we're walking, and he's behind us fine. We turned over, we don't see him. We sit down. We wait. We went back, look for him, we couldn't find him. And we don't know what happened.

So what was the date of the escape then? When did you go?

I don't know date.

Was it sometime in November 1942?

Sometime end of October or November. I don't even remember the dates.

And you said you began making the plans in July?

No, later, like July. You see, we saw what was going on later.

So you walked you walked away into the forest and--

I walked away in the forest. Only the other guys, they couldn't go. But was a Jewish guy, you know, which one that was, about 15 to 18 guys working in the forest. And the Jewish guy was our friend, and he knew we want to run away, as he was afraid. As he was watching them, we didn't let him go.

I looked for 4:00 or something. I looked from the forest, and I see all the guys. I count the guys, and all the guys going back in camp. So I didn't know what to do. Anyway, I stayed in the forest. I was hiding.

How long did you stay there?

Till night, about 11:00. And between the time, one guy came back. And he told me, don't worry. You stay in the forest. You see, he thought he forgot something in the forest. As he came back and I saw him-- he came back. You see, he screamed at me, just stay there. We're going to try to run away from the camp.

And that's what happened. The guards, they got drunk or something. I don't know what kind of occasion it was. And through the wires, you see, they could get out, you know?

So they crawled out through the wires.

Through the wires at night, and they came in the forest. Next, we start-- we slept over in the forest there and start to go. Where we go? We didn't know where to go. One thing we knew, we have to go south. Slovakia is south, there where we want to go. That's when we start.

So now, you got to get-- you decided you're going to go back to Slovakia.

To Slovakia.

Why did you decide you're going to go back to Slovakia?

We didn't have the chance where to go.

So you thought if you could go back to Slovakia, you could find a place to hide out for the war?

It's easier for us in Slovakia to hide those. We know the language. We know the place. We know the terrain. We know everything. We know how the people behave in Slovakia.

As we start to go-- and to go through Poland, it wasn't so easy, especially up where any place was concentration camps. We saw Jewish people working here. We saw--

How long did it take to make the trip back?

20 days.

20 days?

Yeah.

OK, we'll pick up on the second tape. I think that's where we should pick up. And you'll tell us the story of how you take the 20 days back to Slovakia.

OK.

And that's where we'll give all the details of what that was like, OK?

OK.

That's what we'll do.