

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, in the last tape, you were telling us how you escaped from the labor camp in Poland. And we were just going to go into the story of what happened on the escape. Why don't you begin from when you and your two friends left the forest.

When we left the forest, we start to walk south. Only the worst part was that, you know, you can orientate yourself south if you've got sun. And we didn't have sun for 20 days.

As I made my orientation to go south, you know, on the trees and forests, usually the northwest side is marshy and darker, you see? And according to this, we took the-- how you call-- to go.

It was very lucky that you had lived on a farm so you knew all these signs.

Not the farm. This I picked up from the Czechoslovakian army.

From the army, you knew that.

From the army, yeah, I picked it up. And we were walking us from the beginning up. Over there, the people were very bad. You see, they wouldn't give you nothing. They would--

So when you were walking, you were walking past towns and farms?

No, not towns and farms, forests. We just hit some places, single houses or something on farms. At the end of the village or something, we stopped, and we begged for something. They wouldn't give us nothing over there.

Did they realize you were Jews?

No. When they asked us, who are you, we told them we are political prisoners.

Political prisoners?

Political prisoners from Slovakia, and we were run away from Krychow, you see? We heard about it that they have some political prisoners there. And that's how we were.

And food? No, they were afraid. You see, I tell you, one place we stopped, there was about four or five houses on the hill, not far from the forest. And we stopped over there. One house was burned down. And we stopped in there, and we went in the house, and we were asking for some food.

We told them who we are. For three days, we didn't eat nothing. We want to eat something. They told us-- it was about two men, two women, and kids. And they say, we don't have nothing food. As I told him, I'll take a look, you see?

And they had such an oven from bricks-- a stove from bricks and the oven, you know? And I went, and I opened up the oven, and I saw a pot with potatoes, I don't know, maybe a week, a few days old. As I told them, you've got potatoes. Oh, we are kids, and we hungry. As I told them, I don't care. We are hungry, too. For three days, we didn't eat, as we pulled out the pot, and we ate with our hands a few potatoes. And we went away.

And over there, the other place they told us-- I was asking, why is the house burned down and this? They told us the SS, they're watching from the-- how you call-- from the forest if some partisans or some strange people coming in the houses, you know? And they cannot explain. They shot the people on the spot.

And these are Polish peasants who are telling you this story.

Polish peasants. And the house-- why it's burned down, the house, was a single girl living there. And she had a

boyfriend. And the boyfriend used to come to her. And once, they caught him there, and they shot her and him, and they burned down the house.

So the people in this village were very afraid.

They were afraid. They were very afraid.

Next, sleeping-- you see, we couldn't go-- we never went through villages or to towns, always behind. And we used to sleep once in a forest. It was cold and this, and noisy. I don't know what kind. I never heard such an animal as what's over there.

Once, we were sleeping in a hole, just unfilled in a hole. We just pushed us in in a little hole and were sleeping there. It was very bad over there, right from the camps where the camps used to be.

And usually, we were watching in barns. We came to a village. As we were waiting till it get dark or something, we were watching. Were picking a barn, which one is farther from the houses, you know? And when it got dark or something and no dogs over-- there were usually a lot of dogs, so we didn't want the dog to bark.

As we sneaked in in the barn, we pushed down in the straw and was sleeping over. And that was the best sleeping that we had, like, outside.

Next, the food-- no food. We find a potato, raw potato, there was farm, you know?

Yes.

Raw potato-- was eating a raw potato or, like, anything what we find in the fields. We were eating from--

So the fields had been harvested, and you were looking to see what you could find in the fields anyway.

Yeah, what we find in there. Next, we saw a lot of Jews were walking, running around. And we stopped them. Well, this time, they took till '42. Some Polish Jews still were at home, and they got some special permits.

This time, they took away all the Jews. We saw running a woman with a child with a man. Where are you going, we asked him? They don't know.

So these are people who were also running and hiding in the forest.

Polish Jews they were hiding, yeah.

So the last roundups of Polish Jews were happening in this area, and these were people who were trying to get away.

They're trying to get away. They didn't know where to go. Next, one time, they were running after us-- Germans-- through the forest. I don't know, maybe about five or six kilometers. We were running through a forest, and they were after us, shooting and this, and we just were lucky, you know, disappearing.

Next, the other place, you couldn't go in. You couldn't go in a house. You couldn't go ask. Well, we were afraid, you see?

Two guys caught us on a field and asked us who are you? So we told them, no you are [NON-ENGLISH]. You are Jews. So I told him, we are not Jews. We are Slovaks. We ran away from Krychow, and we're going to Slovakia. And he said, no you are Jews, Jews.

And I had a winter warm coat and a belt. And I opened up the belt, and I'm going to show you if I am Jewish. You see, that's what the Germans used to control, you see, Jew or not. And I start to talk to him very sharp in Polish a few words,

very bad words. And I don't want to mention it here. And when he saw that I have such a-- how you call it-- against him--

You showed such courage there.

Courage against him. I said no, they are not Jews. Just let them go. You see, we were prepared. He kills me or I kill him. You see, it's no choice.

Next, it was very hard from the beginning. Next, when we came farther down to the Carpathian--

The Carpathian Mountains.

The Carpathian Mountains-- so we went in a house, and we were asking for food. We are Slovaks, this and this. We told them the same story.

So he started to ask us questions, this and this and this and this. As I asked him, son of a gun. What do you want from me? You want to give me food, fine. I am hungry. If not, tell me as I go. And he excused himself. He's afraid. But the German used to send some spies to the guys to ask food and this, you see? And next, you see, there were Germans spying for the Germans if the people are supporting the partisans or something like that.

And next, he gave us a terrific supper. He brought straw in the room, and we were sleeping on the straw in the room.

So you got to sleep indoors that time.

Inside, yeah. Later on, when we came farther in the mountains--

This is still in Poland, though. You haven't crossed the border yet.

Still everything in Poland. When we came in the mountains, that was-- in the mountains, you got single houses, here a house, there a house. Walked in in a house, was nobody there, just one man. So we told him who we are and this, and we want to go from where we are. We told him Presov.

So he started to tell us a story. His wife used to work like a maid in Presov by the priest Gojdic. We knew the name. We knew the priest, you see, was a bishop later on-- Gojdic. And he used to go to see her from Poland, from there to Presov. That's a pretty good walk.

Oh, so he prepared a supper. We slept there and everything. She wasn't home. She was doing some kind of, I think, black marketing or something, his wife.

So next, we asked him the next day, you see, would you-- we have some money. Well, we sold what we could in the camp. And we had about 500 zloty, Polish money. We give you the money, take us over the border.

He said, oh, no. Today, I wouldn't go over the border if you give me I don't know what. Only he said, I can do one thing. I have a friend, and maybe he will take you to the border. I have to ask him. So he went and asked him. So the guy, he was ready to go with us. OK, fine. Only not over the border, just to the border.

They were all afraid to cross over.

They're all afraid to cross.

Was the border that closely patrolled?

Yeah, it was patrolled. So OK, fine. I said, I don't know. Promised him, OK, we give you 300 zloty. Let's take us.

Was in the morning about 10:00 he took us out. It was same thing, like I said. The whole time, no sun-- was just dark, cloudy days.

So he took us up on a hill. There was snow in November, you see. It was snow, I don't know-- big snow. And he showed us like this. You see, you go straight down, and next, you go straight up the hill. And when you come to the hill, you'll find the border.

So I look over, and I was thinking, OK, it's easy. OK, fine. We gave him the money, and we start to walk.

We're walking down the hill. You know, in the forest in snow, you get lost, you see? So we're walking, and walking, and walking, and no border, and no nothing. So we don't know what to do.

So my friend, the doctor here today, his mouth starts to bleed and everything, because he was exhausted and tired. And I turned as he said, let's go back to Poland. We cannot find anything here.

So where we went down and everything in the snow-- the how you call it-- so we went by back up on the hill. Come on back up on the hill. I said, take a look again, the orientation. What went wrong? So I saw right away we went too much left.

So I told him, OK, let's go again. He wouldn't go, you see? Well, he said he's too tired. So I tell him, no, we have to go. We don't have any choice. I don't want to go anymore to Poland.

So I took again the-- what do you call it-- to go. And I keep more right, more right, more right. And it took us a couple hours or something.

So this hill was a pretty big hill, almost like a mountain you had to go down.

Yeah. Well, you see, this guy, he told us over there you go there, and there is the border. And we're going, and no border.

So we came over, and we found the border, you see, in the right. And when we came to the border, as you got on one side, D. Poland was marked Deutschland and S, Slovakia. As we passed the border, and we're going, OK, so we are in Slovakia.

Next, he told us you have to turn left. Only we didn't turn left right away. We went farther-- I don't know, maybe half a kilometer, a kilometer. And again, the same border.

So you were at a spot where the border was all very wiggly.

Over there, yes, went a spot like that. So we were walking beside the border, and I was checking the stones, you see-- Deutschland, Slovakia, Deutschland, Slovakia.

The whole border was marked in stones there.

Yeah, stones. Yeah. About 200 meters was a stone or something.

So next, we turned back left on the S side, and we started to walk down. We were walking but 15, 20 minutes, as we came on a place where people were working in the forest-- was cutting wood and this. OK, you see, no people there was for night-- was the whole day we were walking in the snow over there.

And you didn't see any people at that time.

No, no people. You see, they went home. They were working in the forest, the Slovak people. And they went home. So we went to the same place that they went home. As before--

So you were following these people's paths.

We were following their paths.

But these people didn't see you at this point.

No, nobody was there anymore. It was late. And still we came to a village that's a Slovak village, Frishka. And the first woman, she was feeding pigs.

So we came to the house, and we told her, you see-- we didn't tell her hi, hello like the Slovaks, you see? Blessed be Jesus Christ.

That's a Slovak greeting.

That's a Slovak-- yeah. So she asked us, who are you? What are you doing here? So we made up a story. We went from Grodzisko from where the other guy is, to Bardejov. That was on a Wednesday. We went to Bardejov. The one in Bardejov was a market, Wednesday. We went to the market, and on the way back, we want to go straight through the forest, not the route all around. And we got lost.

So your story was you had gotten lost going to a market day.

Gotten lost, yeah. And she said, oh, people. Aren't you lucky? You see, you are on the Polish border, and if the Germans find you, they'll shoot you without any asking questions.

As I was wet from snow and this, I asked her, can I go inside to warm up a little bit? So we went inside. And you see over there, they have from bricks the stoves-- big stove built.

And I took off my pants. I took everything but my [INAUDIBLE] and sit down to the stove, and I start to warm. 10, 15 minutes came in a teenager boy with a-- how you call-- on his back.

Knapsack on his back?

Yeah. And he asked, who are these people? So we told him, who we are. We are this and this. We're going home to Slovakia. So he said the border-- how you call-- the guards are after him. Well, he was smuggling something or something.

He said, what shall we do with him? So I told him, I don't give a damn nothing. I am not moving here from the warm stove. And I was sitting there.

The guards never came in. She gave us supper. She brought straw on the floor. We were sleeping on the straw. And the guard, wintertime was cold. In November, it's cold over there. So they used to come in to light the cigarette, come to warm up.

We heard the guards talking under the window light. And never nobody came in. In the morning, she gave us breakfast. We ate, thank you, nice and everything. And we start to go. Besides, she explained to us where we go, you know, that other village beside this village. And next, we turned left, and we go down. When we were walking, we saw the guard walking across from us.

That's the border guard.

The border guard. Nobody stopped us, you know?

Next, we found on the street-- how you say it-- like you use for horses.

A whip?

A whip, yeah. We find a whip. So I pick up the whip, and we walk with the whip. And we watched people and this. People stopped us. What are you doing? Over there, we were hard with the language with everything. We were home.

So we told the story. A guy stopped us. Where are you going? What are you doing here? So I told him we went from Grodzisko to Bardejov for a market. We were ready to buy a cow, you know, [INAUDIBLE].

And somebody told us he got here a cow, so we came to see the cow here. Only I don't like it. So he said, I have a cow, too, for sale. Come on. I'll show you. I said, no thanks. I am not-- I picked the cow over there, you see? I give him a village what I know. You see, I know the neighborhood. And I go there, and I buy the cow.

And that's where we walked farther. We came before the city Bardejov. That's a little town, a nice little town.

That's that evening you got there.

Yeah, before the evening. So we had so much lice. We had the two shirts and our two underwear, you see? So we tried to get ready, we have a little bit with the lice. For 20 days, you didn't wash, you didn't do nothing, you know? And we had lice in the camp. There was lice in the camp.

It was horrible, us bothering you, as we took off, you see? And we start to clean everything. You couldn't clean it. So we threw the bottom shirt-- we threw away. And we put this on, and we walked.

We came to Bardejov. That's the city-- so hungry. Before night, the whole day, we didn't have nothing, no bite, no nothing, you know? ?

And we didn't know Jews are there. Well, it was still-- in '42, it used to be Jews which run-- they had a special permit, you see? The Gentile people, the Slovaks, took over all the businesses from the Jew, only they were so dumb, they couldn't handle it. You see, they couldn't manage the businesses. So anybody who had a business, he got a special permit to teach these people.

So the Jewish business people hadn't all been deported then.

Not all of them, yeah. You see, always somebody left over to teach them and to manage the business till they learn it or to manage it.

So we're walking around hungry and this, looking here, looking there, still with a whip in my hand. And we're walking before a bakery. Oh, how can we get a piece of bread? As no, we didn't want to risk-- so we're walking once, twice.

Next, my partner, he was close to the door. The door was open, and he said that it's a Jewish bakery from where you know. There was a girl in the bakery, and the guy told her, in one hour will be bread-- in Jewish.

[SPEAKING HEBREW]

Still, it didn't look to me Jewish, so I didn't want to risk the walking back and forth. And next, I see a Jew-- an older Jew with a Magen David. And that's what they had to wear.

The Jews had to wear the yellow star.

They had to-- Magen David. So I go to this Jew, and I tell him, OK, listen here. We came just from Poland. We ran away. Where can we get something to eat or something?

He looked at me, and he didn't know what to answer. So I asked him, is this baker a Jew? He told me, yeah. OK, so we

walked in the bakery when nobody was there, and we told him if we can get bread.

So he told us, OK, get out from the store and stay by the other door next to the store. And I'm going to open the door for you in my house and let you in. And we went in.

So we told him the story. He gave us food and everything, coffee and everything. They still had everything there, you know? And we're sitting there and talking.

You told him what was happening in Poland as far as you knew?

Yeah. Yeah. And at once walks in a teenage boy, and he told somebody, Sobel was looking for you. I asked him, Sobel is here? You see, I knew the guy, you know?

He was looking for you?

No, no, no. Sobel was looking for the other guy. You see, next came in some people to talk to us. So I asked him, Sobel is here? Let's send me to Sobel. Go look up where Sobel is. He went looking. He brought Sobel in.

You see, Sobel there was a guy. I knew him very well, you know? His uncle and aunt, you see, they're where we used to go to pray in [INAUDIBLE], what I was talking before.

So he came in. And I told him, listen here. We don't have any money. We don't have anything. We want to go to Presov. What can you do for us? Come on. He fixed up everything.

Why had this guy Sobel been deported?

He wasn't deported. He was a special-- he got a special, how you call it?

He got a special permit to stay?

He got the special permit.

Did he have a business or you said--

No, they were farmers.

And somehow he was able to work by protekcja of some type?

His parents and him, they had a special permit. Because they were still there in '42. There were a lot of Jews still in '42.

So he took us, OK. And we're going to go. You see, he used to live on the same line, you see, on the railroad between Bardejov and Presov. And he bought us tickets, and we go in the-- how do you call, in the rail, on the train? And we're going to his house, home.

So we came on over there. Frishka was their name. We come in the house. His mother was there. His father was there. Oh, boy. They prepared everything, food and everything.

But only on the train, before we came, was a Bohemian guy, which he used to be a-- he used to buy pigs and this and cows and everything for me. He used to ship to Bohemia. And they told him who we are, not the Jew. And he came over to us and handed everybody 100 Krone in the hand. And watch yourself, keep well.

And he knew you were Jews?

Yeah. They told him, the friends, our friends. They told him. He was a nice guy. He was doing business with Jews.

And he hadn't bought all the propaganda.

No. He gave us money we have to spend, to buy. So next, this Mrs. Sobel, the mother from this guy, my friend, she was ready to put us in bed to sleep. She was excited, you know?

You were the first people that had returned from anybody who'd been deported.

So I told her, oh, no. We're not going to sleep in bed. We are full with lice. We're going to go up over-- they used to stack hay for the cows and everything.

In the barn where they had a hay loft there.

Yeah, we were sleeping there. And in the morning, OK, we were ready to go to Presov. In Presov, we are home over there, with the train, you see? We had money. We bought tickets.

And that was on a Friday morning, as we came with the friend in the morning. Only we passed villages, you know? People start to go-- Friday is usually a market in Presov. And the farmers, they used to go to the market to sell, to buy, to anything.

So a lot of people walked in what we knew, and they knew us. So we were sitting by the window like this, you see?

So they didn't recognize you, because they all knew you'd been deported.

Sure, they knew. So we came to Presov, only we didn't go to Presov to the main station-- to the station. We went, before Presov, down a little station, in a little village in the station. And we walked through.

So we're coming on Friday morning to Presov. We don't know who is here, what is here, what's going on here. Nobody. So we're walking here, we knew where Jewish people used to live. So we're looking in here and there in the places. We don't see nobody.

You don't see any Jewish people.

No, we don't see any people at all.

Oh.

No, we didn't know. We couldn't just go any place.

Had you realized that that many people had been deported, or you didn't realize?

No, we knew the Jewish people are there, you see? Just we didn't know who and what. I said, once, I see a guy. I know him, a friend. And I go to him, and told him, OK, take a look. We just came and this. What can you do for us? Where can you take us?

And he told me like this. I cannot take you to me. Well, over there, very bad people, Nazis and this where I live. Well, he had, too, a permit. He had a textile store, and he had to teach-- how you call-- the people, you see, who took over the store.

So I start to ask him. Is this guy here? Is this guy here or this guy? Yeah. You see, I knew a place which Jews-- all Jews-- used to live there. So we went down.

OK, so I told him, fine. We took off, and we went down. As we come in there, you see the name is Kauffman. He had, too, a textile business. As we came in, just the wife was home and the daughter.

And we came down. That was in the morning. She started to prepare-- not in the morning, before noon. She started to prepare coffee and this, give us food, and we're sitting in the kitchen.

We're sitting in the kitchen-- walked in a farmer woman, started to bring her butter and chicken or something. And I take a look at the woman. I know the woman. She knows me. So we walked out right away from the kitchen, and we went in.

And she was asking this Mrs. Kauffman, tell me. Is this not the guy from Bardejov, from Grodzisko? And she told her, oh, no. They're not. Only the whole villages, they knew. You see, she told everybody that she saw us.

And she knew that you'd come back.

Yeah, she knew that we came back. Yeah. Only nothing happened.

Right away, the daughter went to the store. You see, he wasn't home, Mr. Kauffman. And she brought him home, and I told him, OK, listen here. We need clothes. We need to cut our hair, you know? And we need to take a bath. So where are we going to go? You see, we have so much lice. Where can we go to a barber?

So I knew in Presov an old barber. When I was a boy, you see, I used to go to him. I asked him, is this barber still here? Yeah. OK. We had money. We went to the barber. He was blind. He couldn't see nothing.

Oh, so he didn't recognize--

He gave us a haircut. We paid him, and we came back. And this Mr. Kauffman, he took clothing for us-- organized clothing for us. And we went to a bath, you know?

And we went to a bath. We were taking the new clothing and paper, wrapped up, everything. We came in a bath. We put it aside, took off all the old clothes with the lice, with everything. We rolled it together, put it in the paper bag, and the other one took out. And we took a bath. We were clean as we start to walk back to this Mr. Kauffman.

And over there was a river. We were looking left and right, and we see nobody by the river, as we throw the clothing in the river. And from there on, you see, we were home. We were clean and everything.

So what were your plans?

No plans. We didn't know what to do. So we stayed. I found some friends over there that used to live in Presov, a friend. He had a room, so I got in touch with him. And I went over there to him to sleep, and the other guy went to other places. And that's where we were staying for a few days.

And our plans was this. We want papers. We have to make ourselves papers.

Legal papers to be in Slovakia.

Slovakia-- changed my name, you see? I had the other friend. He took a birth certificate, a Jewish birth. And he took everything out, the ink. He left just a stamp on it, you know? And next, he filled in a name, any name. You see, like my name was Joseph Kucharek-- Slovak name.

That's the name you took.

Yeah, I took Joseph Kucharek. And with this paper, I had the other friend. You see, when I say, it was a lot of Jews still in the business, you know? He used lumber-- how you call it? He had a lumber business.

A lumber yard?

A lumber yard, lumber business. So he used to take laborer and send away laborer. So I told him, I need, you see, like Social Security. So over there, when you register a laborer, they give you a book. I had the birth certificate. On this birth certificate, they gave me the--

The lumber book. That's was your identity papers, weren't they?

Yeah. No pictures, no nothing, just me. And with this book, I could go work. I could do anything. They didn't ask over the pictures or what like this.

So I was looking, shall we get some place not in the city? We don't want to stay in the city. We want to go both. We want to go out from the city and in the villages.

Were you planning to pretend you were a Slovak, or you were going to still be a Jew?

No, you couldn't be a Jew.

So this was you're a Slovak.

No, a Slovak-- Joseph Kucharek. I am not a Jew anymore.

And I had the other friend, and he had a farmer in Zehna. You know what I'm talking? And he used to come to bring him all kinds of produce and everything, you see? And I used to go to him. Like for example, you know how hungry we were? Still we came back and there were filling up. I went for two suppers on two places at supper.

And I bought a 2 kilogram bread. That's so much like 4 pounds. And I came home where I stayed with my friend, and I start to eat the bread. And I put away a piece of bread, and I went to sleep. I couldn't sleep. I have to get up and finish the bread. You see, that's how it works in your mind, hunger.

So this guy, the farmer came over. And he said something. He's looking for a helper, farm helper. So I asked him, would you take a Jewish boy? OK, introduce me. So I talked to the guy, and I went over.

This guy, he knew I am a Jew, you know? He was a-- how do you call it-- like the Bible [NON-ENGLISH]-- Bible-- what do they call it? You see, where they're reading. He was a Lutheran.

He was a minister?

No, not a minister. They live according to the Bible, you see? They are reading the Bible-- Jehovah Witness.

Oh, he was a Jehovah's Witness.

Jehovah's Witnesses. Yeah And that's where I went. And I worked there.

And this was in this the village of Zehna.

Show us on the map where Zehna was. I think we marked it beforehand.

I marked it before where I find it. Let me see if I find it. It's not far from Presov. Here is Presov. Here is Presov, and here is Zehna. This was about 10 kilometers from Presov.

So now, you spent then the remainder of the war there.

The remainder of the war there. I used to work for this farmer with horses and with buggy. And I still had two families I was hiding.

Tell us about that. You're working for this farmer. The farmer knows you're Jewish.

The whole village knew.

You're using this Slovak name, but everybody knows you're a Jew posing as a Slovak.

Now, wait a second. I'll explain who I-- you see, later on, when it was very bad, as the German, they want-- was a lot of partisans. The German, they want everybody have a picture and, how you call, a card.

The identity card.

The identity card. It wasn't a problem on the village. But the secretary-- all the villages, they had mayors. Only the mayors, they couldn't handle the-- how you call it-- the anything.

The administrative things?

The administrative-- for about five, six villages was a special secretary, you know? And this guy was paid with the government, and he handled it.

As he came in the village, and everybody have to give him a picture and he stamp it over, he gave you an application. No problem at all, you see? Nobody asked me any questions.

So you used this name Joseph.

Joseph Kucharek. And he gave me--

With your picture. And so you had Slovak identity papers.

I had everything, just the whole village knew I am a Jew. Just they were thinking I am a converted Jew.

I see.

For example--

They thought that you were [CROSS TALK].

I went in the church, Lutheran church. The priest from the church, he knew. And I was sitting with him and talking with him like you. He knew I'm a Jew. Just when they go once a year to the church, you see, and they tell him, yeah, we are sinning and this and this, I never went this. The teacher over there, he had two sons, and they were good friends with me, you know?

So everybody thought you were a converted Jew, and they kept you in the village.

Was students-- they used to go to gymnasium in town, in Presov. They were my good friends there in the village.

So in what month-- this was already in 1943 when you went to the village?

No, in the village I went-- yeah, in '43.

In the winter then?

Yeah.

And you were there how long?

Till January 1945.

So two years you were there.

Yeah, till January 1945. That's when the Russians came in the village.

Now, so I want just to tell you. You see, I was living with these people over there. They would do anything for me. You see, I went over, and I told my friends, or I was sitting in a bar and drinking vodka like water. And I told them, I need-- I have two Jewish families. I need a bunker to hide them in.

How did these Jewish families come to you?

Well, they came to you, you see, from the mayor. The mayor had got four sons, and they were all good friends of mine. And one son used to live outside the village on a farm there.

And this engineer, Frovirt, which one is still alive in New York, he used to work. They used to build a new village. And he was an engineer there till '44-- sometime in fall '44. He was there, just in fall '44 there was a revolution of some kind. And this time, they took all the Jews.

The remaining Jews who had-- all those Jews who had permits.

They cleaned out all the Jews.

Was this when Tiso took over? Or Tiso had been there all along?

Tiso was all along there.

Yeah.

Only this guy, this engineer, he was working there at this time. That's the end of it. As he started to work, I don't know. He came over to this my friend, the mayor's son that he was living there. And he told him he's a Jew, and he don't know what to do.

So he told him, no, wait a second. I have here a friend, a Jew. You know, me. Let's talk to him. I go talk. So he came over to me, and he talked to me.

And he asked me, Josku, what can you do for them, some engineer? I didn't know him, you see? I knew I heard his name, only I didn't know. What can you do for him?

So I told him, wait a second. I don't have time. Before night, he came, in the afternoon. And I told him, wait till the evening, and bring him over in the evening. So he brought him over. There was a man with his wife and a boy about 10 years old. So I put them over there in the barn to sleep over the night, and I am going to see what I can do for them.

You thought you'd find a place to hide them out.

Yeah, to hide them out.

Did you feel any sense of danger to have to do this for them?

No, I don't know. I was self-- I don't know. I don't know. I didn't feel no danger, nothing. I was talking with Germans, I mentioned later. And I started to try to-- you see, I didn't want to keep him by my father, but everybody was mad on my farmer. Well, he didn't drink, and he was rich, you know?

So I went to other farmer, and I told him, you see, I have a Jew, and I have to-- need him to hide but two or three days, you know? And she told me, boy, I am afraid. So I asked her, you believe in God? So we have to help people. She said OK, do what you want, what you think is right. So I took him over in their bottoms, and I kept him there for three days.

Next, I find a place for the men to hide, and the woman, I gave her clothes like a peasant was wearing, you see? And I send her to another place, same thing, you see-- a good friend. He was very good. He was, too, a Jehovah's Witness.

And I told him, listen. I'm sending you here a woman with a kid, and don't tell nobody she is Jewish. She is going to say she is evacuating. The front was coming through the Carpathian. And she is from over there someplace. She doesn't know where her husband is and nothing and she is--

So you gave her a story to tell.

I gave her a story, yeah. And that's while she was sitting there. Only she couldn't sit that long. I'll tell you. Well, it was German and Italian soldiers. She was a good looking woman. She was even very good looking woman. And the Italian soldiers started to talk to her, and she couldn't talk anyway.

And the mother from the wife, you know, she wasn't bad, only she sees her behavior was different like the peasant, you know? And she came to her son-in-law, and she told him, I think that's a Jewish woman. She doesn't behave like our people.

So he came home and he started to tell me. So I told him, OK, don't worry. I'll find you a place.

You mentioned the soldiers, because the battle lines were now going through this part of the country?

Yeah, they went through, only it wasn't fighting then.

There was no-- just the soldiers passed through, but not fighting.

No, the soldier was there for a while.

They were stationed there?

Just let me finish this. I had to take her out, and I put her in another village. And she survived there. The soldiers-- yeah, the German soldiers were there. And we didn't have anything to do with them. You see, they didn't bother us.

Were they bunkered in the various villages, or were they in the bigger towns?

No, no, no. You see, the people dug holes in the ground for hiding in case they need to hide from the Germans. That's what they do. You see, a friend of mine, a guy over there, I was drinking with him vodka like water. Here's the hole like this, so I took the people there.

And next, it was cold. I needed a stove, so I started to look in the village for a stove. I find one. Next, I took him over, prepared him wood and food and this. I brought him over there, and they survived there.

Only I organized not only this, I organized the village. You see, when the Germans went back-- they're pulling back-- as they took horses, cows, young people--

This is under the German retreat when the Russians are coming or almost there.

Yeah.

This is when the Germans know they're going to lose the war.

And so I organized. They didn't took nobody from the village, you know?

How did you organize the village?

Well, we built like this room bigger-- like this room, a bunker in the ground, you know? And the last night, everybody from the village was in the bunker, was hiding. And I was in the village.

Well, in the bunker was-- everybody wants to know who got whiskey and this, who got vodka. As one guy said, I have vodka. I have vodka. Who would go? So I went with the other guy down.

And we came down. We got drunk in the village, and we lay down, and we were sleeping on the-- how do you call it? And in the morning, we got up, it's quiet. We're looking here, we're looking there, nobody in the village-- no Germans. We didn't know what happened. That was in the morning. About 10:00, the first, how you call, Russians came in.

The Russian battalions.

Yeah, the first one, you see? They came. They were very nice, friendly, and everything.

So this was the liberation.

That was the liberation. Only 2:00 in the afternoon came the second, how you call? You see, the first one, they went after the Germans right away. They didn't stop. The second one, they stopped. They were like wild animals, horrible. They want vodka. They start to shoot in the rooms and this. And it was horrible.

Before we talk about the liberation, you spent two very exceptional years in this village.

Yeah.

Did the people in the village know what was happening to Jews?

Yeah.

What did they know? What had they heard?

They knew. I told them.

What, you told them?

Yeah. You see, not everybody.

Did anyone know about places like Auschwitz, or that wasn't known?

No, they didn't know about Auschwitz. You see, we knew. Well, for example, Dublin-- from Presov was the same thing, a transport. The whole transport, 1,000 Jews, went to Dublin.

And they started to write back to Presov. And in Presov, the people-- these people who still had their permit, they start to get money or something like this and send over there with some Polish people, especially, so they have money to buy something like this. Because they knew what's going on.

And next, you see, I knew what was going on. They really don't you. Some people, they wouldn't believe it that's what's going on.

But people felt that Jews were being sent to their death in Poland somewhere.

Who?

People like yourself. You knew that that's--

Oh, yeah.

And when the Polish peasants-- the Slovakian peasants believed what you told them?

The Slovakian, no. We didn't talk about it.

You didn't talk about that or anything like that.

No, we didn't talk about it.

When you look over the whole time, what gave you strength to keep going?

I don't know. You see, that's really unbelievable. To me, it's like a dream that I survived, you know? Well, that's no food and I don't know.

Did you expect help from anybody?

No, I didn't expect no help from nobody. I was on my own. You see, not only this, in the village they respected me. You see, in the village over there, my farmer, you see, he didn't drink. He didn't smoke. And he bought from a bank, you know-- bankrupt. You see, some farmers went bankrupt when the bank sold out their field. And he bought it. They didn't like him in the village.

And when I came in the village, they didn't like me either. Only, you see, what I did, I was sitting in a bar. And two brothers over there, you see, they hate my guts. They hate my boss, my farmer. And they started to hate me, too. They say, you are like your farmer.

So I put him down on a seat to a table, and I told him, here, you're going to drink with me vodka. And I bought him 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 glasses vodka. Oh, you are my people. Don't worry. You see that's how you survive. That's how you work with these people.

Did you did you think about God or anything like that during those years?

I have a problem about God. You know why? These Jehovah Witnesses. He brought me all kind of missionaries, and they start to convert me, you know, shall I take the religion from them. And they were praying for me and this. They gave me a hard time.

Only I told them, listen, people. I am here under pressure. What is going to help when the war be over and I can take the religion on my own? I said, OK, I have time to make up my mind. And they left me alone.

That's how you put them off.

Put them off. You see, the missionaries, even Jewish missionaries, they brought me. And they were trying to convince me. For them, it's a big thing to convince a Jew to take--

Even if they thought you were a converted Jew, they still want--

No, they didn't. They knew I am not converted.

Oh, the farmer's family knew that you were not a converted Jew. He knew.

No. The other, you know? They were thinking I'm converted. Only my farmer, he knew. He tried to convert me.

What about the rest of the world, like the United States? Did you think about anything like that during that time, where the rest of the world was?

We didn't have any contact at all with the United States. You see, I had family here or something-- no contact.

You didn't hear from anybody here.

No.

Did you wonder where the rest of the world powers were while all this was happening?

Listen, that's hard to say. I tell you why. These Germans, from the beginning, how they were going in Russia, we were thinking there's no help for us at all in Europe. See, the Germans, day by day you see, the newspaper, the radio, and everything, you see they were showing the picture [INAUDIBLE]. It's unbelievable, you see? You see, they were-- I don't know. It's no army in the whole world can do something like they did. They took in-- I don't know.

One hope was for us that the Germans were going to lose the war, only it didn't look like that from the beginning. Later on, sure we had hope. You see, I was with the Germans. I did unbelievable things with the Germans there. I was working with the partisans and this.

What's this about-- how did you have contact with the partisans? From the village you had contact with them?

Yeah, in the evening they came over. I got in touch. I went on spy-- on spy missions I went.

Tell us about some. Describe some of these, would you, some of these?

You see, I went Presov to spy out where the Germans got tanks, and where they got the cannons, where they got-- you see, there was [INAUDIBLE] on that place. And I went over there.

Next, I had the two Jewish families I had to go--

You told us about how you hid out the one family. Who was the second family?

The second family was a gentleman. I forgot even his name. I don't know, he went to Israel. And this guy, I was holding him for a long time in my barn where I was working. Just later on, you see, that I couldn't hold him there more while-- you see, my farmer was-- they didn't like my farmer, you see?

So where did you put this family?

I put him through in the bunker in the forest.

So he was with the other family in the bunker?

No, no, just the two men.

The two men were there.

And the woman with the kids, she was living like a Gentile, you know?

How long did you hide out the two families?

From '44-- from fall in '44, sometime in September, October. I was hiding more families, only I couldn't-- a doctor and his parents. He was working in a hospital, and at night, I pulled his parents. They were hiding his parents, and I brought them in a village, and I placed them in a village.

And he went to visit his parents from the hospital. He was working in the hospital. He got a permit, you know?

And the Gestapo, the SS, came after him, after Dr. Friedman, you see, in the hospital. They looked for him. And the stupid nurse, you know what she told him? He went over there in this village. He got his parents there. And they went over there, and they caught him and his parents, and took them away.

You showed some exceptional courage, though, to help these people.

During the night-- during the night--

And risking your own hiding out to do so.

No, I wasn't. Listen, I was so self-confident, you see? I didn't have no for the German, you know? I handled him like dirt. Would you tell me, shall a German [GERMAN]. I don't know for [GERMAN], what is-- how you call.

He was sleeping in my farmer's house, and he got my-- the farmer found out he got lice, and he threw his blankets out. And he asked me, shall I tell the farmer? He don't let him sleep here while he got lice. As I told him, you're the boss. You tell him, as he asked me, please do me a favor. OK, I'm going to tell him.

The guy walked in, and he saw blankets out and start to scream. Who threw out my blankets, as I pull my hair here this way, I button my jacket this way, make myself like a stupid guy, you know? And I go to him, and I said in German, [SPEAKING GERMAN]

You see, you are not going to sleep here while you've got lice. And he pulled his pistol on me, [SPEAKING GERMAN]

If you understand.

Yes, you said you spoke--

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

You see, he have to do with some [INAUDIBLE], some kind--

I understand.

--as he took his blankets and walked away.

When we go to the last tape, I want you to share with us some more of the stories about what happened in the village, and then tell us what happened to you after you were liberated. And what where we'll pick up on the last tape.

OK.

OK.