

Good afternoon. Today we're interviewing Sara Kay, a Holocaust survivor and my mother. My name is Abraham Kay. And this project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, the Cleveland Section.

Let me ask you if you could please tell us just a little bit about what your life is like today, your husband, what your occupation is, your family, just a little bit of information along those lines.

Well, I'm a grandmother, and I'm a mother, and I'm a wife. In the other order, but that's what I am. And I'm very proud of my children.

And I'm happy to be here. Because Cleveland is really the place where it's my home. And until we came to Cleveland, life was not so simple at all.

But we're happy here. And we're very, very happy, very proud. And the memories are not so happy. And it's not so easy to talk about them.

Let me ask you, going back really to your earliest memories, you're from Poland.

Yes.

What was your home?

Wielen, Poland.

And where was that located?

We were right on the German border. And we were the very first to be bombed, I don't even know if the war was declared. Friday morning, September 1, we heard the sirens.

And we really thought that this was a civil defense alarm. It was called LOP. Lotnicza Obrona Przeciwpowietrzna. And we knew that the Germans are supposed to attack Poland. But we didn't believe it. And we were hoping they weren't.

But when the sirens started blowing, pretty soon we heard big booms. And I was a little girl. We had big windows at home, which opened, French windows you would call them. And I climbed on the window to close it.

And I saw the plane did not have the Polish markings on it. It had the white crosses, which we knew were German. And it just didn't add up to me.

But while I was on the window, our room was much bigger than this. And I was blown to the next wall, like a little ball. I was blown all across the room from-- it was such a air.

And I didn't know what was going on. But it sounded awful. And it felt bad.

And my father was not of military age. So he had a band. He was a captain of the [NON-ENGLISH], because the civil defense, which is the LOP, had given people jobs, just in case something would happen.

And my mother was in bed. I was just in my nightgown. And I had a little sister who was 4 and 1/2 years old. So I grabbed my skirt and my sweater and I put on her.

Because we just didn't know what was going on. There was such a strange experience. And it was terrifying.

Somehow, I don't remember why, we ran into a basement, which was under us. But it wasn't our basement. People lived there.

Our house was made from stones, cut stones. And the basement was like you would call cathedral. The ceilings were very, very thick. And near the chimney, near the ends of the wall, it was yardstick, not just inches.

And while we were in the basement, the bombs were blow-- really, we heard really terrible noises. And I was there with my mother and a few other neighbors. And my father wasn't even downstairs yet.

Then it quieted down for a couple of minutes. And in the meantime, my father came down, too. And he brought down some clothes for us, because we were naked out of the beds.

I grabbed the coat. Because I had my nightgown. And I grabbed the coat. And my skirt was on my sister. And my mother had something on. I don't even remember what.

And this happened three times, with a couple of minutes in between, a pause. And then my father didn't go out anymore to take care because everything was coming apart. The buildings were falling. People were dying. Horses were dying.

And all the electric wires were down. And a week before this, we had a storm. And one of the wires on our street was down. And there was water. It was what you would call a flash flood?

Flash flood.

Flash flood, and a horse got killed because it didn't see the wire. The driver of the wagon didn't see the wire. So we wanted to get out of the house, but we were afraid. Because the wires were all over, and we didn't know if they're alive or dead.

And it was great panic. And people didn't know what to do. One thing we were afraid of was gas. For some reason we thought, if this has to be war, and we were sure that everything will be gassed.

So we put something in a tin, the kuchen. Because this was Friday morning, and the kuchen was ready for the Shabbat, so we had some food. It was, like, you just did anything that came to your mind.

And pretty soon, we were out. It took about a half hour. And it quieted down. We didn't know if this is over, but we started going out on the road.

And somehow I had a knapsack. I don't know how, either my father brought it down, out. And I was with my father, with my mother, and my little sister, and also the neighbors. And as we started going, I was in charge of that knapsack for some reason.

And a neighbor had a wagon with two wheels. I think the kind that you push. Because he used to deliver milk or something.

And I put this knapsack on. And in a few minutes, maybe in two, three minutes, I didn't see my parents. And we started going faster because we thought the parents are ahead.

So I was lost. Because you had to hold on to somebody very tight not to get lost. Because the road was right away full with people, the ones who were alive. And there were dead horses and other things on the side of the road.

And we were going toward East. It was, like, nobody said anything. It's just we knew that this is the direction away from the border. And this is the direction East. So that's where we went.

And we waited a few minutes. And we were going quicker and quicker. And when we didn't see our parents, the neighbors didn't want the responsibility. I was less than 13 years old. And they had three of their own children.

And I was very upset. I didn't know what to do. On top of the bombs and everything, I was alone.

So we waited a few minutes. We still didn't see the parents. So this was my fate.

So once we got out of town, I saw planes again. But the planes were diving. And they weren't bombing us anymore.

And then I saw a Polish soldier. And he had what you call a field shovel. And he was trying to dig a trench with one hand. And when he saw the plane, he tried to shoot.

And I said to myself, this couldn't be happening. This is the Polish army. I was always so proud to be Polish.

And I believed everything I heard in school. And everything we learned. The slogans were we won't even give a button of our uniform, [NON-ENGLISH] uniform. And I really felt I'm part of a great country and how could this be happening, one soldier trying to shoot at a plane.

Even I was so young, I just thought this was ridiculous. I mean, this is just not possible. But that's what was happening. And people were going naked and half naked because it was such an early time.

And I couldn't keep up with the grown ups. So I took off the shoes. And I walked barefoot. And the rucksack was on their wagon.

We walked all day without stopping for water or for anything. We were running, not walking, as fast as we could. And there were some people who had a buggy or a horse or something, but very few. The majority was just running. And there was great panic.

By early evening, we got off the road. Again, I don't know how these things were happening. But some people went off the road. Evidently, they realized-- and a farmer was boiling a big pot of potatoes, which you do for cattle, with the skins.

And he tried to give them to us. But the potatoes weren't ready yet when we heard planes. So, again, we were afraid. We were afraid to be in the house all together. We felt that outside is already better than being in the house.

So we grabbed the potatoes, which were half-cooked. They were hard inside. And by then, I couldn't chew anymore. My gums were all-- it was strange. I couldn't even chew. And so we ate the potatoes, just the part on the outside.

And we ran again. And it was dark. Finally, I guess the grownups decided that it's time to stay for the night someplace.

So another farmer let us stay in a barn. And it was very, very cold. It was September 1. But during the night, it was very cold. So I tried to find underwear in the rucksack, because it wasn't really underwear. It was my gym shorts.

But somehow, this was packed. Because we intended to leave. We were sort of dividing everything.

My father had a business. So half of the machines he was trying to keep. And half we were trying to send away.

Because we figured even wars don't last forever. If something would happen, then half of it would be at my mother's cousin's place in Piotrkow. And my mother and I and my sister were supposed to go there. So that's why things some of the things were packed.

And the rest, he didn't want to just leave everything. He wanted to stay and keep his business. So that's why this rucksack was packed.

So I put on my gym shorts. In the meantime, I lost a shoe. I had a pair of shoes there, too. And I didn't realize it, but I could never find the shoe anymore.

And we slept a few hours. And then we started walking again. And we came into a village or a little city. It was called Belchatow. This was Saturday morning.

And by a day over there, in the first place, when we were was Ozeacov. When we got there, it was very close to our city. People thought we were a bunch of beggars.

They said what's happening? A bunch of naked beggars are running. What's going on? We told them it's war. We're bombed.

They said you're crazy. There is no war. But the war was on already. And when we came to Belchatow the next morning, not only did they know that there was war, but they already knew that the Russians are coming from the other side.

And the Red Cross had set up help stations. I had very big blisters on my soles from running all day. So the people said if you go there, they'll cut them open for you. And I was scared.

So I said I already do without cutting it. And I'm not going to put on shoes. And I'll manage how I can.

And in Belchatow, I found an aunt and an uncle, which was my father's brother and his wife and two cousins.

What were their names?

It's Itzik Hersh Lipszyc and Mendel Lipszyc. And the older cousin was Jakob Lipszyc. And the younger one was Shlomik.

The younger was my best friend, anyway. We grew up together. Because he was my age. And my sister was eight years younger than I.

Somehow I always liked to play with him. And they used to live, for a long time, they used to live, like, next door almost. And we played a lot with each other. So I was comfortable with them rather than with the stranger. And I don't even know if it was so much my decision as the grown ups', but at that time, I felt relieved to be with an uncle rather than with a neighbor.

And the same day, also in Belchatow, because we weren't running so fast. When we heard the Russians are coming from the other side, and that the army is going with tanks and trucks and everything, we realized we weren't out random.

And also, then in the same day, we found another uncle and aunt, which was my mother's brother. And his name was Idalia Abramovich. And my aunt's name was Hannah Abramovich.

And she had a son. But I don't remember that the son was with them. But she was with two sisters and her parents. And I had a little cousin, her little boy, Srulik. And she had a four weeks old baby, Hindzia, who was named like my sister, after the same grandmother.

And they couldn't go quick, either. So I liked this end better than I liked the other end, for some reason. Even though I liked the cousins there, I felt more comfortable with my uncle from my mother's side. And so I was with them.

And I think we stayed overnight in Belchatow, or maybe a little longer. Because this end couldn't move that fast. She was nursing the child. And there wasn't so much food available. There was very little food.

But the Jewish people somehow helped already. They knew we were not beggars. And they heard people ahead of us, because some people were much quicker already than I was. There were young people on bicycles and stuff. So by then everybody knew there is a war.

And we didn't know what to do. And since my aunt's parents were with her, I think they were really making the decisions. And she had a sister living in Pabianice, which was not very far from Piotrkow, either. And there was a tramway, because actually, this was like suburbs.

But before the war, we didn't know anything is suburbs. And everything had a name. And everything was a city or whatever.

So we stayed there. And we didn't move on till Tuesday. And Tuesday was the last tramway going to Pabianice. So I guess that's when they decided we're going on the tramway.

So I remember it was already dark, so I didn't walk anymore. I don't know how many kilometers we walked that first day. But it was probably about 25, 30, at least. We walked, we ran all day, straight.

So we went already on a tramway to Pabianice. We came in in the evening. And they tried to give me stockings or something, because I was half-naked. I had the coat and I had summer shoes, but no stockings or anything like that, no dress, nothing like that. But I had a coat, a summer coat.

And they were talking and talking. And the sister lived a little bit on the outskirts of town. And somehow, I don't think the first day, but sooner or later, we were in that place.

And I think it was called the 11 Listopada, or so. And this was the road to Lodz. Pabianice was in the direction northeast of Wielen. And it was in the direction toward Lodz.

And it was a smaller house. It wasn't in the main city. In the city, there were mostly buildings. And many people lived together.

And this was a smaller place where they were renting. And I only remember one room. But since there were so many of us, and she also had-- I think it was a little boy. But she had a little baby which she was nursing and was also very young. This was my aunt's sister.

And by the time we were there, Friday morning, which was one week after the first Friday, the Germans started coming with the motorcycles and [INAUDIBLE]. And these were like scouts, I think.

And this was early. And after this, they marched in full force with all the paraphernalia. And soldiers came to the room. And they were cutting through-- in Europe, we don't have built in closets. We have what we call garderobe, which were wooden closets, furniture. And you keep your clothes there.

So with the bayonets, they were cutting through the clothes, searching. They said they're searching for Waffen. And we knew German. Because in the First World War-- see, on one side, we were afraid.

But on the other hand, the First World War, Germans were in our place. They called it Warthegau. We were part of Germany.

And people had memories that the Germans were civilized, they were educated. So even though Hitler was saying all these things, people always felt we'll manage with him. People even did business during the first war with the Germans.

So on one hand, we were afraid. But we figured we were more afraid of the war than of the Germans itself. We were running from the bombs and from the bullets, but we felt that sooner or later it will slow down and there'll be some kind of normalcy.

So when they came in that Friday, they started rounding up the people. They took my uncle. And they took my aunt's brother-in-law.

These were the two younger men. Because their father was already an older man. And the rest of us were all women or girls or younger kids yet. And they took them. And the father-in-law was staying and praying Tehillim, which is a very special prayer.

I didn't know what to think first. I didn't understand that much. And my aunt was crying. And her sister was crying.

And there was too much for me to understand everything that's going on. I wasn't happy, but I wasn't crying, either. I just was completely baffled.

Here we were. And we weren't thinking about food or stuff like this. But we knew we were not safe. And we didn't know what's going on exactly.

Later that evening, my uncle and his brother-in-law came back. And everybody was kissing and hugging them. And it was so strange to me.

And in Europe, you didn't tell children everything. But somehow, not my uncle, but the other brother-in-law sat down. And he told us what's happened.

They were all lined up. The Germans lined them up with their hands up. They took men, any kind of men. At that time, it wasn't just Jewish men, any young men. By young, I'm talking early thirties or people who were not in the army.

Because when you were younger, you were already in the army. It was mobilized.

And they shot 10 men. And my uncle and his brother-in-law were 11 and 12. So they were the first two for whom the bullets had stopped. They came home all shook up.

And like I said, my uncle, I don't remember talking. But the other one was telling everything. And then I understood already what's going on. And actually, we slept on the floor, not just in beds. But we were already afraid.

The one girl even survived with me afterwards in camp, and she was older than I. She was already engaged. She was probably 20 or something, Golda. Golda Bornstein is her name, because that was my aunt's maiden name.

And there was another sister who was engaged, an older one of her, but also in her 20s or something. And for some reason, they put us in another room. And I remember it must have been like a storage room or something.

We were sleeping there. And the mice were creeping on our bed. And I wasn't allowed to make a peep. I didn't-- you know, there was so much going on. Naturally, I was scared of a mouse.

But I knew I had to be quiet. And when I saw what went on that day, and when I saw my uncle come home, when they told me to be quiet, I knew that my life depends on it. And a mouse or whatever it was, it could have been even a rat, but we knew something was crawling on us.

We kept quiet. And we were relatively safe for a few days there. And then, again, the grown ups made the decision.

The Germans kept making announcements that people should go home. If they will go home to their own places, they won't be hurt. And they won't be punished. Because they wanted to have everything normal.

So the grown ups decided it's time to go home. And, again, we started walking. And a little bit, we already had transportation, but not much. By transportation, I'm talking, like, a wagon and horse.

Because everything was very upsetting. But I think when people saw a woman with a small baby on her arm-- so we started walking home. And we came home two weeks-- the war was already on two weeks.

When we came home to the city, our house was just a chimney. And it wasn't a house. It was a building with a few buildings around, with a courtyard, like in Europe. There was just a chimney.

And most of it was just chimneys. We lived in the city. It was either chimneys or rubble. It was very, very scary. And I didn't know what's going on.

But where my aunt lived, the place was all right. Because she lived a little bit out of town. But already, I don't remember.

The Polish people were taking over whatever they could find. If their places were bombed out, or if they used to live in a basement, they went into a Jewish place. And for the Jewish people, there was really nothing that you could say this is mine, or I want it, or I want to go back.

But my aunt still went for a little while back into the place where she lived. And I was with them. And I don't know how we got, you know, communication.

We didn't have telephones. And I think even if you had a phone then, it wasn't working. Because the main city was bombed. The electric company was bombed.

The first bombs fell on the hospital. And one line, the hospital was the very first to be bombed. And the buildings had white crosses on them. But they were the very first to be bombed.

The surgeon from the hospital left in his underpants. He didn't even have a top on. Because he lived in a villa right next to the hospital.

The synagogue was bombed, which was very close. The church was bombed. And these are the things that was left. That's how our city looked.

Now what are these photographs of?

I really don't remember, exactly. But this, I think, was the German church. And I think this one was left.

That's the German church on the bottom?

I think so. This was left. But this is how our city looked. And this is already when we were working and clearing the rubble. This was taking in the very beginning of the war. And we didn't take this.

We got this after the war because the Germans took it. And one of the Germans recognized-- this is a friend of ours, from our city.

And his name is?

His name is [? Israel ?] [? Yakubovich. ?] And he lives in Lakewood, New Jersey. Now he's not so young anymore. But this was in 1939.

And so we didn't know that-- somehow we got the messages across. And we heard from my father's side-- my maiden name is Lipszyc, and my father was one of nine children. And everybody lived in the city.

And also, we had cousins. And my grandfather had a cousin which had established family. And Lipszyc, was a big name. Because this was a city, there were quite a few of us, and we were in all different things.

And somehow they said that this home of Lipszyc, which was not my grandfather, but was my grandfather's cousin, Abraham Lipszyc, was his name. But he wasn't alive. But the wife was alive.

She was, like, you would call a patriarch. She also had, I think, six or seven children. And she couldn't leave town because she was an older woman. And she couldn't run or walk. So two sons stayed with her, one single son and one married son.

Anyway, their house was not bombed. And that we should go there. And we went there. My grandfather-- in the

meantime, I was always asking have you seen my parents? Have you seen?

So at one time, somebody told me they had seen my parents. My grandfather and two of my aunts and my parents were together. And one of my little cousins, because my aunt had a little cousin, and one aunt was single, and my mother, and my little sister.

So that made me happy. So then I heard that they're coming home. And they did come home.

So Mrs. Lipszyc, who was the patriarch called us in. And she said, listen let all of us fill up these places. And let's stay together. Because whatever building the Germans are not taking over, the Polish are taking the Jewish places to live. And at least this way we'll have a place to live.

So I was happy to see my mother and my sister. And I wanted to know where is my father. So they said they're waiting. My father should be coming. My father should be coming.

So what was the story? They were happy to see me, they said. When I got lost right at home on Friday the 1st, they were waiting for me. They thought I'm behind them.

And they started going. And they were waiting, waiting. Then my grandfather came, and my two aunts, and my cousin. Her name was Shifra Blitz, because that was my aunt's name, Blitz. Her maiden name was Lipszyc, but her married name was Blitz.

And from then on, they were together again. They weren't going very fast. Because my grandfather was already, I think, 60, or in the 60s. And they were sort of waiting there, maybe they'll find me.

And by that time, it was, I think, Monday, or Sunday or Monday. They got taken prisoner because they hadn't gone very far. And the German army came to our city. At 12 o'clock, they were in the city already on Friday.

So naturally, they caught up with my parents very quickly. And even though they were civilians and not young or anything, they took them prisoners. And they had other people as prisoners, too, not just my parents.

And somebody was shooting at them or bombing them, or there were bullets, there were things coming. Something was going on. I don't know if this was the English or this was the Polish. There was some shooting going on.

So the officer in charge took them. And they were outside in a field. And the officer had seen my sister, who was 4 and 1/2 years old. She was a very pretty girl.

And he gave her a pound of kunst Honig. We had never seen kunst Honig before, which is artificial honey. In Poland, I had never seen it.

We had the real honey. And we didn't know what kunst Honig means. And this was, I think, a German invention.

And he had given her 50 pfennig. And, again, we hadn't had German money. And he said to her, [NON-ENGLISH]. And my mother was telling me this.

Which means?

Which means it's a shame, child, that you are Jewish. No good times are coming for you Jewish people. But, again, we weren't in such luxury before the war. We had a rich life, but not a luxurious life.

And we didn't worry. We figured we can survive a lot more than they can give us. We never believed that they can kill us. We always felt if they put us in one room, if we sleep on a straw sack, and we have to stand it up in the day, so what?



This isn't going to last forever. Wars don't last forever. We felt that, too, shall pass by and everything will be back to normal again. We always felt, I especially felt, that the war will be over.

Everything will be back to normal. So they didn't scare us. No matter what they did, we were never scared. We always believed that things will be over and things will be back, again, to normal.

So in the meantime, when they were being bombed, then one officer in charge finally told them, if you go this way and this way, this was in the fields, this wasn't in a building and not on a road, you will get to the road. And if you take this direction, you end up going where you're supposed to, which was Oceacov, but which was already on the road to Wielen.

And my father started. There was a little stream. And my father started helping.

So the first, he helped my mother and my sister. Then he helped my aunt with my little cousin, who was about 8 or 9. And then he helped the single aunt. And then he helped my grandfather.

And my mother was in front. She was calling to my father. My father's name was Wolfe. And she called Wolfe, Wolfe.

And my grandfather said Wolfe is right with me. And as I said, my grandfather was not young anymore. He was 60, or in the 60s, something like this. I never asked for age.

But pretty soon, they walked a little while. And when they were out of the sound of the bullets. My father wasn't there. And they went to the road. And they kept waiting.

My father didn't come. And they didn't go back, which they should have. But they were afraid of the bullets and of the Germans. Then they went into Oceacov and they waited again. And my father never came back to this day.

So in the beginning of the war, we kept waiting and asking, waiting and asking. We wrote to the Red Cross. We never heard of my father.

Today, I feel that same officer probably shot my father, the one who let them go. When he saw my father by himself, the last one, he probably shot him because my father was younger then and he was a man. Anyway, we never knew what happened to my father. I never knew.

So my parents were waiting my father should come-- my mother was waiting.

Was that the first Friday?

That was a few days, like, by Tuesday, I think. Because I wasn't with them by then, see. I was lost.

And then they started coming back. When I came back, I found them also home, but not my father. And we still kept hoping that my father would come back.

So we separated. In the building, we separated. They took a place downstairs, my two aunts and my grandfather. And my mother and I and my sister were upstairs. We were holding two rooms.

And we didn't dare to go places other than for food. And stores were closed. And only one or two bakeries had bread or anything. And you had to line up for it.

So my aunt would go with me. And she would wait someplace far away. I didn't understand at that age why they were afraid. But I wasn't so much afraid, especially when I knew I have an aunt waiting someplace.

I was the one who got bread. And it was closed before Rosh Hashanah. We didn't have anything.

I went and I heard people are digging potatoes. So I dug out the potatoes with my hands. I got tomatoes.

When I came, my grandfather was blessing me. This was our Rosh Hashanah. We had potatoes and we had tomatoes and we had bread. So this was terrific.

And whenever we had to go in line, at that time, anybody could go in line. But if the Polish people recognized you that you're Jewish, they said [POLISH]. And they pulled you out of line, or the Germans pulled you out of line when you were pointed out as Jewish. So that's why I was the one who stood in lines.

And then we started digging out salt and things. We knew where the stores were. And things were still smoldering lots of places. Because there were cans in stores, there were things which were burnable, but they were covered with rubble. But in the meantime, it was after burning, also.

And then more people came home. And one of the people who came home was Tovie Haim Lipszyc, which was one of the young-- he was, I think, the youngest son of the patriarch, Mrs. Lipszyc, who was cousins of my father. So he was living in one room and we were living in the first room.

And pretty soon, he became president of the Jewish community. Because in Poland, church and state were not separated. Before the war, when my father had a Jewish person working for him, he had to pay to the Jewish Kultusgemeinde and Jewish kehilla, we called it, Yiddish kehilla. And if you had a Gentile person working, you paid [GERMAN], church taxes.

So the Jewish community in Wielen was a very beautiful community. There were 7,000 Jewish people. And we had a center which was the Jewish ritual baths, the Jewish slaughterhouse. And it was called the beis medrash, which is a school.

But this was a religious. And it was also for prayers there and teaching. And it was quite a few acres. As a matter of fact, this was left. See this was one of the places which was not bombed. Even after the war, this was left intact.

So over there, they made the Jewish Kultusgemeinde. And my cousin, which was really my father's second cousin, he was president. And I was living with-- we were living with the president in the same apartment, the same rooms.

It was advantageous and it was disadvantageous. We saw many things that other people didn't see. For instance, when the Germans came in, they knew Jewish people still had things, even though we were bombed and everything.

So they said if you deliver so much gold, if you deliver so much jewelry, we won't bother you. We have to pay this as a ransom. And we won't bother you. So I saw briefcases filled up with gold watches and all kinds of gold jewelry. This was handed over to the Germans in the hope that they will let us be as a community and that they wouldn't be so bad to us.

And I don't remember what they called it, but they wanted people to clear the rubble. So they wanted the Jewish people. So I, too, lined up in the street.

And you lined up-- we had two squares. One was called the old square and one was called the new square. So in the old square, we used to line up. And they would take you to work. And in the beginning, I worked with rubble, clearing the rubble.

When was this?

This was in September, right away in September.

Still right after.

As soon as we came home, we wouldn't get any rations, any food. Because in the beginning, we just lined up for food

the first two weeks or three weeks. Then they started making some kind of order. Made the Jewish Kultusgemeinde.

And they said don't worry. There'll be bread. But you have to work and then you get rations. And if you work, you get food.

For working, we used to get, I think, either three zloty or three mark. I think it was either 50 pfennig a day or 50 groschen. And right away, they said the Polish money is good. Don't worry.

But whatever a Jewish person had in the bank was gone. It's just if you had money on your person, if you had any money. And we were not that lucky. Because my father had the money on him.

And some families were smarter. They slept with money on their heart. Each child had some money, which was much smarter.

But like I said, we knew a war is coming. But we didn't believe it. We still hoped maybe it isn't coming.

So I was lined up to work. And my mother was lined up to work. And Sundays, we would clean the streets with brooms and the parks.

And also some days, we worked in a factory of sugar. It was called cukrownia. And they were driving the beets, you know, sugar beets? And we were working with that.

But we used to walk. This was quite a few kilometer out of town. Was in [PLACE NAME], which was like a suburb of Wielen. And we worked on these jobs. As long as it didn't get so cold, it wasn't so bad. But I had no shoes and nothing.

And slowly, we sort of settled in. And my little sister didn't want to stay home alone. First of all, school was nonexistent. Jewish people were not allowed to go to school. It didn't matter how old you were, even if you just wanted to go to first grade or something.

And the Polish people were very happy that there were no schools for Jewish people. I remember a girl who lived in the basement before the war and whom I always considered as a decent person because her father was an alcoholic, but the rest of them were nice people. Her name was Zoha Kolesinska. And I thought that she was an intelligent person I considered her as a fine person.

And she was going home from school. She saw me working in the rubble. She said you won't be a good student anymore. I'm in school. And you're clearing the rubble. She was very happy about it, that I had to clear the rubble and she could go to school.

What I'm trying to say, when I was working and my mother was working, my sister could have stayed with my grandfather and my little cousin who was a little older than she, but younger than I. She was 9 or something. She didn't work, either.

And my grandfather didn't move out of the house because he didn't go in the street. He tied his chin because he didn't want his beard cut. He was a rabbi. He didn't want to have his beard cut off.

And when the Germans came into our house, and when they saw people with beards, they would pull them. They would put them in front of a wagon like horses. They would denigrate the people, whatever they could do.

And some they killed. They made them run. And they had pneumonia right afterwards, run in front of a wagon, pull a wagon. These were the things they were doing. It was like a sport to them. They were having so much fun.

But we sort of thought this was the individuals who were doing it. We didn't realize this was the law, that they were probably getting medals for doing it. It was too much to catch it all, to understand it all.

Anyway, my sister said I already lost my daddy. And I'm not going to let you go to work. I have to know where you are.

So she was outside already. When it got cold, my sister's hands were all sore because they were frozen. She was less than five years old. Her hands were all open from wounds from being frozen.

In the meantime, my father was one out of nine children. But not one of us, not one of the aunts or uncles had anything left. Because we all lived in the city. And everybody was either bombed out or burned out.

One of my aunts who got married shortly before the war, her name was Haya and her husband's name was Krzynian. And he was a candy maker. They had a candy store.

She was bombed in the house where she lived. And supposedly, from what I heard, she was pregnant at the time. Because people didn't tell children your aunt is pregnant, you know? So she and her husband were killed.

One of my uncles was in the hospital. And his name was Moishe. And he had a wife and three children. One was a little boy born two months before the war. And one was [NON-ENGLISH]. I don't know if he was six or seven, six years old, I think, and a little cousin, four years old, [PERSONAL NAME], beautiful girl.

So my aunt was also left alone. Because he was killed right in the hospital. Then one uncle was missing. He wasn't home yet.

We were hoping he would come home. And actually, he did come home. He was with the army and he was taken prisoner. And in the beginning, they let the prisoners go home. They didn't pay so much attention if you're Jewish or not. This was still in '39.

So my sister didn't want to be home alone, not even in the warm room. She wanted to be where my mother was.

So my mother originally came from another city, which was named Krzepice. And a young man who was engaged to a Lipszyc, girl, and we were in the same building, told them. And he was coming on a bicycle. And this was 36 kilometer away, but he was coming on a bicycle.

It wasn't legal for Jewish people to go out of town by any means, walking or riding, and we had a train. But it wasn't legal. So he was coming on a bicycle, and he managed.

So he told them what's going on, that we have no clothes and no bedding, and winter is coming. And my mother's family tried to help us. So first of all, they send us something. I think they sent us a cover or a pillow.

From Krzepice?

From Krzepice. They sent us something on a bicycle, whatever he was willing to bring. Because on a bicycle, 36 kilometers, you don't carry that much. This man is alive today, too. He's in Australia, if he's still alive. So whatever he could bring for us, they sent us something. It was already a little bit more helpful.

Because it wasn't enough that somebody wanted to help you. If nobody had anything, nobody could help you. Out of the whole family, nobody had anything left. So how could anybody help each other?

So when they heard that we are working like this-- in the meantime, I turned 13. And the water was going in and out of my shoes, because I had summer sandals. My feet had healed up. I had sandals.

And a doctor we weren't allowed to go to. Because there was one Jewish doctor and he had to take care of the whole Jewish community. And we were not allowed to go to a Gentile doctor.

But the Gentile doctor who was a surgeon, Dr. Patrín is his name. I don't know if he's still alive. Because the Jewish people helped him, he learned a lot during the bombing. And the Jewish people were the ones who gave him clothes,

because he ran away without clothes like everybody else. And they gave him some money and they helped him.

So then he tried to help the Jewish people by telling this doctor what to do if there were things to be done. Because this was just a young doctor. I don't know if he was really done with residency. His name was Dr. Froehlich.

But how can one doctor take care of everybody in times like this, when everybody was having problems? So help was nonexistent. And we were just existing. We were hoping a war like this cannot last forever.

In the meantime, again, we heard-- at that time, I think we still had radios. I don't remember for sure. But I knew that we knew that Warsaw was under siege in the beginning. And then we knew it was fallen. And we felt in a few months the war will be over. How long can a war like this last?

But in the meantime, it was already so cold. And I was going to work in the morning. I had some kind of a wool babushka. And somebody gave me a coat, I think from my aunt, from her parents who lived in a little place which was called-- oh, I forgot what it was called, my aunt.

So I had some kind of a coat. And we tied around things. So my eyebrows would freeze. And my eyelashes would freeze.

And in the afternoon, my cheeks were so red that when I was going home once, a Polish boy said to me in this kind of life, you still paint your cheeks? I never painted my cheeks in my life. I didn't have to, not after a day being out.

But it was so cold sometimes we were afraid to go near-- but sometimes we would burn a little wood, which wasn't legal. But sometimes if we had a person who was watching us that wasn't so bad, they let us use some of the-- the wood was bad, anyway. But that's what people were using. People were collecting wood.

And the ones who were in charge of us, I think, were really from Austria. They had the black uniforms. And most of them were very mean. They tried to do all kinds of things.

I used to hear-- the older girls were talking to themselves. And they didn't want to me to hear. But I used to hear that they said that they're not going straight home. They're afraid to go home. Somebody will follow them.

But in every home, in a room like this, there were at least six people sleeping. So in the daytime, you stuff the straw into burlap mattresses. And you had it standing upright.

And during the night, sometimes people had to sleep under the table and on the table. Because people were so crowded in that just to be inside was a privilege. And like I said, the people who did come home to their own homes were happy to get people whom they know rather than somebody would come and make them leave.

And some places which were better, people did have to leave. And a Polish person who said he was a Volksdeutsche came, you had to leave. Because they had priority.

Let me ask you. When you go back to your earliest memories in Wielen, before the war, how do you remember the city?

That it was a beautiful city. And we had good schools. We had four public schools. And one of the public schools-- I didn't start in public school. I started in a Jewish school.

But by the time I went to public school, it was only five days a week. And it was only for Jewish people. But the teachers were not all Jewish. The teachers were mixed. The principal was Gentile.

As a matter of fact, he was taken to Auschwitz. And he came back. He survived.

So we had Jewish theater. And we had Jewish sports club, which was called Maccabi, and a band. And we had many Jewish schools.

But the school I went to was just for girls. But for boys, we had many schools. And some schools, most of them were religious schools.

But it was a full day school. I mean, we learned Polish. And we learned all the subjects. And we learned Yiddish.

And we learned two prayers, which is Hebrew. And then, when I was already out of it, I think they started teaching modern Hebrew. But I didn't go there for very long, because then when we didn't have to go to school on the Shabbat, I went to a public school.

How old were you when you changed? What grade?

I changed into the third grade. And you had to take a test. And some teachers were not very nice to Jewish people. Out of, maybe, a dozen kids, they let two pass. And I was one of the two who passed.

One of the reasons was we were younger, too. I was the youngest in my class. And the girl who went with me was also the youngest. I mean, she was, maybe, a couple of months older.

But we were a year younger. Because we were allowed to start a year younger than public school started. But we had very good curriculum. And from our school, we were supposed to go to gymnasium, which would be like high school here.

And everybody knew when you came from our school that you had to have a test again. But they knew that we make the test. Nobody ever failed from our school to make the tests. And the teachers were very dedicated and we had clubs in the afternoon. And we had all kinds of things and life was fun.

Did you belong to any clubs?

Playing -- not clubs like you had to belong. You just came to school. The teachers, really, were running it. And we didn't call it clubs.

Like, we had Red Cross. So what did we do? Part of it what I did was getting food from kids in the afternoon.

Because we had classes till about 1:30 most of the week and Friday we came home earlier. And 10 minutes was the biggest recess. This was our breakfast recess. And otherwise, we had five minutes for recess.

So it was not too much extra. In the afternoon, we would have more what you would have here as extracurricular activities. That's what it really was. And I remember I would collect sandwiches and hand it out to other kids. And it was signed up, which kids are lining up.

And I always had time. Because I came home, I did my homework, and then I went to school. And we played checkers, or we played ball, and whatever. We did things like this.

And we had our own plays. And we were running programs for holidays. Like 11 of November was called [NON-ENGLISH], because Poland became independent.

And we considered ourselves Polish. I mean, before the war, I was Polish like everybody else. We had art shows with our things which we had made, which we painted, and different things. And people made woodwork, whatever. We had art shows from this.

And the Jewish community, like I said, had many Jewish schools and everything. But you had to be a little bit older already to belong. And they made all kinds of things. And quite a few people had left for Israel. And I think they all belonged to one club.

But I wasn't with the grownups yet. And sort of you stayed with your own age group. This was more than anything else, more than going with an older cousin.

You went with a younger person your own age. Because the older people, they didn't want to associate with the younger ones. If you were with people a year or two older, it was a big deal already because they didn't have that much in common with you.

What was your family life like at that time?

Well, I was the oldest of two kids. And my father had a business. It was called [NON-ENGLISH], which means he was making the upper parts for the shoes. And he was already in business when he was single.

So all I knew is that I went to school and I had a good life and didn't worry about anything. If I would compare it to life here, life was simple then. And we didn't have so many things.

But we had a very rich and happy life. We would get together with cousins and celebrate birthdays. Not the way we celebrate here, not with a cake, even.

We would throw candy and raisins and almonds on the head of the one who had the birthday. We would make a circle and dance around and have fun and play games. And every holiday was fun.

My grandfather would listen to me, how I know Hebrew. And he would say that I know it well, he would give me a dime, which was 10 groschen. It looked like a dime.

And it was, at that time, to me, it was a big deal. Because people would give you a penny or two pennies, or not even that. But a dime was a big thing to get.

And we had a park in the city, which we used to play ball. And also, we used to play ball in school. Then there was a new park, which was already on the outskirts of the city. And that park you had to go already more out of the city.

And I wouldn't go there alone already. Because the Polish people, before the war, the last year before the war, they were already very anti-Semitic. And part of it was because there were so many Volksdeutsche in our city. And they were agitating the people.

So we knew that if there were a few of us, and if one or two boys would try to do something to us, we would fight back. And if we felt that there were more of the boys or girls who were throwing sand at us, then we would run. But in the city, it was so close, we were at home in the park.

And in the park, there were different things always going on. And there was ice skating in the park because there was a little pond which was right across from the synagogue. And I didn't worry about anything. I didn't know what to worry about anything.

I had my favorite aunt and another aunt. And one was more favorite and one was less favorite. And this uncle loved to teach me this, and this one was doing this.

And I didn't know to worry. I didn't understand to worry. I made good grades. And I worried about what's in school if I--

All right. We're going to take a break now for just a minute.

OK.

OK?