

Hello. My name is Abraham Kay. Today we're continuing our interview with Sara Kay, a Holocaust survivor. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section. Now you were describing a little bit about your home life from before the war. You were born in October of 1926, up until really the time that the war started. And you were talking a little bit about your schooling and about the religious life in your community.

Well, I think I'll start when I was really young. Life was simpler in Poland. Because first of all, it's so many years ago, in 1930s that I remember. And I remember when I was a young girl, my father was a [GERMAN], and we had two big rooms. And in the one room my father had part of it was where his warsztat, where he worked.

And we had about five machines, and he had a special place where you cut leather. Because you have to cut it on a big board. It doesn't have to be so big, but so that the knife doesn't cut through tables. And he was what was considered a meister which meant that he had young boys who came in and they were apprentice, and then they were journeymen. And what my father was a member of what was called cech. I don't think it's like a union, but it's of people who are in the trade and they give diplomas.

A guild.

A guild I guess.

And the person who was before he got the diploma, he had to show to the other people what he learned. And I was alone till I was eight years old, so I was always underfoot. I was always trying to be with everybody else. I was never alone. I always wanted to be where the action was. If I couldn't be in my father's place, I went next door. And next door were two young sisters and they were doing embroidery on the machine, and they also had girls whom they were teaching.

And the places weren't so big. This was where you lived where the business was. So sometimes in order to stay there, they made me sit under the table. But I was so happy to be with them and get to watch them, and get their magazines, which had all the designs, and they were so colorful, it was all right to sit under the table. And with my father when we had people, so I tried to teach them how to pedal the machines. Because the first thing you had to learn so that the wheel doesn't turn back. And I don't remember when I didn't know it.

It seemed that I always knew it. Because I was always watching. There was no TV. And you could only play that much outside in Poland. The weather wasn't so terrific. So I was always watching. And if I went to the dressmaker who was making my clothes, I was watching there too. This seemed to be my favorite place. If they were building a home, I like to watch. But they chased me away, because they were mixing-- I don't know what it was, but we called it wapno. It's very hot, white, and you can get burnt.

So they would chase me away. But I used to like to watch. So naturally, in my father's place, I watched too. They had big machines. I used to draw my teachers when I was already in school, I used to draw my teachers on those boards. And the boys used to laugh. They were bigger than I was, so I was just a nuisance to them. But I used to like to be, and watch, and I always knew how to sew on the machine. Because if I was watching all the time, I knew how to do it.

And the first time I went, my mother took me to school, I was almost six years old. It was Bais Yaakov. It was a girl's school. And it was a religious school. But we learned everything in the religious school. And we had plays for the holidays. And I was always a little bit of an independent spirit, because I remember when our teacher let all the girls watch our rehearsals, and she didn't allow us to watch the rehearsals from the older classes. I said this isn't fair. We should be able to watch their rehearsals. If they are allowed to watch this. And we were like one family.

If you went to that school, no matter what grade you were in, it was like one group. And I still have one friend who survived from that school. She's a year older. But I still feel a kinship with her.

And who is that?

Havcia. Her name is--

And her last name is--

Hava [PERSONAL NAME] now, but her name used to be Horowicz. Havcia Horowicz was her name when she was in school. And so we were all like one family. Then when I went to the public school, again, I had friends always. And I was always a very good student. So in Poland, you didn't pass your classes unless you knew everything really well. So there were girls and boys who were a few years older than I was. I think because Poland wasn't so wealthy, they only kept the people in school till they were 14 years old, or if they were already in sixth or seventh grade and they were good students, they let them stay.

But if a person got to be 12 or 13, and third or fourth grade, they didn't care if the people dropped out. They encouraged them to drop out. And I was with people who were already big and tall. And I was younger. And I was shorter. But I used to help them. And we had lots of fun. Whenever we had a chance, we played ball and everything. And school to me was just like something like eating breakfast or eating lunch, one, two, three. I was done. And I had no problem.

What about life in your house?

And in the house, we always used to have company. I had for my two aunts got married shortly before the war, one the year before the war, and one I think two years before the war. And she was my favorite aunt. And she had a place with upstairs where we lived, not in our house. I mean we weren't in a building and there were stairs to go up. And she was making wigs. And I used to like to sit and watch her too. This was another place I used to like to watch.

And she would sing to me. And she would eat with us. And she was my favorite aunt. Then in the evening the women would sit and crochet, beautiful vests, and different things. And my mother would go to the theater and my father would go places, and shopping in the evening. During the day, they were working. But not my mother. My mother wasn't working. And she was cooking. She was being a housewife, visiting her own friends, and doing shopping.

And at that time, if she wanted for me a dress, I had to go to one store, buy the material, then take it to the dressmaker, find a design, and everything was custom made. If you needed, whatever you needed, everything was custom made-- shoes, boots, everything was made. And people didn't have so many things, but we had good things, quality came first, because you only bought so much, but it had to be right.

Then my sister was born January 20, 1935. And all my friends were all excited for me. But I don't know, it didn't mean that much to me. I guess if she would have been bigger, it was all right. But a little sister wasn't such a big deal. And I used to take her before the war, close before the war, I used to take her to the park. And my friends liked her. But I was kind of bothered. Because I felt I want to play ball.

But most of the time we had help when she was little and like I said, I was busy in school. And I always managed to go back in the afternoon to school because we were doing something. We were getting ready for a play, or for a show, or games. Or some people needed help with homework. I liked to do my homework by myself. But then friends wanted to do homework with me. So I figured, OK, so I used to help them out. But my homework was done. I didn't go before I had my homework done.

And also I used to go to buy milk. This was my place to go shopping. And this place was a historical place, only I didn't realize so much till I went there with the teachers from school. It was a tower which had walls which were yardstick, and it was built by Kazimierz Wielki. And this was in the city. But this is how the farm was, and the people's name was [NON-ENGLISH].

And because we were religious, we couldn't buy milk just anyplace. So the lady was milking the cows at one time every day at noon at a certain time. In the morning, she was milking them, and another person was watching. And one of us had to be there and watch. And then she would measure out how much we would buy, a quart or a quarter and a half. We did not have refrigeration. So we bought milk every day. In the summer we bought more, because we liked sour milk.

And the reason I'm telling this because this man, although he was Christian, was also taken in the beginning of the war to Auschwitz. And he did not come back. And I went back there after the war. And Mrs. [NON-ENGLISH] gave me straw for a mattress. And so because she had also suffered, so she was not so bitter like some people who didn't suffer.

And we had all kinds of excitement. We played with the kids in the neighborhood. And this was everybody, Jewish and not Jewish, and we played with everybody. Now you were saying your family was pretty religious. What was the religious life like from day to day, or season to season?

Well, Sabbath was Sabbath. Nobody would dare to do anything on the Sabbath, like go shopping, or anything like this. Friday afternoon, everything was covered with white cloths. My mother lit candles when the time was. And my father would go to shul. Saturday morning, my father would go to shul. And on Saturday I would go with my father to shul, up to a certain age. But I remembered where exactly where we were sitting. This was in the big synagogue. And my mother had a place upstairs, and the balcony was like-- I think it was like wrought iron, because you could see through. And it was beautiful work.

Then I don't remember why, but if it was a little too far to go. My mother was going already to a place where I said beis medrash, which was closer. And there were also prayers. But it was only one kind of Jewish. Everything was Orthodox. We didn't know anything else. And there were some people already closer to the war who didn't want to be so Orthodox. But it was a community of 7,000 Jewish people. And I guess if you weren't behaving, if you weren't doing what everybody else, it wasn't proper. So people hid if they didn't do something right. They didn't dare not to do what was right.

Was the community at all Hasidic? There were some Hasidim, but they had their own shtiebel. But it was no big deal. I mean we didn't pay so much attention if this one was a Hasid, and they had this kind of Gerrer shtiebel and this kind of a shtiebel.

But my father belonged to the synagogue. He was not that Hasidic. And my father wore European close, which means he did not wear the small hat. I had one uncle who did wear this, and my grandfather wore the hat with the coat, my grandfather did. But my father--

And his name was?

My grandfather's name? Meyer Shmuel Lipszyc. And he was really a rabbi, so he raised the children religious. And we were plenty religious by the standards for here. But my father wore regular clothes. And if you wore a hat and a coat, and if you didn't wear the other kind of hats, it was already not special. It was-- I don't know. To me this was called modern Orthodox you would call it.

How many people lived in the whole city, Jews and non-Jews as well?

25,000 people were all together. And out of this, there were 7,000 Jewish people.

Was there a special section of the city?

Not officially, but because the Jewish people had the businesses, and you didn't live away from your business, you lived where your business was, the most of us were in the city, but not necessarily all the city was Jewish in the center. There were other businesses too. But the majority of Jewish people lived in the city. And that part got bombed out and burned out, the city. Either the Germans did it by design, or not. I don't know exactly. But they knew exactly where everything was.

Because in the first minutes they bombed the places they wanted to bomb. They came, and the very first few minutes they bombed exactly what they wanted to bomb. First of all, they were flying so low, and they could tell where everything was anyway. So the Jewish people were hit harder already when the war started. And because we were the underdogs afterwards, we were hit even harder then.

But before the war, I went to my girlfriend's. And my worry was about a dress, or if I didn't get the right grade, or things like this. And I don't remember worrying before the war. Now, I think you said that Wielen had been part of Germany before World War II.

At one time. My grandfather spoke German. And at one time during the First World War, Germany had occupied where we were. And that's why I said, the people were afraid of war. And they were afraid of the Germans. Because Hitler was persecuting Jewish people. But the grown-ups always felt that the Germans are civilized and that there's enough good Germans among them that they couldn't do bestial things. People didn't imagine that the Germans could be the way they were. Nobody believed that it's possible.

Even I mean we didn't dream of anything. People felt that they're going to get along with Germans. In the beginning, some people who had their business left, got you see, when the Germans walked in, they took over everything they wanted to take over. So business was one of the things they took over instantly, property and business.

So people thought they called it Treuhander. I don't know why they call it Treuhander, when they set in somebody in the Jewish business. So the Jewish people thought maybe if they help him run the business, they'll make a living out of it too. But it wasn't the case in the Second World War. Maybe one in a city would be this way that he would give to the Jewish person to whom the business belonged something. But most of them didn't.

My husband's parents had land. And the German who took over--

Now where was this?

In Wielen-- it was right on the outskirts of the city. And the potatoes were being ready to be dug at the beginning of the war because. Potatoes are dug in November. In October, they're dug. And when my husband's father asked for some potatoes from his field, the Germans kicked him. He said, you have nothing to look for here. So this was kind of a shock too. People thought the Germans are more civilized. They thought they'd be able to get along with him. They didn't think what was coming. And then when the Germans came, and when they were taking people away, some of them were saying [NON-ENGLISH], which means on the word of honor nothing will happen to you, we believed.

We always kept hoping that it's just temporary and that we can manage. We can manage. We can manage. But it wasn't manageable.

Before, say, the year before the war, did you have contacts with non-Jewish people in Wielen?

Yes.

What was that like?

It was already being anti-Semitic, because they stood in the front of the Jewish stores and they had signs, [NON-ENGLISH], which means this pig is buying from a Jewish person. And they were being agitated. But it was organized. And the people who came from the villages to the city were afraid. They were afraid to buy. Also, we lived in a city where we had twice a week, we had fair. And once a month we had big fair which was designated so many communities came. We had two squares. And the two squares were filled up. And there were different places for vegetables, and for fruit, for chickens.

There was a special market out of the town for livestock. And also they were selling clothes, and yard goods, everything had designated places. So before the war, there were already what we call rough guys like who were going among the aisles and say that the Jewish people shouldn't be selling, that the Polish people shouldn't be buying from the Jewish people. But Jewish people were in business for years and years, and they knew how to have merchandise for reasonable prices. They had some customers for generations.

In Europe, things don't change. People don't move. So generation after generation, and it was kind of a shock.

How long had your family actually been in Wielen?

I don't know. But my family was in Poland for I don't know how long. And my father was from Wielun. My mother was from Krzepice. But my grandfather I think was originally from Dzialoszyn, which was right near Wielen. But it was all one, here, it would be like suburbs. But because there were no cars, everything was a little bit farther apart. And one of his brothers was living in Pajeczno, which was also very close.

And this was at one time, Poland encouraged the Jewish people to come in. And once you settled you stayed. You didn't move. You married from one city to the next. Or sometimes for a reason, you moved away. But out of all the uncles and aunts, everybody was in the city. My uncle, who was the oldest had the same trade as my father. And then one uncle--

Did he work with your father?

No, he had his own. He was independent. People didn't have big business. People had more of what you would call artisans. Everybody had their own business. You didn't hire too many people. We didn't have factories. We had a sugar factory and stuff. But in our city, there weren't so many factories. Like Lodz, that was known for factories. They had weaving and stuff like that, making yarn and weaving. But our city was not heavy industry. It was mostly people were for themselves.

And in the business, you have to have people working for you, but not big business. It was all smaller, and independent, and it stayed in families. Sometimes when parents had a business, dry goods or something, then the kids took over, and two sisters were. So the two brothers-in-law were, and then the third generation took over the store. If it was run well, it stayed for generations.

Before the war, what were your plans for when you grew up?

I wanted to go to school, not that I wanted to. I mean it was common knowledge. I was a very, very good student. And everybody knew I'll be going to school. And in school, at that time, I wasn't at the age where I figured out exactly what I wanted to do. My favorite subject was math. And I was better in math than people who were a grade higher than I was. So the teacher used to brag about me. And then all the boys used to tease me. And it didn't make me so happy because they were teasing me.

They said, the teacher said, if you don't know what-- if you're complaining this is a big problem, I'm going to bring Lipszyc over from the lower grade and she'll tell you what to do. So sometimes it used to annoy me. But I didn't worry far ahead. I just worried, the war was not in my plans. And I knew I'm going to be going to school. But when the war started, we weren't allowed to go to school. Not only weren't we allowed to go to school, because Jewish people don't give up schooling so easily, after working in the street all day I had an hour in which I was allowed to go home. Because we were only allowed on the street from certain hours to certain hours.

That hour I stopped at a girl's house, and I taught her the ABCs, and I taught her things so that she has a little bit of a start. And most people when the children got to be six or seven years old, somebody tried to teach them. And this was not legal. But that's what we were doing. And that one hour, I used to stop. And for this I think I got 50 groschen a week or something, which was every little bit helps since my father wasn't back. And if you had money in the bank, you didn't get it.

And we didn't have nothing, no clothes or nothing. And I liked to do it anyway. So and then in the evening, we used to crochet and do things, because if you make things by hand you can unravel them and it's one piece of wool or one piece of yarn and you can make them over again. So that was what we used during the war. And if you had a coat, you took it apart, and you used it on the inside. It was not that worn out. And you made exactly what was absolutely necessary for survival.

If whoever had some clothes left, it had to be enough for the whole family. We divided up everything so that everybody has something on them. And there were no clothes coming in from any place, no help whatsoever, or bedding or nothing. Nobody worried. I don't even remember a store that had anything.

Now, you were saying right after the war September, October, you were in Wielen again.

After the war--

After the war started.

In the summer, after the war, oh yeah, when the war started, yeah, during the war.

How long did you stay in Wielen?

I stayed the first winter. And then since my mother's family heard what bad shape we're in, they felt that they could help her better in the city where she was. And my mother was one out of six kids. And also my grandfather had a sister. And she had a family grown-up children also. In other words, my mother had cousins. My mother had cousins from two aunts actually. And one aunt was also bombed out.

Because the bomb fell in her business, and her husband, something happened to him and he survived for a few weeks. But I think something happened in his brain. He was not all right for the first few weeks, and then he died. Because they run in the basement. And when the bomb fell right above them, something busted in him, in his head I think. But most of her kids were there. Two were not there.

So one of her oldest sons, Baru Seligfelt or Seligman? Seligman. Seligman was their name, was the one who came. And I remember he got me on a train. It was not legal to go on a train. First, he took my mother and my little sister. And my mother didn't want to stay there because she kept hoping that my father will come, and she wanted to be in Wielen when my father came. In other words, she stuck with my father's family, with my grandfather who was my father's father, and two of my father's sisters. And we were in the same complex, in the same building, not in the same room, but in the same building.

But my father never came. But this was not how we figured it. My mother was sure that my father will come back and will come back. And our place was burned down. And at one time, my mother and I went without any tools, and we tried to dig out things. So what we dug out was a brass-- pharmacists use, what is it called?

A mortar and pestle.

A mortar and pestle. We dug that out. That was solid brass. And we found a salt dish which was covered. It was blue and the salt was still clean in it. And we used it even. This is what we found. And what we looked other things for, we couldn't find.

After we dug this out, the rule came right away that Jewish people naturally had to hand in jewelry and brass too. So my mother wasn't very keen on handing it in. And we were afraid to bury it, because if somebody would see you dig, because there was a garden in the place where we lived, there was a big garden. But next door were already Germans and both sides. So we were afraid to dig. They would know. So my mother gave it to somebody. And I think they dug it into a place that didn't have, it was like before the war it was a place for storage, a shed. And I think they buried it there. Because they didn't want to give it to the Germans for bullets, and it wasn't legal to have, and it wasn't worth risking your life for either.

We were so afraid that nothing was worth risking your life. And the jewelry, she hid. She made buttons out of it. She hid it in her clothes. And that's what most people did, because nothing was legal to have. You're supposed to hand everything in. And people handed in a certain amount for appeasement, because they said if you hand in this much jewelry, you'll be able to stay in the city. Otherwise we have to liquidate the city. So it was actually like a ransom you had to pay. But nevertheless my mother hid certain things that she had on, only what she had on, because she couldn't grab.

Nothing, you run. You didn't stop to take things. So what was I trying to tell you?

You were telling that you were going to get on the train.

Yes. So first my mother went to Krzepice. And my mother didn't want to stay. But they taught her how to make something that she shouldn't have to work with the rubble. And since our cousin was president and our name was also Lipszyc, he said he cannot exempt all the Lipszyc from working on what was called rubble or cleaning work. But he said maybe he'll find an inside job or something. But he kept saying because our name is Lipszyc, it's hard for him to do. That wasn't the reason. But that's how he said it.

And so they taught my mother how to make-- it's not tea, but they bought a little rum and you burn sugar with water, a flavoring for tea. Because we didn't have tea, or coffee, or anything. And in Poland, it's hot. And if you don't have so much food, for sure need something to drink. So my mother learned how to do this. You burn sugar, and you make it. And they figured that maybe this will help her make some money, and maybe with the president being our cousin, maybe she won't have to work.

It wasn't so much that people felt sorry for my mother. They felt sorry for my little sister, because I told you my sister had her hands frozen off. And it was really heartbreaking. So my mother didn't want to stay in Krzepice. She said, if you want to, take my daughter and they wanted to help. Because there were so many of them.

And that was you?

That was me. And I was older. I didn't have to be with my mother they felt. And they should teach me something. So a friend of hers who was a little younger than my mother, a few years, but they were friends as children. They grew up together, was a seamstress. And she promised that she'll take me and teach me how to sew. And she could have taken anybody. Because again, she didn't have a place where to teach the people. And she could only take one or two girls.

So it was like getting into a special place. But everybody tried to help everybody. And I remember thinking, I'm going to support my mother I was thinking. I was 13 years old by then. And I was thinking, I'm going to learn. For me to sit and sew was like being in prison. I never liked to sit long in one place. And I never sat long in one place. But I knew how to sew on a sewing machine. So I felt, what's the big deal? I already know how to sew on a sewing machine. I can sew one, two, three. Which wasn't true. But at least that's how I thought.

And a cousin of my mother took me in. And I stayed with them. And for a little while my sister was with me. So I took care of my sister. First, she didn't take me in right away.

When was that?

This was already 1940, in summer 1940.

And this was in Krzepice.

This was in Krzepice, yeah. And I went on the train. Like I said, this wasn't legal. But my cousin had more gumption. And I was a little girl and the Germans didn't look so much for me. They looked for men and they looked for more grown-up people. And I used to, like you would say, get by the cracks. I could do many things that grown-ups couldn't do and I got away with it.

Now, how long did you stay in Krzepice?

Till 1942, at which time, in May 1942.

Between '40 and '42, did you get to go back to Wielen at all?

Yes. I got to go back to Wielen, but not so easy. The first time I went, I took my sister back. So I couldn't walk. It's 36 kilometers. So we went on the wagon. And we went as Polish girls. And at that time, we even helped an older lady who

came from Warsaw. She was the mother of a mechanic who used to take care of our machines before the war, not just ours other people's too, but that's how I knew him, Rabinowicz. Achim Rabinowicz. And I was the big shot.

When they stopped on the road, I was the one who was doing the talking. Somehow we knew German always. I don't know why. But we knew German pretty well. Besides Polish and Yiddish, we knew quite a bit of German. And I got by.

Did you wear a star at that time?

At that time, in Wielen, we were registered and fingerprinted when they came in. And we right away, we had to wear stars. But in Krzepice, it wasn't that strict. It was considered a border between us and Krzepice during the war. We were called Warthegau, which means we were part of Germany. Which we were not when the war started, and Krzepice was called something else. They belonged to Sosnowiec. And they only wore a white band with a blue star at that time. And that was much easier to hide.

In Europe, you wear I don't know what you call it, like stoles or something. They're made of wool. And you fold them in two they have fringes around. And then when you fold them in two, they have four sides. So if you put your star on the inside. If worse comes to worse, you have two stars there, but they don't show. So that's what I used to put on a lot. And you could carry something under those stoles. We called it a [NON-ENGLISH].

And this was part of the clothing. Before the war, people wore it, but not too much. But during the war, this became the most popular item. It did keep you warm. And it was good protection. Because everything was under penalty of death, no questions asked. If they called somebody and the person didn't stop, which happened to a Gentile person who was deaf. They shot him. So it didn't have to be Jewish necessarily. If you didn't stop when they said halt, they shot. And there was never any inquiries. This was part of what they were allowed to do, and this is what they were doing.

So I went back the first time on the wagon. Then to go back, then my mother decided in Wielen, it was getting worse and worse. The president's wife took over more and more of the space where we lived. And at first we had two beds. So I slept in one bed and my mother and my sister slept in the other bed. Then when I came back, the one bed was gone already. So my mother and sister had one bed, and with me already I didn't have a bed.

And everybody was telling my mother, she has such a good chance to learn something, so and also to feed me. I mean there was no food. And my mother just barely made out on what she could do. She had no stove to cook on. And the president's wife didn't like that she should cook there. And I came to Wielen, and I remember going down in the basement someplace, and made soup from potatoes. I was 13 or maybe 13 years old, 13 and 1/2.

So I was the one who made the soup. So when my mother came home, there was a potato soup, which was a big thing, something cooked. Because if you don't have a stove and you don't have firewood, but we picked up some pieces. Everybody was picking up, so it wasn't easy to find firewood or anything. And by that time, it was already a little ration. So we got coal. One time I went, and I got in a sack coal. I'm not a big person now, so I wasn't big then either. And how I dragged that coal home, I don't remember. But I was dragging, it and dragging it, and I got the coal home. It was very heavy and hard. But I got it home.

So my mother has a little coal, and still she didn't have a place to cook. But it helped when she gave the coal to another neighbor, she could cook a little bit. Then when I went back to Krzepice, we weren't allowed to write either. So we wrote there was a Jewish family in Krzepice, whose name was Zawadski. They were a very religious family. But Zawadski was also a Polish name. So my mother would write to them, and I would pick up mail from them.

And occasionally, I would write to a Polish woman whose name was Pavlovski. And my mother would pick up the mail from there. Because to a Lipszyc, they wouldn't deliver in our building. That's how they did it. So I kept in touch with my mother through other people. And other people were also working.

So then when in Krzepice, when they started taking people to concentration camp, and so I was already 14. And then--

When did that actually start in Krzepice?



I think in '41, they took the first people. And the first people were men. They just lined up. They went from door to door, and they had everybody was registered in Krzepice, too. You couldn't be during the war someplace without having papers. In other words, you had to have-- we had [NON-ENGLISH], it was called. You had to have a registration. You had to have something. And that was for everybody, not just Jewish people.

In other words, if somebody was a soldier and he wanted to run away from the army, he couldn't either. He had to have papers. So they knew where everybody was. And they lined up the people. The first time, people were caught off guard and quite a number of young people got caught. And they were allowed to write home one a month. And they were writing to us things about what they're doing and they were working in a Zwangsarbeitslager.

And they were being bombed already. And they couldn't-- on a postcard which was sent, you don't write you're being bombed. So they wrote the wrens are laying eggs. And we understood what it meant. Because why would they write about birds laying eggs, the wrens? So we knew that they were being bombed.

And all this time the grown-ups, because I was young and I didn't join the conversation, but the grown-ups were always talking, the Germans are getting it over, and they're going to lose, and is going to be over, and it's going to be over. And everybody thought the war is going to be over any day, any day. Always we knew that the Germans are getting hit. Also in one summer, I don't remember. I think it was 1940 or '41.

And the German army was going toward Russia. They were going through our city also. So when there were soldiers in town, we didn't go in the city at all. We didn't go in the street. So I remember, they helped me climb a couple fences, so I could go from the place where I worked to the place where I live. And I climbed three fences. And some were very high. I managed to go home, because I was afraid to go in the street. We were afraid.

And also when people wanted to go in the evening, Krzepice was a smaller city. And it wasn't that much bombed, not like Wielen, just a little. People went over fences. And most places you could go, if you went a couple fences, then you crossed one street or something but you didn't walk on the street, just because we were afraid.

And so then when they started taking people, people tried to hide. And my cousin, it was my mother's cousin's husband was also on the list for going to the camp. And then we all hid. There were places to hide. We made places to hide. See, we didn't think that they would ever come and take everybody. But everybody had a place to hide, which we could last a few hours, or even a day or two without food. We didn't have food or water in those places. But you could survive a day or two.

And we thought that after a day or two, they would leave. That's what usually happened. They came. In a day or two, it was over. In two days, they took the transport, and went away. So we thought if we could hide, we had a place. One place was under a baking in a bakery, where you bake, under this was the place where we were hiding. So we stayed above the place first, and when the dog barked. We were running under and put the boards from inside and you couldn't tell.

But if the Germans would bring dogs, which they usually did, they would find us anyway. But we thought we had a good place to hide. And there was one place in the attic where we had to hide. The young people would hide. We tried to hide. We always felt it's going to be over. And who will survive will survive. But eventually that's not how it was.

Eventually, they send you notices to come. And then in 1942, my cousin in [NON-ENGLISH] man, was secretary in the Jewish Kultusgemeinde. The Germans didn't know who was Jewish and who was--

This was in Krzepice?

In Krzepice, yeah. He was secretary. So one day he told me. By then, I think my mother was already probably wasn't alive anymore. But we didn't know for sure.

Now what had you-- how did you learn that?

How I learned? I never learned anything for sure. But what happened was this. It was Pesach 1942, and people came running from Wielen, single people. One of the persons who came survived with me in concentration camp.

Who was that?

And she said-- Rivcia Landau. And she said, the reason she came to Krzepice also because her father was there for a while. Her father was one of the first to be taken in November. At the beginning of November or end of October, before November 11, the Germans rounded up people what they called intelligentsia.

This is '39 now?

'39. And they had a list. And they took Polish people who were like the druggists, and like I said, the person who we were buying milk from. He was szlachta, which is nobility. Burchaczynski, they took him. They took the principal from our school, Josef Kosnicki. They took him. They took quite a group of people and those people wound up in Auschwitz. And somehow Rivcia Landau's father got out of there yet. And at that time he got out. I don't know how.

And he was in Krzepice. So she came to Krzepice. She came also on foot. And then we found out that the day before Passover 1942, which was Sunday, because Passover ended on Saturday. The Germans came with tanks and trucks and everything, and they circled around a certain section where the Jewish people lived. Because by then, we lived only in certain sections. Not that it was not legal, but there was no place to live.

And this was called [NON-ENGLISH], part of it where my mother lived by then. Because eventually she had to move out from the place where she originally was. Mrs. Lipszyc wanted her to live. Her daughter-in-law didn't want her to be there. She wanted to have two rooms for herself. After all, they were presidents. So why did she have to put up with my mother? She didn't want my mother to be there.

And my mother lived what was called [NON-ENGLISH], which was a block of homes with one courtyard. The whole street was one yard. And I don't know why they called it [NON-ENGLISH]. And by Tuesday, they took the people from there. And these were the trucks that later we found out that these were the trucks that they probably gassed on the road. And this happened, started on Sunday. And they did it the whole week. And some Gentile boys, one Gentile boy on a motorcycle tried to follow, because there was one girl for whom he cared very much. She was on one of the transports. But they didn't let him follow.

And we don't know if they took them to Chelm, or they took them-- or they killed them in the trucks. Till today, we don't know. But I know that where my mother lived on Tuesday, she was taken. And I didn't have mail anymore. And this was either March or April. And I couldn't get in touch with her. And my cousins couldn't get in touch. I never had any mail from my mother anymore. And then in May--

And your sister as well?

My sister was with my mother. Yes. So this was the last that I can figure out that my mother and my sister were taken the third day after Pesach, because from where they lived, because some people were taken the first day. And if some people were out, like we have friends. Moshe Jakubowicz, the father and three sons survived. And the mother and her son and a sister didn't survive because the others were out of their house at that time. And they only took. They didn't come with a list at that time. They came to take whoever they could.

They took young and old, and the people were very upset because they were mistreating the people, throwing them on the truck. And if somebody had a cane, they didn't let them take it or anything. So some of them would say, where you're going you don't need anything. And some of the soldiers were saying [GERMAN]. They were given the word of honor, you'll be all right.

And it was, we didn't know what was going. On but this was really close to the end. Because in '42, they really were making judenrein. But we didn't believe and we didn't understand. And they had made so many borders that they were

doing section at a time. And Warthegau was one of their main sections. Because we were like Germany, we were supposed to be Germany.

You were then in Krzepice?

I was in Krzepice, And from then, I didn't hear about my mother anymore. And in Krzepice, I used to help my cousins. I used to help everybody. Because like I said, nobody was looking for me so much. And for a long time I wasn't registered in Krzepice. I still had my [NON-ENGLISH] from the Wielen, so I wasn't on the list. So when they were catching people, at one time I went to the person we were buying milk from. Because everything was illegal. To have milk was illegal.

And I was the one who was running the errands. I would take the shawl. I would take a bottle. It was a quart bottle. But it was like you have a beer bottle with a cap. In Europe, you had lots of those bottles that you could even lie down and the milk wouldn't spill. And this was the bottle I was buying milk in. And we were getting milk three times a week. And I was the one who was shopping there for the milk.

One time I was coming home. It was winter. And the snow from the street was cleared. And it was taller than I was, a very big pile of snow. And the house we lived in at that time was already in a corner house. And when I saw the commandant of the city almost a few yards away from me facing, walking toward me, I was very scared. He could have shot me on the spot because that's what they were doing. And having milk was just like you will kill somebody.

So I went and I had the milk drop into the snow. I just didn't know what to do. I had to think quickly. And the milk got into the snow you didn't see it anymore. It fell in and I don't even know if it broke or not because the snow was more than a yard high. It was a couple of yards high. And then I opened my scarf to show that I don't have anything. Because they suspected that we carry things under those shawls. But I opened it and I walked into the front. And when I came home, my cousin said what happened?

She knew right away something happened. Because I guess I was green. And when I explained to her, we were scared that he would come in. But he had already taken from my cousin so much, they all took on their own and they took legally and illegally, so that my cousin felt if he come in, he already knows him. Because my cousin was also a [NON-ENGLISH]. And the commandant and another one who was in charge came in, I think in summer '41. And they confiscated everything, all the letters.

And what was the confiscating? Sooner or later, they got to talk. They gave measurements for their wives and for themselves. And he had to make boots for everybody. Naturally, for boots they had to leave him leather, so they left him more leather than he needed for boots. But it was his leather in the first place. But if they would come in and say, I needed boots, my cousin would say I have no leather. But when they confiscated in every corner they looked for, whatever you did you had to hide. You couldn't have food lying around.

Everything was illegal it was illegal for us to have wheat. It was illegal for us to buy poultry or meat or anything. Everything it was illegal to kill poultry. So when they wanted to scare the people, in every city in Wielen, they hung 10 Jewish people. They did it in more cities. But in Wielen, they rounded up 20 people. 10 they were holding was called [NON-ENGLISH], which means like a hostage. And 10 were for killing. And then the 10 people who were the second 10 had to hang the other people. And they wanted everybody should watch.

But I wasn't in the city then. And I was glad. But when I went to the city, I walked. And that wasn't legal either. And also, the Germans had taken their people who wanted to be German, who weren't German but they said their grandfather or somebody was German, they were called Volksdeutsche. And they called them [NON-ENGLISH]. They were from Ukraine, from Romania, from I don't know, from all over. Some of them didn't know how to read or write. They were just unbelievable. I don't know what to say.

But they came in to a few Jewish people and they took away everything from the Jewish people. And naturally the property they took away. And they made them, so they were living on farms and on the road. So when you went, and if you had to stop in for two minutes someplace, you didn't to whom you go in. Because if you went into [NON-

ENGLISH], he would have the gendarmes in a minute. And they would kill you.

And when you walked, I didn't carry anything. I looked like a village girl if I had to go to the village. And then I learned one time, because after they caught me I was already afraid to go again, and I wanted to go back already to my cousins on the way back. So a woman, an older woman, showed me how to go a little bit through the side. There was a stream and there was a board. So I could stand, and then I found my way on the road again.

But we were afraid to go. One time after I left with my girlfriend's sister, an older sister, we went back to Wielen. And this was in 1941, in summer. That was the last time I saw my mother. We left in the morning and it started raining and it rained all day long. And we had a bread sandwich with us. And we knew in the one little city [NON-ENGLISH], was a village like Jewish people lived there. We were so soaked wet, we wanted to get in for a few minutes at least. We were afraid to go into a Gentile person or to a German. We didn't know.

And we were so desperate to go into a house that I said to her, Frania Pilcer was her name. My girlfriend's name was Hania Pilcer, and this was Frania Pilcer. And I said, I think this have to be Jewish people. The reason I said so, they had awnings from wood that you could close, and that was like a storefront. But it was just a private place. And everything had foreclosing. So that's why I figured they're Jewish people. And it was.

So she had an oven going. She let us dry up a little bit. And we ate our bread up. And we left. When I came home, I was so soaked, and my mother was still living with the presidents in the same place, that the wife who was not a nice person, she wasn't nice to my mother. She even let me wash up and dry up. And so that I get into dry clothes.

When did you finally leave Krzepice for the--

For concentration camp? In I think it was the end of May.

Of '42?

Of '42. And at that time my cousin came and we had like a family meeting. And he told us already I had my mother's one cousin was in camp. And he told us it was like almost like he didn't want to tell us, but he had to tell us that this is the beginning of the end. That they're making judenrein. It was either we could go through the border to Czestochowa, which was another 35 kilometer, but it was considered government they called it. There was another-- somebody else was in charge there. It wasn't considered like Wielen. It wasn't considered like Krzepice. It was considered government. Krzepice belonged to the Sosnowiec.

And I forgot what they called it. But they called it something else. And that he suggests that the young people like me shouldn't hide anymore, and shouldn't run anymore. That we should just let ourselves be caught and sent to an arbeitslager. Because one of his brothers, the youngest brother, Harsha Wiselikman was in the camp at that time. And he felt already then, there must have been rumors that things are not going to be to good end, and we won't be able to hide anymore. Because it's not going to be for a day or two or for a week, and that they're going to liquidate.

He told us a little bit. But he didn't tell us everything. And he must have known a lot more. Because he and his wife and their two children, one boy who was a couple of years younger and the girl was probably 12 by the time in '42. She was maybe 12, and the boy was maybe 14, Matusz, and Hanna. And they were in Sosnowiec.

Later, I heard from people who came to camp that they saw them in Sosnowiec. But they did not survive. I am the only one who survived. From my father's side I don't have any body at all. And from my mother's side I have one cousin who landed in Israel in September 1, 1939. He was already a teenager. He was older. He was already with an organization. And he wanted to go to Israel. So he landed in Israel.

But otherwise, of all the people who were running and hiding, and all the things we did, was all for nothing. In the end, everybody perished. Everybody perished.

Where were you taken in '42?

It was just a plain building. It was called dulag. And I even have at that time, I have a picture, a girl who was with me. And I understand that she's alive in Israel now. Her name is Helem. Not anymore, but her name used to be Helem Monat. And she gave me that picture. And this was one of the things that I managed to have.

This is a picture of her from the dulag?

In the dulag. Yes.

She's got the Jewish star. I see it--

Yeah, we had to have the star not just on the outer cloth, we had to have a star on everything. And this was inside. But she had the star. And she gave me this. And we thought we'll be in the same camp, coming from dulag. But from--

What was dulag? Was that a place?

Durchgangslager, this was not an official even durchgangslager. This was just for Krzepice, because they only needed a temporary.

Was it a city?

No. This was in Krzepice. It was just a building in a place where guards were there. The German police and the Jewish police was there. It was called dulag. Then from there we went to Sosnowiec, and there it was called durchgangslager, which dulag is really for short. Over there, it was already a big thing. And from there, they were sending us to camps, to different camps. And we didn't know exactly what they were doing.

How long were you in Sosnowiec?

I don't remember. If it was a week or something like this, a short while, not very long. Because they send me. They were lining up people. I guess they had the order like you have an order for a dozen donuts. That's how they had the order for 50 people, or for 100, or for 300. And they kept lining us up every day. And then when my turn came, I was the only one even from Krzepice.

I didn't have anybody from Wielen. I didn't have anybody from Krzepice. I wound up completely alone with girls from all different cities. And I made friends with two sisters from a city, and then one taller girl from Sosnowiec. The two sisters, I don't remember their names. But they did not survive.

And where were you sent from Sosnowiec?

From Sosnowiec, I was sent to Parschnitz.

Which was where?

And that's in Czechoslovakia. And it's near Trautenau. It was called Parschnitz. And it was called Porici in Czech. We didn't know where we were going. But that's where we were sent. And we came to a camp. And there were lots of girls looking at us. And some of the girls recognized me. And they were from Krzepice. And they were girls who were sent to the camp a few weeks before. And this was a transport. See, they tried to do so many things. Every time they tried to tell us something we probably didn't have any choice, but we believed.

They said that if a person from a household will go to camp voluntarily, will sign up for arbeitslager, then the family will not be touched. And the family will stay, be allowed to stay in Krzepice. So parents send two girls, they didn't want to send one girl alone. So whoever had a large family, two and three sisters would go together. And these were the girls who were in that transport, two and three sisters, everybody had somebody.

And when they recognize me I was so happy because I didn't know anybody. It made me feel already like a kinship with them even, I didn't know them Krzepice. I knew their faces. And it made me feel already a little bit at ease. They told me right away, what to hide, where to hide, and they took stuff from me. Because when I was in dulag, in Krzepice, my family brought bread for me. In Europe, you had the big loaves of bread. And the first thing you always wanted was bread.

And somehow, I managed to bring a bread. So I gave it to them. And it was safe. And we were checked for everything. And they took our clothes. And they left us a little bit clothes. And they said that the other clothes are for safekeeping. But we didn't get back those other clothes, just what we had on. And I had given some stuff to the other girls. So I had a good pair of shoes, which was lucky because we didn't get shoes in camp. They didn't last through the war, but they lasted a long time.

And in camp, place we lived in a place that used to be in the First World War--

OK, we're going to take just a short break here. And then we'll come right back.

OK.