

I'm Sylvia Abrams. Today we are interviewing Jack Mintz, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section.

Mr. Mintz, why don't you tell us a little about yourself, your name, how old you are, where you live?

My name is Jack Mintz. Well, I used to be Jehuda, but they started calling me, and it didn't come out good. So I changed it to Jack. And I live in University Heights, on 2612 Warrensville Center Road.

And how old are you?

I am 60. I am born 1924 in September.

What kind of work do you do?

I am a tailor. I used to work by Mr. Skoll, in Cedar Center, in a clothing store. Then, since he closed, I work on my own and in home.

Are you married?

I am married. I have two married children, a son, Toby Mintz, and he has one child. It's 10 months old, Shauna, and his wife, Elaine. And I have a daughter. Her name is Adina Gelbmann. And she's also married. And her husband is Peter Gelbmann. And they have one child, which will be, this month, one year old. His name is David.

And your wife's name?

My wife's name is Ethel.

It sounds like you have a very lovely family.

Thank you.

We're going to go back in time now to the time of World War II. Let's start out with, how old you were and where you were living.

Well. I was, when the war started, in 1939, in September, I just begin my 15th years. I was not quite 15 years old. And then we lived in home, the whole family. We were four brothers and four sisters and my parents.

What was the name of the town?

The town was Miechów. It's north of Kraków about 38 kilometers, which is approximately about 25 miles. And I just finished, 1939, elementary school, seventh grade. I also finished a Hebrew school, what was about the 10th grade.

Tell us a little bit about the town. What was the town like?

Well, the town was a nice little town. It was not approximately, but maybe about 15,000 people, was a agriculture center. It was-- the Jews lived there, nice and quiet and neat. Was no problems with the non-Jewish population.

How many Jews were in the town?

In the town? I would figure a families, approximately, maybe about 500 families.

Tell us a little bit, now, about your family. You mentioned your brothers and sisters.

Yeah.

How many of you were at home?

We were four brothers and four sisters.

How old were they?

My oldest-- my older brother was? He was born in 1911. He was-- in 1939, he was 28 years old. And I was the youngest. In between him and me, there were the rest of us.

Were they all living at home? Yeah, all were living except, well, one brother wasn't living in the home. He was in a kibbutz. Because he went to emigrate to Palestine. And after, he was in the army. And also, just during the time when the older brother was in the army, he wasn't at home. Otherwise, they lived all in home.

And they were painters. They used to work. They used to go out. Because the town was small, so they used to go in neighboring towns. And they worked there, too.

Was your father a painter, also?

My father was also a painter, very Orthodox. And--

Did you do interior and exterior painting?

Yes. He do interior and exterior. And also, he used to do signs for stores. And my sisters, three sisters, they were dressmakers. And my mother was a shirt maker, make shirts, too, custom shirts, for customers.

Did they do this at home or in a shop?

They did this in home, everything in home. What the-- mine older sister, what she was a dressmaker, she worked with somebody. And when she got older, she became self-employed. She worked in home. We lived in a small apartment, a two-bedroom and a kitchen. Wasn't too much. Was no running water. Was no bath or shower. So we have to carry the water in and to carry the dirty water out.

Would you describe the family as well-to-do, comfortable, or poor?

Well, we were not poor. We were-- my father was very proud. He didn't never complain. He never asked for no help. And when the kids grow up, everybody was working and everybody was helping out. And actually, he used to give a lot of charity. Because we used to pay dues to the Jewish federation.

And we used to help in all organizations. Even I have to-- in fact, I used to, in home, sometime I eat just bread and tea in the morning. But I have to bring money to support the poor children in the school, what they should get in the wintertime, hot milk and a sweet roll.

So your family gave a lot of tzedakah, a lot of charity?

Yes. This was in-- we got boxes from-- all from the Jewish National Fund and from all the institutions-- were always in home.

How would you-- when you're thinking about the family's life, who made the major decisions in the family?

Well, the major decisions, I think, was up to the mother, to my mother. Because my father was always working. He went out to work Sunday morning. And he came back Friday afternoon, usually, unless he works in town.

So he was all-- but mostly, he worked out of town, because my father worked with the three brothers. And sometimes, he got helpers, too. And he used to take big jobs, like schools or railroad stations. So he was always busy. Just in the wintertime, it was slow.

How did you get along with your parents and your brothers and sisters?

Well, we get along very good, because I was the youngest. I was the baby, so everybody treats me nice. And they were making money, so I got some treatment for ice cream or chocolate from them. Otherwise, you get along very good.

How did you and your family get along with neighbors in the area, Jews and non-Jews?

Well, we lived mostly in housing where were just Jews. But we got a lot of non-Jews. We didn't know the difference between the non-Jews. We just know they're non-Jews. But we were very friendly. My father, most of his customers, they were non-Jews.

And in fact, when he worked someplace in a village, in a cooperative, what they used to collect the milk and produce butter and cheese, like a corporation, my father always used to get gifts from the farmers. And they used to come to town and always stop by us to see us. So we didn't know. We didn't have no-- except in school, sometime, we was fighting between the non-Jewish and the Jewish children.

Could you describe a typical day for the family at that time?

A typical day was, like, I have to go to school in the morning. And from 8:00 to 1:00, sometimes to 2 o'clock. And from 3 o'clock, I have to go to the Hebrew school. They used to call it a cheder. I used to have to go to 7:00. And after then, I have to make the homework, for the public school and for the Hebrew school. Because we used to get report cards the same way from the public school, and the same way we got the report cards from the Hebrew school.

How religious was your family?

My father was very Orthodox. And he liked us to follow him. But we always drift a little bit away. And when we got older, we drift away more. But we always were respecting our father and our mother. And we used to go. If we like or not, we used to go to shul Friday and Saturday and holidays. And we didn't drive in holidays, because we didn't have no cars. And we respect their will.

What do you remember about the holidays and how you celebrated them?

The holidays, they were very nice. All the holidays, we celebrated nice, with my mother and sisters prepare a beautiful meal. And everybody was home. And in fact, always, Friday night, if there was a poor man came to town, from out of town or like they call him a beggar-- maybe he wasn't a beggar. He was a poor man-- my father took him home for dinner, sometime Friday night and sometime Saturday night.

And the holidays, there always was enough food, which was very good. And we rest and dressed up nice. It was always a nice time when the holiday came.

You mentioned you went to shul. Did you belong to a synagogue?

Well, my father belonged to-- they used to call the professionals, like I would say not doctors or lawyers, just professionals, like painters, shoemakers, tailors. They got a little small shul in the building from the shul, because the shul was a big building, a big-- a lot of room there for men and women. They were separate. But inside, in the complex, there was, like from different groupings, like the Agudat got their own little shul, and the professionals, there, got their own. And my father belonged there.

But in the real belonging, he belonged to the Agudat, to the Orthodox. And he respect the rabbi sometime. In Lag BaOmer, he used to go, every year, to the rabbi, to Kraków. And he gave a letter, there, to the rabbi, what he wishes.

Used to come thousands of people, there, to Kraków, on Lag BaOmer, to the rabbi. And he left him a letter and some donations, too.

Was that one of the special Hasidic rabbis?

Yes. Was it that--

I think they called him a rav. I don't know what this means.

Was the one that was in Kraków?

Yeah. Yeah.

How about politics? Did your family belong to any political organizations?

Yes.

Which ones.

My father belonged to the Agudat, which was religious Zionist. My older brother belonged to the Betar, what was Menachem Begin's party, today Jabotinsky. And my other brother and two sisters, they belonged to the HaShomer Hatzair, what is left-of-center. And also was my brother, what is still alive-- he is in Israel-- he belongs, too, to the same party. And my two sisters and me, we belong to the Shomer Hadati. That was like, today, would be Young Israel, here.

Did socialism or any groups like that play a part in the family's life as well?

No. We didn't. We weren't infected with any socialism or communism. My father, he was, as far as I remember, he was supporting the socialist party in Poland. Because the socialist party was the only party what was non-communist and was supportive for equal rights for the Jews. That's why he belonged. He supported them.

But the family was mainly active in the various Jewish kinds of Zionist groups.

Just the Jewish and the Zionist groups.

Were there any other community organizations that the family belonged to?

No.

Let's go on to the cultural background in your home. What was the main language that everybody spoke?

The main language we spoke? Yiddish in home. But we were very good educated in Polish.

So?

Outside home, we spoke Polish.

What kind of books were in the house?

Well, my father got a lot of Talmudic books and Torah books. And what my brothers and my sisters, I don't really know. But I know they took some books from the library. And me and my brother, what is in Israel, we used to like to read Tarzan if we can get that. They used to be weekly magazines. So he used to buy, and I used to read them.

Was there a theater in the neighborhood?

No.

Was there any museums or concert halls in the town?

No. It was just one movie house.

Did the family get to go to the movie house at all?

My brothers, yes, and my sisters. But I went. Until 1939, the war, I saw just two movies. Really, in the movie, I saw two. I saw the Dybbuk. And I saw a Polish movie.

What other kinds of things did the family do for entertainment then?

Well, we didn't too much. They used to go. They used to belong to the organizations. And in the organizations, they got lectures and dancing and picnics. We used to go. In summer, we used to go to the forest for picnics. It was organized from the organizations or from the school.

So the family social life really revolved around the Jewish organizations they belonged to?

Yes. Yeah.

Was the family ever able to afford to go on a vacation?

No, we never. The only vacation that I used to go? I went to an uncle. He lived in a village. And so they sent me there for a couple of weeks. But we used to go, sometimes, to visit friends in other towns.

Let's talk a little bit about you, personally. How do you remember yourself in those days? What did you look like?

Well, I was very obedient. I never missed school. I never missed cheder. I always did my homework. And we were-- whatever the mother used to say was like a holy word. That was the law. And you didn't ask questions. I think I get along with everybody. I wasn't a fighter. I wasn't a show-up. I just walk always my own path. Maybe that's what helped me to survive.

Were you a healthy boy?

I was healthy, just when I was 10 years old, I got polio. We didn't know it was polio. I find out, after the war, when the Polish Army want to draft me, when I came back from camp, that I got polio. I was sick this time. But we didn't know. And my father took me to Kraków, to a hospital. I was there about seven weeks. But they didn't know it was polio.

Did you have anything remaining from it?

Yeah, I have one. My left leg is thinner and a little shorter. And I was in hospital. When they released me from the hospital, I was crying. They sent me home, because they were treating me there. So the doctor asked me why I'm crying. I say, because you didn't straight-out my leg.

So he explained to me. He says, the leg stopped growing. But from now on, he will grow. And that's what we did. But we can't even up the other one, make it even with the other one, because it's already too late. It stopped growing for a while, and that's the reason they can't even up.

Did this affect your health in those years at all?

No. It didn't affect me. I was just afraid, when I was in camp, if I go through a selection, they will see it. But I was so skinny, so they didn't. I went through a few selections. They didn't see it.

At this time, what was your outlook on life when you were a young boy of 15?

Well, we were always dreaming to go out from this town. We were dreaming for to go. We were dreaming, more, to go to Palestine than to go to America. We know we have relatives in America. And we know we have an uncle in London. But our dream was to go to Palestine.

When you think about yourself, how would you characterize yourself-- brave, sensitive? What kind of a word would you use? I would say I wasn't brave. I was sensitive, more sensitive.

Are there any particular memories, from childhood, that still stick with you?

Well, the memories, where they stick is the vacations, in the villages, when I went to my uncle, and the holidays in the home. And when I look back, I would say, I hardly know my father. Because we never sit down, like person-to-person, my father should tell me the story, what's happened, who is his family, from where he come or something. Just what I know what I just heard, by accident or talking from the brothers.

Because I was born in 1924. And I started going to school when I was 7. When I was 5 years, I started the cheder. School, I start at 7. My father, every week, he was out of town. And when he come Saturday, when I was little, he took me. We walked around in town. He showed me going to the parks. And that's the only contact what I got. We never talk what's going on. I never ask questions. We didn't know this, the whole life span from, let's say, from 1930, '32, when I start to understand something, until 1939. It went so fast that we never know each other, almost.

Would you consider that you lived a sheltered life?

No. I didn't live a sheltered life. Because, when I went to school, I went on my own, since I was five years old. And when I was beat up, somebody beat me up, I came home, my mother says, maybe you start it or something. Never-- so I wasn't sheltered.

What do you remember about antisemitism, in those days, before the war?

Antisemitism, I remember a lot. Because since I was a little-- since I know how to read and write, I was reading. I couldn't afford to buy a paper. But I used to go always and read, on the display, the papers, the morning papers if I got a chance.

On every Saturday-- there was an antisemitic organization in our town. And they always display anti-Jewish literature and caricatures. They worked very hard to hurt, to hit the Jews. They make ugly caricatures for picturing the Jews. And also, the articles, what they always wrote, that the Jew is dirty, the Jew is a cheat and a liar, and the Jews have all the money. I remember more poor people in our town than rich people, than even average people.

Were you aware of any antisemitic attitudes toward you or your family, personally?

Yes, I know. Because when my father want to, in 1936, he want to open a store to sell paint. Because my father's partner went to Israel. At this time, it was Palestine. And he used to own a paint store, sell paints. So he told my father, he should open one. It's a good business.

So my father rented a store, and he brought material. He bought all the tools and scales what he needed for the store. And he was going to remodel the store. Then they broke the lease. They don't want to rent it out, because he was a Jew. Instead, they rent it out to an ice cream and candy store, to a non-Jew.

Do you remember, were there any plans to fight antisemitism that you heard of at that time?

No, we didn't got a-- The community, that's in our town-- maybe in the big towns, but in our town, there was always the community was busy helping each other and to staying alive. And the antisemitism was growing. It was coming from Germany with the propaganda. And there even was pickets. They used to picket the Jewish stores.

And my mother, she spoke very good Polish. And she was dressed like any average Polish woman. So we used to go out on the market, buy something. Because, on the market, you always buy cheaper than in the store. The guys used to come and tell her, lady, don't buy from the Jew, because, if you buy from him, this article or something, it's like you put a nail in the coffin of our country. So we know this.

And we know, when they used to call the soldiers to recruit to the army, so before going away, they got a free hand. They used to demolish, break windows in Jewish stores, and they pour tar on the signs from Jewish stores. And they beat up some Jews, too, if they find them.

So we know. We were feeling. But I was young, and I didn't pay too much attention to it.

What do you remember about the beginning of World War II? When were you first aware there was a war?

Well, we were aware, because we lived not far from the German border. I would say it's about 60 miles, maybe. And we know the war is coming, because we know refugees, they were coming from Germany, already, to our town. And so we know something. And we read the papers every day. So we know the war is coming.

And this was, I think, September 1st was a Friday in 1939. Already, the sirens were and the planes were already flying over our town. And the artillery was shooting to them, against them, the machine guns. And people were pouring in the thousands, day and night, running from the Germans. Because we were east of the German border. So there was like a road going. They were always going east. And they came.

Some relatives who came and stopped. And people was coming in cars, stopped, because they didn't have enough gas. And people with horses and on foot, on bicycles-- it was like a stream, day and night were going. So we know. Relatives came and stopped, but I never saw them. I never know we have them. So we know, already, the war start.

How did the war's beginning change your life?

Well, the war? My mother, when I finished school-- we finished, I think, the end of June. And my mother wanted to send me to a vocational school, like bookkeeping or something, some education. But when the war started, I couldn't go anymore no place. And the closest Hebrew gymnasium-- that was like a junior college-- was in Kraków. It was a Hebrew. Because in our town, we couldn't-- a Jew couldn't get into the gymnasium. The gymnasium was run by the government. But not one Jew was accepted there. So we have to go look in Kraków to the Hebrew gymnasium.

But when the war start, everything was changed. So my father and three brothers, they ran away. They were running, also, from the Germans. They say, women and children, the Germans won't touch. Because my father, he was born in Sosnowiec, what is, I would say, about five miles from the German border. So he lived with the Germans. Even he was apprenticed by a German. So he said, the Germans are not bad people. They won't hurt you. If they hurt, maybe they hurt men, but they won't hurt children and women. So they took off. And they went on foot. They were going east.

When did they decide to do this? How far into the war?

Well, right away.

In the first month?

First day.

In the first days?

First days, yeah. And they took off before the Germans came in. Because the war start Friday. And Tuesday, the Germans were already by us. So they went. They took something with them, on the back, and they were going. So my father, he went. He went maybe about 30 miles. He came back. He couldn't. He says, he couldn't take it. And my three

brothers, they went. And they went as far as-- almost they hit central Poland, like Lublin.

And then the Germans caught up with them. And they told them, go home. You have nothing to worry. We won't hurt you. So they came back. We were glad to hear they came back. Because they're alive. Because a lot of people got killed from the bombs and from the shooting, on the way, running. So they start, the Germans start doing their job.

What changes did your family have to make, right then, because of the war in your life then?

Well, the first thing was the shortage of food and the shortage of jobs, because people, they didn't want to paint anymore. But my father still got paint jobs. He paint. I remember this. He was painting a church, inside and outside, in a village. So he was still working. And they got other big jobs they were working.

And after, they start working by the Germans. And then, in a few days later, the Germans start catching the people in the streets.

Jewish people?

Jewish people to work.

For work roundups?

Yeah. So first of all, they came in on Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, they caught, they took. They came. We were praying by the rabbi-- in his-- it wasn't a synagogue. It was like in his house. We were praying. So they came. And they took all the Jewish that were wearing the white robes, the kittels and the tallis, and they took them all out to wash the tanks. In the same--

This was on Rosh Hashanah in 1939?

Yes. And on Yom Kippur, they did the same thing.

Now, these Germans were Nazis? What kind of troops were they?

They was the army, the German Army.

This is the German Army?

Yeah.

This is Wehrmacht not SS troops.

No, not yet.

OK.

And they took us out to wash the tanks. So I ran away. But the older people, they couldn't run. They were working until they released them, and it was already dark. They let them go home. And they tried to burn the synagogue. But the synagogue didn't catch on fire. So they didn't burn.

When these initial acts began, do you remember any discussions, in your family, about plans, what to do?

No. I didn't remember nothing. But nothing-- we didn't talk nothing. But this, maybe not in my presence, because they always treat me like I'm the baby. And I didn't took part in it. But we were-- the only talk was about surviving, to have food and to survive, not to get killed or something. Because the first day, they killed already people. They round up and shoot, here a few and there a few.



So they start catching everybody. Who went out in the street, they caught them to work. We didn't carry no signs yet and no armbands or something. So my brother, he got together with a few friends. And they say, why should they-- and with the Jewish community, the Jewish federation, why should they catch people on the streets. He says, I am a painter. I have to go to work. When I go to work, they catch me.

Let's go in the federation, make a list for eligible people. And we ask the Germans, how many people they need to work, every day, for what job. And we will support them. So they don't have to catch me or catch you when you go someplace. So we know, you have to go today and I have to go tomorrow. And that's the way they did.

So this was your older brother who helped organize this.

Yeah. And they did this. And for a while, it worked-- not long. And I was young, so I got nothing to do. I didn't work. So I was going around with friends. And they were catching me, too, to work. And a lot of time, I run away, because--

And one time, they catch me to work-- was in the wintertime-- to shovel snow. And I run away. And they were running after me and after another few guys. And they were shooting after us. Was at night. So we got away.

My mother find out and my father. He says, you know what? The war will be over in a short while. Maybe six months, and the war will be over. How would you like to go to work? I say, OK. I will like. I will go to work with my father or, if you want me to go to a profession, I will go. I want to go work with Mr. Grushka, he was an electrician. He said, well, go with him.

She says, my mother says, no. She says, you? It's a dirty job, she says. Look, how much dirt your father and your three brothers bringing in from the job? Why don't you go and be a tailor? I said, where should I go? Oh, we talked already to Mr. Plotek. And he says he will take you in. And that's, I went to work.

So your family decided, since you couldn't be in school--

Yeah.

--that they would have work for this tailor.

And he says, after the war will be over, then you will go back to school. Because I was a pretty good student, in both, in the Hebrew and in the school. So they want me to continue some education. So I went to work to Mr. Plotek. He worked and his two sons. One son came from Łódź, too, because always was easier in a small town to live than in a big town. And I worked there. And I got a paper that I'm employed.

You were you're a little over 15 at this time?

Yeah. And we worked there but still was no ghetto yet. So this was in the wintertime, I think, of 1940. I got sick. Or was it '41? I think it was '40. They took me. I was sick, and I got high temperature. They took me to a hospital in the city, there. They say I have typhoid. And they put me-- I had typhoid fever, I think.

And they put me in a separate room. And they give me food. They give me food, what they got, the potato soup. And bread was like lime, you know? But I ate. And the temperature went down. And they start treating me for typhoid.

In the meantime, they went to our home, and they took everybody from home, my sisters and my brothers and my parents. And they cut off the girl's hair. They got long braided hair. They cut them off to zero, nothing, no hair. And they took them to the bath, city baths. And they treat them with some disinfection. And they went. They fumigated the house. They burned the mattresses. They throw out everything, the clothing, and they took them to the fumigating. And they took us. We were walking like pariahs, like some-- walking through the streets, all the way to this bath, with the guards, police. And

Because they were afraid of an epidemic?

Yeah. And I didn't have typhoid. Because, after a few days, maybe five days, the temperature went down. And they sent me home.

Turned out not to be typhoid after all that?

No. No. And then they start making a ghetto.

When was the town organized into a ghetto?

The town was in 1941. So my father, he still was going out to work. My father, he used to have a beard. So one day, two Germans caught him, two gendarmes. And they was like police, German. And they took out the bayonet. And they cut his beard off with a bayonet. And they asked him where he lives. He show them. They came into the house. And they want, we should pay them for the haircut, what they did. If not, they will demolish the whole house. And they caught a cleaver that was hanging, and they say, they're going to chop up everything. So we tell them, we don't have money. You can do whatever you want.

So my brother went out. He was working. I think he was painting, by the Germans, a building. And he was going to call the commander. In the meantime, he saw coming an officer. They ran away. And they let my father go. And then they start organizing the ghetto.

When the ghetto was organized, was it open or closed at first?

No, first, before the ghetto was organized, we have to wear armbands.

First was the armbands?

A white armband with a blue star. And then we can't walk on the sidewalk. A Jew shouldn't walk on the sidewalks. You have to walk on the street. Then a Jew couldn't walk through the public square. And then they start organizing the ghetto. So my brother, he got a friend. His mother was a midwife. And he owned a part of a hardware store. So my brother talked to him. He lived in the part where the ghetto is supposed to be. And we lived outside. So he says, my brother asked the German, where he was painting for him, the commissar from the housing, if he can change? He says, yes, you can change.

To move into the section?

To move. So we move into the ghetto section. And he moved. So we moved in there. And it was very small. In the meantime, my second oldest brother, he got married. So he moved, with his wife, to her parents. And when we moved into the ghetto, the ghetto was still open.

The Jewish-- and the leader from the Judenrat-- was already, this time, they used to call a Judenrat.

Was the Judenrat organized, right away, at the same time as they made the ghetto?

Yeah. They change from the federation to the Judenrat. And a lot of people, what they say, they couldn't cooperate with the Germans, collaborate, so other people took over. There was-- so we went. We moved in there. On Wednesday, every Wednesday, the Germans got a holiday, because it was Hitler's birthday or the day he took over power, anyway, took over. Was a holiday. And they didn't work. The offices were closed.

Then they came to the Judenrat. They send in Polish police and Jewish police, and they throw us out, from the house, on the street. Because my brother didn't ask them for permission, just he asked the commissar. So my brother went to the commissar. He told him, next day what. And he called them. And they say, OK, they find another apartment. They give it to us. So they find one room, for us, in the ghetto. They say, we can give you another room. But in another place, it

was living there two sisters and a brother. They were, I think, grown-up people, but I think they were mentally a little bit retarded. They want to throw them out. So my brother says, no, I don't want these people to throw out. We will live in one room in ghetto.

When you were moved from your own house into the ghetto, were you able to take any of your furnishings or belongings?

Yeah, we took everything what we could.

Now, when they picked-- was the section that they picked still a Jewish section or did a lot of people have to move to get into the section? By us, it really was not a Jewish section. The Jews lived in the town, in the center of town, but all over the town. But as Jews, I think, because this was easier to close up this part. And so we moved there to this part.

When was the ghetto closed?

The ghetto was closed, I think, in 1941.

Very soon after it was established then.

Yeah, they closed up. They built the walls. They closed up the streets, and we can go out to-- you have to have a permit to go out. But I always sneak out, because I was young. And there were holes. Not all over there was a wall. Someplace was just a wooden fence. And we just lift up one part of it, and I walked out. I used to buy the German paper or something. And my brother, also, he was very good in sneaking out from the ghetto.

When the ghetto was established, what did you do to support yourself, you and your family?

Well, my father still was working. My sister was making dresses for the Germans. And my father worked for the Germans. And my brothers, they would paint. The Germans, they painted all the county offices and they paint the post office and they got the buildings, what the Germans took over from big landowners, out of town, like mansions. So they were painting them. And they got paid.

Plus we got the rations. We got so much bread a day and marmalade a day. And also, a lot of Germans, they didn't use the fat coupons to get oil or margarine. So some, they used to give it to us. And my mother, she used to make shirts for the Germans, custom shirts. So we survived.

Were there any refugees, from other cities, in this ghetto?

Yeah, there was from small cities. They bring them in from villages and from smaller cities. And there were also refugees from Germany. They were there. But they were stuck with us.

What was the attitude of the local Jews to the ones that were brought in from other cities?

Well, helpful, very helpful. We helped them with everything we could. They were very helpful. Was there any school going on inside this ghetto, at all?

No. I know it was just a cheder.

There was a cheder?

Yeah, there was a cheder?

What about a synagogue?

The synagogue was in the ghetto. But the synagogue was, until the mid of 1941, and after '41, I mean the mid, they call-

Well, first of all, they collect all the fur coats from everybody, the Germans. I forgot to mention. And then they were looking if somebody was hiding a fur coat. They say they collect this for the German Army. So they came into our tailor, because they were friends with my brother. There were two brothers. One was deaf. And one was the master, the leader. And they were orphans. They didn't have a father. They got a mother. She was blind-- almost blind.

And they were looking at my tailoring. They used to make the furs. Always scraps left over, and they got a box of scraps. So even I have. I do tailoring. I have a box with scraps. Something, you can use a piece. And they find the scraps, and they took out the leader. He was the master from the shop.

They're going to kill him. So the deaf brother, he was the older one. He said, shoot me instead of him. No, they took him out. And they took him maybe, about, I would say, about, 25 yards from the house, and they shoot him, there. But I remember this.

And yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I remember another episode. There was one man. His name was Polski. In World War I, by us, was the last town between Galicia and Germany. When was the war between the Russian. We belonged to the Russian. So this guy, he was a smuggler. He was smuggling all kind of stuff between the Russian sector to the Galician sector, to Kraków.

And he beat up. That's what they say. He beat up a Polish guard on the border. And he ran away. So they were looking for him, between 1919 until 1939, he was on the wanted list. And then he came back home in 1941.

And this is what I remember. He came back, quiet, into the ghetto. And he went to his family, his wife and I think he got one son. And soon, he came back. And they start eating Friday, the meal, Friday night. Polish police knocked the door. They took him out. And they shoot him, right in the back, by his door. And next day was in all the papers, that finally justice was done and the killer from our Polish policemen was killed. So this was a single episode from this story, from the ghetto.

You mentioned Polish police. Who were in charge and who were the guards in the ghetto?

In the ghetto was Jewish police. Outside the ghetto was Polish police and also German police. But inside the ghetto was Jewish police. Sometimes Polish police came in. And the Germans were always in there, inside.

How would you describe the Judenrat of the ghetto?

The Judenrat was cooperating with the Germans and trying to save their own skin. In fact, the secretary of the Judenrat-- this was the highest rank after the chairman-- his name was Bernard Minc. He lives in Australia. He used to make the lists, whom they should send out. They used to take bribes, too. And in fact, they sent my brother, they sent to camp, to Kraków. Thanks to my brother, maybe I survive. Because he took me into his camp on the [? airport. ?]

Because they were talking, a group of young boys, that were standing in ghetto. And the Jewish police came. And they told them to disperse. And they didn't want. So my brother started fighting with the policemen. So the next day, they put him on a list. And the first transport they send away to a camp, they send him away.

So your brother was on the first transport out of the closed ghetto?

Yes. Yeah.

Let's do a little bit more with what life was like in the ghetto. Was there any communication with the outside world at all?

No, we didn't have any communication. But we used to-- people tried to have communication with other towns, like with Kraków or where they got relatives. And through couriers, like Jewish policemen or poor Polish people, what

they got paid or they were just friendly, they used to bring some mail back and forth.

Were you aware of any underground in the ghetto?

No. I didn't think we had any underground. Because I find out, after the war, there was a underground.

What year was the ghetto liquidated? In 1942, it was liquidated. But I would say 90%, but was still in exist. But before the ghetto was liquidated, the Germans established a tailor shop in the synagogue. We were making uniforms for the German Army. Every tailor has to bring in the sewing machine. And every tailor has to work so many days. We were working in two shifts.

And this is where you work till 1942?

This, I worked until-- yeah, in 1942, my sisters worked, too, over there.

When we pick up on the next tape, you'll tell us about being deported from the ghetto and where you and your family went next.

Yeah, I will tell you about how this shop was liquidated, too.

OK, that's where we'll pick up next.