

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, you were telling us about conditions in the Miechów ghetto, and about what happened in 1942 before the ghetto was liquidated.

Well, yes. Well, the Germans, the way I said before, organized a shop, a tailor shop. So every tailor has to bring their sewing machines and has to come to work one shift, each person, one shift. Not one from a family. So we brought in a machine from our home too. And the tailor that I used to work but he wasn't anymore in charge of me, because it was organized shop, and they organized groups, and a group leader in the shop. And everybody was doing a certain process. Like somebody was doing pants, the other was doing jackets.

And we started working there. We worked, and we thought this will save us from being deported. Because all the time they deport people, they send. They say we have to send 500 people to this camp. We send 500 people to this camp. Now we have to send all the people. They're going someplace East to Russia over there. They will live there in a village. And they will live. They will have a good time. So we felt this is something fishy. And people started coming rumors, they start coming. They send people to be killed in the camps. But nobody believed they takes just people, healthy alive people, but innocent people. They're just were going to kill them.

So people they want to believe. Even they didn't believe, but they want to believe that they send them someplace. So we figure maybe we will be saved, and maybe the war will be over in this time. So we worked in there. And my sisters worked and I worked. And everything was going fine. I don't remember if they paid something. I think they didn't pay anything.

One day they came in. They brought in from another ghetto they brought in unfinished work. And we find out from which ghetto they brought. From another little town they brought in the finished work. And we finished this work. And then one day we saw the yellow uniforms came in with the-- they used to wear like French hats, the high hats, the round, not like the German army. But this was the third organization, as far as I remember.

And we know if they came in, this is like they liquidate us. Because our days we're counting. We can count the days as long as we will be here.

Now, let me just ask you this. Where were your parents at this time? Had they been deported or they were still there.

No, my parents were still there because my father was working, still working for the Germans with my brothers. And my mother was making shirts.

Was she in this tailor's shop then also?

No.

She was still working separately, like she had--

My sisters used to work two shifts, so my mother didn't have to go, or one sister can stay home. So the younger sister used to work two shifts in the shop so there is going to be an end to this thing but we couldn't help it.

So finally, we worked. And they say they don't need any more our work. And we were in the ghetto going for every day. My father used to get up early in the morning. He used to go to shul there. Because the shul, the way I told you was, a lot of buildings in the back. So they used still to go there to pray. And he got up. This was September before the holidays. And it was on a Friday also. And my mother got up early to start making some dough to bake a challah.

And my father went up early and he came back. He went out and he came back right away. And we got just one room. So he says, [NON-ENGLISH]. He says, children, I think that's the end of it. Get up. We was still laying wherever somebody could on the floor in the bed. Get up because we are surrounded by the SS.

The whole ghetto or your apartment?

The whole ghetto.

The whole ghetto.

The whole ghetto. We lived in the last house by the ghetto. I mean next to us was already outside from the ghetto. So we got up and started. What should we do? So my brother and my sister, usually my brother he was more informed. He says to our parents and to his sisters, you take the jewelry what we have. Because you don't know where you're going. And we will take the money what we have. Because we know they send us to a camp.

You mean a work camp, you thought?

A work camp. Excuse me. My sister, she was running the tailor shop, dressmaking shop. She got a paper because she told the Germans, the clients, that she needs to go around to buy supplies for them. So she got her paper. She could travel the whole district in Krakow and in town.

So we told her. Her name was Bella. I said, Bella, you run away because you have the papers. And you will see after what's happened. No. And the other sisters could run away. Because the way I told you, the last house from the ghetto, the next house was already was a wooden fence between our house and the other. We could run away. And there wasn't much. The sister says, no. Whatever will be with mom and with dad will happen to us. We don't want to leave them alone. We don't want to go away. They could go run away.

In fact, some girls ran away and they survived. So they went. We went out. Everybody grabbed whatever we could. I saw. We went we got a big credenza was with the shirts, and underwear, so I went in and I grabbed a whole package. There was a shirt on the top. In the meantime, when I came to camp, I find out I got one shirt and the rest was sheets, bed sheets.

Oh, you had bed sheets in that underwear.

Bed sheets and one shirt. So we went out. And with us was my brother's wife. She was maybe eight months pregnant. And was a little cousin's girl. She ran away. When my father worked in a neighboring town, it was about 10 miles. And when they send out her parents with three children, she saw my father. He got a permit to travel. She saw him and the mother told her run to Uncle Toby, to Uncle Tovia. And she ran through the German guard. She ran and my father brought her home.

But this was in June. And she was until September. So they put us eight in a row, I mean 10 in a row. And they were marching us to the train.

This is the SS.

They're marching everybody from your town.

Everybody, yeah. We put us in-- we were standing in the line in the ghetto. Then after they opened the doors from the ghetto, I still got time. I didn't get a pot, something to take a drink of water. I ran in, in a house, where everything was open. People left everything open. And I grabbed a pot and I tightened up. I put in a sack and a string on my back. And we walked to the train. And the Polacks, they didn't give us not a nice goodbye. There was laughing and joking and all kind of dirty jokes.

So when it came to the train, there they didn't march us into the waiting. They march us in a field, in the side. It was a big field. There was already the Polish Baudienst there. There was young guys, I would say between 15 and 18 or 20, but they worked for the Germans. They were wearing uniforms. Some, the leaders, got the platoon leaders got rifles. And the rest, they got shovels. They were waiting for us. They surrounded us too. And the Polish police and the SS, and we saw they start segregating, men all the men, women, and children separate.

My father told me to put up two pair of pants, and two jackets I should look bigger because I was skinny. In the ghetto I was very skinny. I still have a picture from ghetto. So I put on two pants and two jackets. And we were standing together the whole family, and they were starting segregating. So I say, my father says, kiss me goodbye. He says, I hope we will see each other again.

And my mother, she couldn't talk. She just give me-- she got a bottle raspberry juice. She give me. She said, take this. You can use it. And they're segregating separate groups. And me and the two brothers separate. And the train was already waiting. It was cattle wagons. Train was waiting, one side and open like coal what they're transporting coal wagons.

Open cars.

Open cars. Was standing in the other end. And on the top of the roof were already sitting SS with machine guns. And on each wagon was sitting a guy with a machine gun. And they start, it was up the hill. What they did it, first of all, they shoot every sick person, every invalid who couldn't walk. They shoot them right on the spot. In the Polish Baudienst, they call them. They started burying them.

Right there?

Right there. Even if he was alive, right there on the spot.

The train, the wagon, the cattle wagon has an opening. And each side was standing on an SS with a whip along with all the people, women and children, they can't climb. There was no steps, no ladder on the train. So it took them a while. In the meantime, they took a beating from both sides. Then when the wagon was inside was full of [NON-ENGLISH], you know what's [NON-ENGLISH] like powder.

The chlorine powder.

Chlorine powder. And the windows were with barbed wire. In the front was sending an SS with a machine gun. When the wagon was full, then he pulled the trigger like he's going to shoot. So people move back they squeeze each other. And he pushed in more people. When they pushed in so many people, he couldn't even close the door. When they closed the door in who was standing close to the window you can see, they picked up little babies to the window they should catch a little air and there was sweat was running.

You ask me how I could see this. I could see because we were the last ones, and we were standing close. And I was young I didn't wear glasses at that time. One thing I can brag myself, I used to have good eyes, and I still have a good memory. And this was going on until everyone was inside.

And the young men who were going to go in the other wagons were all standing there, and had to see everybody go.

We were still standing. Yeah, when they were already loaded--

I know this is a hard question to ask you. Was this the last time you saw your parents?

Yeah. Then they start chasing us, loading in the train. And it was a hot September day, like here something. And we went in. When we were loaded already, we were standing a whole day.

Were the closed cars still there too?

Yeah. They're like one--

So they're all closed up and they're standing there?

Everybody was standing. I'm sure my mother didn't survive for too long, because she was already sick. She got trouble breathing when she was home. So we were standing. We were starving for a drink. I saw a girl, a Polish girl, a neighbor. Her name was Martha. And she was going in the other side of the train. It was like a big-- the train was high, elevated. And she was very low. And she asked, can I do something for you?

She was my age. I said, Martha a drink water. She ran. She risked her life. She brought a bottle of water. I don't know where she got the bottle. She bought a bottle of water.

OK. We were loaded. I don't know how many was in a wagon, in a car. So people tried to stand up. So the Germans, the guards, they took the rifle, with the rifle, not with the butt from the rifle, just with the other end was punching everybody. They make holes in the head who try to get up. So one was laying on the other. One was sitting on the other. Finally, when the sun set, we start. The train started going, so it was a little more air and it was cooler.

We came to Krakow. I don't know where we came. But I know one guy, he was already in camp in Krakow. And he ran away from my town. And he came back and he went again. This time he went again. So he recognized that you were being brought to Krakow.

He recognized. It was dark, so he recognized the station. He says, we are here in Krakow. And he recognized a guard too, a Ukrainian guard. So the train stopped and the railroad man was-- we were on the first train. He was uncoupling, dividing the train. And we asked the man. Where's the other, where's the front train going? Because we know they leave us here. And the other was going to move. He said it's going to Belzec.

Ah. And he told you, but you didn't know what Belzec was.

We know this time already from Belzec. But we didn't know it was a death camp. Because they used to send before transport from other towns to Belzec. So he told us this goes to, its directed at Rava-Ruska, and Rava-Ruska to Belzec. Because he got a plan where the train is going.

And the train went. They unloaded us. It was pitch dark. And we started marching.

Now this is a train station in Krakow?

Yeah. But we were someplace where the commercial, not the passenger.

OK.

No someplace on the side. When we start marching, they start chasing us. So the front like a snake, ran away. So they stopped the front the back was catching up. In the meantime, the Ukrainian guards, they start asking for watches, for gold, asking what time is it. I said, I don't have a watch. I really didn't have a watch. So he didn't let me go. So I asked the other guy maybe you know what time it is.

So the other guy he looked on the watch. He took out a pocket watch. Right away, he pulled him out. He said give me the watch. If not, I shoot you right here. So every time, he pulled out somebody else. He says give me the watch or gold or money, otherwise I kill you. Because it was dark. And we were marching, it was I don't know how many hundreds of people were marching.

We marched. I don't know how long. Finally we came. They led us into a camp.

This is a labor camp now?

We didn't know it was Prokocim. So when we came in there, we didn't know where it is. We found out later. It was also by a railroad station. We smelled the oils and we can hear the whistle. We can hear the train moving. We went in, it was no doors, no windows. They told us to lay down on the floor. We lay down on the floor.

In the meantime, they start grabbing whatever somebody's got a bundle, the Ukrainians start grabbing. And they start shooting from one-- the windows was across. So they start shooting, scare the people. In the morning, we got out and they start chasing us around until everybody throw away whatever he got, couldn't handle anymore. We came in. It was no toilet. There was no water.

How long were you here?

I wasn't long there.

You told me you were in a series of these labor camps then one after another.

Yeah, this was the first one.

OK. Before we go on to the conditions in them. Just quickly tell us the names of the labor camps and how long. And then we'll go through each one.

Well, this was Prokocim. How long? I wasn't long there. I was maybe two or three weeks, or maybe four weeks. I don't remember exactly. But now I can tell you the conditions.

OK.

OK, we went there. So they wake us up in the morning. They start us chasing. We didn't have assignment to work. After when already they got what they want, everybody throw away whatever he got, they give us walls. Four guys, they give a wall from a part from a barrack, and four guys were carrying it. And two guys were walking around and picking up a piece of paper, and stones in this.

Now, we have to go to the toilet. There was no toilet. It was a big hole over there, where they used to mix calcium with cement, they make mortar from it. And the water was standing there. So this was the toilet. And this was the water what you were drinking from this hole. People used to go there. Because people, they still were shy. When men and women together, there were some women already there from other places.

And so but anyway, we have to go and this was the water we was using and this was the toilet. And it was no kitchen yet.

You mentioned the camp authorities were Ukrainians.

Yeah, mostly.

Were there any SS guards there?

Yeah, it was just a few. And the rest was Ukrainians. Outside the fence was no electric fence, it was running a stream from dirty oily water. But if somebody asked, can I go out and take some water. He says, yes. Go out. When he go out, he shoot him. When the German came for inspection, he asked what is that guy doing there. The body? He says he ran away through the wires, so he killed him.

And then they assign us to work. And then we got some food next day. We got some food. But still, there was no water, no toilets. They wasn't there. They start building toilets.

What kind of work were you assigned to do?

We were assigned to go, me and two brothers, we went to build a railroad bridge. Your two brothers were with you?

Yeah.

To dig. We were digging there. It was digged out. I was assigned to pump the water out, because water was coming in. And after, next I was assigned to carrying cement from the train to the mixing site all day. And so every day was the same thing going back and forth.

And my brother's brother-in-law, he was in the same camp with my brother. And he find out this my brother is there with me. So he sent a message that he will come to pick him up. So he heard that you're in this camp Prokocim.

Yeah. But they were not in this camp. They were somewhere else.

No, my brother was in the airport.

OK. How was their communication back and forth that they knew where you were?

They were going, people ran away. And they were walking there to the camp.

Because there were such chaotic conditions?

Yeah, and they got-- they let them know from the Judenrat. Because the Judenrat was still in ghetto.

I'm going to ask you a couple of questions now to get the organization. So all these labor camps were under the Krakow Judenrat?

Yeah, Plaszow. No, this was under Plaszow, the labor camps.

These were all considered under Plaszow.

Yeah.

Plaszow you're telling me was the main camp at Krakow.

The main camp, yeah.

So that all the people who had been deported and didn't get sent to Belzec were here.

Yeah.

Their names had been given to the Plaszow Judenrat to know where they were?

No. So the Judenrat in my town, the eldest and the secretary, they left them behind. They didn't deport him. So he got-- my brother-in-law, he was the I would say the manager or the lagerfÃ¼hrer from this Krakow from the airport there, in the ghetto, in the camp. And he find out that my brother, his brother-in-law is there.

He found out that he'd been deported to Prokocim?

Prokocim, yeah. So he find out. So he let him know. He sent with somebody a message that he will come to pick him up in a day or two, because he used to go with a German driver. He used to ride with horses. He used to go for products for the camp for, for the horses there what they got. So he says he will come with a covered wagon and he will take him to his camp.

In the meantime, came from the Judenrat came Mr. Applebaum. He took over the Judenrat after the deportation or before.

This is which Judenrat?

From Miechów.

From Miechów, OK.

And he came. He came to Prokocim. He says the post office wants my brothers, they should finish the mansion. They were painting a mansion for them. They should finish. And then they give him all the papers and they bring him back to camp. So what everything was better than that camp. There was no water and you work by the railroad, and carrying the rails and digging.

So they went back and he came, my brother's brother-in-law came to pick him up. They were already gone. So he told me, my brother will come to see me. You see, on the airport there wasn't a strict yet. They used to get a permit to go out. They got a paper from the Schultz. For a good bribing, he was a good man. He took the bribes, but they got something for this. They gave him--

So though even though they were trying to organize Plaszow to be a ghetto and a labor camp, there was still enough chaos that people in the various work areas could communicate with each other, and try to help each other out?

Yes, especially on the airport was very loose. The guards, they didn't have SS. Just the Air Force people, they watched them. So I worked there. And I couldn't stand anymore. And we got together a few guys, we said we run away. Because if they went back to the ghetto, maybe we can live there in the ghetto too, do something. In the meantime, my brother sent me a message. So he told me he will come tomorrow and I should wait for him here and here. They know where we were working because it was a big project, the railroad what we were building.

And we wait for them and my brother came. He gave me this paper what he got a permit from airport. And I walked with the paper in my pocket. And he says like this. If they catch me they call up and he will tell them, he will certify that I work there. And they will release me if they catch you, then you have the paper. So I was walking behind him. He was walking first and I walked behind him. When we came to the airport he got into a hole in the fence. And I went into the main door and I went into the camp.

And I was there a day or two and he got together with his sergeant. They used to call him the [NON-ENGLISH]. He was a big drunk. And for a liter of vodka, he would do everything. So my brother was in good relations with him. He promised him something. And he put me on the list.

That you're legally in this camp.

That I'm legal in this camp.

And the people at Prokocim never realized that you had run away?

No, no.

Because it was so chaotic there.

This was so chaotic, every day people ran away. And every day people got killed by accident, by the train. It was a hard work. We was carrying the rails. What used to take six people one slab of a rail, so they came and they took out two. He says two is enough, four is enough. And there was no food. And people were standing, waiting for treatment to the doctor because they think maybe this way they will somehow save themselves. They took him away in the-- nobody knows where they took them.

So now you're at the airfield. Now this is the Krakow airfield?

Yeah.

But this is considered part of the main camp of Plaszow?

Yeah. This was a part of it I mean. All were related to Plaszow got the authority over all the little camps. How long were you working then at the Krakow airfield?

Over there, I came. I work until December, I think the middle of December 1943.

So is it almost a year you were there?

Yeah.

What kind of work did you do?

Well, first of all, when I came, they took me when I was illegal already there, they sent me to watch the sheep. They got sheep over there with other guys. After, they took me to work in the fields. And one day, the ober engineer came and he says he needs four people to work by the airplanes, what being shot down, by the wrecks. So I volunteered with the other three guys. And since then we work until the end of it. We worked there by the taking apart or cutting in pieces and loading on the train the airplanes, bringing in some, go with a truck and with two mechanics to bring in a wrecked plane.

So we worked by the planes all the time until one day they came. They surround the camp, and they took us all to Plaszow.

The year you were at the Krakow airfield, what were the living conditions for the people?

It wasn't bad. We got not too much food, but we got enough food. We could-- the Schultz, because it was we worked like we were housed in the garden, between hot houses. And most of the people work in farms in the gardens. We picked apples. We picked cherries. We plant potatoes. We plant wheat. And the inspector, he wasn't a vicious man. He was a good man I would say compared to others.

If a horse got lame or sick, he'd shoot the horse. He says, take it to the kitchen. So we didn't got too much food. But we weren't hungry, especially if somebody want to steal a few potatoes or onions, he could. He wasn't strict.

About how many prisoners worked on the field?

Well we were there I would say 200.

What was the kind of interaction between them?

It was OK. Because it wasn't no fighting and no arguments because the main thing we weren't hungry. And if somebody was hungry, he could always find something to eat when you work in the fields.

Were everybody Polish Jews?

Yeah, mostly. Mostly were from the same area. And it was another camp there, it was from Krakow. They take care the loading, and unloading, and the cleaning the offices, and working housekeeping. So we were [NON-ENGLISH] camp. They were [NON-ENGLISH]. And there was another camp, a third one there, where they were building, Bau. So all was almost from the same area.

Then there's three camps we're all associated with the Krakow airfield?

Yeah. Now after they liquidate the building, they send them away. And we left just with the [NON-ENGLISH].

Did anyone attempt any religious observance during this year?



Yes. Yeah, there was a lot of them. They observed when they could. And one time, I think this was in 1943, Yom Kippur. We even got a word from Schultz, he will let us observe Yom Kippur. He won't call us to work. But it came out an emergency. There came trains with supplies, and they called us to work. I don't know if it was an emergency or it was staged like this. But he promised it.

Why was the Krakow airfield camp liquidated in December 1943? Because the SS decided they don't need us anymore. And they took us away.

Where did you go then?

Then we went to Plaszow.

Now, what kind of a camp was Plaszow?

Plaszow was a terrible camp. It was the worst camp. Maybe people know some worst camps. But when we came, first of all, we came. They took us. We came at night in the wintertime. When you came into the camp, the camp was the way I mentioned. It was on a hill and the cemetery. It was a narrow passage to go in, because it was like hills on both sides.

When we came in, the first thing what we saw, we saw looks like in a movie. We came in and the lights were so bright. We saw a wall and people on the wall with picks breaking stones.

At night?

At night. And we didn't know. Then when we came in, we found out this was a quarry. They were breaking stones and they were working there. Then they took us special to a place to go to take a shower. And they say, OK. Here's the room. You undress here. Leave everything what you have in one place, everything what you have leave here. And you go in here through this door. You're taking a shower.

We went in over there to take a shower, it was men and women there together. We took a shower. And they tell us to go out to the other door. We went out to the other door, and they throw everybody a shirt, some kind of shirt and a pair of shoes. They didn't ask you what size or, you will exchange with somebody else. And there were millions of shoes over there. OK, we didn't see any more the things we left behind.

And we went out there, and after they took us to the barracks. And in the morning, they assigned us. They wake us up and assigned us to work. They gave us a uniform with stripes. You know? And we were going out early in the morning to the appellplatz, where they used to counting. They count us. They put us in a row. And we wait for the German, the SS man. He came. He took over the report, how many here. And they sent us to work.

How many people appeared to be in Plaszow?

Well, I would say average was about-- I didn't know. But I would say about 30,000.

It's a very big camp.

Yeah, and it was a camp inside the camp was a Polish camp. It were separately surrounded, from Polacks. What was like for-- they were sentenced to two years, three years. They were inside. They didn't got nothing to do with us.

How long were you in Plaszow?

In Plaszow, I was there, first of all, I think in summertime of the beginning of '44, the beginning of summer '44. They were sending a transport to our little camp, also from the Air Force, from the communication department. They were sending people. They didn't accept them. So the next day, they sent other group. But the first group, they dispersed. They didn't want to go. It was people, they figured out they're better off here than to go there.

And so I went with my brother.

You were sent. So while you were in Plaszow, you were sent to this other camp?

Yeah, Zablaocie.

Zablaocie.

Yeah. They sent us over there. We worked there. It was good. It was a small camp. We got whatever food they got was divided equal, and it was on time. And next door at Zablaocie was another camp for products, were building some-- I don't know, storage something the River Vistula. And we got over there a good sergeant. His name was Kabot. And he was the master builder. He was doing all the building.

And we got lucky, me and my brother. Because he asked if we know bricklaying or mason work. So I say to my brother, tell yes. Tell him you know, because you are a painter in Europe, a painter has know to patch up a wall, to put some kind of brick. So we went out. And we were under his command. And he was a good man. So when we went out to work from camp, someplace to bring in wood or telephone poles, we were building shelters, artillery stands, barracks.

So the Polacks there were working by the building sites, they used to sell us, and sometimes they give us for the holiday I think it was the beginning, it was I think in spring we went there. They give us potatoes, a gift. We didn't know. But we figured out there were some Jews there too working what they got Polish papers as Polacks. And they sent us in a gift for the holiday. They send in potatoes.

And he was a good man too.

So I'm trying to get the timing right. So December of '43 until the summer you're in Plaszow. Then you're sent out to this camp.

Zablaocie.

Zablaocie. And then you told me that you then you returned to Plaszow.

So how long are you in Zablaocie?

We were in there not long, we were maybe three months.

So the three months of the summer time of-- this is still '43 or is it '44?

'44.

'44 in the summer you're in Zablaocie.

Yeah, we weren't long there. No, not long.

And then you return to Plaszow. How long are you there?

Yeah, plus we got from Schindler-- we'll get to-- we'll go there.

Yeah, we have to finish with Zablaocie.

Schindler used to operate a factory what they used to make the pots and pans there. And he knows here is a camp here. And he send us in bread too, a gift sometimes. So it was we weren't too hungry in this camp. Then from Zablaocie, we went back to Plaszow.

And how long were you in Plaszow the second time?

Then from Plaszow, I wasn't too long. Because they sent us to-- yeah, in Plaszow we were working there, where I told you, we worked by digging out first, they took us to dig out the graves, the mass graves.

OK. I'm going to take one thing at a time. Now I think I've got a picture of the timing. So you're six months in Plaszow, three months in Zablaocie, then you go back to Plaszow to work.

Plaszow, yeah.

Now let's go To the things you did each place. The first time in Plaszow, what was your work?

The first time, we work by outside, building barracks. We was piling up wood in barracks, and building barracks. After they liquidated the barracks building, they said we don't need anymore, so they asked what kind of profession I have. So I told them my brother told me, you know what? He says maybe we will go, because I told them I am a tailor. They don't want me to take. There was a tailor shop in Plaszow.

They were making clothes and uniforms. But the policeman, the Jewish policeman, says you are too young to be a tailor. So they didn't accept me. Then my brother figured out to be, let's tell him we can make shoes, the shoes with wood. He says it's easy. He says you can sew and I can knock the nails into leather. So that took us there.

Then came an inspection. And they asked what you know to do? I say, wooden shoes. They say, they don't need wooden shoes. So they sent us out from there. We went back to building the barracks outside, digging ditches, building barracks, spreading sand. In winter time on the road, in summer time straightening out.

So then they took us to dig the graves out.

Now, the graves was the second time you were there, or was it the first time?

First time.

The first time. Describe for me the story you started to tell me about what happened with digging the graves. Well they're digging the graves, they took us there. We worked 12 hours. From 6 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the evening. Yeah.

Yeah, before we dig the graves, when I was the first time in Plaszow, I forgot to mention, they took us to make the electric fences around the camp. This I forgot. And we worked there a whole day until it was dark building the fence around. And we walked in water, because down from the hill was like a swamps. And we walked in the winter time in water. And we were building, binding the wires on the top and the snow was running in the sleeves. And they don't let us make a fire to warm up.

Then this was the first time when I was in Plaszow. Then when we finished the day, the work, we went to the eating room. They used to call it the eating room. And we wait there in the line to get in our group. Then goes out the Jewish policeman. Mr. Greener was his name. I don't know if he's still alive. He says, go SBs to the barracks. No soup today.

So we went to the barracks. We came to the barracks. The barrack leader, they used to call him the blockalteste. He says, stay outside. I'm washing the floor. So we stay outside. We got in wet, hungry, no food, no place to dry out the clothes. It goes on the-- it was three stories, lay down on the place. If you want to go in the latrine, it was far away. You have no right. You shouldn't put on clothes. You have to go in shirt, underwear, if you have. Otherwise if you put clothes, you will be shot. This means you want to run away.

And the lights were so light like in daytime. So it was bad. And in the morning, we have to put on the same wet clothes and go again to this work until we finished the thing. And we were so bad, I was thinking, I don't know what the others were thinking. If the guard was standing on the top, if he would shoot me, he would kill me, I wouldn't mind. It was so

bad.

This was why you and your brother were willing to go to [PLACE NAME] when they offered that?

Yeah, but we didn't know we will go there. We just went there by accident. Because the other people refused to go again the next day. They were refused. So they refused. Because they got maybe better jobs in Plaszow. So they didn't want to go. And everything in inside and camp was manipulated or organized by the Jewish policemen, so if somebody knows somebody in police or in the office, he could go. Like for example, like the judge basically what is in Tel Aviv, he worked in the office. So his brothers he could always protect him and find good jobs for him.

So then let's go back to the graves. They took us there to-- we were afraid. Because we know, we figured out, we know if we will finish the job we will be killed too. We works 12 hours digging the graves. And we pile up the bodies on a pile of wood. And whatever we digged out during the night and during the day what they dig out, by dawn in the morning, it was lighted up with gasoline and it was burned.

These were that the Germans were trying to remove the evidence of all the shootings.

Yeah, and the ashes we put back in the grave. When we were digging, we were going forward. So the front was digging and the back was already filled in, so it shouldn't be no mark, no nothing. Then my brother says, yeah, so we run away from this work. We got to a group where they were going out, outside the camp working dismantling the railroad rails. So we worked there. It was mud and rain and terrible.

So my brother says, you won't survive here too long. He says, you go back to the digging the graves. And I will work here. So maybe I can buy some, or bring in some food from outside, a piece of salami or bread. How could he buy? Because people used to work in the shops, like making sweaters or suits, they used to take this or give me \$1 or something for this. And you will sell it outside. So we tried. Because the Polacks came.

And so there was contact with the local population then?

Yeah, just because they were bringing in. They were picking up the rails or the material. So they came with the horses and buggies. And we got close to him. So we could, the Germans didn't see. The same we did when we built the electric fences. We did the same thing. We demolished the houses outside. The Polacks salvaged whatever they could. So they used to take this. And we used to exchange with them.

The one time we always, Ukrainian guard, he report us to the command. When we came in, they were waiting. They surround us and we were thinking we will be killed too. Because two weeks before they killed a group for just bringing in food. But we got a good German. His name was Willy, an SS man. And he says, the all thing what we have is bread. And we got it from the Polish people there. They give us. So we didn't buy. We didn't have money.

So they took everything away from us. They beat us up. But he saved us, this Willy. In fact, when we were going to Zablaocie, he was standing guard. He said, now you will have better. Because you go to the Wehrmacht. He says it's always better by the Wehrmacht than here. He was an SS man, but he was somehow a human.

So then we worked there by the bodies. So my brother says you go back there. Because you won't survive here by the railroad. He was going around with a gun all day, with a gun in his hand, and the whole time he tried to shoot somebody. He says, he will shoot you because it was terrible. They didn't take the crossing from the railroad. They didn't let us to take this apart even. They say that's the way it goes. You have to load it.

So I went back there until the job was over.

So how long did you work with the graves?

With the graves, I don't know. We work until-- I think in until maybe September, until everything was finished. We didn't find any more bodies.

You told me about the kapo and what he was doing.

Also when we digged, and we saw a body was sticking out or we could skip it or cover it up, we skip it. We didn't bother to dig it out, unless he saw it. The kapo he was terrible. He wasn't a human being. He was an animal. If he started beating somebody with a shovel, so he beat him so much until the guy fell. He couldn't breathe anymore. He almost killed a few guys.

And so when my brother went away and I worked there, he wanted to kill me too. Because where is my brother? He knows my brother, because he likes him. He was a strong, healthy guy. And he liked the way he worked. So anyway, I survived and then we finished. And we went away. We were doing work in the camp there, everything outside.

So one day, I don't know when was it, maybe already in October, we got up. And the kapo came, the Jewish kapo. He says, you're not going out to work. Everybody has to be assembled with his kapo with his group on the appellplatz, where they're counting the people. The whole camp was closed up.

So this is in September of 1944?

Yeah.

This is Plaszow is going to be liquidated.

Yeah.

But you're not liquidated. So on the last tape you'll tell us what happened to you, and where you were taken, and the remainder of what occurred during the war. We'll pick up there on the last tape.

OK.