

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 the conditions in Plaszow, the big work camp in Krakow, and about the camps around it that you were sent to from time to time. Were there any other camps outside of Plaszow that you were in before the area was liquidated?

Well, the other camps were the ones I mentioned. I was in the airport. And I was in the twice in Plaszow. And I was in Zablaocie. And I was in Wieliczka.

Tell us a little bit about Wieliczka. You didn't mention it before.

So they sent us to Wieliczka to work there. But in the meantime, we start dismantling the camp. We were going to all kind of work on the salt mine, and inside a little bit. And later, just we didn't go anymore inside, just on the top. Because inside was already dismantled. Everything, the machines what they put in, the Germans, they took them out. Then we work outside. And we start dismantling the camp.

And over there was Germans, the guards. But mostly there were Hungarian Germans from Hungary. And we weren't treated especially bad, just the only thing we didn't have enough food. The food was terrible there. Plus it was not enough. It was hardly to survive.

Then we took apart the barracks and we took apart the fences. We rolled everything up. When we were working by dismantling the fences, the guard told us if we have something with us, something valuable or pictures, we should hide them someplace. Because now we're going to Germany. And in Germany, they say they wouldn't leave even a hair on your head when you go there.

So we were working dismantling the fence. And we talked to a Polish man. He was living maybe 20 yards from the camp. We told him we have some pictures we would like to save them. So he says, I will save them for you. And when the guard was walking back and forth, when he was with the back to us, we make a bundle from a handkerchief, and we throw them over to them. And after the war we picked them up. That's the way we have a few pictures from the family.

So then when we dismantled this camp, was everything closed. Before we came there to dismantle, they hang over there three Jewish boys because they were hiding themselves in the salt mine. They want to run away. They thought there's a tunnel between Wieliczka and Bochnia. Because it was also a salt mine. They figured they will find out. So they ask a Polack, a worker there, which way is the tunnel. Then this Polack report them to the Germans. There's three guys hiding and they hanged them in Wieliczka until they died.

Then when we finished the dismantle, they took us back to Plaszow. We came back to Plaszow from Wieliczka.

I want to ask you a few more things about Plaszow. The camp was right in the city of Krakow?

Yes.

What kind of contacts were there with the local people?

Well, the camp was in the outer part of Krakow. Krakow has two parts. One side on this side of river, and Plaszow is on the other side of the river. So in the cemetery was on a side street on a hill, not surrounded by the town. There was quarries over there and factories, mostly building material. So when we went out to work, we were always surrounded with the SS guards. We were carrying the boxes with the bullets. They were carrying the machine guns.

The local Krakow population had to know that there was this forced labor camp.

Yes. They know. They know.

We came in contact when we were on the airport. When we were on the airport, we were like free. We were just, we

have to come back to sleep in the barracks, and the camp was closed up. Otherwise, we were free to go during the working hours. We couldn't run around. But if I have to go from one place to the other, I could go. I went without guard. And we came in contact with the Polacks. They were nice to us.

In camp, they was nice. They even like to help us.

When you had to burn the bodies from the mass graves--

Yes.

Was there any reaction from the people in the town?

Well, the reaction was then we didn't came in contact with the Polish people. Because we were in camp. But when we were working some people were delivering from outside some materials, or picking up because we produce in camp all kinds of materials. They used to complain the smell. They can't stand the smell from the burning bodies. They didn't complain they're killing people. They complained for the burning bodies. The smell they couldn't stand.

But when we work in Zablaocie, then we used to go to town or to pick up some cables, or radio sets for the Air Force, then the people didn't know we were Jewish. Because there were Polish prisoners too. And we were all dressed alike, with the striped suits. Then the only thing we got, we got a KL tattoo on the left hand what the Germans make us in Zablaocie. That's the only thing. But when we go out, we went out, they people used to throw.

Let's say when it was a busy street in the main streets in Krakow. We go with the truck the truck couldn't go because the streetcars were going, the taxis, it was a congestion. People were throwing from the tramway, from the cable cars. They were throwing sandwiches, and soap, and cigarettes. So the people, if they could, they helped. And the people when we came in contact with them in camp, they was very friendly.

Some people they offer us, they will hide us on the airport. They say they will dig for us shelter in the barns where they keep the pigs or the horses. Other guy operate the station, the pump, the gasoline station for the planes, he wanted to sell us guns. But we couldn't trust him. And we couldn't do nothing with a gun in camp.

So this wasn't-- the few people that we came in contact, they behaved pretty decent when we were already in the camps.

You told me then that the big camp of Plaszow was liquidated in September 1944. What happened to the camp and where did you go?

The majority of people, they send them out. So what happened? One day, the way I told you we were surrounded, and they took us out to be counted. They start reading the list, which group will go, the number and the name. So because my brother worked by the railroad dismantling, and I worked by the digging the bodies out, we were already on separate lists.

Up to that time, you and your brother had been together.

We were together. We always stand one-- if my number was one, his number was two. So this was bad. So he was going in another group. And we were going in another group. My brother asked this kapo, he was watching us. He says maybe you can help us. We want to go together. He likes my brother very much when he was working. But because my brother asked him, he hit him in his face. He almost broke his jaw. Because he asked him a question.

So we were standing in the line. I was standing with a man. His name was Freiman, Ansel Freiman. And my brother was standing with his father, they divide him too, Ansel Freiman from his father Freiman, and they divided me from my brother Iser. His name is Iser.

So he came running, Ansel, to me. Because we worked together in camp. And we got to became good friends. He says, listen, Mintz, you want to change with me? He says, I have to go with your brother. You have to go with my father.

Let's change. You will go with your brother. And I will go with my father.

So when they start calling the name. He says they will call Freiman. You go run. If they call Mintz, I will run. Don't forget. And he gave me his number, and I gave him my number.

And when they call, F comes before M. so they call Freiman. I run there. And I stand in the line. And when they call Mintz, he ran with his father, went in his group. And my brother came to me. And then we, OK, after they load us on the trains--

Did they tell you where you were going?

No. There was rumors we're going to Czechoslovakia. We didn't know. And there were rumors the others are going someplace, to Berlin. So we were, I don't know how many days we were on the train. They give us a little piece of bread and margin. And we went to the train. We finished this right away. We were, I think, two days we were traveling or more, or maybe three days. It was cold. No food, no water, nothing, in the train. We came there.

They unload us to a place. And we start marching up the mountain. We came. It says Gross-Rosen.

So you were in Germany.

Yeah, Germany. And we came in. It was the camp looks like a death camp. I mean everything is dead. You didn't see no people, quiet, clean like a whistle. Everything in order. What's going on here? Finally, we came to a place. They tell us to take off the shirts. They put on everybody a number. And who got some food start eating, because they were afraid we will go again to the shower and we won't have anymore. And the guys they were working by the crematorium over there.

They show us today you eat and, and tomorrow you will go like this with the smoke. When we came there, they tell us to take off the shirts, they put on everybody a number. And then they tell us to take off the rest of the clothes. And they tell everybody was made like a long thing like the things I call what they give food for the cattle.

Along a trough?

Yeah. And water was running. And the tell everybody should go there and do their thing, to see if we don't have some gold hidden in the rectum. And then they start telling us to march to a table, and they start looking all over again checking all the places where somebody can hide something. And in mouth and they count how many gold teeth you have, and they mark everything down.

Who are in charge here?

The SS. The Germans.

All Germans? Were there any--

I think all Germans. And it was kapos, there was a lot of Polacks there, kapos. Then we went there all naked. And they tell us we go to a barrack. We went to a barrack. And they started taking groups to take a shower. The shower was, the bath, the top was a barrack and on a mountain with like grass, like a hill. And it was like underground. So we went there to have a shower.

Before we get a shower we was cut off the hair. They cut us here. They cut off here the hair they left maybe a 3/4 of an inch, a half inch. And here we shaved out a stripe, like about 2 inches wide, everybody. And they shaved us all over. There were Russian prisoners they were shaving us. And they wasn't excellent barbers. They scratched the skin and everything.

Then we went to take a shower. They sprayed us with Lysol, everybody. And after the cutting and shaving, they were

burning with fire. We went in. They gave one guy a little soap on his hand. And we went in we got 1 to 10. We went in 10 guys at one time. We got one towel for 10 people. And then when we were through with this. They chased us out naked. And we was in a big tents. And we were going in the tents inside. We were waiting until the whole group is finished.

Then some people start climbing. It was there was no room. It was some hay was there, or straw inside, balls with hay. They start climbing in the tent there. They came in, they chased us out outside middle of the night. And the mountain it was very cold. It was September or October and start beating us and chasing. And the camp was with burned out coal. It was spread all over like gravel, but not gravel just coal from a steel mill or something.

So they start beating us and chasing us. Finally, it came an officer. And he told them if you start beating us, I suppose we were sent to Czechoslovakia to work there for Schindler. He says until morning, you will have a dead-- he says a dead [NON-ENGLISH], a dead mountain he says from them. So they stopped beating us. And we went to the barracks. And they throw a shirt everybody and a pair of shoes. And they say to go lay down on the floor of then the barracks.

In the morning they give us a pair of pants. That's what we got the whole clothes. And we got the toilets was, they didn't let us use the toilets. We have to go all the way in the back was holes over there. And then there came the soup, lunchtime. He brought a soup, a big thing with soup. And he brought a bucket, marmalade. He says, here's your marmalade. Put it in the soup. Mix it up. And everybody get.

From time to time, he saw an older person. He says you got already soup. Why are you standing here? So he says, no, I didn't got. He says, you're lying. He start beating him up. And one guy from my town they beat him to death from the line. An older man, he was a blacksmith. They beat him to death.

Then we were there. We wasn't working there. We were there all day. They're marching us out, and we were standing.

And you think you're going to be in Gross-Rosen to be transported to Czechoslovakia. But it's not sure.

We didn't know. Maybe the other people, what they they work in the offices or the kapos, the policemen. Because there was a lot of kapos and policemen. What they went in, in the same group because they know they were going there. And so we didn't work. We were standing a whole day, and beating all the time. And at night we were laying like sardines, one lay this way. One lay this way, on the floor as much as they could push in, in one room.

We couldn't go out to the toilet because you have to walk over the people. So finally every day, we weren't working. Just they call stay kommando. We were just standing. And they were watching us. And at night we got beaten, and by the soup taking beating. Finally, came they give us a jacket, some kind, pants, the shoes. The shoes you have to switch with somebody, if they don't fit. And then we're marching us to the train.

So when I was there, I saw-- I saw another transport came. And I saw Freiman is there. And I told him with his father, and I show him, I couldn't tell him. I show him he shouldn't say nothing. He should remember, otherwise we will go there.

OK, I went away. And he left. He was still there because he was in another group. We came to Czechoslovakia.

You were transported then by train to Czechoslovakia?

By train. We came there. We was--

When did you arrive in Czechoslovakia then? I think was already cold, maybe it was November.

Still 1944?

Yeah.

We came there. They were waiting for us, the SS. And they put us out in the front and they start counting company. Then they give us a talk. He says, if somebody is here, he's not on the list or he is illegal or he changed me somebody, somebody's name and somebody's name. He says, he should tell us because we want just to straighten out for the accounting, for bookkeeping.

In the meantime, all the people, some people smuggle in kids. They were written that's a boy who was 10. They put down he's 15. So they took all the fathers with the kids and they send them back to the Gross-Rosen, fathers and mothers, they sent back. So I was thinking like this. If I tell them I'm not my name, they send me back to Gross-Rosen. And if I don't send them, if I won't tell them and they find out it's the same thing. So why should I tell him? I didn't tell him. And I didn't got a chance to ask my brother. He was on the other end.

So you made the decision yourself.

I made the decision myself. And I started working. They called me Freiman. And they called my brother, they call Minsk. OK, and I worked. After they gave us some food--

So tell us exactly where you were. What was the name of the place in Czechoslovakia?

That was they call it Brunnlitz.

Was it a labor camp or a factory?

No, this was a factory.

It was a factory.

In fact, it was textile factory. We came there. We throw out all the machines and make ammunition factory.

So when your group came, it changed over, or had already been changed?

No, we changed. We started changing.

Who is in charge of the factory?

This was Mr. Schindler.

Oskar Schindler.

Oskar Schindler was in charge of this factory.

And Leipold was the commander. Who else who was well known today in history was there? Leipold and Schindler.

And Schindler and Bankier, Stern, Bejski. Bejski was a judge in Israel. And I don't remember all the names.

So you were all here to work in this munitions factory?

Yeah.

About how many people were in the munitions factory now? 1,200 including women. Later, he brought some women. And the woman bring also a couple, I think, children with them.

What kind of work did you do? Well, first when we came there, they assigned me to transport on the lorries, the little wagons, all kinds of stuff, cement and gravel from the railroad to the factory, pushing back and forth. It was cold. We didn't got no clothes. We got no underwear. We got just a shirt, one shirt and the striped suits. And over there is a

mountain. And it was winter. It was cold.

So we used this paper from the cement bags, wrap around the body, and around the feet, and inside. And we started getting some food. We work regular hours. If I want to wash my shirt, I got one shirt until the war was over. So I have to take it out. There was no soap to wash. I put in a bucket with water took it was a little stream over there, and make some fire outside when I work outside, cleaning out or pushing in. I let it boil. Then so and after I put it on, the same shirt, until the shirt was coming apart in pieces.

Where did you live while you were working in the factory?

The factory was downstairs, and we lived upstairs.

In the same building.

In the building, because I was young, I mean between the youngest, there was not enough beds, there was not enough room. They had double beds, bunk beds. So we slept under the bed, me and another guy, we slept under the bed. We put two bricks, so it should be higher. But after they say, they came in. We should take out the bricks. All the beds should look even.

And the food was very scarce over there. We were working around hungry most of the time.

How were you treated by the camp authorities there, the factory authorities?

Well we were working. And the foremen didn't got nothing to say. The SS, we didn't came in touch with them, except for counting and telling us every morning they were counting taking a haircut. If somebody steals something, they punished him. A guy stole a potato. They put him in a box in the entrance to the factory. And they put his potato in the mouth. He was standing a whole day, and during a whole day was a puddle withdrew from his mouth, standing punishing because he stole a potato.

The prisoners who were working in the factory, were they from all different countries?

Yeah. There were some from France, and some from Holland. And a lot came from Central Poland. They were even from the-- there was two guys from Russia.

What was the interaction between all the different people?

It was OK. Just the guys, there were prisoners of war over there too, Jewish prisoners of war where they were caught in 1939. And then they were in charge because they were first they were in camp where Leipold was commander. When they came to Czechoslovakia, he put them in charge in the kitchen and in the supplies. So they were in charge.

Did the factory have any contact with the local population, or was it removed from them?

No, it was removed. But the local population was good because when they were going to work, walking to work, they always throw some food, a sandwich or something, even the Germans scattered them, and they say, next time if you throw we put you in jail or something. They still-- and when we were going outside the camp to work, outside the factory someplace or bringing some stuff, and it was going from a flour mill a tractor was driving through with the flour or some barley, and we were marching. They throw down a sack like it fell down. And we grabbed it, and everybody put in their pockets whatever he could.

So the Czech people were very nice to us.

Was there any attempt at any religious observance in the factory?

Yes, some. Yeah, but not in mass, just individual.

Did people have much contact with Oskar Schindler?

They were always in contact with him, the people that work in the office. That was this Bankier and Stern, and in Marcel Goldberg. And basically he was working in the office and his brother was even like a valet for him. He was doing all kinds of thing. And his older brother worked for Schindler. A lot of people came in contact with him.

But I never came in contact with him.

Now you were liberated when you were at this factory?

Yeah.

Tell us about the liberation.

Then when we work, I told you, in May the 8th, I think they were, the Germans surrendered. And the Germans the day before the SS guard, they told us to cut the hair, because tomorrow will be an inspection. But we know already they're running, because we saw they were loading everything. And we helped them to load on the trucks. They were running away.

And May the 9th, they were already gone. So Schindler came. He took all back together in the factory. And he told us how he saved us. And Bankier and his people, and Stern, they told us it's true. They digged for us graves, and he saved us. Schindler saved us. And somebody make from bread they make a cake for him. Thank you, with a thank you card to Schindler. And he wants to run away. He was afraid the Russians are coming in.

Because the Russian came next day. So the Polacks, the Polish drivers, they didn't want to go with him. So he begged the Jewish drivers, chauffeurs, what they know how to drive a car, he should go. So he took his engineer and his whole staff with him. And they went West.

And some of the Jewish prisoners were the drivers and took him?

Yeah, and we left behind. So we got somebody that was an artist, a painter. And he painted us hammer and sickle, a Russian flag. And somebody went up on the roof to hang it up. In the meantime, the factory was in a valley. Both sides was hills, mountains. And somebody was shooting with a machine gun. It was still German troops. They didn't know where to go. And they saw a red flag. They were shooting. And they hit the guy in the side with a bullet.

After next day, the Russian came in. And the Czech people came in. And they send in doctors to inspect. Who was sick, they took him to hospital. They didn't have horses, the Czech people. They brought in a wagon with sugar and flour. There was no bread, because the bakeries didn't bake. And Czech people came to the camp when they let us out. We should go to them. We should go to eat. And if we need something, they will help us. And meat, we got because they butchered over there.

Schindler left behind the cows and the horses. So somebody butchered a cow, and they still cooked in the meals for us. And after they opened up, everybody went on his own. And we start grabbing food and come back to the camp, because we were afraid. Maybe they will close. They say [INAUDIBLE] was. I went into a storage from the German army, so I catch a bucket with canned tomatoes, and rice, and beans, and went back to the camp.

And after, the next day we went into the same camp, I was a tailor. So I grabbed some scissors and needles and thimbles. It was like a general store. My brother, he's a painter. He catch cans to spray paint. And the Russians came and the Czechs. They say, everybody will be checked and checked. And then we go out. We went out. So the Russians when they came in, the first Russian he says, we ask them what to do with this kapo, what he promised us he will kill us all.

He says, do whatever you want. So they hanged him, guys did, the prisoners or what they used to be from 1939. They hanged him up, because they know him good. And the hang him, and after they shoot him. Then they start issuing

papers to everybody. They ask where you want to go. A friend of mine says he wants to go to Palestine. So they give him a paper. He went as far to Italy.

We want to go to Poland, they gave us to go to Poland.

Before you go on to tell us where you went in Poland, I want to stop just a minute, take a deep breath. Well, you've made it to liberation from an extraordinary experience of being in so many different labor camps, and also having been in the ghetto before that, and having you and the one brother. Of all the different things that happened till the liberation, what was the most painful thing?

The most painful was making the electric fences and digging the graves to burn the people.

Did you think that you would survive?

Yes. But the daily thinking was concentrated on food mostly.

What gave you strength and hope?

Hope? The hope was from the beginning, since the war started was the hope that the Germans will be defeated. They will lose the war.

That was your big hope?

This was the hope.

Did you have any particular belief in God during this time?

Well, we always when we were-- we always ask God why. And the Germans used to tell us. They say, see your God is with us. He's on our side. Because sometimes we talked to Germans. Like when I was in Krakow on the airport and the Germans painted our suits, I got like an overall from the Germans, like the mechanics. So they painted yellow stripes in this way they make like a ladder. And here I got a number, a big number. And here I got a yellow star. And a German asked me.

He says, he looked at it and he's laughing and I say why are you laughing? This was in 1943. Is it so laughable? Well, he says if it's up to me, I would release you. He says, but he says I'm not Hitler. I can do nothing. He asked me, but what are you going to do to us when we will lose the war? Because he came back already from Russia an invalid.

I say if everything what you do to us is humane, what you afraid we're going to do to you? So then he says, I'm not Hitler. I don't need slave workers. He says, there's plenty people that are ready to work for pay.

Your one brother was with you. Was that one of the things that helped you to stay alive?

Yes. Yes. He was very bold. When we work in Czechoslovakia in camp in the winter time, he went and he find. He didn't stole. He find a turnip, a frozen turnip. And I make him mittens, from all the rags and he put in the mitten, he put the turnip. And the German, the SS caught him. And they sent him to Strafe kommando, like a punish kommando. From 6 o'clock in the morning until it's dark, to work in the quarry where they stone breaking.

And he was going every day to work. They send him because of this turnip. And when they were passing by where the potatoes were stored in the fields and covered with straw, they were passing by every day. And they were hungry working in the mountain, in the quarry, and everybody was hungry. And he says, boys, next time when we will pass by here by this mound of potatoes. He says, you grab it. And I will talk to the German. And if he wants to shoot, I will hold him.

And that's what he did. When they passed by, they were carrying buckets and tools. They grabbed the potatoes. He



wants to grab the rifle down, the machine gun. He got a machine gun. My brother was very strong. He didn't let him. Then he says he was already an invalid too. He got one eye. He says, I'm afraid. He says, when Leipold will come to inspect because he comes every day around 10 o'clock he will see a fire. He will see potatoes. They will put me in jail.

My brother told him, don't worry. He won't put you in jail because before he comes, the potatoes will be finished. And they baked the potatoes early in the morning. And after they cover them with sand when he came. And then my brother bring to me potatoes.

So your brother gave--

He helped me survive.

So your brother really helped you survive.

Yeah. And--

I want to ask you some other questions about how things went at the time of liberation. Besides your brother, did you expect help from anybody else?

No.

How about the Jews in Palestine? Did you wonder where they were?

No. Before the war was over, we were thinking like we're the only one what we survived. Because we were talking between us. We were talking. I say now maybe they will take us like in a zoo, because we're the only ones maybe will survive. Because it was going I am, the slowest, so fast all over.

What about the Jews in the United States? Did you wonder where they were?

We didn't think about it.

How about the other countries?

I didn't think.

How about the other countries, like the Russians and the Americans, the Allies?

Well, we were survived-- we didn't know even if the people survived in Russia. We were cut off. Since 1940, we were cut off from the world. And all thinking was about surviving, either way. We didn't think too much what's happening in America or what's happening in England. We know one thing. We know for sure the Germans will be defeated. And this keeps us going.

But it was moments when we built, let's say, when they took us to dig the grave, the bodies out from the graves, we were sure we will be shot. But nobody is sure until he comes to it. And when we were doing this thing, the electric fences, it was better to die than to suffer. Because we were hungry, wet, and no place to dry out, nothing to eat. So this was the only thing.

When we dig the bodies out, we dug out a woman's body. And when he opened her mouth, the German to pull out to see if she has gold teeth, she got a gold ring in her mouth. So the conclusion is she was thinking maybe they're looking if she has something hidden. She didn't believe she will be shot. So she hid the ring in her mouth. And she was shot with the ring in her mouth. So that's people don't believe until the real come to it.

Is there anything else about those years before you tell us about what happened to you when you were liberated that you want to share in particular?

Well, it's nothing. It's nothing unusual. Unusual is we didn't got even to know the family like people in my age. We didn't got enough time even to know their own father, or their older brothers. My parents, they were proud. They got eight kids. Everybody except me, what I got polio. And still I wasn't a cripple. The one brother finished. He was a master painter. He passed a test to run a chemical store.

He was a corporal in the infantry. The other brother was a corporal in the cavalry. And to take a family like this, and we didn't got time. We didn't know will come an end to us to our life. We didn't got time to ask questions, who is our family, where we have uncles. We know the uncles where they live close and the cousins. From far away, we didn't know too much about them. We didn't got time to talk to them.

After the war you were concerned to see what family there was.

Yes.

So after you were liberated by the Russians, where did you and your brother go?

So when we were liberated, we take a horse and we tried to go where the train. Because the train wasn't going from this place where we lived, where we were liberated. So finally we went. I don't know how many miles. We came. We got to the train. And the Czech people were very helpful. All over where we stopped, with food and with sleeping over. When we came to Poland, everything was cut off. From the Red Cross, when we went to the Red Cross, we got just lukewarm water. That's all what they got. They said that's what we have.

And then we crossed the border. They checked us what we have. We didn't have nothing. The Russians gave us a few pieces of cloth, like 3 yards of Navy blue cloth and 3 yards for a jacket, and some linen they give us. Everybody they measure up. Because it was a factory next door. And they give us this. And that's what we went with it. So the Polish guards on the border, they took half away from us too.

And then when we came to Poland, there was no food, no money, nothing. We didn't know. So when we were going, we were going to Krakow. Because we in our town nobody left. And in Katowice, when the train stopped, and it took passengers, it was also a train like a coal train, were carrying passengers. It wasn't passenger wagons.

They weren't passenger cars.

No passenger cars. So there came a priest, a Polish priest, a Catholic priest came up. And I helped him to get up, because there was no steps to go up. I helped him. I took the suitcase. And I in fact, I speak very good Polish. So he asked us from where we come. And we told him we came from a camp from Czechoslovakia.

He says, were there are some Jews there?

I said they were liberated, 1,200 Jews they survived. In fact, 1,200 survived. Well, he says, thank God. He says, Hitler did one thing for us. He says, he cleaned up the Jews from Poland. That's what the priest told me. He says, but one thing he says, my conscience is not clear because our boys, he says dirtied themselves. They have the Jewish blood. I ask him how.

So he told me this story what I tell you about the Polish Baudienst. Whoever was sick, whoever was crippled, the Germans shot them. And he wasn't dead, they beat him up with the shovels. That's what he told me. And I saw this myself. So--

What happened when you got back to Krakow?

When we got back, when we were going back to Krakow, on the railroad station in our town the train was going to, there were a few Jews that were hidden by Polacks in villages. And they saw us, me and my brother, they tell us come down. He says, you will have a place to stay. We went down, and we say goodbye to the same priest. Then we stayed

there in our town.

And they were killing every day. They killed one day, they killed in the next little town, they killed six Jewish boys when they came back from camp. They went to see their old town. They killed them.

This was--

At night, after the war.

This was in 1946, when that was--

'45.

Still in '45, there was [CROSS TALK]--

After the war.

--in Poland.

And then I went to stay by one guy. He was a neighbor of ours, Berger, Aaron Berger. His son, one son was in Palestine. He was waiting for papers to go to Palestine. The other son was killed in the partisans. The Polacks killed him. There was 11 Jewish boys, students that were in the forests not far from the town. The Polacks surround them and they kill them all. So he told me he buried his own son. Then we slept by him because I didn't got no place to go. Our house was taken.

One day, he went to the same village where he was hidden, where he buried his son. And he says to his nephew, come with me. His nephew came back from camp too. And he went with him, and going home somebody ran out and shot this Berger and killed him.

So but for yourself then, you come back and you find these kind of conditions that people who you know are being shot and all. But you're already in Poland.

Yeah.

What did you decide to do?

I decided to go to Krakow. So I went to Krakow, but I didn't get a place to stay. So I still as long as Berger was there, I came back to at night, because I got a free travel pass. They give me.

So you went back to Miechów at night?

Yeah. And then somebody came and told us it's a lot of survivors in Silesia, in Poland, around not far from Wroclaw. And they used to call Reichenbach, a little town. There were a few camps, labor camps around. So they told us. So my brother went down to see what's going on. And he went there and he sent a message I should come. And it was another girl also, she survived from my town. And her cousin was there waiting. So we came to Reichenbach.

And my brother started working for the Jewish committee, was already. So he was a driver for the committee. And the other guy was a driver. He was working for the committee. And the Joint started sending food and clothing.

So the Joint helped you there?

Yeah, then in Reichenbach there was already we got from the Germans, what the Germans ran away, we took over a beautiful apartment with everything inside-- furnitures, and mattresses, and covers, everything. And we lived there. And my brother was a driver for the Jewish committee.

And me and other guys, we started to organize a cooperative, a tailor cooperative to work. We got machines, a couple machines, sewing machines from the government. And later the joints send in sewing machines.

Then so you settled in Reichenbach. To what year did you stay there?

In Reichenbach, I worked and I met my wife. And in this cooperation, she came back in '46.

So when did you get married?

And we got married in '47.

So you married her in Poland, in Reichenbach?

In Poland. And then we went to join the Haganah, to go to Palestine to fight. But they didn't want to take my wife's mother. She didn't want to leave her mother. And she got two sisters that were already in Germany in a kibbutz. So we say without her mother she wouldn't go. And I didn't go.

So we applied for a passport in '48. And my brother applied-- my brother got a passport, my wife's mother got a passport in 1950. My brother got in '51. And I got in '56.

So in 1956, then you left Poland?

I left Poland.

And you went to live in Israel?

In Israel.

And you stayed in Israel till what year?

Until 1963. And then how come you came to Cleveland? Because I have a cousin here, and she sent me papers from here, Edith Redmond. So she sent me papers, so I came here. I came to see how this looks. And after, I told my wife and the children to come.

Did you always work as a tailor then?

Yeah, since after the war, I work always as a tailor.

Did you ever talk to anybody about your experiences?

No.

You didn't you didn't talk to anybody about it at all?

No, no.

I'd like to ask you a few questions now about the effect of all this on you.

Yeah.

Do you ever think much about the Holocaust?

Well, I think I ask all the time the question, why? I have two beautiful grandchildren. And I work in my home. And I

have hanging the pictures in the front. And I always ask why a million kids like this, what they left, if I have to give away a part of my body for this child to say, I would give away. Why such children, innocent children, a million of them maybe more was killed? Where was the world and where was God?

When did you begin to talk about it? Is this the first time you have?

I started talking about it when people started talking about it.

Just in the past few years?

That's right. I never shared with my wife or with my kids.

Do you think the Holocaust affected your present physical health at all?

Yes, I think so. I think I was hospitalized in camp. I got with fever. I got stiff my ankles, because we walk in the shoes in the water. The shoes the top was cloth and the bottom was wood, and we walk sometimes up to here in the water. And also all the time scared, being shot, or that's all.

Do you think the Holocaust affected your emotional state?

No, I think I'm stable emotionally. I just all the time ask the question, why. When people say, well the opinion but something I say. Where was the world opinion when we were being slaughtered every day?

Do you think that the Holocaust affects your outlook on life today?

Yeah?

How?

How? I think you should be able, everybody should be able to help themselves. And a nation, the Jews especially, should stick together. Because if they won't helped themselves, nobody will help him.

Do you think survivors are different from other Jews?

No. They're just more skeptical maybe.

They're more skeptical?

Yeah.

You talked a lot about your experience. It sounded like you were a very young man when this began and you really had to grow up. If you were going to give one reason for your survival through those years, what would you pick?

Well, one reason, the reason was maybe my brother, number one. And the other reason is to see the Germans defeated. But they didn't suffer, not enough, to be paid at least 1% what they did to us.

Do you think that survivors have a message that other people need to understand?

Yes. Survivors have a message, don't depend on world opinion or nobody's help. Just try to help yourself, because when you are in need, the only friends and the good doers disappear.

Is there any personal message that you would want to share through this tape for historians and others who will see these particular tapes?

Well, the personal message is the people what are in power, what they really think for the good of the humanity, to prevent holocausts, whatever it is, if it's the Jews, or Indians, or Turks, or any nationality. Because it can happen to everybody what's happened to the Jews during the history.

I want to thank you, Mr. Mintz, very much for sharing your story. I think it was a very important story. And I know that those of us who will be able to listen to these tapes will learn a great deal for posterity.

This is Sylvia Abrams. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Jack Mintz. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section.