

This is the Council of Jewish Women Yale Archive Project, tape 1 of an interview of Milton Steinbock, survivor, with Sylvia Abrams. Mr. Steinbock, I want to thank you for coming today to tell about yourself. Will you start by telling us your name, and how old you are, and where you live?

My name is Milton Steinbock. I am 65 years old. And I live in South Euclid, Ohio.

Do you work now?

Just a little bit. I'm semi-retired.

What kind of work did you do?

I'm a painter, house painter.

Are you married?

Yes, I'm married. I have a wife, one son, two grandchildren.

What's your son's name?

Mark Steinbock.

And what does he do?

He's a CPA and a lawyer.

And where does he live?

He lives in Shaker, Ohio.

And you said you have two grandchildren?

Yes.

What are their names and how old are they now?

The girl's name is Jennifer Paige Steinbock and she is three years old. The little boy is three months old. His name is Lee Scott Steinbock.

We're going to go from today back in time to before World War II. Why don't you start with your earliest memories before the war? Tell us where you lived and how old you were at the time you remember the war.

Well, I was born in a small town, it called Deblin-Irena. I was born in 1918. We lived a Jewish life as possible as it was. When I grew up a little, when I was a small child, I started to go to school. I didn't understand what antisemitism was. So it didn't bother me so much.

Soon, I went to school. I found out what it is. All right. So I know that my father was very poor. And he couldn't afford it to feed me. So he took me out. He pulled me out from school when I was three years in school.

Let's start with a little bit about the town. You mentioned that it was an antisemitic town. Tell me exactly where it was located and about how many people were in it.

The town was located by the Vistula, about two miles away from the Vistula. The town was built years back by Tsar

Nikolai II. We had there five military regiments, like to say. There was an air force, artillery. There was an infantry. There was a engineer.

And there was a ammunition place that in the beginning, when the leader, that Marshal Pilsudski lived, Jews had a way to get into it. Because he was saved by a Jew when the Russians were fighting with the Poles together, he was saved, and he was hidden in a basement full of potatoes, covered so the Russians couldn't find him. And he remembered that.

When he became marshal of Poland, he gave the Jews a little break. So a Jew could make some kind of living. So in our town, there was-- mostly, the Jews delivered all the products to those five regiments.

So this was a military town then?

A military town. Whatever you walked out with a road, you had to come to a town, to a military base. So anyways, my father was a painter. My grandfather was a painter. My mother's five brothers were painters.

And my grandfather was very religious. I'm named after him by the same name. And my father was married to my grandfather's. And that's how he became a painter. But my father went to the Hebrew school as he was married and had yet two children. There was two sisters where they were born.

How many brothers and sisters were there altogether in the family?

We-- I had three brothers. With me is I'm the fourth. And I had four sisters.

Who else lived in the house besides you, and your parents, and your brothers, and sisters?

When my grandfather and grandmother died, the older sisters and brothers, each one, the wife took in one child. And my mother took in a boy, hers brother. And I was raised with him. And I thought he was my brother until I grew up. So that's the way it was going on. Life was going on.

And then when I started to learn as a child, to learn the trade, you weren't so anxious to work. Because children like to play. Children got different things on their mind. But I had no choice. So I had to stick to it. And I caught the trade very good. And I started to work. And there were times before that that I went to bed without anything in my mouth. And I was crying.

So you said, the family, then, was very poor?

Right.

Did your mother work as well?

My mother? Yes. My mother was a wig maker. She made wigs for women.

How had she learned that trade?

She learned-- the parents send her away to a big town, L<sup>3</sup>dz. It's called name L<sup>3</sup>dz. And they-- she learned there. And she was staying there by her cousin. And she lived there. And she learned the trade by a professional.

Then all the time you were growing up, she was making wigs at your house?

Right. She was doing the wigs. And my father was painting.

How old did you start to learn the trade? How old were you when you learned the trade of being a painter?

When I learned the trade, I was 12 years old. And I started to work. Like I said before, we were poor and everything.

But everything went, like to say the poor way, it went all right. Then all of a sudden, in 1935, April, the month of April, that Marshal Pilsudski died. And I was working in one of the military bases.

As a painter?

As a painter. The whole country was in-- very upset about it. But what can they do? After the week, two Polish gendarmes came. And they walked in, as young as I was, and they asked me my name. And I told them. And they asked me for my passport.

So I gave them the passport. One grabbed me by the collar and pushed me right to the gate. And the other one kicked me in behind. And they tore up my passport. And I went home.

Can we go a little bit into the life in your family's home at this point when this happened to you?

Well--

In terms of--

By that time, two sisters were already-- they were married. One sister was-- she went away to France.

You said you had a picture of that sister, didn't you?

Yes.

Would you like to show us her picture now?

Yes. That is the sister. And she lived in France-- I mean, Paris. And she was married, had a husband and two children.

And she-- what year did she-- had she left?

She left in 1934? '34, yes.

I see.

And the Germans occupied Poland first. Then they came to France, they occupied France. And they started to take the Jews out. The only one we had is one time a letter from that, when the Germans occupied. The rest of it--

So she was gone from your family as of 1934?

The rest, we didn't hear from her. And we had no connection with her.

You said you had also had obtained a picture that had your mother and your and your sisters before the war.

Yes, I had a picture. This was taken in 1934. And that time, a neighbor emigrated to Palestine. And she got some pictures as-- for a souvenir or something. When I visited in 1977, I visited Israel. So I stopped in and I got that picture.

Tell me a little bit about the life and the family. Those are beautiful pictures of some very lovely people. How did the family get along?

Very good, very fine. We loved each other. We lived a Jewish life. And each taught the other one to be respect and everything. And that's the way it was.

Did your family have much to do with the non-Jews in the town?

Well, you had to because a Jew from a Jew couldn't make a living. So you had to go out. And my father went out and did some painting for a non-Jew. And that's the way it was. But it was OK until 1935, when that Marshall.

How many Jews and how many non-Jews were in the town?

There were about 4,5000 Jews in town and about 11,000 Poles also in that town.

So that was a good-sized city.

Oh, the city wasn't so large. But the waves coming out to those regiments, they were very large. Each, we had a citadel that was laying right by the Vistula. And mostly, the-- like I said, mostly the living that the Jews made is from those army camps.

But as Pilsudski died, and a second marshal took over by the name of Smigly-Rydz, he took over the town. Another town, he took over Poland. And right away, the propaganda was boiling.

You mentioned the propaganda. And was your family very political when all this was happening?

No, not at all, had no politics, except my sister. She was associated. She was-- the older sister from France, she was associated with the Bund.

She was the only member of the family who was political?

Right. She was the only one.

Was the family very religious?

Well, my parents yes, the children not so. They believed in everything that was taught them. But they didn't follow that right that way that my parents wanted them to be, to go to the yeshiva, or to go to-- when they grew up a little bit, they kind of stayed away anyways.

Do you remember, did you belong to a synagogue?

Oh, yes. Everybody belonged to a synagogue. There was only one. There was no Reform or no other, just Orthodox, strictly Orthodox. And we had all to go belong. My father was a member. And as he didn't have nothing much, but he gave donations, whatever he took away from the children's mouth, and he gave donations.

Do you remember any special holidays or special occasions that the family celebrated?

We celebrate all Jewish holidays. We celebrate Purim, Passover. We celebrate Shavuot. We celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. We celebrate Tisha B'Av-- any that there was, we all celebrate it.

What was the main language spoken at home?

Jewish.

Did you speak any other languages?

No. I spoke the Polish because I learned in school, I learned Polish, I still remember. But in house, in the house, there was mostly spoken Jewish.

Do you remember what kind of books were in your house?

We had Jewish books. We had just Jewish books. This was the main thing because each organization-- there was a lot of

Zionist organizations, and Bund, and all kind of organizations-- had a library. And there was all kinds of books. There was books from the United States, books from all over, mostly in Jewish. And we used to take them home and read them. And life was going on normal.

How about theater, concerts, museums-- were there things like that in the town?

Oh, yes, each organization had their own handymans or handywomans to act on the stage. And they made content-- concerts. And they played all kind of theater, just like songs and everything. And we enjoyed life very much.

Did you get to go to things like that?

Yes. It was hard to get a ticket, not because there wasn't enough tickets, but our tickets were a quarter to buy. That was like today \$50 to us that time. But most of the time, we went.

What other kinds of entertainments and things did your family do?

Well, mostly religious entertainments because my father used to come home, we used to sing around by the table, and the sisters and brothers-- everybody helped. You also could buy a book. There was a book given out in Jewish songs that were from all the place, all over the world, which had cost five Polish zlotys.

So we saved the money, all the sisters and brothers, and we bought that little book. And we entertained ourselves. But mostly, we used to walk around on the street somewhere winter didn't bother, just on the streets, always on the streets, and talk about the future, and what's going to be, what's that, what's this. And that's how life was going on.

And you mostly entertained yourself with each other in the family then?

Right. And on occasions like holidays-- my mother had a lot of sisters and brothers with a lot of children-- we used to go, like in here, from one family to the other, and have something to eat, and just talk about whatever happened or whatever is going to happen.

Did your family ever go on any vacations? Did they have enough?

No.

There was no money for things like that?

There was no money for things-- for vacations. Each child had only one pair shoes, one dress, one pair stockings, and one shirt. And that's how we lived. If he couldn't afford it to buy another one, we used to from rags-- wash some rags, and patch it in, and that's the way we went.

You've given me a little flavor of what the town was like and what the family was like. Let's think about yourself personally in 1935. What do you remember about yourself in those days? What were you like?

In 1935, I swore to myself, one day, when I was little and then I went to bed hungry, and my pillow was wet with tears, so I swore to me-- to myself that everything will come second. The first thing will come work. If I'll get anything to work, even for a penny, I'll go and do it, as long as I have something to put in my mouth.

What did you look like at that point? How would you describe yourself? Were you tall, short?

Well, I was very skinny. If I had to pick up a gallon paint, that was very hard to me just to lift it till my waist. And when I started to work, like I said, I tried to learn better than the rest of it. Like my father used to say, you go here or you go there, you'll satisfy him.

And in town, we had, on account of the armies, we had about 45 Jewish painters. And Polish painters was twice there a

month. So when my father took a contract before this happened, before that new marshal went in, he used to go into neighboring towns, like Radom, Lublin, and Pulawy, and this, and that, and bring in workers, which the wages weren't much.

For \$3 a day, anybody would come and work. And life was going on. Listen, you didn't make-- there was no banks. There was no saving money. You couldn't save it. Whatever you made, you lived.

You mentioned that your own outlook was that you remembered promising yourself that you were going to have enough to eat.

To eat, which I did.

How would you describe yourself, your personality at that point?

Well, not violent. I would say respectful, respect anybody.

You sound like you were very strong-minded, though.

Yes, I was very minded because even when the Germans came in, I said to myself, as long they not going to put the trigger to my head, I'll do anything that they want me, which I did. So as I started out, I went to work. I was good that everybody who had a contract, some other painters, they used to call me right away.

And I didn't bargain with them. I knew I could make it more money. But I went to work as long as I fill in the days and the weeks. And that money, I used to bring home. And my mother used to go shopping for food to feed the rest of the children.

I was so involved in my work that I pushed away, like I said, everything, even if I had a chance to go for vacation or even if I would I don't know what, go out to dance or go out to a movie. If there somebody would come and say, there is something to do right now, I would go and do it. That's the way it was. And I wasn't going no more hungry until the wind started to blow.

Before we continue with that part, I want to ask you about one other thing. You said, your father took you out of school after having been in school only three years because of things in the school. Could you tell us a little bit about what happened in the school that they took you out so young?

Well, the school, we were together with Polish children and Jewish children. The majority was Polish children. But the children were taught to hate us. Why, I don't know. I mean, just that's the way it was, just to hate us.

So the Jews were capable, like in everything. A Jew was capable. Even the Germans saw that we were capable in doing things, and a lot of things. Because in the war machine, in the German war machine, the Jews did a lot of things that the Germans-- not that they couldn't do it, but they didn't want to do it.

So the same thing is in school. We played soccer, we played volleyball, we played-- and the Jews were capable. They were capable of doing those things. And we always won because we put in our mind to it that this is it. We going to win. And that's it.

So on account of that, they were mad. And they used to start fighting. A lot of times, I used to get a stone right in the middle of-- between my eyes. But life was going on, even that. When the new marshal took over and the work stopped, there was so much work in those armies that the work stopped.

So how many years had you already been out of school at that point then?

Oh, quite a few years, quite a few years.

So but-- just on the-- so because of that--

I exactly-- I would say-- but I would say about '35, '36-- I would say about three years.

And so how-- in 1935, how old were you? You were then--

Well, if I was born in 1918, then in '35, I would be 15-- 17 years old.

17 years old.

Right.

And then this-- you described to us that in 1935, there was this very antisemitic incident that occurred.

Right, because the Germans already started to drop in by folds, passes, or anything agents, German Nazis. Because Hitler came to power in '33. And by '35, he already had an eye on Poland.

So anyways, there was a lot of agents, which they spoke good German and also good Polish. And they used to come on the markets and make trouble. And they used to say, don't buy by the Jews. The Jews are bloodsuckers. The Jews are this, the Jews are this, and the Jews are that. And that's it. And which-- the Polish population wasn't educated and they bought it.

Were you aware of any plans to try to fight this kind of antisemitism when it happened?

You tried, but you couldn't. You just couldn't. You see, the only luck we had that was working in those days for us that you couldn't get a gun like you get it in the United States. You just couldn't get a gun.

To get a gun in Poland, you had to be registered, and fingerprint, and have a special permit from the governor. If you didn't have that, you wouldn't get a gun. So the Poles didn't have guns. The Jews didn't have guns. So if they came to a clash, so only with sticks, and bottles, or anything. But we stood up to them, even if we were a minority.

Let's pick up there now, when you said you were kicked out of this job. I went back to ask you about your family life. Let's go on from that point. Tell me what happened after you were kicked out of the painting job.

After I was kicked out from the painting job, I had a lot of Gentile painters that they were working with me. And I used to go. They liked me because I was a hustler. Anyhow, I couldn't look into them because it's hard to find out what they are, if they are antisemitic or not.

So I went-- I'll even mention names that I still remember. They probably not alive because the Germans gave them guns to go out in certain places. And one guy said to me, why don't you go to this guy by the name Rajewski? He was a big contractor.

And he said to me, go over. Maybe he can do something for you. Because I was walking around. And it hurt me, since I swore myself that I would never go hungry. And it hurt me when I walked in in the house and I saw my mother didn't have a penny to go buy a piece of bread or a potato. We didn't talk about fruit or luxuries, forget it.

And I was standing-- that day, there was a market day. And I was standing in the corner. And on the corner, there was a shoe store, a big shoe store and by the name. The owner was-- he was a very Orthodox Jew. And two sons were working with him in the store. And I see a Polish painter walks in. And I was waiting just to ask him something. I knew him.

And the Polish painter walks out. And he shows him around the outside on the front. And he says to him, how much would you charge me for that? And he brought two pairs of shoes or something, which he wasn't allowed to get-- to go in in that because if the picket lines would be before the time-- they started in such an hour-- he wouldn't go in. But he went in before the picket lines. And he bought two pair of shoes.

And he said, he's going to do the front. So he did the front. No, he didn't do the front. But he walked out. And I decided, I'll go over, and I'll ask him. So I walked over and I asked him. His name was Stambler.

And I said to him, Rab Stambler-- like you said, talking Jewish. I said, whatever he charged you, I'll do it for half price. He says, really, would do that for half price? I said, yes. I said, OK. How much would you charge me? I said, I don't know how much if you would tell me the truth.

So he told me a price. I said, OK, I'll do it for half price. It's better than nothing because I knew my mother wouldn't have nothing today to give the children. So I went in, bought a little material, went out, did it in no time. I got \$8 that time. So it cost me \$1 and change some-- the material. And I went over right to him-- to my mother. I gave her the money, the rest of it.

And I was walking around, as I said. I got in contact with a Polish painter. And he said, I should go to that Rajewski. So I went over to that Rajewski. He says, wait. Soon the army goes out for maneuvers, I'll put you in a villa. He says, you'll get a key. You'll go in, he says. I'll make sure you have enough material. You'll stay there and work. And that's fine. I know, I'm going to make money on you.

I says, I'm not asking for wages or any wages, just give me a break, give me a chance to work. He said, yes. He was a fine guy. So I waited for that day. The army moved out early in the morning. And the Polish chaplain went with them. He was a lieutenant.

He moved out, and I went in. He puts me to work. On my luck, on my-- what can you do? He forgot his binnacles. So I stayed there and work. It's almost lunchtime. I hear a key in the door. All of a sudden, the door opens, and he takes a look at me, he says to me-- like it was written on my face.

He says, what are you doing here? I says, what does it look I'm doing? I'm working. He says, who gave you permission to go in? This was the chaplain. I says, the boss, Rajewski. He says, I don't want you in here, he says, I want my people. I says, but I'm a Polish citizen. He says, I don't mean that kind of citizens, I mean mine pure Polish people. He says, and if you're not going to get out, I'll call the gendarmes, and they'll take you away.

So I packed down my suitcase and went away. And at night, I walked to that Rajewski again. He says, I'll try once more. And I worked-- with all those guys, I worked on jobs. There was a lot of work, like I said before, I mentioned it. And they knew me. They knew me like I know somebody that I grew up with and the next neighbor.

He says, I've got a big hospital that's eight floors, he said. And there's a lot of work. That'll be at least four months' work, he says. After you'll agree on it, you'll have four months of work. I said, OK. All right. He takes me in the morning, introduce me to the foreman. All right. Oh, everybody pats me in the back. I was the only Jew.

And they all knew you were you were Jewish?

Yeah, they knew me. I worked with all of them. There wasn't one guy there that I didn't work in my life with him. And oh, they call me Mendelek. My name in Jewish was Mendel so they called me Mendelek in Polish. Oh, you'll be all right in here, everything will be fine. Fine, OK.

The first day, I went. He gave me-- the foreman gave me paint, puts me-- we went in a room. There was a guy. There were three brothers. The father was a painter and the sons, they all worked there. There was one, the youngest, a little short guy, the name was Wierzynek. And he stood by one wall. And I stood by the other wall. And we start priming those. OK.

Well, you have to have a break. You have to go to the bathroom or something. I didn't smoke, never smoked in my life. But he smoked. All right. So I went away. I left my bucket, the bucket with paint and the brush. And I walk away.

And I came back, I recognized that the brush is already turned around on the bucket. That's the way you were raised.



You noticed everything. Because without education, your mind had to be sharp. Your mind had to be.

So anyways, I come back, I start working on the door, I see it's already sand or whatever it is, can't work. This was the first day. He went down. They had-- in the shop, they had some kind of washing powder which they needed for certain things to wash it, the brushes or this and that. And they put out a whole handful right in the bucket, and mixed it out, and put the brush on me.

So I'm not going to spoil for that guy, for that Rajewski. He was nice enough to give me the job. So I walked down to the foreman, and I gave him the bucket. I mean, I said to him, there's something wrong with my paint. Oh, he says-- in Polish, naturally-- he says, I knew, the minute a Jew comes in, he says, I know it's going to be trouble right away.

I said, I only want to change the paint. I'm not trying to make any trouble. He says, no, I can't give you no other paint. You have to wait for your boss. So I stood. What can I do?

The boss came. He says, you-- I told you, he says, if it goes by good, you'll be able to work. But what am I going to do, he says, which he couldn't do. So he says, you stop into my house in the evening. And I'll pay you.

Which he was nice-- he paid me for both days, which I didn't put in. Maybe I put in on the second day two hours, two and a half hours. The first day, I put in three hours. And he paid me for two days, which was nice. He paid me \$14. Gave it to my mother. I walk around another week, another week. And me without work, it didn't clash. It didn't-- what do you do?

Was this already 1936 by this time or longer?

Yes, that was in spring 1936. So I went, didn't have any money to go-- to buy a ticket on the train. I decided, I'm going to leave town. My mother cried. My father wasn't happy. I decided that I'm-- wherever I'll go, if I'll find something, whatever I'll find, it's all right.

Didn't have a ticket, how do you go? So I took a shirt, one shirt, and whatever I wearing on me, walked down to the Vistula. And there was barges going, like little ships, which they loaded lumber, and coal, and potatoes, and anything. I see, guys are working with wheelbarrows. And they throw them in. And they go in on a plank. And they dumping in a place there.

And so I said, can I help you? He says, go ahead, help. So I took a wheelbarrow. And I had in my mind what to do already. So I took a wheelbarrow, went up on that plank, and I made myself-- in those boxes, I made myself a place where to hide. I didn't cover everything.

And soon I had that place, I shoveled that wheelbarrow away in the side, jumped in, and took some potatoes, and rolled over me just to breathe a little bit. And that barge started to roll because I found out that it's going to Warsaw. And I came to Warsaw. In the morning before--

What date was this? Do you remember the date when you came?

It was-- I'll tell you the date, but the day exactly, I mean-- it was in that time about four days before Shavuot. I came in. And to get out there was hard because the police was standing right there. And the guy was taking the tickets from those workers and everything.

But somehow, I got out. I got out. And I started to walk without a dime in my pocket. I started to walk until I came to the Jewish section of Warsaw. When I came to the Jewish section, was already nice-- warm, the sun and everything. I see guys are sitting in the park, older Jewish, reading papers.

I said to a guy, could I see the section where there is for rent some rooms? He says, here. So I looked at it. I wrote it down. I took a pencil from him and a piece of paper, wrote it down in Jewish, naturally, and wanted to give him back the paper. He says, no, you can have it. I thanked him. All right.

And I walked. So I said, how far is it? He says, you need a streetcar. You wouldn't be able-- for that address, he says, it'll take you a half a day to go there. But if I haven't got-- if I got money-- I haven't got it. So I went. And I came.

Meanwhile, walking on the streets, I saw a sign, painter, this. So I walked in. There was one guy. He was making his prayers in the morning in the house. But it was already late. So he must have been away, he didn't have time. So he was standing with that shawl and the tefillin on his head. And he was praying.

And I ring the bell, the door. I opened the door, ring the bell, and I came in. He turned around, he made with his hand, and I should wait. So I waited until he finished it.

He says, what can I do for you, in Jewish. I says, I just came from that and that town. And I'm looking for work. I says, I'm not going to ask you how much you want to pay me. But just try me out. I said, I would like some work.

He says, are you union? I said, I am union, but I'm not registered in this town. He says to me, I've got un-union. All right. He says, you come over tomorrow morning by that and that hour, he says, and I'll try you out.

But I was ashamed to tell him that I didn't eat the whole night. And I'm hungry. I need something to eat. But I figured, a shame, not a shame, before I close the door, I turn back. And I said, look, could you-- if you're so nice to me, could you offer me something to eat at least? He says, why? I says, I haven't eaten since yesterday.

Takes out a card from his pocket, writes down the back on the card, takes me out outside. He said, walk down a block. He says, you see that sign? Walk in, give them the card, they'll give you a breakfast or lunch, whatever you wanted.

So naturally, I went in. And I want to make sure that this will last for me till tomorrow morning. Because there is no way. You can't go hold up a bank. You weren't taught that. You can't go ask somebody to give you a donation. So I walked over and went in.

The guy took the card. He says, what do you want? I says, you put on the table whatever you like it, I'll eat it. So he puts bread, he puts butter, he puts eggs. I finished that off, full, went out happy.

So I'm looking for that room that I saw in the paper, walked in. There's an older woman. I only had my pass with me, Polish pass, which it was written and show that I'm a Jew. And she shows me the room and everything. And I said, how much is it? She said, it's \$7 a month, seven Polish zlotys.

I says I'll take it. But there's a problem. She says, what's the problem? If you're going to take it, what's the problem? I said, I'm looking for a job. I haven't got a dime. The only thing-- I like the room, I says, I'll leave the pass with you, when I'll get the job.

She says, where are you going to sleep? I says, in the park. She says, no, I'll take a chance on you. She says, you go in, wash yourself up. Then I fell asleep, right in the middle of the day, slept over till the next morning, went up, went to work.

Do you remember the woman's name?

I'll tell you in a minute. Now, you got me. I remembered until now. I think it was Goldstein, if I'm sure-- yeah, it was Goldstein, Mrs. Goldstein. She was a widow. Anyways, I slept over.

In the morning, I walked, didn't have nothing for the streetcar. I walked to that guy where I made myself a mug. And I came to him. He was waiting for me outside. We went right to the streetcar. He took me back to the-- he took me right away to the Polish Senate-- that's called in Polish Sejm-- and not inside where the Poles are sitting, those senators and the representatives.

But he took me to the other building where they lived, right across, takes me in in a big, huge suite, maybe 30 rooms.

And he says, you'll start working on ceilings. OK. Went up on the ladder, start working, he liked it. He says, I'll be away. I'll be back sometimes later. All right.

I came out from a religious family, that's true. We were kosher and everything. I ate always kosher. But what do you do now that you haven't got it? So the guy, the custodian comes in, he says, would you like a cup of coffee? What do you do? I said, yes. OK.

So he gave me-- there was no cups, he gave me in a glass. Naturally, the glass isn't so kosher. But it didn't matter to me, when you're hungry. So he brought in a piece of bread and gave me a cup of coffee. And I ate. And my luck, the guy came. He wore a beard. What was his name-- with a F. I forgot it. I didn't work long for him so I can't remember his name.

Anyways, and he sees me, he says, what are you doing? I says, having a cup of coffee with-- a glass of coffee with a piece of bread. He says, don't you know that this is not kosher? I says, well, did you ask me this morning if I have something to eat? You didn't ask me. You knew that I came without a dime.

He says, if you're religious, you're not supposed to do that. I says, I didn't tell you I'm religious. So he said to me, OK. You can't work for me. OK, so I said, fine. Pay me for the half a day. I'll pay you for that meal that I owe you from yesterday. No, he says, finish the day. OK, fine, finished the day.

In the evening, he saw I'm a good worker. He didn't want to let me go. He says, if you would only not eat. I says, so I wouldn't eat. OK, just-- all right. Anyways, we finished the suite. It took us a week. He came and helped me a little bit. And he paid me out.

He says, I got lots of work. But I says, forget it. I don't want to-- that kind of business, I don't want it. If I'm worth it for the work, it doesn't matter what I do, I said, as long as I give you a day's work. OK. So went away from him. And I was-- didn't have nothing to do. I saw an ad in the paper that outside work on scaffolding.

So you worked for him the first week you were in Warsaw and you just worked for him that one week only then?

Right. Didn't even know-- didn't want his name. He paid me off, I paid him whatever it's coming. And since the wages for un-union was six zlotys, like dollars, a day, I took only five. So I worked five days.

So I had \$25. I paid him for the food. That was \$1 and change, something. And the rest that I had it. So I went into the office, to the post office, I took out \$10 for me. The rest of it, I put it in the office. And if I signed my name, my mother got it the next day in the town.

So you sent your family back most of the money then?

Well, sure, listen, who else? I was the supporter from the family. My father had nothing to do with it. My father just couldn't go out because as the time was going on, there was contributions and penalties put on the Jews that there was almost impossible to live. I'll go back what-- for the penalties. First, they abolished the Jewish slaughter.

The ritual-- kosher ritual slaughter?

Slaughter, they abolished altogether. So when they voted in that Sejm, in that thing, they voted-- if it was 300 guys, they voted against it. So what are you going to do?

Then they started to make rules that they saw a Jew on the street, and they walked over to him, and started to talk. So they made pretend that a Jew insulted them. There was a law passed through that-- in that time that he called him Polish pig. And for Polish pig, got three months in jail.

So if any Pole had something against you or something, he didn't like you, like a year before or something, he gave you in right away. And you had to go for the three months in jail. So naturally, some of them bought them self out, and this,

and that. But life wasn't so.

And this is all before the actual start of the war?

This is all before it started the war. Then I went and I saw an ad in the paper. I'm going back to Warsaw. And I saw scaffolding work. I never worked on it. But I can walk around. There was two Jewish partners by the name of Kaplan. And I went up to the sixth floor. Never was that high up. I was up four floors. But it was fine. If I didn't look back, it was fine. All right.

And one of the partners there, the shorter one, worked with me. They were cousins or something. I don't know. They were relations, I know. And in the back, we were working in a court, in a big court. In the back, there were plasterers plastering the-- whatever the patches they had to do it.

And the Poles like to drink a lot. So they came back from lunch drunk, went up on the scaffold. And one missed a step. And he went down, boom, and flat. And I turned around, and I saw this, I said, no more. Let me down. Let down that scaffold. So he let me down.

And he saw I'm a worker, so he says, we got inside work. I said, inside is different. But in outside, I don't want it no more. So he puts me in in hallways. We worked, I worked, I worked. Went on weeks. Every Friday, when he paid me, I went to the post office, wrote out a money order, and sent home to my mother. My mother started to see the lights.

I worked for them about a month. Because it goes back-- I was always mixed out in that trade with all kinds of people. I saw a guy that he used to work for my father. And he comes to me.

And he says, what do you have to work? I'm working on a brand new building, he says. And the guy pays wages. Come, you'll have an interview with him. He'll try you out. He'll love you. So I figured, I'll tell this guy one day that I have to go someplace else.

And I went away. He tried me out. And he says, OK. He says, are you in the union? I says, no. He says, come out with me. I'll put you in the union right away. And you'll get wages. And we started up.

And life was going for me in Warsaw wonderful. I couldn't-- this was the best part of my life since I lived till that time. I was making good wages. I dressed myself nice, went out, ate in restaurants, had good times. Warsaw was a Jewish city, had a dozen Jewish papers, had over 100 Jewish temples, had all kind organizations.

There wasn't a night or a day that you couldn't go and see something-- I mean, reasonable. And the rest of the money, I sent it to my mother, sent it to my mother. And I still lived by that Goldstein, by that widow. She liked me. I paid her. And that's the way it was going on.

For each holiday, I used to go home for each Jewish holiday, take a ticket. That was-- the train used to run from Warsaw to our town. But there was a lot of stoppage. So I used to take the-- it's called the express. It didn't stop, just Warsaw and Deblin. In two hours, I was there. There was 200 miles from Warsaw to Deblin.

And actually, I bought a lot of things for the family, like I knew my sister needs this, mine-- the brothers needs that, this and that for everybody, a present. And money, I had money. And life was going on.

How long did you live there in Warsaw then?

I lived from the beginning, from spring 1936 till the Germans started to go around half Warsaw. I'll come to it. Anyways, fine. All of a sudden, in 1939, the air was thick already from antisemitism all over.

My mother writes me that you can't leave the house. Whenever you step out, they try to beat you. They do all kinds of things. They use they used to throw in pork in the wells because we had wells with a pail to pull it out. And it was terrible for them, for the Jews.

They took away the slaughter, the kosher slaughter. So I used to send my father-- there were big boxes like that chair. And I used to send him those boxes, smoked sardines. And they ate that, vegetables, and fish. And what can they do? They couldn't go buy non-kosher meat.

And life was passable. I mean, that way, it was all right. But other Jews had a rough time. To go make a living, you couldn't go out to go in a different market from one city to the other. And that was till 1939. In 1939, I was almost 19-- I mean, 21 years old. So I had a-- I got a paper that I have to register to the army.

This came from the Polish government here?

The Polish government. All right. So I went home in spring in 1939. I went home. And they changed the district at that time. Instead Lublin, was Garwolin, a different city.

So they made it like-- there was a little town not far from us about 10 kilometers, it named Ryki, like in here you call a lot of names Ricky. And over there, we went about the same age, Jewish boys, but double the Polish boys. And I registered, and went through the doctors, and everything. And I was accepted to the artillery.

So you were drafted into the army?

Right. I wasn't right going. I was I was registered that I'm-- in a year's time--

That you would be taken into the artillery?

Taken to the artillery.

I see.

Like light artillery, OK. Came home, told my mother the news, she started to cry. Well, listen, I said, well, let's wait. And a lot of things could happen in that year-- which it happened.

A month before September the 1st, the Polish government in Warsaw gave out on the radio-- there was no television that time-- on the radio, and they printed all kind of papers, and they hung them in all the corners around in the Jewish section, in the Polish section.

So this is just before the war is going to break out?

This is before the war is happen, yes.

What we're going to do-- we've gotten a real good picture of how life was up to this point. We're going to take a break now. And then on the second tape, we'll start, and you'll pick up right with the war, and what happened.

Come in with everything. Oh, yes.

And we'll leave everything right here. And we'll pick up right there. You've got a terrific picture of this part.

Can I now?

We'll move in just a minute.

Oh, there's somebody coming now.

Yeah. So we got--

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