

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Phillip Abraham conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 21, 2011, in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is track number one.

What is your full name?

My full name is Phillip with two L's, mid-name Ben Zion, and last name Abraham.

And when and where were you born? I was born in a little town by the name of Podu Turcului in Romania on August 10th, 1931.

OK, let's talk a little bit about your family. And how far back does your family go in Romania?

Well, the Romanian Jews, because this is a part of that, actually entered Romania from the invitation of, at that time, a prince of a portion of Romania. It wasn't called Romania yet at the time. He invited the Jews from Poland to come to Romania with their craftsmanship knowledge and so on and in being merchants and all that. And he gave them the idea that or he said they will be under his protection. So they came. So basically--

What year was this?

500 years-- 1500 something.

OK.

And they came, and my family was there, which there are two branches, so to speak, from my mother and father. And my grandfather on my mother's side was named Marcus, but my father on his side, he was a named Avram or Abraham. Marcus is a name that comes from the people-- the Jews who were in Italy and Rome after the destruction of the temple and so on.

So they basically moved toward the East from there into Europe and perhaps to Germany. And so, for instance, one connection is that Marx, the famous or infamous communist--

Karl Marx.

Karl Marx-- was based on the fact that his people were called Marcus, but the Germans made it into Marx. So my grandfather, his family name-- his last name was Marcus.

So that was my connection there. This little town that I mentioned where I was born was actually a center of a lot of Romanian villages who were working the land, and they were raising crops. And this town-- there were 400 Jewish people there, mostly merchants who actually brought and bought from other places to give to their customers who were from the villages.

So my father had a store with fabrics. In those days, there were no ready-made clothes. You had to buy by the meter or yard, and you went to a tailor -- and so on or a-- what they call it-- mistress. And so my father brought this stuff from other places and sold a lot of from silk and so on, even British cloth that came from England. And also a variety of fabrics that were actually made in Romania itself. There were a lot of factories that did that.

So my father, who's story is also of interest, at least to me, he had been-- during the First World War, he was about the age of 14, 15, and worked in the store of an uncle of his, who kind of exploited him. So at one point, he decided to go on his own.

And there was a war, and the Romanians fought against the Germans-- the First World War. And he decided to go with a wagon and one horse, and he went and bought from the Germans and sold it to the Romanians and bought from the Romanians and sold it the Germans-- food, basically, and so on. And he managed through three or four years to make a

lot of money. Came back to this town where I was born, Podu Turcului, and started a regular store with fabrics. And that was his, and he became quite successful, basically the most successful among other merchants.

And his philosophy was, if I can put that in, was to buy as cheap as possible, meaning-- and how did you do that? By putting the money on the spot, not on credit. And he sold it to the older villager that came there on credit, because they didn't have money every time. Only after the crops came in they had the money to pay.

And they came, and they were extremely good customers. They never defaulted. They came and paid and so on for many years, even during the Second World War that something happened. This little town--

But we'll talk about the Second World War in a--

All right.

What was your father's name?

Isaac Abraham.

And he was born what year?

He was born in 1899.

Oh, OK.

Yes. And OK, so that's my--

That's your father's story.

My father, yes.

And your mother's name?

My mother's name was Chaya or Clara Marcus.

And you know when she was born?

Yeah, she was born actually about three or four years before my father. So she was-- and a little story there, too. There were all sorts of-- she was very beautiful and so on, and she was educated. And my father, on the other hand, had only two years of grammar school. But he was extremely good at math-- arithmetic, I should say.

And when he came back to the town, he said I want to marry Clara Marcus. And she didn't want to and so on, and then one of her brothers, who was older than she, said, you should marry him. He is going to be a success. And not only this, he gave her-- because there were-- my mother's-- they were orphans. There had been 12 children and two separate mothers. One died, and then the father of her married another woman, which happened to have been the sister of the first one. Because that was the Jewish thing. She was not married, and when her sister died there were already six children. And she gave birth to another six. But not all of them survived.

So when this older brother, who by that time was also very successful, said I'm not going-- there is nobody. The father already died. My grandfather [INAUDIBLE] died. So there was no money to give as a dowry.

So he said, Clara Marcus is not going to go without a dowry. My father never even asked or anything like that. So he came and gave her at that time 50,000 of currency.

So in any case, it was a very successful. They loved each other throughout life and so on, until 1973 when my mother

died.

Do you have any siblings?

Yes, actually I should say one elder sister who died several years ago. And I have a brother in Canada.

What are the names of your siblings?

My sister was Rosa, or Varda in Hebrew. She died in Israel. And my brother was named Carol, because that's the name of the king.

The king.

Right-- Carol Abraham. So he has been a citizen of Canada for quite a long time, but he was in Israel as well. It is another story, OK, with Israel and so on.

Yeah, we'll get to that.

Yeah, he's still-- we're in touch all the time.

The difference in ages between you?

He's about 2 1/2 years older than I am.

So you were the baby?

I was the baby, yes. Yeah, so there had been four children, but the first born died when he there were some epidemics when he was one year and a half. It was something that my mother would cry when she mentioned that and so on.

How religious was your family?

Well, they kept kashrut, never anything in the house or anything like that. My father was a member of the synagogue and so on. And also the community, the Jewish community that took in this little town care of orphans and widows and so on.

And it was very, very interesting. They didn't force people to donate. And so they got together, said, well, you should do this. And they too took care of everybody. Nobody died of hunger or anything like that.

If there was some problem in the winters and so on, people would go and cut wood for them-- for all these people. It was really civilized in that respect.

We had a rabbi for life there. His son became the rabbi. And so it was very, very nice. And people would meet during the summer in the evening after all the stores were closed. They would meet, and actually would have outside on the sidewalks-- they put tables and so on. And friends would come, and they drank something cold and talked and so on. So there were all sorts of things of that nature. And so it was a happy childhood, until the Second World War.

Did you live in a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews? There were very few Romanians in this town. The majority were Jews. But there was a church and so on, and it connected between the-- not connections, but relatively speaking they were a good friends and so on.

And I'll come to a point before the Second World War in the '30s. There was a mayor. Ordinarily the mayor was a Romanian guy who happened to be very, very good and, in fact, very friendly with my father. And he said in the '30s when Hitler came to power in Germany-- and he kind of was a very intelligent man. He was a lawyer as well.

And he said to my father, Isaac, why don't you-- he knew that we were capable, because my father was rich by the Romanian standards. Just go to America. Take your family and go to America.

And he didn't follow this, because he said, well, I have all my family-- his siblings and so on. And so he didn't want-- his parents were still alive, my grandparents on my father's side, and a sister, and a sister-in-law and so on. So he didn't do it. And so we were there when they--

But what I wanted to say is that there was kind of a friendship between the Romanian people, at least in this little town. Not everywhere it was. Oh, there were some antisemites as well in Romania, and we know that things happened during the war.

But prior to the war, for instance-- to give an example of their relationship, is that when they said to put the yellow thing on to show that you are a Jew-- we put on our sleeve-- the police were supposed to enforce that. But they grew up with the Jews, so they never did. So it was-- you couldn't tell who was Jewish and was not.

So that was the situation. And I went to kindergarten there.

This was a public school or a Jewish school?

No, it was a public school. They had also grammar school, all public. Until the war started, when suddenly in 1940, the order came. Romania at this that time was an ally of the Germans.

And from the point of view of the Romanians, I want to say something that is not bad. Because they saw France defeated in three weeks, and Romania had just about-- the older forces, they had cavalry against tanks and so on. And they said they couldn't survive.

So they were from patriotism, they said we have to go, even with the famous or infamous men in power at the time-- General Antonescu. He said-- and he was a patriot himself-- that we cannot fight the Germans. In the First World War they did, but then France was not defeated, and all the others were attacking the Germans.

So because of that, in the end when the war came, the Germans demanded from this general that the ambassador-- the German ambassador to Romania-- that they collect the Jews from the little towns, push them into the other centers so they would be there available for them to take and kill them. Of course, the Romanians at the time didn't know that-- what was happening. That was quite secret-- the Germans-- the way they did it.

So the order came one day in the little town-- this Podu Turcului tomorrow you have to leave and go to the larger town, which was about 20 miles away. So people had the stores. What to do with the stores and the merchandise?

So most people took whatever they could in horses and wagons and so on. And so did my parents, with one exception. My father decided he couldn't take all of it. It was a large store with fabrics, and that's very voluminous, and how to carry this on a wagon with two horses, or something like that.

So they took-- well, my parents took whatever is my most valuable and so on. And my father went and actually put all sorts of wood in the front part of the store and in the back and so on. And it was so effective that later, when I come in this story, nobody was able to enter there.

Before we go on, let's go back a little bit pre-war.

What language did you speak at home?

We spoke Romanian. My parents, of course, spoke Yiddish, but on purpose, because at the time they didn't know where what was going to happen to us. They wanted-- if you spoke Romanian, you had a chance to go have a good life and so on. Nobody would bother you. But if you didn't speak Romanian kind of immediately, you are a Jew.

So they didn't speak Yiddish with us. I never-- to this day, I don't know much Yiddish. A few things, but ordinarily they talked with us in Romania.

So you celebrated holidays, Passover, the Sabbath?

All of that. Absolutely.

Very observant in that sense?

Oh yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

With extended family?

With extended family and so on. For instance, Yom Kippur we'd go for the children so we'd be out of the synagogue and play and so on. And lunch came, and oh, let them eat something. Take them home. Yeah, I remember that.

OK, you were born in 1931 you said.

In 1931, yes.

And Hitler came in power in '33.

Yes. I couldn't do anything about it.

So again, pre-war. At what point or were you ever before the war started aware of a man named Hitler? Did your parents talk about it?

Oh, yeah, sure. Sure. Yeah, they knew that it happened, but the number of-- there were newspapers, of course, as well that mentioned what was happening in Germany to the Jews?

Not really. No, I don't think even throughout all of Europe-- people were not interested. The Jews may have been interested i and so on. So I remember only later on when just close to the war, 1939-- so in one of the newspapers there was a huge headline that the war is about to start. Something like that.

Did your parents say-- I mean, you were young, of course. Do you do you remember if your parents talked to you about what was happening and who this man Hitler was?

No, I don't recall. They may have done that, but I was kind of--

You were a young child, I know. Yeah.

It was 1939.

You were eight.

Yeah, I was 8. And I knew how to read this headline, and I remember that as if I am looking at it right now. But what we knew earlier, we had keren kayemet, a little box where we put money and so on all the time. And we're talking about Palestine, not Israel-- Palestine.

And I'm telling a story that I told my wife and everybody, and it's a true story. I said at the time when I was young, about six, seven, I said I want to be a general in Palestine. Well, I didn't become a general. I became a sergeant-- first sergeant.

Almost. Almost.

Right. So I was a Zionist, because--

And your family-- I was going to ask if your family--

All the family-- all the people there were for Palestine, but they couldn't go there.

Right.

The British wouldn't allow them. Already 1921, 1922, they put a stop basically, just only a few people could go to Palestine-- Jews, meaning.

Were your parents politically involved in the '30s at all?

Only my father was a member of the Romanian party that was actually a party of the people living in the agriculture and the villages and so on. That was not against Jews or anything like that. They were quite good for Romania at the time.

But later on, they lost in the elections, and other people came in and so on with antisemitism and so on. And at that point, my father, of course, was no longer, and nobody was interested in supporting them. And they knew that there is a danger, but nobody believed.

If Jews in Germany didn't believe, and in Romania, yes, they were antisemites.

Did you yourself as a child every experience--

As a child, yeah. One thing that I remember very-- I may have been seven years old, something like that. I was in one of my uncle's garden in the back of the building where he had fruit trees. And I was getting some plums or something like that. And there was a gate. And I was just about-- I wasn't exiting through again back gate.

And there passes a Romanian little boy like me. And she shouts, zhid, zhid. So my reaction-- I remember it as if it was today-- I picked up a stone and threw it at him. I didn't hit him, OK? He was running by that time. That was my reaction.

Did you talk this over with your parents?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

What did they say to a child? What do you say to a--

They said don't do that. Don't do that, because then you put everybody else in jeopardy. And then this boy, if he were hit by this stone, he would go and cry and so on and his parents-- oh, the damn Jews, or something like that.

How would you characterize yourself? Were you an independent child?

My letter history, it will appear that I was really more independent than my siblings when I come to that point.

And one other thing that happened, I want to show that basically the people in the town that were in power, so the mayor and so on.

The mayor's name? Do you remember the mayor's name?

I don't remember now.

Because you were talking about him before.

A Romanian man, yes. One day he came and told to the community-- Jewish community, meaning the people who were kind of in charge. And they said, look, I heard news that the antisemites, and there was a group--

In the town-- in the area.

They could have been in the area. They intend to have a massacre-- to come and attack the Jews. So he said you better go and prepare yourself to fight. And I remember that evening, particularly we went to one of their relatives that had a bigger store and so on, and the only family there. And other people did the same thing with axes and sticks and whatever. Were ready to fight. It didn't happen. So but I remembered it exactly and so on.

One of my cousins, as we were waiting there, suddenly we hear a noise. Something-- a big noise. Something fell on the ground in the store.

This cousin was a little bit retarded, and he was sleeping on a bench and fell. So that was about all that-- we always remember that. But it didn't happen, so until we had to move [INAUDIBLE].

OK, let's get to that point, because up to that point, you were going to school.

I was going to school-- a Romanian school and so on.

And did the teachers-- were the teachers--

No, they were not--

Antisemitic.

No, they actually were harsh-- much harsher on the children of the villagers and so on or who were Romanians.

So in a sense, you had a safe childhood.

I had a safe childhood. Yes, I cannot at all complain.

Except for that one incident, you said.

OK, so now, as you said, things started to change.

Right. And so we were sent to another town, much larger than this. It was a real town.

The name of that town? T-E-C-U-C-I. That's pronounced Tecuci. And all these still exist. Actually, we could look them on the internet to see their locations now. We did it here. And they have increased a little bit in population, all these places. Not that much. And so we moved there.

Do you remember when this was?

It was I think in the summer of 1940.

OK. Oh, OK, war broke out September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. Did you-- OK, you were 8 years old. Were you aware of that?

I wasn't aware of that. Yeah, my parents were.

Yeah.

We had a problem there with radios. For instance, not everybody had a radio, because there was no power-- electrical

power. So the only-- I have some older cousins who were kind of smart, and they put together a radio with batteries. Not the little batteries, but the battery like a car battery nowadays. And we heard the news. I mean, they heard the news.

They heard the news.

Yeah.

So 1940 comes, and you have to move.

1940 comes, and then this is happening that we have to move.

What month? Do you remember?

I remember that must have been--

From what season? What was the season, if you don't remember the month?

It was in the summer.

The summer.

And the reason I know exactly that it was the summer, I remember we went with this horses in the wagon. And I was thirsty, and we didn't even take water with us. And we stopped at a fountain. And what happened that fountain-- actually the water was polluted. An nobody else got sick, but I did, when we reached the place when they were put in this work. We found a place to live there.

One day I had some fever. They didn't know what it was at the time. So they thought malaria or something like that. But aspirin, something like this.

And one day, my mother-- my father wasn't there at the time. What happened? They took the Jews who came from this little town and other little towns that were brought in-- were told to move. They took those men to labor camps. And they didn't take the men that were the residents-- Jewish residents in this Tecuci. None of the men there were taken, but there were Jews who--

The refugee Jews in the other towns.

Right. They were sent to some labor camps. And that could have been bad, and for some people may have been bad. But if you had money, you could bribe the guards there, and they would say, Mr. and so on-- treated you with respect because they were getting money.

And that's one characteristic of the Romanian people. They like bribes, but they actually produce what they take the money for. Other places-- Hungary and so on, the Ukraine-- they took the money, and actually, in many instances, they were going to move them over the border and so on. They killed them and took everything they had left. Or even if they didn't kill them, they take anything they had and left them there and didn't move them. That was--

What did your parents tell you why you had to move? What do you tell an 8-year-old child? You've got to leave your home and go to another town?

Orders came from above me. There was no time even to talk.

Were you frightened?

Oh, I don't know if I was frightened, but--



Well, you were going with your family.

Yeah, I was with my family and so on. I wasn't frightened, because I had my parents with me and so on, and my siblings.

Were you able to take things special to you as a child-- with you?

I don't recall now.

Like toys or books?

No, because we had to do it fast, and so on. And there were all night long and so on to do all this. And it was difficult to find a wagon and horses, because it was a small town. So they had to go to the villages and say, OK, for money.

So they came. And my father had friends in all these villages because they liked him-- the way he dealt with them.

So now you're in the new town.

We're in the new town. We found a place to rent, actually, because we had money at the time. That was for us the beginning and so on. Later on it became more difficult.

And so my father was taken. So my mother had the money and so on, and we lived in-- what really happened to everybody in the population there at that point. And the food became scarce, because they were giving to the Germans. They were giving and so on. And the Germans crossed through Romania to attack the Russians.

So everything was like you got-- what is--

Ration?

Rations and so on. And the beef wasn't-- you didn't want to buy beef. It wasn't kosher anymore. And so on. But we survived and so on. My mother was a very good cook.

During the time in Podu Turcului, we had two servants-- one that cooked, one that took care of the children. Because my mother was in the store with my father and so on. But she was a good cook in any case. So she managed to do for us, and we survived throughout the war.

You stayed in that town throughout the war.

We stayed in town throughout the war.

OK, let's talk a little about your life during that time. Did you go to school in that town?

Right, but another thing happened. The government said that Jewish children cannot go to the public schools. So they did as a favor. Why? Because the Jews said, well-- they started a high school-- the gymnasium.

The Jews started a Jewish school.

Right, the Jewish school. And they allowed that. They didn't care about that. And who were the professors? One was a pharmacist. One was an engineer. One actually studied in France and so on so was the French teacher. And so we had a much better school.

Education.

Education. Until the end of the war. OK? And we studied, of course, religion-- Jewish and stuff like that. I mean they--

Was there a synagogue in that town?

Yeah, there were several synagogues. Oh, yeah.

You felt free enough to go to service.

Yes. Yeah, there was no problem-- OK with that. So that's why I'm saying we didn't suffer that terribly.

And also after I said my oldest men were taken to defend, their family stayed behind, after two years there, 1942 something like that, they allowed them to come home. And they came home. That was that.

Had you had any contact with your father in those two years?

Yeah, letters. They allowed to send letters and so on. And they--

Where was he taken? Do you know?

I don't remember now. I think there is information, because somebody from Podu Turcului put together a book, which they actually sent to me-- one copy with all the names and so on. So I could answer this. The only problem is, I sent it to my brother in Canada. He still has it. So I'll ask him to send it back to me so I can comment more details-- the actual details.

Because they did a search of-- in all these little towns, they had the people-- all the information about the births and so on in the town's records and so on. So they could go, and since there were so many survivors, people remembered. So they put together this book. I'm not sure that there is a copy of it. Maybe [? Micheline ?] may be able to.

And I had it in my hands at the time, and I looked through it, and my father appears there and so on. And many other Jews.

So during this time during the war, again, how aware were the adults of what was happening in the other countries and even in Romania-- terrible things in other parts of Romania?

Yeah, I'm sure they knew, for instance, that bad things happened in Bucharest. There was this so-called Legionnaires at a party-- the green and so on. And they had a massacre of Jews in several places in Bucharest.

And then they got this General Antonescu sent after them, caught them and killed them. And those who survived-- [INAUDIBLE] ran and they left and went to Germany and stayed there during the war.

You hadn't mentioned wearing yellow. When was that?

That was when this Tecuci, I suppose. But I remember for the same reason,

You didn't have to wear.

[INAUDIBLE] Yeah, they didn't pursue that, probably because of bribing the police. And the police would say what do I care that, too, for them.

Wear a yellow band, yeah.

It was not a Romanian thing. It was done because of the Germans. Yeah.

So what do you remember from those years of ward? Was it a very frightening time for you as a child? You were 14 when war was over. I mean, you were getting older and more aware.

Right, I was aware that there was danger and so on, and be--

Were you afraid of being Jewish? Did that bother you?

No, I was Jewish. I was Jewish.

Were you Romanian or were you Jewish? What did you feel?

Of course, Jewish.

Jewish. You did not feel Romanian.

I didn't feel Romanian, even though that was the language I was speaking.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah. But I was reading. I was reading a lot in Romanian. Incidentally, one good thing about that-- they translated from other languages books. And in this Tecuci place, they had a huge bookstore that went like several-- all the way, had to go on ladders. And they had translated from French and English and even Russian books. And they were kind of cheap. So I was able to read through the--

Classics? Is that what you're saying?

Yeah, the classics. And that was my real passion-- to read.

Were you active in sports?

Yes, to some extent, but you couldn't call it sports like here. You know, we played-- if we played, let's say baseball, it was a ball made of pieces of old--

String or something?

Yeah.

Yeah.

So we played the games like that and so on. But after the war it was different. Yeah.

So did your family stay in the same apartment that they had rented?

We stayed there until-- yeah.

You stayed in one place the whole time.

One place, right.

What were your parents' frames-- do you remember what your mother or father's frame of mind was?

Well, they were worried, but they wouldn't all the time let us just-- we still were--

Children.

Children, yeah.

Did you talk things over with your sister and brother about what was happening?

I don't recall that we talked about that, OK? Maybe that was done on purpose not to make the little boy-- yeah. But we knew that it was dangerous times.

Did you see German soldiers?

Toward the end of the war, and I'll tell you the story. The end of the war came and 1944 for us. The Germans were retreating from Russia, and they actually came toward our own town, Tecuci. And then retreat. After them were coming the Russians to attack them.

So I remember this very clearly. It was August, 1944, and I was 13 at that time. And this is when they retreated.

Did you have a bar mitzvah?

I had a bar mitzvah, yes. And my father actually wasn't yet home at the time for my bar mitzvah. He came a few weeks later. And so an uncle of mine, and I was studying for the bar mitzvah with a teacher. And bar mitzvah there wasn't the kind of thing that it is nowadays here-- a festivity and all this. You went to the synagogue. He didn't give a speech. You just came to the Torah and you read and so on, things that you learned and so on. I was the only one who read it in Hebrew, not in Yiddish pronunciation. Because I didn't know Yiddish. So my teacher taught me in Hebrew, and that was good for me later on when I started learning Hebrew.

You had said that your father wasn't home, but I thought you said he came home after two years?

I think that I was wrong about that-- the two years. I think that maybe they were taken later or not immediately when they arrived in the town. So my dates are a little bit--

OK. OK.

And so in any case, yeah. So we-- on this trip to Tecuci and so on, I got all this. And my father wasn't there after. So one time after, my mother was left with me in this house that we were renting. And my father-- that was maybe a year after that and so on. I kept having attacks of malaria. That's what they called it.

So one day, my mother-- my siblings were sent to our relatives, because I was--

Sickly?

Yeah. Yeah, right? So if I had something for them to not to catch it from me. And I had a high fever and so on. And she had to go, and she locked the door and said, stay here. Don't go anywhere. And I couldn't go out, and she didn't want other people to be able to enter.

And I had fever, and somehow I remember this, because it really happened. There was a window, and the window was open, but the window had bars. So I felt like I was in the room, and it was also warm. I wanted to go out into the air.

So I managed to go to between the bars to get there, climb up and down into the-- and my mother comes and screams, Phillip, Phillip! Then she would call me [? Phillamel. ?] That was my name-- little Phillip.

And so I was in bad shape. So she took me in, and she called a Jewish doctor by the name of Dr. [? Sheinwitz. ?] And he came. It was an interesting story with that man. He was suffering with his heart, and he was a devoted person to do everyone-- all the patients.

And so he came, and he found out that it wasn't just malaria. I had typhoid fever. So there was a rule that anything that was-- if a person is sick with something like this that is a catching thing, that they should be taken to the public hospital.

But public hospital meant death in anybody that was brought like that. Not because they were Jewish, but the hospitals weren't the way they should be. My luck was that they didn't take me there. The major medical guy in the town-- in this Tecuci place-- was a friend of my doctor. They had both studied in France. They got their degrees there in medicine.

So Dr. [? Sheinwitz ?] told to this doctor-- said, look, if he goes to there, he's going to die there. So but here. And the man said, but look. If he is not under-- what do you call it?

Quarantine?

Quarantine-- then I can't let him stay at any other place. So the doctor said there is nobody else except his mother, and nobody can enter and so on. He is truly quarantined.

So this doctor, the medical officer, came with Dr. [? Sheinwitz ?] to the place. And then remembering again, I was in bed. I had high fever above 106, something like that. And he sat next to me on this bed and so on. He saw they were clean and so on, and my mother was there, of course. And he let me stay there, and that saved my life.

Saved your life?

Yeah. And my mother-- I had to have ice all over on myself to get down and so on. And at that time, there were no medications like nowadays. So somehow they managed, and so on. I remember I wasn't allowed to eat solid food and so on, so my mother made everything else was and so on, and cooked.

And so many times during the night, she changed the ice sheets and so on. And they had ice on my stomach, and ice on my hand, and so on. And I survived.

You survived.

Yeah, so due to my mother and to luck. I'm trying to find out-- I know that the man has died, Dr. [? Sheinwitz ?]. But wonder if there was any-- I don't think he had children. He was married. So I would like to put his name among those people who saved and so on.

We had been talking about as a child when you saw a German soldier.

Yeah, I'm sorry.

What reactions you had.

Oh, yeah. As I said, they started retreating. And the Germans, they hadn't been there. They came from the east, but there was a whole army.

So they started going through this town, and they thought they were going to exit through the road away from the coming the Russians. So they started doing that, and lo and behold, the Russians had been smarter than they, and they were waiting for them there. So there was a little bit of skirmish, and then they retreated back, and they went through another road, they thought. Well, they were caught again.

So we heard the sounds of firing and all this. Somehow I found myself outside the house. My parents were there, but everybody was worried, OK, what's going to happen?

So I got out of the house and took a walk. And what do I see? I see a German soldier on his back dead-- a face like the yellow, dark yellow, and blood coming from his head. I looked at that. I didn't start running or anything like that. And that was one of my experiences in seeing and so on. I wasn't scared. So that was my reaction.

And then to finish the story about this, they got some prisoners. They didn't kill them all, they meaning the Germans. So

some were caught. They were put behind barbed wire in a camp and so on, but they weren't killed. So that's not what the Germans did to the Russians. They killed prisoners and so on. It's well known.

And so that was one of my experiences at the time. Then the Russians came passing through the city. And now that this skirmish is finished and so on and some Germans escaped and so on, the Russians I mean came more in bulk.

And once more, I was coming, getting out of the house. I had to see where the Russians were coming. They were on the boulevard and so on. They were passing with their tanks and trucks and all that.

So I went there, and I saw indeed this tremendous group of men. They were just going, and they were shouting now Berlin, to Berlin. So as I was there, this is something that I did. I'm not sure that is a proud thing to say, but I saw some people coming from a building that was a government building. The government at the time-- Romanian government-- had the power to sell tobacco. Nobody could sell tobacco, so everything came to this warehouse that was government.

And the tobacco was not cigarettes-- just packages with tobacco that you made a cigarette, and so on. And I knew about that. And that was 1944, so I was 13 years old. And I look. I let me go, and I saw people coming out with boxes-- wooden boxes.

And I go inside, too. I was dressed in shorts and sandals and a cap. I go in and I see people taking this and go out with boxes. And then I hear shouting. I was still inside. I hear shouting, and then a shot or several shots to the ceiling.

The Russians had come and they-- oh, tobacco? They wanted tobacco. They call it tabak. And so the people who were there who were adults-- Romanian, probably. I didn't know anybody there. They got out. They were afraid to be killed. I wasn't afraid, so I took a box myself. It was heavy.

And I couldn't carry it. I rolled it. It was a kind of a cube.

Like a barrel?

Not a barrel, no. Just a box-- a wooden box with a shape of a cube. So I managed to get down the steps there on a side street. The boulevard was here, and this was a side-- small street. And there was nobody there, because everybody was in their houses by that time when they heard the shots there.

And I started rolling it, and I brought it home. And my father said, what did he do? But I was there with that. That meant money. Why? Because when they opened up and so on, there were all these packages of tobacco.

And so my brother, who was two years older and so on, said he was going to take a bag of this and sell it to the Russian soldiers for rubles. And he did that. And with that money, my father started a business again in this town and managed to recover. That's our family history, right? Just my brother reminded me just a few weeks ago. We were talking on the phone about that.

And it wasn't-- ordinarily my parents would have said to me, well, this is stealing. But that was then. What other memories do you have at the end of the war in '44? Do you have any other memories?

Well, at the end of the war, yes. It was in the very-- basically since we were liberated by that time. The war ended basically in '45.

Yeah, yeah.

But in '44 we are liberated. We started hearing about what happened in Germany.

That was going to be my next question. Because up to that point, did your parents-- do you know if your parents knew?

No, we didn't know--

You did not know.

--what was happening there. We knew that there was bad for the Jews-- something. But we didn't know details. Suddenly the news are opened, and they said, in fact, the German soldiers who had been in the town during the-- there was an airport there-- a big airport. And the German Air Force had there, and also the Romanians that were forced to fight with them against-- and there was a little story about that, too.

But the Germans used some soap that some people, Jews, bought them soap. They didn't know that this soap was made in Germany from the fat of Jews. It said so with letters. I forget-- Rhine-- pure Jewish fat. Something like that.

And whether that was-- in any case, we had the city, this town. We had taken this from everybody that may have had it, and went to the cemetery. And they were putting as dead people. And rabbis were there and so on.

You buried the soap.

Buried the soap in the cemetery.

Did you go to that? Did you go to that service?

Yeah, I remember that. Yeah, so all of us-- all the Jews. They went to that. I mean, it was a big shock. Went what? And so on. And we didn't know all the other things that happened. But it was something that was-- the soap. You know, the soap was incredible.

And then on the positive side, during the war, as I said, because it was an airport there-- military airport-- the Germans were in with their planes, air force, and also some Romanian also were forced basically to fight against the American and British and so on.

So they came, their pilots and officers and so on. And there was no room enough in their hotels or anything to put them. So why did they decide? The Romanian side said OK, let's put these pilots-- put them in Jewish homes.

So we got an officer who is a pilot-- a fighter pilot-- a man named [? Lungulescu ?], which means tall.

Tall.

And he was indeed tall and so on and he was a very nice man. He knew we were Jewish. So one room was given to him and so on. And he came from all part of Romania that had never met Jews. It heard all the stories about the Jews killed Christ-- Christ Jesus, and so on.

And suddenly he sees people like him and so on, and he behaved very nicely. He would bring us coffee. That was something that we didn't have, and so on.

And he was not married, or he had somebody or a friend who later came to stay there with him. But he liked me. I was the youngest there.

So one day he decided to show me what he does. He takes me to the airport and puts me in his plane-- in the pilot plane. I mean, it was something that is so unusual. Of course he knew I was Jewish and so on.

And he puts me there. And the pilots when they want to shoot something, there is a stick with a button. He doesn't take aim. He takes the full plane.

So I was almost ready to push the button. Don't touch it. So it was lucky, and so on.

Did you go up in it? Did you go up? No, you stayed on the field.

Stayed on the ground. Just on the ground and so on. But I remember this. And so this man later on and during the war-- that was not the end of the war. Actually, he was an excellent pilot in terms of fighting. He had actually downed quite a few planes, British and American. But he ended up in the ground dead, OK? He was shot down as well.

He was?

Yeah. And that was the end of his life. And he was against the Germans. He really was, but he couldn't do anything. He was kind of forced. You don't do that, we'll shoot you. Period.