

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Jack Ophir. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 16, 2015, and is taking place at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is track number one. What is your full name?

My name is Jack Ophir.

And where were you born and when were you born?

I was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1938. To be precise, April 6, 1938.

Let's talk a little bit about your family. How far back does your family go in Lodz?

I think that my family goes in Lodz maybe two or three generations prior to my birth. I do not know where they came before that. This is on my mother's side. My father's side, they came from . And that is three or four generations, as well, in .

What were your parents' names?

My mother's name was [? Dorca ?] Tiger and my father's name was Jehuda Leib Feingold.

All right. And what kind of work did your father do?

My father used to be a judge, or I should say a juvenile delinquent judge. Later on, he was also a merchant. He dealt in porcelains and very unusual housewares.

OK. And did your mother work?

I don't believe my mother worked, no. But she was brought up in a family of furriers. And I guess she married pretty young and did not work.

What were your grandparents' names? Do you know what they are?

My grandparents name on my mother's side-- her father's name [? Josef ?] Tiger, T-I-G-E-R. And her mother's name was Miriam or [? Manya Wehrenberg. ?] Of course, as she married it was Tiger, as well.

Now, you said your father's name was Fein--

My father's name was Feingold.

--was Feingold. So when you were born, what was your name at birth?

At birth my name was Feingold.

And your first name?

And my first name was Jurek or Jacob.

Was Lazar part of your name?

Lazar was a middle name that was actually adopted when we were on the way to the concentration camp.

Oh, so that's a later-- yeah.

That came a little bit later.

I see. OK. Now, let's talk about your family a little bit. Were they a religious family?

My mother came from a, relatively speaking, assimilated family, and non-religious family. My father came from an ultra Orthodox family. There were the Hasidiums of Gora rabbi in Warsaw. Nevertheless, he was somewhat bohemian, and he left that tradition when he married my mother.

Oh.

The Feingolds in Warsaw where ultrareligious.

And how did his family feel about that? Do you know?

His father, at the time he married, was already deceased. And his mother, if I'm not mistaken, she was on the way to Israel together with two of his siblings. So there wasn't too much of the family in Poland on his side when he married my mother.

I see. yeah. You mentioned Israel. Were your parents Zionists?

None of my parents, to my knowledge, were Zionists. Otherwise, they would have traveled to Israel together with their other siblings.

Did you have any siblings or were you an only child?

I was an only child.

And what year did your parents get married? OK. It's all right. [LAUGHS]

I would think--

It's OK.

I'm not completely positive, but I would think that my parents got married in 1936.

OK. OK. Now, granted, you were very young when the war started, I know.

I was.

Yes, of course. And you hadn't had any schooling, I assume, when the war started.

No. I had absolutely no schooling in Poland.

Yeah. Yeah. Do you have any-- again, you were so little-- any memories before the war, before September '39 or not? You were such a little boy.

Well, the only memories that I--

No, you couldn't have. Were only a year and a half. So you were young. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So let's talk about your first memories.

My first memories come-- come to mind when I was a little boy looking for toys, and there were none to be found. The only toy that I remember is a-- it's a bank type of a-- of a rider.

A train? A little train?

Not a train, no. Like, a--

A crane? A truck?

It swivels.

A top? A top?

It swivels when you--

A top? A top.

A top. Yeah.

Yeah, it was a top. That's just about the only--

This was in Lodz?

This is still in Lodz, where we-- were when we were hiding and the Germans were coming into Lodz.

OK. I know this is what you've heard. So can you tell me what you heard about what happened to your family? You were a baby, of course. But what do you know of what happened when the war started?

The only thing that I know--

Know of--

--that I know of that happened, that the Germans moved into Lodz.

Yeah.

And, for the longest time, my parents were not really concerned because they thought it's something that will go away. It will pass. They were very-- both of them were very established people. And they did not think that anything would happen to established people in Lodz or in Poland.

When it did happen, both of them, as, many other people were looking for foreign countries to intercept them. And they were looking for papers or passports to be either gotten or purchased in Lodz. They could not achieve this request. And both of them, together with me, traveled through the tunnels to Lodz-- I'm sorry, to .

From Lodz to Warsaw.

To Warsaw.

Through tunnels?

Partially.

Yeah.

In other words, we traveled from Lodz by either-- by train or buses. But when we arrived before-- when we arrived to Warsaw, we traveled to most of the route via tunnels. I believe those tunnels are called--

Do you know what year this was, when you left Lodz to go to Warsaw?

This was in 1940.

In 1940.

In 19-- in 1942. I'm sorry, in 1942.

Approximately what month, approximately, if you know?

I would say towards the end of 1942, maybe November, December of 1942.

Yeah. And the only memory you have up to that point, you said, was playing with the top and things.

That's about it.

That's it in Lodz. OK.

That's about all I remember from Lodz.

OK. Do you remember about the trip to Warsaw?

The trip that I remember when we arrived in Warsaw was going through the tunnels.

Oh, OK.

And I was carried on my father's shoulders. And the guide that showed us the way to our hiding place in Warsaw was a fellow by the name of [? Vacek-- ?] [? Vacek, ?] in Poland--

Polish.

--who works for a living by showing people where to go in Warsaw.

Yeah. So your father obviously paid him to show you.

Absolutely. He was paid for, and he brought us to the place that we were hiding in Warsaw.

OK.

It was on the Jewish side, in the ghetto side of Warsaw.

It was in the ghetto itself.

In the ghetto. Right in the ghetto of Warsaw. And, when we arrived, I remember a relatively small apartment or I should say I remember a room in that apartment that was completely sealed with a wardrobe against the wall. And my mom was coming in a couple of times a day to feed me. And I was there with a helper, that was not a Jew, that my mom brought with her from Lodz to take care of me.

This was like, a nanny? A child nanny.

A nanny. That is a nanny. That's correct.

And her name-- do you remember what her name is?

Her name was Paula.

OK. OK. So you're now 4 and 1/2 when you come to--

Now I'm just about 4 and 1/2--

When you come to Warsaw.

--when we came to Warsaw. And my father, from what I understood, was able to get Palestinian papers, certificates, from all the countries. Because the Americans certificates or passports were not available no more. They were all sold out. And the only thing that was available were Palestinian certificates. And that's what he got.

And one of the reasons that you got those papers was that his brother, sister, and his mother, at that point, were already in Palestine. They left Poland. And my mother's sister was in Palestine, Israel.

Can you give me the names of these people?

Yes. My father's brother was [? Naftali ?] Feingold. His sister was Leah or [? Lurka ?] Blumberg, but Feingold from her family home. And my mother's sister was Esther or [? Eja ?] Tiger, or [? Zilberberg ?] in Palestine.

OK. So your father now is able to get-- is trying to get Palestinian papers.

My father had the Palestinian papers. And he believed that the Germans, of course, will let us go. And one morning we were supposed to move from the-- from ghetto Warsaw to the other side of Warsaw, which we called the Aryan side or the side that the Polish people-- the Polocks lived.

Right. How about-- can I just ask you-- while you're in that room, as a little boy in the Warsaw ghetto, were you able to see outside the room?

I wasn't able to see anything. The only thing that I remember when I left that room and we went into the tunnel again to go to the other side, is the smell of fire. At that point ghetto Warsaw was completely in flames.

OK. So this is the up--

Totally in flames.

This is the uprising you're talking about.

This is the uprising.

April '43.

That's correct.

But any other memories in that room as a little, little boy? No other memories while you're in the room before the uprising?

There was one other member that I should mention. My mother had a daughter, who was my stepsister, who was with us as well. But what were her about and what did she do, I do not remember. But she certainly was with us. And when we left this particular apartment, she was with us, as well. Her name was Erika or [? Yehudit. ?]

So you were in this room from December to April?

From December to April.

To April.

Yes. And this is when we moved through the tunnels, again, to the other side of the ghetto, while the ghetto was completely in flames. Totally in flames. And this is another thing that I still remember-- smell of fire and flames. And these are things that will never leave you. Matter of fact, until this very day, when I go by any place and there's a fire smell, the picture of ghetto Warsaw comes in front of my eyes.

Again, you were a small, small child, very dependent on your parents. Were they comforting? I mean, how do you handle a five-year-old child?

They were constantly with me, of course. I was constantly with them. And the next thing I remember was when we were out of the tunnels and we were supposed to go to our new hiding place.

How did you get from the ghetto, outside-- to the outside?

Through the tunnels.

Through the tunnels.

Through the tunnel.

And you walked yourself, a little boy?

Could I stop for one second?

Sure. Yeah.

The tunnels were actually sewer tunnels-- big, large sewer tunnels. And when we came out of those--

And you walked-- you were walking--

We walked right through the tunnels--

--through the sewer tunnels.

--to the other side.

You, yourself, as a little boy.

Myself, absolutely. My Dad-- my father--

Holding onto your father?

My father carried me on his shoulder.

Oh, he carried you.

And my mother was walking together with my stepsister in the tunnel.

So you were sitting on your father's shoulders.

Yes. I would staying on my father's shoulders. When we came out, we were supposed to be led to our new hiding place. But, at that point, the Germans were waiting for us outside the sewer tunnels.

Oh.

We were taken, all of us.

Do you, yourself, have memories of this or this is what you were told?

Yes. No, this I have a memory of.

You remember. OK.

I do not remember if it was a violent type of taking us or just showing us how to go and where to go to.

Yeah.

But I do remember we were taken. And we were then placed into lines of segregation, where we were told to stand. And my parents' idea was that they would have to present their papers, and they would take us to the place where we would be able to leave to Palestine with our Palestine papers. This is, of course, what I was explained later on. However, this never happened. And we were put into-- after the segregation--

When you say segregation, men and women separated-- is that what you're talking about?

Men and women were not separated at the point we were at. And later on we understood why, or I was explained by my father why. Whoever had Palestinian papers, the Germans took those families and put them aside for a purpose of at a later date exchanging them for the German people that used to be in Palestine.

Oh, my.

And they only kept in a certain grouping people who had-- who used to be academicians-- engineers, lawyers, doctors in their families-- and kept them together for the purpose of the exchange of the scientists and academicians that the Germans had at the time in Palestine.

So that's what you mean by segregation.

That's correct.

OK. OK.

At that point when they segregated us, my mother, who came from a relatively speaking, very well-to-do family, had on her arm an umbrella. And this is a story that I was told for all the years. And this umbrella had the handle that was removable, and it was filled with the family's jewels-- large diamonds, rubies, all type of jewelry.

As she was [INAUDIBLE], one of the German officers came to her and said to her, may I have this umbrella? So she responded to him, I will give you my ring instead of the umbrella. It may rain. And I have two children with me, and I will want to shield them.

And he answered to her, no. I don't want your ring. You can keep your ring. I'd like to have that umbrella. And she had, of course, no choice in the matter. And she gave him the umbrella.

Oh, my.

This is as much as I remember from that meeting. From that point what I do remember is being on the train that took us to Bergen-Belsen.

Oh.

So we were, at that point, all together.

Now, this is still the four of you.

The four of us.

How old was the other child, the stepsister?

My sister was about seven years older than I.

Oh, OK. So she was-- so she was 12 or--

If I was 4 and 1/2, 5--

She was 12.

--she was already 12 years of age. Yes.

OK, so she was older. Yeah.

And we were all taken to the train, of course, on the way to Bergen-Belsen.

Can we back up a little bit? As a small child, did you have anything special with you? Any special--

Absolutely nothing.

Just the clothes on your back.

Just the clothes on my back and whatever maybe--

No toys or--

My mother had maybe a few other things for me. But absolutely--

Nothing else.

--nothing else. Because we went away light from Lodz to Warsaw.

From Lodz, yeah. OK. So now you're on your way to Bergen-Belsen.

Now we are on the way to Bergen-Belsen. The only thing that I remember from that trip is me being most of the time asleep. And when I woke--

This was a passenger train?

Passenger train.

OK.

That was a passenger train. And when we arrived-- I must say that on this train there was another sister of my mother's with her husband. I do not recall their last name. Her name was [? Lilka. ?] And we all came together to Bergen-Belsen.



Was that by chance that she happened to be on the train or you don't--

I don't know their whereabouts, how they came on the train.

They happened to be on-- OK.

Her husband was an engineer, and he ended up on the same train that we did.

Oh, my.

He did not have Palestinian papers, however. This is the story that my father had told me. He had South American papers. Nevertheless, being an academician, he ended on the same train, going to the same camp in Bergen-Belsen. The camp that we ended up in was Block 10 in Bergen-Belsen.

Do you remember arriving there or not? Any memories?

I do not remember arriving there.

OK.

I remember me being in a barrack.

OK.

That, I remember. And we were all together in the barracks. The women, for a while, were not separated from the men until maybe a little bit later, where the men slept in different barracks and then the women slept with the children.

And you're now 5 and 1/2.

Now I am about 5 and 1/2.

And other memories of Bergen-Belsen-- any memory-- other memories of Bergen-Belsen?

The memories from Bergen-Belsen were day-to-day memories of being hungry all the time, and I mean hungry. And the only thing that I can remember and always was reminded to me, that I was crying, asking for a little piece of bread. I do remember my mother begging for some food from some of the soldiers and supervisors that were running around the camp.

At one time she was hit and she was sent back to the barracks. I do remember that next door to us there was another camp where the [? Kesner ?] people came from Hungary. And we, as children, saw that they were burying in the ground all kind of belongings before they were separated and put into their barracks.

And maybe a day or two or three later on, there were a few children in Bergen-Belsen that we were friends. And we went under the wires and dug out some of the things that were hidden there. Of course, they were nothing important to us, with the exception of little knives, folding knives, combs, glasses-- things of this nature, which we brought back and we played with.

Were there many children with you?

In our camp, block number 10, there were 10 children.

Oh, my.

Most of them were liberated together with us. When we left the camp on the train to be exterminated, we were liberated

by the Americans, by a couple of soldiers that came from the company of Mickey Marcus, who was called Mickey Marcus, who later on ended up in Israel. And we were liberated by them.

Yeah. Well, we'll get to that in a minute. I just want a little more detail, if you can--

In Bergen-Belsen.

--in Bergen-Belsen as a small child. What did you have to eat? I know you said you cried for bread. What was your mother able to get for you to eat?

Some soups--

Soup? Yeah.

--that were made out of water, salt, either potatoes, potatoes peels, and-- [NON-ENGLISH] beets, and beets. Then is once a day we were getting a little piece of bread. What I do remember vividly, that once a day the Germans came from their Kitchens and they set up milk cans-- old fashioned milk cans made out of steel. And they were maybe 3 or 3 and 1/2 feet tall, with soups in them.

And they were arranging them, like, maybe six or eight of them, one after another. And they made the people in the camps, or what they call the prisoners, stand lines, mostly the men. And in front of those cans there were soldiers, German soldiers, who used to give every one of the people portions of soup.

They had a habit of maybe after 10 or 15 people that they served, they left the cans and they left the place. And within seconds, there were piles of hundreds of people, one on top of another, trying to grasp and get into those soup cans. Many died underneath, and many never made it. And this was a picture that I, of course as a child, will never forget. This is how we were filled in the camp.

What did you wear? What clothing did you have?

I have no memory of my clothing.

No memory. OK.

None, whatsoever. My father wore a striped uniform. And I don't recall what my mother wore.

Did anybody have a yellow star?

We all had yellow stars. Yes. We were all--

What did that mean to a five-year-old boy? It mean anything to you?

Didn't mean a thing.

Didn't mean a thing.

Absolutely not a thing.

And the language that you spoke, was it Polish?

Polish.

We spoke to my parents--

Did you know any other language? Did you know any--

None, whatsoever.

You didn't know German?

My mother was-- my mother my mother was French speaking, Polish speaking.

Oh, my.

My father was Polish speaking, Hebrew speaking, background of the family, and the full German speaking. Later on I learned some German, as well, as I was in the camp.

So what did you do all day? You said you didn't-- you, with the other children, go out and dig up some of the things. Anything else that did to make the time pass?

There is nothing that I remember how we passed the time with. We were with our mothers. And we played them among-- the few children that were there, we played with one another. But what did we do, I do not remember.

And what were the sleeping conditions like?

We slept on the floor in the barracks. There were some wooden beds, as well, that they were tiered with one-tiered beds out of wood that we slept in.

Yeah.

We slept with our mothers, generally speaking.

Did you ever have to line up to be counted? Did they do that there?

Every morning we were counted. But I don't have a clear reflection of that. But we were candid.

And then it was time to leave, you said, Bergen-Belsen.

And then there was time to leave Bergen-Belsen.

When was that?

We were notified that there was a transport and we are going to Palestine.

Oh.

And we did have the Palestinian papers, so we believed it to be the truth. My mother's sister was, at that time, still in Bergen-Belsen. And, as I was told, my mother was begging her to come with us so we would stay together. But her husband convinced her not to do so because they had South American papers, and he was a little bit more surr-- or he thought so, anyhow--

He was optimistic.

--that he was more optimistic about having those papers and being maybe liberated with them. So we left the camp with another large group of people. We were put on trains, supposedly to be sent out to Palestine, supposedly on the way to Hamburg. However, we were on the way, the trains were stopped. And when they were stopped there was a lot of commotion. There was a lot of bombardment.

Do you have memories of this?

Yes, I do. I have memories of the train stopping. I have memories of heavy bombardments.

Was this is a passenger train, also?

No. That was a--

Was it the cattle car that--

That was a cow train.

Yeah. They're called--

That was a--

They call them cattle cars. Cattle cars.

--cattle car. These were all cattle cars. And we were all standing or sitting in there-- in those cars and traveling. And when the train stopped, we stopped in Hillersleben, a small town not too far from Bergen-Belsen. We did not travel very far on the outskirts of Hamburg. And this is where we were liberated in the forest. Two soldiers came out. One of them was by the name of Colin. He introduced himself and said that help is coming very soon.

So you were in Bergen-Belsen until when? When did you leave?

We were in Bergen-Belsen until the very beginning of April--

'45.

--'45.

To go back to Bergen-Belsen--

I'm sorry. We were-- yes, until April '45.

'45, when the war was over. To go back to Bergen-Belsen, you said that some people died trying to get food from the soup cans.

Many people died.

Did you ever see any dead bodies?

I saw hundreds of dead bodies.

Well, how does a five-year-old understand that? And what does it do to a five-year-old? And what did you think? Can you remember?

A five-year-old doesn't understand it. A five-year-old, as I had seen it, just sees piles of people, one on top of another, and a lot of screams and hollers and pain around. That's what I remember. What did this really mean, I didn't know at that time.

Do you remember what your parents' explanations were?

No.

What does a parent say to a child?

I do not recall any explanations whatsoever. I only remember clinging to my mother.

Yes. OK. Let's move ahead now. You're at the liberation, you said.

We were first liberated and then--

Outside of Hamburg, you said?

I'm sorry?

Outside of Hamburg?

Outside of Hamburg. And everybody, at that time, realized that we are liberated. And all the people that could-- I remember one other thing, that before-- maybe hours before we were liberated, the Germans came to the train, to the cars, and asked-- well, didn't ask-- took from everybody they could civilian clothing. And, at that point, many of the men realized that something is going on. Because they were putting those clothing on and they were running away.

So when we were actually liberated, some of the older men, they were half naked. And they were looking for clothing. And they all ran into the-- into town, which was not too far away from where the train stopped. And we were left there with my mother, and other women were there. And the men ran to bring food and clothing. And that's how I remember we were liberated. And later on I remember that we were brought to a camp, I would say it was, or a area of identification.

What does liberation mean to now a seven-year-old? Was it a difference? Did it make a difference to you?

It didn't mean anything. It meant to me that I had something to eat. That was the only thing that I had seen or practiced differently. But I did not really realize--

What it meant.

--what it meant.

Yeah.

None, whatsoever.

Do you remember if there was-- and, again, you were so young-- a change in your parents' feelings, and relief? Did you sense any of that or not? You were too young.

I was too young to sense that.

Yeah. Of course. Of course.

I do remember their plans that we are going away. We are going someplace. At that point-- at that time, I didn't even know where we're going. But, at one point, I was separated from them.

From your parents?

From my parents. From my mother. And I was either looking for food or looking for something-- food. And I was separated from them. And, matter of fact, my parents were elsewhere. My mother was elsewhere someplace looking for food, as well. And when she came back to where I was, or when I came back looking for her, we didn't find one another.

And I was placed with a lot of other children. They had a special camp for children-- for left children. There were no parents. For a few days-- I don't remember how many days, but maybe not very long. Maybe two days, a day, or three days-- I don't remember how long.

But my mother did come, and she had to convince-- now, this is what was told to me later on. She had to convince the caretakers to have me. Because they did not believe anybody. People had the tendency to urge getting children to their families because they're lost children.

And the only way she was able to get me-- I have a birthmark on my back. And she had told the guards over there, if you take off the child's shirt, you will see that he has a brown mark on his left side, right below his shoulder. And they did. And they let her have me. And this is how we got back together.

Oh, my.

And the next stop from that point--

Do you remember that situation or not?

No.

You were told that.

That was--

Told to you.

--told to me.

OK.

I do remember being separated with some American soldiers at first, getting some sweets-- maybe a waffle or something of that sort. And then there's no memory for a couple of days. And, again, my mother getting me out of a place. I don't even remember what place it was.

So you're back now with both your parents?

Now I am back with both of my parents. We are all together. And the next memory of mine is not even the trip itself. But the next memory is being in France. So, obviously, we traveled to France, and we ended up in Paris. And we had-- I should say both of my parents had friends in Paris.

And they were not thinking at that point of getting to Palestine, but they wanted-- or I should say my mother, more so, wanted to end up in France because she had some family in France, family in Belgium, and she was French educated. So her preference was to be in France. And we ended up in Paris. And the place that I remember is Hotel Lutetia.

Is this after D-day, after June? Oh, no. Excuse me. That was a year before I apologize. I'm sorry.

This is [INAUDIBLE].

Is this June '45?

This is in June, I presume--

June '45.

--of '45, that we are in France. And I don't remember too much of this hotel, with the exception of its grandeur. As a little boy, I looked around and I saw these beautiful, beautiful decorated walls. And that's all I remember. And the next thing I remember-- being in Pales-- being on a boat moving to Palestine.

You went from France to Palestine.

To Palestine. I remember being-- we went from Paris to Marseille, which I do not remember how we got there. But in Marseille we were put on the boat-- on a ship. And we were on the way to Palestine totally legally. Because my father-- or we all had Palestinian papers. And I remember vaguely the trip on the boat, arriving in Palestine.

Is your name still the same-- Lazar Ophir?

My name is still Feingold.

Oh, Feingold.

Jacob Lazar Feingold.

Feingold.

The name Jurek dropped from the picture because it was my Polish name. And nobody referred to me anymore, with the exception of my mother, by the name of Jurek. And I remember that we were taken-- I remember getting out of the boat-- of the ship. And we were taken to a place in Palestine called Atlit.

Oh, yes.

It was a camp that all the comers to Palestine were kept there. Now, there were two different groups of people in that camp. Of course, we were intercepted by the British. And there was one side that had people that came in illegally to Palestine. They just had the desire to come up to Palestine, and they did all kinds of different ways-- not necessarily on our ship, on different ships. And they were kept separately.

We were kept in a camp of people that legally arrived in Palestine because we had the papers. And I remember after maybe a few days, a few weeks, my father's sister came to visit us in Atlit. I don't remember the meeting. I don't remember how they met. But I do remember that very shortly thereafter, they let us go from Atlit, and we ended in Tel Aviv.

OK. Let's back up a little bit. I wanted to go back on the voyage from France to Palestine. What was the name of the boat? Do you know? Do you know the name of your boat and who it belonged to? You don't know. OK. And what month--

I have no memory of the name.

That's OK. Right. And what month was this in '45?

It was--

In the fall.

--probably in the fall of the-- fall of the year, for sure.

Fall of '40-- for '45.

Yes.

Yeah, OK. And with there many children on the boat or were you one of the few?

Yes. There were all the children that was with me in Bergen-Belsen, in our camp. I don't remember if all, but most of them are on--

Many of them were the Bergen-Belsen children?

Yes. Most of them were on the ship.

Oh, my.

A few, I remember. I remember their names until this very day.

Such as-- [PERSONAL NAME] is one of them, or Richard. There was [PERSONAL NAME] or Esther, was just about my age. They were from the [? Flakovic ?] family. Then there was a girl by the name of [? Irina ?] from the [? Ingle ?] family. There was Hanna or [PERSONAL NAME], the way we used to call her. And I don't remember her last name.

What did you all talk about as children? Did you play games on the boat? What did you do?

We played games on the boat. What type of games, I do not remember.

OK.

But we were running around when we were playing.

And you had enough food, obviously--

And we had enough food.

--for the first time.

There's another family with two boys by the name of [? Shladov. ?] And both of the boys were approximately my age. No, I'm sorry. One was Adam [? Shladov, ?] who was my age. And the other one was not with us. I'm sorry. There was one [? Shladov. ?] The other one was born in Palestine.

Now, you're going to Palestine. What did Palestine mean to you at that time, at seven years old? Did it have any meaning to you?

Palestine did not mean anything to me with the exception of meeting my uncles and my aunt, which, of course, I was introduced to them. And I all of a sudden had uncles and an aunt. And that was my first recollection of Palestine.

So then they come and take you from Atlit?

They take us from there to Tel Aviv. And, at the very beginning, we lived in Tel Aviv together with my father's sister, [? Lorca ?] Blumberg or Leah Blumberg. We all moved to their small apartment that was very close to Jaffa, and that's where we lived for the first few months in Tel Aviv.

And I would say that within maybe three or four months my parents had gotten an apartment in Tel Aviv, a small apartment, very close to the Habima Theater, or to what's called the Rothschild or "Rocheeld," the Rothschild Boulevard on Berdichevsky Street. And I remember vividly, at that point, me living there or us as a family living there.

You did not know any Hebrew before you came.



I did not know any Hebrew, whatsoever, until I came to Israel. But what's interesting is that-- I was talking about this with my wife a couple of days ago. And I said, you know, I kind of thought about it. And I do not remember when was the day or when was the time when all of a sudden I started speaking Hebrew. There was like, no time no time limit to that, not early or nor late. Nor did I develop, since I was relatively young, any Polish accent while speaking Hebrew.

Hebrew.

My Hebrew was--

Is really Hebrew.

--totally fluent in the real Hebrew. And, must I say, my father spoke the fluent Hebrew, as well, because he was educated in Hebrew from at his home. And he did not have any accent in Israel, either.

That's interesting.

My mother, in contrast, had a very heavy accent, and didn't speak Hebrew very well until the day she passed. Because she spoke other languages-- Polish, German, French--

French.

--and never found it-- and never found the necessity to speak fluent Hebrew.

So you started school right away?

I started school right away. I do not remember where did I start school. However, I do remember that to the second grade I went into a religious school in Tel Aviv. When I say religious-- it wasn't ultra religious, but it was a religious school in Tel Aviv by the name of [NON-ENGLISH]. That was the name of the school-- of the elementary school.

And were most of the other children refugee children, like you? Are where they sabras?

Most of them ended up in Tel Aviv, of the children. And they were all part of the [INAUDIBLE]. And from time to time later on we have met socially. But we all parted company and everybody went his own way. As I know, the parents were working people. They were seeking jobs and had jobs. Some of them went into businesses and that sort of thing.

What did your father do when he got to Palestine?

My father had actually two professions in Israel. My father was a merchant and my father was a writer. For many, many years, he wrote in the Palestinian newspapers, I would say, which was what was later on the Israeli newspapers. And he heavily wrote to the American [? Morgan ?] Journal in Yiddish for many, many years. So his occupation was a dual occupation.

He was a writer. And if you opened up the telephone book in Tel Aviv, his name appeared as Jehuda Feingold [NON-ENGLISH], which means a writer or a newspaper writer. However, to subsidize himself, he was a merchant. He dealt in piece goods, and later on in glass.

Did your mother work at that time?

My mother, as well, yes she did. She worked, and mainly as a seamstress for many years. But her job, however, was not a steady work. She worked few days a week, in and out.

During those years of the war, your health and I assume your parents' health was OK?

Both of my parents health, as I remember, was OK--

OK. Yeah, anyways-- OK. Good.

--as was mine and my sister's at that time.

And was your sister with you now in Tel Aviv?

My sister was with me in Tel Aviv, as well, for relatively speaking a short time. And then, as children, we parted company for a short time. I ended up in a private school away from my parents, and she ended up in another school.

Is this in Tel Aviv?

In Tel Aviv, yes. I was out of Tel Aviv and she was out of Tel Aviv. We were both out of Tel Aviv, basically because my parents were trying to get themselves together as a family on one side of the spectrum. On the other side of the spectrum, we were very difficult children, and I mean very difficult children.

In what sense? In what sense?

In a sense of getting along.

With each other.

Not with each other, with children on the street. With other children. I, for one, as I remember I was very physical. And I was very aggressive towards other children.

Were you big for your age or average? Were you large for your age or were you average size?

Largely my age or maybe a year or two younger. Because, when I started elementary school, I was a year older than my contemporaries just because of what had happened during the war. And when I came to have a beginning, I was about a year, a year and a half late. So we were kind of separated for a while in Palestine. But, very shortly thereafter, I came back home and lived at home since then.

OK. So now it's '46, '47.

Yes. Palestine came into fruition as an Israeli state-- as an Israeli state. We were, at that point, all together. My sister was on the way to the army. And I was in an elementary school.

Because you're 10 years old now.

I am, yeah, just about 10 years old. That's right. So I went back to elementary school, and my sister was in a different school, still not at home. She was in a separate school. I'm sorry. She was on the way to the army at that point. And very short after, she had never finished her army. And she was declared or found to be mentally ill.

Oh, my.

And it was a mental illness that had never left her. She was very substantially schizophrenic, at that point. And there was no solution to the situation or there was no therapy to the situation, at that point. And she was institutionalized.

Aw.

So we parted company from her as a family.

Yeah.

I stayed with my parents, and I continued my pre-high school education. And very shortly--

Did you celebrate with the establishment of the State of Is--

We certainly did. We celebrated.

What was it like for you?

We celebrated the establishment of Israel.

And, again, what did it mean to you as a 10-year-old? Anything special or just a time to celebrate?

The only thing that I-- it didn't mean anything to me, with the exception of being free and joyous.

Yes.

But I did not had the concept of what does it mean to have a country. At this point. I did not understand it.

Too young. Of course. Of course.

I was too young to understand it.

Yeah.

But, of course, very shortly thereafter I started high school. And, at that point, I started to understand that I am in a new country, and I came from Poland where I was in a concentration camp. Thereafter, the understanding of these circumstances started to be much more clearer for me.

Yeah. You had no positive feelings, I assume, for Poland at that point.

I had no feeling for Poland.

Just no feelings.

None, whatsoever. I had memories, as I stated before, from Poland, from being through the sewer canals.

Yeah.

That's about all.

They were all negative. All of your memories were negative.

I don't know if there were negative or positive. There were memories of escape, of travel. There were memories of fear when I had seen the ghetto burning. That's all I can say about Poland. But I had no feeling of the country being good or bad.

Yeah.

I had stories, of course, explaining or telling me that my parents came from a very extremely well-to-do background. So Poland was good to them. But I can attest to that fact.

Good to them pre-war.

Pre-war, naturally.

Pre-war. Yes.

Yes.

Yeah.