

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Elie Eilam. It is taking place on February 25, 2015 at the Museum and in Ra'anana, Israel. And it is being conducted by Gail Schwartz. What is your whole name?

Whole name?

What is your full name? Your full name? Yeah.

Eliahu Eilam Kimel.

And is that the name that you were born with?

I was born like Eliahu Kimel.

OK. And where were you born?

I was born in Krosno, Poland. It is Galicia.

And when were you born?

On 30 July, 1934.

Let's talk about your family. What were your parents' names?

My parents' name were-- my father was Abraham Kimel. And my mother was Regina Rivka Kimel.

And--

She was called Regina, but in Hebrew she was "Rivka."

And did you have brothers? Any brothers or sisters?

No, I was the only child.

Yeah. What kind of work did your father do?

He was a photographer. And he had also a business with, well, like toys or something. And also equipment and materials for photography.

And did your mother work?

Yes, she did. She was actually the photographer, because she started it as a student, as a girl. And she was an expert. In those times, also the negatives and the positives had to be retouched. It means it means today with the new technology, it's not needed, but then were little spots on both, on the negatives and the positives. And she was correcting it by hand. And she was expert in this.

And what kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a Jewish, a non-Jewish neighborhood?

I don't think it was a Jewish neighborhood, I can't say. I don't remember. None of my neighbors. Yes, one neighbor was Polish in the same floor of our house. I remember them because then they had a girl in my age, and we were invited to each other's homes.

Was your family a very religious family?

No.

No? OK. Did you observe any of the holidays?

Yes, we did, of course. But in those times, I think even today, also not religious people also here in Israel, we celebrate all holidays not being religious. We as seculars, we don't think that it has to be connected with religion. Because it is part of our lifestyle.

Were your parents Zionists then, in the 1930s?

I didn't understand the question.

Were your parents Zionists in the 1930s?

Yes, my father was. And wanted to make aliyah after I was born. And my mother said, if I have two or three Jewish clients in a week, so I have two or three complaints. And imagine if all my clients will be Jews, Jewish? What shall I do? I don't want to go there. So we stayed. They stayed-- that's saying, we stayed in Poland.

OK. did you have a large extended family? Did you have aunts and uncles and grandparents?

Yes. A few years, maybe a decade or more ago, we made a family meeting, and we prepared like a family book. And then I saw that our extended family was nearly 100 persons.

Oh, my.

And after the Holocaust, my generation, we were six.

Oh, my.

Six.

Yeah. Let's talk about-- I know you were quite young. Did you start school before the war started? Did you begin--

No.

You did not.

No. I was five years old.

Right. And you hadn't started. What language did you speak at home?

Polish.

Polish.

My parents spoke also Yiddish, but not between themselves. Only with other Jews. My father studied in Vienna, so he was speaking very good German. And my mother also knew German, because in Galicia was the Habsburg-- the kaiser, and they were speaking a lot of German there.

How much education did your father have?

How much what?

Education.

Education. He had like secondary school in Vienna.

Is that where he was born?

No, he was born in Sanok, in Galicia in Poland.

And where was your mother born?

In the same town, Sanok.

And how much education did she have?

She studied elementary school. And then she studied how do you say [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Occupational high school.

Occupation high school. She studied photography.

Yeah, OK. OK. Now, do you have any memories before the war started? I know you were very young. You were only five, but--

Well, not really memories. I had only once there was a flood in our town, and this I remember. And even my father doubt that, because once I spoke about this with him, so he said well, you were too young to remember this. But then still I think maybe somebody told you about, but I think I do remember it.

OK. OK, well, let's talk about your first memories, then. What are your first memories?

Oh.

Anything in 1939, when you were five.

I have memories, but not important, I think. Like once I was left alone at home, and I remember that I was very upset and I cried. I think it was just the time when the war broke out. I can't say exactly when it was.

OK, well, now the war-- now the war has broken out, so what's the first?

What was-- I can't tell you if I remember it or not of it was told to me is that my father went from the photo shop home, and the Germans occupied our town. Well, I remembered before this, when I was standing on that balcony and I could see the airfield in our city. This was also a pilot school.

So German planes were diving and shooting. And it was such a beautiful vision to see it. And I remember my mother was crying, "come, we go to the basement. Come, come. They will kill you." And I said, "no, I want to look at it."

Oh, my.

This I remember.

Yeah.

Maybe this was one of the first things that I remember. And then when the German occupied, it was a few weeks later, maybe two. And they made a barrier, and did they stopped by father, and my father was a tall man, and he felt himself very confident because he had very good German.

So he started to argue with them, what, you are making a barrier. Go away and that. And they beat him. And he got a shock. He came home, and he told my mother, we are going. And we fled somewhere to the east, near the River San. In a ranch of my cousin's grandfather-- it was not my grandfather. It was the grandfather of my cousin.

And we--

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

And we were there. My father was not with us in this ranch. But I was with my mother and with my aunt and this cousin at their grandfather.

Where was your father?

I don't know.

OK.

I don't remember it.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

I didn't ask.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

So you--

And we were running. There was a place to hide, such a cave in the ranch. And we had always to run if they were saying Germans are coming or Ukrainians are coming. So we were running and hiding in this cave. And I remember very good that once I was sitting in the cave, and it was quite long hiding there. So I slipped out from there. I escaped. My parents-- my mother and the aunt, they didn't take care I was speaking with my cousin my age. And she didn't say a word that I went out.

And I went out, and there were pear trees. It was a [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. How we say? [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] It was a plant, a plantation of pears. And I was climbing on that tree to pick the pears, which were little pears and very ripe. Because I think they couldn't pick them up because of the war. And it was left on the tree.

And I was on the tree when I saw three people coming in. They were dressed-- now I know were Ukrainians. And they spoke Ukrainian. It's very similar to Polish, but it's not the same language. And I tried to hide, and I jumped down, down from the tree. And I didn't run to the cave. I was standing on the place.

And the chief of them, he had a pistol. And the others had guns. And he asked me, where are you? Where is your mother? And I was so excited, and my nose was full. And I wanted to take out a handkerchief from my pocket, but what I took was a pear. And I gave him the pear.

So all of them started to laugh. It was a very funny situation. And I don't remember exactly, but they left me. They went away. So when I came to the cave, so my mother and my aunt, they started to-- they hugged me and said, Oh, you are so clever that you didn't run and show them where we are hiding.

Oh, yes.

So I became a hero because instead I didn't do anything. I was so frightened I couldn't even run. So this I remember also, memories.

So then you stay there? You stay for how long?

All these periods of time, what I remember I have no quantity. I don't know how long it was. I don't remember. It was some time. I assume it was a short time. And then we crossed the river, River San. River San was the border between the German occupation and the Russian. They had an agreement.

And the Russians entered from East and the Germans from West. And we crossed the river at night. And I think I was most of this time either asleep or I don't remember. I don't remember how we crossed the river. And--

This is you-- is this you and your mother?

And father, also.

OK. All right.

And we reached the city of Lw³w. Lemberg in German.

Right.

There my grandfather, he was already secular, this grandfather. Not the other one, but this one was secular. And he had a-- he was a lawyer. And he was a secretary of the court in Lw³w.

Is this your mother's father or your father's father?

My father's father.

OK.

And we settled in Lw³w, and I went to the kindergarten for the first time. And it was not long, maybe two months. In this time what I remember that my father, he had good connections with a vendor of photographic supplies. And he went to him, and told him, I was buying all time from you. Now I want you to sell me all your stock.

And this was an old man. And he said OK. And he gave him also a credit for all the stock. And my father was going around in Lw³w and the surrounding to all photographic shops. Why? Because the Russians demanded that everybody will get a new ID with a picture. So there was a great need of the photographic supply.

Oh, my.

And I remember my father was coming in the evening with a suitcase full of money. And he and my mother were counting the money. My mother was also working as a photographer. They made a cooperative-- cooperative. How you pronounce it?

Cooperative.

Cooperative for photography. And in this time, my parents made big money, which I think-- this I can't tell you exactly-- but this helped us in the future. Because of course the money was not the same value as before, because it was inflation, also. But when we were taken to Siberia, which was one night, they took us in a train--

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

The people, the Russian called us, and they told us. And this I also know from what they told me. They said we can either go back to the German part, where we ran out, or we are not allowed to stay in Lw³w. They will transport us somewhere to the East. And they pushed us in the midnight in such-- in a train, that the cars were--

Cattle train.

Sorry?

A cattle train.

A cattle train.

How long were you in LwÅ³w? Do you know?

Maybe two months.

Two months. So this is-- so what are we talking about when you left, about?

We are talking now about--

December? About December?

No, no, September. Maybe October. But this was a very hot October. I remember it exactly. Because when we were in the train and they the people were like two floors. They divided the car in two floors. And we were pushed inside. The adults couldn't stand up. They had to bend. And we went one way.

Do you remember this? Do you remember the train?

Yes, I remember it very good, because also I got-- how you say in English? [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Whooping cough.

How?

Whooping cough.

Oh, my. OK.

And the people from the second floor let me sit near the little opening, which was like a window-- I don't know-- of the car to get some air. It was very hot inside. And they gave us little white water to drink. And this was very, very difficult and traumatic ride.

Yes.

We went three weeks one way.

You were in that car for three weeks?

Yes, three weeks. The car was going and standing and going and standing in stations.

Did they let you get off the car at all?

No, not at all. They did not. And I don't know where-- I can remember how they threw out the pile of what people do.

Right, the waste, the waste.

The [INAUDIBLE].

Yeah. What about food? How did you get food?

In the stations, they was supplying us. Guards were-- all stations where we arrived were guards. I don't know if the guards were going also on the train on another car or they were waiting for us in the stations. But in every stations we stopped. They opened the doors to let air get in, but nobody could get out.

Oh, my.

And sometimes I remember once they wanted to close-- to shut the door before we went. And one man put his leg, and he didn't let the guards to close it. And one of them said, let's leave him. The officers had other hats as the soldiers. And I was saying, these were the heads of the officers. They are bad. They are closing the doors firmly. But the others, they don't care about much to shut the door completely. Because it was very important to get air.

Yes.

Well, this ride was one of the traumatic rides I remember. There was another even worse.

Well, what did you do all day long with your mother and father? Did they--

Well--

You just sat there?

We were sitting there inside. I don't think that we did something. I don't remember we did something. It was like--

Cattle.

We were like cattle, yes.

Did your mother do anything to comfort you? Did she--

Yes, they were. When I was coughing and I was throwing up, she was holding me.

Yeah. And so then when did that end? When did that train ride end?

We arrived somewhere in Siberia. And I tried this time-- when I was in Israel in [INAUDIBLE] I was looking in the map, trying to find where it was. And I couldn't find, because the place that we arrived at the end was not marked on the map.

First, we arrived to a train station. And then they took us in such a-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Truck.

Truck, yes. They took us in trucks, and we drive two days in the forest somewhere. And at last we arrived to a place that was called Ozero. Ozero is in Russian a lake. And there was a lake and a swamp around this lake. And this place is not placed on the map, because there are a lot of Ozeros, a lot of lakes in Siberia. So--

Do you know how to spell? Do you know how to spell that word? Do you know how to spell it?

Ozero. O-Z--

Yes.

--E-R-O.

OK. Thank you. OK, so now you're there, and what's happening there?

When we entered there, it was a like glade in the forest and a slope down to the lake, which was a swamp. And there was one barrack, a very big barrack. Once I think it was a prison or something like this, I assume. And we entered. We got [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. What happened to your English?

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

[LAUGHTER]

Some stretchers to lie on.

Stretchers to lie on.

Yes.

And there were, I think, three, one over the other. And I was lying with my older cousin.

Like in the concentration camps.

Yeah.

She said like in the concentration camp.

Yes, yes.

It was not a concentration camp. It was--

A work camp.

It was a work camp.

Yes.

And so the first night I remember I was lying with my older cousin. And he was-- he had matches, and he made a fire with a piece of paper of a newspaper. And he was burning [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Oh.

Bugs.

Fleas. Fleas.

Fleas?

Oh, the bugs, the fleas?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yes. It was-- it was very nice. I remember it. I was so happy that he was burning them. There were so much-- so many that you can--

Yeah. Are we still talking-- are we talking about 1939 still? Is it still '39?

Yes, yes.

OK.

And we stayed there till after Molotov-Ribbentrop. After the Germans started war with the Soviet Union. And I think it was '41.

Yes, June. That was June of '41.

Yes. So we stayed--

What did you do? Wait a minute. What did you do there? Did you do anything?

I am just going to tell you. The men were working in the forest. They were cutting trees and putting them [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

The trunk.

The trunk? They were putting the trunks into a river.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

The trunks of the trees into a river. And it was flowed southward.

Yes, yes.

And they were cutting it. I remember that one of the family friends was killed by a tree, and this I was very shocked I won't see him anymore. And we stayed there.

Did you have enough clothes? Did you have enough warm clothes?

What I remember is that we had one we got one house that the parents built. The prisoners, the families, the adults, they had not only to cut the trees, also to build the housing for us. And we got a house built of the trunks of-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

No, the whole left [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Trunk. Out of trunks.

Yes.

And this was built in-- the house was one big-- for me, it was big.

Was it just one family? You were just by-- was it just your--

There were a few families.

Oh.

And it was also my cousin, and my aunt, and my-- they were adults, the cousins.

What about food? Did you--

They were 20 and 19 years older than me. So they were already adults.

Did you have enough food?

Well, this was also a question. I don't remember hunger in this. We got-- as prisoners we got food. And my aunt was also the cook. She was-- like my mother, my mother studied photography. And her sister, which was older than she, she started cooking. And she was a cook in this camp. So I assume that because of this we had enough food then. Because I guess that it was like this. Because then I didn't ask and I didn't care. It was not luxury food, but we didn't starve. We didn't feel hunger. Or I didn't feel hunger then.

What I feel-- what was the worse is that I was closed in winter time in one room that I couldn't get out. It was 40 degrees minus.

Oh, my.

And I couldn't play. It was a very, very hard time for me as a child.

I'm sure.

What else? That I had no toys, and I had no sweets.

Yeah.

And this I remember very good.

Were there a lot-- were there any other children? Any other children from other families?

Yes, but not in my room. There were children in the camp.

Yes.

But not-- I could-- only when the snow melted I could play with other children.

Right.

And then we went in the forest. We were picking all kinds of berries.

Did you go to school there?

No.

No school.

There was no school.

OK.

What was built first was a prison.

Oh.

And the second was a [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Infirmery.

How?

Infirmary.

Infirmary.

Oh, OK.

These were two public buildings.

Uh-huh.

And before the war with Germany-- the Soviet Union and Germany started the war, before the invasion of their Germans, once my father said there was from the Soviet like a manager. And he quarreled with him, and he said that Hitler is a son of a bitch.

So he said, this is politically-- you speak politically, and he put him in prison.

Oh, my.

And just the next morning, he opened-- it was announced that the Germans attacked Soviet Union.

Yes, yeah.

So this manager came, entered my father's cell, and he opened the door of the prison, and he bowed, and he said to my father, "you know, you are right."

Oh, my.

"He is a son of a bitch."

Oh, my.

This I remember, also. Some days my father was telling it very proudly.

Yes, yes.

So what else?

Any other memories of that time until June '41? Any other memories?

Well, the memories of a child, that I was picking mushrooms. Not important things.

Yeah.

Because there was something special traumatic then.

OK.

Relatively, this working camp for me as a child was not-- this was an open prison. Why I say open? Because all around was forest. Nobody could escape, and there was nothing for to escape, because there was food. We were supplied by food. And there was nowhere to go, only forest and forest. And there were wolves over in the forest.

Oh, my.

I remember that the next house to us was a female dog. And at night, she was barking at the wolves and at her. And the next morning we found in the snow, they left her womb with little puppies inside. And we as children we had the sticks, and we pressed the womb, and we took out-- we put out-- we pushed out very little puppies from her womb. But they were dead, of course, and frozen. So this also I remember. This was a very nice view.

OK, now it's June '41, and the Germans have invaded Russia. Now what happens?

Now we are going to get at my hardest time in my life. We were liberated. They said now you are free. You can go wherever you like, so I understand. But in Soviet Union, nobody can go out of Soviet Union. It now happened that all my family that was there, and not only my family but most of the people-- not only Jews, also the Polish people that were refugees there, went to Uzbekistan.

Many people. I don't know how many. Many, many, many million or close to it went to Uzbekistan. Also many went to Kazakhstan, but was Uzbekistan was-- maybe the Russians did it. They wanted us to go there. Or there was a rumor that it's nice and good and there is food. Of course this was the main question-- food. So we went to Uzbekistan. And--

How did you get there? How did you get there?

By train. This was a train not like cattle train. It was a train that we went. Also not one day. Many days we traveled in the train.

You're with your mother and your--

Sorry?

You're with your mother and your father.

Yes. And we met there in Uzbekistan one aunt and another. So it was very-- for me, all my life I didn't know and we didn't ask when we could ask how they contacted with each other in order to meet somewhere. I have no idea. Maybe my mail. Because mail still was working there.

And we arrived. First we met in Tashkent, which was a big city. And then we to the east. It was called Fergana. It is on the east of Uzbekistan. We saw mountains, and they said, this is China already. Mountains that you see are in China.

Oh, my.

So this was a big valley. It is called-- now I know because I looked at the maps, it discovered the Fergana Valley. And we were in this town of Fergana.

Do you know how to spell that?

Sorry?

Do you know how to spell that? Fergana.

I think F-E-R-G-N-A.

OK.

No, Fergana.

Fergana.

A. A-N-A.

Yeah, that's right. OK.

F-E-R-G-A-N-A.

Yes, OK. And then how long did you stay there?

I think more than a year.

Oh, all right.

This was-- this was terrible. It was such a hunger that people were-- all the fields were cotton. Because they had the-- this was a military need, cotton. They made of the cotton the uniforms and tents. And so they needed cotton. And from the grains they made oil. And they made soap and oil of it. So this was very important for the war, for the military. So that's why they had to grow only cotton.

And there were some gardens of the Uzbeks that they had also fruit, but not for us. They needed it for themselves. And after some time, maybe a year of terrible, terrible hunger, which people died, I remember we, myself and my cousin that lives in Jerusalem, a female cousin, and the male cousin, they both are a bit older than me, but let's say the same age, we were going around looking for something to eat in the winter. We had to collect it, what the camels or donkeys did with the--

I don't know. I don't know English enough.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

It's OK. Just you can keep talking.

She will remind me. We are collecting it.

Human waste.

The waste of the-- not human. Of the--

Of the animals. Of the animals.

Cattle waste.

Yes.

We were collecting it. And by this we found many children dead.

Oh, my.

Swollen bellies from hunger. And--

What did you have to eat?

Nothing. My father was going to the factory that was pressing the cotton grains. So after it was pressed, the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] that was taken out of the press, it looked like a roof-- like the roof, what you put on the roof. And this, he was taking this, and my mother was boiling it with-- Ya'eli, how you say [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]?

Radish.

Radish. She was cooking it with radish that somehow they got. And this it what we were eating.

Yeah.

And so we were eating.

Did you go to school there? Did you go to school there?

No.

No. OK.

No, I had another cousin there that she was also older than me, 19 years older. And she was in Poland a teacher. So she taught us, all three of us cousins, the same, nearly the same age, to write.

Oh, OK.

So she took the newspapers. What was there? It was newspaper. It was always because the Soviets, they had to write and to put their ideas, to say how great is Stalin and so on.

Right, right.

So there were a lot of-- we could get newspapers. So on the side of the newspaper, on the white, not printed side, she'd lines. And we started to write the letters. This was like a school, but this was the education I got.

Yeah.

And I told you that I had no toys.

Right.

So maybe this is why I became an engineer, because I was planning and building my toys.

Oh.

I started then. I was creative. And I made many, many things of nothing. And one day, the Polish military organized to-- you know that there was the Polish government-in-exile in London.

Yes, yes.

And this government was against the communistic government in Poland. And they mobilized the refugees in the Soviet Union.

Yes.

It was agreed with Stalin. And they were trained and financed by the British. And this army, after they trained, they went to Persia, and from Persia to Iraq, from Iraq to Palestine, from Palestine to Egypt. From Egypt they went to Italy, and they made a great fight in Italy, which made them very famous. And till today the Polish are so proud. This is the only place where the Polish army did something, not that the communistic army, but this Polish Anders army, they conquered Monte Cassino, which was a very important place in the war in Italy.

After conquering Monte Cassino, the Germans retreated, and they actually went all over Italy. And this was-- this battle

was so important that today in Poland, in every city, there is a street named Monte Cassino. And General Anders is very important, and they have statues of him in Poland today.

Right, right.

When I go back now to where they were training, so we went-- we moved to a little, little town. It was near the base of the Polish. And my mother and aunt were cooking. They were buying somewhere on the market apples. They were cooking like a compote of the apple with a lot of water. And we were carrying-- also we children were carrying the-- it was very heavy for us.

We were carrying it to the gate of the base. And the soldiers, they were coming out and buying this, drinking this, buying from our mothers this thing. And this we did. We were walking six kilometers one way in the very, very hot days. I remember it. We were going--

Are we still talking about 1941 or?

Yes, '41.

OK.

But then when my father was mobilized, and also he tried to-- also my uncle-- so they--

They were mobilized into the Anders army?

Yes.

OK.

And then they got food. I don't know-- our hunger was not so bad after they were mobilized. I remember the first time I saw chocolate.

Oh, my.

This was that my cousin, my age, he got the portions before us. So he came and brought me. He had in his hand a piece of chocolate.

Oh, my.

So he said, "guess what I have in my hand." I couldn't guess. I said, "maybe you have a bug." "No, who eats bugs?" So I said, "Oh, maybe--" we were drying the seeds of melons, and this we were also eating. "Ah, melon seeds." "No." And he was so anxious to tell me about, so he opened his hand and "look, it's chocolate!" And the chocolate melted in his hand. So I licked the chocolate from his hand.

Yes.

This was the first time I had chocolate.

Yeah, yeah.

This I remember I also. And then one day I told you about the hunger.

Yes.

There was also-- people were sick, because there were so many lice that everybody-- many people got typhus.

Yes.

And people died from hunger and from typhus. And my mother became also ill. And they took her to a hospital there. It was still in Fergana, before we went to the base of that Polish army. And there was a hospital. And my father was visiting her every day. And one day came. He said, let's go. Tomorrow we shall go to visit Mother, because she is missing you, and she doesn't feel well.

OK, so we went the next day. And he took me out. I think it was the first floor in the building. And we entered to the room, entered the room. And my father saw another woman in her bed. So he said, "where is she?" "She died this night, and she's down in the cellar."

Yeah. Oh, my.

We went to the cellar.

Oh, my.

And there was like a car with a sled, sled, carriage.

Yes.

And full of bodies laid, piled on it. And we were looking around the bed-- the dead. And my father find her-- found her. And he said, she has still pulse. And we tried to push-- to pull her out. Oh and I had to help him to hold the other corpses down. So she--

And he said now to me, go and call a doctor to make her well.

To save her. To save her?

Yes. So I ran. I was first time in my life there, and I didn't know where. So I ran out all the four floors up where we were before. And I saw a person. It was a physician with a stethoscope on his neck. So I pushed his apron, and I tried to tell him something, but I had no air to breathe, because I was choked.

Right.

And he understood, maybe. And he went after me. So I ran down, and he and my father married her-- they put her to life.

Oh, my. Oh, my.

This was a memory. And then I go back to the way to Tehran. We were-- we were allowed to get out as a family because of the military to follow the army to Tehran.

OK, well, just one minute. So they revived your mother, and then did she come back with you?

She revived. She was-- since then she was ill person.

Yeah.

She didn't--

But she came back home? She she came back to you?

She came back home, and she went with us to Persia.

OK, OK. So until you left then life went on the same way is what you're saying? Right?

Sorry?

OK, before you left again and your mother came back--

Yes. It was short time before we went-- we were allowed to go out of Russia.

OK. OK. Now you're about to leave. OK.

Yes. I need a short break. I give you Yaeli in the meantime. Excuse me, please.

OK.

Hello, hello.

Hello. Is there anything you wanted to add?

Well, you know, I am just a bystander. I heard some of these stories before, but I clearly-- all I can say is that the time in Uzbekistan is really-- and what happened to him was his mother was really the biggest trauma. Not that the rest of it wasn't traumatic, but that was the hunger and his mother's so-called death was really what made the biggest--

Effect?

--stamp on his psyche.

Yes.

Did he tell you about when they had to leave Uzbekistan, how they were trampled?

No.

Uzbekistan and how they trampled over each other?

No. No, we were just--

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

OK. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

OK, it's coming. OK, hold on.

Thank you.

Now we are allowed to go, so we--

Are we talking about what, 1943? Or what are you? no, for '42 maybe.

'42? OK.

It was after that the Japanese made the attack to Pearl Harbor.

Pearl Harbor. OK, so it's 1942. OK. And they let you?

They let us out.

OK.

So we went to a town on this coast of the Caspian Sea in the Soviet Union. And there we had to cross the Caspian Sea to the southwest. It was not as south-- it was quite a long journey. And everybody was afraid that he won't get place on the ship.

Oh.

Because it was not so organized. No tickets. No nothing. Everybody was pushing in. And we entered. And I remember this, they gave me water.

Bucket of water.

Bucket of water. And told me, you know, this is so important, the water. So you have to keep it very good. And it was with a rope. It was--

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Held together with a rope.

Held together with a rope. And I holding this, and everybody was pushing into the entrance to the pier. It was like a gate.

Yes.

And the people were so pushing in that I was so pressed that I lost breath, and I fainted.

Oh, My Oh, my.

Before I fainted, I stepped on a child that was already dead.

Oh, my.

And after this, I fainted. And the stream of people pushed me out. And I was on the other side, the side of the pier. And my mother and my aunt, they revived me with the water that I had, but not all of it.

Yes.

I didn't lose the water. Even though my hand was cut on the rope, I was so stubborn not to lose the water. And we went on the ship. The ship was--

You're now 8-years-old almost, right?

Sorry?

You're almost 8-years-old now?

No, I am-- yes. Almost eight.

Yes.

And then we found that the ship is a tanker. And there is only place above. And there were-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Benches.

Like benches from wood over the tank-- the tanker-- over the tank. And everybody pushed in, sat on his place, and was afraid to get up because the place would be taken.

Right, right.

People were pushing. You know, people are like animals when it is--

Survival.

Survival.

Right.

And we wanted to survive to go out of the terrible Soviet Union then. It was really-- everybody was shocked from the hunger and wanted out. So we went 36 hours on this tanker. Not getting up, making all our needs where we sat. It was impossible. This was very, very shocking, this. And after 36 hours, we arrived to a place called Pahlevi. It was the name of the Shah family, Pahlevi. And this town, Pahlevi--

This is in Persia, in Iran?

Yes.

Yes. OK.

It was not called-- we didn't get to any town. We just went on the shore of the sea. And there were mats of 14 foot on the sand and mats above to make shadow. And then they laid us then. This was a few days. I don't remember how many we were there. We were ill with malaria and all kinds of--

And then we got the dates from India, pressed dates. This was our food to eat. And after a short time, they took us with trucks through a very bad road in the mountains to Tehran. Near Tehran was a camp.

You're still with your parents?

Yes.

OK.

But my mother was taken to a hospital. She didn't function anymore like a person. She was always ill. But she was taken to a hospital in Tehran, and we were separated. I was with my aunt and with my cousin.

Where was your father?

My father was in the Army he was already maybe in Palestine or in Iraq.

Oh, he left, and he went into the army right away when they formed it?

We were allowed to get out because he was already in the army.

I see. OK. OK.

So he was in the army, in the Anders army.

Yes. OK.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

And we--

So you got to Tehran, you said?

Yes, Tehran, but it was out of the town, out of the city. It was in a camp.

Yes.

Also a refugee camp of Polish, Polish camp. And they put us in a like ghetto, like three or four barracks for Jews. And there was also a house that was an orphanage of Jewish children, which later became the Tehran children.

Yes.

And we were together with them. They were helping us. Those Tehran children were organized. And there were only Jews with Jews, and we were few. We were few Jewish children with the Polish army. And when the kids were bullying us, beating us, or trying to do any very, very bad things to us, the big children were looking after the very little. So those children were helping us, were coming to save us.

Oh, OK.

And one day, there were wanted to pushed me into the toilet. Was like a groove. And upon were wooden covers. And the people were-- all the-- it was like a canal full of shit. And they had to-- the big children wanted to push me into it.

Yes.

And I was fighting so hard with them. And my cousin saw it, and they called the children, the Jewish children from the orphanage. And they came to save. Those bullies ran away. And I didn't-- so I didn't dive in the shit.

Right, right.

But the time in Tehran was for me very bad also, because I went to the school there. I went first to the school. The first class I was older than-- I should go to the second class. But as I never studied.

Right.

So I went to the first class in the school. I had a teacher that I remember until today. Because in the morning when we started the school day, the children-- the Polish had such a song to sing for like Adon Olam in Jewish-- religious song in the morning.

Yes.

And the teacher was holding a big cross with poor Jesus crossed on it.

Oh.

And she went around the desks, forth and back. And she was pushing him in my face, Jesus.

Right.

Because I crossed him.

Yes.

She blamed me for crossing Jesus.

Right.

So I remember her. She was a very great pedagogish person. And I hated school.

So you were living-- you were living with your aunt?

Yes.

OK.

These were a few barracks, and every family put some blankets like walls in the big barrack. And so there were like beds of wood. And in these barracks, I worked in the barrack of my aunt.

Did the army camp have a name? Was there a name? Do you know?

I didn't understand.

Did the place have a name? Was there a name?

no this was called Tehran. It was a refugee camp, Polish refugee camp. I read about it later. So there were 27,000 citizens in this camp. And we had-- I have to go to shower once a day. So this was more than a kilometer. Let's say about a mile one way to the shower and one way back from the shower. Or to the barrack. And that's--

But there was no name of this barracks, of this place? It didn't have a name?

No, it was called Tehran.

That's all it was called? OK, OK, OK.

Even today it is called Tehran. Also the children that came to Palestine with Aliyat Hano'ar--

Yeah.

You know what is Aliyat Hano'ar? They got-- it was called certificates-- permission to go to enter Palestine.

Right.

But we didn't use certificates on the quota of their Jewish agency, Aliyat Hano'ar, because we had the permission of the Polish army to get in.

I see, I see.

So we came separated from them, not together with them.

I see. OK.

So we arrived to Israel, to Palestine, on December '43.

So you were how long-- how long were you--

Second Hanukkah, second Hanukkah light, I remember.

How long were you in Tehran?

I started the first grade and part of the second.

Oh, OK.

So let's say one and a half year.

OK. And then you were told you could leave to go to Palestine?

Yes, we were taken to a port. I forgot this name. I knew it. I found it in the map, but in the moment I don't remember how it is called. The port in the Persian Gulf, near the river, near the two river from Iraq that come in. And we went on a ship. It's called Ascanius. This I remember because this was the first time that I enjoyed being with my mother. She is an ill person. She got a cabin, a cabin. I was with my mother in the cabin.

And all of us, before I got to the cabin of my mother, we were down in the ship with the children together. So the people were together inside the ship. And I had a cabin with my mother. And this was such a nice time for me that I could enjoy my mother for the whole journey to Suez. This ship went to the south. And far to the south in the Indian Ocean, because there were German U-boats, submarines, that could shoot the ship.

So we went very far to the South, and then turned back and arrived to Aden. And in Aden we stopped for three days. And we were not allowed to get off the ship. So I saw Aden only from far away. And after this, they got Aden also supply. So one day I see two people carrying a bunch. I don't know how it's called in English. Maybe bunch of bananas?

Oh.

How it is called in English?

A bunch of bananas.

Bunch?

A bunch. A bunch.

Bunch of bananas.

Yeah.

And I looked at this with very big eyes. I assumed I was very-- looking sad big eyes. So one picked up a banana and gave me.

Oh.

So I ran to my mother and I said, "Mama, look what a funny cucumber I have."

Right.

Boy, this was-- I like bananas still today. We arrived to Suez. And we didn't cross the canal. We got off and we were put on a train that took us to Atlit.

Oh.

So Atlit is near Haifa.

Right. So you went through the-- you went through the desert the Sinai Desert on the train?

Yes, we crossed the Sinai Desert, and we crossed all Israel along. And people in the train station were coming and looking at us like they are so-- when we arrived to Israel, we were not the first. Because first were those children from the orphanage.

Orphanage, yes.

And this was such an excitement here in the Jewish yeshuv, that those people from Holocaust, the first children arrived.

So when did you--

It was such an event that when we arrived, it was already Hanukkah. And the children of-- i don't think it's from Haifa. I think they were from the kibbutz there in Beit Oren, is a kibbutz. And they came to make with us a Hanukkah party.

So you arrived when? Was this 1940--

Three.

1943.

December.

December '43?

Yes.

Oh. Oh. OK.

And my father is all the time in the army, and he was fighting in Monte Cassino, in Italy.

Oh, my.

He got a medals from King George for the fight of Monte Cassino.

Oh, my.

And I was with my mother. And my father arrived only at '47.

Oh, you didn't see him till 1947?

I didn't. Because after the war--

Well, we'll get there in a minute. OK, so you've just arrived in Atlit, you said.

Yes.

In December 1943.

Yes.

OK. And so you're 9 and 1/2 years old.

correct

OK. And then how long did you stay in Atlit?

A short time, a few days.

OK. Yeah, and then you went to a kibbutz, you said?

No, I went to Jerusalem.

Oh.

I had a cousin that was 19 years older than me. He was married, and he was [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Our [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. You know what is [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Do you? The center that-- absorbing center we have now for newer--

For immigrants? For immigrants?

Yes.

Yeah.

So my cousin was the absorbing center for our family.

What was his name? What was your cousin's name?

Shlomo Mai.

OK.

His wife accepted us in Jerusalem. Well, and from this time I became immediately Israeli. I didn't want to be [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. I wanted to be a Sabra. And when I didn't behave nicely, in my mother's eyes, she was calling me, "you are a Sabra!"

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, and how was her health?

She didn't recover really.

She didn't?

But she died very young.

Oh.

She died in Jerusalem. And I think she was--

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

She was 51.

Oh, my. Oh, my. So now you're in Jerusalem, and what do you do? Do you go to school? Or where do you live?

Yes, I went to school. And then I went to high school, high school.

Did you live with your cousin?

No, I lived first with my mother, and then I mobilized. After I finished the high school, which I did, I told you that I hate school, hated school. But when I was in Jerusalem in the high school, I loved school.

Did you pick up Hebrew easily?

It took me maybe three months to learn Hebrew. I wanted so much to be absorbed, and to be like everybody, and not to be poor, you know, and [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Right. Did the other children ask you about your experiences?

No.

So did you talk about them?

Once we met, maybe 50 years after school or about, and we sat together, still friends. And one lady said, I didn't know nothing about you. We didn't ask. We were not interested about what happened to you. We lived another life.

Yes.

She complained about herself.

Yes.

They didn't ask. Nobody asked, and they called us nicknames, "polanit," or "Polish."

Did you see any of the other Tehran children at all? Did you?

No, because I didn't go to a kibbutz. And I went to Jerusalem, which I saw with two of my cousins that arrived with me. But all the other children, I had no connection anymore.

No connection.

And I don't remember them even, because it was not a friendship, because I was not in the orphanage.

Right, right, right. Yeah. OK, so now you're in Jerusalem, and you've gone through school, and you've learned Hebrew, and you've finished-- when did you finish high school? What year?

In '54.

No.

I was 20.

Oh.

Why? Because when I--

You mean '40--

--came to Israel, so my cousin said, well, he doesn't know Hebrew. I could go to the fifth grade. So he put me in the third. Why? Because he said he doesn't know Hebrew, and I was also in his eyes childish, because I was very creative. I was always playing and building things. So he said he's-- you know Yiddish? He called me a "verspieltes kind." Verspielt is playing--

Playing around. Playing around?

Playing around child. Yes. So he put me in the third grade. And these two years I lost.

Yeah. So you were in school when the war ended in 1945. You were still young, of course. You were only 11. So you were still in school.

Yes.

The end of the war, do you remember the end of World War II at all?

Yes, I remember. But yes, of course.

Any experience, anything you can talk about?

I remember the victory. There was some-- in Jerusalem there was--

Celebration?

Yes, the people were. But I didn't take part of any.

Well, you were only 11. Yeah. And then what about in 1948 when the state of Israel--

This I remember very good.

What do you remember about that?

I was in the closure of Jerusalem. It was again hunger, but no comparison with the hunger that we had. We got I don't remember how many gram, maybe two slices of bread per day and very little water. That was also. And we used water a few times, first to drink, and then to wash, and then to wash the toilet. And the same water we used a few times.

And well, this was-- but the closure of Jerusalem, I had always a hope. I was very optimistic. I always hoped that we will win. And really it happened. We won.

Yeah. OK, so but it's 1948, and the state has been formed, and you're 14-years-old. Almost 14. Almost 14 when the state of Israel was formed. Do you remember the celebration at all?

Oh, this I remember excellent. This was a night that we went out to the streets dancing. And this was very, very unforgettable night.

Yeah. And your mother, was she still-- she was still with you?

Mother died--

What year did she die?

'50.

1950, Oh. OK. So then you stayed on. And then you were still in school. And you said you graduated from-- your father had come back, right?

'47.

1947. So you lived with him, also?

Yes, yes.

In Jerusalem.

Yes.

Yeah, OK. And then you said you graduated from high school in '54.

Yes.

And then what did you do?

I mobilized.

OK.

I went to the army.

Yeah.

I became an officer. And after many years, when I was 56, because I volunteered, I finished the reserve at 56.

Yeah. But then what happened when you finished, what, the three years you were in the army?

I was three years.

On active duty.

And then I was in the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] on reserve.

Yes, yes. And then I mobilized again. After I became engineer, I mobilized to the army as an engineer. And one of my inventions then as a very young officer and a very young engineer still today works. And all the armies took it from Israel, from the IDF. I don't know if they got permission or they stole it. But it was not a patent, but it is a development that I found out.

Can you talk about it? Or you can't talk about it?

No, it was not very--

What was it? What did you--

It was something to security-- no, safety. Safety of all kinds of grenades, of hand grenades.

Oh, OK. So when did you get your engineer training?

'57.

So you went back to school. You came back from the army.

In Haifa. I left Jerusalem.

Yeah.

I went to Haifa to the Technion.

Oh, you went to the Technion. OK.

And I stayed in Haifa for 40 years.

Oh, my. Oh, my. OK.

Because I married there and I had three sons all born in Haifa. And that's it.

Yeah, and you stayed in the reserves. Yeah. Can I ask you just some special questions now? Do you think about your experience when you were a small child, when you were going through? Do you think about that a lot now? About what your experiences--

From time to time.

Because you had a very difficult childhood, of course.

Yes. One is that I had some traumas that I still suffer from them. A few times I fell down from bed because I'm fighting against bullies that want to do some harm to me, and I find myself on the floor. It happened many times.

Yeah.

But except this, relatively I think I am normal. I function. I made relative good life, and also economically I built myself.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Who did you work for once you finished with the Technion? Did you work for a private company?

I worked-- I worked in two places as an engineer, but lately-- but then I started to be-- I started to be more a manager. First, I worked for a foundry, Urdan. This was a very good experience for me. After the military I went to-- it was a foundry in Natanya.

Did you--

Then I went-- after this I found-- I got a good job in the fields of [NON-ENGLISH], the oil fields.

Oh.

And I experienced this piping. And after that I started to-- I made a course in marketing. And I was-- and at the end, I had a company of actually marketing.

What happened with your father? Did he work in Israel?

My father--

He came back from the army, and what did he--

My father, he-- my mother died very early.

Right.

And my father, he married again. He remarried. He lived with his new wife the same time as he lived with my mother. And then he died.

Yeah, yeah. Said you have three sons?

Yes.

When they were younger, did you talk about your experiences when you were a child? Did you tell them?

Actually, no. What I did, it was-- since I mentioned before there was once a meeting of the family, and we spoke about the past, and we made [AUDIO DROPS]

So then I read what I wrote, and I read for them some of my experiences. And-- [AUDIO DROPS] --lately, because everybody is busy with his own-- [AUDIO DROPS]

Maybe because I was so childish. I don't--