

I remember one episode. I was standing with an older man from my hometown, and we'd been talking together. And all of a sudden, I heard a noise coming from the bottom. It was in the woods.

They caught him by his coat, and I ran away. I lost my cap. It was hanging on the woods. And then later on, I heard they took him into the town, and they killed him in the town. They even made all kinds of things with him before they killed him, bad things.

And I was-- I was talking to him. I was holding him by this. And this after that, I had always a problem. My uncle used to tell me, every time something happens, you're so sensitive. You run at the moment you hear some noise that used to be. So that's why I used to lose everything, and I had no shirts, no pants, no nothing, only what I have on me. Because I always figured one minute or one half a minute can make the difference between life and death.

I'm going to make it brief. And we'll get to that. The winter came in, and before we get to then, that bunker what we had originally, we had abandoned, because they discovered there. And we went to another place, another part of the forest. We made another bunker there. We made that bunker, and we went in to stay there for the winter.

We stayed there for the winter. We were 18 people, I think. We had one old woman. The old woman died. We were all laying all around.

And then they used to come. Being that the village was a Polish population, the Ukrainians used to kill the Polish, too. So they used to run to the forest. And being there, they run after them, we were afraid we were going to be discovered on account of them.

We had no choice. Then comes the month of February, and we had no choice. We had no place where to go. It's winter. It snowed, and a peasant, if you make a footstep in the snow, in the forest or outside the forest, they can tell where people are living or where they are where they go.

So what happened, we decided to go back to the old bunker there from the beginning, only because we had no choice-- was a dangerous thing. And we paid for it for going back there. And all those that were already then survivors from other countries, which they had with the Germans and the Ukrainians. And there must have been 70 to 80 people together.

And we stayed there the month of February. And we heard already that the Russians are nearing the front. The Germans are retreating. And we saw that pretty soon, we are going to be liberated. But this was the worst time of our life. We knew any minute we are not going to see it, the situation.

You suffered so long, and it can happen in one minute you're finished. And this was even the worst part and everything else.

And being that we were in that bunker there, we had problems. We had no food. We were afraid to go to the villages, because the Ukrainian nationalists, Banderas, used to catch Jews and kill them. And they were horrible. Here and there, we were able to get some food. We risked our lives for that.

And one day, when the Germans were-- when the Russians came near us, and the bombardment was already, like, front-line bombardments, some people running into the forest. And we didn't know who the people were, whether they were Polish people or were some other people which were running, hiding there.

And it so happened, those who ran after them discovered our bunk. Here, the real thing starts, a day before. Yeah, it's not-- I went over already.

Anyway, a day before, we heard noise on top of the bunk. So we all ran out of the bunker. We ran out of the bunker. I had my aunt, my uncle was living at that time, and his daughter, and the rest of the people there. We all ran out. Each ran his own way where he could.

I didn't have my shoes tied, and I had these wooden-sole shoes. In the month of March, it's wet, and one shoe got stuck in the snow. And I was so sensitive that I didn't give myself time to put on-- to grab the shoe and put it, being that I knew that I'm going into snow only with one shoe. But I figured, I don't know. That's what I did.

I ran away, and they caught my uncle and his wife, my aunt, his daughter. There was another boy with his father. There were other people. And we heard shooting.

The other man, the boy which I just told you, ran with me. His father ran somewhere else. So they shot.

And after the shooting quiet down, we went back to see what's going on. We couldn't find nobody, so we went around looking. And around looking, I heard screaming, yelling, and all the things.

So it was the boy's father. They shot him. They thought they killed him, but they did not kill him. They wounded him. In the upper way was laying my cousin, my uncle's daughter, shot. I even turned her over to see what's with her.

I walked further. I found my aunt laying dead. I was so-- I don't know what I did, but I took off her shoes, and I took and I left her laid there. That dehumanized how--

And at night, when it got darker, we went back to the-- we went back to the bunker to sleep over. We cannot sleep at night in the snow. In the morning, about 11:00, I hear somebody walking. My uncle came. He was shot, too, but he wasn't killed-- wounded.

[? He was close to it. ?]

He came in, but he lay down. He must have bleeding with all the things. We didn't do nothing about it. We couldn't do anything. There was nothing to do. And he lay down there, and about an hour or two later, we heard noises.

When we heard the noises, we knew the end is coming, and that was the crucial moment. They discovered us. We were all inside. We all, which survived from a day before, were all inside. We had no place where to go.

The village was near. It's only two miles, but nobody would let us in. Nobody. They came over, and we had a small opening into the bunker. They start yelling raus, raus, [GERMAN]. That means come out. We are killing. We are shooting. We knew, because the accent was Ukrainian accent.

And nobody wanted to get out. There was one woman who said, kill us here inside. We don't want to go out. So what they did, they took-- they must have came with a sleigh or something. They were afraid to come down.

So they took a straw. They had straw with them. They lighted it with a match, and they pushed it through that hole. They wanted to burn the bunk, being it was from wood made, the top.

I don't know what to-- so that woman was an older woman with a daughter. She was there. And she extinguished the fire. So they saw they cannot do. They still didn't want to.

Finally, the scene at that time, it's hard to describe. There was a brother and a sister which ran away from the Germans a few years before. They came to us where we were on the Russian.

They kissed each other, and they all said-- they all decided they're going to go out. Whatever happens, happens. They had no choice. They had to come out.

And the father-- the wounded father, that boy's father, which we brought him and he couldn't even carry him-- was a big man-- we brought him back. And they started to yell he should come out. And the people started to come out.

That brother and sister, it was made like bunk beds-- so-called bunk beds. Now, between the beginning of the bed up to

the floor, the ground-- the floor was wet. There was a space, that much space.

And I was there. He was trying to get under it, but he could not. He was a big man, a grown-up man, and heavy. He could not get. I saw that.

And something came in my mind. I don't know what was in mind. I said, if I go out, I stick out my head, one shot, finished. What is there to think about? A day of standing with the death? I don't know. Not because I was smart, I don't know. But yeah, that's what it is. That's what I was thinking at that moment.

When they all went out, that old woman wouldn't go out. She said she wants to get killed inside. She wouldn't go out. They knew that she is inside.

I lifted up. I tried to get in between, but the body would go in, because the body is flat. But the head is not flat. The back of the head is always a little wider than the thing.

I had a lot of strength. I don't know how, but I lifted up from the center. The wooden branches stuck in my head. And over there was deeper because of the wetness. It's not a flat thing. It's only when it dry it's flat, but not the wetness.

I got my head in. Once the head went in, the whole body-- automatically, I slid inside. I pulled back the wooden sticks. They had a lot of schmattas there, a lot of this. I put the schmatta, they shouldn't see between the spaces there.

The time I had, because she was arguing with them. They want her to come out. They were afraid to come out. If anybody would have had a gun at that time, could have saved her. I don't know how it would have happened. Probably a machine gun definitely would have saved us all. But unfortunately, that's what it was.

And they started. They started digging up the top. They dug up the top, and then they come down with a ladder-- with a ladder. We had a ladder to go up and down.

And they came down, and my uncle was laying there. They shot him. They took him down. They shot him. He fell with his head, and I was laying there and looked. His blood was on his face. And my heart was beating. I was afraid that they hear the heart beating.

And I said, Shema Yisrael to get this man. Now they killed that woman inside, shot her. I forget now it's my turn, because they hear. They hear my heartbeat. I thought that's it.

And they were interested in robbing those schmattas there. They took sacks of schmattas. They picked. They had time. They picked the best stuff they could, and the rest of them they left.

Then, one said, you know what? I'll go up and you come down. You take. I thought already he is gone away. Another guy came down, took something there-- not much, but he took something out. Because everything was on my head. And believe it or not, they went up.

They went up, and I was laid. I heard the shooting outside, everybody killed. I heard the shots. I knew more or less how many shots. They didn't waste no bullets just for nothing.

So what happened, I was lying. I don't know how, but two hours later, I still heard them roaming around in the woods with the noises, with the shooting, with the all of this. It quieted down later.

I already started to worry, what am I going to do? I'm the only-- I figured that something-- as all these people couldn't survive, because if they come out of that hole, I heard somebody walking down again.

I had already heartbeats. I was still laying there, winter in the dirt. I always was a sick boy, but at that time, I was healthy. I didn't cough. My mother used to treat me like, I don't know, sick. Put a scarf, put a this, put a that.

So what happened, this man was a man which went away a day before. He had two children with a wife, which they killed. But he went away to get some food. He got stuck in the village, so he was afraid to come back. He happened to come back. I don't know. It was my luck.

And I recognize his beaten up shoes with his schmattas around his feet. And I started to yell Pini, Pini. His name was Pini, Jewish Pinchas. And I said, take me out. He looked, and he saw already was the massacre he saw there. My uncle was laying there, my aunt.

But he didn't know where to look for me. I start pushing up the thing. He pulled me out. He pulled me out. I was standing, and I passed. Well, it was natural something like should happen. I guess he gave me something to eat. I vomited after that, but he gave me something to eat.

He looked around. He was asking for his wife, for the children. We go out. I saw people without boots, without shoes. They pulled from everybody. They took everything from everybody off. Whatever they could, they pulled off.

And he said-- he was an older man. He was a businessman. He has his acquaintance. He knew the villagers. He dealt. He was a grain dealer, he said, and it was already in the evening. He said, he's going away.

I said, you're not going. I go with you. He said what do you mean? He goes, they're not going to let in two people. How can you come in two people at night? Somebody shoot.

I said, I'm going with you. You're not going to get rid of me. I don't know. I just-- I didn't know anybody. I was too young to be a businessman. I was too-- I didn't even the-- he had no choice. I went with him.

We came in to not far from where the forest was into a village there. He knew the people. He knocked on the door, and these dogs, they always were against us, barking. And you couldn't walk in. Each peasant has dogs. They're afraid they shouldn't steal from them nothing.

So we got ourselves in. And if a dog barks at night, the whole village knows that there is something. We got in there, yeah.

What we did, whatever was left over from the schmattas, what they left, we packed two bags. He said, at least we're going to have something to go in that's going to tempt them to give us something for them.

We came into them. They let us in. And I said to her, to the goy, I had a bag, he had a bag. Keep the whole thing, just give us [INAUDIBLE].

So she said-- she was a very vicious woman. It's like usually the husband was a good man, but he had nothing to say. Both can't be good.

But still, they said, I'll give you to eat, but I don't want you on my property. Certainly not going to be on your property. Just give us to eat.

We ate. We left the stuff and we went. We went out, and the-- we hid in her stables there. She didn't know.

So what happened? The next morning, we have to eat again. So we're laying in the stable where the cows are. But where the cows are is not so warm to be there. So we got herself on top. It wasn't too warm either.

So when the owner came, he came to give the cows some food. They have potatoes with the peels they cook, you know, the bad potatoes which they pick out. They give the animals there.

So he knew this man. He knew the owner, started calling Stahu, whatever his name. He looked. Who? Finally, told him, go tell your wife we are here. We going to leave. Give us something to eat. He said, what can I give you? Take from the [INAUDIBLE].

At night, we came in again as guests. She didn't know what it is. Same thing. And this went on a couple of days, nights like that. Finally, we wanted to be where it's warmer, so we went to the where they keep the straw and the hay, where it's warmer.

Finally, with our bad luck, a Polish guy was hiding from the Ukrainians. He came there to hide, too, without the owners knowing. He kept it up. So finally, we saw him. He knew that we are afraid of him, even though he was hiding in a Jew, anyway, town.

And this went down like this. And over here, we hear the news already. At night, we heard the news the Russians are here. They are only a few miles away. How can you just survive these few--

So we heard the buildings were shaken. That's it. We are near-- we're near the liberation. And that woman changed her tune. She already talked nicer to us, And she did it.

But she once said, you know what? I'll do everything for you. But I don't want to see you killed on my property. Of course, these nationalists, to the last minute, were killing Jews.

What she did have, they used to make bricks. And the bricks, they make their ovens. They put the wet bricks in the baking, and they take them. So what happened one day, we slid ourselves into the ovens. And the dogs found us.

Finally, the woman came over. She saw us there. She said, out. We don't want you. I said, it's daytime. At night, we're going to go.

So she gave us something to eat. And she gave me to eat. And after I ate, I vomited everything out, because it was terrible. I was in that-- first of all, I was scared. What do I do when she starts baking these bricks there?

And finally, at night, it was the same thing. We had no place where to go. And we saw the end is near from the Germans. And it's only a matter of days-- a matter of days where we're going to start.

And on one day, on a Thursday, she knew that we are hiding already on top. And she told us she knew. She says, you know what? If the Russians come in, we want-- one thing I want from you. Say a good word for us, that we saved you.

When we heard her talk like that, we felt a relief there. I mean, I said-- what's her name? Was Genia, I don't know. I have my aunt left and lots of things by the-- in hiding. I'll bring you everything I'll give you after I'm liberated. I promised her everything. OK, everything.

But she wanted we should say a good word for her, which I probably would have, if it would have been a chance. Even though how bad she was, she still saved us. I mean, after all--

What happened? Did Russia come in?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We're getting to the end.

We're going to go over.

No, it won't go over. So I'm making this short, because this is not the whole thing.

So on a Friday morning, 29th we heard that the Russians are near our hometown. It's good. Fine. We still slept there on the thing. These murderers, the Ukrainian nationalists, they are still killing people and looking for Jewish people, to the very end people. So we were afraid to get ourselves to the hometown. We didn't know what to do.

In the morning, my partner man said, we are almost liberated. Let's go in the morning. We eat a meal like a human being to her.

I said, Pini, let's not go. He said, let's go. We came in, we found a murderer there inside, these guys. But the [INAUDIBLE] was, on account of her, because they knew each other so much, he had no-- he wouldn't do it on her place. He might bring later somebody over, or might wait somewhere else to catch us, but he wouldn't do on her property. I mean, they're neighbors. They live together, would do it.

And I started nagging him. See what you got me into? And it was our luck, actually.

And she said, you know what? I'll make you sandwiches. And yay, go. So she made us sandwiches.

So we have to go to the forest. And they say-- she told us that the hometown is liberated already. No, you have to come, too. Soldiers, you know, they are in a war. They have patrols which patrol. They shoot indiscriminately. They want to have the enemy answer the thing.

So we go into the forest, and these patrols are on horses, the Russian patrols. They're shooting all over. We go, we lay down. We go, we lay down in the straw. And then they take us as spies, too. Well, they don't know who we are.

Finally, we came over. He knew. We got into-- near my hometown about a kilometer, the outskirts. We come into the house. A woman there served us milk. She gives us milk. And there were boys which went to school with me together.

And a day before, they killed a couple of families. A day before they killed them from my hometown. And they saw us there. How lucky we were there. They could have taken us in into a stable there, or into where they could have killed us.

So she gave us to eat. I went with the fields. You know, if you look with the fields, you see a town. You figure, oh, it's close. But you start walking there, the more you walk, the further it gets.

And we came over to the hometown. The hometown, a woman comes out. That's how they were, these Ukrainians. Say, you Jews, what are you doing here? The Germans are here. We saw the Russians already-- how they were.

So I said, we don't care. Well, then he took me. He knew some people. We went into a house in his neighborhood to a Polish woman, and hanged her husband on barbed wire-- the Ukrainians, the Polish guy. And she was kneeling to their guards, prayers, saying every day killed them.

She saw us. She gave me to eat. I couldn't wash myself. I have worn one shirt for nine months. You should know that. You should know that when I put in my hand to that shirt, I didn't have to look too far, that I don't want to make you feel bad how dirty that shirt.

I have worn two pairs of pants. I don't know. These pants, I slept in them nine months, all the time. I was afraid, because I was a loser. Every time I was running away, I was losing something. So I didn't no more chances. So I had that shirt. That shirt was full of holes already, cleaning it.

And then she took me where a Russian soldier was. He took off my shirt. He took a look at my back, was full of scratches. And to the other. He applied some oil.

I was afraid to take a bath, because the woman wouldn't let me take a bath in the house, because I was too dirty with lice, with all the things. So wiped me off with something there.

And we're coming to the end very soon. I'm just helping, giving my sister here, and that's it. And what happened, standing near the window, I see somebody walking with a coat with one sleeve-- one sleeve. I said, it couldn't be a Gentile. It could only be a Jew would walk with one sleeve.

It was, from my hometown. I ran out to him. I spoke to the man. He didn't remember me, because he was an older man. And I asked him whether he knows if somebody is alive. I thought that nobody is alive. I figured I'm only one, me and him is alive.

He said, there's a woman and a child in this and this village. I started getting butterflies. I have heard that my sister and my aunt got out of the ghetto, and she was in a forest somewhere. And that I heard in the middle of the summer.

And I wanted to make some arrangement to bring them over to me. I could never arrange that. It was too complicated.

And it started, and I couldn't sleep already. I couldn't do. Maybe I'm so lucky that I have somebody

And on a Sunday, I saw a Polish guy. And I said to him, I'll give you whatever money I have, you go into that village. I was afraid to go, because on the roads, they were killing Jews. Just even the Russians were there, but the Ukrainians were still killing Jews. Nothing changed. They were killing Russians, too. So nothing changed. So I didn't want to go.

What did I do there? And my intuition, something, something was in me with the description. He didn't know who they are and what their names are, but he heard.

The next thing, they say that the Russians are pulling back. With all the luck, I'm just liberated, they say they're pulling back. So if we got already, I said, I'm not staying anymore here. I'm running with the Russians.

So we got outside of the town. I saw the village. I've never been in my life in that village, but I saw it. I saw the field, like I told you. I look at it. There were other people, too, which ran away. I don't know what I did. I don't know whether-

I said, I'm going to the village to look for my-- I don't know for whom I was looking, but I went. I was walking on the fields. I saw people frozen. These must have been the Polish people, which they killed the last minute, the Ukrainians.

I got into the village. I came in. I was afraid any place I'll go in, they'll kill me there. Here, I lived through all these things, and they were going to get killed. I don't know.

And I walked. I go from house to house. Did you see a woman with a child?

We didn't see Jews for two years. This says, three years, one year. I walk from barn-- from one house to the other, not a trace.

I come into one place. They say they heard four to six weeks ago, there was a woman with a child somewhere in that neighborhood. I go to the neighborhood. I go to the neighborhood. They heard about something, but they don't know where they are.

I start going. I got tired of it. I said, I'm giving up. I cannot go from house to house, everything.

I was downhill. I walked uphill. I come up, my sister noticed me through the window. There was my aunt and my sister.

And they took me right away. My aunt took a pair of scissors, cut all my hair off the head, because I was dirty, full of lice-- full of it. And I took her with me back to the town, because they said there was a false alarm, that the Russians are there. The next day or two, same alarm came. So already, we ran away together, and I found a cousin of mine, and we stayed over here.

This is already not that important, but important thing, I found my sister and my aunt. And she's here. She's here together.

Oh.

Yes. Well, it's a happy ending.

It sure is. What a story. OK.

