

--1983, and I am interviewing Moshe Kantorowicz at the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. And it's approximately 2 o'clock in the. Afternoon Mr. Kantorowicz what was your birth day, day of your birth?

February the 6th, 1923.

And where were you born?

I was born in a small town in Eastern Poland on the eternally changing borders of Poland and Russia, A town by the name of Shereshow, which is some 85 kilometers east of the city of Brzesc, or Brest-Litovsk, on the road to somewhere between Brest-Litovsk and Pinsk.

How big a city was this?

In my time, it was a small town of some 5,000 inhabitants divided into, I would say, three equal groups, one-third, Jews another third Russian church or Greek Orthodox, and another third Catholics. As far as I can-- as far as I know, as far as I could gather, the Jewish history of my hometown goes back 300 years, at least. In fact, in our-- history of my town goes-- the Jewish population some 100 or 150 years ago was much larger than it was, let's say, 50 years ago. There was a census taken in 1848 which had close to 4,000 Jews. I would say most likely that there must have been more Jews in my hometown than in all the United States at that time. But then, of course, that mass emigration took place in the late 19th century, and most of the Jews of my hometown moved to America, so to say.

You have quite a famous name, Kantorowicz. There are some very famous doctors by that name. Are they your mishpocha?

Surprisingly enough, I found out some four or five years ago in Israel that they do come from a small town, something like 30 kilometers from my hometown, by the name of Malech. And my grandfather comes from that same town. So the chances are that we must be somehow related. I did succeed in looking up the family tree, so to say. And thanks God there are records of it from my father's side, at least in Israel, dating back to 1845, which is very interesting.

Was there a well-developed Jewish community in your hometown?

Yes. We, in the mid-'20s, and in fact in 1925, there was a modern Hebrew school established. There were six synagogues, a ritual bath-- which is a--

A mikvah?

A mikvah. Of course, a cemetery. That goes without saying. In those years shortly before the war, there was what we used to call a [NON-ENGLISH], which was a charitable loan--

Free loan--

Free loan-- right-- society. In fact, a little bank that belonged to the community. They had a Jewish library that was founded. The money was raised penny by penny from the members of our community. And volunteer work was done. Of course, in those days it was very popular to buy books, and young boys, boys-- well, not my age, but a little bit older, used to buy them, because we were readers. That was the only entertainment that there was available, of course. So we used to read books.

And it was very fashionable to brag about being able to read all the books in our library, which consisted of 800 books. And the boys of my age, before they were 14 or 15, did do it.

Were there Zionist organizations?

Yes, there were. In fact, there were both spectrums of the Zionistic movement. There were the leftists, like the

Hashomer Hatzair, and there was that revisionistic Betar led by Jabotinsky--

Jabotinsky.

Jabotinsky's followers, right. Yes, there were. And contrary to the trend of Poland, which was-- which most of the cities had a third, so to say, the [NON-ENGLISH], which were considered as the Bund, which were-- there was none in my hometown where-- so every young person was a Zionist. Let's put it this way. Yep.

And did you had an opportunity to get schooling in your town?

Yes, that was-- I would say it was the pride of our town, the Hebrew school that was founded in 1925. Had seven grades. And as, well, for 14-year-old boys, when we went to school, we used to take pride in being able to converse in the evening without using a single Jewish word. The trick was to try and converse fully and express oneself fully in Hebrew, which was--

In fact, even now, when I go to Israel, the Israelis find it hard to believe that I'm not an Israeli. So I am bragging a little bit. So. [LAUGHS]

You learned all the secular subjects too?

Yes.

Mathematics.

Mathematics and geography. Science was in everything. Everything was taught in Hebrew, so that Hebrew was actually the language.

In my hometown, I wanted to grow up speaking at least three or four languages. At home, we spoke Yiddish. In the street, we spoke a sort of White Russian, because it was, actually, geographically-- well, the Russians claim, at least that it is part of White Russia.

In school we were speaking Hebrew and we were taught in Hebrew. And in the offices, like in the government offices, we had to speak Polish.

You had to know at least those languages.

Those languages we had to know, right.

And what sort of work did your father do?

My father was a war invalid. He was Tsarist soldier and had lost two fingers of his right hand. So it was a privilege to-- it was a sort of-- there were certain privileges that came with being a war invalid, and he had the permission to sell liquors-- real liquor. We had a little liquor store in my hometown.

And you had brothers, sisters.

Yes, we were a family of five. That is, I had an older sister and a younger brother and two younger sisters. My parents got married in 1920. In 1921, my sister was born, and I was born in '23. In '29 my brother was born, my sister in '31, and a sister in '33.

And they all continued going to Hebrew school. Mind you, we had some cheders. Familiar with the term? But it was-- we were sort of the--

Elite. Elite.

Elite. And we went to Hebrew school. And there were quite a few youngsters that do go to cheder. But in the last few years, it was in Poland compulsory to have a public education. It had recognized education. And those chadarim were not officially recognized as institutes of education. So they were forced to-- a lot of the Jewish kids were forced to enter.

If they couldn't afford it-- let's go back again. The Hebrew school was founded by the parents of these pupils. Our community was supporting. It was a public school. The government gave no subsidy whatever, while in the Polish school it was free education. So a lot of the children used to go to the Polish school in order to get the public education. They used to go to cheder in order to get a Jewish education.

My sister was older than I was. After finishing, graduating from elementary Hebrew school in my hometown, went to Pruzhany, which is 80 kilometers away, where there was a Hebrew gymnasium, which is a high school. And she graduated-- finished four grades, which was the equivalent of a-- well, the school had what's called an [NON-ENGLISH], a small matura. Matura is the matriculation. She got it in 1939.

I went to Brzesc, Brzesc nad Bugiem in Polish, to enter a trade school or an old trade school in Brest-Litovsk.

What sort of trade did you--

I have learned--

--learn?

--a locksmith. And I became-- in fact, I learned a bit of lathe operating.

Lathe, uh-huh.

And this sort of helped me in many ways to survive Auschwitz.

When the war broke out in 1939, was your community in the Russian zone or the German zone?

The war broke out on Friday morning in June and September, of course, the 1st. We had no government for about two weeks. The Polish government ran away, and that vacuum was eventually filled, to be exact, on the 17th of September. The Russian forces marched in town. The 18th-- I beg your pardon. They came into my hometown. And they remained until June the 1st, 1941.

When the Russians marched in, of course, the Jews felt relieved, because it was suddenly the better of the-- the lesser of the two evils. And then again, we really did not realize that-- what life was like in Russia. We sort of felt misled a bit. Being not exactly equal in Poland, we sort of felt as being the oppressed. And some, at least some people, I'm sure, were looking forward to be liberated by the Russians. The White Russian population sort of felt that their kinsmen are coming, and they certainly felt glad by the coming of the Russians.

When the Russians came in, we were-- my parents' home, my home, was one of the first, one of a dozen homes that were nationalized, or, rather, confiscated by the Russian government. Any house that was larger, had larger than 113 square meters was nationalized.

Of course, there was no reimbursement of any sort. I mean, there was nothing. You didn't get anything for it. It wasn't something like you got the reimbursement of some sort. They just took it-- took it away. They told us to move out, and we moved in with my grandparents, my father's parents. And we remained there until the very last day that the Russians left.

I went back to Brest-Litovsk school, and after a while, because of our social background, I was thrown out of school.

You were too capitalistic?

Too capitalistic, yes. My father was a merchant, and my grandfather was-- his name was Kopel. My father's name was Itzik. I should have mentioned it. He is a Isaac. My grandfather's name was Kopel. We was the mayor of my hometown during the Polish regime. And of course, that branded him as a Polish lackey or whatever you would call it. And we were sort of blacklisted.

And for this reason, I was thrown out. I was not allowed to come to Brest-Litovsk, which was written-- well, a certain zone of 100 kilometers from the border. Brest-Litovsk was on the border, the Russian-German border.

Were the Jews during the Russian occupation persecuted as such, as Jews, or was it on the basis of social--

At that time, no. At that time we-- in fact, we felt-- we felt reasonably free as Jews. What I suddenly learned-- and I was only a boy of 16-- I suddenly had to grow up to learn, to keep my mouth shut, which, even in the Polish-- we'll call it democracy, but it wasn't exactly a democracy, I did not-- I was still a minor, and I didn't have to be afraid to say anything. I wasn't listened to, but I didn't have to be afraid to say something.

And when the Russians came in, I suddenly realized that you got to really keep quiet. In fact, my younger brother and sisters were told in school to tell the teacher anything that they heard at home, anti-- that refer to anti-communistic or anti-Russian sentiments, whatever. Of course, the kids knew better. But to think that there were seven, or eight, or nine-year-old children, and we were told to literal squeal on their parents was in itself shocking.

We realized that you have to learn, because in order to survive, as-- well, reasonably a free person, by not-- by keeping your mouth shut. Simple as this. Not to criticize the government or any of the members of the Communist Party and so on and so forth. Just stay clear of them.

And I must say that the Jewish population did not, surprisingly did not, did not sign up. They put in motion a huge propaganda campaign for the Jewish children to join up with the Komsomol. The Komsomol is the Russian communist youth--

Young communist.

And I believe, if I recall correctly, only two Jewish girls signed up out of the whole town, while the non-Jewish population was much more willing to sign up to it. There wasn't--

They also asked for volunteers to later be enlisted into the militia, which is the police. And there wasn't a single Jew-- it was a local Jew, that is-- that belonged to-- that signed up to be a policeman, which is-- I think it's complimentary.

Of course, there was appeared right away the shortage of everything. That's usual, and the well-known and well-publicized way of life in Russia. But there was no hunger. I mean, there were-- the storekeepers had managed to hide their merchandise, their wares that they'd managed to trade and acquired among themselves and amongst the civilian-- what the population that the farmers who refused to join the kolkhozes, the collective farms. And they approached this-- there was a barter was very a very common affair in Russia.

And that became a way of life until-- some of course, there are a few kolkhozes around-- not in my own town of course, but in some-- in some villages, the Russians have succeeded of driving the farmers into a kolkhoz. But it wasn't-- I wouldn't call it a successful venture.

In your area.

In my area, yes. Most of the farmers still remained.

What happened is that some of the richer farmers-- and sadly, the Russians refer to them as kulaks; kulaks is a fist actually-- were arrested and deported to Siberia, the same what happen to most of the former Polish employees of my hometown, like the members of the police force, members. Anybody who was employed in the civilian administration

of my hometown during the Polish administration were deported to Siberia.

There was even one Jewish family that was deported because the son was sort of at a minor function in the Polish government. My grandfather and my grandmother certainly would have been deported, but due to their advanced age, I think, was the only reason. They were in their mid-70s, if not more. And sort of they figured that it's really not worth it. So they remained.

Did you have much contact-- as a young man, you're 16 years old, you're growing up-- with the gentile population? Did you have gentile friends?

Yes, I had a contact, but not as friends, I must say. After I finished four grades of Hebrew school, I am embarrassed to admit that even though I lived in Poland, my Polish as a language was very poor, because in Polish was only one hour a day in the Hebrew school. My father found it necessary to transfer me to the Polish school. And in return, I got a Hebrew teacher who used to come daily to my house to teach me Hebrew.

There, our class consisted of 45 students. There are two Jewish boys-- myself, and one I'll mention his name, because he perished. I don't even know where. Eisenstein was his name, which is Lazar. And we had only two Jewish boys.

I must admit that we were exposed to, quite often, antisemitic not only expressions or abuse, but even now and then a kick or a push or a shove or something like this. And somehow in the seventh grade, which was the graduation class, it eased up. I don't know the reason. That was in '37. Somehow we began to feel chummier. And even now, I'm trying to analyze what happened, what came up on those boys in my class, that somehow it ceased. The harassment ceased.

And after this, when I used to see those boys, I used to say, hello. But we really never, never played together, or never-- there were a couple which we were closer. One-- I don't know if he's alive or what happened to him-- had an exceptional talent for painting. And he used to come to my house, and I used to go to his. Sis was his name. It's not important. But the others, my friends, my immediate friends, were all Jewish boys.

And when the Germans invaded Russia, in June 22, 1941, they occupied your city rather quickly?

And the war started on a Sunday morning. They were warning us that there will be some military maneuvers of some sort around our city. That Saturday night, the lights did not go out in my hometown. Sunday morning, some people that traveled by horse and buggy to the nearest town, called Pruzhany, 80 kilometers away, and they were turning back. And within hours, we saw planes flying overhead. And then we took it for granted that they were Russian planes. I guess they were not.

In the late afternoon, suddenly we have seen the Russians that came as the civil administration, that they have established their offices in my hometown, whatever they were, the-- what do you call it-- the mayor and the others, the town functions and so on, and the police. They all gathered there, belongings, whatever they could, not too much, of course, and they got into a few trucks and they pulled away.

And I must say that we suddenly felt so abandoned. The depression, I can still see it. We were so sure that the Russians couldn't stand, because when they came in, they came in with such a military might that we have never dreamed could exist. Their tanks could be counted by the thousands. And suddenly, within a few hours, they should run like this, leaving their belongings behind, actually. They just took whatever they could carry with them on their backs. And they'd left us alone, of course.

Monday morning, they turned back for a couple of hours. They came into that headquarters of the Communist Party, and they opened up a safe. Took a blacksmith, in fact, a couple of blacksmiths to help them to break it up. And it seems like they couldn't open the safe. And they took whatever documents they needed. I don't know what. And they went away.

And Tuesday morning, about 11 o'clock, the first German military units came into my hometown. This was on a Tuesday morning. Not only the Jewish population, but even the Christian population was afraid to-- was afraid to

venture into the street.

They looked so forbidding, so strict, so we, as Jews, certainly feared very much their presence.

They must have had-- they had precise maps of our hometown, because in many minutes, they put their military positions in the most strategic-- well, if you can call it strategic points in my hometown. And in the late afternoon, the army started marching in, and they marched for three continuous weeks, day and night.

But the second day, as they marched in-- this is Tuesday. Wednesday, they rounded up some-- I'll-- trying to be precise, 21 and 17-- 38 men. They took them out at random from houses or caught in the street.

There were 17 Christians and 21 Jews. And they brought them in this town square, my town, which is shtetl, which was a famous [INAUDIBLE] shtetl. There was a city square and streets sort of--

Radiating.

--radiating in four directions from [INAUDIBLE] in this square. Our house was in the square. But we did not live in that house. We are still-- we remained in my grandparents' home.

And they came into the square. And just behind our house, we-- our house was right next to a synagogue. And behind it, there used to be an old synagogue, which was the pride-- must have been, once, of the whole area. I, in my life, I've never seen a nicer one or a larger one even now. It was built, according to the minister of my hometown, by a Polish king whose wife was by the name of Bona. It was in the 16th century or something.

Now the Russians in '39 and '40 destroyed that building. The building itself burned in the First World War. Our community didn't have enough money, couldn't raise, to--

Replace it.

Not replace it. The walls remained. The ceilings remained. Just the roof burned.

And in our last landslide from this New York send money, and there wasn't enough even to fix it up. So that money went partially to building, in 1925, to the [INAUDIBLE] of that Hebrew school.

But the Bolsheviks, when they came in in '39 razed that building. And they used the brick. And interestingly, it had a local paper in Brest-Litovsk wrote that there was a brick factory in my hometown, Shereshow, who opened up, where they are producing 20,000 brick a day. Those bricks were torn out of the walls of this huge synagogue.

Now right in this triangle, in the back of our house, and in between that other synagogue, which I said was next door to us in the back, was that huge synagogue [INAUDIBLE], the rubble of that synagogue. They dug a hole. And those 40 men dug the hole, and they were shot right there and buried.

And they, of course, they couldn't really-- they couldn't tell who is a Jew and who not, because in my hometown, we Jews were dressing like the Christian population there. We didn't grow beards until over-- in older-- in advanced age, or the side payos. So the Germans couldn't really tell.

And they told the others that those Jews that buried, the machine gunned ones, that you go around and tell the Jews to bring in all the weapons that you have. Otherwise, you'll all be killed. And they did.

Of course, we had no weapons. It was just a [? label, ?] really, a German. Of course, we didn't sleep nights, fearing any moment that those Germans would come and round us up. But they did not.

And that marched where my hometown was for three weeks eventually was ceased. And we went back to our home, in my home town--

In the square.

--the square. But we came in. And the Germans had established an Ortskommandantur like a police.

Now our house was a very big one. They took the front part of the house, and they let us stay in the back part of the house, back section. That was the military government. There were half a dozen soldiers, and that was it.

We just were told that we had to do, perform all kinds of work. There was no work to be done, really, because it was a small town, a small town. There was nothing there. So we used to go as gangs of laborers to go on the high road and fix the potholes that the German tanks and artilleries tore out. They used to take us to the woods to cut wood, which nobody needed, just to do something.

But not far from us, we are-- there the famous forest, supposedly the largest forest in Central Europe, Bialowieza. The city of Bialowieza, which used to be known in the Tsarists' times, when the Tsarists used to come and do a lot of hunting, they'd put a beautiful palace there. When the Polish government established in 1918, Pilsudski and his friends used to come and do some hunting. And in 1938, the Polish government has invited even Goring. and Himmler, and Goebbels, all this elite, the German elite came to do hunting in that forest.

Now in that Bialowieza, in that small town, the Germans had set, made a headquarters of the Gestapo and the gendarmerie. Those gendarmes used to come to my hometown every couple of days. Just at random they pick a house or two, ransack it, take whatever they wanted. Or sometimes they used to come and try and ring-- round up all the Jewish population in the middle of the square, and make us crawl and roll in the dirt.

I remember, the rabbi, they put under the pump and poured water over him. All kinds of--

Humiliation.

--humiliation, threat. And many times we used to manage to run away before they came. But my mother and the kids remained. I and my father used to-- we were afraid more for the men than the women and children, for some reason.

In fact, my second youngest sister, Sarah-- we used to call her Sonja-- who once stood in front of my mother. She says, Mommy, let me stay in front of you. When they'll shoot, they'll kill me. They won't kill you.

She was, at that time it was '41. She was exactly 10 years of age. No, she was nine of age. She was, in '31, that's 40. Yeah, 10 years of age. That'll give you an idea of what it was like.

And that continued till September the 24th at night. At the evening of September the 24th, we have heard a car pulling up in front of our house. This is only a-- still only a single-story house. And we heard-- we could hear even the footsteps. We could hear if somebody spoke loud over through the wall, where the Germans had their own Kommandatura. You could hear if somebody spoke loud.

And we heard them telling the Germans that we want all the Jews out of here tomorrow morning, because [INAUDIBLE] the Germans called the Judenrat-- the Judenrat, like, established a few prominent Jewish members. And they rounded them up. And they told the Judenrat to go and tell all the Jews tomorrow that every able-bodied man from 16 to 50 should show up tomorrow at 5:00 in the morning with a shovel or an ax. You're going to work. 5:00 in the morning due to the order.

We all able-bodied men. I was there too, and my father, of course. We all showed up in the city square. [SIGHS] Germans were all around us. They told us, go back to your homes, bring your women and children. Tell them to take food for two days, and only take what you can carry with you.

We went back to our homes. We took whatever we could, a knapsack, a suitcase. We sort of expect that it won't come-- we coming back home, so I put on two suits. And it was September the 25th. It was still fairly warm. I took a heavy

winter coat. I put on.

And when we came, they rounded us up again, and they told-- they took the men apart, and they marched us out, out of the square. And at the corner, they said to drop all the shovels or all the axes. They took about 10 men. They told them to keep the shovels. And we marched out. And they left behind the women and children.

And we marched right through the city, which was the main street, which was the Jewish street. And the end of it was the Christians, the farmers lived out there. They coming out. Even a Christian didn't dare look in the window. It was such a depressing moment. The fear was hanging everywhere.

And they marched us all the day. And that day was a warm, very warm day. And we perspired an awful lot. And a lot of men couldn't-- they were men over the age of 50, even, they couldn't march.

There were a few men that were lame, or crippled, or something, just by birth or something. They were picked out, the first ones that are shot. As they were picked out, we were told to sit down. And those men that carried-- they determined to carry shovels, were told to dig a hole, and we buried them.

That continued all day. By early afternoon, we passed the town of Pruzhany. It was 80 kilometers. And we stopped there. And my father had a sister, a married sister, and a sister and a married brother there. But we were not permitted to talk to them. We were just resting there for a little while. And we marched on farther.

With later in the afternoon, trucks passed us by. We were not supposed to-- we were told to sit down and not to look back. But we heard the women and children screaming from the buses. We knew they recognized us. And they were taken farther down the road.

That continued all day until about 7:00 in the evening. What happened is that those people that were digging the graves were very tired. While we were resting-- while they were digging, we were resting. So what they did is once they told them to run back in the line, they used to drop the shovels. And somebody else was told to pick up the shovel.

Just about 7:00 in the afternoon-- it was maybe 6:30. I don't know. It was still daylight. Somebody dropped a shovel right in front of me, and a German told me to pick it up.

And I carried the shovel, of course. And they marched us into a farm unit by itself. It wasn't a village. Just a single farm in the field. And they took six of us-- not the whole 10-- and they told us to dig a grave.

And I didn't hear any shooting. And I was wondering, what are they digging the grave for. And for some reason, sort of, that the Germans all around us. And it was hot. I was wearing two suits and the heavy coat. And I could feel the perspiration going right through my coat.

[AUDIO OUT]

--the Germans lined out about a half a mile ahead of us. And they told us to run. And of course the blows kept coming all the time. Whoever fell, you used to put them aside and they used to shoot them. Or somebody used to get a blow, and it started bleeding, so they used to go through the lines and see if somebody is bleeding. Used to pick them out and they used to shoot them.

And he was, as I said, he was a handsome, strong, very strong fellow. And he had got a blow right on the side of his head. And the side was bleeding. So the German waved him out and says, OK, you go over there. Like [INAUDIBLE] the bleeding and head bleeding.

But he wasn't about to give up. And it was-- we were right in the middle of, like, fields all around the road. Instead of running over there, I started running by the side. And I start running away. The German raised the rifle and shot and missed. And he kept on running. Of course, a few Germans joined him up. They start firing. And within a few seconds, a dozen Germans kept firing after him, and we all sort of-- we are not supposed to look, but couldn't. They were too



busy firing at him.

So we looked around. I saw him fall. The Germans put their rifles down. I remember they put their rifles down. And he jump up--

And run again.

--and run again. And he was running in the direction of the forest. And the forest was no more than half a mile away, or maybe a kilometer away. They started firing again, and he fell again. And that, did it for three times he fooled them. And eventually he run into the forest. And this I saw.

The [INAUDIBLE] told you before we started, and it was true. If somebody ran away, was shot 25 men.

I missed one thing. As we were running, I was thinking about my father. I wasn't concerned about myself. I was only 18 years of age. I could run. But my father was already a man of 48. 49, just about. 48, 49. And I was concerned about him.

As we were running, I saw people stumbling one over the other like a pile of people sort of. And it must have been a feeling I had. And as I came towards the group, I looked down. And sure enough, my father was just about on the very bottom.

I don't know where I got that strength. I just stopped, and pushed everybody aside, and grabbed my father, took his arm over my shoulder and I ran with him.

And as I ran, of course, I couldn't avoid the blows. And I took it as a blow in the side of my head. But it wasn't bad enough. I didn't bleed.

And as we sit, I could hear the Germans coming closer to us. They were picking 25 men from-- starting from the back. And I was afraid. They were not-- I must-- I say this much. They were not picking young people. They were picking the older ones. And I was very much afraid that they'll pick my father.

Well, they had their norm of 25 before they got to me, to my father. They told us to dig the graves, to dig a grave. And they put five in. They shot them. And told five to lie alive on the five, shot again. And that's how they filled up 25 bodies.

As they finished this job, the officer speaks up, says, Judenrat, like this, the elderly to come out. And my father says to me, well, now they're going to finish up the Judenrats too.

The few men came out, of course, petrified. Didn't know what's going to be.

He says, which of you can read a map? There was-- one of them was a doctor. The doctor says, I can. He says, OK. Look, he says, you are-- I don't know exactly, but we could hear him. And he was certainly talking in a low voice, says, you are here. This is the town of Antopol, which is only 7, 8 kilometers away. You go there, and you'll find your women and children.

And would you believe it, he shook hands with a Jew, with the doctor. As he said it, there was one man. A young man. I know his first name was Moche. I don't remember his second name. He fainted. And as a farmer drove by with a wagon, he stopped the farmer. He says, you take this man, turn around, and take this men to Antopol. If not, you're going to be shot.

The paradox, it is so hard to imagine. It is so hard to understand what we went through, what's happening to us. The men, sure enough, turned around in a wagon, and then took us in Antopol. And we started walking out by ourselves. And my father looked back. He says, watch out, they'll put the machine guns and they'll opened fire.

They didn't. They had bicycles. We, like the younger boys of our group, helped carry those-- didn't ride the bicycle, but

just pushed those bicycle for them. They took the bicycles, sat on the bicycles, and pedaled away.

And we came. It was dark already. It must have been late. It was about 10 o'clock till we got to the city of Antopol.

There was fear in the town. Nobody was allowed in the dark. So we got into a farmer's barn. And we hidden there with the morning. We came out in the street. We started looking for Jewish [INAUDIBLE]. Of course, it could recognize the farmers also, most of it straw and shattered roofs.

We came to Jewish homes and we asked about the Jews. They said, don't ask. There were Germans here yesterday, and they took 200 men away from here. And everybody was petrified.

But they knew that they brought from my hometown, from Shereshow, women and children. And there were two synagogues, one next to the other. He says, you go there and you'll find your families. Sure enough, they came into our-- families, my mother and my sister and my brother were there.

Of course, 100 men exactly were shot in these two days. You can imagine the wives and the children of those men, mostly married fathers, husbands were shot, that the reunions, or rather, the lack of reunions.

Within half an hour we were told, the local police, well, they called the Ukrainian police, came. And they said, there's no room for you here. Go on farther east.

We didn't get a chance to rest up. We didn't get a chance to have a meal or anything. And we just driven on farther.

It was a warm day again, and we were thirsty. And the farmers were-- not the farmers. Each farmer-- the farmers were along the road, like all the way. And the farmers would not permit us to touch their wells. The police went ahead and told them not to let the Jews get any water.

Got to keep in mind, there were infants and children and babies and everything else, and old people. And the whole town of 1,500 souls was marching on the road without food, without water. And there wasn't anybody who could help.

But after we passed about 10 or 12 kilometers, the population began to let us at least get water. Somehow, the police did not go any farther. They just went so far. They wanted to make sure that we keep on going. And at least we could get enough water.

That night the population spent under an open sky. We just sat all night. And the following day we just picked up again and went.

And there is a town called Drohiczyn Poleski, which is past Antopol, east towards Pinsk. We came into Poland. I must say to the population, first of all, the population did not suffer yet from the Germans. It seems there was a-- the Russian word for it is pop, which is a Greek Orthodox priest.

Patriarch.

Patriarch, right. And he was a very nice man. And he intervened on behalf of the Jewish population. And the Germans have not-- until then, have not touched them.

And they, out of compassion, of course, and out of whatever the reason, they have taken us in. Every family in the town took in a family of my hometown. And I'm sorry that I don't even remember the name of the family that took us in and make us comfortable. And we stayed there just for Erev Rosh ha-Shanah. And we stayed there for Rosh ha-Shanah. And we stayed for the [NON-ENGLISH] of Sukkot.

Now some 18 or 20 kilometers north of the region, Poleski, there's a town called Chomsk. And there are towns that go parallel to the Drohiczyn Poleski to Yanov and Pinsk. Those towns, Chomsk, Motele, and [NON-ENGLISH] go parallel some kilometers north of this to due east. Motele is the birthplace of Weizmann, the first president of Israel, Chaim

Weizmann.

In Chomsk, the Jewish population was slaughtered already three months earlier. There wasn't a single Jew. The population was something like my hometown. We are told that Jews can go there. There is the empty Jewish homes. And there are some gardens where there are still the potatoes that the Jews have left. And we can come there and stay there at least for the time being.

And something like 80 families from my hometown, from Shereshow, that were in Drohiczyn, were picked up and we came to Chomsk. And we picked a Jewish home.

How can one describe to walk into a dead town? The non-Jewish population was there. They looked at us like one looks at a cat or a dog, or even less than this, because some people have compassion. There was no compassion. There was such an indifference.

I don't know. You can't-- you can't describe it. Something like you say, well, OK, hang around for a while. It's only a matter of days. And it all began, too.

We came into that house. There was no furniture. All there was is an old building in the back full with wood that the men, the family, at the head of their family, they must have prepared for the winter.

And there was a garden in the back. And sure enough, there were potatoes in the garden. Everything else was already taken away. Like the non-Jewish population must have taken it away.

There was some hay in the stable in the back. So we took the hay, and we spread on that one room in the floor, and that was our bed we all slept on. And we had to-- all we had with us is just the clothing that we had on our backs.

We stayed in Chomsk eating potatoes three times a day. The difference of the menu was in the morning it was potatoes with peels. For lunch, it was potato soup. At night, it was plain, dried potatoes. Or the men used to change around in circles.

We did not know from day to day, in the mornings we were all of us up and listening for a sound, if the Germans are not surrounding again now in the area, so we should try and run or something. We were expecting the town of Pruzhany, which was the larger town next to my hometown, Shereshow, 18 kilometers away, where my father had his brother and sister married to be driven out to.

But we heard that instead the Germans have made a Judenstadt, a Jewish city, a complete city. They have, in fact, driven out certain streets cleared out of Christians. And they have taken in Jews from the surrounding towns of Bialowieza. I mentioned about this forest's name. Tuisi-- sorry-- Bialowieza. And [NON-ENGLISH] was a large wood industrial center. Bereza, Kamenets Litovsk, and a few more. And they brought over 5,000 Jews from Bialystok in that ghetto Pruzhany.

And it seems that Pruzhany was supposed to be a permanent place of residence, a sort of a permanent ghetto. And we started talking about going to Pruzhany, seeing it's closer to home, whatever it meant, and that we have at least somebody there.

And in order to make sure, my father and I set out, first of all, to see what the situation is Pruzhany, what people are saying. Now a Jew was not allowed to be anywhere but in the place of his habitat. For this matter of us, it was Chomsk or anywhere else. To go out of the town, or to be caught on the road was a crime punishable by death.

But we decided to go. There was no future, because we realized that there isn't enough potatoes even for us to survive the winter. And there was nothing to do. There was no work. There was nothing, really, no future.

So my father and I set out. We left behind our mother, my mother, all my three sisters, and my brother. We went. We came. We had to go through a small town, Malech, where my grandfather comes from, my grandfather of my father's

side. And my father had the two cousins there, because this was very--

Family home.

Family home, right. And the one-- their name was Nisselbaum, because it was a sister, like cousins. And he was, for the Polish government, he was the orderly of that small town of Malech.

And he remained in good terms with the chief of police. The chief of police ran away in '39 when the Bolsheviks came, but in '41 came back. And we came back, the chief of police of the town under the German rule. But they remained on good terms with my father's cousin, that Nisselbaum, Isaiah Nisselbaum.

We came to that town two days later. We marched through. And of course, having a cousin there, we-- my father said, we'll stay here overnight.

And at night, in my father's cousin's home, to visit him came the chief of police, who, of course, wasn't a Jew. He was a gentile. And he introduces us, the chief of police's chief. This is my cousin, Kantorowicz [PERSONAL NAME], and he tells him the story. Fine.

Anyway, in the morning we set out. And we had to cross. Now the Germans have somehow, that Malech, and all the southern parts in the region, and Antopol cities we came, now included into Ukraine, the northern, east, of us, like Pruzhany, my hometown. They put it into East Prussia. So there was a kind of a border.

Now that's the border-- the border line was a railway track. It's a lot to tell. We ran into a house on the border, and they had a lot of women, gentlemen wanted us out. And there was a German right in front of the house just passing by.

And a young woman of no more than 20 or 22 had a fight with the mother. She said, no, she says, they are not going to them out because they're going to be shot. Stay in. They are both fighting, and the woman is screaming, and the other German just passing by in front of the house.

Anyway, we went on. I don't know what miracles happened. We had no choice. The woman was going to scream.

We walked out behind that German, no more than 10 yards. He was no more than 10 yards ahead of us. He never turned back. We went up from the side streets, and we went straight through the railway tracks. Just sure a miracle.

Anyway, we came to the ghetto, Pruzhany and went to my other brother and sister. And well, they said, look, there's no future for you there. Whatever it will be with us will be with you too coming.

So we stayed in Pruzhany a few days, and we started on our way back. We started our way back. We came back to Malech.

My father had a distant relative there. I don't-- it was a baker. And for some reason, we decided to stay there overnight. As [INAUDIBLE] not more than 5:00 in the morning, or maybe before this, we suddenly hear shouts and firing. We jumped out. And while there, we saw that the Jewish population running back and forth. The Germans have surrounded the town.

We already knew what to expect. There was no time to [INAUDIBLE]. We got this fast, and we ran out. You can see now the rabbi of the town running no more than 50 yards or 75 yards ahead of us with somebody else.

And I remember I saw one which I knew. Her name was Goldberg. And she run-- she was no more than 100 yards to the right ahead of us.

And I can see her now. She was shot, got a bullet. And she went. We had not only the Germans but the local police fired at everyone who tried to run away. We did not get hit. We run.

And we came late in the afternoon. I remember, we got there. And we saw a farm. And we got behind the farm. There was a well. And we started drinking the water.

And I noticed two Germans walking on the road. And I didn't want to tell my father. I didn't want to scare him. I didn't want him to see the Germans. So I stuck my head in the pail of water and I pretended I'm drinking. [INAUDIBLE] how much do you drink? Will you stop?

Anyway, after I realized the Germans already have passed it, I stop drinking. I tell my father, you see.

And we walked out. And we came to the village. I remember the village was Minki. The name of the village was Minki. We came in there. And we asked the local population there, do you know anything what happened in Malech? And they said, we don't-- we know only that the Germans are there, and they are killing. We don't know what.

Anyway, we waited a couple of hours. And some of the local people went out to find out. And they came back. And we went to the elderly of the village. He says, look, he says, they are killing some of us people and some of you, but mostly you. Some of us people is they are already robbing, already breaking the Jewish shops and taking. So the Germans were shooting at them too.

They gave us permission to stay in that village overnight, which we did. And in the morning, we set out, back to Chomsk, where my mother and sisters and brothers were there.

As we approach about-- in the late afternoon the following day, they approach Chomsk, 5 kilometers, a few children run out from a house on the road and say, hey, Jews, why are you going to Chomsk for? The Germans are there. They've killed everybody.

My God, what do you do? I mean, in those days you don't take things-- you take them for-- yeah, you're running from Malech and here you were coming to Chomsk. They tell you that-- my mother is there, my sisters, my brother. 5 kilometers from the village, from town, they tell me that the Germans, they are killing everybody.

We start to think in a-- we see for a distance there are farmers' wagons coming along, like a horse and buggy coming. And a distinguished-looking elderly man sits in there. And he says, gentlemen, he called us gentlemen, not, hey, Jews. Where are you going to stay?

Look, we don't know where we are going. We are from Shereshow. Tell him the story. We are going to Chomsk. And there is these young people tell us that there is a slaughter taking place right now.

And he says, no he says, I am an elderly of that village way back. He says, I would have known. Nothing is taking place there. He said, don't worry. You get in the wagon and come with me to Chomsk. Don't be afraid. Nothing will happen to you.

We got in the wagon. And he turned out to be such a nice man. And so much so much sympathy. An elderly man he must have been, an elderly. He was my age, 60.

We came in Chomsk. And sure, there was nothing. The kids just [INAUDIBLE] Jews.

We came there, and we stayed. My father says, well, let us finish the potatoes, because there was no ration to get in Pruzhany, either. We didn't know what to expect there.

We stayed till the 21st of December in '41. We waited. It was cold and winter and snow. Now that was in '41. My youngest sister was then eight years of age. [INAUDIBLE] eight years. The second one was 10, and my brother was 12, and my older sister was [INAUDIBLE].

And they set out on the road with no permit-- Jews are being caught on the road, they are killed-- in the snow, in the storm, walking with the clothes that we had on our back. Nothing. Absolutely nothing to our name. Not even food.

Nothing.

And we walked. And we used to come into the houses along on the road on the farms to warm up. And the farmers kept begging my mother, leave those kids with us? Why are you taking them?

You're going to Pruzhany. You know what's going to be there. Sooner or later you're the Germans are going to come and kill them too. Let them-- they will live, at least. They'll be our kids.

Everyone said, what do you do, my mother says. What shall I do? How can you leave kids behind knowing you'll never see them again? We wouldn't leave them. Of course, my mother wouldn't. And I don't blame her. I don't think I would.

And we came. One day, we slept in a farmhouse. The second day we came to Malech, the same town which we ran on the way out there. We come into the town. We had no choice. You took-- either you'll make it to Pruzhany or you'll be shot on the road. There's just no place. It's cold, winter, with kids.

The police stops us. Jews, good. That's exactly what they were waiting for, to take us in the police station.

From the police station, of course, we were very much afraid. Of course, we knew it's there. We walk in there. The chief of police [INAUDIBLE].

Oh, he says, Missis Pani Kantorowicz, Mister Kantorowicz. He shakes hands with my father, the policeman thought he was dead. He couldn't get over it so suddenly.

My father says, look, I want to go. I'm going to Pruzhany. And I would like to stay here overnight. Oh, no trouble at all. They put us in two homes of the local people.

One we knew from before, and one of stranger with the police chief. He says, keep them. So they kept us. In the morning even they give us breakfast.

On that day, in the late afternoon, we crossed that border, that railway track. And in the same day, in the late afternoon, in the winter, in the cold, we managed to smuggle in to ghetto Pruzhany.

Came in Pruzhany, and we went to the Judenrat. We were assigned living quarters, one room. And we shared a kitchen with another family from Bialystok, with other refugees.

Then I had to go to work every day. We used to get a certain ration. I'm not going to say it was comfortable, but we were not starving. The family was generous, of course, to us too.

The winter of-- we came Christmas Eve to the ghetto Pruzhany. I started going to work. At work, there was no pay for it. But we had to, everybody needed to go out to the ghetto. We went to work.

And I remember in the early summer they took us-- I'm trying to remember which [INAUDIBLE]. Just early summer, they took us. The Russians have left behind, unexploded, thousands of thousands of bombs some 8 or 10 kilometers away from Pruzhany. We used to go to work there and collect those bombs. And the German Air Force men, we used to blow it up.

And then I got a job in the [INAUDIBLE] in Pruzhany. There are six of us. The job was to peel potatoes, chop wood, and pump water into the kitchen continuous all day long. We used to get whatever the soldiers did not eat. So sometimes it used to be a filling meal. It was good. Whatever was leftover.

We used to manage to get some vegetables to take in the ghetto. Sometimes managed to get some wood. At least wood we could take in a knapsack that we were allowed to carry. If the police at the entrance to the ghetto didn't take it away from us. It was a help.

In my work, even though it was without pay, it was this much reward that I used to manage sometimes to bring in even a loaf of bread.

Surprisingly enough, I might-- I'll admit that those Germans, the [GERMAN], the soldiers there, the Wehrmacht, if they steal a loaf of bread or sometimes-- anything they didn't really need, they used to throw it our way.

The Germans used to get us salt cod sometimes. They used to soak it in water and then cook it. And they didn't eat it. So we did-- let us take this into the ghetto. And it helped somehow.

There were still some towns left around Pruzhany. There was a little railway station 12 kilometers away by the name of [NON-ENGLISH]. There were other towns.

But slowly, but surely, those towns were annihilated one by one. We eventually realized that we have remained in our land, that region that was so nice to us when we first came from Antopol, and saw to it, that we should have a place where to go to, it was divided into two ghettos. That was the German policy, of ghetto A and B. And then ghetto B used to be liquidated first, and the ghetto A afterwards.

I don't know if-- I don't want should go into the whole story of the life of the ghetto itself, that-- but I'll say this much. There was a lot of bitter feelings of-- expressed by many communities about the Judenrat in their ghettos. I for one have only praise, as far as the ghetto Pruzhany and the Judenrat of Pruzhany goes. If at all, if it ever was possible to save a Jew, those members of the Judenrat in Pruzhany, they are best, they done as best to save a single life.

There was a time that they had to send out 500 members of the ghetto just to be for an exercise. The Germans wanted to, I suppose, to take us somewhere, or shoot or whatever. For three continuous days, they attempted, and helped, and eventually succeeded in bribing the Germans. And those 500 Jews were never-- have never left that ghetto.

And the ghetto as such, except for a few exceptional events, exceptional facts that some Jews were caught smuggling individuals, or some of his former non-Jewish or even maybe a Jewish neighbor had a grudge against somebody, and brought it to the attention of the Germans, claiming that he's a communist, or supports communists, or something like this, there were no executions, no mass executions of any sort in that ghetto until the very end.

But before I go to the very end, I would also like to mention that there were-- we were in the forests of White Russia. And there were a lot of partisans. And the Jews in ghetto made contact with those partisans and some organizing groups, and they went into the forests.

Their big job was, of course, to procure arms. We used to go and chop wood in a former-- near a former Russian airbase that the Russians had built in 1939 and '40. There were a lot of magazines. Some of the magazines held weapons. Some of the magazines held parts of machinery and everything else.

Those weapons were collected after the Russian army withdrew, and they left it on the battlefields or whatever. Some of it were intact. Some of them had broken stocks.

We tried to get it out, and we organized a group, the group, the six of us that worked there belonged to that group, that eventually had to-- it was our task to get those weapons out. And we did manage to get them out through the magazine and hid them in the lumber down there on the-- which is the lumber.

There is a man who is still alive who worked for the mayor of the city of Pruzhany, not the Jewish part of the ghetto, but the outside part, who was-- used to-- the Burgermeister was a German, a member of the--

Volksdeutsche?

No, no. He was a real German from Germany. And he sort of had the job with him. He got from him a permit to get some wood exactly where we were working. A sled was made. And I want to mention those names. A sled was made by a name called Herschel Morawski, who is alive now in New York-- he retired to Florida-- with a double bottom. He

came to us.

And the name of the man to pull that sled was a Hermann, Shmuel Hermann. I mention those names because I think they deserve to be mentioned. The Shmuel Hermann came to us.

The German that walked with him out of the ghetto went in to speak to the Germans inside the watch house, the guard house. We opened up the bottom. We pulled rifles in, covered it, put timber on it. He harnessed himself into the sled, and with that German, went to the gate of the ghetto.

Of course, if this German came with a Jew, the Germans would not-- the other, the guard of that ghetto would not dare to look in the sled. And they let him in.

Now there was a man in the ghetto Pruzhany who came from Bialystok. He was a carpenter. I'm sorry, I don't know his name. He made the stocks for the rifles. And the group managed to get out.

I got to go back a second. On the 27th of January 1943, we, the group that were trying to go out of the ghetto, trying to procure the weapons, had a meeting in Pruzhany on [NON-ENGLISH] Street. The Judenrat was then in the house of my uncle, Leibel Pinski. We had the meeting right across the street.

And it was after 8:00-- after 8:00 at night. We were not allowed to work in the ghetto after 8:00. And as we-- the meeting finished already. It was after 8:00. And as we were going out of the house, in the back of the yard, we heard a car pull up in front of the ghetto.

And I remember the words I had-- a German said, [GERMAN]. Keep watch. And within a minute or two we heard shots.

We found out later that, as the Germans, whoever they were, marched and walked into the ghetto, they found two Jewish partisans speaking to the members of the Judenrat. Precisely there are different conflicting stories. Some say that the Judenrat were talking to them because they had connections with the partisans. Some say they came to ask the Judenrat for supplies.

Whatever it happened, those partisans run away. But the Germans opened fire, and they killed the guard, which was not a guard. It was a watchman, actually, in the ghetto-- in the Judenrat office. And two members of the Judenrat were wounded.

And the Germans said, if you do not bring us those partisans by midnight, all the ghetto will be evacuated. Before midnight, yet, the Germans said, forget it about bringing them back. Of course, the German-- those partisans run right out of the ghetto-- the ghetto wasn't so thoroughly guarded-- through the fence.

And by tomorrow morning, 2,500 Jews have to leave the ghetto. Anyway, what they issued is an order to evacuate the ghetto. Now the ghetto had 10,000 people in it.

Now the conflicting story is that some say that because of this event, that they found the partisans, the ghetto was evacuated. Others say it's impossible, because when the farmers came in the morning with the sleds to take us, they already were told a day before to be in the ghetto. So for just a coincident that the Germans have found a couple of partisans in the [PLACE NAME].

To make it short, the ghetto was divided into four parts. And every day, commencing with the 28th of January, 2,500 Jews left the ghetto. We were taken to the railway station, Leniowo, or Raticchi-- it had two names-- 12 kilometers away. We were packed in cattle cars--