

So we were already in the woods with the Russians.

And the kombat, what I made him the ovens, they let us stay with them. And they bought food for us and everything. And we stayed with them. And every time they took in somebody from us to them to help them, and they gave him a rifle, and he became a partisan.

And we lived in the woods. But we feel free man already, you know. We feel more safe.

What year was this, Irving? What year?

This was in '43.

'43?

This was in '43, yeah. And I had a relative, a boy 14 years old. So the Russians, they liked him because he was a handy boy, and very lively. And they took him as a partisan, 14 years old. So they took him in. They gave him a machine gun. He taught him and everything, and he was good.

But one day, they gave him a rifle. And they went to make a zadanie. That means they have to make some kind of wait during the night, somewhere to blow up a train or something. So he went with them. On the way back they stopped by the farmers to eat something. So they went into the house. They went in the house and he put his rifle away on the side. But the Russians, this rifle you're not supposed to let it go. And you have to hold it with you always. He put it down, and the rifle fall down, and shoot out. And hit somebody in the house in the family, and killed somebody.

So the commandeer took him out outside and killed him right away there in the place. And that was-- did we notice nothing?

When every time they took in from our people to being a partisan, we had a little bridge there on our place where we used to pass by. We used to say always a little note you'll put on when you go past there, somewhere what you're doing. Put in a little note. We'll know what's going on with you. So they used to leave us a little note. We used to pick it up and see that then we know the story of what happened to this boy.

And we were living like this with the rest until this was while we were in the woods, in the woods, and we used to go out and steal food and beg food and everything. We are on the Russian side. And this was in the summer.

In the summer, a beautiful day, nighttime we stole the potatoes. And in the morning we baked them. And we divided everybody a big one, a small one. Nobody should have less or more. We used to make a soup. We didn't have no spoons nothing. We used to give a sip, and give it this one, like this all around. Nobody should cheat each other. And this is way we have to live.

And this day, and then one day, we're baking the potatoes, and we undressed altogether in the woods. In 1943, when the Germans started to go back already, the Russians chased them back. And they had to pass by the woods. So the partisans put a bomb somewhere on the road. And when they passed by with the truck, the truck blew up with the Germans. So the rest of the Germans started to run into the woods and they looked for the partisans.

So they find us, because we were sitting there. While we were sitting there and eating a potato, we hard, [? sty, ?] [? sty, ?] [? sty. ?] [NON-ENGLISH]. Shooting, and we peeked up, and there was an open field, and there was the woods. I run in the woods. Always with the woods, because when they shoot in the woods it's hard to hit because the trees. And a few people went out in the outset in the woods. There was a dump with water or something. And there the things where they're biting the blood. How you call them?

Mosquitoes? No, the leeches, no in the water.

Oh, leeches.

Leeches, leeches. So two sisters went out with her husband to go there, and they was faster than me, and he couldn't go. So the Germans shot him. They shot him and they went in, in the water they were sitting there with the leeches all day. They said the blood was sucking out from them. They couldn't take it. But they had to stay there. And they was alive. And the next day-- yeah, and this woman what I told you, she was there with a kid, one woman with a kid, was at that time out of the field too. But she didn't have what to do.

So she put a kid down, and she laid on top of the kid and the Germans passed by. They thought she's dead. And she's in America today, and the daughter is married. So I can never forget. She saved the kid and she's alive.

So and this woman, next day she buried her husband with her, there in the sand. She moved away the sand, and she buried her husband. She's in Israel, the woman. And now she's old, and she became paralyzed. She's in a hospital. She with a sister. And this was, he was an educated man, an accountant. He was a fine man. And he was shot. Later, she brought him home to bury him from the woods. After the war, after.

And then every time we find somebody else in the woods, a Jew walking around somewhere. So come with us. So we were together already. But finally, we was there with the Russians, with the partisans. Without them, we wouldn't be through because they helped us a lot. But this was they took in a few people to them, and they gave us food, and they gave clothing. They went and robbed everything, and they brought it in the woods. And we had it.

Only because I did for them. I forgot to tell you before something. There was a lady on the Polish side, when she was there. A woman, she was pregnant. And she gave birth in the snow in a stable. There was, I was there and a couple of people were there. I says, we have to go in, into the farmer and ask what can you do. We never saw. What can we do? He says when the baby comes out he says, you have to cut the cord. You have to cut.

So I had my rusted shears from the sheet metal. I cut that cord. But the baby froze to death. They had to bury the baby there in the woods.

[CRYING]

Everything comes up. Everything with what you saw it, what you remember. And then by the end, already the Russians was pushing the Germans in, and while we were in the woods. So because the Germans couldn't go through no more the woods. Because they put bombs and mines and this. And the partisan-- with not the partisans, the Russians will never win. The Germans couldn't deliver to the front no more anything, only by aeroplanes. And by aeroplanes, they shot them down too.

But in this, the partisans helped them. So when the front moved, then we saw, we find one day we find out that we are near the front, where the Russian trenches are. We're in the woods. But outside the woods, the trenches where the Russians are already, and the soldiers fighting the Germans. So one day, a soldier saw us all there in the woods there. And he told his commandeer, the Russians. And this commandeer was a Jew too.

He told him. There is people, the Jewish there. So he came over, and this was a little town, Krasnostav. That's the name of this Russian town. And he says, you can go out. You can go in, in this town. And any house you see people living, just go in and live there with them. He says, they should feed you and give you everything. So we went out. We were 25 people at that time. And we went in the houses.

The next day he comes in and he says to us, you're going to have a trial tomorrow. We have a trial. What happened is this. When the Germans came in there, they took out the Jewish people and they killed them. But there was a Gentile, a Ukrainian, and he says to the Germans, he knows where three Jewish people hide. They should give him a rifle, and he's going to bring them. So he went there. He knew where they were hiding. They're hiding somewhere. So he went there. He threw one down in a fence, and he was hanging off the fence. And one he shot it, and one he beat to the Germans he brought him, and they killed him there.

So somebody reported to the Russians. So they said they're going to make a trial, and they want us to be in that trial to see what they do. They didn't call him, he killed the Jewish people. They just say he killed Russian citizens. In other words, they didn't mention Jewish. They said Russian citizens.

And there is a hall, like here the convention hall. The Russians have in every town there was a big hall for meetings. So they went and they chased out from their all the houses the kids and the people, the families, they should be there for this trial. Everybody has to go out there. And here, they should have a lesson that they're not going ignore us. This is what they did.

And they chased out. And the guy admitted everything what he did. And when he admitted, the prosecutor said he's going to be hanged. They built in the middle of the town in the main city where we have to go through a lot of cars, they built a clear--

A scaffold?

A scaffold to hang him, hang there. When we finished, they says to us, we have to go out there, stay for it. They want us to see that because he lost his wife to the commandeer. He was Jewish. He lost his wife and kids too. So he want us to stay there and see. So we ran out there. He was standing on a little chair and the rope on his neck. And the prosecutor had a speech and they put a sign on him that he helped the Germans to kill the Russian citizens. And that's what happened to him that everybody should remember this.

And then he took out his this and he aimed, and he remained there a couple of weeks there because everybody who passed by the trucks should read the sign and should look at that's what the Russians did. And from then, we moved into Zhytomyr. Till this time took from 1943 all year till 1944 in January. When we came into Zhytomyr, a city of Zhytomyr. And we came in there in the woods. And there was written in the street, whoever comes out from the woods should go and register for recruiting, to go in the army.

You don't want to go out when you come out [INAUDIBLE] go in the army, because the war was still going on in Poland, you know, later on. So I came out in Zhytomyr. So I went in, the Russians there was Jewish people there, a good feeling. The people, the government is no good, but the people itself they share with you everything, the people. They were good.

So we came into Zhytomyr, and we started to look on. If somebody says they had-- some of them had permission to hire you, and to hold you there to work for him. But you cannot go in the army. They won't take you in the army. So you find a place, but he fooled us. Because he would have taken us to the army anyway.

So we had to leave them, and go look for another place. So we find a place where [INAUDIBLE] for an army place. Army place, we came into the general. And he was Jewish, and told him we're from the woods and they are Jews. He was wonderful. He says, I'll call up this, the recruit place and ask them if they're going to take you, he says. In two weeks, if they're not taking you, they're not going to take you, he says. Because I'll tell them I have work for you.

Me, I was nobody because my friend is no mechanic. I was a mechanic they had work for me right away. So here, I says he's going to be my helper. So I took him my helper. He is in Israel. And he give us a place. But they still say they may take us away. So some other good Jew in the army, Russian in Rovno, another city, 30 people he didn't want them to go in the army. So he sent them in this place where we were there. That's there they're going to make sure that they're not going to going to work there.

So when they came this Jew general says to us, me and my friend, we should go with them, and say we forget that we were there once. Just we should go in there with them together and say we just came with this whole bunch, with a group. The other kitah is no more, he says. And our Aaron Balman is no more. But this is a new group in Rovno. We came in with them.

We went through everything again, and he had assurance that we can stay there and work. So we worked there. this was that we were free already. But the Russians, you don't make a living with what they're paying you. They give you so

much food and this.

So there was a lot of houses burned down. We were 25 people together. And nobody is what to wear, and the Russians don't help you by coming out like in America or somewhere. There was no organizations like this. So what they do? I send them to bring some metal, what burned down the houses with the metal there. And I made up things from this metal.

And some days there are market where they're selling. I send them out and they sold it. And we had food for everybody. We lived in one room there. And then we heard that who lived in the site in 1939 in the Polish Ukraine when it was Poland can register, go out to Poland.

So I took a chance and I went to Rovno. And there was the main office. And I registered myself, and I register everybody. And I find out the day when the transport goes out. We all picked up in the jobs. We didn't tell the Russians. They're still looking for us. Because if I go in there, I never want to go there. Because they still have the name. You cannot go there. They remember all their lives.

So we picked up ourselves and went into Rovno. So like this, I came into Rovno to the main guy, what he has a transfer station to send out the transports, his office. I know Friday goes a transport. And they say, there is not going to go no more transport. Only this one, the last transport for a while. And I want to get out, because we escaped from there. They catch us, they put us to Siberia.

So I go into him and I say, listen, what can I do for you? I am sheet metal worker. I can do for you eight days I'll work for you, I says, if you do me in two minutes what I'll ask you to do. He says, what do you want me to do? I said, I'll wait for you all week. But you do me on Friday with this transport, I want to go out with many people, with this group that I got with me. He says, I need a pail, of washing, a pail. And I need a pail of water what you're carrying.

And my wife lives in this hotel in Rovno, he says. If you bring up this and this, I says, I'm going to make it. But I didn't have to make it. Because the Ukrainian robbed the people with the stores, they had a lot of things like this selling in the market. So I went out and bought a pail and brought him this, and I went into this place with wife. And I gave it. I said her husband send it to give it to you. She called him up. And I came up to him and he gave me the paper on Friday. I took all the 30 people. We went into the train. We went out to Poland. And to Hel, Poland. The city is Hel.

And from there, we went to Lublin. And there was a house already. At that time I saw already the people coming from the concentration camps. They were sick and this.

This is 1945 already?

This is 1945, yeah. 1945 in March I left Russia. 1945, yeah.

When did you leave Poland? When did you leave Poland?

Poland was this. I came to Poland. So I had to look for-- I didn't want to get out from Poland. I wanted to get out but I didn't know how to do it. But my friend what is in Israel, he was a big Zionist home in that time. When he came out with me to Poland, he find right away the organization for the Zionist. They took him out to work with them, the Haganah. And then there are organizations where they send out people out from Poland, [NON-ENGLISH] So I came to Poland, and they sent me out from there with another couple of people from my town.

They send me out. From there we went to Czechoslovakia. And with Czechoslovakia, we went to Hungaria. And Hungaria, we was about six months there. From Hungaria, we went to Austria. And in Austria this was in June, almost the end of June, 1945.

What zone were you in, in Austria? What zone in Austria.

I was--

Was it Russian zone or American?

The Russians, the Russians.

The Russian zone.

The Russian zone. We had to prepare. We came into Russia. And every border that you passed, we used to pass, we had to give the Russians a watch. Every man, everyone has to give him a watch, a lady's watch or our men's watch. During the night, the soldiers let you through. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to get through.

So we went. And this was in the Russian side. And there we was a couple of days. And from Italy, came already at that time was the [NON-ENGLISH]. These Jewish soldiers came from there with trucks during the night. And they packed us in the trucks and took us to Italia, to Italy. In Italy, they took us away right away they know somewhere where it's warm. And there I was about 2 and 1/2 years. And I came to America from Italy.

So I wanted to go to Israel, not to America. But the thing is this. There were so many people wanted to go to Israel. Everybody wants to go to Israel. Escape from Europe, but not everybody, they couldn't take. In the meantime I find here family in America, an aunt, my aunt, my mother's sister. So I let them know that I'm the only one alive. She sent me the papers. And I by this lady with a kid that I told you in the woods, I helped her from there, I helped them get out from Poland and all over till Italy. And from Italy I helped them even to pay for their ticket to come to America.

Did you work in Italy? Did you work there? I worked in the magazine, where they're giving out the food for the people. There was an Englishman, what he took care of in England, English manager. So a lot of people was making [NON-ENGLISH]. You know? But I didn't want to do that. I'm not so handy to this, to do it. I was afraid always maybe I'll be killed and nobody knows where my body is. So I looked for a job there, and I worked.

I had to put up some people in the camp in Italy, with this who wanted dry food, he cooked for himself. Or not, you get to the kitchen, or else you can go to the kitchen, one kitchen. And they cook. So I worked in that magazine, and give up the food.

And you met your wife in the United States?

Yeah, yeah. She's from Czechoslovakia.

And you have a family?

I have two kids, also they're healthy and very good kids.

Yeah. My son was here yesterday, maybe today too. My son is a lawyer. He works in Washington here.

Oh well, that's nice.

For the government he works.

Yeah.

And I have a daughter. She's a lawyer too. She's in New York.

Very nice.

She's in New York. She works in a corporation. She's a corporation lawyer. But my son is the urban development. He works for the housing, housing and urban development, Yeah, HUD.

Yes, HUD.

Yeah, he works there.

It's very nice your son came with you too.

Yeah, he was here. Yeah. Yeah, he was here yesterday too. He was yesterday by the shuls. He came to your shul. He's staying by the [NON-ENGLISH]. He is single. He's not married. He's alone. He's still single. And the girl is still single. They don't want to rush to marry. I don't know why.

Same with me. I have three not married. They're working here today.

Right.

My daughters and my sons. I have two lawyer sons who are lawyers too.

Yeah.

My daughter's a lawyer and my son is a lawyer.

Irving, is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

I have nothing whatever, what I came here today--

You told us quite a story.

When I came to America, I had a very hard time in America. This is different story. But I came to America, was no job.

Where did you come, to New York?

I came to Coney Island in New York, Coney Island. My aunt.

When I was in Italy I had when I worked, I had a couple of dollars saved up. So I figured I go to America, I'll buy a couple presents for the family what I go stay there. So I bought her a present. And my cousin got married at that time. So I bought her a present, a tablecloth. So whatever I got, I had \$100, how much, I spend it for them the presents. When I came here, I figured the family will help me.

But this was not so. When I came here, I saw there was no jobs. And if I worked a job \$1 an hour they paid.

What year was this was in 1948. I came here in 1948 on 11, February. And then I worked. I find a job, another job, and then I paid my aunt \$15 a week to stay in the house. She just gave me a little army cut in the middle of the living room. And that was my room to sleep. There no room there. Because they didn't have no room. And no help, nobody gave me any money.

Yeah, once came to me an aunt from the Bronx, my father's sister. I figured now she's going to help me something, a sister. She's in American so many years. So she says just to talk to me in the [INAUDIBLE]. Because there was a lot of sisters and other brothers, big families. In Europe was very big families. So she was here. I tell her all the stories. And then she makes money up like this, rolls up, and goes to me and puts me there in my pocket like this. I can never forget it.

So I figure now maybe I got some money already. So I go outside on the side. I think I'll take a take at look how much she gave me. Four single dollars. So this is not finished. So the cousin got married. I brought you a tablecloth for \$25 in Italy. She gave me a present \$5. So I had \$9. And then another cousin gave me a present \$3. So I had \$12. That's all. So in one day, in a Saturday or Sunday in Coney Island is a boardwalk.

So we go for a walk with my cousin, what she gave me the \$3. And she goes in. She says she has to pay a bill, the telephone. And she goes in and comes out and says, I forgot my checkbook. I haven't got the checkbook with me. Irving, do you have any money? I said, I got \$12. I can give you the \$12, if you want it. She says, that's what I need. So I took the \$12 and gave her. She never gave me back. I never asked her for it back, and I never got it back.

And then when, little by little, I worked and saved up money.

Did you work with sheet metal?

Sheet metal, yeah. I worked. When I saved up already, \$100, my aunt says to me. You don't go around in in New York money in pocket. You have to give it to us. And whenever you need money, we'll give you. I said, no, no. She's rest in peace, she's dead already. I said, what are you kids doing with the money where they're working? She says, they're saving in a bank.

I said, why can't I save in a bank? Why do I have to give it to you? I'll give it to you, and I'll ask you for a couple dollars? So she didn't want to talk to me no more. So I went. And an old friend was here, a sheet metal. He used to be my boss in Europe. So he got married. He was a single boy. He got married for a girl when he was here, before the war. So I went into him. And he took me to a bank and made me a book, helped me make, because I didn't speak English yet, and made me a book. And I put in there \$100 at that time. And I saved.

And then, little by little, I worked. And I took a job for Saturday to work in a restaurant and Sunday. And all week I worked sheet metal work. And when I learned the trade, the roofs, make roofs a little, so I worked all the week. And on Saturday and Sunday I stayed in Coney Island to make roofs. And I started to save up some money. I knew I have to get married. Nobody will help me. And I started to save up. So I saved up.

I saved up to buy a ring for my wife and to make a wedding, to buy the furniture. And then I saved up a couple of dollars and I bought a house. And I started to work and I worked. And then I came in. I went in, in the union. The union took me in. So the union I made more money than with private. And I started making-- the boss liked me. They always paid me over the scale. Always they got me over the scale.

And the union wages was high wages, but they paid me more always because they know I made a good day's work. And this is the way I worked up. And I saved and I saved. And then when the kids became bigger, they finished high school, they want to go to college, that's a lot of money. So my wife went to work. So she helped me. So we both together, we sent them to good colleges, and we send them to law school. And they became lawyers.

It's a real story, a very successful ending to that tragic beginnings.

Yeah.

Things were hard.

OK. Thank you very much.

You're very welcome. I'm sorry I was crying, because I couldn't help it.