

April 12th. We are interviewing Mr. Michael Klein. Could you begin by giving me your full name? My full name is Michael Klein-- K-L-E-- K-L-E-I-N.

Where and when were you born?

I was born in Czechoslovakia during the-- by the end of the First World War in June the 8th, 1917.

Do you have the name of the town in which you were born?

Yes, it was called Strazowiec and [PLACE NAME] because it did belong one to Austria. Now it's called Strazovice okres [CZECH] in Czechoslovakia.

What was your mother's maiden name?

My mother's maiden name was Milstein.

OK. Has your name been changed?

No.

Your name has not been changed.

The same.

Would you like to discuss your early childhood experiences before the war, the time where you were taken into captivity, how you managed to survive, or your liberation.

At that time or before?

Would you like to describe your early childhood experiences?

Well, my early childhood was-- start then since about the age of 12. I began my, in fact, my bar mitzvah at the yeshiva, Yeshiva Vizhnitz. The yeshiva in Europe was called the higher, not like here. Here is any-- cheder. We called it cheder there, a school, a public Jewish school, what we are here Hebrew school, they call it here yeshiva. We called yeshiva, people who are going to study Gemara, which is the higher--

What did your yeshiva look like? Could you describe it for me?

Well, it was, like, big. It was also the temple over there. Boys was sitting at tables and studying. Every day we had there the part which to study. We are sitting at tables and study. Some were learning day and night.

There were some we had to-- we had to take him away to go to eat. He wouldn't go on to even eat. They was starving there in that yeshiva. And that was Vizhnitzer rav, he was the son of the big Vizhnitzer rabbi. And his name was called [NON-ENGLISH], rav [NON-ENGLISH].

And he was like a father to all the children. He didn't have any children himself. He was married. Didn't have no children. He used to say, these are my children. And they really seen to it. He used to go all over the world making speeches to get-- to make money to be able to sustain it.

Do you have any memories of your grandparents?

Yes, very nice. From my mother's side, my-- well, from my father's side, I knew only my grandmother. My grandfather had passed away. But from my mother's side, which they were living in another town, I used to go and stay with them.

So I had very nice memories.

My grandfather always used to come home from yeshiva. He also was learned. So he used to-- how do you call it? Not interview, or try to see how good I was.

Quiz you.

Quiz you. Yeah, that's right. Quiz me about what I was studying. And also, from the holidays, the prayers, always to sing with me, and teach me now.

When you had a Passover service, a Pesach--

Yes.

--did the whole family get together?

Oh, sure. And that was really a-- thinking now how it's here, it was kind of like a really a-- how to say it? A--

Simcha?

A simcha, but a simcha is something kind of like in the memory it stays. And also, I think a lot about my mother, how she could-- we were six children. And the grandmother was living with us. How she could manage everything, to cook and wash, wash and bake and do everything.

Did you keep kosher?

Very kosher. Strictly kosher.

OK. So you had extra dishes?

Right. Oh, we had three-- we had, first of all, we had fleishig, milchig, and then parve. And then, for Passover, was separate. Was put away after Passover, washed and cleaned and put away. Next year, taken out and washed again.

Were you the youngest child?

No, in fact, I was the oldest one. I was the oldest of the children.

OK. Could you tell me some more about special, sort of special foods that you remember, or close friends that you remember, that you remember from this time that--

Well, close friend to one, which was he got away from there before the war, and he lived in Canada. We went to the yeshiva together, to school together. He was a year older than me, by the name Isaac Katz. But he is not anymore here. He passed away a couple years ago in Montreal.

Were there any--

Nice memories.

Sorry.

Go ahead.

Were there any antisemitic incidents that occurred to you when you were young that you remember?

Well, yes, there were. In Romania we had-- they were called the Cuzist group, Cuza. And that was a group. And then there were the Iron Guards. Iron Guard. And they were a antisemitic group.

One incident I recall from that town where my grandparents are, I went to yeshiva only for two years. And I used to go-- then I was trying to make money. So I was a teacher in that place that's called Kosnowiec. So there, at one time, that Cuza group became kind of a active. And they were going around beating up Jews and breaking windows.

But one incident that one of the guys which I knew-- I knew there was that-- the people in that town. They kind of respected me because even I was younger. I was teaching young children. But the way I taught the children, how to behave and how to greet and all that. So they can't-- even the teachers from the public school, they always tried to talk to me and all that.

So this one particular guy, I saw him with a group of hooligans going. So I didn't know what to do. Should I greet him or should I not? So I was going on the other side on the street where they were walking.

He came over to me. And he said-- they called me there Michal. How come you are-- he said, we are still friends? I said, how can you be my friend? You are in that group.

He said, in fact I am the leader of the group. But he said if it wouldn't be me, it would be someone else who might be worse. So that's, I mean, that incident. And I remember about the antisemitic.

We had-- I mean, the Jewish people in Romania, in our home, were kind of not too-- couldn't get ahead of anything, like to go to colleges. That was very hard. You had to really only-- to be very rich to be able to afford it. And also, in the military, no officers or so, Jewish officers. I think it was kind of a antisemitic country, but we still did get along all right up to the war.

OK. Can you tell me about the events leading up to the actual moment of your capture?

Right. It's not a capture. I would have to go back since 1940. 1940, when Russians and Germans, they became allies at the beginning of the war, and they start kind of like dividing between themselves part of Poland. Some Germans were in one part. The Russians were in the other.

In that part where I come it was called Bukovina The Russians occupied it. So we were occupied. I don't understand how under the Russians it was. At the beginning they promised all kind of things. And then we saw everything was just plain lies.

And most of the-- some of the rich people who could, first they run away. The middle class here, some they went and took them away into Siberia. They just came at night and hauled them away.

So they were for about a year, they had occupied Bukovina. And then, when Germany and Russia got into war, saw the Russians were driven out of there. And here again, Germans marched through. And here, at this time, the Romanians and the Germans became allies.

So during there when the Russians were there, there was the Romanian officials, they all ran away to Romania. And this part where the Russians are. After the Russians got out, the Romanians still came back. Matter of fact, the same officials. We didn't have police. We had gendarmes there. So they came back.

But until some officials came, military, it was kind of like nobody's land. So at that time, they formed some kind of a hooligan group. They called themselves the militia. And they were going around playing, shooting people.

So to start, it was on a Friday in '41. They shot some Jewish people, mostly who had stores or something like that.

And then that leader of them, riding around with a horse and saying that there's not going to be any more shooting. We should stay at home. Everything will belong to the government. It's going to be taken away from us. And we are going

to be sent away to a ghetto, to a place somewhere.

So because before that, we were hiding in the fields when the shooting was going on. And my father was-- he was ill before, so he went to hide at another Jewish person, a Jewish friend there. On the way going there, he was wounded in the thigh. So while we were in the field-- I cannot recall exactly how I found out that he was laying wounded somewhere. I went and brought him home on a wheelbarrow.

And then we stayed at home. And it was turned Sunday. Monday was quiet.

On Tuesday, I saw two guys, and one of them was a school colleague of mine, with rifles. They came into the house and came to me. He knew me, he said, Michael, you have a pistol. Give it to me. I never had one, I said. I never had one, and I don't have one.

Anyway, he took-- I had a watch. He took it away from me. And then they left.

About less than an hour, I saw him come in again. But again, they were going to come in, maybe plunder or do something. They came into the house and just start shooting. And we were in the kitchen. Our kitchen was kind of like dining room, a living room all together. So he came in and start shooting.

And I, I don't for what reason, something came to my mind. I should make-- lay there. I just fell down on the floor. And at once I felt something hit me, and I got wet. I felt it's probably blood. I thought, well, am I shot? Am I dead? But I don't feel no pain or anything.

And I heard them go out of that room. Between that room and our bedroom was our basement. So you can hear the walking over the basement. I mean--

And when they were in there, I kind of turned around, and I said, well, I'm alive. And when I saw what it was, that my sister was laying on top of me. And without getting up even, I just turned.

And I-- I had the youngest brother, the name [NON-ENGLISH]. He was screaming. He was shot at that time, wounded, and he was screaming in pain.

So I said, [NON-ENGLISH], in Yiddish [NON-ENGLISH] You understand Yiddish? So--

But people don't know.

I'd better say-- I told my little brother, be quiet, because they are still in the other room.

And here I heard them coming back. So I played again, quiet. And then they heard him scream. And they said, one more little Jew is still alive. And they finished him off. And they shot him again.

How many of your family were killed in this?

In the house at that time, my father was killed. He was laying in bed, because he was wounded, and my brother. So he was shot. My mother was right on the floor, laying near me. My sister Gitel, from the age of 14, and that little brother, which I just mentioned. And also a little girl at the age of my younger brother from my neighbor, also a relative, was shot in our house too.

And what was her name her name was-- I don't remember exactly, no. And my sister's name was Gitela. She was.

Then, when I got-- when they-- I heard him get out of the house, and I stood up, and one of the brothers, he is the-- was the fourth one, was staying right in a corner of the house, and scared. And he said, oh, they are not dead. They are not real bullets. Something like he was all kind-- and he didn't remember if he was lying down or they didn't see him in the corner standing.

So I said, let's get away from the house, without even checking. I just looked around, and I saw the people dead. And I didn't get out through the front door. I got out through a little window which was facing-- that was kind of small town. It was kind of like we had cattle, cows. And that was facing the-- what do you call-- the barn.

So I crawled out through that little window, and my brother also. I said, let's go and hide. So I was-- we had a walnut tree right over the house. I climbed up. And he wanted to go to get up there too and hide in the tree, big leaves.

So he couldn't get up. I said, you go run in the-- we had corn and wheat at that time, high. It was during the time that all the-- was in the fields everything. So he went and hid there. And later on it quiet down, I went, climbed down. I went in through the door and checked again. I saw--

In fact, I looked at my father. I thought he was alive. His eyes were open. And then I looked. I saw he was shot in the heart. I just closed his eyes, and that's all.

And I took some two little bread-- not bread. How you call it-- the rolls, in my pocket. And took a coat. And took also my mother's jewelry, which was hidden. There was the double-- in the basement, we had a double-- what do you call it?

Cellar.

Cellar. Had it hidden, and took. Put on my little back like that, and went out and called my brother. And I said, let's go. I thought, where can we go? We're going to hide at some Christian which my father did a lot of good things for him. I thought he'll hide until we found out what we should do next.

So then we came. He was away from the main road and so on. When we came over there, he saw us to go, just go, go. I'm afraid for myself. Just go. I cannot let you even in the house. So we had left from there.

In our minds, we thought maybe we can get somewhere to the Russian front, that maybe the Russians are still holding back the Germans with the Romanians there. And there, and then if I go there, where my grandmother-- my grandfather, who is from my mother's side, had passed away before, just a year or two before that. My grandmother was living there, and they were kind of loved in that little town.

My grandfather was once mayor, there but twice, he was elected mayor. So that's kind of distance, I would say, in miles, about 25, 30, miles distance from there. So we walked.

It was an afternoon, Tuesday. We walked, and it started raining. It was raining there at that time, continuously, for about two days. And on the way, we had to walk and hide so nobody can see us. On the way, a guy saw us, so I kind of walked right to him, you know? Instead I'm showing that I'm afraid of him. So he was kind of afraid of me. I had my hands in my pockets and a leather coat.

So I said, what happened here with the Jewish people here in this town? He said, they are all gathered up with skole. Skole means, can has two meanings. It can mean the Jewish temple, or it can mean the public school and what called scholar. I didn't ask him which one, but I just thought to myself, if they are gathered up, it's not good here anymore. So I kept on going.

And I just watched to see him that he watched me like I want to go off the road to the right. As soon as he was out of sight, I just turned the other way, went over across the street, and went to the left.

And I went through little towns. And one place I was hiding, it was raining. I crawled up on an attic from also from a cattle. We crawled up there. There was a ladder that. But you can take away and pull the ladder up with us. And we stayed there during the day because there were people working in the fields.

And then later on, we went down. And we finally, we reached that [PLACE NAME]. And it's on a Thursday morning. We walked Tuesday night and Wednesday. Wednesday, during the day, we were hiding. So Wednesday night, we

walked

Early in the morning, we got to that [PLACE NAME]. And that was a village, also, not on a main road. And I came down and I got to the first Jewish home, by the name, a guy named Shloime Shpirer. It was a very Orthodox, used to be the reader of the Torah in the temple.

I reached their house, and I looked in the window. It was locked. I looked in the window, I saw the Sabbath, the Sabbath candlelight, the candelabra on the table that it's Thursday, the candelabra. So they must be away from the home, already, since Saturday.

I walked across the street, was another Jewish home. The same thing. So I thought, well, it's dangerous here, but I'll go and see about my grandmother. I'm sure she must be on the way, even yeah, my brother was with me.

Can you say your brother's name for one second?

Alte Mendel.

OK.

And while I was walking through fields, it was early morning. One of the Gentile people, they had their outhouses outside. So when he was going to the outhouse, and then he saw us. He just kind of like almost he wanted to scream.

He said, here, there are no Jewish people here. They're all dead. All shot. All killed here, in that [PLACE NAME], in that little town [PLACE NAME].

I said my grandmother, too? He said, yes. So I saw here there is the end of the-- I don't know where else to go. So I asked him is there a Gentile, he was a good friend of mine, by the name Genik Kobylanski. Is he away with the Russian army? He said, no, he is home. I said, would you please go and call me. No, he said. You want to go, go by yourself.

So I went back, and I had my little brother hiding in the bushes. And I went there. When I came in, they really start crying and screaming when they saw me. And he said he had a Jewish girl as a girlfriend. He said, he told me that all that he couldn't even save her. He tried to save her. He couldn't do nothing.

He said but there are no more shooting now. I say the best thing, he said, would be if you go by yourself and kind of give yourself up. I said, would you come with me? He said, yes.

So he went with me there. But before I went, he said, do you have with you any money or jewelry? Better leave it with me, because they search you and take it away. So I thought he is right. So I took and left everything. He even wanted that leather coat I had. So I gave him the leather coat, and he gave me a short one.

So we came to that-- it was before that, the place was the post office and the [INAUDIBLE] made their for their militia. And there, I found out how the Jewish people, probably that would be good to record, how the Jewish people in that town were all shot. Some of them, which were hidden, Gentile people had, they went to hide. They all gave them out.

And they gathered them all up, first at the Jewish temple there. Then they took them out of town, near a relative, by the name of Sruel Axelrod. They were, some people say they were digging a big ditch. I heard it a little different at that time. There were trenches which the Russians had dug trenches there.

So they put them all up near the trenches, and they called up a patrol from another little town, which was called [PLACE NAME] with machine guns. And they shot them.

So you just gave yourself up.

So there, I gave myself up. And then I wound up, they took me to a ghetto. Then they made a ghetto at Storojinet. And

there we were for a little while, and they-- I'll skip a lot of things because it's too much.

No, no, please, tell me.

Well, it so happened at that [NON-ENGLISH], the next day, in fact, in the morning, the later one, the leader of that band, she was the one, the murderer. And he came and they saw us. They took us, they put us in, was like a, what do you call it, a basement or something? Outdoor, they had, which they keep in wintertime a--

Storage cellar.

A cellar, storage storage cellar. And he locked, the lieutenant was just one guard there. They locked us up over there. And then that, we call the chief, the leader of that band, when he came, and he knew me.

And he opened up the cellar, and he said, why did you have to put him there? Then he came by on his own. He wouldn't run away. And he kind of like, he had, he became a heart. He had given some water to wash up because we looked so dirty.

And then he took us to a place that was the public school. They were gathering up, from the Jewish homes, all kinds of things. And they had a party. When we came in, I saw those tables still with food standing. They had a big party there that they made.

And told the cook there to give us something to eat, and so we ate. And he took his back. Then came the real, the gendarme, the chief of the gendarmerie, the military guy, from [PLACE NAME], he also knew me. And he said, oh, that happened. He said, if I would have been here, I wouldn't have allowed it to happen. He said all those people, the Romanians kind of they had a heart. They were not mean. They didn't serve the soldiers for them. So he said from the other little town, from [PLACE NAME], relatives of ours, the [PERSONAL NAME] husband of the lady, the neighbor Axelrod, also.

In fact, what I want also in that [PLACE NAME], was my relative, by the name Milstein, Bernstein, and Axelrod, were relatives. There were many of them. So she was the only one and one or two children alive. And so they were there. And another guy, which was shot, all his family and his wife, he was running around begging to be shot. But they didn't shoot him, and he was alive.

So from there then, next day, they took us to that Storojinet. And there, they separated the women and the men separate. And it was in a place where there was a temple there, they made lager, what they call it.

And we were there for about two or three months. So at the beginning, we were there. And then they made kind of like a ghetto. The commandant, the Romanian, the major, was really kind like a friend to the Jews.

Did you ever have to go on a train to a camp?

Yes, well, then after a while, they made a ghetto. And they let us kind of about one hour a day, go to do some shopping. Then after what he said he can't do no more. He has to send us all away. So they send us away to a camp on a cattle train.

And he was nice. He said take everything you have with you and so on. You can have it. Then we got there to that camp, a place was called [PLACE NAME]. There, they gathered us, and it was barbed wires. When we came, we were outside of the barbed wires. He said we should have to give up everything what we have, money or jewelry or materials or papers, the doctors, doctors or attorneys, their diplomas, their certification, everything.

And he said that-- I mentioned the name that was from the Romanian bank, by the name Mihailescu. He was dressed up and going around with a stick in his hand and he said, like a speech to us. Don't you think you can hide something from us. A lady just before, a Jewish woman, he said, hid some ring or a diamond in her hair. And we found it, and we shot her for that. Scary. If it was true or not, I don't know.

And he hit some people. And then after that we were cleaned out everything, we got in into the place where there were others already, in the barbed wires. I still even at that time tried kind of safe. So we were--

By the way, I forgot a very interesting thing too. So I was away with my brother there, with my one. Two days later, they brought in from that city where I come from, [PLACE NAME], some Jewish people who survived. And between them was an uncle of mine.

While I was in the court of that, it was a temple, like I mentioned before, cooking and to bring something for me and for my brother. When the uncle came and he saw me, he start crying and screaming. Like, I couldn't understand, like he sees a ghost for himself.

I said Uncle Yossel, what is it? He said Shimshon said that you were dead because you were not in the house. And he saw a pool of blood on that little window. I said, Shimshon? I left him for dead in the house. He was shot over his shoulder. I thought it's the heart, but he was shot and the bullet was stuck.

I said, where is he? He said, they had to put him down. They had to bring him. Most of them, they walk. But some of the children in the [INAUDIBLE], they had put him on a horse and buggy. And then they brought him into the city Strazov, it was a lot like the capital of that part of Bukovina. So they put them down on a sidewalk. They said he's going to be taken to a hospital.

So even we had a big fence around. It was a wooden fence. I broke through, and I went into that city, I mean, into the downtown and found the hospital. And when I came into the hospital, the first I saw another fellow from this town. He was also shot in the thigh, [NON-ENGLISH]. And then he saw me. He said, don't go to Shimshon right away. He'll die.

He'll die.

When he sees you because he's very ill. He said, let me go in first and prepare him that I'm alive. Because he thought I was dead. So he went, really--

And did you see Shimson?

Not that I see him, only the later one, in that hospital, they kind of helped him. And then they made, in the ghetto, they made kind of like a, not a hospital but an infirmary. And there were Jewish doctors, and they took the bullet out there, which was lodged. And he survived it. He survived with us.

And I went back. Now I'm going back to that they send us to the Ukraine. But first at [NON-ENGLISH], where they cleaned us out. So we were three of us now, the two brothers and me.

Yeah, his name, that brother, which he was wounded, his name was Shimshon. So I kind of had told him, you go in first to that, it was a checkpoint that they took everything. And then you were on the other side, and you stay still, over night. Under the fence, I'll give you some, we had bread and we had some things.

I had jewelry, I think, what I mentioned. In fact, before we left, I baked in some of the jewelry in the bread. Baked it in baked bread and put the jewelry in there. So I pushed it through under the fence to him inside.

And then from there, they took us to the Ukraine. It's that at that time was called Transnistria. Because it's on the other side of Dniester. Dniester was, at one time, the dividing line between Russia and Romania. But that's in Basarabia, in Romania. But not Basarabia, was also-- no, at that time, it was Romania.

So in any case, they took us there and it was just before Sukkos, after Sukkos. But still kind of snow and snowy but it was melting. They was driving us, you know, like worse than cattle. Cattle you count because you have a use of it. Us, who fell down, they let them die without even shooting. They didn't want to shoot.



An incident, which I have to mention. I saw-- is it up?

You've got another.

[AUDIO OUT]

On the way, where we were, when we saw a lot of people from previous transports who were, a lot of them dead and kind of eaten up by who knows, by dogs or by hyenas or something. And one incident which I wanted to mention, in a ditch, it was a deep ditch, it looked like that guy was a young person, a middle-aged person, but he was swollen from not eating or something, from hunger. And he was alive.

His shoes probably have been taken off, but he had his stockings on. He had some money hidden in the socks. So he took out the money and offered it to that gendarme who was. Please, here have the money and shoot me. I can't take it. I can suffer no more.

So he took the money from him, He said, why should I waste a bullet? You're dying anyway. You're going to die. So he let him kind of suffer and die

He didn't shoot him.

He didn't shoot him, but he took the money from him. And other incidences, what different horrible things that we saw at that time on the way from people. Like, for example, I saw a mother and the baby, right, with her and dead. People stood. I said, why we should let it go? I took some from the fields, it was like straw and covered her up. It didn't help but at least--

There was no time for burial.

No, no, no. They were just driving us, like I said, like cattle.

How many days were you driven?

I cannot recall exactly. Also, again, my brothers, the younger one, the one who was wounded, people allowed, they kind of paid money to some of the peasants there with a horse and buggy that they should take the old people and the young and so on.

So I didn't have any money to pay but some others said if you're going, because they saw I kind of, I can get along with people, with the gendarmes. Said, if you would go behind those carts and watch, we'll pay for your brothers to be on that--

Buggy.

Buggy, yes. So but what happened, because it was so muddy and cold at night, what they were doing, those people, they got their money already. So they used to leave the buggy and get the horses on the hitch and ran away. And then, people couldn't do anything. So they had to-- they didn't care.

So I remember, I kind of used kind of also my trick. At night, when I was going to sleep, I tied up a piece of rope from the-- you know it's called a [NON-ENGLISH], from there to my leg in case they want to move something, I should feel and wake up. Because if you woke up and start screaming, the gendarme came and didn't let him take the horses away.

So kind of like I saved our buggy with the horse with that guy that he took us all the way to the Ukrainian border. And then, they, over there, they let us all off. It was in a wooded area. There were really a lot of dead people laying around there in a big ditch, not a trench, a big ditch. And people were kind of there, and everybody, it was already smelling, you know? It was decaying.

So I kind of-- so they tried to get people to go and threw some more people in the ditch and cover them with the earth. So some, you know, everybody tried to hide. I said, why should we hide? Let's go and do it. We should do that.

So I helped kind of putting that people into those ditches and covered them up. Then from there, they got us across the Dniester. Which probably, I would like to mention for the record, in other places, before that, through Dniester, what they did, the Romanians were driving the people into the river. That's deep. Dniester is a big river. To go on the other side were the Germans, in the Ukraine. To go there.

So who couldn't swim, drowned. And who could swim and came to the other end, the Germans said we don't want it. They didn't want to accept it. Go back. And so they did it, specially. Kind of made them swim back and forth until they drowned. And I don't know, hundreds or maybe thousands of people drowned over there in Dniester.

That was another, not of mine, the transport where I was. We did go through that and came to the first city called Yampil'. We got there. From there, some people who had some money or who had vision, they stayed there. That camp was much better. I had later one. A lot of people did survive more.

Then when they drove us further, just, like I said, worse than cattle. And we got to a place near Obodovka, and it was a cattle stall. How do you call it? Because it was already in Russian Ukraine. It was like a kolkhoz they had there, where they were housing cattle.

And there, they put us in there. And there it started, people start dying. Who knows what it was-- typhus or just plain dirt and not eating, not having anything. They didn't furnish anything. They let the people plain die of starvation, who couldn't help themselves.

I, what I did, because I speak the language, you know, Russian and German and Romanian, so I got in, out of that, early in the morning to some Ukrainian people with the tobacco, cigarettes, and some things. And I got something to eat. They gave me some potatoes, a piece of bread. I came back to my brothers and had them go and wash with cold water, bringing water and tried keeping--

Keep them alive.

Keep them alive. Finally, there, I found out that there, in Obodovka that they made some kind like a ghetto, and people who had some money, some means, there was a Jewish guy who was kind of in between, the go in between and the commandant over there with money that they could stay in that ghetto.

And in that ghetto, were also Ukrainian people from that town, of Obodovka. So he kind of suggest to go there that you wouldn't be driven further, you know? Otherwise, you will die on the way.

So I said, I asked him, too, if he would help me to get there. He said, no, he can't, but he told me how to get there. So I got there, also first, by myself. And I found a place. It was like a basement that I'm going to stay.

Came back there to get my brother, the younger one. The older one, because he was really felt kind of weak. And he didn't want to stay. I should leave him behind, in that Ukrainian's house. So we kind of suggest to get him drunk, vodka, so he would fall asleep. And he slept. Then later on, I came and got him, and he was dead.

So we stayed at in that ghetto, Obodovka. And then later on, about a year later, it was during the wintertime, from those people who were there in Obodovka. It was about more than 80% died of typhus. Because we had doctors, but they couldn't help. There were no medicine, no nothing.

And when the summer came, it got warmer a little. So those who survived got out in the fields, stealing, doing whatever they could. And I was pretty good at that. I even, go and get like potatoes out from the ground and leave the rest of that. To cover it back up. They should not be able to tell and it still should grow. And so that's how, at the beginning.

But we all got sick, typhus sick, all the three of us. And the two younger brothers, they did. First, one survived it. I

mean, got out of that even before me. Because there was something I don't even remember what happened. I remember only thing, I used to crawl on all my four, out in the snow, to try to get to empty myself. But we didn't eat. And I thought that's--

And he survived but he had his toes frozen, and they start falling off. And on top of it, he got diarrhea, and he died. The younger one died first. And after the two brothers died, we were in a little room and sleeping on the floor, about 15 or 20 people, just barely. When we had to turn, we all had to kind of.

And I was the one who used to go out of the ghetto, dressed like a Ukrainian, to be able to get something for the people to survive, to live. When the two brothers-- when I left the last time and one still was alive, I told him watch the water and stuff. When I came back, he was dead. He had died. So I didn't-- I find myself.

You said you had six siblings. Now that's two of your brothers who had died. One of your sisters had died. Your father had died. Your mother had died. What happened to the other siblings?

So well, one, the little brother, the youngest brother, was shot at home. The sister was shot at home. The older brother, which I thought was-- I mean, the fourth from me, which I thought he was dead, he had, at the beginning, he still survived and got with me, to the Ukraine.

One of the younger one, I said, he was not even-- didn't have a scratch. He did run away. So that is, you have, there are four of them, one brother and a sister. And the little brother, the youngest one, [PERSONAL NAME], also was shot because he cried that he was wounded. And then they shot him, finished him off.

The two brothers and the sister and father and mother was left at home, in the room. Later on, somehow, I tried to inquire. I was told that they were taken, all put in a mass grave on the Jewish [NON-ENGLISH], in the Jewish cemetery.

So then the two brothers died in, already, in the Ukraine, in Obodovka. One brother, which lives now in Vienna, Austria. He was not at home at all during this time when the shooting was going on. He was lucky. Czernowitz, a lot of Jewish people in Czernowitz survived.

And in fact, they told them there, that the Jewish people from all the other places, they took us to the Ukraine. They give us their land to work on. But he packed himself. He wanted to go to join this cousin of mine, who just passed away not long ago in Israel, didn't let him. He said, you stay here, and he was lucky he did. He did that. So he survived, and he is living. That's the only brother.

You were off at the camp and your two brothers had just died. Now did you stay at that same camp, or did you move on to another one? I stayed in that camp, but later on, like, not being able to take it, I start-- first of all, yeah, about this brother who survived-- after the summer camp, a year later, we heard that they sent some more transports out of Czernowitz to a place on the Bug. That's the water, Bug. And on one side was the Romanians, and the other side were the Germans.

They were Allies. So I thought to myself, my brother must be in one of those transports, because I thought they took all the people from Czernowitz. So me and another guy by the name Blum, which he heard that his sister's supposed to be there, we started out at night to get there.

So we were caught. And we were sent-- we didn't even tell from where we are. We were sent. And then we got back after a while. I took another boy, a younger one, a young boy, and kind of promised him to pay him even to come with me.

And we went, and we did get there. So there, I found out from an aunt of mine that my brother stayed in Czernowitz. And some people tried, begged us, and that was winter, begged us to help them. What could we do? So but we picked a couple, a younger couple that I thought, I mean, they could walk. By the way, at that time, I was 23 years old.

So we took them and in the snow, they walked with us. And we got kind of lost a little at night. So we got to Obodovka, got back. And then because already I met people in there, people I knew from Czernowitz, and they begged me. So I went, I started going and getting people out of there. Had to go and cut through barbed wire.

But then, the next time, I went with a partisan with a sled, with a horse and a sled. And I did that for about seven or eight times. The last time I went, I was supposed to take out a family. It was a husband and wife and two daughters, and the guy was a pharmacist, who was engaged with one of the girls, the five of them.

So I cut through the barbed wires and got in there. The guy, the partisan with the horses, was about a half-a-mile away, hidden with the sled and all. I got there and told them to get ready. And I went again to get him to come a little closer when they come. They had to go through the cut barbed wires, and it was winter, at night, with snow.

While I was going back, they had that camp was, not patrolled, the Ukrainians with rifles, they were watching, you know? But at night, he could see me walking. So he said, [UKRAINIAN]. [UKRAINIAN], means in Ukraine, means "stop." I stopped, but he still kept on shooting bullets, many bullets.

One got me, shot me through my arm, through and through. Luckily, it didn't break my bones. It was between the arm bones. I don't know how you call this part of the hand. I probably must have had my hand turned so that it went through. If I had a hand like that, it would have--

So then, when he shot me, I felt not the pain of it. The heart and the blood was gushing because you see how big the wound was. And he was coming toward me. I took my arm with the other hand and got myself full of blood. And he came close, and I told him, oh, you shot me. And I played like, I just, I'm finished, You know, threw my head up. So it was the second time I had to play dead. That's my second time. And he left me. Just took with his foot and you know, kicked me, turned me over, and left me there for dead.

That Ukrainian partisan, later, when he heard the shootings, he came looking to see what happened. So he found me. He took me on his back and took me to the first village. He had a gun, went in the village, and asked for a doctor.

So he found a doctor. Knocked on the door, and the doctor said, well, I don't have no, can't give you no medicine, but I can sew it up like that. So he gave me something in my mouth between the teeth to hold. And he sort of just, the plain flesh, stitched it up.

Well, later on, when he brought me back to where I was, that Obodovka. And there, we had in the ghetto, we had an infirmary. And they start taking care of that. But in the meantime, because of the wounds, I was wearing that Ukrainian, it's a cotton quilted jacket. And the dirt what go in, so that it infected there, and it start swelling and hurting very often. So they opened it up, and they put the drain to drain out the things. And then later on, stitched it up again.

So but what I want to come again to tell about is after I was still kind of going every time to the infirmary, I got a note from the same people. I should send somebody for them. They didn't even think that I would come. But I said, who I'm going to send? I'm going to go again.

So that girl, like the nurse, she was packing, and I used to wear that on top of in the arm in a sling. I said to put it in from outside. She said, Mike, you are still having, you're going away something again. You look very pale. I lost a lot of blood.

So I said, no. I said, don't tell me. I said, well, if you know already, don't open your mouth. Don't tell it to nobody. And I went again, and when I got there, in the meantime, those people were taken out to another place.

And later on, when I got to that place where they were, a lot of other people, start begging me to take. So I had only one sled and that horse. I was afraid. I couldn't take too many people.

So I went there to the gendarme. They were, there, they were kind of like agricultural thing. The gendarmes were taken away from the people, the grains and all that. That's what they were doing there. Gendarmes were anyway, just like

working for the Germans. Whatever they told them to do, they had to do, even though they were Allies.

So I saved, still some more people, and one of them was a doctor by the name Dr. Yazlovets, him and his wife and a daughter. So I remember his daughter was on a sled and him and his wife were walking in the snow. We were all walking. His wife lost her shoes. So she was walking in the snow just in the stockings.

And then later on, because she was a good doctor, a surgeon, so I was taken to Tiraspol. That was the capital there with the Romanians. And he was doctor for the offices for the Romanian military. And later on, because I brought people into that place, Obodovka. I was never caught bringing the people.

But they knew, so they sent me away to another place. And because I had a girlfriend. I supposed to-- like, engaged to her, supposed to marry her. I came back, and they caught me. They said, no, we have proof that you were going. Because there was big signs, who was going to be caught outside the ghetto will be shot. But at that time, they weren't shooting. They were sending to the court martial.

So they got me and sent me to court martial and I was, still in between all the things, I was sentenced for three months. And that, well, that saved me a lot. In the jail, I had there, that commandant was very good to us. He was, in civilian life, a professor. So he was from the jail, the commandant of the jail. So we were a few Jewish people. He took good care of us. Told they should feed us good and all that.

But later, when I got out and back to Obodovka, and just by the end, before the Russians start advancing, getting the Germans out, you know, the Germans start getting a beating, the Romanians start try to do, too, because they knew what's coming there. So they tried to help. So they try to get the orphan children. children.

So and I had to go to that [NON-ENGLISH] for another time, something. So when I came to the commandant, he said, are you crazy? You know the Germans, they're going to come, and they're going to shoot all the people here, all the Jews, especially. And they'll take over from there.

He said, you get away. Get to the ghetto. In [NON-ENGLISH], they had a ghetto. Because they were Romanians, and they were wearing, I mean, even Romanian uniform. They were from [NON-ENGLISH]. They were sent there, not like us. They were sent there to work, tailors, all kind of to fix--

Artisans and craftsmen.

Craftsmen. Fix for them, for Romanians. And that Dr. Yazlovets was there. So he seen to it that I should get with those orphan children on the train, even though I was older. I was shaving every day. And I got in on the train, and I got out of there, even before the war ended. And I got to Iasi, in Romania, with those orphan children.

And from Iasi, I went back to Czernowitz because of my brother. He was there. And here, the Russians came. There were still Germans there. And it was kind of--

Ambiguous.

They were already circled around the Germans. They couldn't escape anymore, but they still were going around the houses and shooting, robbing and do all kind of things when I got there. And I got with the train. When I started out with the train, I was on top, on the roof of the train.

When I got in, I came to my brother there, my brother and I had an uncle and all his family. And also, I was saying about that uncle, which I was talking with, he saw me in that. I'm going all the way back.

At the beginning, he and all his family was saved by a Pole neighbor. He had them hidden in the attic. And later on, he came to that. And then he was sent there to the Ukrainian in a transport before us. And they came there, and they all died of starvation, the whole family.

So at that time, I would saying my parents was Tzadikim.

Righteous people.

They were shot at home.

Did you go to-- you said you went to another camp. And you said that you went, and at this point, none of your brothers were alive, and your sisters, except for the one in Vienna.

Yes, I mean, now we are left, I mean, two brothers, yes.

Oh, can you tell me about liberation from the camp?

Again here, we were, now we're talking about the liberation in Czernowitz. So the Russians came in, and we thought, they are going to help us or something. And we came especially to Czernowitz, came those Ukrainians, which they were very anti-Semitic. Because at one time, they had the Ukrainians, they had in fact, in [NON-ENGLISH], there were mass graves of Jewish people, which before that in the Ukraine, they were massacred by Ukrainians.

So when they came, they came in there, and we saw how they behaved, how they treated the Jewish people. They were taking them in on cattle trains. Many in fact, a lot of girls, they put on, on the train, prostitutes. So that they took them away to Russia to work. How you call it? Like, slave labor. And many of the Jewish boys, they wanted to go in the army to fight against the Germans, but they took them to work in the mines.

So then we saw-- and then I met some Russian Jewish people. They said, get away. They said, you know, they said. And they saw how the lie was in Czernowitz. Czernowitz was a city, about 80% Jewish, very nice, big, clean city. And that was like the capital.

And then we saw how the Russians behave at us, so we tried to get away. So the first, I was afraid they were going to take my brother, also. So I got him out first to Romania, to that part of Romania, of Bukovina, which still was Romanian, called Dorohoi.

Then later on, I followed him and got to Romania. And then we got to Bucharest, is the capital of Romania. From there, we wound up in Vienna. And then I went, because I was born in Czechoslovakia, but I didn't have no papers, you know, not anything. But I did remember the city [NON-ENGLISH], where I was born.

Somehow, I got to Bratislava, to Czechoslovakia, with a passport from a friend, but with my picture, and it was kind of-- and I tried to find that place. Then I was told that they don't know about that name. They called it different names. Now, it's called [NON-ENGLISH]. Before it was called [NON-ENGLISH]. But they said all Jewish [NON-ENGLISH], what they call the birth certificates, there in Prague, at the Jewish community there.

I went there, and I got my papers there, my birth certificate. I even remembered who was the midwife, because when I was born to a midwife. They call it there, a [NON-ENGLISH], even her name, and that was on the birth certificate.

So you went back to visit your town.

No, I didn't go to that town, because it's a small town, where no Jewish people are there. Besides, I was just born there, and I was there only just when I was a few months baby. Because at that time, after that, and my parents went back to Romania.

Did you visit the house where your parents were living with you?

After the war. No, there I could not visit it. In fact, they were still, there, they formed, at that time, bands, partisans against the Russians. And the Russians are not Americans. They went there and cleaned out the whole town, all the people, because otherwise, they couldn't catch the partisans. And they brought in people, Russian people, to live in that

town.

So I didn't go to that town. I was in Czernowitz, and I tried to find that girl, which I was supposed to marry in the Ukraine. So I found out she didn't come back, because she met up with brothers of hers, one, who was a general. She had her mother with her, too. He was a general in the Russian army, so he got them, you know, his family there. So I didn't find her there.

How did you end up in the United States?

And then, like I said, I was in Vienna, and then I was living also in Frankfurt. And I applied for papers for the United States. But because I was born in Czechoslovakia, my quota was very good, and also, as a DP, displaced person. So it didn't take long, less than a year, and I got my papers. And in 1953, I came to the United States. And now I'm living in California, in Santee.

And you're living with your wife?

No. I married. I met my ex-wife in Vienna, and we got married in the United States. And I have two nice girls, but I'm divorced now, 16 years divorced. So I'm single.

Are there any other things you'd like to add? We have about five minutes.

What I'd like to add, especially, why I am even thinking about recording. Because I've been in Jerusalem, two years ago, when they had the Holocaust survivors conference. And now I'm here in Washington. There is not much mentioned about the eastern of Bukovina, of that part, which I was just talking, you know? Here, I haven't heard any mention even about that, and there is not many records of that. So I would like that--

To be a record, and it will be a record for all posterity. And I'm glad that you talked with me. Thank you for your interview.