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This is an interview with Mr. George Lynn at the American Gathering of the Jewish Holocaust Survivors. It's April the 13th, approximately 4:30 in the afternoon. Mr. Lynn, would you tell us where you were born?

I was born in Warsaw ghetto-- in Warsaw, Poland.

And what was the date of your birth?

It was February 2-- February 5, 1922.

And how big a family did you come from?

Of course, the immediate family--

The immediate family.

--was five children-- my mother, my father, and two brothers, one of whom was a twin, and two sisters.

And did you go to school in Warsaw?

Yes. I was finishing gymnasium, Chinuch, which was located in one of the nearby streets. But that was, of course, in 1939, just before the war--

Just before the war--

--broke out.

What sort of work did your father do?

My father was a merchant. He dealt in leather goods, but shoe leather.

Shoe leather. And of course, everybody knows what happened to Warsaw right at the beginning of the war.

Yes. Of course, the division of-- we lived on Franciszkanska Street. And the division of ghetto and the cutting of various streets was so systematic that we have been, of course, bombed out from our home. And we had to move from street to street for all intents and purposes.

Of course, he lost everything. He was burned out. My father was a wealthy individual. My older brother was an attorney. And my twin brother and I were going, of course, to school.

That essentially was the circumstance-- they were the circumstances until the loss of my brother. My brother was taken to Majdanek in 1942 selection.

Mr. Lynn, did they--

Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself.

No, no. That's OK. We can go back and forward. There's no rule to this.

Very difficult for me to remember certain [CROSS TALK]

I understand. I appreciate it. I was going to say, your family was bombed out in the military action in the bombing of Warsaw?

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Yes.

And did you find a place to live with other people?

Well, yeah. My father, of course, owned some buildings, different-- on different streets. And we moved to one of those buildings.

I see. OK. And when did they actually form the ghetto as such?

The ghetto was formed, well, on and off beginning with 1941, I suppose. And it was a case of squeezing the people into a certain area. And the Germans, of course, have had developed various factories to help their military might, I suppose. And they developed certain factories on certain streets. And they divided even that area--

Subdivided it.

Subdivided into very little thing. This was, I suppose, a very thought-out, good strategy because they had so many people there from different countries, so many Jews gathered together, that they had to split those into various camps. And they did that.

For example, the Schultz factory was on Mila Street. Tobbens factory was in a different area. I don't recall the name of the street. And so that was the life at that time. You had to survive from one camp to another, for all intents and purposes.

When did they start bringing in people from other places?

Oh, that began right after they took over Warsaw. In 1940, they started already moving different groups of people from Germany, from Hungary, from various places into this-- into this area. I suppose there are documents and maps that would show exactly how large the area was.

As a young man, of course, I remember that we were several hundred thousand people in this small area. I wish I can tell you the exact date. But they started to build this wall around that ghetto. And that was, of course, a move to congregate these people in one place--

Concentrate them.

--as much-- as much as possible.

How did that impact your own family as such?

Well, if I can remember my father, he was a-- he was beginning to give up. He was always the head of the family.

Just take it easy.

Keep together as much as possible. And you know, the tradition of Jewish family is stick together. Well, we just moved from one place to another together, from one-- you know, some people-- we, of course, stayed with my parents, being the youngest children.

My other brother was with his wife somewhere else in a different camp, in a different factory. And my sister was somewhere else in a different camp. And that's we were-- but just two brothers--

You and your twin brother.

Me and my twin brother were together with my parents. So we were kept together.

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Were you working?

In the camp, sure. Everybody had to.

No, I mean in the ghetto.

Yeah, in this camp, working-- how do you mean working?

Did you have a job? Did you work in a factory?

No, we were students, students. But we had to work in the factories, of course. Prior to the war we were students. So we had to work.

This kind of life lasted, I suppose, until 19-- the first traumatic break was in 1942. In one of those selections, my twin brother was taken from us. And the last time we heard it was in 1942, around-- probably around May or June. It was very hot. And we lost-- we understand that this group was taken to Majdanek. And we haven't heard from my brother since.

Well, we stayed together with my-- I stayed together with my parents in-- where was this-- on Kupiecka Street. That's where the house was. Well, not the house. Kupiecka Street was it was a street of a different camp. I don't remember where. But this is where the family of my father gathered. His brothers from LÃ³dz came up, and his sisters.

And as I can recollect, we were trying to keep together. And we stuck together like this until the burning of the ghetto. And when this started, that's where we were.

I of course, as a young man, I was going out on various-- various areas through the sewer to see what is happening. You know, they sort of, even though I didn't belong to any military or-- military groups, you know, one of those Anielewicz group, because I was too young. They wouldn't even have me.

But we tried to determine how we can get out from there. It was just some straw that we could grasp in order to get out. Of course, this was silly. Now, now I know how silly it was.

Well, so my parents and the family of my father, sisters and brothers-- there were two or three brothers here. They were in a bombed out building, hidden with quite a large number of people. And I suppose that when there was a systematic burning of ghetto, from building to building--

Building by building?

Up and down from there. As a young man, me and my brother-in-law, we went into the sewers because we just simply could not-- there was no room with the older people. And we stayed in the sewers. And I remember distinctly a sight that was quite late at night. We came up from the sewers. The whole street was burning. Every building on that street was burning.

And when we came up, we saw these Germans putting hand grenades into the area where my father was. There were about 70 people killed in that thing, including uncles and aunts and my father and my mother, everybody in that--

Whole family in that one building?

Well, I went back into the sewer. But before I did, I recall that I was talking to my brother-in-law. He says to me, he says, what are you going to do? I says, I don't know. I don't know. What are you going to do?

Well, I said, I'm going to go down to the sewer and see if I can get out from here somehow. He says, well, I'll probably go to the partisan movement somewhere outside of the city. You know, it was such a silly--

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Grasping, grasping.

--talk. It was without any plan, without-- it was just on a spur of the moment. Well, I went in, and I stayed in the sewer for probably about two weeks. And I just-- I lost my shoes. I lost my-- I was wet because it was water.

Was there anything to eat?

I didn't have anything to eat, nothing whatsoever. And that stench of people in the sewers, was plenty of dying people there and dead people, for all intents and purposes. And I was with a fellow by the name Mark Wassermann, who was a wonderful harmonica virtuoso. I mean, just like Larry Adler, outstanding man. We stuck together somehow. And we were going from one place to another, one place to another.

Wherever we want to go out, Germans were there. And in some cases threw poison gas or some sort of a gas that we couldn't even breathe. So we decided to just get out. There was no point. And we got out. And when we lifted the cover of the sewer, we heard someone was yelling that there's not going to be any shooting of anybody, if we get out. And the Germans are collecting people for camp, work camp.

Well, if that was an entrapment or not, we didn't care anymore.

You didn't have any choice probably.

Well, we just didn't care anymore. We just were tired. We were young, kids for all intents and purposes. We were just plain young people. And so we got out. He still had that harmonica with him, carried it. And on some occasions it saved our life because he played so beautifully. His name was Mark Bassermann. I'll never forget it.

Well, sure enough, we came out from the sewer. It was hot. It was quite hot. And the Germans were waiting for us. And we were collected and sent over-- it was probably sometimes-- probably in June 1943.

'43.

The we-- I don't know whether you know what an umschlagplatz is. We were collected in this umschlagplatz, these thousands and thousands of people coming out from the sewer. So of course, the trains were waiting there.

There was a large building there, about five-story building. And they let us sit there for some time. The group that guarded us were Latvian. Bastards, cruel bastards. And they were guarding us. And suddenly I see right on top of that-- we were sort of they were sitting down. We looked up, and there were, on the fourth, maybe fifth floor, right on the roof of that building, we saw a man clinging to the building. And a couple of these Latvians were hitting his fingers with bayonets. Finally he fell right in front of us.

And 15 people like that-- they were throwing people off the building. And we had to-- they picked us up to clean up the mess. Well, of course, we didn't know who was going to be next-- children, women, men-- the yells, the yells. It's just doing like that. I remember this one.

Well, we sat there for maybe five hours. And suddenly I hear someone tapping my shoulder. It was my cousin, a girl, who says, what are you doing here? I says, I'm waiting for a train. And her father was with her, and her mother was with her-- my father's father-- brother. And I said yeah, that's too many years.

Well, after some five or six hours of sitting there without anything, we-- they suddenly took away my uncle and that cousin. They went to Majdanek. And I, as a young man, stayed there with that Mark Wassermann-- not Wassermann. It wasn't Wassermann, Weismann-- maybe not. It was Wassermann. I can't remember anymore. Oh, people in Warsaw knew him. He was just a virtuoso.

And they took us out to a camp near Warsaw. I of course, lost contact with them completely. They went to Majdanek. I know that this train was going to Majdanek. And it was then that we thought perhaps we-- we were saved. They took us

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to this camp, a work camp. I don't remember the name of it. I was trying to remember so much, and I just-- I just don't remember.

Somehow my-- [BACKGROUND CHATTER] somehow I found out that my older brother was on the other side, while I was there in the camp. And through his help, I escaped. I was in camp maybe for two weeks. I had to leave this fellow, Bassermann. I just never heard since what happened to him because I ask, I ask everybody.

So I-- my brother told me that I am going to be with my sister, who is also-- who was hidden in one of the-- well, with one of the Polish--

Family?

--family. Except the Polish family were also Jews. They posed as Poles. So I finally got together. And there I found my older sister with two nieces.

Your brother got you out of the camp?

Got me out of the camp. I escaped from that camp with the help of my brother, who was on apparently some kind of a false papers, he and his wife. Oh, not papers-- they had some passports to go to South America. Of course, all was this-- the whole thing was an entrapment. I mean, it was just manipulated to such a perfection. It's just amazing.

He paid a great deal of money for those passports. And many, many people paid a great deal of money for false passports. And this is where I indicated to you that my brother died in France. When they went-- I found out later that the entire group of intelligentsia, of the professional people, lawyers and doctors, somehow believed that those passports will get them out to South America.

They went to a town named Vittel. I don't know whether you heard of it or not.

I've heard the name of the town, but--

Yeah. That's-- I think that's in France somewhere.

I think so-- V-Y-T-E-L, something like that.

V-I-T-E-L, I think so.

V-I-T-E-L?

Yeah. And that was a concentration of these people that were supposedly for exchange purposes with the Germans-- for the Germans. But all this was a ploy. They took them out to Auschwitz later on, from those camps, and killed them. So not many people in those ran, although, there are records. There are records that indicated that these people, some say, so I understand, that Beate Klarsfeld is the one that found out about this.

Anyhow, he saved me. And I went to this hiding place with my-- with my sister and those two little nieces. One was probably about three years old. And the other one was maybe six years old.

In that place there was a hidden wall.

Was this in Warsaw?

That was in Warsaw, still in Warsaw.

Outside the ghetto.

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Outside the ghetto. Was a hidden wall, and whenever there was some sort of a car approaching, we all went into this thing. Somehow the neighbors found out about something is going on in that apartment.

And one beautiful day, a big truck, maybe with 50 SS men or Gestapo men came out, surrounded the building. They came into this apartment. We were behind that thing. They didn't find us, but they took those two guys, those two people that were posing, posing as Poles. They took them away, and they shot them.

And we stayed in that hiding behind that wall for a day and a half. Every time this little-- this little niece of mine started to cough, we almost choked that kid to death. And I said, one-- maybe a day later or a day and a half later, I says, I just can't be here. There is no point. We've got to-- we've got to break up. We've got to leave.

So at night I left. I didn't know where I was going. We had no papers, nothing. I did have a paper my brother gave me, bought. But I didn't know where I was going, absolutely. My eyes, being somewhat blue and my hair was blond, and a young fellow-- oh, yeah, I had a uniform of a streetcar conductor and a hat. So at night I left.

Now, I was going towards the direction of ghetto. We just split. All of us split. I said, there's no point in me being with you. I just got to get out of here because they're going to come back.

Well, my sister, later on I found out, my sister and the girls, they also split. My sister was caught and shot at the-- and the girls were picked up by some Polish woman that they knew my sister. And one girl was taken to a convent, a Polish convent, this little girl. And the other girl stayed somewhere.

Finally she was caught. She was put in Bergen-Belsen. But I don't know what happened to them really. I can't tell you much. I just heard this after, after that.

I went to this place where I was told by someone while I was there in camp that I may find some Polish patriots or Polish underground that may help me. Well, while there I found a fellow by the name Kulik, who was also a Jewish fellow that escaped from the area. And he and I were going to school together.

So we just stuck together. They gave me some new papers, false of course. And I stayed together with him from-- from one place to another, we just wandered. We wandered all over the city. We just wandered.

The Polish underground wouldn't even have us. We offered ourselves. They wouldn't even have us because they claim that we're Jewish, Jews, Jews. I mean, you've got your own problems.

So we were just kicked from one place to another. We slept on the street. We slept in empty houses. Wherever we--

Street urchins.

Just street-- we just went on the street. Would you believe that when the Polish revolt, the underground revolution started, that was sort of our-- what do I want to say? What's the word? Our--

Reprieve?

Reprieve-- or we thought that we'd get saved because the Russians were not very far from there. So my goodness, this is great. Somehow, near an area, MokotÃ³w, we got caught in the crossfire between the underground and the Germans. And the Germans just annihilated these guys. And we got caught by the Germans. It was the SS Totenkopf Division.

Here I am again with him. I was-- I was captured. That was probably late in 19-- well, 19-- maybe early 19-- late '43 or early '44, somewhere there.

And many-- now of course, I had that uniform of that streetcar conductor. Somehow even the Poles didn't know that was Jewish. So I was caught as a Pole and put a big B, bandit-- a little stamp B. In Polish this is bandita, which is a bandit.

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You're a criminal.

Criminal-- because they were shooting everybody. Because the first thing I remember when I came out of this basement because there were shots fired-- we all were there. There were quite a number of SS men. And we were taken prisoners, you see. And I got a tremendous knock-- excuse me-- got a tremendous knock in my-- and broke some teeth with a butt of a rifle.

Well, when a German hits you and you bleed, the chances are that you get shot. So I was so afraid of-- I was so afraid of bleeding and showing this. So I wiped myself off. Of course, I-- full of blood. And they took us to this barracks. It was German barracks in MokotÃ³w.

There they asked someone, who knows how to speak German? Well, there were thousands and thousands of people. And I said-- I was thinking to myself, if I tell them that I know how to speak German, they may accuse me of being a Jew because Yiddish and German--

It's too close.

But I didn't have anything to lose. And they were asking-- my German wasn't that great, you know. But from Yiddish-- and my Yiddish wasn't that great either. But from Yiddish, at least I had this opportunity of understanding what they were talking about. And they needed an interpreter. I said, well, I'll take a chance.

And I say, I speak some German. You, come on here. So they call me in, and I was interpreting of what some of the Poles were telling them.

Well, one of the camp commanders was known ObersturmfÃ¼hrer Patz-- P-A-T-Z. I mean, just a killer. And he will shoot even the Poles just like-- just unbelievable. And he is-- I was so afraid. Can you imagine, I was a young man?

Somehow, he took a liking to me, that guy. And he says, you stay with me. He says to me, you stay with me. You're going to be my interpreter. Of course, there were thousands of these underground fighters that went through here, through that area.

It's just amazing now when I recall all this. He says to me, he says, we're going to put you in this prison. It was like a barracks prison. So when I call you, you'll be ready to come out. So they put me-- I don't know whatever happened to that guy, Kulik, you know, my friend. I just don't know what happened. I lost contact completely.

So I was there for about three weeks performing the function of an interpreter. One day, I swear to you as Lord is my witness, I hear that a German doctor is going to inspect everyone. So we had to drop our pants.

Circumcisions.

Circumcisions. I said, this is it. I've had it. Can you imagine me? I mean, it's beyond comprehension. I was so afraid. I said, well, what can I do?

I dropped my pants. I skinned-- I skinned my penis as much as I could. Somehow the party, the doctor, came through-- didn't even look, and I passed the inspection.

I passed it inspection. And ever since that time, I became a goy. I became a true goy. These guys could even suspect me of being. I says, that's the way I'm going to survive.

But you can imagine, my heart was-- I just--

You figured it was just there.

Unbelievable. It is-- honestly, it is just something that no one would have to go through to believe it. So about five days

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later, we were put on trains, all the Poles, and taken to-- oh, we were on a road for many, many days, probably 14 days on the road.

We were strafed by the incoming English and American planes. And we ended up in Stuttgart. There was a Camp Neuler. That was the main headquarters of this division, of this SS Totenkopf Division. And there I was put with these Poles to work.

I stayed there in that area, of course, as a Pole, no questions asked. Nobody could ever doubt that I was not a Pole. Fantastic-- it was just fantastic until the liberation day. When the tanks rolled through I was-- because I was hidden with some of these Poles. And the 63rd Infantry Division went through this area.

I finally told them who I was. Do you know, there was a hidden SS man among these Poles. When he found out, he came up to me and, with a bayonet, stabbed me. Now, I was foolish-- I was so happy that everything-- so he stabbed me in my legs and cut me completely open.

Now I fell down. That was after the American tanks are all through. And I fell down. I couldn't walk because he cut my-- my hip. I have a big-- right here.

A fellow by the name Greenfield, from Syracuse, a sergeant, they sweep the area-- they swept the area-- came from one of the infantry division-- regiment. And I was on crutches, of course. Crutches-- there was some pieces of wood. And he says, what happened to you. I told him. I said, Greenfield, I said, Greenfield.

So he started to talk Yiddish. And I said, my goodness. I said, I'm Jewish. Take me out of here because even the Poles are going to kill me when they find out. And sure enough, they were after me. How could I survive? I couldn't.

Well, I survived. I had to survive. I had to tell the story. You know, I came out of this camp, and I was in one of the German-- they put me in a German hospital after the army swept through. And I stayed in a hospital for maybe four weeks. And this guy Greenfield came back to me. He took me out of that hospital, and he put me in one of these displaced person camp.

That was the Seventh Army, 63rd Infantry Division. Of course, I will never forget. And later on, he see if I could-- as a young man, if I could help them in the kitchen. So I started-- of course, I didn't have much to eat at that time, so I started working in the kitchen as kitchen [INAUDIBLE].

Helper.

Helper. I worked there for a while. Of course, at the same time I tried to determine who from my family survived. After a while, someone told me that my sister was looking for me, the other sister who was on the other side, you know, who saved herself. And sure enough, after a few weeks I found her in one of the camps. So we were the only ones who survived. And she's here in New York, of course.

And that's the story. It's just unbelievable story.

How did you get here, George?

Well, we, my sister and I, came through immigration, of course, in this 1940-- we were the first boat to come to the United States. And we-- I had a sponsor. There was a cousin by name Cooperman in Syracuse, who sponsored us.

Since, of course, he passed away. But my sister and I came up to the States. We lived in Syracuse for a while, then we went to New York. We had to make some sort of a living. I mean, do something.

And I stayed together with my sister. My sister knew some people that my father used to deal with leather.

In leather business.

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In business, yeah. And they were helping us for a while. I had to go back to Europe to find more people. If I could find my sister, I said maybe there was someone else.

You did go back?

I went. I joined the army, the American Army.

Is that right?

Yeah. In 1946, I joined the army. I went to basic training in Camp Lee, Virginia. And sure enough, they sent me back to Europe as an occupation soldier. There I couldn't find anyone. I went as far as I could, to East Germany, up to-- almost to Poland, as an American, there an American Army. Couldn't find anyone.

So I came back to the States.

That niece who went to the convent was a possibility.

Yes. Sure enough, they-- apparently they were saved. You know, they went to Israel.

Oh, you did find that out?

Yes. I found out that this little girl was taken out from that convent. And she just couldn't believe it. Of course, at that time she was a little bit grown. She couldn't believe that she's Jewish. No way.

You know, she's in Brazil now. And I see her every now and then. We do get together. My other niece passed away. She committed suicide. She couldn't bear it. So she just committed suicide in Israel. And for all intents and purposes, this is my war story.

George, can I ask you a question? You're a married man?

Yes, I'm married to a girl, to a Polish girl, for all intents and purposes.

You have children?

No.

No children.

I can't have any children. My doctor says I can't.

I was going to ask you-- have you told your story before?

No. First time.

What prompted you now?

When this gathering came up here, I just-- I didn't tell even my wife things about-- about that because it was such a story. I just couldn't tell. I couldn't tell. And I was afraid to break down.

When I was here, I broke down so badly it's not even funny. But I had to come in since I don't live very far from here. And every time I go back home, I says to my wife, I can't. I'm not going to go back. I'm not going to go back. And yet something pulls me here.

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And so every day I used to be--

This week.

This week. Something I think I-- Sure enough, I must tell you that-- funny. In 1949, while I was still in the army, before I left Germany in 1949, I befriended a fellow from Bergen-Belsen, who was also in the army. He was a Hungarian Jew. His name was George Lefkowitz.

He and I were together. And we just-- just like that.

Buddies.

Buddies. And do you know that we parted in 1949, and I lost completely contact with him. I found him.

Here?

After 34 years, I found him here. So this time we're not going to lose any contact. Of course, he changed his name. I changed my name. So at least I found someone here, I suppose.

Again, I want to ask you something. I'm repeating the question. Why now? Why do you feel like you want to speak?

Oh, I just had to tell the story. I had to. You know, this gathering made such a tremendous impression on me that I said to my wife, I've got to tell it. I've got to tell it to someone. I've got to cleanse myself. I can't keep it longer.

It just like in Catholic religion, what do they have?

Confession.

Confession. I just had to-- I just had to tell someone the story.

I think it's probably a very good idea from your own personal standpoint to tell it, to get it out and to get your tears out.

Of course, my sister knew about it. I told my sister.

Yes. Of course. But you're also doing a very important thing by doing this because you're-- you're a living testimony to this. And things have a way of changing after the generation passes. Well, did it really happen or did it happen this way or that way?

In Chicago, this is what's happening. They just don't believe that this thing happened.

Yeah, it was all a hoax. So it's extremely important that this get here.

Right. I'm so happy.

I'll tell you, that young lady there is my daughter.

Yeah, I've heard about you.

And my wife is here and my two children are here, for exactly the same reason, because they should know too.

Yeah. Exactly. I know. And just, I had to tell. I had to tell. I just couldn't keep it. I said to my wife, I've just got to tell somebody.

What you're saying here to me--

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It's a little bit different story from a lot of people, because a lot of people were in camps.

Oh, yeah, it is a different story.

Yeah. And that's the issue that-- I don't know whether I should say it.

No, please.

I take issue with Elie Wiesel on this because I read in the Washington Post where he claimed-- and I don't know, maybe he was misquoted. I don't know because he's a too brilliant man for this. That he just claims that the survivors are only those that got out of camps.

Believe me, I'm a survivor too, and how I survived.

Yes.

If they only had to go through some of these things that I had to go through.

See, in the camps, a lot of choices were made for you. You didn't have any choice.

Choice, yeah.

Here, you had to make your choices. You had to make your decisions for survival on an hourly basis or a minute basis.

And this inspection, this was just horrible, just unbelievable. And when I passed through, I just says, this is it. That's my passport to life.

Opened up your world for you. Right. Right.

Can you imagine that? It was fantastic.

We only had one survivor in our family. And he survived also outside the camp. And it's similar kind of a story.

Well, Meed, President Meed-- he was standing outside the ghetto, watching the ghetto burn. I was inside, but he was outside. But he survived that way too.

Sure. No question about it.

That's survivor. That's surviving. I don't know why-- why there's--

I don't-- that differentiation doesn't make any sense.

I'm sure he didn't mean that.

No. I don't think so.

I'm sure he didn't mean it that way.

Suffering is suffering, and endurance is endurance. And in so many ways what you went through and people who were not in the camps, you were outside but you were in jeopardy all the time.

I wanted to go back to school when I got out of the army in 19-- well, '50 they released me. Well, I went to school. I went-- I got my degree. I went to Syracuse, then I went to American University, got my degree and my graduate work.

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But before that, in 19-- I was in the reserves. See, that was one reason that they let me go, if you joined the reserves. So I joined the reserves. Sure enough, in 1952--

Korean War.

1950, a few later-- I was called in, back. And they shipped me to Korea. I was in Korea for two years. At that time, I became a master sergeant. I was first sergeant of my outfit. But I still wanted to get out. I finally got out in 1950-- no more reserves, no more army-- out. And I went back to school.

What sort of work do you do?

Well, I'm retired now. I used to be with the Department of the Interior.

I see.

And I retired. See, everybody's crying. This is just-- it's so emotional. I hope they don't have this every year.

I don't think they will. That's why I think it's a very historic time to come here. And look, I don't think you can have this every year.

That's the first time since-- since I left, I spoke Kaddish. The other day--

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