

April 13, 1983, at the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. The interviewer is Phyllis Dreyfus. If there is a beginning for you, where would you like to start? [INAUDIBLE]

I will start, I was born in the city of Baranowice, Poland, in 1918. My name, the full name from before the war is Juzek Swaroteki. I had a family of six people-- two brothers, two sisters, myself. Actually, seven-- my mother and my father.

When the war broke out between Poland and Germany, it didn't take long, and the Russian army marched in on the 17th of September to the city of Baranowice. So we were occupied, and we were very happy that the Germans didn't come that far, period.

How many people lived in your town?

Oh, we had about 60,000 people in the city. Of this 60,000 people, close to 17,000 were Jews-- occupied the center of the city. It was a city that had yeshivas. It had a lively town-- merchants, scholars, all kind of people, all kind of trades, that cater to themselves, to the Jewish population. And to the surrounding area, that came in for the main two days of shopping, that they came in on Mondays and Thursdays.

So the merchants cater to the Polish populace, or the White Russian. And they did brisk business in those days. And they were pretty happy, contented, and they didn't know any better.

What did your father do for a living?

My father was a merchant, he was a very educated person. But from education in Poland, you couldn't make a living. So he just started up a small business in textiles. Over here, you would call it a fabric store. And they sold it to the anybody who wanted to buy.

OK, very happy family, traditional family. He loved to sing and go to school, and taught me the same thing. He didn't let me go to a Polish school-- told me to go to a cheder. I didn't like the cheder, so he transferred me to [NON-ENGLISH] school, where we were taught strictly Hebrew, and a couple subjects in Polish-- that we had to take, we must take it. So we took it.

OK, all these good things ended when the German army came in, in 1941, into our town. And right away, they picked people off the street, and they summoned supposedly a Judenrat, which was the old kehilla. And they called them in, they told them, you are the representatives.

And we want to have 5 kilos of gold, and so much in leather, and so much in silver, and so much in money. And you deliver it. If not, we're going to take those people that we have as hostages, and we're going to shoot them. It didn't take an hour-- the money was delivered to the Gestapo. They shot the 80 hostages anyway.

How old were you?

At that time, I was 16. We saw the writing on the wall that if this can happen with 80 people, with no qualms on their part, and with broken promises, you can't believe them, because they don't keep their promises.

Right away, there were rumors that there are some concentration camps being formed, because a lot of people escaped from the German government of Poland, which was the Warsaw district, primarily. And they had already put in the Warsaw Jews in the ghettos over there-- in the ghetto, the first big one.

And some of them escaped and told us gruesome stories, but nobody wanted to believe. Some people escaped from Wilno, they came into Baranowice, because Baranowice was a sleepy town at that time. Peace and quiet, so people felt safe over there, because there was not too much doing over there.

Then, it really started in the fall of 1941-- they grabbed about 4,000 people. They called it the first [NON-ENGLISH].

And they just eliminated. And there was a little green forest outside of the city, so just herded them into the vans, on the pretext that they're going to send them to a work camp. People left without any qualms.

And they took the Jewish police that were going along for the ride, to help keep the people orderly. And they just killed them off, and they killed off the police.

Were you aware? Did people back in the town know this had happened at that time?

There was a couple of escapees that came in, and they witnessed what happened. There were some friends that we went to school with, which I had a friend, Richard. So he came and he told me the story, but I knew from where he comes out that these people will only do anything to aggravate you, and to blow it out of proportion so you didn't take their words as true what they are saying, of any value, because they wanted to aggravate the Jew before the war.

In between there so, they just walked away. What can you expect from an antisemite? And that was it.

But after that came in the real stuff started up, with the Gestapo, with the Sicherheitsdienst, the SS people that came in and rampaged through the streets-- through the streets. And stopped you on the street, because you couldn't walk on a sidewalk, and they had to see the Gauleiter.

A lot of kids used to roam around and bringing stuff to the ghetto at that time. And they used to do a thriving business, because the rations that they gave the, 200 grams of bread, and the [NON-ENGLISH] that they used to give out once in a blue moon were never available. So you couldn't live on that.

And a lot of people used to trade through the wire-- through the barbed wire-- with the Polish peasant that used to come up, and used to make exchanges with all kind of goods-- already baked bread, or just plain potatoes or carrots, or a piece of meat, whatever they could smuggle in through the--

How was your family surviving? How was your father and mother dealing with the change?

They were caught in that squeeze in such a way that they were totally flabbergasted. They couldn't cope. That's all they were sitting-- like they were sitting shiva. They just didn't budge. They couldn't believe that intelligent people, like Germans, that they remember them from the First World War, and they just could not understand that these people, with this education, and with this level of intelligence, that they can come up with this kind of treachery and killing people.

This was unheard. This was like they going back to Genghis Khan. So to them, it was a total breakdown, because nothing clicked.

There was no regard for older people, there was no regard for the young, whatsoever. There was no compassion, feelings, that you would come out and say that you feel.

How did you handle the change of feeling? You saw your parents couldn't handle it, how, as a young man, did you see it?

You see, I was looking for my brother. And he was called up in the Polish army in 1939. So we were looking day and night, [NON-ENGLISH] with main thing-- maybe they will come through, because there was an exchange with an agreement between the Russia and Germany, that the people who live in the Russian zone will be transferred to the Russians. The people who are caught by the Russians, in the Russian zone and belong to the German zone, will be transferred to the Germans.

But the Russians played a trick on them. They asked the people whom they were supposed to deport to the German zone, if they will take a Russian passport. By no means, nobody says, no. They didn't want to go. So a lot of those people were caught in that. A foreigner, in a way for them to go to Siberia was bad, but they didn't want to wind up with the Germans under any circumstances.

So we were preoccupied to see the brother. The sisters, as girls, belonged to the Betar which was a good organization, brought up to people in the right way with a feeling for Israel. And they have a longing in their hearts, you know, for--

But worst circumstances, life has to go on. So you had to live. We formed in the ghetto, even the older boys that they looked-- young fellas from the Betar, who is a livewire. So they said, you go with Osman, and you go with this one, and you go with this one, and you go with this one. And we formed five people, like cells.

And we had people who work for the Germans, they used to clean munitions. So they used to smuggle into the ghetto-- like my wife was one of them, too-- between the panties, or attached with a piece of adhesive tape, grenades, single bullets in the shoes, wherever they can-- under the armpits.

At one time, they had such a chutzpah, that we brought in wood, and between the wood, we smuggled in machine guns.

And thousands and thousands of armed ammunition were made at double ceiling in the [NON-ENGLISH] on [POLISH]. And we hid all our stuff over there, we made a double wall facing the ghetto entrance, that it will see if the Germans were marching, marching, like they want to do another thing the way they did the first time, we'll let them have it. From that place they occupy, with a good vision of the ghetto entrance.

At the same time, they told me to go ahead to my good friend who was the head of the Baranowice which are ghetto Judenrat. There were nice people, and we got along with them beautifully. My father and my mother, they were good friends.

And I asked her for a favor, if I could join the Jewish police. And they told me, if you want it, you're young, but if you want it, you can. That will be my duty-- you'll stay at night on guard on the side of the Jewish ghetto. Because on the other side, where the SS and the Polish police, the White Russian police, we called them the [NON-ENGLISH]-- black holes.

What was the duty of the Jewish police inside the ghetto?

The Jewish police was to-- whenever there was a line, they were giving out bread, to keep the line straight not to let people take advantage of each other, to knock out a kid, or pushing an old woman. Each one stays in the line and watch your step.

Now, the next thing was to make contribution. If they put up another contribution-- and there were many of them-- but they didn't want that time 5 kilograms of gold, they stand there for 50 kilograms of gold. So we had to go from house to house and beg the people to donate rings, earrings, whatever they could have, just to pacify them a day later, you know, with the gold and silver, whatever, and leather.

It was not a pleasant thing, because a lot of people were hoarding-- they didn't want to give voluntarily, they had a lot of people in the police who didn't belong to the city, because they called them at that time [NON-ENGLISH]-- they were running away from the Germans. So they were like refugees, which is the name there, [NON-ENGLISH].

So they told those people that they joined, you are not Baranowice. Take advantage of these people that don't want to give, because a Baranowice, I couldn't do. I didn't feel like doing it, didn't have a heart to do to your own. But a stranger could easily go ahead and say, give, when I would shy away, because I knew the people, they knew me.

So this was their thing. There was a lot of functions you have to watch, because if you want a little city government, there's always people complaining for this for that. This one didn't get his card, like didn't get the tickets to go into the show last night. So there's all kind of things, so you try to keep order as much as possible.

And we had a little jail, too. Yeah, we used to put in bums who used to hit each other, because some people got bread. They used to rob them from the bread, used to take away their ration. Yeah, we had all kinds, you know, it was just like any other people around there.

Make the story short, that's the way it was involved for quite a while it was going on, and things were not going good.

Did anyone escape from the ghetto?

Here, when it started, it started in September 1942. 1942 started in a way that we didn't realize actually what we were doing. But we were geared to give a hell of a fight, in the case they come into the ghetto. But they were smart.

It was Passover. And Jews were allowed to go ahead and make a holiday. But they said like this-- going to have a holiday, relax, start the day 6 o'clock in the morning, on the Passover day, first day, they surrounded the whole ghetto, which was maybe about 60 blocks, all around the ghetto. Nobody could come in, nobody could get out.

They send in maybe about 15,000 police as the SS, you name it. And the worst thing, the Lithuanians, with the Latvians and the Estonians, this was their storm troops. And they combed the city clean. They pulled out from that ghetto at that time over 8,000 people. Herded them in--

Was there any reaction, any attempt to fight?

There no reaction because they did it in such a way that we couldn't come to our points. They blocked us off, because the minute we stepped on the street, they were troops. So right away, they grabbed you. So we were isolated, we couldn't do nothing, less just fight them and die there on the spot because they didn't bother. They just shot you before they blinked.

Did many people do that?

A lot of them died on the spot. A lot of died right on the spot. And this, we knew, this is curtains. But each one, the youngsters, were weasels-- we knew the city, the backyards, everything else through the backyards. I run into the [NON-ENGLISH], and I thought that somebody came there.

But that day, they cleaned out the whole [NON-ENGLISH], the Germans took them away on the-- the way they brought them in. With the beds, they brought them up to trucks, they threw them in the trucks like just garbage, they threw them in, and they just cut away the whole [NON-ENGLISH] so there was nothing there.

I jumped up in the attic, I pulled off a board, I got myself two grenades, I got my pepper shot-- that's a machine gun. Like a Uzi.

Yeah.

I got my pepper shot that I knew I liked it, with the 72 rounds. So it was enough. And two I had on the side over here with a [NON-ENGLISH]. And I ran out, and I run through different ways. And I came into my house, where we lived. And at that time, they got my family, and there was nobody there.

Because I didn't get into the house. The main thing I was going into the bunker, which was built. And I hid my gun, with the rounds, inside over there, with the grenades. But one, I kept.

On my right foot, with the pin half-pulled, I taped it to it, and that was it. Kept it for one thing-- if they did catch me, I'll just pull the pin, whoever's on me, goes too. My leg goes, whoever goes with me, that's it.

Since then, I started looking for the [NON-ENGLISH] across the street, and they told me nobody around. But it kept up like this for close to four days.

Where did you stay for those four days?

I jumped into my bunker, which we built, to hide my gun. By the time I came back inside, there are about 60 Jews who were already inside. I couldn't get in. So across the street was the house of [NON-ENGLISH], they had-- from the

ground, there is a little bit-- about 18 inches from the ground, there is-- how do you call it from burnt coal? They keep it, they spread it--

Ash?

Heavy coal like that. To absorb the moisture.

So I found an opening in the floor that they had, they made something like that. So I opened up the opening, and I crawled inside over there. But then, they thought, maybe I'll go ahead to the next house-- I had my girlfriend, the mother was the mother's-- maybe I'll sit there. And so I jumped into that house, and I took a look, and they told me they're in my bunker.

Everyone is there.

So I jumped in back into the bunker and started yelling, Rachel! The missus, because the father was gone the first [NON-ENGLISH]. So they came out, where are you taking us? I says, let's go to the [NON-ENGLISH] over there, you're going to get choked over here. The air was so stale already just a couple hours.

You had to watch yourself, they were running around-- the White Russian police. So we jumped into the end of the floor, and we laid over there from the 14th of December, until the 31st. We didn't know it's the 31st.

But we lay there, and occasionally at night, they used to go up to the water place, and roll up bucket of water, because you didn't feel even like, but the water--

Drink?

The drink-- you were dry. And during the day, I used to see through the cutouts in the masonry that you look out, there's a street from four ways, that the house is situated, we saw sights-- I couldn't believe my eyes, I'm seeing, I thought I was hallucinating. I saw they pulled out-- you know what a [NON-ENGLISH] is? You know what a blanket is, full of dawn?

People used to sleep under them, but they used to cover themselves up with them, too. It's like a down blanket. They pulled out a blanket, or they cut it up and they pulled out a Jew-- full of this here down on him. They go out with water, they dunk it on his head.

And on top of that, he's already all wet, they take all those feathers, and they drop it on him, and they tell him to dance. So he's dancing, and while he's dancing, they shooting at his feet. And after that they got tired, put a gun to his head and they killed him. He just topped over.

And you look to that full brick cut-out, and look at him, that's not real. I must be dreaming. This is hell. This is unbelievable.

Rachel pulls me away from the thing. She says, what you looking at? Says, I don't know look at, but I would hate like hell to wind up like that. I said, but you know what? I can't take it anymore.

They couldn't get out no more. We had one night a terrible scare. That board, that was like a cut-out in the floor, wooden floor. You pick it up, you put it back inside, and you crawl underneath. We went out again with another young fellow to get water again, the bucket.

The night was so beautiful, was like a full moon. So we just gaped on that moon, because we didn't see light in a long time. So we both gaped at that moon, and then we heard a couple of shots. He was a young fellow. They were not shooting at us.

He dropped the bucket of the water, and it hit bottom. It hit bottom with such a bang, that it was just unbelievable. Shots rang out through all the area. [NON-ENGLISH] Jews. They converged on that house from all and any direction.

So I had time to push him under, put myself inside. I didn't have the time to get the cover and put myself over. But there were dirty blankets on top of that bed. So they were scattered under that bed. And every time we were walking through the water, we were wet feet, so we made the blankets wet and they were dirty.

So the police came, and they started with the flashlights. And I was holding there, laying on my back, and holding up the blanket, because I didn't have the time for the cover to be closed. And I held it like this in my hand, and one pulls on the cover. And he says to the other guys, a shitty cover. Said, don't you know they're dirty Jews?

In that blanket, they were-- look at this dirty they were sleeping in. It's garbage. Didn't touch that blanket. I have to thank him, he didn't want a dirty blanket.

He left and knocked off the blanket. I put the cover, says to Rachel that night, and go, I don't know where, but I'm getting out of the ghetto. I'm going to go to the Jewish cemetery, which was out of town, right near the house, '41. Here we go.

We had two cousins underneath, too. And we had Rachel's two sisters-- my future wife, two sisters. They decided, we'll take everybody. What we got to lose?

At one time, I was afraid to go for water, and we had from the house, we picked up glasses, we picked up all kinds of utensils. We picked up a pot they used to make kvas, that the people when they were thirsty before the massacre, so they put in bread, they should ferment. And that fermented bread gave us some kind of a juice with the water, that they called it kvas-- a sour mash.

If you let it stay enough, it'll start to ferment, it'll be like vodka. So we drank that. And after you drank that stuff, you know, you got to go.

So you tried to drink as little as possible, because there's no way to move. And if you go, you go on yourself, because you just can't stand up. Especially women, it was unbearable.

So you're stuck with urine. And at one time, without that water, people were just dipping their finger in urine and just to wet their lips, nothing that, just didn't realize it the more you wet it, the more that salt used to get you more thirsty, and parch the lips, for a cup.

So we decided we're going. So we did. We walked out, and we started going with the [NON-ENGLISH], the way it was lit up in the sky. The [NON-ENGLISH], it was so beautiful, let's follow it, wherever it goes. Because it's clean.

You followed--

We walked out, and we started walking and walking. And they started asking the question, where are we going? The mother of the little boy, Rachel's brother, 12 years old. The mother grabs him. She's going back, they couldn't stop her. You, [NON-ENGLISH], find a new life for yourself.

But for us, we'll stay in the bunker. Whatever happens with me and him, it'll be it. There was no goodbyes. Just left.

They walked out of the ghetto through the barbed wire, they came up in [NON-ENGLISH] street, to a house. And the entrance to the--

OK, I can talk? OK. So as we entered the house that we wanted to go into, and ask, we thought maybe not to. Instead of going into the house, there was a door that was open, like around the house. It had a little garden, and we saw an outhouse behind the house.

I says, let's go ahead and hide in the outhouse. So we walked into that place, and we hid until the morning in the outhouse. About 5:00 in the morning, I heard walking, somebody walking somewhere on the street. So I walked out

from the outhouse, I stayed by the door that leads in, you know, from the street through the door. I remember going to the house, because I saw the way he was walking, I knew he was going in from the front, he's going to go from the back.

So I watched it, and then I see he's waving with a lantern. I figured, those people who have those lanterns are people who work on the railroad. So as he walked in, luckily for me, he walked into the end which I was standing in.

So I said quietly, don't be afraid, there's no harm going to happen to you. I just want to ask you a favor. We want some water. And take a look at us, and tell us how do we look?

Because what day is it today? So he told us, the 31st of December. So I figured out, we were hiding from the 14th until the 31st under a house that was about 18 inches underground, under the house, under the floor.

So the way the Polack is claimed [NON-ENGLISH], you know, and crossed himself. Who are you? What are you? You look like devils, you all black.

So I says, mister, there was coal on the bottom. So we must have been black. That's why we looked so bad. That's why I told you, look at us.

We are Jews that we came out of the ghetto through the wire, they cut the wires, and we came through the wires.

What ghetto?

Baranowice. But he was so excited, so he says, because of you, I can lose my life. So I says, mister, nobody is here. It's 5:00 in the morning. There's only you and I.

How old were you?

18. He somehow mellowed, figured, what can I do to him? Big man. Prime of his life, I figure maybe around 40.

So somehow, I show a different voice that it came out-- you wait here, don't move. I'll be right back. Figure at that time-- we didn't have no telephone, he can't call nobody. So I'm not afraid. To the voice, what can happen? They're going to shoot me, that's all.

He came out with a bucket of water, with a big bread, eat. Says, I have eight more hiding in your outhouse. Oh, my goodness. He crossed himself again. Eight?

Said, yes-- cousins, friends. He came up, and took a look at how we all look like devils. All devils. We washed up in that bucket of water. He brought another bucket of water, he brought a linen, and we washed up and cleaned up.

I had overalls, because I was a printer, so when I went away from my shift when it started, the executions, and they're grabbing the people and the shootings, so I was still wearing my overalls, with my hat, in the printing shop. So because they didn't bother the printers at that time. But when they caught up with everybody, so everything went. And it was a total clean-up of the ghetto.

Everybody share with the bread. They drank some water. And we asked him a simple thing-- I know the street we're on. How do we go to this and this party? We had a [NON-ENGLISH]. You know what a [NON-ENGLISH] is?

A [NON-ENGLISH] is a Gentile who came over on the Jewish side. He took learning from the rabbi, and he converted to a Jew. So he's a [NON-ENGLISH].

But the Germans didn't believe in those things. Once you're a Christian, you're Christian. Gentile is Gentile. He had a Jewish wife. So I figure, if he can go to Juzek, and Juzek and I were friends. My buddy, we used to play soccer together.

Juzek is the [NON-ENGLISH]?

Juzek, Juzek, his name was Juzek, like Joseph. So if I can see this kid, and the father that became a Jew, so we can find out something what's going on. So he told us how to go there.

Sure enough, we split up in groups-- four, four-- one side of the sidewalk, one on the other side, sidewalk, and we walk. Lucky for us-- my party arrived to the [NON-ENGLISH], the others did not. They caught them. Because they never arrived.

They had to go through the gendarmerie.

Who was in the other party?

Rachel's sister, my wife's sister, a cousin, and somebody else.

What was the cousin's name?

What was the cousin's name? Elke. So they never came to the [NON-ENGLISH], so we didn't know what happened to the whole party. Maybe they were caught.

Who was with you?

My future wife, and another sister.

Her sister?

Yeah, her sister. And another cousin. And they came to the [NON-ENGLISH]-- he looked at us, he couldn't believe it. Gave us food right away. What are we going to do with you?

They kept an eye on him, the Germans. This was Thursday before New Year's, the 31st of December. The people used to come in from the outlying area to get some things for their holiday-- buy whisky, vodka, all kind of stuff for the holidays. So it was a big gathering of people with horses and carts, coming and going.

And there was a couple of people staying in his place where he had. So I asked the father, maybe he can do us a favor. Where is the camp, the lager, like a working lager? He told us, there is a working lager-- the people work over there in a place. They have tailors, they have all kind of people-- shoemakers, tailors, all kind of crafts.

And then, they need heavy labor, because they had over there a brick factory, and they need over there people to work, dig the clay, and bring it to the oven. And where they fire the bricks, and when they dump it from the wagons-- when they bring up the clay from the diggings, from like a mine, but a open mine. They bring it up, the clay.

So they need workers over there. So we went to that camp. But how do we go? If we're going to go, they're going to catch us, the Germans, whoever. The Polish police, and the White Russian police.

But he take us with his wagon and horse and the buggy, take us up to that camp. He said, yes.

So they took us to that camp. And that was the-- who's in charge of the camp, Mr. Adam, he was a very fine person. He was with Organization Todt-- they were builders, they were not killers. Plain engineering people.

So they let us into the camp, they told us to go and wash. They gave us delousing, to delouse and be clean. And they told us-- they gave us a number where we can sleep. And they let us alone for that day.

The next day, we had to stand up and go with everybody else to work. We were in that camp from the December that we came in-- the end of the month, we went through all kinds of stuff in that camp which takes too long to talk about it. But we saw that sooner or later, they're going to dissolve the camp, and it's going to be the end of it.



So what's going to happen with us? Is it death? So death is going to be regardless. Even the camp over there, they're going to knock us out just by working us like horses. Or they're going to kill us when they-- or they will come to just annihilate the camp, dissolve it.

So we decided we're going to escape. Where I worked in an area where we were building new tracks for a railroad, for heavy building materials. One day, I saw a hand was waving to me from the other side. So I had looked up and I noticed my buddy, with whom I used to train in boxing, because I belonged to Maccabi, he belonged to the Polish [POLISH]--

[NON-ENGLISH] was an organization, like Eagles. So we always had teams that we competed between [NON-ENGLISH] and Maccabi, and [NON-ENGLISH]. And this was a [NON-ENGLISH], and he waved to me.

So I made sure that there is nobody watching me, and I told to the German, and he said, what do you want? I said, I want to go down and make a pee, excuse my expression. So he says, go ahead. But we'll look for one guy, they called him the artist, the artist used to send some people down on purpose to go down from the hill. You know, like you make a road, a railroad?

So there's a hillock. So he used to send people down. And they used to shoot them in the back while they were going down. Because, he used to say to the other people, the people they met in the [NON-ENGLISH] and they wanted to run away. Can't argue with that.

People were down below, he's on top. And we watched things like this happening. So we knew that he got to watch us. So he was not around, so it was OK.

I came down, and that guy was watching me, Wagner, called him the [NON-ENGLISH], he had a big nose. Like Jimmy Durante. So we call him the [NON-ENGLISH]. But he was a nice person-- he was a Sudetenite-- Sudetenland, from Czechoslovakia, that was. They were a German by-- like German-born, you know? But they belonged to Czechoslovakia. They lived there all their lives.

Let me go. When I came up over there, he told me in Polish, I shouldn't speak too loud, that he's going to make a couple of boards loose. And the first chance you get, run. First hide in the outhouse right here, we'll leave it open. And from the outhouse, I'm going to leave some stuff for you, you should clean up.

And walk out from the tannery, and go straight with the road, and go to [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] is a house near the Jewish [NON-ENGLISH]. You know what a [NON-ENGLISH] is? [NON-ENGLISH]?

What is it?

Cemetery. He was helping out in the grounds-- he was helping out with the grounds. But his job was cleaning out the outhouses. And at night, he used to put it in barrels. Pull it out from the outhouse and put them in barrels. And then throw it on the land over there.

It was not good land, so they could throw it out. And that was it. Disposed of that way, a simple disposal.

So he was this kind of worker. He worked mostly nights. So during the day, he was off. So he says, he's going to wait for you. I'm going to tell him, I'll be in touch with him. This was the first connection I had with the partisans. I didn't know that [NON-ENGLISH] was one of them.

But there was a silent group that worked to help a Jew to escape, or somebody of their own.

Polish?

Polish. And the next day, I had a talk with my wife, and I said to Rachel, Rachel, saw [NON-ENGLISH], and [NON-ENGLISH] is making two boards loose. So they can just pull the nails, and get out, and go into the toilet-- the outhouse.

And walk out from the tannery and go straight ahead, to [NON-ENGLISH] will take us somewhere that we're going to be safe for a while. And maybe to the partisans.

Sure enough, the way we said it, we had a chance around 3 o'clock-- before they start calling names, and take us back to the camp around 6:00. They had a chance to go down. And my wife was nearby, so I told her, come up on the right time. She was cooking for them.

So she came down, and she saw me walking down, and I opened up the first board, and I walked through. And nobody noticed it. And then, she came through. They walked into the outhouse, cleaned ourselves up-- I cleaned up her, she cleaned up. Maybe she'll look a little bit decent.

And we started walking from the tannery. He gave us a couple of satchels-- some food and things in it. They had there. And we walked through the whole city, and we came up to [NON-ENGLISH] house, and we walked into [NON-ENGLISH] house. The wife must have known about it already, so she said, he's going to be here soon.

And they kept us in the house. Then [NON-ENGLISH] came in the evening, and took us to a guy, [NON-ENGLISH], that he was friends of friends. And he took us to a place about 12 kilometers out of town. It actually was a place that you could not walk, because it was all wetlands.

But he knew the spot where to go through. So we came up to here in our neck between the reeds. And we walked through these reeds. And we came up in a little bit higher ground, between ash little trees. And they cut down those little ash trees, and they put them on this swamp.

And they built it up about 2 feet high. And they made for us like a little Island, so we could sleep on top of it. So we stayed over there for about a week.

Just the two of you?

Two of us, and there were two previously there. So we were four. Slept one next to the other. The water was red, so they gave us bottles of water. They had four bottles of water.

And we stayed there, just a little sip, and we ate bread that they gave us along the road. And they came to visit about every third day, or fourth day, see how we're doing. And brought up some more water, because there weren't--

After about a couple of weeks, they picked us up, and they took us to the partisans. About 50 kilometers in the line, and took us to a [NON-ENGLISH] lager-- that there were a group of partisans by the name of Nikolski. And he was a colonel, a Russian colonel. And he was organizing-- anybody who used to come to him was welcome.

Women, children, anybody they were separate, the men were separate. But the men was supplying the women with food, the children, and watching them, that not no harm should come to them. So I was with this partisans for a while. And then, they told us that we have to join another group and go in a different place, because the area was heating up. They were doing too much damage to the Germans-- cutting down poles, communications, letting them trains.

And they just absorbed a lot of shellacking from our side. We were there until 1943, when we got the orders, we got to march on [NON-ENGLISH]. We came into [NON-ENGLISH]--

What's [NON-ENGLISH]?

That's a town-- a little village. A name of a village. But we were always in the woods. We had underground houses that we lived in them. Like little log cabins, just to live on.

We had a kitchen, we used to jump out from our jumping off place, our camp. We used to get supplies from the local peasants. Like potatoes, and used to bring in a cow, or slaughter a bull, and bring it in together with the different provisions.

Soap, we couldn't get. It's one commodity that we just couldn't get. The luxuries you didn't think-- should thought about soap, because everybody's teeth were loose, they were just shaking. Because they didn't have no vitamin C, and couldn't have no dentifrice, didn't have no--

So at least with soap, you know, it gave you something, you could rub it in the gums. So call it over here, gingivitis? So that what happened, that people suffered from this. And then, it hit us with the scurvy, because no vitamin C. The only thing we had is potatoes, no vegetables, no greens, no fruits.

And we used to give him the business-- we were pretty good organized at that time. The Russians were supplying us from the air, plopping down heavy drops with ammunitions, guns, instructors, parachutists. And we used to hit them behind the lines pretty hard.

So it became a regular campaign of us against them. Suffered heavy casualties, because for us, we were 700 or 800 people, they were who knows how many. There were thousands of them. But they used to ambush them.

Our tactic was surprise-- hit and run, hit and run, hit and run. Hit them, and just disappear. Don't wait until they disembarks and knock them all out. Just hit them the first shot that they are surprised, they didn't know coming or going. You had a chance to hit them again on the ground, but then we run, because you can't fight the transports.

Because we were going in small groups, not to absorb heavy losses, we didn't go 700 or 800 people in one shot. We used to go in commando style-- 12, 14, 18, 20 people. The biggest thing was, we go 50 people was a lot, we made too much noise. 50 people is a lot of noise. You go on a bus over here with 30 people, aye, aye, aye, the noise.

We finally accomplished what they were supposed to do. We survived until the Russian army arrived in 1944, in July, and they liberated us. And from our liberation point, of a small little town in Poland, Lachowice, that was the point where everybody was gathered.

They picked us up, told us to say hello to your friends, say goodbye to your wives, acquaintances, friends. They going on the front to fight against the fascists. And in the civilian get-ups that we would wear, we were led for four days until we came to Bialystok.

In Bialystok, we walked all the way from Baranowice, from Lachowice, to Bialystok, four days. We made 200 kilometers. And we came to the front, and this is where they gave us the real christening. That's the way they came in, that's the way they threw us right in-- say, hurrah, and roll like hell and shoot.

And we just went like wave after wave, who came out, was good who doesn't come out, didn't count. And at that time, they give you 200 grams of vodka, you don't feel nothing anyway. You just roll like an idiot, and that's all. So a lot of idiots fell, a lot of them got up, and they run again.

And that was it. And finally, thank God, the many months of this [NON-ENGLISH] until they changed the uniforms, well, as they gave us assignment for different troops. We finally joined the regular army. Who went to--

The Russian army?

Yeah, who went with this place, who went without place, but we're all scattered between different. They didn't want to have us all at once in the same squad, because we're all Jews. So they had a little rachmones, you know, that we shouldn't all get killed in the same place. So they scattered us between different battalions, the regiment. So maybe there were 200,000, you know, so you have a chance maybe to survive.

But you had to go. You felt obligated that you should go.

Because they set you free? Because you felt, it's duty. It's the right thing to do. In retrospect, maybe not, but that's what happened.

The liberation came for me, actually, came in 1944-- '45, in January the 9th, because I was hit in the town of Elbing-- near Konigsberg, in Germany. In a way, I was glad. Because I was in Germany, I was killing Germans, on German soil.

So they came a long way. So each one was pretty happy, even got hurt. I had third degree frostbite on my left foot. My right foot was shot through. The head was bleeding, and total concussion.

But I didn't know for three days where I was. Because I was laying for three days there, in this January the 9th.

And at that time, we were wearing-- you know as storm troops-- the Russians have storm troops, just like the Germans had storm troops, they had the elite storm troops who didn't give a hoot for nothing. They just go. They fall and they go.

They wind up in a town of Narva, in a hospital. And I asked them, how the heck did I come here? And they told me, you're wounded. I says, where? Told me, don't move.