

My name is Nikki [PERSONAL NAME], and today is June 15, 1983. I am here to interview Rabbi Sadi Nahmias, who is a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust. The interview is taking place at the Sephardic Jewish Center of Miami Beach.

I am doing this under the auspices of the Southeastern Florida Holocaust Memorial Center, Incorporated. The purpose of this interview is to add to the oral history of the Nazi Holocaust, so that, through this living memorial, future generations will know what happened. With this knowledge, hopefully we can prevent any such occurrence in the future.

Rabbi Nahmias, if you would begin by telling us where you were born and what you remember about the early days of your childhood.

Yes. My name is Rabbi Sadi Isac Nahmias. I was born in Greece, in 1908, and raised in a very religious family. And I study in the commercial Jewish school.

And we had a life, very, very peaceful, a Jewish life, among our family, because our ancestors came from Spain during the Inquisition and settled in the Ottoman Empire. And after 1912, this part of Turkey become Greece, so we become Greek citizens with my family, together.

To make story short-- until 1940, our lives were just wonderful. At that time, when I was 16, 17 years old, I started to learn the Sephardic liturgy with professors from Turkey. And my parents pushed me to go to become a cantor and later on to be a rabbi. But in my town, in Salonika, where I was born, there were too many rabbinim, too many hazzanim, too many cantors. They did not need people to get paid. They want only volunteers.

So I have to go with my father, in my father's business. My father's business was wholesale produce, in Salonika, since generation-- from my great-grandfather, they were wholesalers of produce.

In Salonika?

In Salonika, yes. So I used to help my father during the weekdays. And on Saturday I used to go to the synagogue to enjoy my people, because, as I told you, there were too many hazzanim and too many rabbinim, and they didn't need extra help with pay. So we had to be both.

As a matter of fact, 90% of the rabbis in Greece, in Salonika, they were merchants only, not only rabbis. They were merchants. They used to sell sugar, kosher sugar, to sell wine, kosher wine, to sell matzahs during the Passover, to sell eggs-- to sell anything they could sell, to make a living, because the community could not bear them to have a nice living.

So everybody used to be a hazzan or a rabbi and also a merchant. So this is the way we did our lives in Salonika.

Tell me what you remember about holidays in your parents' home?

The holidays were the most wonderful days in our lives. It was unbelievable, the way we kept the holidays.

Tell me a little--

--is no more-- it will be no more in this world of today-- impossible. The holidays were kept with such dignity-- the Passover, the Sukkot, the Rosh Ha-Shana and Yom Kippur. I had to go with my father, all the holidays, in the synagogue. Every Saturday, we can never miss. Only if I was sick, real sick, I could stay home; if not, we had to go to the synagogue.

It was an enjoyment, in the synagogue, in Salonika. We had 82 synagogues-- a population of 120,000, at that time-- seminaries, rabbinical schools-- the best in Europe.

So when you first started school, was that a Jewish school, too?

A Jewish school, yes.

Oh, so you were you--

Commercial school called school of [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH]-- it was the name of the school.

So does that mean you learned Hebrew, there, as well as--

Hebrew and we had French,

You had secular subj--

Greek.

Secular subjects, as well as religious subjects?

Yes. Absolutely. They taught us over there all the holidays and-- different language, of course. Greek was mandatory, French, Spanish, and families who want the children to learn German, they had to learn German. Others want English, they have to learn English. Italian. This was the schools-- not public schools.

Private.

Private schools. They were doing a terrific job with our young generation, because we learned over there everything. It was a really good school.

Do you remember if there were any Jewish organizations or what the Jewish organizations?

Many, many, many.

What do you remember?

We remember-- I was a member of Maccabi, a member of Theodor Herzl, a member of the [NON-ENGLISH], a member of Trumpeldor, a member also of this Jewish hero-- I cannot remember-- [NON-ENGLISH]. We were all members of these organizations.

We was a-- was a wonderful, wonderful people, to teach us everything. And we had also the help-- the financial help of the YMCA. Because we could not afford to buy the athletic equipment that we needed. And the YMCA--

The Christian Y.

--Christian, yes-- men's--

Helped you?

--YMCA, Christian--

Young Men's Christian Association.

--Association-- yes-- they used to help us by giving us all the equipment we need for the Maccabi.

The sporting [CROSS TALK].

Sporting equipment. And we had a band of 60 musicians, all young kids--

All Jewish children?

--all Jewish-- young kids. And of course, there was no tuition-- was no membership, the everything free. And we become athletes. As a matter of fact, I became an athlete at that time.

Also [LAUGHS] when I was 18 years of age, in 1920, I was the heavyweight boxing champion of Greece-- of north Greece. All these were with the help of the YMCA-- of those teachers in the YMCA. So we had a life, a Jewish life, that today in no part of the world you can find this kind of life.

Were your parents Zionists, also?

Yes.

Do you remember if there was a kehilla?

Kehilla?

A kehilla, in the community?

Kehilla is a synagogue.

Well, the community organization, I mean, specifically.

The community of Salonika was the richest community in Europe. As a matter of fact, when from Vienna or Yugoslavia or Romania or Bulgaria they need a rabbi, they had to apply in Salonika, to the Jewish community, to provide them a rabbi-- or a cantor. Always. It was the center of the religious studies in Europe. As a matter of fact, they used to call Salonika not in Hebrew [SPEAKING HEBREW]-- it means "from Zion, that I will come." It is [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. That means "from, Salonika they have to learn, all the European people, the Torah and the religion."

And the fact that it was a Sephardic community, that was not--

It was complete Sephardic.

Yes.

We had no Ashkenazi community over there. I have to be honest. It was a very small Ashkenazi community of maybe 20, 25 people. They had a small shul, a very small shul, in a Jewish quarter.

One day, the gabbai, the president of this small community, went to my father and told him, can your son, the little boy, come to us to read the sefer Torah this coming Saturday? My father said, why not? So, for the first time in my life, I went to this small Ashkenazi synagogue. I saw things that I never saw in my life.

Like?

We used to show the sefer Torah before a reading. They do not--

After.

They do after. I was amazed-- something [LAUGHS] that I was not used. I start to read a sefer Torah in our melody, and the Ashkenazi people were looking each other. What kind of music is this? They like it-- not that they didn't like. They liked very much. But they never heard the Oriental melody that we are us, because our melody is a mixture of Turkish, Byzantine, and flamenco music, all combined together.

The Ashkenazi music is European-- it's occidental. And these gentlemen-- they were very nice people-- they were amazed. They wanted me to go every Saturday. My father told them, no, he has to go to our synagogue to help. I was helper. I was a boy, 16- 17-years-old boy, and I was helping all the rabbinim and the all cantors to give to the synagogue a little bit of joy, because of my voice. But no pay-- absolutely nothing! Just the honors.

Would you sing a little melody for us?

No, I don't sing outside of the synagogue. Now, the only honors was that they used to give to my mother the best seat in the synagogue and to my father the best honors. This was my joy, to see my mother and father happy. That's all. Pay? Absolutely nothing.

This was our life-- a wonderful life. As a matter of fact, my wife's father-- my wife's father was our neighbor. He was the [YIDDISH]. [YIDDISH], in Yiddish, is "gabbai."

Oh.

In Sephardic, it's [SEPHARDIC]. In Yiddish, it's [YIDDISH]-- of a wonderful synagogue. That was-- all the rabbinim were in this synagogue. The all rabbinim were in this synagogue. And my wife's father was the [YIDDISH], the rabbi.

On Shabbat morning-- because we were next-door neighbor-- he used to come to my house, to wake me up, 5 o'clock in the morning in wintertime--

Why so early?

--because he want me to go with him-- walking. He was very religious-- walking, until his synagogue, to help the rabbinim, to hear my voice, and to enjoy. I didn't want to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning. But I had so much respect for my wife's father that I couldn't refuse him.

So I used to go with him, every Saturday, to enjoy the rabbinim in his synagogue. From there, I used to go walking to my synagogue.

You were tired before you started [LAUGHS] the services!

No, it was a joy. It was a life--

He never took it bad.

--a life-- no. It was a life of religious enjoyment that unfortunately, my darling, it will not no more be in this world. It's finished.

Do you have brothers and sisters?

No. I am the only son. The only son.

Tell me, Rabbi, when were you first aware that there was a Hitler and there was trouble for the Jews?

In 1938, 1939, we start to read in the papers that in Danzig, in Poland, was some trouble over there. But we said among ourselves, Danzig, Poland-- so far away. We've got nothing to do with the Germans. After all, all the commerce, the business, in Salonika was done with Germany-- all The import-export, with Germany-- for years, for years and years.

So we said among us, we've got no fear. What's done over there is Danzig, in Poland-- nothing to do with us. Just, we have to relax to see what will happen. This was 1938.

1939, things start to be a little bit shaky, in Salonika. All of a sudden, in 1940-- October 10, 1940-- I was with my father in my father business, 4 o'clock in morning, 5 o'clock in the morning. We had the farmers who used to bring the merchandise to sell for them and to take back. commission. All of a sudden, we saw the little boys with the newspaper boys-- Greece, with Italy, in war. If I were to say in Greek, [SPEAKING GREEK] That means "War between Greece and Italy."

We were amazed. We never believed that the Italians will attack us. Two hours after, they started to bomb Salonika, the Italians. And they call then-president, dictator, Metaxas, one question-- surrender, or we will take Greece. We will invade Greece.

And Metaxas says, N-O, no. Right away, the newspaper came out and says, all the classes from 1920 till 1935, they have to go to mobilize in a secret place, to get dressed and to go to war right away. I was in this category. I left everything in the middle--

How old were you, at that point?

I was born in 1908--

And that was 1939?

--and this was 1939-- 1940. 1940.

So you were 22 years old.

22 years old. I left everything in the middle. I pay all the farmers the accounts, and I told my father and mother goodbye, and I have to go to war. But God was with me.

We left Salonika, walking, till one secret place.

"We"-- you mean all the young men.

All the young men-- to a secret place, that nobody should know. And there they were dressed, give the ammunitions and the machine guns and everything, to go in the north Greece where is the frontier between Greece and Italy-- is a frontier between Albania, Greece, and Italy.

I was a fat boy, at that time, very fat boy. And they could not give to me a uniform, because I was a fat boy. With me, with another 11 boys, fat boys. And they call us. The fat boys have to go back in Salonika, to order for their uniforms.

So we went back in Salonika to headquarters. And a tailor came. He took measure for us. It will take three to four or five days until they will give us the fatty uniforms.

Meantime, all the soldiers left for the frontier. And for 10 or 12 people, they could not make a transport. So they ask, who of you are bookkeepers, who knows real bookkeeping? I raised my hand. I was a real bookkeeper.

So we went for examination. I was number one. And they gave me a post. They give me a job in Salonika, to take care of shipping-- shipping meat to the front lines, shipping bread to the front lines. This was my job, over there-- 1940. This was 1940.

Let's go back a little bit. What was the important industries in the town? What did most of the Jews do, to earn a living?

Commerce. Business. Merchants. Doctors, merchants, engineers. that's all. They were not farmers. No one Jews I knew were farmer.

Were there factories?

Factories? Plenty of factories, yes.

What kind of factories?

Different factories. Different factories. I can't remember. Different factories.

Do you remember any antisemitism, as you were growing up?

Always there was antisemitism in Greece.

Well, tell me--

Since was a child-- a child-- a baby. Always, they used to call us "dirty Jews," always. Wherever you went, in Greece, it was antisemitism.

As a matter of fact, it was in 1932, we had a neighborhood built by an American Jew-- an American Christian-- Mr. Campbell. Mr. Campbell. Yes. He was a Christian. He built a neighborhood in Salonika for all the poor people-- around 2,000 families, a big, big neighborhood. And they used to call "Campbell neighborhood."

All of a sudden, one night, those like Ku Klux Klans here in America, they were the three A-- Three E-- Es-- Three Es.

And what does it stand for?

This stand for Enosis-- Union of the White Supremacy Greeks. They went over there. They burned up every single house-- every single house. Then, it was a very rich Jew in America, Baron de Hirsch. Still the family's still here.

The father, or the grandfather, he built the biggest hospital in Salonika. And at that time, he built a very big neighborhood they used to call the neighborhood of Baron de Hirsch, for these families that were burned up by the antisemites in Campbell neighborhood. So, in Greece, it was always-- till today, till today-- I had a friend of mine who came, two weeks ago, here. He told me, it's terrible. Terrible.

Do you remember a particular incident of antisemitism, as a child--

Not one, not two, not three-- dozens. Dozens of incidents, dozens of harassment, dozens of insults, all over. It was people, since I remember from my childhood-- always antisemites, every one of them.

Did your father do business with the gentiles?

Of course. The farmers were all gentile, but they loved us, because we were, from many generations back, from father to father to sons, giving the business.

How many generations were you in Salonika?

Since 1452.

Directly, you can go back--

They came in Salonika since 1452, my forefathers. I don't remember how many generations. They came from Spain, during the Inquisition, as I told you before, to the Ottoman Empire. Salonika belonged to the Ottoman Empire. So, from generations and generations.

So you saw yourself as a Greek.

I became a Greek in 1912. I was born 1908; I was a Turk. In 1912, I became a Greek, automatically, because Salonika was in Greece but no more Turkey.

Did the government supervise anything that went on in the Jewish community?

"Supervise"? What do you mean by "supervise"?

Well, the synagogue-- anything that went on among the Jews.

No, no, no, no, no.

They led you--

Nothing, nothing. As a matter of fact, every synagogue in Salonika, they were, once a year to give to the community an inventory. During the year, we had donations of \$100, for instance. We had expenses, \$130. The community used to give to the synagogue \$30.

If on the other hand, we had an income of \$1,000 and we spent \$800, this \$200 used to stay in the treasury, toward making renovations, to do something nice for the synagogue. So it was no trouble with the synagogue. Always, they were covered by the Jewish community for any expenses, any deficits, any losses-- always, for years and years and generations.

But the government left you alone.

Of course.

Oh. All right. Well, now, let's pick up-- just a minute. Let's pick up when you were working in the office.

The reason the Jewish committee was rich is because all the Jewish people-- we were 120,000 families-- we used to give taxes to the community. For instance, if you want to marry your son, you should go to the community to take the license. The government won't give you a license-- the city hall. Only the community will give a license.

So how much Mr. So-and-so owe to the community? 500 drachma. Drachmas was the Greek money. You haven't got money to pay? Is no license for your son to get married. So he has to pay.

Now, if somebody pass away, the same story. They had to pay whatever taxes they were--

To bury him.

To bury him, yes. This is the way the community could afford to sustain--

Itself.

--hundreds of hundreds of people-- and the poor families, to give in wintertime, food-- to give them coal, to give them clothes.

So it was a well-organized community.

The most good-organized community in Europe.

All right, well, let's continue when you were working in the office. You said-- when you were not taken to the work camp-- to the army.

Yes. I left the office of my father, and I went to the headquarters-- get dressed. And for six months during the war, I was in the office, working in the office. Later on, when Italy was losing the war, they call Hitler to help the Italians to conquer the Greeks. So we left-- all the officers, every soldier, should leave the office and go to the front line-- and me too, together with them. We went--

This was on December or January 1941. We were in the mountains, fighting with the Italians. The Greek soldiers were just near Rome, near Tirana, in the Albanian frontier, going into Italy, when Mussolini saw things so bad that the Greeks were ready to enter Italy. He called Hitler, and he sent those Stukas. I don't know if you Americans heard what means "Stukas." Those German airplanes who do, who go down like this.

Stukas.

Stukas. And they made us kneel. We were all dispersed, all the Greek soldiers. We left every ammunition, every single machine gun, in the fields, and we ran away in the mountains. This was the end of the Greek army.

And at this time, what was happening to the community back in Salonika?

Exactly.

Were there problems?

There started problems now. When we were dispersed in the mountains, it took us about a week or two weeks to come, walking, from the mountains, to avoid the German SS troops in the highways-- because the highways were full of German soldiers. Through the mountains, we went back in Salonika.

We found there everything bombed-- every single synagogue destroyed. Everything was very, very-- in the city, every-- too many buildings were destroyed.

This was done by the Germans?

By the Germans and the Italians. So we came back in Salonika in beginning of 1941. And we saw the Germans in the city-- masters of the city.

Now, a couple of things. Were you married, at that point?

Yes.

Tell me when you were married?

I was married in 19-- 19-- just a minute. 19-- what year-- 1933. 1933. My first wife. With my first wife.

And was she an old-timer from Salonika? Her family--

The same thing. Same thing which--

And did you have children?

No.

No children.

No children. No children.

So was there a ghetto, in Salonika?

Just a minute. I will come to ghetto in a few minutes. I came back, through the mountains, in Salonika. I find everything taken by the Germans. Our families were not molested, in the beginning. Nothing happened.

They continued their business?

They continued business-- or, kind of business. Everything was taken by the Germans. My father's business was destroyed, completely.

So how did you live?

How do we live? Black market. On black market. They did not molest us as far as--

Physically.

Physically. But, for one year, little by little, they put us down, financially and morally. And 1942 was the worst year for us, because they ordered all the Jews living in the fancy quarters to go to a part of the city that make a ghetto.

Was that a Jewish neighborhood, originally?

No, no.

No, it wasn't?

No. No, no. They-- Salonika, a fancy parts, good neighborhoods, it was mixed up with the Greeks.

I see.

But they told us to leave this neighborhood and to go, everyone, in one part of the city and to have a Magen David, a yellow Magen David in our jacket.

Where did you get the Magen David from? Do you remember?

The community gave to us.

The community gave--

The general give to the community, give to us. This was 1942, end of 1942-- end of 1942. We had a chief rabbi from Austria.

Do you remember his name?

Yes-- from Austria, the Jewish community hired in two years before the destruction, to be our spiritual leader, because he could speak Greek. Our real chief rabbi, a man of God, could not speak Greek. And when the Jewish soldiers went to be a soldier, they have to say the Greek oath. So the rabbis should be there and talk to them in Greek. This rabbi could not speak Greek--

What did he speak?

Spanish.

Oh.

And Hebrew--

And Ladino? Did you speak?

Ladino, yes, Ladino, speak Ladino. And Hebrew, of course. And the Greek government did not like him, because he could not speak Greek. So the Jewish community was forced to hire a rabbi-- Ashkenazi rabbi, not Sephardi rabbi-- from Austria.

But he spoke--

His name was Rabbi Koretz. The first name, I don't remember-- Rabbi Koretz, with his wife. He came in Salonika in 1939, I think so. And the only thing he used to do is to go every time that Jewish soldiers had to go to the headquarters, to go with them and to talk in Greek.

This rabbi sold us. He went to be together with the Gestapo, with the promise-- they gave to him a promise that they will not send him in concentration camp. They will send him in part family camps.

Theresienstadt?

No, it was not Theresienstadt. It was in that camps. I don't remember the name. I will, later on, maybe I will remember. It was in Austria, in Austria, a camp with the families. They did not kill them, because there were also the Spanish Jews who were Spanish citizens they sent in this camp. And they promised to the Rabbi Koretz they will send him with his family in this camp-- not in Poland-- not in Auschwitz--

Those are death camps.

--if he could cooperate with the Gestapo. He did it. He sold us.

He called all the Jewish population in the synagogue, to make speeches, telling us, just don't worry. My children, you will go in Poland. They will give you a piece of land. You will be farmers. They will give you houses over there, small houses. According the family, according your children, they will get small or big house over there.

You will take without you your money. Take as many clothing, new clothing, heavy clothing as you can, because it's cold over there, and your gold, your jewelry, your diamonds, and everything with you. You go over there for a period of time-- maybe six months, maybe one year-- until the end of the war. After, they will bring you back in Salonika and your houses, and-- blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Most of us believed him, unfortunately.

Just a moment, before you tell me a little bit about it. Do you remember what life was like in the ghetto itself?

A miserable life, because you could not go out at nighttime. In daytime, they left you to go shopping around in the neighborhood. At nighttime, you could not go to see your parents or your friends or your in-laws or whatever it is.

You could not walk at nighttime with the Star of David. Sometimes my second wife was smart enough to take the Magen David out and to go wherever she wants to go. I did the same thing, myself. But if, by chance, you was caught oh, my, oh, my, oh, my. It was a terrible thing.

Now, at that time-- I have a little story to tell you, a very important story. Just, it was in 1942. End of 1942, my parents had a very big warehouse of dry fruits-- walnuts, almonds--

Hazel.

--those hazelnuts-- very big warehouse. We used to sell this stuff in wintertime. All of a sudden, one morning, the Gestapo-- two Gestapo, with two Greeks-- those antisemites-- they went to the Gestapo and tell, the Nahmias family, they have a big warehouse of dry fruits that the German needed very badly. Those [NON-ENGLISH]-- they call this raisins, those golden raisins--

The white raisins.

--the golden raisin-- they loved. The dates, they loved. So two Greeks from the wholesale market went to the Gestapo and told them, the family Nahmias, they have a big warehouse with those fruits.

One morning, I was with my father at my desk. All of a sudden, we saw two Germans, two colossal boys, with a black-- was a nickel, a color of nickel [NON-ENGLISH], here, the Gestapo-- and says, who is Nahmias, here? I says, I am.

My father, when they saw coming in, was become white. He was trembling, the poor man. He was a very, very shy person.

Says, what do you want? Do you have a warehouse of nuts? Yes, we have. We couldn't say, I don't have. Yes, we have.

So we have a trade in. You will give us all your dry foods that we give you, tomorrow, biscuits to sell in the open market-- biscuits. I mean, it was a German-- like a pancake, dry pancakes--

A cracker?

It was sort of a dry pancake they used to give to the soldiers. We will give to you the equivalent of this dry fruits in biscuits, to sell in the open market-- not black market; open market-- to get your money. I told the Dolmetscher-- I mean, the Greek who was interpreting us, we don't know how to sell crackers and biscuits. Our job business is to sell the fruits.

If you talk too much, he says, you will go in jail right now. And the German took his gun in his hand. Says, what you want for it?

It took me two days to deliver to them all the dry fruits. It was a fortune. And they give me a piece of paper, to go the next day to the German headquarters and to start to load the biscuits.

Then, the same evening, 12 o'clock at night, they came to my house. I was living with my father and mother and my first wife. Knock on the door-- two Gestapo-- said, you're Nahmias? Yes. Come on. What do you want? Come on.

They put me in jail, with the criminals.

Did they tell you why?

Nothing. No explanation. They put me in jail, with the criminals. So after two days, we put some two big lawyers, Greek lawyers. They told me, do you want your liberty or you want your-- you want your liberty, to stay in jail? What do you want?

I says, I want my liberty. My father said, the hell with the fruits and everything. I want my son. So-- OK! I went home. Was the end of '42, beginning of '43, when the big tragedy start to come.

What did the children do, who had been going to school? Were there schools in the ghetto?

Schools in the ghetto? Nothing!

OK.

It was a life of misery, a life of subduing us like animals. We could do nothing-- just waiting, eating-- eating-- I mean, spending our money, the money that we would sell-- spending our money, until we see what will happen-- the end of the war.

All of a sudden, one good morning, we heard the newspaper asking all the young men from 17, 18 years of age until 30, 35 years to go to the-- we had a big, big place in downtown, where 1,000 people could be assembled, to have a reunion over there-- a meeting. So, we went over there.

They started to make to us-- like, to count as monkeys, to have exercise in the dirt, down there, to-- going around like monkeys in the dust, just laughing of all the Jews, going around, around, like animals. Then we started to understand that things were going to be very, very bad for us-- very bad.

They took part of the youngsters, 20, 22, 25 years old, to work in different German--

Camps?

--German camps in Salonika.

What kind of work did they do? Do you know?

Transporting materials and-- just, like porters-- like slaves. I have to spend a fortune, to give to some lawyers, to--

Keep you out?

--to keep me out of this sham. Things start to come very bad for the Jewish people, in end of 1942.

Now, let's go back to the rabbi who told you that-- who suggested that you listen to the Nazis.

Yes. This was.

What did you talk about, yourselves, when he told you this?

Right away, we understood it was a traitor.

You did.

Yes. But you could do nothing to him, because he was protected by the Germans. We couldn't do nothing to him, absolutely nothing. He was protected by the Gestapo.

And we were so afraid, so scared, we didn't know what will happen the next day. Every day, one new law. Every day, orders-- counter orders. They get us crazy.

Now, at that time, we start to find out how could we buy food in the black market. How could you find nothing, except black market? Anything you want to buy-- bread-- for the Jews, I'm talking. Anything you want to buy, you have to go to the black market.

What did you do about medicine?

Everything, black market. Everything. We start to spend our money, because we could not live without the food, without what we need. And when Koretz, the rabbi, told us to buy heavy clothing, we went to the merchants and we bought the best heavy clothing for all of us. Because we will be in Poland, in a very cold climate.

We bought the best things in the world, those fancy shoes and fancy coats, everything heavy, thinking that we will need it over there. And this was for the Germans. Because when the orders start to come, beginning of 1943-- January, February, March and April-- those four months-- they start to take, from different sections of the city, in the morning-- 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock 4 o'clock in the morning, to close all the neighborhood and take all the Jews to the railway station-- start to send in Poland.

Then, it was the most terrible days, the most ominous days of our lives, that we saw that everything was the end of us. My farmers came to my house and brought me villager clothings and false identities, false-- Greek names-- to take all my family in the mountains. My mother didn't want to be.

Why? Was she afraid?

She was afraid for me. If they caught me, she said, I am an old lady now. I don't care anymore. But, for you--

Say, Mama, those farmers are from my grandfather and my great-grandfather. We know them so well. This was like family. Don't worry, Mama. No, I don't want it.

So the Greeks, the poor boys, left the house, crying. I says, we give to them whatever we could save-- two or three big suitcases-- trunks-- of things of the house I give to them, and they take to the village, to the mountains. And when our turn come--

Do you remember your date?

Yes, absolutely. They took us from our homes on the end of March-- end of March 1943. They took us to a place-- to a neighborhood adjacent to the railroad station. They called the neighborhood of Baron de Hirsch-Meyer, Baron de Hirsch-Meyer, the neighborhood that he built for the poor, years, years ago. And they used to call the neighborhood of Baron de Hirsch-Meyer.

They took us over there. And after a few days, as a matter of fact, my mother was with fever. I had to put her in a pushcart--

To take her?

--and take her to the railroad station. Over there, we wait-- who can remember? 3 days? 4 days? 6 days? 8 days? 10 days?

What did you do for food? Where did you stay-- outdoors, in the open?

No! No, everything closed, over there. We had to buy food with black market. They used to bring--

So they sent you to other homes and other houses? You said you moved-- you went to--

This was the houses, the empty houses--

I see.

--they first shipped to Poland.

I see. Jews who lived there.

The whole neighborhood was empty. They brought another contingent of people to this house.

Take their place.

When they used to ship this one another contingent from Salonika. He took this shipping from January, February, March, and April, as far as we are concerned. After us, we don't know how many shipments they made.

Her family, my family, all our families were shipped, April 7, 1943. We were shipped all together in those cattle cars.

What was it like?

Cattle cars-- what's like? God forbid.

What was the trip like--

Not even to your enemy, you should not wish to be in those cattle cars. Those cattle cars can hold regularly 20, 30 people. We were 100 in each cattle car. No place to move. You have to stay like this.

So my mother was with fever. I could sleep in the floor, but I did not sleep. I was, I mean, standing and leaving to my mother a little bit more room for her, because she was with fever. And every 10 hours, 8 hours, 12 hours, 15 hours, they tell you to stop. And--

When our time, our turn, come to be shipped, they ask us everything we had in our fingers-- rings, the ladies, the [INAUDIBLE]--

Earrings.

--earrings, bracelets, money-- everything-- everything, they used to put in bags, those Gestapo people. Because, they told us, you won't need no money over there.

That was before you got onto the train?

Before we got in, they took us the money, the paper money. When we went to the trains, they took us all the jewelry. When we ask why you took us the paper money, they gave us Polish money. We give drachmas, Greek money, and they give us counter-- I mean, counter value in Polish money.

We ask, why you take our Polish money? You won't need nothing over there, they told us. We didn't understand the meaning of this word. You won't need nothing over there. Who could understand what was waiting for us over there? Nobody.

Rabbi, all of this time, did the Germans set up a Judenrat in Salonika?

A what?

A Judenrat, a government of the Jews-- that the Jews ran the community.

No.

They didn't.

No.

In some communities, they did.

No, no, no, no, it was everything upside down. Everything was a nightmare.

But there was nobody else, beside the rabbi who worked for the Germans-- or were there other people--

One rabbi, this only the--

That's the only--

And another one, tailor by the name-- I don't remember his name now. He was also a traitor, this tailor. Don't recall his name now.

He went to the Germans to say, Mr. So-and-so is a rich man. He has gold and silver and whatever it is. And you catch him and take his money. Mr. So-and-so-- he was pointing out the rich Jews to the Gestapo, and they took everything.

The big problem was that they put us in those cattle cars without thinking if we were human beings-- worse than animals. They could put 100 cows in the cattle car. They didn't care about. But they put us over there, sick people-- sometimes we heard that people died in the cattle cars.

Was there water?

And this-- or this water? Nothing! Nothing!

So what did you do?

They-- I remember very well, we took those soldier canteen, soldiers things, with us and to drink just one sip at a time. And when someone died in the cattle car, we used to tell the Germans, once the car used to stop, we had two or three or four dead people. Raus, they says. Take them out. Take them out.

This was our families. I don't remember if my second wife's family was with us in the same cattle car. I don't remember, but we were just like sardines in a box.

How long did that trip take?

11 days. 11 days there, 11 days-- between 10 and 11 days. To be honest, no one can tell you exactly how many days. It was the biggest nightmare in the world, because the day was night, the night was day-- we could never know what was happening to us-- looking the misery, looking sick people, crying into the cattle car-- how could you imagine if it was seven days, eight days, or 10 days were, and approximate between nine and 10 days.

What kind of-- did you have any food?

What we took with us!

That's all.

That's all we have. The Germans, during these 10 days, they absolutely did nothing to us-- nothing. And the need of everyone, it was done into the cattle cars. It was a nightmare that nobody can describe. In no books in the world can this be described. It's impossible-- impossible.

Now, waiting and waiting. Now, what will happen? Now, where we are going? All of a sudden, one night-- it was a night-- it was in the morning hours-- nobody can tell-- the car stopped. And we saw, like, demons, like devils, soldiers, German soldiers, with those dogs, those German shepherds, and some boys with their jackets with the-- with the--

Stripes?

--the stripes. We could not understand what was these boys, going like demons.

Excuse me. You didn't have a clue of where you were going?

Absolutely nothing!

OK--

Only the rabbi told us we are going in Poland. They give you your house over there. You will go farming. You will plant your own vegetables. And you will buy your own food from the markets over there.

They gave us, the Germans, [NON-ENGLISH]-- "zlotys," [NON-ENGLISH]-- I don't remember.

"Zlotys."

"Zlotys."

That's Russian, isn't it?

No, "zlotys" is Polish.

Oh, Polish.

Yes.

The zloty.

They gave us the zlotys, so you will go to the market to buy whatever you want, and you will plant your own vegetables, and-- blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

So when the wagon stopped--

You believed--

--we saw four chimneys, burning. We could not even understand what means those four chimneys-- four big flames. It was night. Yes, it was night when we came already. Yes. It was nighttime. It was not daytime-- yes, nighttime.

So my first wife was with my sister-in-law. She had four babies, four little-- three girls and one boy, age four, six, seven, eight years of age. I told my wife, you take two boys, or two-- two children with you, and let Mary-- her sister-- take another two. Don't leave her with four children together.

I send my wife, my first wife, to the crematorium myself. I didn't know that any woman with babies, with children, has to go to the crematorium. I didn't know that. So with my own-- and I sent my first wife to the crematorium.

So she took two-- two-- my sister, one boy, one girl, and my sister-in-law took another two, and we went down. All of a sudden, a German doctor come in. [SPEAKING GERMAN]. [SPEAKING GERMAN]. Dangerous.

Oh, dangerous, of course.

So they separated us from our parents-- all the youngsters in one side, our parents, our uncles, our aunties-- everybody, in other side. We said, among us, listen, boys-- finally the Germans start to be humane. They want to send the older-- with trucks or whatever thing, walking, what they were to go. And we are the youngsters-- we go walking. Because we saw big trucks over there-- empty trucks. And we imagined that these trucks were for the old people and babies and infants. So many infants, so many babies. They could not walk.

So we thought they will go with the trucks, and we will go walking. Right? So they took all of us, the youngsters, in one side. And we start to walk and to walk. And we left our parents in the other side.

What happened to them, the story knows, everybody-- this is the Holocaust. They were taken to the trucks, straight to the gas chamber, straight to the crematorium. We didn't know nothing at the time, in is moment. The only we know-- we saw the anti trucks, and our parents and relatives and friends in one side, waiting for to be loaded into the trucks and to go in our little house they will give to us to be farmers, to have a family life.

We went in the camp-- start to be a daytime. There was a gentleman by the name Savator [PERSONAL NAME]. This

was-- from Salonika, but he was born in Austria. The wife was born in Austria. And he used to speak very well German.

They caught him one of the first to take him over there, to be the Dolmetscher, the interpreter. The wife was friend of my friend-- of my now-family, from her and her sister-- they were friends. [NON-ENGLISH], the husband, was friend of mine.

So the wife went with the women-- with the young women-- and the husband, [NON-ENGLISH], for the man. Then he become an interpreter. The moment we enter Auschwitz-- we enter Auschwitz-- they put us in a big, big hangar, a big, big--

A barrack?

--barrack. They told us to get completely undressed-- naked. And [NON-ENGLISH] brothers, what I will tell you now, I want you to be men-- to don't lose your courage, because I will tell you something that's going on here.

Do you see these four flames, over there? This is crematoriums. We--

Did you know what the word meant?

To be honest, we didn't know what the word "crematorium" means. We didn't know what "crematorium" means. I says, [NON-ENGLISH], what are you talking about? These four big flames is in Birkenau, where you was before.

The trains were in Birkenau. This is the station where the train goes. Birkenau, Auschwitz is Miami, Miami Beach-- or Miami City, Miami Beach. Let's say, Miami City is Birkenau; Miami Beach is Auschwitz.

So, in Birkenau, these four crematoriums, they burn up your parents, your children. We told among us, [NON-ENGLISH], mind's gone. He's crazy. I remember very well talking him, [NON-ENGLISH], are you in your right mind, how you're talking with sense?

Sadi, he says, I'm telling you this true story. This is the end of everything. Your parents, our parents-- everything is gone. They are be cremated. They will be killed over there.

Nobody could believe him. Still we thought that [NON-ENGLISH] was crazy. If [NON-ENGLISH] lost his mind, they was telling stories--

Who told him?

Huh?

Who told him?

The Germans! He was there, three months before. He saw everything. He knew everything.

And still we thought that [NON-ENGLISH] was out of his mind, that this is-- we told ourselves, in 20th century, how can we conceive that people, so-called civilized Germans, so-called civilized Germans, will kill babies and infants and ladies and men and old people in the gas chambers, in the crematorium? How can be? That's impossible!

[NON-ENGLISH], you must be wrong. I am telling you the truth, boys. I want you to be-- from now on, to live for yourselves. "Sauve qui peut" means, in French, "sauve qui peut," "save who can be saved."

Try yourself to be alive. Whatever you can do, try to be alive. In French here, "sauve qui peut." Whoever can be saved, try your best. It's the end of the world.

Don't ask me no questions. I don't know nothing yet. The only thing I can tell you is, all our parents are gone. It's

finished.

Now what you will do in the camps, God knows only. Try your best to be alive. As much as you can, try your best.

Still, we thought that [NON-ENGLISH] was crazy. They took us, all naked, with the machine, like they trimmed the-- how you call this-- the sheeps, they trimmed, the machines-- they trim us completely, the--

Shaved.

--shaved completely. And they send us to the showers-- showers, cold-water showers. OK, fine. And they gave us a bunch of clothing. It was one pant, one shirt, one jacket with the stripes.

Shoes?

Shoes, a pair of wooden shoes, and one-- and one hat, a kind of a--

Cap?

--cap, just a cap. And-- to the camp. We start the life in the Nazi concentration camps.

What did you do there? What kind of work did you do?

In the beginning, we were in Auschwitz for about two weeks or three weeks or one month. Nobody can tell you exactly, because the [INAUDIBLE] messed up at that moment, and no one can tell you how long we were in Auschwitz. They ask us what kind of trade we're in, what kind of skills we had. Some people says, I am a barber. Some others say I'm a tischler. A tischler means [INAUDIBLE]--

Carpenter.

--carpenter. Or the shoemaker or whatever it is. They were taking notes. And one good morning, they told us, you will be shipped to Buna concentration camp-- Buna-- B-U-N-A. To Buna.

There is the concentration of all the buildings that the Germans are building over there to manufacture bombs and whatever they need for the war. It's around 1,000 big buildings. They have to be built by those [NON-ENGLISH], those prisoners, in Buna. So they select the most healthy boys. As a matter of fact, my first brother-in-law, one, he was not so strong. They left him over there.

My brother-in-law, another one, he was almost sick, the poor man. They left him over there. And so many friends of ours, they were left in Auschwitz. And they shipped us in Buna.

But before you tell me about that, do you remember what the food was like?

Yes. In Auschwitz--

Mhm?

In Auschwitz were those rutabaga. "Rutabaga"--

It's a vegetable, yeah.

But here in America, those little turnips are small ones. Over there is like a watermelon-- the size of watermelon, those rutabaga. Those rutabaga turnips boiled, with margarine, this was the main meal. In the morning, a slice of bread-- like there are some bread-- one slice, with a teeny piece of margarine-- teeny piece of margarine. This was-- and a coffee-- and it was not coffee, anyway, it was ersatz, was-- was some--

Chicory?

--herbs.

Oh, yes.

--and this coffee, they used to put the medication to-- to not be a man anymore-- with all the respect I have for you.

That's interesting. I didn't know they did it to the men as well.

Yes.

I knew the women--

Had medication that we lost completely--

Any desire.

--any desire, sex desire, completely. We saw each other like piece of wood. As a matter of fact, the Germans used to have, in Buna, two big barracks, very well kept. And every week-- I think every Saturday or every Sunday-- I don't remember-- two or three trucks of ladies used to come over there, for the German officers. We used to see these ladies, like if we saw a piece of wood-- absolutely nothing.

We were just-- it's a word for that. It's an English word for that-- just robots with no desire, with no nothing. The only desire for us were how to find a piece of bread, how to find a piece of potato-- whatever it is, to sustain us. This was our only desire.

Now, this is the food they gave us in the morning and in the evening-- in the morning, piece of bread, I repeat, with a piece of margarine. In the evening-- not lunch. In the evening, this bowl of soup. Once a week, they used to give few boiled potatoes-- small ones, potatoes. Few, on Sunday. This was the meals in Auschwitz.

Did you do any kind of work, in Auschwitz?

In Auschwitz, not yet. In Auschwitz, they were the kind of camp-- they were selecting different groups to send in different camps-- was a concentration of people coming from Europe. From there, they were asking, what's your trade? Carpenter. Your trade? Shoemaker. Your trade?

They were separating and sending all over the country, in-- they used to send in Ravensbruck, in [PLACE NAME], in Malchow, in Breslau, in Lublin, in Golleschau, in many camps, they used to send contingents of prisoners, according what they need in each camp.

Were they cruel? Did they punish you? Do you remember, did they beat any of the people?

[LAUGHS] The beating is something that nobody can believe it. Nobody can believe. I will tell you one kind of beating.

In the bottom of the pot, that the soup was there, in the bottom always was pieces of turnip. Everybody was waiting to be the last one to go for the soup, to take the bottom. And when two or three or four used to hide themselves in the washrooms, to be the last ones, the Blockalteste-- you know what's Blockalteste? Chief of the block-- in German, means "Blockalteste." The chief of the block.

Was this a kapo?

A kapo. Yes, the kapo. They used to call him "Kapo." Now, Kapo was the kapo of a part of prisoners. Blockalteste was

the chief of the whole block-- 800 people. Kapo is the kapo for 10, 15, or 20, or 30 persons-- is the kapo. Blockalteste of the whole block.

When they used to call, to see that three or four were hiding, this was the punishment-- to give us two pieces of concrete in our hands and through kneibl, you know.

Kneel.

Kneel, with the piece of concrete, one, twice-- ein, zwei, drei, vier, funf-- how many times you could. Many of them, they used to fall down. And they used to come and then, with a piece of [INAUDIBLE]-- with a piece of rubber, piece of rubber, and to give them and to beat them. It's so unbelievable. The beating was unbelievable.

OK, this was Auschwitz, for two or three weeks. From there--

Just a minute. Before we leave-- did you get a number, in Auschwitz?

Yes.

Do you remember when that happened? Immediately?

The second day, the second day. The first day, they sent us to the showers. I don't remember if it's before the shower or after the shower-- before the shower-- we went over there with our list like that. And we wait in line, until they put a number.

What did you think they were doing?

There was no name, over there. Was no Albert or Robert or Isaac or yourself or whatever it is. This is the name that you have. On the morning, on the morning when they used to make the Appell-- "Appell" means--

The appell, appell, the roll call.

On the [SPEAKING GERMAN] And you'll say "Jawohl" or "Heil Hitler."

And if you didn't?

[LAUGHS] Don't ask. Don't ask. Don't ask. It was another trouble. Many of our boys did not understand German at all-- at all. And they did not answer.

So, one day, I was stupid enough to answer for him-- for one of my next neighbor. Oh, they beat me so hard. Who are you, they told me, to answer for him? I says, [SPEAKING GERMAN] German. It was worse. It was terrible.

Do you remember if any people got sick-- if there was any kind of medical care in Auschwitz?

Oh, sure-- [LAUGHS] medical care. [LAUGHS] I will tell you the medical care in Buna, because I was in Auschwitz just two or three weeks.

Or is there something else want to tell me about Auschwitz, before we go on to Buna?

No, because my life was not in Auschwitz. It was in Buna-- it was in Lublin, and Gollerschau.

All right. Well--

Rothenburg, Mauthausen, Dachau, and Buchenwald. I will take [INAUDIBLE].

Now, in Auschwitz, I was just, as I told you before, one week, two weeks, or three weeks. I don't remember. I can't tell you. The only I remember is that, one morning, we went down to the faucets to wash ourselves. You have to take all your blouse--

Shirt.

--shirt-- shirt, yes-- and to go to-- it was 100 faucets in one way, 100 in the other way-- to wash ourselves. The only time they give to you, two or three minutes.

Was there soap? Was there a towel?

No-- just water. Soap-- don't mention the name of soap! Doesn't exist, soap, just water.

And I went to one faucet, sort of to wash myself. One boy-- he was a Polish boy who was before us over there-- wants to wash himself before me. He grabbed from my pants-- he put me out. And he says in Polish such words that can't repeat to you. I can't put in this tape-- the most dirty words in Polish.

Did you know him?

No! The only thing is because he grabbed me and he gave me one punch. So I was very, very strong. As I told you, I was the heavyweight champion of Greece.

I took him with my hands. It was a football match, it will be killed. I gave him plenty.

They took us both to the Blockalteste. I thought Blockalteste with somebody who could translate. He told me this and this and this and this. And you did very well to him. It's very nice.

And then they start the fights, among us. The all Polish boys were there, who were a year already or two years over there. And we're the newcomers. We didn't know nothing. And they didn't believe we are Jews. This was the big trouble.

Because you couldn't speak--

Yiddish.

--Yiddish.

You are not Jews. You are Franks. You are Turks. I says, can you speak Hebrew? No! Yiddish! I don't speak Yiddish. I speak Hebrew.

I can read the sefer Torah by memory, in front of you. Can you read sefer Torah? No, you, you're no Jew. You are not Jewish.

So they hate us very, very bad. It was terrible. I don't want to go into this, because it's real-- real-- it's a shame. Forget about. So-- go ahead. Ask me.

What I was going to ask you-- were there any people who tried to observe any kind of Yiddishkeit, in the camp?

"Yiddishkeit"-- what do you mean by that?

Anything-- any kind of observance.

Yes.

Did--

I was the one, in the morning, to ask my boys, my friends, to stay with me, just for five minutes, and to say two prayers-- two or three-- as much as I could memorize. And the only place we could get together was in the washrooms-- in the men's room. Because if we went outside, 10 people or 5 or 10 people, praying, the machine guns the Poles will kill us like ants. Was no question about.

So I told the boys, in the portion of our Torah, of our Bible, in Yitro, the portion of Yitro, in the end of this portion it says [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. It means "in any place that you will mention my name, i WILL come to you and bless you." And so this is the place we came back to be. That's all.

Rabbi, you're crazy! How can we play into the men's room? And where you want to pray-- outside? They will kill us!

This was in the morning-- three or four minutes. In the evening, three or four minutes, I prayed-- begged them to be with me, for a few minutes. Some were completely disabused-- completely, they lost faith. They lost everything. We don't want. They used to try. And they start to call me the "crazy rabbi."

You are crazy. Why are you wasting your time? You see these wires, over there, the way electrified? One day, you or me, everybody's dead. Well, we die here

I said, boys, I don't know why I have here in my heart something that tells me that I will not die here. I will survive. And one day I will be free man. One day I will eat steaks and broiled fish, in my country.

They thought I start to lose my mind, because I used to tell them, don't lose your faith. Don't go, in the morning, to the black market in the camp to sell your piece of bread and piece of margarine for a little tobacco.

Is that what they did?

Yes. Go in the morning to the Polish-- Christian Polish boys. They were, over there, many Christian Polish boys. They were saboteurs of the Hitler regime--

They were political prisoners.

Political prisoners. And their family send them, every week, one package. They were free to send a package. In this package, they put some makhorka. Makhorka is poison.

Makhorka is not tobacco. It's not the leaves of tobacco. It's the--

Stem?

The--

The stem.

The stems. And they used to sell, to cut this with a knife, and to take a piece of [? cement ?] paper-- not cigar paper, [? cement ?] paper-- to roll this makhorka, and to sell this for the bread and butter they have to eat, to sustain themselves. These boys used to go in the black market to give to the Polish people the bread and take this makhorka and come to me.

I says, no. I will not do that. My boys, you are wrong. You are giving your little piece of bread for poison. It's not cigarette. It's not tobacco. It's poison.

How long-- listen. The Americans will come to the war. The Turkish people will come to the war. Tomorrow, in one week, in two weeks, everything will be gone. Don't worry. It's not a question of two weeks or one week or one month.

This is not a question of weeks and months. It's a question of year-- maybe two, maybe three or god knows.

Sustain yourselves. Don't sell your bread for this poison. They didn't listen to me. The most strong boys-- two months, three months, four months, six months-- they start to become skeletons. And unfortunately, as my wife told you, weeks before, the selection on Sundays-- the Sunday, a day of rest, after going to work in the morning, 2 o'clock in the morning, coming back in the afternoon, 3 o'clock, we have to go for selection to see which one was still able to continue to produce.

This was in Auschwitz?

No. This was he Auschwitz-- all of it. All of it.

All right, tell me about your particular experience when you left Auschwitz.

Yes. Now, when they told me-- with me, many other boys-- that we will leave for Buna, some people, they fooled them, telling that was a place over there for those who had malaria. Which malaria was this. And those who wish to go to a place-- it was like a sanatorium-- they will take care of them. They will cure them from the malaria and send them back in the camps, full of good health.

Many of our people start to rise themselves. I swear my good God, how many times I told you, don't do that! Don't be foolish! It can be here sanatorium for you. Go kill-- they kill people here. They give you a sanatorium. Are you crazy?

No, we'll go over there. They never come back. That's the end of the story. They left Buna or the Auschwitz or any camp, they never come back. They went straight to the crematorium, because the Germans had a fear from malaria-- a fear. Two things they had fear-- malaria and [NON-ENGLISH]-- skin disease.

They were so afraid of skin disease and from malaria. All those with malaria, straight to the crematorium, without even second question.

Now, one day, they told us we leave to Buna. OK. We took our belongings. You know what was our belongings? Nothing, [LAUGHS] with us. And [INAUDIBLE], we went to Buna. We passed by Warszawa. We pass by Lublin. And we passed by different, other camps, other cities-- not camps-- other cities from Polish cities. We don't remember their names anymore.

And all of a sudden, we find ourself in a big camp. In the entrance to the camp was "Arbeit Macht Frei." "Arbeit Macht Frei." So we entered this camp-- Buna camp. We were, some friends of mine were there already. Sadi, what-- why they send you here? I don't know, I says. They send me here. We'll see what will be.

This is the-- it's not the tough one. The next one I will tell you is the real tough one. This one, Buna, it was--

What did you do there?

I become, over there, number one, a Tischler--

Carpenter?

--carpenter I become over there a boxer. I become over there a singer.

And where did you box, and where did you sing?

Singing-- [LAUGHS] these come, the story, one after the other. The carpenter-- when they ask, who is carpenter, I says, I am. I didn't have any idea about carpenter. But I says, I will learn.

I learn. I did my portion of work as a carpenter. But when they ask for entertainment-- boxing-- the Germans want

boxing, who can give, every Sunday, entertainment to the German officers.

So I raise my hand. Her brother-in-law was with me. Her first husband was in another block-- Block eight-- it was a block I don't remember-- 21. We were in block 18, with her brother-in-law-- Jimmy.

I says, Sadi, are you crazy? How do you know which one you will fight? Those crazy Polish people, those giants, they can kill you.

I said, I am looking for the piece of bread I will trade for the piece of cheese, and maybe they will give-- they promise us to give us three or four cubes of sugar and a piece of [NON-ENGLISH]-- garlic. It was a fortune. Who could get a piece of garlic and three or four cubes of sugar and a piece of cheese is a fortune, over there! Nobody can have this-- nobody!

So, with the idea that I will have this food, I said I am a heavyweight boxer. All right.

So, to make story short-- on Sunday, they give us gloves, and they gave us all the equipment, and we have to go to the German quarters, where the officer were. They make a ring over there. And all the Germans-- officers and soldiers, but not together. The soldiers were waiting one part and the officers in another part, according the ranks of the officers. They were sitting and enjoying themselves.

There, they want to see blood. There, they want to see blood-- nothing else. Rules and regulations of boxing, they didn't exist. The only thing they want to see-- the winner has to go to a German kitchen and take the bread, the cheese, and the sugar, and the garlic. This was the main thing, for the main, the person who will fight-- the food.

So, many times, all the times, thank god, I was the winner. Because--

Who did you fight-- other Jews?

No!

Poles?

No! Poles. One time only, they asked me to fight with a Moroccan Jew. The poor man, he was a lightweight champion. I was heavyweight champion. How can you fight with a lightweight? It's impossible.

I said, you will finish [INAUDIBLE]. I say, listen-- I will try to-- to-- to don't hurt you. But in the seventh round, eighth round, you have to fall down, because they will find out that we are fooling up, and we will go outside. I don't want to hurt you. It's a shame. You can't fight with me; I can't fight with you.

So we did this. After, we-- whatever they gave to me, I gave half to him. But with the other fighters, with the Polish-- Christian Polish-- they were eating from their house--

The packages that they received.

--the packages-- what do you want? Ham, eggs, bread, butter. If they get everything, they will run like giants. They were full-- full of health, and we were starving.

So her brother-in-law told me, when you find things hard, try the Greek boxing.

And what's the Greek boxing? [LAUGHS]

Illegal boxing. Illegal boxing.

And what is that?

I am ashamed to tell you. To give a punch wherever you should not give a punch. You understand. If you do this in America, you go in jail-- for years, you go in jail. It's not a joke. And then suppose, when someone start to do this in the ring, the--

The referee--

--referee says, once, twice-- the third times, you are out. Over there was no referee-- was no nothing. A referee was a German, I tell you who didn't even understand what means boxing. They only want to see blood. That's all.

So her brother-in-law told me, Greek boxing, and put him down. It's what I did, many times. So I had to feed-- to take all this food and give to my-- Share it--

--friends-- to her brother-in-law, to her first husband, to my cousins, to all my friends-- a piece of everything. I used to cut the bread pieces and give to everyone a little piece, to sustain them. And one evening--

This is the boxing. About the singing, now. This was in Buna, not in Auschwitz.

One evening, some boys told me, why don't you-- we sit in the back of the building-- of the barrack in building-- the barrack, in the grass over there, and sing us a little bit of Turkish song, just to remind our old days in our country. Says, OK, let's go. But with one condition-- one of us has to watch in the other corner. If the Gestapo comes, oh, it's terrible!

So, this what happen. I start to sing, over there. And the Blockalteste, the German Blockalteste, was coming by. That boy, our boy, did not see him. It was from God. He didn't see him.

And the Blockalteste come slowly toward us and saw me singing in Turkish. Come here! He says to me-- come here. I was so afraid.

I was so afraid. I started to tremble, because it was not permitted to sing, over there in the camp. Said, come here, come here, Greco.

Was Greek.

Greco. Come here, Greco. So he was walking, and he was walking behind me. And my boys-- oh, poor Sadi. He will leave now, and they will beat him so bad. OK?

So I walk [INAUDIBLE]. We went to his office. [GERMAN]-- "Sit down." From where are you? From Salonika.

How, you're Greek? Jawohl. How do you know how to sing in Turkish? My Mutter, I says, my Mutter taught me how-- it's true. It's not-- my mother taught me how to sing in Turkish-- my Mutter.

Oh-ho-ho! Listen for him German. I used to understand very well German. You will come to my office, when will be no SS around.

I was living in Istanbul for 15 years. Ich liebe Turkish music. I love Turkish music.

You will sing for me Turkish music, and I will give you bread and cheese. And whatever I can sell, I give to you. I thought he was fooling me, because they used to do that, after they start to punch you, your nose, and-- until you got full of blood.

And I says, Jawohl, Jawohl. Jawohl, Mein Herr. Jawohl, Mein Herr. And I went to go out, into--

Sitzen. Sitzen. He opened his [NON-ENGLISH].

An armoire? The cupboard.

No.

Where you keep your clothes.

The closet. He opened the closet. A piece of bread like this, a piece of cheese-- I thought I will [LAUGHS]-- I will pass out, to see a piece of bread. It was true!

Still, it was coming to me. I was going back. I was afraid. I thought it was a joke.

He says, in German, don't be afraid. I don't remember, in German. Don't be afraid. Come here, come here. Come here. Come here, Greco.

He gave me the bread, and he gave me a piece of cheese. And I will call you when I want you to come to sing for me.

I went out. My boys were waiting for to see me in blood. And they saw me with--

Bread and cheese. [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS] They could not believe. Nobody could believe that this man was so many years in Turkey, and he liked me. All right. It was maybe six, seven, eight months. And he used to call me, when the German was not--

How often?

Two or three times a week, when Austrian soldiers were in guard. It was very easy for them. Those Austrian soldiers were very nice. When German SS soldiers were in guard, that was out of question to call me-- out of the question.

So, with this kind of food that I ate, for so many months I sustained--

You sustained yourself.

--myself and I sustained my friends and whoever-- her brother-in-law was my manager. In the boxing, every Sunday, he was my manager. So he used to clean me up. He used to be with me, and I used to give to him as much as I could and give to my brother in laws and my friends and my cousins and [INAUDIBLE] to give to everybody. This was the life in Buna.

But-- but-- all of a sudden, this Blockalteste was dismissed. One day, we don't see him anymore. What happened to him, we don't know. Finish, the singing.

The Americans and the Russians start to--

Come close.

--advance the entertainment stops. No more entertainment. So we start to starve-- starve! We want to eat. What we can do? So we become thieves.

So we tried to find out when the trucks of the general kitchen will come to unload potatoes or cabbages or beets-- beets- or whatever it is they will unload, to go and to steal as many pieces we could. Until one day, they caught me with a piece of cabbage in my shirt. [SPEAKING GERMAN]. "Damned Jew." Right?

The "damned Jew," the next day, has to go to the main office, with three or four other thieves like me. We were four, six people stealing, but they caught me only. That one day, they run. They caught me only. But the other people, they caught them, too. And they want to hang us.

One German officer told the jury, this is the Greco, the boxer. Is-- he's the boxer! He's the singer, the Greco singer.

So they did not hang me. They send me in Golleschau.

They hanged the others?

I don't know.

Oh.

I didn't see. They took me out in a truck-- right away, the truck, they send me in Golleschau.

And what is Golleschau?

I didn't went back to my block. I didn't see nobody of my friends. From the Kothau, from the jury, from the-- from the court, they put me in the dock. They were without nothing, they send me in Golleschau.

Golleschau, Nikki, is the frontier of Poland with Russia. They called "the Siberian town of Poland." This is the name they gave. And this is the only place in Poland they have the biggest cement mines and cement Fabriks. "Fabriks" means--

"Factory."

--"factories." Tremendous, tremendous factories of cement. And the cement mines, the biggest in Poland.

So it took us three, four, five, six hours-- I don't know-- ride. I saw-- I saw Lublin. I saw many, many towns. Finally, I came in Golleschau.

One boy over there-- you remember [PERSONAL NAME]? This man used to be, in Salonika, a supervisor in mines of asbestos.

Asbestos.

Asbestos is-- chalk-- I mean, asbestos is the white stuff they put--

Asbestos.

So he knew how to conduct the team of workers in the mines. When he saw me, and immediately says, why they send you here?