

Herszberg, reel 1. Can we go back before the war please to the time you were living in Poland--

Poznan.

--say in the mid '30s? I mean you were very young.

Yeah, yeah.

When do your memories go back?

Oh, the early '30s I would say. You know, one starts to remember. I was roughly three years old. Well, Poland, as probably is known, was sort of a bit antisemitic country. However, I have to speak in their defense. The government was not against Jews. It was the population.

And I went, well, first to a Jewish school, then to a Polish school. In fact, it was called Saint Teresa. And there was a certain amount of antisemitism, but not unbearable.

What do you mean? What sort of level?

It was, well, love-hate relations, but that's too mild. But sort of push you a little bit, like boys would-- this Jew boy and this sort of thing. But it was never more than that. Sometimes they chased, you know, when we were playing.

But I wasn't physically strong. So I never got involved in any fights. So I would just lose, sort of mechanism of self-defense, you know, self-preservation.

But as I said, the state was sort of defending the Jews. And the police their sticks, and people, you know, would obey the police. Our synagogue was never, to my knowledge, synagogue was never dogged or never damaged. Whether it was Polish religious upbringing or whether it was the police that was behind it, I don't know.

Can you tell me about your family? What did your parents do?

Well, my father was a representative of a firm from Łódź. That is where we eventually went. The family was in Łódź. And he got this post in Poznan. That is why we lived in Poznan.

Your brothers and sisters?

I had one sister, older sister. I don't say anything about her. Somehow I felt it was a little private.

How much did you know about Hitler and the Nazis as a child?

Oh, well, not very much. There was the name Hitler was known. And there were pictures of Hitler, you know. And sort of I remember there were sort of various pictures, I don't know, sort of comparing him to a pig, well, some pig. And when it was folded in the right way, the face of Hitler has appeared. You haven't seen this anywhere? But I remember people were having this.

And then it hit us in 1938. You know, Poznan is fairly close to the German border. The German refugees came. They were sort of Polish nationality or something. But they were Germans. They couldn't speak Polish. And suddenly, they arrived in Poznan.

And that was rather sad. Their standard of living was much higher. And the Polish Jews, of course, were not so well off. And although they were fairly hospitable and gave their homes, you know, the German Jews sort of looked. And where is the bathroom? Where's the toilet? You see what I mean. So it was rather sad.

But I think the Polish Jews, as I said, showed a lot of heart. And we also put up somebody. That was the

first time that sort of I was aware that Hitler wasn't such a gentleman.

And what about Łódź ghetto?

Well, I think the history is fairly well known. We were--

I mean for your family.

For my family, we first moved to Łódź. And then there were-- this perhaps is not so well known. There were notices by the Germans that Jews have to move to Łódź ghetto. And there was a very sort of elaborate system for Jews to move from various streets.

And, well, the usual story, then few Jews got shot. And it was known immediately. And everybody moved regardless of the plan of the timetable. You just took the sledge and your belongings, and you moved to the ghetto.

But we had a paralyzed grandmother. And we managed to get her. So there were some, you know, horse carriages-- [NON-ENGLISH] called. We did get her into the ghetto. She died here. Well, one can't blame the Germans altogether. She was 72 and paralyzed. But maybe she would have lived a bit longer. But we still managed this. So there were this sort of-- not for everybody-- but if you wanted to get it, you could get it.

How much were you able to take with you?

Well, as much as we could carry in a number of journeys. It depends how many journeys you could make. I don't know if this [NON-ENGLISH]-- but we still took some beds I remember. There were some beds. And we moved in Poland.

And it was known in the part where Russians occupied-- I'm not trying to express sort of my prejudices. But Poznan, where I lived, was the part was occupied on the Germans until 1918. And sort of the roads were better. The waterworks were better. Łódź was occupied by the Russians until 1918. And the water used to break down now and again.

So there was somebody called, well, in Yiddish, vasertreger. I'm not sure what the right translation is-- someone who carries water when the water breaks down. And he lived in that part of the ghetto, which was the worst part of Łódź. And we moved to his place I remember.

And there I was sort of struck by the poverty. We were not very rich-- lower middle class. But there, the poverty was really-- I really was a bit shocked. I remember one room, and there were about five children and sort of sleeping and frying onions and oil and so on. I sort of had a bit of a shock.

And your point is this isn't because it was the ghetto, but because it was--

No, that was--

--that part of Poland.

Yes, a combination of both. I would say, partly this was Poland. And then sort of the borders changed. The Germans, they were not so methodical as people feel they were. The borders changed a little bit. And we had to move. And then we moved to some parts of the ghetto, which was rather nice. It was occupied by the Poles before the war.

And we moved in when the Pole was still living. Poles and Jews were not sort of so very friendly. But since we came from Poznan, we were fairly assimilated. We got on perhaps better than the majority.

We should make the point, you, yourself, were Polish. But you're using the word Poles to mean--

Poles I mean-- no, by Poles I mean Poles non-Jews. By Jewish, I mean Polish Jewish. I think I make this

distinction in the article. And I sort of define it very clearly-- I think-- so that there is no confusion. Yes. And in the conversation, I shall use the word Poles to mean not a Jew and Polish Jews.

So then what sort of accommodation in the ghetto did your family end up with?

We had a room fairly well reasonable size and the kitchen for seven. We started with seven. Then my grandmother died. And my mother died. And we had to move to a smaller place.

What happened to your mother?

My mother had pneumonia and, as I said, partly a weak constitution. She was from twins and wasn't very strong. And it was November, snow. And she got a cold, pneumonia, and lack of medical help as well. But she had she had a doctor. And she had some injections, but didn't help.

So she died in November 1940. My grandmother died earlier. And so we were only five. And five moved to another place.

Your father, you, and your sister--

My father died before the war. Sorry, I should have mention it. So when-- that was partly why we came to Łódź.

But you were with an uncle's family, is that it?

Well, when we were-- when my mother was alive, we were sort of still family of our own living, with my uncle, yes. We got the same place. In fact, we moved to my uncle before we moved to the ghetto because we were thrown out from our place by the Germans. You know, they occupied sort of various houses.

I would like to say one thing. Occupied, it wasn't-- at that time, there wasn't the sort of shooting and hitting and beating and dogs. No, they just-- I'm not sure even if they came. Suddenly, you know, we knew that we had to leave the place by certain time. And, you know, we were roughly prepared. So we took the things and moved to, well, my grandmother, then to my uncle, and with my uncle to the ghetto.

You at that time were only 10 or 11 something.

Yeah, yeah.

How did that seem to a little boy?

Well, I think-- I just don't know. I just did what I was told. I still went to school right in the beginning. Then when we went to the ghetto, I went to school again. And somehow-- I just don't know. I didn't think very much, you know. You do what you are told. A little bit like you're there, but if you are told to wait 12 hours, you do and that's it.

Yes.

You sit down.

So you just accepted it--

Oh, yes.

--the way children have to do with so many things.

I think most people--

But does this mean then that it was not a frightening occasion for you?

I don't think fear is irrational. And I don't think I was terribly frightened. I'm not a hero, as I've pointed out very, very, very carefully. But I don't think I was frightened.

My uncle was frightened much more. Whether it was his character or whether a function of age or whether because he had a daughter and responsibilities, I really don't know. But he was very frightened of the Germans, or maybe because he remembered them from the First World War. There were not such gentlemen even there-- even then.

I believe you have written that the ghetto was well organized, but crowded.

Fairly well organized, crowded, yes.

What makes a well-organized ghetto?

Well, there was food rationing. We could get our rations without queuing, without-- we knew we would get them. The dead were buried. There was even some ration of cloth, shoes. We went to work, always sort of arrived there and did our work. Well, I would call this well organized.

There wasn't this sort of you arrived at work and you didn't know, and then people said go here, go there, this sort of thing. You see what I mean? And with rations again, you knew where you would get it. There was soup. And we got tickets for our soups, you know. It was not just pushing and, you know, whoever pushed hardest got it. This I call well-organized. And also, there was this ambulance service.

My friends sort of-- well, I have various comments about the article. And then they can be divided into the survivors and the non-survivors, you know, and the people from outside. I think the survivors from the ghetto found me, and they felt perhaps I painted too rosy picture about the ghetto with this.

And, in fact-- oh, dear-- this is almost comic the way one told me off. I write in the article that those-- I forget the exact wording-- those undernourished got medical certificates for extra food. The extra food was potato peelings. Now, I think any person would probably draw the conclusion this was pretty grim.

My friend called me up. He says, how can you say this? I got medical certificate. It was terribly difficult to get potato peelings. I had to fight in the morning, never got them.

People get the impression that it was-- you remember the nice cakes we used to make out of potato peelings. Well, people get the impression that we sort of all enjoyed these potato peelings and cakes and everything was rosy. Well, you see my point. I said, don't worry, I don't think anybody will reach this conclusion. But if I rewrite it, I'll say they were not obtained so easily.

Who was in charge of this organization, these potato peelings, on a daily basis?

This, I really don't know. I never got any-- no member of my family got. But I know somebody whose father got. And, in fact, he showed me the nice cake he produced out of it. I think I had a taste of it. But it was nice. And how it was done, I really-- but I do know that there were medical certificates, people who had, for instance, swollen feet from hunger.

In the camp in general--

Pardon?

In the camp in general--

No, no, no, no, no, I'm talking about the ghetto.

--who kept things flowing in the-- sorry--

I'm talking about the ghetto.

We're talking about the ghetto, yes. In the ghetto in general, who kept things flowing smoothly?

Well, there was first of all the leader, Rumkowski. Then there was the parliament, [NON-ENGLISH]. It was called [NON-ENGLISH]. Then there was police. And then there were commissars, Jewish commissars, in charge of factories. And then there were foremen. And then there was the leader of the factory. So the factories were fairly well organized. We didn't work very hard.

All these people or bodies are Jewish?

Jewish, all Jewish.

It's not--

It was all done by remote control, all by remote control. I think the only contact with Germans was in-- there was one marketplace where some Germans were sitting and some Jews were there. But you had to have permission to get there. In fact, I was a messenger at one point. And that gave me the distinction of being able to go there.

The Jews tried to please Germans very much. It's not sort of easily admitted. But good heavens, I worked in leather works. And one German asked for a strap, which was done very quickly. And I was sent to give it to the Germans. And I hoped to see the Germans and hand it and maybe get something. But good heavens, I got nowhere near. Policeman took it and so on, you know. So I never had this honor of giving it.

So the Germans were there. And they came to the factory now and again. When they came to the factory, I remember once or twice, for a reason which I cannot explain, the Jewish leader of the factory walked first about something like 10 steps ahead. He marched in a very dignified way. And the Germans followed him. Two were there on their own.

And there was no question of beating or anything like it. They looked very gentlemanly. We were not afraid of them. I hoped they would come and see how I worked. I worked beautifully. I did some things for parachutes. These-- I don't know what--

The harness?

--the technical word is The harness, sort of leather bits, I think that is what it was. I cannot be sure. But that is what I was told. And the work was very easy. And we could finish it in a few hours.

And how old were you at that point?

Oh, let me work it out, sort of 12, 13.

I ask because I wondered if your education had been stopped unnaturally early. It was stopped unnaturally early. But I did go to school in the beginning of the ghetto. Yes, there was school. And I went to this 19-- the winter of '41, '42. And I think this-- until summer '42, I went to school and learned. And then I had to go to work.

It was just as well because that was the time of the selection, Sperre. And just as well, I worked, although I don't think they asked, the Germans. It was done in such a sort of arbitrary way.

Speaking of whether or not you saw Germans, what the relationship was with Germans, didn't the Germans bomb Łódź earlier on?

One night of sailing, I think I do say in a rather silly way that I overslept it. And there was also one-- I remember once-- that's right, before shelling, there was something on the wireless that they are going to bomb Łódź. And we all ran to the cellar. Then there was something on the wireless that they are going to

gas Łódź.

We didn't have gas masks. I remember I had sort of a duster with a piece of cotton wool. And they said we should run upstairs, you know. That would save people from gas. So we went to the top floor, everybody.

And then some other announcement came. I remember we sort of finished somewhere. And I fell asleep. And that was the end of this story. And the Germans were there the following day. So, no, I have no experience of this kind whatsoever.

Can you tell me about the selection? You've just mentioned it in passing in 1942.

'42, that was a very serious one.

First, how did people know about it?

Oh, dear, difficult to tell. We sort of-- everything was stopped. It was called Sperre. I don't know what it means, what the translation is, sort of standstill of some sort. And Dr. Fuchs was in charge. This is what I learned. I'm not sure if he was or not.

But we had to stay where we lived. The Jewish police came. And they said, come on. And we had to go to the corner. And there the Germans, sort of the usual story, left and right. I don't think we were asked questions.

But as with most of the-- and there, we were very depressed over it because before they started this, they took all people from hospital. And they took them rather in a brutal way, things like throwing children out of the windows and things like that.

They took from hospital-- I don't know where else, whether there was a lunatic asylum. I think that was cleared earlier. So hospitals were cleared.

And then during the selections, they looked for older people or children. So we were rather depressed. It wasn't absolutely final because they took to hospital these people who were so-called selected.

And some-- well, perhaps one or two could still come out if you had-- if you knew somebody, some policeman or somebody, you could get them out. But that was very exceptional. In fact, some of my family lost their lives in this. But they were all there, sort of grand aunts rather than aunts.

So they were looking for people who were fit?

Only for those who were fit, able to work. And now, I'm not sure, my memory is not clear. And I think after that there was-- the working hours were sort of a bit longer. And those who worked these hours got sort of two soups a day, something like this. There was some criterion, that if you work certain hours, you were better off, "better off," inverted commas.

Soup could mean anything. Was it such a soup that two soups a day would be a good diet or not?

No, there was no question of good diet. It was starvation. There was no getting away from it. You are hungry all the time.

The bread was-- I think a little bit of strong willpower was needed. You got bread for eight days. And, you know, you had to-- some people had it in two. And most of those are not here to tell the story. But we managed sort of over, perhaps not eight, but six, seven. And we got rations and soup.

But it was very meager. People were very, very emaciated and thin. And there was no butter, no milk, no eggs, a bit of horse meat. So the diet was very poor.

We had garden, as I said. Well, not much grew there. We were not very good. But, you know, it

supplemented a little bit.

Vegetables you mean?

Vegetables, yes.

What sort of soup would it have been?

Well, it varied. Sometimes we got turnip. And that was terrible. Sometimes cabbage, sometimes potatoes, but very few potatoes.

In fact-- I don't know. You probably heard it. I don't know if you are aware of it. But if you have soup from the bottom, it is a little thicker. And there were even songs about it, you know. Please give me from the bottom, not from the top. And when new sort of barrel came and they poured it in and you were the first in the queue to get it, oh, your heart sank. And, you know, that was the mentality. So, no, this was hunger.

My feet were never swollen in the ghetto, not-- in my family, my uncle, but he looked very thin. He had some trouble with boils and things like that. But for all that, we all survived four years. So you see my point. It can't be compared to camps.

Was it getting progressively worse, the food situation? Or was there a dramatic change?

There were changes. I think after the Sperre, after the-- somebody, whose name was Gertler. I don't know if you heard of him. Suddenly, he became sort of in charge together with Rumkowski.

And for a reason which I will never know, we got more potatoes. And things improved. And we all said, oh, well, things are much better. The Germans are nicer to us.

On one occasion, we got snails. That must have been a failure. And they wanted to get rid of them. But now, I can't eat shellfish. But then I enjoyed it very much.

On one occasion, we got a tin of meat. It was sort of grease. And in retrospect, I feel it was again something went wrong. And they sent it to us. But we enjoyed it very much.

When you are hungry we digest things fairly well, you know, and absorb things. You know, nature somehow provides certain digestive juices. I don't know how to explain it. But we enjoyed it. And it, you know, strengthened us.

Did your family or any other people you knew have contacts outside the ghetto--

No.

Friends--

No.

Colleagues--

No.

--who could help.

No. There was hardly any contact outside the ghetto. This differs from other ghettos. In Piotrków ghetto, there was contact. In Warsaw ghetto, there was contact. Lodz ghetto, it was virtually closed, no contact at all. I haven't come across anybody who had contact. Now, people like to talk about the emotions and, you know, other spectacular parts, you know, smuggling and so on. But I don't remember it.

Have you any idea how many people you're talking about in Lodz ghetto?

No. No idea. I believe there are some statistics--

Yes, no doubt.

--how many were sent and how many were originally. And I'm very suspect of all the documents that are found now. But--

I think you have written that there were some people who were deported, perhaps this was before that selection, who were deported but returned.

Before the selections, that's right. There were some who were deported. There were many who were deported and never appeared again.

In fact, who I think it was-- I think soon after my mother died, in 1940, there was mass deportation of those who didn't go to work. And, oh, dear, I have to put it very, very carefully. But in some way, if my mother didn't die, possibly we would be deported because we didn't have anybody who went to work in our family. But because he died and my uncle worked, possibly that is why we were not put on the list. So I have very great difficulties in putting it in this you know way. But you see my point.

So there was deportation. I remember-- I remember there was one woman who came. There was again terrible poverty. I went there once. And the children were sort of in beds. I don't know how many. And she gave them a cigarette to puff, so that they don't-- you don't notice the hunger. And she was deported with the children in 1940. And, oh, yes, there were-- and there were deportation quite often.

But one friend, he's here in England. He lives in England. He was deported. I'm not sure when. And he's very strong, exceptionally strong, and for hard labor near Poznan. And he returned. And I remember in our factory somebody returned.

Returned to--

[AUDIO OUT]

Mr. Herszberg, reel 2. You mentioned your friend who was deported--

Yes.

--but returned.

Yes. He--

Did you know him then--

No.

--well enough to ask--

No, I didn't know-- I knew him vaguely, and his family, but not well enough to ask. But there was somebody in our factory. He came back. And I remember him. He said, oh, the ghetto is so marvelous. So you can imagine what it was like where he was deported.

But this friend, well, I don't know, he should come here. And he has got some story to tell because he was one of these unique people who had a horse and was driving sort of the-- where his foodstuff from place to place. I don't know. His name is Aaron Silberschatz. I don't think he makes a secret. I don't know if he was here.



You said that most of the people who were deported were never heard from again.

Never heard from.

Were there rumors going about as to what had happened to them?

There were rumors. There were even some sick jokes. I'm not sure if I should tell the sick joke. I think I do say that some-- there were rumors that Jews were used to make soap. And the joke was sometimes, you know, you parted from a friend. You said goodbye and you said, oh, goodbye, I'll see you sometime in the ghetto. If not, perhaps we will find ourselves next to each other as bars of soap on, you know, on a shelf at Boots, equivalent of Boots. And that was the joke.

But, no, we were never sure. At least, I was never sure. My family was never sure.

There were some people who were more-- I remember somebody said, don't believe, you know, they do and they exterminate. And he was hiding before. He didn't go to Auschwitz, refused to go. But minority, whether it is some psychological blockage or something, I don't know, but, no, he didn't believe. I didn't even believe in Auschwitz at first.

Had you heard of it before you went?

No. Not about the nature of extermination, gas chambers, and showers, and so on. That is why I'm a bit suspicious when people say, you know, they were so relieved when water came out, you know. And I didn't know. We didn't get lectures about the extermination of Jews. Sorry to put it like this, but you see my point.

Yeah, I think that's an important point.

I just had no idea. Well, we were full of hope going to Auschwitz, as I said. But there were these jokes about soap. And then young people were even making jokes, oh, no, no, they don't use us for soap. They fry us on a frying pan, you know.

But why would people think that?

Well, because people didn't return. And there were some--

Yes.

--and of course, there were-- the Germans, as I said, were no gentleman. And the way some deportation took place, there was shooting and just throwing people you know out of windows, and you know--

So it was obvious that the people who were being deported were not simply being moved elsewhere?

It was fairly obvious, but never 100%. As I said, then all of a sudden, some people returned, but never 100%.

So, of course, those people who returned had no firsthand experience of soap or whatever--

No. Of extermination, no. They went to a labor camp. And they worked. And they came back with rather, you know-- I think it would be interesting for you to interview this gentleman whom I mentioned.

Yes.

I'm surprised that he didn't come. That's what I object about this society, this elite of survivors. Some have-- there is one of us who-- sorry, I digress-- who was in Majdanek and Auschwitz. And this is almost unique, I think. I don't know if you came across him. But he would be very interesting.

Then there is this one, you know, who was deported out of the ghetto, in the ghetto. And then there is one

who escaped and-- well, escaped, tried to escape, and was shot. And a spoon saved his life. I don't know whether he came for it. He still got the spoon. And that is rather a remarkable survival story.

And what's his name?

Arthur Posnanski. I'll ask him to contact you. Again remarkable story, but they are not mentioned in Martin Gilbert's book or anywhere or BBC or-- it's usually the same people again and again.

You've spoken of the hunger and of the somewhat unsuccessful, perhaps, garden that your family had. What about wild plants?

Well, there--

Were any of them available?

There were some-- no, no, everything was cultivated in some way or another. People, you know, used all sorts of fields. And usually, we grew beetroots for the simple reason that you can eat the roots and the leaves. Believe it or not, the leaves are quite nice.

And then there was a question of getting the right seeds. I mean we were very limited. And potatoes, it was a waste to put a potato in the earth. So, you know, we didn't do it. To grow potatoes, you have to have a few potatoes, some peelings with the eyes. We put in now and again. But they were not very successful. So beetroots, radishes, believe it or not, you can eat the leaves as well. They're not great delicacy, but we ate them, and lettuce.

We used to boil it, most of the things for a reason. Perhaps it was better for stomach and so on. Not to eat salads where you couldn't wash them easily or something.

Easier to digest, I suppose--

Easier to digest.

--although you lose the vitamins.

Yeah. We were not quite so aware of it. But boiling--

But was the area too crowded, too confined, for there to be dandelions, berries, things like that, wild plants?

Yes. Yes. No, they just didn't exist. No. We had a tree, a cheery tree. It never gave any cherries, apart from the last year when we were deported to Auschwitz. I remember there were quite a lot.

And my uncle was-- well, as you can imagine from the article. Police came. I said we have to give some cherries to them. And we picked some cherries. And he said, well, I won't feel very well, you know. The ghetto was deported. In case, there is a record, no, I will give them the cherries they ask. And I carried the cherries to the police station, almost get deported.

But that was the only time. Otherwise, we didn't have cherries. And I must say we didn't very much care for fruit. It wasn't very filling. We cared more for something like potatoes or flour and beetroot, you know. We managed. But--

The flour presumably was provided--

The flour was provided--

--from some outside source.

Oh, yes, we got our ration. There was some flour provided.

Was it made into bread within the ghetto or was it provided as bread?

In the ghetto, yes. Quite a lot was done in the ghetto. For the ghetto was, as I said, reasonably sort of efficient unit.

You mentioned food. What about other comforts. Were you cold?

Oh, I don't think I put it quite-- terribly cold. The cold was unbearable. I'm not the complaining type. I don't like to indulge in self-pity. But water froze to ice in our bedroom, and not just to ice, absolutely solid.

It was so cold in the winter. And at first, we lived sort of five in a small room. So because of the breathing there was snow on the walls, and we scraped it. The cold was one of my chief enemies. I still fear winter, although I can know manage, can take it. Sort of like Africans, they hate the sun. They suffer from it. And, oh, Yes, the cold was terrible. I'm glad you mentioned it.

What was your source of heat?

We had no source of heat. We just boiled a bit of soup. And that was it. And there was no source of heat.

Were you unfortunate, your family unfortunate, or was everyone in the same condition?

I think we were, how should I put this, slightly less fortunate than others. We had the garden, as I said. So we lived a little bit outside. It was an isolated place. So it was a bit worse.

In fact, I remember once, we got snowed up and couldn't get out and shouted for help. And people came next door and sort of dug the snow. It was I think the first winter. So perhaps slightly worse off than others. But most people suffered from the cold.

Did you have a fireplace?

No. Oh, no, no question of a fireplace. We didn't have enough coal or wood or anything.

I wondered if you had a fireplace even though there was nothing to put in it.

No, no, no, it was just the stove, we cooked. I don't know how the Poles did before, probably also the stove, you know, and that heated the place. It could heat the place if you had enough coal I imagine.

A coal stove?

Yes. We boiled on it. We had no gas, of course.

And where did the coal come from?

We rationed. There was a ration of coal. It wasn't very good. But, you know, we always managed to sort of light some sort of fire and boil soup.

And you said you had a clothes ration. But if you were so cold, it suggests that it wasn't very ample.

No, there was no clothes ration as such. But we did-- we could get some cloth now and again. I remember I got a pair of shoes. That was soon before going to Auschwitz. I was very proud of them. And I was allowed to retain them. So they kept me going until the winter.

And I got a jacket I remember. But there was no ration. It was-- what the criteria for giving it, I just don't know. I really forgot. Probably you went to your boss and said, you know, I haven't had any shoes for a long time, and he gave you a coupon or something. No, I--

Did your shoes and jacket fit?

Good heavens-- the shoes, yes, reasonably. But the jacket, I really can't tell. I don't think I wore it. We have no mirrors so that solves this problem. And that was just-- it didn't come into it. Just put on, you know, nice jacket, warm jacket.

I remember I got new jacket. In fact, I had the new shoes and this jacket when I arrived in Auschwitz. I thought I looked very well, very presentable.

Your job, you mentioned that you think you were probably making parachute harnesses.

I think that is what it was. I cannot be certain. It was leather work. And we are sort of small pieces of leather, sewing them onto some bigger pieces of very thick material.

Was the work regular and steady or sporadic?

Fairly regular. But we had to keep it, you know. There was a ration we had to do, a certain amount we had to do. It was so small that we could finish it in two or three hours.

What the reason for it is, I don't know. The Germans must have been aware. I imagine some German was sort of lining up his pocket, and, you know, didn't go to the front and told them how important we were. I mean it was probably in somebody's interest. Bebo was mentioned. I just don't know what went on behind.

But now, when I think of it, I feel that possibly something of this took place in the German ranks. But, no, we always had the supply. The limited supply was there. And we did it-- there was no question of sabotage. We did as well as we could.

I was just going to say, with parachute harnesses you'd have an ideal opportunity for sabotage.

Yeah. I don't know whether it was. I think it was-- oh, no, it was done very well. It was checked. I would imagine if there was any question of sabotage, of not doing it well, ooh, the repercussions would be very heavy, very heavy indeed, in ghetto, no ghetto. Oh, no, we just would not-- the obedience was absolute.

How did you come to have this job in the leather factory?

Just went to school, wound up-- I think somebody said, you know, they take younger boys there. And I just went, registered, and, you know, landed very quickly. It was sort of two needles. I don't know if you ever saw a very old fashioned or-- no, you are too young to have seen these things. But two needles and you put one needle and another and sort of together and stitch by stitch. And you had to put, you know, something-- I don't know what the name of it is-- sharpen the needle to make a hole. And then the two needles went through. And this I did.

Was there an unemployment problem or were there plenty of jobs?

Oh, no, unemployment, no, there wasn't. To my knowledge how the work was obtained, I really don't know. But, no, no, everybody had to work. I think, well, that is probably why we did three hours a day. You see my point.

At 13, whatever it was--

Pardon?

When you were 13 or whatever--

Yeah.

--what do you think you would have been doing otherwise?

Studying.

And how would your life have progressed?

Oh, I would have studied. I don't know how because my father died. But I was reasonably gifted in mathematics at an early age.

Would you have gone to university?

An ability which shows very early. I'm not sure about this, but possibly some form of engineering. Perhaps as a result of the war and coming here I did better than I would have done. But I think my mother was very much for me to start-- I had this mathematical ability as a child. I played chess, you know, the usual manifestations.

Were there any problems of discipline within the ghetto with all that crowding?

Not to my knowledge. I think at first when-- at first-- and I'm going back to 1940. There were crowds. And to get our ration of food, we had to push and sort of names were called out and so on. But then we got organized fairly well. And if there were queues, they were sort of fairly orderly.

Here, perhaps I don't know, I may be wrong, to my experience there may have been instances where there were sort of fights and pushing and so on, and the stronger one got first. But, no, we always got our rations. And it was without any queues, or without much queuing, perhaps for certain hours, you know, were some queues. I worked in an office. I could get out. But there was no problem.

You worked in office after--

After I worked-- I worked leather, leather work. Then I had typhoid. And I went to a hospital. It was soon after the Sperre after the deportation. And in fact, my sister, everybody was very worried for me to be in hospital because I thought the Germans might deport again everybody from hospital. And still with typhoid, you had to be there.

But I was taking home a bit too early. And I had another one, a repetition-- I don't know what it's called. There's medical name for it which I don't know. So I was whipped again to hospital. But, well, the Germans left us alone.

And as I said, at that time, we got some extra food as a reason of this fellow, Gertler, coming to the ghetto. I think he survived. He was in Germany after the war. I cannot explain who he was, why he was there, and what his connection was with Germans or what. It's a mystery which I cannot puzzle out. I have no news on it at all. Gertler, the name.

Yes. You had said that your mother, though she wasn't well, that death was probably hastened by the poor medical care.

Oh, it was definitely. Yes.

Did you have better medical care or were you just lucky?

I think I was lucky. Her illness was pneumonia. And she wasn't taken to hospital. It was very cold. It was November, end of November.

In fact, she got this pneumonia because she wanted to get some soup, which was still available. It was right at the beginning of 1940. And I remember there was deep snow, sort of 19th of November, I remember. And she sort of wanted to get the soup for us. And this is where she was-- I think that was the reason why she was taken ill.

Although there was a doctor, it was difficult to get the medicine. The medicine was not the right medicine. But anyway, she was only in 40s. And so I think that was-- I have to blame the ghetto and the war.

And how were you all right?

With my typhoid? I had typhoid. I was sort of-- I lost consciousness. And I think my sister or my uncle informed the doctor.

Oh, yes, I remember the doctor came, Weiskopf. And then I remember, yes, I was taken to hospital. I still remember being taken to hospital. They carried me. I was a little boy, sort of carried me on the shoulder and horse and cart. And I was taken to hospital.

I was unconscious. And I tried to sort of run out of bed. But there was medical care. And it was luck. I don't know what medicine I got and how I survived. But as I said, I was there a few days. They took me home and then back again.

And I got out of it. I didn't go to work for some time. And then I got a job as a messenger.

That was very tiring. I was so tired. My legs hurt me, oh, dear. It was really grim. The recovery was very pathetic I really feel.

Typhoid could be a severe problem in a confined, overcrowded space.

Oh, yes.

Was there an epidemic?

There was--

Were they able to isolate?

There was an epidemic. According to my memory, it was in 1940. There was a dysentery epidemic in 1940, and typhoid epidemic in 1942. But one of my friends says that I got the dates wrong. So here, I'm open to correction. To my knowledge, I remember I was ill in 1942. And that was the epidemic.

And oddly enough, the stronger ones, you know, sons of policemen or policemen or those who had more food, they died when they got the illness. But the weaker ones had a better chance of survival. This is-- but this is not too surprising. I think cancer when a young, strong person gets it, it moves much more rapidly than the very old people of 90 where it goes on for much longer and develops much slower.

So that was the same. So maybe for a reason, you know, I wasn't so strong and robust that I sort of managed, pulled it through. And as I said, I got a job as a messenger, which was, oh, dear, I did suffer these few weeks.

And then I got a job sort of-- I had to sit outside the office of the director, the Jewish director, and sort of let people in and out and stay in. And I think he was a little bit impressed with my efficiency of some sort. And he put me in the office.

I did they work. And it was very efficient. Everybody who came to work had to give a card. And that was registered. That was put in one box. I did it.

And then those who had the cards, got the card for the soups, or one soup or two soups. And before they left, they got their cards. And next day, the same story, and it was run fairly well. There was a record of how many soups were given and so on.

What language were you speaking amongst each other?

Mostly Yiddish, Jewish. But as I said before, we come from fairly assimilated families. So we spoke Polish. Polish was not very common in the ghetto and was in some way looked down. You know, the people who spoke Polish before the war usually were sort of a little bit ahead, you know, assimilated, perhaps not so much better off, but somehow looked down on those who spoke Yiddish. So the ones who spoke Yiddish took their revenge in the ghetto.

So this official business in the office, would that have been done in Yiddish?

Polish. Polish. But that, I would say, varied from office to office. You see, it depended on the people who actually were there.

There was a teacher there. I remember her today, Mrs. Romanowska. And there was some small amount of stealing of soup. I didn't do this. I did it once or twice, you know, not soup, but the cards for soup, the coupons.

I remember like today, she did it once. And she felt so guilty that she went to the boss to tell him afterwards. So that happened in the ghetto. And she said to me, she called me and said, I didn't take the easiest way, but this is my way, honesty. I cannot do anything else.

I don't think she survived. But she was a teacher before the war. And she said, I'm not telling you what to do, but this is how I decided. And I was very impressed with her.

Did you speak German at that point?

No, Polish. She spoke Polish to me.

No, I don't mean to her.

Oh, did I speak-- yes, I had some lessons in German. And I could speak a little bit of German. But, yeah, the announcements were in German, I think in Yiddish. I'm not sure if they were in Polish as well. You see memory sort of is not as good as people think.

Though also, in a case like that, if you knew enough of all three languages, you wouldn't necessarily know which one the announcement was in if you understood them all.

Yiddish I couldn't read very well. German I think I could manage. Of course, Yiddish and German are very similar. I mean, after all, Yiddish is the 14th century German. Some people in Cambridge even study this now.

And so I had no difficulty with language. Well, the rations, in German, you knew what potatoes were. You knew this. You know what--

You mentioned the woman who stole the soup coupon and then repented.

That's right, yes.

To what extent do you think there was theft within the camp?

Within the ghetto.

Yeah, sorry--

The ghetto--

I keep-- the ghetto I'm referring to.

Not much. Not much. The people who worked in the kitchen probably, yes. But not much. The people who

worked in an office, they may have the people-- as I said, people used to give a card when they entered. If somebody was ill, then they would give to the person in charge. And the person in charge would slip it in and pretend that the person is present, would get two soups, would give one to them. And one would eat.

I knew there were combinations of this kind. I wasn't involved. Even if I wanted, I think that I wasn't forceful enough, you know. They would shout at me, what do you want? You know what I mean?

Yes, you were quite young.

Yes. So I didn't have a chance to better myself in this way. But there were these things, but not much.

How were you restrained within the ghetto?

Oh, this I don't remember. I don't remember whether we had to be in at certain hours or not. I know we could sit in the garden.

But we didn't-- in the winter, you just came home. You ate your soup. And you tried to get to bed before you felt hungry again. But you never managed. And you just slept until you had to get up early in the morning. So there was no social life, no life of any kind, no wireless, no gramophones, nothing.

But in the summer, the days were a bit longer. And as I said, the garden, and we had neighbors, and they came and they talked a little bit. One played drafts with me. He sort of enjoyed playing. I was reasonably good at it.

And there were some policemen there who guarded the field with beetroots, of course. And they talked to us. So there was a bit of life.

And my uncle, I remember, used to walk and sort of recite Russian poetry, Gogol, you know, and talked about it. Because when he was born, Poland was Russia. And he was born in the 19th century, so Poland.

Well, there was no Poland. There was Russia. And he went to Russian school and learned everything in Russian, although he spoke good Polish. But, you know, he knew Russian literature. And he was always enthusiastic of sort of culture and sometimes, you know, try to sing a bit of symphony and so on. So there was some life.

Were you allowed to move freely within the ghetto to any part of it--

Yes.

Or was this-- you talked about seeing your neighbors. Those were your immediate neighbors. Could you go to other parts?

Oh, yes, we could go-- there were bridges over certain-- there were two roads across the ghetto where there were trams. And then we were not allowed to go. They were boarded. And there were bridges across.

But we could go-- in fact, we did go to some great aunts and so on and some relatives now and again. There was very little social life. But now and again, we would go just to see if they're still there, if anything happened. The news was usually fairly sad.

In fact, in the ghetto during the Sperre in 1942, one of the relatives when they knew-- possibly somebody informed them that they would be surrounded, the little boy came to us. He was so frightened. I remember him like today. And--