

Henry Wermuth, reel 1. Henry, can you tell me a little bit about your background, where you were born, when you were born, and what the area was like?

Well, I was born in Frankfurt am Main, 4 of April, 1923. And when you say the area was like-- well, I was a little bit too young to know what do you mean by area. But generally, it was a town like any town. I grew up. And I didn't feel too much about any Nazis. Maybe you mean, if you are-- if you are really referring to that-- till the time came, near '33.

What was your father's occupation?

My father, in my younger years-- I can hardly remember-- had a shop. Later on, he was a traveler.

What exactly is a traveler?

A traveler? Well, he was traveling, I believe, actually, in oil products.

Can you give me some details about your family-- how many were in your family?

Well, there was my father, my mother, a little sister. My sister was born July 1929.

Can you tell me something about your early education?

Well, I had no special education as such. When I was six years old, I started school. And I went to school up to the age of 14-- normal schooling. I have nothing special to tell about that.

Was it a mixed school--

No, no.

--both Jewish children and Gentiles?

No, no, no. I was in a Jewish school, meaning to say no mixed school.

Were your family religious?

Well, I would say religious in a modern way, if that means something to you. Perhaps not. But there-- as you know, there are a lot of stages-- there's a scale of religion-- of being religious. And we would be perhaps on a scale of just over 50, 60.

During your early years up to about the age of 10, before Hitler became chancellor in 1933, which was the year you were 10, were you aware of any antisemitism?

Well, let me put it this way. There is antisemitism practically everywhere. The percentage is important and also if it's sanctioned by government. And as such, you had the occasional outbreak. And you-- but nothing which is too much disturbing. I couldn't say anything at all. I mean, the odd child-- we were living in a non-Jewish area at first. And well, as I had mostly non-Jewish Christian colleagues, friends-- and there was the odd outburst, which of-- it did hurt when I was called names. But it was in a rage, or in fun, or soon forgotten.

In 1933, when Hitler came to power as chancellor of Germany, were you aware of this and of what it might mean to the Jews?

Well, obviously, nobody foresaw what the future would be. But it was known that Hitler was anti-Jewish. And well, how old was I then-- nine and a bit or nearly 10 in January 1933. And well, I had-- I remember, I had a sort of foreboding. But an inexperienced brain can't make much of what it doesn't know. But I did feel, as you know, what's

going to happen.

Was there much talk about it or feeling of unease amongst your parents?

Well, yes and no. But in those days, nobody expected real drastic changes. And actually, the drastic changes came bit by bit. It didn't come at first-- well, as far as I remember.

After 1933, when did you first become aware? Or when was it more obvious to you that antisemitism was gaining pace and Jewish people were increasingly more insecure in Germany?

Well, I can't give you the dates precisely, but obviously, you saw a lot of Brownshirts at that time. And you learned the SA-- Sturmabteilung-- SS-- Sturmschutz-- whatever that means. And the ones were more to be feared than the others. But how should I say? Well, there was a more substrata feeling for myself because I didn't mix yet with others. I only went to school.

But now and again, you heard something. Relations packed up-- packed their things, moved away-- or no, businessman first, which were not relations, but then, of course, some relations moved, say, '40-- '40-- '35-- '30-- end of '34, '35, the first relations moved already. And that already gave me an idea things are not what they should be.

Are there any particular incidents that you can remember?

Well, yes, but that came-- well, in preparation-- perhaps I should start it different. We were prepared, also, to emigrate. And in 1936, we were ready to go to Palestina-- Palestine-- well, now Israel. And we had sold out, ready to go, when I had-- when we had a letter from my father's sister-- hang on a little bit. The Arabs are making moves. And there's a disquiet generally. Hang on a little bit.

Well, we had sold out everything. And we went for-- from a big flat into one room, expecting to emigrate shortly. Well, from the few weeks, a few weeks became nine month. And there was my bar mitzvah confirmation near.

And something must have happened. There was a decision against going at the time. I'm not quite sure what it was because as a child, you're not being told all the details. We took again a bigger flat-- and well, just for the occasion of my bar mitzvah.

Can we go back just a little bit, Mr. Wermuth, and could you tell me about the burning of the Reichstag and what you knew about that?

Yes. Oh, yes. I do remember that-- I mean, more from the papers, which I didn't read, but my father read and then talked about. And then, of course, the comments-- I remember a Dutch name, van der Lubbe. And he was, well, may I say it-- talked about as being snotty-nosed. Is it not too rude a word? I think he was not normal, that person. And he was made a scapegoat.

And it was generally thought that they have done it themselves because-- for some sort of propaganda reason. I'm not quite sure. As a child, I couldn't understand how burning down your palace or your house could make propaganda. But it might have been-- now, I understand, it may have been against the communists. Because this van der Lubbe who was caught or made a scapegoat of was a communist. Maybe that's more or less all I remember.

Can you tell me what happened after you had made your bar mitzvah?

Well, we were preparing to emigrate. And I was learning English. I mean, I'm telling you this and trying to condense the things of many years, which perhaps many stories not so relevant. And as they come to my mind, I tell them to you. How old was I at that time? It was in 1937, it must have been. I just came out of school, I suppose. I had a bicycle.

And I remember, one night, I went to an English teacher. And on the way, I always-- there was some sort of headquarters of the SA and the Brownshirts. And outside there, under glass, was the StÃ¼rmer, the most notorious

antisemitic paper. And I stopped. And I started reading there.

And as I was reading, I really started to hate these people being portrayed there until it dawned on me, it's not the people, it's you they mean. I mean, if you can speak degrading about anybody and the more-- as I say, everything you can think of in a bad way has been portrayed there and being put in Jewish names and Jewish characters-- caricatures being put to it.

And while I was reading, a couple of boys suddenly came. And they said, aren't you Jewish? They said to me. And I said, yes. Well, get off. That's not for you. Well, I didn't say anything. I went on my bike.

But when they moved on, I went back because I was a little bit of an artist on my bike. And now, I watched out for them. The moment they came nearer, I jumped on my bike and was off. And they couldn't catch me. I played cat and mouse.

And well, I read it a few times, and then they disappeared. So when I went on my way by bike-- slowly, because there, at the time, was early for my lesson. And suddenly, they came from each side. And they caught me.

Well, I jumped off my bike, dropped the bike, and run away. I was a good runner too. And they used some sort of-- they were 18-year-olds, I suppose, the couple of them. They were not proper revolvers. But they were sort of noise-making toys. And they were shooting at me. It was perhaps a game for them or was it genuine, but I don't really know. I mean, perhaps they just made a game of it, catching the Jew.

Anyway, they couldn't catch me. And then after a while, I tried to return to my bike, and they had demolished it. And I noted a few German women were standing around. I noted one saying, [GERMAN]-- many dogs is the death of the hare.

Well, that meant-- that was meant to be friendly. So well, it's perhaps just an incident. But it perhaps tells you as much as about me than about the other two. Because I was cheeky myself at the time a bit.

Well, was there a general fear of the Germans by this time? Did you begin to feel a separation between the Jewish people and the Germans?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I mean, even perhaps businesspeople felt the turning of the screw, which I'm going to call it, quicker than maybe some others because soon, there were laws. Don't buy from the Jews, boycotts. They were not yet standing in front of the Jewish shops right away. I don't think right away. That came later.

It is sort of like turning of a screw bit by bit, a little bit more, more laws, more outrageous. And people-- once people knew that the government is behind them, making use of-- well, in a financial way, perhaps, acquiring businesses cheap, and property for very little, and this type of thing. But me, personally, it was a slower process. I mean, I was young.

My father had no business. And quite often, when he was traveling, he came home and telling us a story that the Germans say, yes, we mean the Jewish big business people, but we don't mean people like you. He sort of-- also, when he was telling us this, he used the local dialect of the people. But that's not important now to me. It sounded funny. And he said, [GERMAN]. Well, this will only mean something to those who speak German. We don't mean you, in the dialect.

Can you tell me about what happened to the books at school, particularly the poem written by the Jewish poet?

Ah, yes. Well, that was, of course, noticed right away. Well, when Hitler came to power, I was nearly 10. I was about 12, 13-- well, definitely, the-- I was-- I went to school till I was 14. The school books-- some poems, of course, were in this.

Special-- there was a special book with only poems we had. And I loved poems at the time. And there were some poems which went so much, which were so much part of the German culture that couldn't leave them out. And instead of

reading, for instance, the Lorelei, which is absolutely world-famous, the poem by Heinrich Heine, it was-- underneath, you could read, poet unknown.

So rather than attribute it to a Jewish writer--

Yeah, yeah. That was the first steps of elimination of anything Jewish.

What happened after you left school? Did you go to work?

Well, yes, I did, actually. And maybe I should, perhaps, put in one little incident I remember just before I left school. Well, to start with, whenever there are school leavers, the teachers are interested whoever has got jobs. Well, there were no jobs available for Jews anymore. But there were Jewish organizations who had provided facilities for people or youngsters to learn a job in preparation to emigrate.

Well, at that time, everybody would sooner or later emigrate to Israel. And the jobs were important there-- any trade, all trades. Oh, actually, a lot of it was farming, which not-- Jews were not generally famous for at that time. And I was the only one in class who lifted his finger and said, I have a job.

Well, it didn't please the teacher too much because I wasn't one of his favorite. Because he was, actually, a very religious fellow. And I wasn't too good at it. And so-- well, I was proud. I was the one who has a job, where nobody else has. But this is-- just because, actually, an uncle of mine could offer it to me. Perhaps I should tell you more about it now and how and why.

Now, in 1933, a person called Gustav E. Rupp, he was the boss-- my uncle's boss. And he manufactured handbags, leather goods. And in 1933, he emigrated, and my uncle took over. The factory was about 20 kilometers away from Frankfurt. And I went by train-- by bike to the train, by train to the factory.

And well, that's where I was an apprentice to this particular trade. There were about 20 people working there. I was the only Jew. And I didn't feel too bad, except for the foreman. He was a little bit harsh, but not overt antisemitic, just a bit strict maybe. But all the others were friendly.

And there is a law that all the apprentices have to be given one day in order to go to a special school. Because there, you have to make grades from an apprentice to a sort of a middle grade, which is called [GERMAN]. And from there on, you go to get a master's degree. And in that particular trade, well, I went to that school.

And now, if the derogatory-- the derogative word for Jew is-- when the Germans call it in their dialect Jude. And somebody called something a name that sounded very similar. And I was right away startled. And I looked at the fellow. And well, I was-- I had trepidations. But he looked the other way. And somebody's name in short sounded like that. It was similar.

So I was-- well, I calmed down a bit. And then he came to-- I went in the classroom. And we had to draw a handbag. I was quite good in drawing. That helped me later, as well, if we come to that, and-- I mean, in the camps. And then he asked everybody his religion.

Well, nobody expected to have Jews there because it was a small village anyway, where we learned. But there were Catholics and-- Katholisch and Evangelisch. Evangelisch means Evangelism, they put it, or maybe the equivalent from-- between Catholics and Church of England or Protestants. I think, we-- everybody is-- those Lutheran teachings, Martin Luther teachings.

Now-- well, as I say, my term was going to be called up and tell the teacher. And of course, I couldn't anymore and all this. As immediately, if there's-- if I've got-- very nervous, I've got some reaction, I have to go to toilet. And when my turn actually came, I went to the teacher. And I said to him, can I go to toilet? And by the way, I'm Jewish.

And then I went out. And the whole class heard me whisper and going out to the toilet. And I was hoping that that's the

reason-- that they just would translate it that all I was whispering was that I went to toilet. But it just shows, I was frantic. I was in fear. It wasn't the case like a wolf among sheep. I was one sheep amongst the horde of wolves.

Did you--

And I never went there again, no.

You didn't return to the school?

I didn't go to school, no. No, nothing could make me go back there.

Did you carry on working at the factory?

Yes. I carried on working in the factory. And sometimes in 1930-- end of 1937 or '38, my uncle sold out. And well, the new boss wasn't too bad either. And perhaps from then is already the next stage to come.

Can you tell me now about the events that led up to you leaving Germany in 1938?

Yes. Well, as I mentioned before, the older generation felt much more acutely what was going on than I did, for the simple reason I wasn't the breadwinner. I didn't have in my daily-- wherever I had to deal with, I could keep to my small circles, whereas my father, for instance, he had to go out. And he had to-- he always brought the news.

And there were the occasional atrocities. But I think my mind has more or less eradicated them because-- for the simple reason-- what came later during the war is of such enormity that it dwarfed everything of what happened during this time. It was minimal, nothing against what was to come.

But anyway, we were preparing for emigration. We had now-- we were prepared to go to Palestina, to Palestine, and to America. We had a quota. There was a quota system. Now, there is the German quota.

When I say the German quota, it was the immigration from-- to-- from Germany to America and from other countries. It went by quota system. And by this system, we were most probably, normally, if the war hadn't come, '40, '41, '42 would have been our turn to go, the early amount of Jews that-- which were let into America. So we had to wait.

Now, perhaps I remember one particular morning, which I should now mention. It was the 28th of October, 1938. At 6 o'clock in the morning, the bell rung. And well, civilian police came in and asked us to get dressed. We didn't know what it was all about. And so we did get dressed. Now, pack your things. And we take our things.

Did you have any idea why you were being woken up at this time in the morning by civilian police and told to pack your things?

Well, no, actually, not at that particular moment. Later, yes, but well, when it comes to it, I will mention it. At this moment, we were just bewildered because, well, I say civilian police because I really think they were Gestapo. Now, all right, we were given some time to pack-- or rather, my mother, I heard her plead with the policemen. And she was-- she really wasn't too well. And my father had a broken arm, I remember.

And so he and myself, we went right away with a minimal of luggage. And well, at this time, this moment, my memory goes a bit vague. But I remember my mother and sister joining us later at the station with quite a bit of luggage.

Had you spoken to these policemen? Were you asking them-- did you ask them why?

Yes, I was a little bit sheepishly-- I was-- when my alarm clock went at 6:10, and I said, well, what is it all about? I have to go to work. And well, no reaction at all. I couldn't even sort of see a grin, just no, no reaction, get dressed, that's all. No, no, I can't. At this moment, I didn't know anything yet.

Yes, they asked for the passports. That's important. We had to give our passports, which I believe we got back later. Don't forget, most of these actions are amongst the adults. And children only notice things. Anyway, well, now we come to the--

How did you get to the railway station?

Well, at the railway station, they made tracks. I'm not-- as I say, I've got vague memories up to the point where we all met again. And actually, my next recollection is in the train. And well, should I say that as a youngster, I had a sense. Oh, yes.

Oh, well, there, I learned that the Polish government decreed that all the people haven't been there for a number of years were going to be made stateless. And that was the pretext for the Germans to deport us. And my mother-- my father was about nine months old when he arrived in Germany. My mother was 14 years old when she arrived in Vienna. And a year or two later, she met my father. And so it went on. That's the story of my parents.

But my sister and myself, perhaps I've mentioned it before, were in-- were entered in my mother's passport. And so well-- so we were technically Poles, although we were born in Germany. Now, this I have learned. And the journey was going-- was to Poland. Well, believe it or not, but as a youngster, I sort of felt some sort of elation or a sense of adventure, new life and out of Germany.

All right, I lost the-- I lost all my favorite things, a bicycle-- I had a new one in the meantime. And also-- well, I'm not quite sure. I mean, later on, one misses a lot of other things, like mementos and photographs. And what would I pay now for these photographs. They would be worth a fortune to me-- nothing to anybody else, but to me that would be. And we left them all behind.

And of course, everybody was-- most people were not as happy, perhaps, as I was because the older generation went into an uncertain future. I mean, whatever-- they had responsibilities, perhaps, for the younger ones. Or maybe they had no relatives. And everybody had a different story. So well-- as for myself, I was-- I had a sense of adventure.

Was the train very full?

Oh, yes, yes, yes, absolutely full. But speaking of trains, well, again, it is-- well, we were traveling in comparative comfort against the cattle trains of the near future, which became notorious. And perhaps I would describe. Perhaps they were the worst part of my experiences during the war, definitely ranking amongst the most terrible.

What was your parents' reaction? How were they coping with this sudden deportation and this journey to Poland?

Well, I mean, I say this, we were not very rich anyway. My father had no business as such. Well, he left the motorbike. And I left my air gun, my favorite toy. And well, how should I say, we were ready to emigrate anyway.

And I didn't notice too much sadness, too much disquiet because we had relations in Poland. And perhaps in my father's mind, well, it is just another stage to emigrate to America, I would say. Because by that time, we were leaning to go to America rather than to Palestine. And so we took it in our stride. That wasn't the worst.

Henry Wermuth, reel 2. Mr. Wermuth, can you tell me something about your sister's reaction to this deportation, to this train journey?

Well, let me say this. You asked me about my sister-- rather, sister's reaction. I can't tell you much, no, I haven't observed it because I was, well, too busy listening to the grown-ups talking, and what they have left, or what the future would be.

Now, well-- but as you mentioned my sister, I mean, we can switch back a little bit. She was my partner, say, in games, card games, and-- because I was over six years older. And I wasn't-- well, not very nice to her, really, I mean, in retrospect-- a lot of quarreling. And I wished I hadn't now, of course-- and perhaps, like youngsters are.

And often, when I wanted to beat her in a game-- and the older generation called me sarcastically, oh, look at the hero. He wants to win against the younger girl. Well, I remember it because it did strike a chord, not being a gentleman.

And well, what else? Just going back to the past when I first bought the Diana air rifle, and we were target shooting. And the outer rim was 1 and the inner was a 12, not bigger than a large pinhead. And she was the only-- the first and only one who hit it.

And well, I was a bit envious. And I was a bit proud as well because other people saw that performance. And it was-- she was nine years old at the time and some feet. Anyway, no, but for this particular journey, I can't tell you much, no.

How long did this train journey last?

You're giving me a thought. I can't give you that at all because it wasn't a memorable journey, you understand. What comes after the journey is more memorable. Maybe we should go on from there because the particular train journey-- this particular train journey wasn't memorable. There were-- I can assure you, the later ones were.

Where did the train stop? Was it-- were you already in-- did it take you across the Polish border, the train?

No, no, no, no. The town was called Beuthen. It had two names-- Beuthen in German and Zbaszyn or similar in Polish. And well, this is in the memory of many people because many thousands were deported at that date to Poland.

And well, we were led into an underground passage. And later-- a little later, not now-- I describe this as the worst nine hours of my life, this underground passage. I mean, it's in comparison with what really were-- was experienced at a few years later, this is nothing against. But at this particular time, I felt terribly. We were packed like sardines and moving every 15 or 20 minutes an inch or so.

After about two hours, I was hardly a few yards into the queue and no end in sight. I was thinking, well, how long is that going to take? Maybe days. And well, I wasn't so much worried about food and drink. But my other body functions were-- well, I was worried about it. But I don't want to go into the next seven hours too much. But I learned that one-- I can control-- could control body functions better than I actually thought I could.

Anyway, it was a terrible ordeal in this tunnel, and packed like sardines, and didn't really know what the end-- and when the end will be. It took nine hours, but quite fateful nine hours. Because after that, we actually stood in front of the border. And then there-- and then still in the tunnel-- well, no, just we came out of the tunnel, I suppose, went up some stairs.

And there, we were-- there was some sort of a barrier. And we were in front of the border. Now, suddenly, there was a lot of talking going on amongst the adults. I was sitting on a suitcase. And I was listening because I was tired.

And then I mean, I was asked by my parents a question because the conversation went-- which went on between my parents was should we or should we not cross the border? Because at that time, the border was going to be closed. And a few more could go over the border. And a few more-- or the rest would go back. And there were maybe still 100 behind us. I haven't counted them, but quite a few.

And well, my parents were undecided because at this point, we could decide whether to go. Because the Poles were going to close the borders in minutes. Well, my parents couldn't decide-- go back to the Nazis or go to Poland? Little money and not many valuables, certainly not the language, and the prospect of living, perhaps, on the mercy of relatives wasn't too inviting either. Or so was going back to the Nazis.

They couldn't make up their mind. And so they turned to me. Well, I had no compunction. No, let's go. Let's go to Poland, no hesitation there. And well, within myself, the motivation was adventure. And so we did go.

Well, as a matter of fact, this sentence now is on my conscience because had we gone back-- and I know a lot of people

who have-- and subsequently managed to emigrate and, well, stay alive-- well, I wouldn't say that we might have been lucky enough to emigrate. But it could have been. Well, as we know subsequently that what happened in Poland-- that I decided for the worse. And it's a little bit-- well, quite a bit on my conscience.

What happened as soon as you crossed the barrier?

Well, we went into a train. And I think my father asked right away for Kraków, although the name Katowice comes into my mind, whether we were there for a time. But I don't think it's very important to go in such minor-- into such minor details.

In Kraków itself, Jewish organizations were alerted. And at the station, people were asked, have you got relations? And there were tea and food. And everything was brought. And well, we almost had a VIP welcome there. And well, yes, then from there, we went to relations. And a new-- a brand new story starts.

What relations did you go to? And what were they related to?

Well, first of all, there was the brother of my grandfather, my father's uncle there. My mother and sister stayed. I slept about five minutes' walk away from there with a-- well, this uncle and aunt had a married daughter, and husband, and child. And they're about five minutes away from where I slept.

My father was about 15-20 minutes away as a sister of my grandfather, rather well-to-do people. And well, for quite a while, he stayed there. Now-- so the family was split up for a while-- oh, well, split up, but not in a terrible way. We could see each other every day.

What were your first impressions of Kraków and Poland? And what was your life like in Kraków at this time?

Well, please remember, I was now 15 and a half years old, not even 16, a teenager, a young fellow who was already starting looking at girls. And the only girls I could converse with were other immigrant girls. And well, I was flirting a lot and was playing pranks on my rivals.

And I made use of that one-- or nearly one teenage year which I felt I lived in freedom, liberty. I felt free suddenly. There was no such oppressive atmosphere. You go out in the street. And you try to avoid people. That's-- I was free. I was happy.

All right, we didn't-- well, don't forget, my parents may have felt a little bit humiliation of being fed by others. And I didn't feel any of that. So it didn't bother me much. I had to eat. I had somewhere to sleep. And I could tell a few adventure stories. My shyness was fighting with my-- well, other-- the liking for girls was one thing. And shyness was quite detrimental to it. But that's just growing up.

What did you do during this time, during the day? Did you work or attend school?

Well, there were a few attempts of going to school. But then, of course, I said to myself, no, I'm going to America anyway. So why bother with this peculiar language which sounds like hissing and spitting rather than a language? And although I mastered it in the end quite well, but it was quite outrageous. I mean, it has nothing similar to anything I have ever heard or learned before.

Just a month after you had left Germany, on the 10th to 11th of November--

Oh, yes, yes.

--there was what has come to be known as Crystal Night. Were you aware that this was happening?

Oh, yes. Yes, yes, of course. Well, it was splashed all over the world, I suppose, in the papers. And we were-- and all the synagogues were burned. And well, we were-- as much as we were aware, or I was aware at the time of what happened,



it sounded more that-- the name Kristallnacht or Crystal Night came later. And it was called maybe another pogrom or something.

Anyway, the synagogues, all the synagogues were burned. This was the central point that was-- impressed me. The fact that what I've learned afterwards, that a lot of people were beaten up, and books were burned, this came later. I haven't learned-- I learned about it, of course, but not at this particular stage, only that all the synagogues in Germany were burned down.

What was--

And the reason was some German was shot. And then, of course, there were rumors that it was a homosexual affair and only a pretext. But so it went. I had mixed ideas in my head. And some of them, I wouldn't understand.

What was your reaction or the reaction of the Jewish people around you to what happened on Kristallnacht? Did it create fear or intensify fear?

Well, no, you see-- and again, I only can speak from my point. They were living their life as they knew it, as they understood it. They constituted about 10% of the Polish population. And in Germany, it was, I believe, between half and 1%. And this is quite a difference. There were-- in some little towns, there were perhaps more Jewish people than Poles.

No, there was no such fear at the time because the Germans didn't make their aggressive noises just yet. We're speaking about November, December 1938. And there was no fear, not that I could detect any. And I don't think Hitler has announced his aggressive desires yet.

I'm not quite sure when Austria-- when he went into Austria. And I should look up the date. Well, it was taken for granted because they always claimed Austria was German. But any other aspirations of any of this, we didn't know anything yet.

Can you now tell me about your recollections of the outbreak of war?

Of course. Well, OK, you asked me the question, so I will answer you, although I must confess that I'm somewhat reluctantly leave the one teenage year which I wanted to dwell on a little bit longer. Although as I say, I can-- I could go on for a long time, actually. But this is, well, actually, the important point of my life, the years, as you say, the beginning of the war.

Yes, when was it-- 1 of September, 1939. And well, we heard the Germans had invaded Poland. And well, my first recollection was that there was an alarm. And we all went down into the cellars. And somebody shouted right away, gas. And well, because everybody was afraid of gas, so much talk was about it, many people had gas masks. And we didn't have any.

And I put my handkerchief in front of my nose. And we were all looking into sort of some seepages of gas. And well, there wasn't any, of course. But well, it was my first real panic and recollection.

And maybe I could-- I should say-- well, it could be true. It could not be true that the first bomb of the war fell about a mile away from where I was in Kraków. Could be true, I don't know. Well, it was only about a week or so, then, the Germans had overrun Krakow.

What did you do during this week? What was happening? What was the reaction?

Yes. Well, perhaps I should switch back a little bit because a few months before, we had taken a flat in the main ring-- main square. I say ring because they were called ring in Polish-- main square of Poland. It was the back part of former servants' quarters of a very large flat.

And there we were, our family lived there together. I don't know if my relatives helped my parents. They didn't let on

much what happened, financial-wise. And there, that's where we lived and when war broke out.

Well, on the third floor, we have a few-- ever so often, if the siren went, we went down into the cellars. There was-- what should we do? I can't recall much else than that. And when the Germans came in, and oh, what was this-- you saw them on the street, and they were passing, and there were tanks and everything. But it didn't-- they didn't just shoot down the civilian population as yet. And when it comes to the major story of the Holocaust, this was what I would describe and perhaps have described already as a screw which was turned, and turned, and turned, but not in one go, bit by bit.

The first thing, I mean, what we had to do-- well, my first recollections-- the Germans were catching anybody with a Semitic or Jewish looks, preferably with beards, to do some work. And well, actually, from the 1st of September till it snowed, it's quite a-- still a few-- a month or two to go. But still, as I say, this is-- my real recollection was being caught by the Germans to shovel snow away and hack eyes off the road.

You yourself?

Oh, I myself, yes. And then you became skilled in evading your capturers. And there's stories about this to be told. But it's not a major story.

Was there much fear amongst your family and the Polish people?

Well, the fear-- apprehension, yes, fear, not yet. Don't forget, the real killings started much later. Only, on the contrary, there was something which perhaps was very significant. And this was, well, the Jewish philosophy, which each turn of the screw, which was-- well, it was felt, but it wasn't deadly yet. And we could hear people say, well, if it doesn't get worse, one can survive that too.

And well, 1942, let's say, it stopped. But that's because it couldn't get worse. But for quite a while and quite often, you heard that. And the next important stage I remember was the decree that all Jews had to wear armbands with the Star of David. And well, people-- some people were, and some people reluctantly started a bit later, only when punishment was meted out. I can't even remember which what type of punishment it was. But I know, then, people-- everybody took to wearing the stars.

Oh, well, when I say everybody, I'm-- there are some Jews who have got no Semitic features at all. As a matter of fact, my mother didn't have, my father, nor-- well, the least of it, my sister, and neither my mother. Perhaps I, with a little bit darkish around the eyes were the most Semitic of the family, Semitic-looking fellow of the family.

But it wouldn't matter now here in London because there are so many mixed people here, I wouldn't-- nobody would point out, well, this is a Jewish fellow. But in those days, and in Germany, and in Poland-- well, I didn't feel that I could disappear amongst the others. And my language wasn't perfect, far from perfect then. I mean, later, it became really much better, but at this stage no.

I venture to say that a lot of people-- and I also heard it after the war-- a lot of people did-- well, the word is go underground, although it's just meant by that they were in hiding of some sort, they disappeared, didn't wear stars, and started a new identity. But without the necessary Aryan papers, I don't think you lasted long. You could disappear. But one day, you could be caught if you didn't have the right papers or forged papers. I don't think you had much chance to survive at all. But a lot it-- a lot of them did that way.

How did you live during this period?

Well, yes, that's a good question. Well, I have to switch back a little bit here. And you will soon realize why. A few months, or perhaps one and a half months before the war, I was sent to Zakopane by some Jewish organization. A lot of children were sent there. Well, my story could go on because adventures and with girls.

But I hasten to say, not in the 1985 way, I was 16 at the time, but innocent, much more innocent than perhaps it sounds.

But still, as I say, I got to know a lot of girls and also a Polish boy. And he had a motorcycle. And with his motorcycle, we went through the mountains. Well, I was in Zakopane, which is a famous spa in Poland. And well, he took me on hair-raising tours all over the place in the mountains.

Now, why I mentioned this fellow will now come to light. During the war, he suddenly looked me up. He came to my flat, or to our flat, and he said, now, people start to selling gold in Zakopane. And he brought along quite a sizable amount of gold and golden trinkets, baubles, and asked me if could help him.

Well, I already had learned that there was a black market going on. But I wasn't quite ready for that yet. I was just 16. And I said to my father, I think you can sell it. And he handed it to my father. And that was my father's introduction to the black market. And not much later, it turned almost out to be the only interaction to any living one could make.

Oh, I must intersperse here-- just before this man came, one rich relative of mine, who had a factory of cucumbers and marmalade-- it doesn't go well together, but that was it. And he left buckets and buckets full, a storage behind. Another brother of my-- another of my grandfather, another uncle of my father's, arrived from Germany. And he, of course, took over the whole storage.

And also, I've forgotten to mention that all the other relatives had fled-- I later learned that some of them got stuck in Warsaw, didn't survive. And the rest went over to Romania and did survive. So I have to mention that as well now.

It was then a month or two into the war when my father and myself, we were-- we started to sell jam and marmalade. And it wasn't too difficult to sell because during wartime, everything is scarce. And it's sold easy.

And after that finished, we were looking around for what to do next, when this Polish fellow came on the scene. And from then on, well, my father got acquainted with other people who were dealing, that type of thing. And it became practically the only way to make a living.

And yes, well, until it comes-- came to the point, he came a few times, two or three months, one after another. And then he didn't come anymore. Anyway, making a point here, my father then started dealing in other things as well. And one day, he was caught dealing in German marks-- terrible crime. And he was sentenced to six months in prison.

And he didn't give away anybody else. So nobody-- I mean, although he pretended to-- that he would point-- he pretended to the Gestapo, or the police, or whoever was with him that he was going to point out whoever sold him-- no, where he sold it to. Because actually, it was sold to him by a German soldier. And he pretended to point out.

But when he came to the point, to the people, he looked straight on. And the people there-- and as he was in company, the people knew right away that-- well, what happened, and thereby, were warned. So it was only a show, of course, that he pretended to give away. Then he said, well, I didn't meet anybody. I didn't see anybody. Anyway, he was then taken to prison. And we visit him every day and handed him some food.

The prison was in Kraków?

In Kraków, yes. And well, it was kosher food because at that time, we still could have this food that soon would disappear from the menu.

Was there any rationing?

This particular time-- beg your pardon?

Was there rationing at this time?

I'm sure there was. But there were so many-- I mean, there was no mass killing or anything of that sort yet. It was just businesses were taken over, properties were taken over. It was a gradual process. We are still now in 1940. And well, how should I explain that? Well, we--

Did he serve--

We brought food practically every day to him. And sometimes, I was caught on the way to do some work for the Germans. But it wasn't drastic. I mean, this-- in comparison-- I mean, in normal times, if something like that happened, I'd say, well, it's an outrage. But looking back, this was too small to make a big point of. But then, of course, our resources ran out. And again, we were helped in a peculiar way. We had one room, which we let to a young couple.