

Holocaust Survivor

Oral Histories

Jack Gun

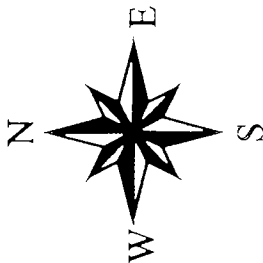
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**VOICE
VISION**



Jack Gun

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City
DP Camp



70 0 70 140 Miles



Could you tell me your name please, and where you were born?

Yes, my name is Jack Gun and I was born in Rozhishche, Poland.

Um, Rozhishche is near—where?

Rozhishche is uh, in Eastern Poland. It's uh, the biggest city closest to it is Rovno.

And also a city by the name of Luck, L-u-c-k, [Lutsk] which was quite a big city.

Um, Jewish population, do you have any idea what...

Yes, the Jewish population uh, was quite uh, large for a small city. The whole city had a population approximately about 15,000. And approximately ten, eleven thousand were Jews. Most of them were uh, business or uh, uh, craftsmen. And all around were villages with the Gentiles. And they used to come in to do, to do their buying and, uh.

Um, from the s...rural areas, you mean.

Right.

Tell me a little about your family. How large was your immediate family?

Okay, my family consisted of my father, my mother and a brother ten years older than myself. A sister seven years older and I was the youngest. There was three children.

And tell me the names.

Uh, my father's name uh, was uh, Shmuel, which is Sam Gun. And my mother's name was Sonia. And my uh, sister's name was Raizal, which is Rose.

And your brother?

And my brother was Ansel.

Um, what about extended family, grandparents, aunts, uncles...

Uh...

cousins?

Extended, as far as my grand...uh, I, I remember both of my grandmothers, but neither one of my grandfathers was alive. Uh, had about three, three aunts that I can remember living in Rozhishche, with uncles and they had children.

These were sisters of?

Of my father. My mother uh, all she had was one brother, which was an invalid. And they lived maybe twenty kilometers away from us in the city by the name of Torchin.

The cousins. You said you had three aunts and uncles and they had children.

Right.

How large are we talking about in terms of the extended family? First cousins.

Uh, say each one had approximately three, four children. We're talking about twelve. I would say twelve, fourteen cousins.

Fourteen cousins, plus your family, which is...

Right, five.

five more. Maybe twenty-five people?

Approximately.

Um, and how many survived the war?

Only one survived the war was my, my brother, myself and a first cousin, which, he ran, he ran with the Russian Army to, to Russia and he survived in Russia.

Um, what kinds of things do you remember? I mean, you were very young before the war. Um, do you remember anything about your family, about the town, about life there?

Uh, very little, to be honest with you. But I remember uh, going to shul occasionally with my father uh, on, on Saturday, even though my father was not a very religious man. Uh, but he used to do it to please his mother. I remember Friday nights we used to have dinner. I remember my grandmother from my father's side used to come over. Uh, I remember also very much uh, uh, the closeness of my other grandmother, from my mother's side. She was very, very—always concerned about us. Uh, we were the only grandchildren she had the three of us, my brother, and my sister and myself. And my mother was the only, only nakhes she had, because uh, her son was an invalid, and uh, my mother was, you know, quite uh, successful, married uh, very nicely and had a nice family and she was always very much interested in us.

The closeness with your grandmother—between you and your grandmother, is that what you mean? You said you remembered...

Yes...

the closeness...

myself and my other two siblings. She was always uh, very much worried about us and, bringing us things and, uh.

What kinds of closeness do you remember?

Pardon me?

What kinds of closeness do you remember?

Of hugging and kissing and, you know, you, you can feel uh, somebody—you always feel if somebody loves you.

Singing songs to you, uh?

Yes, occasionally. If she slept over she would sing songs and put me to bed. But she was not that often uh, uh, didn't stay with us too many nights because she always had to go back home to be with her son.

And they also lived in Rozhishche.

No, she lived in Torchin. My mother's grandma—my mother's mother.

And, oh, so she lived in Torchin and the rest of the family.

Lived in Rozhishche.

Um, and you said your father wasn't terribly religious.

No.

Mother either?

Neither one.

Did she keep a kosher house?

I believe she did. But uh, you know, just traditional like, like today a lot of conservative Jews. Which was very unusual for those days, because most people think of European Jews as being you know, very observant and very religious, and, uh.

So your father didn't have a beard.

No, no, not at all.

Shabbos, Friday night, was there candles lit?

Yes, Friday night we had candles lit, we usually had Friday night dinner. And occasionally my father would try to please his mom and go to shul. And after he finished with shul he went to do his chores that he had to do.

At, at home or at work?

At, at work.

So, he was a modern.

Very modern Jew for, for the 1930s.

Um, do you remember any, any kind of anti-Semitic expression from, from your neighbors or from things in the town?

I really don't. Uh, my brother has told me that there was many occasions, you know, where they called him a Zyd, which means Jew or somebody tried to hit him with a stick. But I personally do not remember. I guess I was too young. I never attended school.

So, he would have experienced this at school maybe.

Right.

And your father, did he do business with um, with non-Jews?

Definitely.

But what was the business he was in?

My father was uh, he had three businesses actually. He had a store that used to sell fabrics which uh, you know, was very important commodity those days. You know, people, there was no Hudson's and Macy's and people had to uh, usually sew their own clothing or else there was a tailor in town. So everybody came natural to buy cloth to make a suit or a dress or whatever. So this was one

business which my mother was also involved in with him. And he also was involved in shipping—exporting eggs.

Eggs.

Yes. And also he was a partner with the mayor of our city in a tobacco—wholesale tobacco business. And I believe uh, the reason he had, he was with the mayor because uh, Jews were not allowed to own tobacco companies. And uh, it was on, on the mayor's name, the license. So, he was involved in quite a few businesses and uh, was very well to do. Uh, I remember many, you know—never, never uh, never being hungry. I also remember of uh, having bananas and oranges and grapes, which was quite a luxury those days. I'm sure that seventy-five, eighty percent of the kids in my city didn't ever saw that.

Do you remember if he was a, a veteran of the First World War?

My father? Uh, I really don't—he was born in 1900. So he probably was. The first war was what, in '17?

1914 to 1918

'14? No, he was too young.

But in the end he might have been able to.

I don't believe he was.

Sometimes that's a way to get a license to sell tobacco.

Oh, is that right?

Veterans. Um, so he had good relations with the community.

Very good and he was very, very liked. Uh, he was always working for the betterment of the poor. I mean, I know—from what I heard from my brother

mainly, that he was always working, you know, uh. He established a Jewish school, which he gave up part of our house for it. It was called the Volkshule. They were teaching mostly in Jewish, I believe, in Jewish language.

Folk, people's school.

Right.

Hm—uh, Was this open for people who couldn't send their children to...

Correct. It was open to everybody.

So he must have had quite a reputation probably beyond Rozhishche.

I'm sure. He used to travel. I also remember one—I, I must have been maybe five. And this I remember going on a train with him to, to Lwow, Lwow, which he, he used to go there for business. And I still can recall the, the plush on the train, you know, where we were sitting.

First class.

First class. Right.

Um, any other memories that stand out in your childhood? Pre-war...

Pre-war? Nothing special. I remember that we had a lady that used to take care of me because my mother, my mother went to work. And she was a Jewish woman that came from a different town, you know, from poor parents. And uh, she used to live in our house. And, you know...

A nanny?

Like a nanny.

What kind of work did your mother do?

She used to sell at the fabric store, because my father did not spend too much time in the fabric store. He was involved more with the eggs and then tobacco. So she sort of handled that store herself. And had lot of employees.

Was there a market day when..

I'm sure we had a, a market day. It was called a Ayarid, in Yiddish. Uh, that once a week, you know, all the farmers would come and there were...

Do you remember what day it was?

No, I really don't.

Um, tell me a little bit about the coming of the war in...

Well...

June 1941.

Well the...

Did the Russians come first?

Yes, actually we.

In 1939...

In September 1939 uh, I believe the Germans came into us. But they were there only for a very, very short period of time, maybe a few weeks. And uh, we didn't feel anything as far as from the Germans, because they didn't have enough time to, to get involved. So uh, the Germans were, were there and, like I say, I don't know if it was two weeks, three weeks, four weeks. But right then, Hitler and Stalin made that pact where they, where they divided Poland into two parts. And our part became Russia. And the Germans moved out. And when the Russians came in uh, I, I was five years old. So, I really don't remember much. And

whatever I do tell you I know from what my brother told me. And uh, the Russians came in and as far as bothering Jews, they did not. Jews were—they didn't treat Jews any differently from any other people, which was something that we appreciated naturally. Uh, the only thing was that uh, the Russians did not believe in uh, free enterprise and capitalism. So whoever was uh, who owned businesses, they used to send, uh. My brother told me there was a man that used to run one of the places. He came in and said, "Mr. Gun, we need the keys to your business, because as of today it's owned by the government." And naturally my father gave it to them. And uh, and then what the Ger...uh, what the Russians also did is uh, they used to inquire in town about people, how they were, what kind of people they were, you know. Especially in sm...small towns like ours. Uh, they uh, were able to find out if Mr. Gun was a nice man, if he treated his employees nicely. If he was nice to the working class. And whoever wasn't, they put on trains and shipped them to Siberia. Uh, my father, as I told you before, he worked a lot with the, with the working class, and he was very much liked, unfortunately for him. And they did not ship him anyplace. Left him home—left him in Rozhishche, left us in our house and gave him a job. And uh, we lived quite comfortably, except we probably didn't have a lot of the luxuries that we had previously. Uh, but nobody bothered us.

Explain what you mean by he was unfortunate—unfortunately...

Oh uh, the unfortunate part that he had such a good name was that the pe...most of the people that didn't have a good name, that were shipped to Russia, most of them survived.

To Siberia.

Shipped to Siberia. They came back after the war. I would say ninety-nine percent. A few did die of hunger, cold. But they didn't die because they were Jews. They died because this is how the conditions were in Siberia.

When, when the Germans came in, do you remember seeing them march in?

Yes.

So, you were what, five, six?

Uh, no, when the Germans came in, we were with, under Russia up until June of '41.

Right, but you said the Germans came in first.

First I don't remember 'em at all not.

So not the first time.

No.

So when the Russians came in in 1939, do you remember...

I don't remember any significant thing from it.

So was it uh, uh, was the town full of soldiers at first.

Definitely it was full of soldiers and there were even some, I understand there were some Russian Jews came along afterwards. And uh, uh, my father used to inquire how life is under uh, the Russian uh, domain. And, oh, he said, "In Russia everything is wonderful." He says, "We have wooden floors and we eat bacon."

He says, "drink coffee. Things are just wonderful." And, uh.

And did he believe them?

Well, when he heard what he said he already saw what the thing is. That if that was the wonderful part of eating bacon and having coffee. [laughs]

What um, so he gave up his business or they took his business.

They took it, yes. In a nice way. They said please hand over the keys.

They did. Uh, was he upset, was he...

Yes, oh definitely, I'm sure he was upset. I mean, I could feel—I could understand how I would feel when I own my business and somebody would come over to me and ask me, hey, hand me over your keys. I mean...

Do you remember any conversations in the house?

I don't.

Um...

I do not remember.

What, what did they then give him to do?

He worked, he, he became some kind of a, a office work in a hospital. My father somehow had some experience in pharmacy. I don't know if he was a finished pharmacist. I know he never practiced it on his own. Uh, but he had experience. And it could be he might have had a degree. I don't know how much it took them to have a degree in it. But he worked in a hospital and, you know, he used to get paid. And that was it. And we lived. I mean, this life we could have got used to, I mean, you know, like, uh...

So, there was no appreciable change do you think, or...

Eh, not uh, maybe to him, to, to his, you know, from being a very successful businessman and taking away what you worked for all your life. Uh, I'm sure he

didn't have a good feeling inside. But, still uh, he already heard, I'm sure, what was happened to, in other parts of the country where the Germans came in. And it was a lot better by us than where Germans were.

What do you think he had heard?

Pardon me?

What do you think he had heard?

Uh, I'm sure he heard what the Germans started to do in the other part of Poland and in Germany. I know we had a radio and they used to listen to the radio all the time. But whatever he heard, I'm sure he didn't believe enough. Uh, we, we, nobody believed uh, that the Germans would come in in every village and every little city and do the things that they did. Because if they—if, if he would have believed it all, I think somehow we would have ran away with the Russians.

Do you think he'd heard what was going on in Germany?

I'm sure he did. I'm sure he did.

Do you remember hearing any talk of Hitler in the house?

I don't. But I do remember when the, when the Germans came in the second time, in '41. By then I was already seven. I do remember the fear I had, the fear inside of me. And I attribute that to, that I must have overheard them talking about the Germans and what the Germans were doing. So this is what I attribute that fear when I heard that the German soldiers are marching in and with their tanks. And before that there was naturally uh, bombardment. And sitting and being afraid to go out. And I'm sure that my parents wouldn't let me out, but looking out through

the window, you know, sort of through the blinds or whatever. And uh, just looking and being very afraid.

Was the town bombarded?

Yes, yes. It was bombarded.

In '41. And you took shelter w...what...

Uh, we took shelter in a, in the basement, or, uh.

There was—it didn't sound like there were any instructions on what to do?

No, no. No instructions of go to shelters or have any special bunkers to get in.

So you—you're frightened.

Definitely.

That's the, is that the dominant feeling you remember?

That's my dominant feeling, of being in fear constantly.

How long? The whole war?

Definitely. From then on. From then on 'til we were liberated. My constant—my dominant feeling was fear.

The Germans came back in 1941.

Correct.

And they marched into, into Rozhishche.

Right.

Do you remember watching them march in, do you remember seeing them?

Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

And you were frightened.

Mm-hm.

What did they look like?

They, they looked like people that were uh, that were not coming in to do anything nice. Uh, very uh, stern looking. Very uh, uh, I don't know what adjectives to use. But anyway like, mean people.

That'll do. Mean. Uniforms. Do you remember what the uniforms...

Yes, looked like main, most of the main soldiers had green uniforms.

Green, so it was Wehrmacht, you think.

Yeah.

Any SS men?

Uh, I think later on there were some SS men. I think the beginning there was only the regular army.

What was the first thing that um, began to change after the Germans occupied the town?

Well, I, I'm sure they weren't there very long, maybe a month or two. They right away uh, made announcements and put out bulletins that on a certain day they want all Jews to meet in the center of town and bring with them whatever they can carry. And uh, we all reported very nicely. My whole family went out of the house on a certain day. Probably must have been by then probably August, I would say. And all the Jews that were left, that didn't—there were many Jews that ran away with the Russians when the Germans came in. But mostly I would say people that had, didn't have big families, single people. Like a cousin—my first cousin that survived.

He ran away.

He ran away, he was a single fella, he was uh, maybe eighteen, nineteen. He ran away. But there was many more that ran away. There was some even—I know of some couples you know, that just got married. They ran away. But people that had large families uh, children and parents. Uh, they didn't want to leave them. So, whatever Jews remained, they started, they put—took us into the center of town and marched us into the ghetto. They took a part of the city uh, naturally the poorest part of the city, with the worst housing.

Did it have a name, the neighborhood?

Uh, they used to call it off...On the Hill. In Jewish, Offen Bog.

Offen...

Bog.

Right.

And that's where it was the, most of the poorest part of Rozhishche Jewish people lived. So, they took us over there. We marched like a bunch of sheep. Uh, I, myself, I, I remember, I remember that I was holding a pillow or something that my mother gave me. Uh, my brother tells me that I asked, that I asked how come my next door neighbor of mine, which was Christian, didn't come, that I used to play with. And uh, the only answer they could tell me was that he wasn't Jewish, which didn't mean too much to a seven year old. Uh, they put us all into—they designated certain houses uh, little houses for so many families. There were three rooms, they put in three families.

So you—five of you were in one room.

One room.

Bathroom?

Outside.

Running water?

Outside.

Medicine?

Medicine, none.

What did you take with you?

I, I told you what I took with me, a pillow. My parents...

Family...

I don't know what they took with them.

So you marched through the street. Do, do you remember anybody lining the streets? You know, there's a scene in *Schindler's List* where the...

Uh-huh.

Jews are marching...

Yes.

through the streets...

Yes.

with all these people.

Yes.

Was it like that?

Yes. The people were standing around. Most of them, I'm sure, were very happy to see us. Uh,

Was there any harassment?

Not that I recall.

So, not even name calling.

Could have been. I'm sure there was. But I uh, I don't remember. I'm sure there was.

What did you think? You're seven years old. You had to give up your house and you're living in very cramped quarters.

Very cramped quarters, with very little food.

What did you think? Do, do you remember what went through your mind? Did you talk to your brother?

Not really.

Did you talk to anybody in the family?

Yeah, I talked to everybody. But...

About this? Did you say, why are...

Yes, I did. Uh, the same reason that I—the same question that I asked why my friend uh, the Christian boy wasn't going with me. I also asked, "Why are they doing this? Why is this?" They, they told me, says, "That's what's happening to Jewish people right now." And we have to do what they say or else they might kill us.

Who said that?

My parents.

Your parents, they might kill us, they said that. When did they start um, when did the Germans start to get more aggressive and violent?

In the ghettoes.

What kinds of things happened in the ghetto?

What things happened. They had—first of all you know, in the ghetto we had uh, the Germans. We had Ukrainian police. And then we also had Jewish police. In fact, they wanted, they asked my father to become one of the policeman in the ghetto, which he refused.

Who as...he Germans asked him?

No, no. The, um, you see they picked out two or three people from the ghetto and uh, they told 'em, we want to have so many Jewish policemen to help us control everything.

So it was the Jewish Council.

Right. And they asked my father to join and my father did not want to join. He, he told them, he says, I was involved in enough things before. Right now I'm—I don't want to be involved in no Jewish police in the ghetto. And some of them were very mean. They thought the Germans told them that if they controlled things uh, they would uh, get more food and they would be all right. You know, they promised them. And a lot of them you know, they didn't, they didn't give the Jewish police any uh, guns, but they gave 'em sticks. And a lot of them used to come around and hit people. And, uh.

Were you ever hit?

No.

Your father?

Uh, I don't know. I was never hit. Uh, I saw many times uh, looking out the window. In the ghetto I saw a lot of times I saw uh, older people walking and for

no reason at all hitting them with the butt of a rifle, dropping down bleeding. Uh. And uh, in fact uh, for a long time uh, we were in the ghetto approximately about a year. From August of '41 'til August of '42. And as I said previously, conditions were very bad. Sanitation, food. They used to ration so many ounces of food, eh, bread a day and then give you a, a—some hot soup, which was water—hot water. And my father and my brother used to go out to work everyday. And my mother also. But they worked in different places. Uh, one thing that my father did do, wisely, before all this started was that, that he used to deal with a man—he used to deal with a lot of people, naturally—but there's one man that he was very close to. He was a Czech farmer. And just before the Germans came in, and I think even in 1939, he gave him an awful lot of our possessions. Furs, clothing, jewelry uh, a lot of fabrics that he had from his store. He gave—before the Russians took over, he gave it to this Czech. His name was Mr. Yerushka. And he told him, he says, "Look, he says, I'd rather you have it than the German government or the Russian government." And this man was a big, big help to us, uh.

He gave him all this, all, all your possessions, with the understanding that he would help.

With the understanding—he, he knew him quite well. And he knew what type of a man he was. And he, he was hoping that he would. Many of 'em, there were many instances where people gave away all their possessions and when they came for help the, the man said, "I don... who are you? I don't even know you."

But he didn't do that.

No, he didn't. And uh, as I told you my, my brother and, and father in a—worked one place and my mother in another. And he used to sneak over to where my father worked and he used to bring him—give him a little food. A loaf of bread, maybe some potatoes, maybe some grain. And at night, my father would sneak that back into the ghetto. So this is what I used to look forward to. He used to, and another thing this Mr. Yerushka did, he came into the ghetto one day and snuck my sister out. My sister was blonde with blue eyes. She didn't look—no trace of Jewish, Jewish looking. He took her with—to the, to his farm. And she used to live with him and work there. So I was mainly alone in the ghetto. And there was some older ladies there and might, might have been a few more children. And never went outside. Stayed in the house. Looked through the window. Now when I speak at schools children ask me, "What did you do? What did you do all day?" I tell them, I says, "I really don't know what to tell you. All I can tell you I had no coloring books, I had no crayons. I had no Barney to watch." I was there and I knew to be quiet. And I knew that I uh, uh, cannot cry and I cannot make any noise.

Because...

Because if I did, something would happen to me...

In the ghetto?

and I knew that it wasn't going to be very nice, what would happen.

Now this is before your hiding.

Yes. This was in the ghetto, for a year.

Your father and brother worked for...

They worked on a base. Uh, it was called a baza. What that was, it was that the— all the farmers and, used to bring in a certain amount, like a tax to the German government. And the tax consisted of whatever they raised. If they raised uh, cows, they would have to bring a calf or whatever so often. Whoever raised corn had to bring so many bushels of corn and so on and so forth. And they had the Jewish people uh, working there, cleaning up and storing the stuff and putting it away. So that's where they worked. My mother, I'm not positive. I, I, I think she worked in a laundry where they used to wash clothes for the German soldiers. And my sister got out quite—wasn't very long in the ghetto with us when Yerushka took her. But unfortunately, a couple months before the liquidation of the ghetto, she got very homesick and she told Mr. Yerushka, you know, she says, "I really miss my parents and my brothers and I'd like to go back." And uh, what were, he didn't want to force her. So he brought her back.

And she did not survive.

And she did not survive.

When do, do you recall that they were taking Jews away in trains?

No.

Away from Rozhishche?

No, in Rozhishche I understand they were taken out. You see, what they used to, to do, I told you about the Jewish police. The Jewish police used to come and harass, harass everybody. Uh, every so often the German government would put out a note that they need so much gold. So they would tell the—I uh, the Jewish

police, we want you to go into every house in the ghetto and get so much and so much gold, or else we're going to take out fifty people and kill them.

So, it was like, you, the whole community was a hostage.

Right, so some people had and they gave. Some people did not have. Or they—like, probably my parents, I told you, gave it away. And some never you know, some might have left it in their houses. Uh, so what they used to do is take out so many people and, or they killed them or they took them to a labor camp. They had in Lutsk, I understand, they had a labor camp. So this is what was going on during that year in the ghetto.

This went on for a full-year.

Full-year.

And that, how did that end?

How did that end? In August of 1942, towards the latter part of August, rumors started in the ghetto that they were going to liquidate the ghetto. And nobody knew exactly uh, what was going to happen. Are we going to be shipped to a labor camp uh, to a concentration camp.

Okay, you'd heard about concentration camps.

I believe they have.

But, of course, you as a child did not.

I did not.

Okay, okay so you were uncertain.

So my father sort of decided, he says—he wanted to make s...some kind of a get...away. So he decided this one morning in August that he was going to sneak

me out with him, when he and my brother went to work. And—excuse me—and my mother was supposed to sneak out my sister when she went to her job. And we were all supposed to meet at a certain point at the end of the working day, and we would all go to Osawa where Mr. Yerushka lived. And we were hoping that maybe he'll hide us in his barn, in his attic. Whatever, but we were hoping that he will direct us some to do to get away from the ghetto before they start shipping us out. So August of uh, it was, I believe, I know the date, August of—August 21, 1942, my father and brother and myself, he snuck me out somehow, I was a little kid. Uh, I don't know how, but it was a miracle, I'm sure. He snuck me out, took me to where he worked, put me in a barn, where, full of hay, hid me in the hay. And he told me, he says, you just lay here. And uh, I'm showing myself, we're going to do our work and we'll try to come by every so often and look in to see if you're okay. And I laid there. Uh.

Feeling what? Do you remember?

Feeling scared.

Fear?

Lonely. But knew enough to obey, not to cry.

This was one day.

It was August 21, 1942. And during that same day, somebody else came on to that base where my father was working and he informed him, he said, "We want you to know that uh, your wife and your daughter were not allowed out today to work. They kept them back. After you guys left, they sort of didn't leave too more people out." So when he heard that, when he had to go back to the ghetto, he

brought my brother over. He says, "I want you two guys to sleep here tonight. He said, I must go back," he said, "because I, I will not leave your mother and your sister alone." He says, "hopefully, maybe we'll try the same trick tomorrow." And he went back. The next morning we laid there. We noticed our father is not back. So we knew something was happening, something was wrong or he would have been back to work. About an hour or so later, we heard German soldiers come in hollering, "Juden, Juden, Raus, Juden, Juden!" Naturally we didn't move. We laid there. Uh, then they took bayonets and were sticking into the hay. Maybe this far away from us. And we laid there. Somehow they walked away.

Anyone else hiding in the barn?

Not that we know of. Not that we knew of. And we laid there the whole day. During the day we heard a lot of—it was very close to the main highway. So we heard a lot of commotion. We heard a lot of trucks going back and forth. We heard some screams. But we had no idea what was going on.

Now this was August 21, 1942.

This was already the twenty-second.

Twenty-second.

Right.

And you knew enough not to react when they were.

Definitely.

You knew they would kill you.

That's right.

Nobody told you that.

Pardon me?

Nobody told you that.

Well, it, it was self understood.

So they left.

They left.

Your father's not back.

Correct.

And you're there with Anshel. What happened next?

Next, we waited 'til it got pitch black outside. I don't know what time, nine, ten o'clock, whatever. We started sneaking out, out of that hay, out of the barn. We got out through a fence to get out of that base. It was very quiet, I remember. This I recall vividly. It was like, you know, especia...you know, there wasn't a city with a lot of cars or anything. So it was very, very peaceful, quiet. We heard a dog bark, we, we fell to the ground. We were afraid—oh, they're after us. And we walked for maybe a mile. And we heard some more noise and my brother got scared. And he said to me, he says, "You know, let's go here." It was a, it was a little house and it had a barn next to it. And next to that barn was a ladder leading up to an attic. We climbed up that attic. He was afraid we should walk any farther. Got up to that attic. There were two other Jews laying there, that I believe also worked on that base. And I'm sure my brother talked to them and uh, we laid there the whole night.

Also youngsters?

Uh, no. They were older. There were like my father's age, probably in their forties. And, and uh, as we fin...as we finished uh, we finished the night, this was going already the second day without any food, any water. And it was August, hot. And that attic had about this much room. And, you know, had that al...uh, not aluminum, what is it uh, tin roof. You know, it was very, very hot. In the morn...early morning the farmer came in to do his chores in the barn. So he heard movement naturally. And came up the ladder and he looked at us and he said, "You're Jews, right?" What we're going to tell them, you know. He says, "Do you know what happened to the ghetto yesterday?" No, we didn't. So he gave us the, he was the first one to inform us that yesterday they took out ev...all the Jews from Rozhishche, took them about twenty kilometers out of the city. They had ditches dug and the funny part was that they didn't even have the Jews dig the ditches because they didn't want rumors to start too much. And they killed approximately 4,500 Jews that remained in our ghetto. Including my parents, my sister, rest of the family. And he told us, he says, "Look," he says, "I'm a religious man." He says, "I will not call the authorities to you," He says, "but I want you to know that the German government gave out a order stating that if they find any Christian keeping a Jew on his premises, they'll kill the Christian and his family, the same as the Jew." So he says, "I'll give you 'til nightfall." He says, "When night comes I want you to leave my premises." He says, "I can see you guys are hungry and thirsty." He went down and brought up a bucket of water and a loaf of bread, which was like heaven on earth, being parched and uh, without any water and without any food at all. And when nightfall came uh, we went down. In fact,

my brother asked one of the other guys that was on there—was uh, used to be a, used to drive buggies, horse and buggies, used to all the villages and my brother asked him. He says, “Tell me,” he says, “do you know exactly how to get to Osawa?” And to me he said, “You must know Mr. Yerushka,” and he says, “Yeah.” So he told ‘em exactly how to go there.

To Osawa.

To Osawa.

And how far was Osawa?

I would say approximately maybe uh, fifteen kilometers.

Which direction?

Uh, I’d be lying to you if I tell you exactly.

Uh, you’ll can point it out on a map later?

Pardon me? I will try to find it.

Try to find it, okay. So you walked to...

We walked down the ladder, started again in walking. And again the same story. Any kind of noise we heard we dropped down on the ground. Uh, I walked for a couple miles maybe and I started to cry. I can’t walk any farther. So my brother put me on his shoulders and he carried me awhile. And then he let me back down. And I walked again. I don’t know uh, how long it took us. But we finally arrived to Osawa and we found his house. And he knocked on the window. And Mr. Yerushka came out. The first thing he did, he crossed himself, he thought we came back from the dead. Because he knew what happened the day before. And he asked my brother, he says, “How did you two kids get away?” So naturally my

brother told him the story. And then he asked my brother, he says, "Tell me," he says, "how did you know exactly how to find my house?" He says, "You were never here before." So, my brother told him the truth, he said that he was on this attic with this other man and this other man used to ride horses and he knew all the villages and he, he explained him exactly how to go. And I'm sure Mr. Yerushka didn't appreciate that too much because those days you didn't want anybody to know too much. But he didn't say anything. He says, "Look," and he told us the same thing as the farmer that came up on the attic. He says, "Look," he says, "I want you to know what, what kind of order the German government gave out about keeping Jews." He says, "but," he says, "I will do anything in my power to save you." He says, "Your father was a very, very close friend of mine. And I promised him that I will do whatever I can to help him or his family." So he told us, he says, "Look," he says, "right now," he says, "the—it's still before harvest." He says, "The fields over here with wheat are very huge, lar...tall." He said, "During the day you go," he says, "you go and lay all day in the wheat." He says, "at night or I'll come out and bring you out a little night or every other night you'll come into my barn." He said, "but we migh...got, it's gotta be uh, very secretive. Not to look obvious that everyday at six o'clock you come to my barn to dinner."

He was afraid they would kill his family.

He was afraid, sure, he was afraid of neighbors. He was afraid of you know, of anybody, because uh, you couldn't trust anybody those days. You didn't know who was, who was friendly and who wasn't. And unfortunately, the majority were

unfriendly towards us. But that village, Osawa, happened to contain, maybe I don't know, twelve, fifteen farmers. And they were all from Czechoslovakia. And they were a lot nicer and more compassionate to the Jewish community than the Poles or the Ukrainians.

They were from Czechoslovakia. Not Slovakia.

Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovakia, further north.

Right. I don't know what years they settled there, but they'd been there for many, many years. And they were very prosperous farmers.

And your, your father had given all kinds of things to the Jewish comm...

Yes, he has.

Do you think that's why he did it, he helped you?

I really don't think so. I really think that he was a nice man, he had a conscience. Uh, because there were many, many people, as I mentioned before, that people gave away all kinds of stuff and when they came to 'em for help, they said, who are you. We don't know you. Get out of here. You want us to call the police on you or something like that. So, I really don't believe it was only because he gave him all the stuff. I believe that he was a decent man. There were some, thank God.

And this was the right thing to do.

And this was the right thing to do.

Well that sounds very optimistic.

Yes. So we laid in the wheat. And he did come every other night or so or we'd go there and get some food. And then go back and lay in the wheat. Uh, one incident

happened to me while I was laying in the wheat there. I was very fair complected at one time and uh, I guess I had nothing for uh, sun protection and I must have had a sun stroke. And uh, all of a sudden my brother noticed that I don't move and I don't talk. He talked to me and I wouldn't answer him. And uh, he got scared. I mean, he could hear me breathing. But that's about it. So, when nightfall came, he ran to Mr. Yerushka and told him, he says, "You know," he says, "I don't know what happened to my brother. He's, he's look like unconscious. He doesn't talk, he doesn't move. He lays there like. He lays there like he's dead, but he's breathing." So Mr. Yerushka told him, he says, "I believe most likely he must have had too much sun. He must have a sun stroke." He says, "Here's a little milk," he says, "we'll mix it with honey." He says, "Open his mouth," he says, "and try to pour it in." And that what he did and that revived me.

Like a baby he fed you?

That's right.

When you heard that the ghetto had been liquidated, did anything go through your mind?

Sure. I'm sure things went through my mind. What happened to my mom, what happened to my dad, what happened to my sister.

Do you remember how you felt?

Uh, I felt lonely, fearful. [pause] Thankful maybe, that I had an older brother next to me, because uh, if it wouldn't be for him, I mean, I could have never survived.

So you launched into a new segment of this, this experience. Now...

A new segment of uh, hiding, running, trying to trying not to be caught. We were people that were, that were missing. They were always looking for us. That's how we felt.

This is now spring.

No, this was...

Summer, summer.

Yeah, end of summer, '42. And uh, then when they cut the harvest, we couldn't lay in the fields no more. So uh, there was a big, big forest very close by. And Mr. Yerushka told us, he says, "The best thing would be for you guys to get into the forest. Get in as deep as you can. And camp out." And uh, that's what we did. We went...

Big forest is...A forest in the United States is sort of something you can drive by on, on the highway and you can sort of see through it.

Yes, but the... you couldn't see through that. That was very, very thick, very deep, very long. It went for miles and miles.

Did it have a name?

It did have a name, but I don't recall exactly the name.

Neither do I.

I should have asked my brother. I'm s...he does know the name.

So you entered the forest with the help of Mr. Yerushka.

Definitely.

Um, you were going to count on him for food?

Right.

And you were going to be hiding in the forest.

And counted on his advice actually. He was like our advisor. Because, look, my brother was also uh, he was eighteen.

Now, while you were in the fields or in the forest, did you—w...w...was there any illness? Did you ever feel sick? Ge...get...

A lot of time, my brother tells me, well, I probably did too. We were sick of life probably. My, my brother told me that many days he was hoping that he goes to sleep and don't wake up [pause] because he didn't know what, what to look forward to. How long this was going on. How long this was going to go on.

Do you think you might have felt this way too...

I think so.

at seven or eight?

I probably did, without realizing it.

What was it like in the forest?

Uh, first of all, the forest uh, we, we uh, r...met up with the other people that also ran away from our town. Some from uh, neighboring little cities. In fact, one of the men that was on the roof on that little attic with us was there. And naturally they used to sit there and uh, talk quietly. Uh, and uh, we had a lot of bad experiences there too. There was a group of Ukrainians called the Ban...Bandero...Banderowices. They were—they, uh.

Bandits?

Bandits, exactly. A group of bandits. They used to come, not with guns, but with sticks or whatever and whoever had a coat or whatever, that they, they took it off

from us. And they would take it away and hit some people. And then we'd have to change our place, not to be in the same place again. Stuff like that. And then we also used to go again to Mr. Yerushka every couple nights or so—not every night, and get some food. In fact, he gave us, we told him that we had some more people with us. So he sent some extra bread. Uh, he was really a good man. And you know he—my brother told them there was some older people there, so he was happy. You know, he felt that maybe they had more experience in life...

And help you...

and help us.

Was there a bunker in the forest?

No, not in the forest. There was no bunker.

You didn't d...dig anything in the ground?

Not in the forest, no. We were just sitting in thick, thick forest. And sat all day and all night. Sat through rain, through early, early snow. And you asked if we were ever sick or medications. We were never sick. Never had a cold, not that I remember.

Did you ever hear any Germans in the forest?

Uh, no. What c...we experienced in the forest was a lot of uh, they used to come every so often with uh, gu...machine guns and uh, shoot into the forest. They knew there were some Jews hiding there.

You'd heard b...machine guns before.

Yes.

But they didn't enter into the forest.

No.

Just...

No, it was too uh, uh, too big of a job to go look for a few lousy Jews, you know.

And uh, there were a few instances, I understand, where people got killed. They were, you know, they got panicky and ran towards the road and they got killed.

All right, let's, let's take a break here and then come back to the forest in a minute.

Let's uh, talk some more about the, the uh, experience in the forest.

Yes.

Just to review a second. You, you and your brother Anshel, with the help of Mr.

Yerushka?

Mm-hm.

Went into the forest to hide from Germans and also from the Ukrainians.

Yes.

Um, you were eight...

Yes.

at this point.

A little over eight.

As an eight year old, do you remember anything, at night, say. What, what, what went through your mind in the, in the middle of the woods at night?

Not really, Sid. I can't recall of any special uh, I have no memories of what happened while—night. Uh, I used to cuddle up to my brother. I can only remember constantly being scared. That's my main...but otherwise any special uh, memories? No.

There must have been noises in the woods.

Yes. There was noises. We, we got used to it, I guess.

Um, what, what happened after this experience? How long were you there?

In the woods?

In the woods.

Well, let's say approximately uh, they cut harvest probably September, probably the beginning of September—October. Uh, one incident I want to tell you about in the wo...when we were in the woods is one. As I told you, we used to go every so often to get food. And one night we were crossing the main—we had to cross a main highway and that—to get to, you know. And as we were crossing the highway, there was a Ukrainian policeman on a bicycle with, with a rifle on his shoulders. And he stopped us. He said, “Where are you coming, from the woods? Are you Jews?” And my brother says, “No, we're not Jews.” He says, “Where do you live?” He says, “We live in Osawa.” “Do you have any kind of ID?” My brother says “No,” he says, “I have it at home.” He says, “Where are you coming from?” He says, “We're coming from a little party,” this was a Sunday night and then it was a custom, they had little get togethers, the Ukrainians, on Sunday nights. So my brother says, “That's where we're coming from, we were at a friend's house at a gathering.” He says, “What are you doing with that little kid?” He says, “Well, my parents were away so I had to take him with me.” He says, “Are you sure you're not Jewish?” He says, “Positive. We're not Jewish.” And he let us go. Uh, it was strictly uh, uh, it was meant for us to live.

Why do you think he let you go?

I think, mainly, I think he probably was scared. He probably realized that there are Jews in the woods, he was afraid maybe somebody else—three, four, five are going to come out and jump him. Maybe somebody come out with a rifle too. I think it was the circumstances that made him—he didn't want to start, because he was alone, even though he had a rifle.

So he, he left?

He left.

And you're standing there with your brother.

We crossed the road and continued.

Did you say anything to each other? Did you, do you remember any conversation after that?

My brother might have said something, he says, "Now, you see? He says, "We just, we, we were just far, we were this far away from being killed." But you know what, I don't know. It didn't phase me, I don't think.

Why do you think?

Huh?

Why do you think it didn't phase you?

I don't know. Maybe because of what I already went through in that one year. Uh, I don't know. I wish I could tell you. It just didn't phase me. Just continued on.

So you think that this went on for September, October.

Yes and then it got cold. When it got cold we didn't know what we—we couldn't.

The winters in for...in the early forties in our part of the country, there was terribly cold, maybe twenty below zero or more. And you couldn't exist in the

woods. You'd freeze to death. So my brother and another man that was also in the woods with a little girl about my age. And I think that Mr. Yerushka also helped. And they dug out a bunker in the field. Not in the forest. Outside the forest on a, on a empty field. They dug out a bunker with a, I don't know how long it took 'em to do it. I, I really don't know. I mean, I'm just, I know what they did, but how long it took them. It took three nights, four nights, five nights. Anyway, they finished up this bunker. And my brother and myself and this man with the little girl stayed in that bunker.

D...explain the, the, the bunker to me.

Explain? A, a hole in the ground. Pitch black.

And when you went into the bunker, did you cover it up?

Yes.

With?

With, I think they, there was a little wooden door and something on top to camouflage it. You know, like, I don't know. It was camouflaged. This I know, it was just a—and maybe covered it with a little soil. I don't know.

And can you estimate how long it was and how wide it was?

It was just uh, uh, enough to sit in. You couldn't get up in there.

You couldn't stand in it.

No. Sitting. And there was just enough room for the four of us.

So you would get in—what, you would jump in?

Yeah.

Some...

My brother would go in and he would catch me. And he, same with the other man and his girl—his little girl. And we sat there all day long, not realizing there was any kind of sunlight. We didn't know that the sun exists. That there was some—filthy, dirty, full of lice. At night we used to get out and shake off the lice of us. The frost would kill 'em 'til the next—'til we go down again and do the same thing over again. And also go again, every so often to Mr. Yerushka and get food.

What if in the middle of the day somebody needed to urinate or....

Right there.

Right there, in the bunker? And the smells of the bunker must have been...

Very bad, very bad.

And lice carry disease, don't they?

I'm sure they do.

And so did anyone get sick in the bunker?

No.

Claustrophobic?

Terrible. I—that's what made me, I'm very claustrophobic today. And I believe, I attribute it to that bunker naturally. Constantly in the dark, constantly in the dark.

This, uh, uh, this memory I—it stands out in my mind very much.

This is the, this is the center then of the surv...of your survival experience. This memory of the lice...

Yes. It stands out very much. The, the bunker, the forest.

You were claustrophobic then too? Where—what did you do in it, when...

Was I claustro...then I was nothing, Sid. I was like a piece of flesh. That's—from that I became claustrophobic, I believe. But then, I knew I had to be there. Did not complain. Did not uh, say to my brother, I can't stand it.

And any, and your feelings?

No feelings.

No feelings. Tell me a little about that. Not feeling anything. You'd lost your parents and your sister.

Mm-hm. Lost my parents, my sister. And here I was with a brother, uh.

And you had nothing to do but think about things like that during the day.

Right. Nothing to occupy your mind with.

And there's nothing that comes back?

And it's, it's uh, it's amazing that uh, uh, to get through, through all that and be half normal.

Yeah, as one person said here—sat here and said, "It's not normal that we're so normal."

Every one of us has got uh, uh, some have more, some have less, but every one, I believe is—every Holocaust survivor has uh, a certain damage done to them, morally.

Morally. What do you mean, morally?

That we're not, we cannot be considered normal people. That we have some, some effect. Something affected us, some more, some less. I think I'm fortunate, I think. Maybe, you know what crazy people never think they're nuts, so. But I feel I'm very fortunate that I wasn't affected that much.

When, when you are, are in a car, driving um, along a highway and you go by a stand of trees or a forest.

First thing comes into my mind.

And if you walk into a dark place.

It's very bad.

A movie theater?

Movie theater, n...not so bad. But terrible if I have to be in an enclosed in an enclosed place, something that has no window. Uh, a lot of times I go into a bathroom that doesn't have a window and I, I literally keep the door a little open. I don't care if, that's how fear I am of enclosure. Or if I go into an elevator uh, I always wait to see maybe somebody else to go in with me, up until today. Uh.

How about nightmares?

Nightmares I had. And—occasionally now, but not too much now. I think I had more uh, when I first arrived here. Dreaming about running and uh, and the bunker.

We'll come back to this if you don't mind. Let me go back for a second. Who was

Primas?

Primas?

Yeah.

Well, I think we should, uh. Primas was a man that I stayed a cou...about a winter and a half with.

After the bunker.

After the bunker.

So, what...

Let's continue maybe with the bunker.

The bunker. What caused, what caused you to...

Okay. To leave the bunker, okay. Uh, this Mr. Yerushka that was our saint, he went hunting one day. And, if I'm not mistaken, he was—there was a German Kommissar that used to come into the villages there. And with this German Kommissar, he went hunting. I don't know, deer or whatever, some kind of a, a... And that German Kommissar noticed something in the field. And he told Yerushka, he says, "What's going—this looks like something that somebody dug or something. And uh, Mr. Yerushka, "Nah," he says, "You're, you're dreaming." He said, "that's nothing." And he took him away from there. And that night, I believe, when we came there to his house, he told us, he says, "Hey guys," he says, "your bunker is no more safe haven." And he told us the story what happened. And he says, "If he noticed it, I don't know if he'll come back or not. But if he noticed it," he says, "somebody else might notice it also." He says, "I don't want you there no more."

Could you hear anything from out?

Nothing.

You couldn't hear anything either.

No, you mean being in a bunker?

Right.

Nothing. Couldn't see nothing, couldn't hear nothing.

Alright, so he's advising you to get out.

He advised us to go out. So this was—I don't know when, maybe February. I really don't—it was still plenty of winter. So uh, so this gentleman that was with us, with the little girl, he had also another band that used to—he used to go to get food that used to be his savior actually. Another Yerushka. But not, not his—didn't have the same nature of a man. But he used to help him out, I guess. He gave him an awful lot of stuff also before the Germans came in. So this gentleman said, "Let me talk to my friend. Maybe he will keep us." And he talked to him and he told him that my brother has a lot of goods and he will pay him. And we told it to Yerushka and Yerushka says, "Yeah, I will take care of him as long as he keeps you." So we went into this farmer and he kept the four of us. In the barn, in the house at time—at night. And we were there for a few month...I don't know, I shouldn't say a few months. Not too long. Now what this gentleman wanted to do. He under...he found out that we have a lot of goods at Yerushka's. So everyday he wanted, "Hey, I want you to go and bring me material for a suit." And so on and so forth, where it got to the point where my brother noticed that he's strictly trying to get everything at what he can. He doesn't want to hold us, he just wants our stuff. So my brother decided one day, he, he told him, he says, "I'm going to get something," or whatever and we left. We didn't say goodbye to him. And abandoned the guy and we came to Yerushka and told him the story. We told him, he says, "Look, this man is strictly, he wants to suck out whatever he can from us."

What was the other man's name, by the way?

Uh?

The man and his daughter.

His name was uh, Berel Polapon. He, I believe he came to Israel after...

He survived?

Yeah.

With his daughter?

Yeah.

Yeah, okay.

So anyway. So my brother tells Yerushka, "What we, we can't go back to this man. This man strictly, he says, no matter how much you'll give him he'll want more. You won't have nothing to give him pretty soon." So he says, "Okay," he says, "I have one other alternative." He says, "I have a gentleman that works for me. He's a young married man with two little kids," He says, "he's very poor. He works for me all during the summer months. He has a house way out on a field with no other houses close by." He says, "If he would agree to keep you, you, that would be a safe haven for you. There's no neighbors. There's no neighbors for miles." So he talked to this gentleman, which his name is Primas—was Primas. And this Primas agreed. He was also very, very uh, he was a nice man. Even though Yerushka used to take care of him financially, but also he did it also because he had a good heart. And he told him, he says, "I have two boys, their father was a very close and dear friend of mine. I'm trying to save these two boys." And he agreed. And he took us in. And we were—he had a potato cellar in his house. We used to be in a potato cellar, sometimes in a barn. And at night he, we would come out and he. It was a one room house and he had two little girls.

And the, all, six of us slept in this little room. It was warm. And he ke...kept us there until the end of the winter. I really don't know exactly—it was already late in the winter when we got to him. Maybe it was March. But it—over there it didn't get warm like here. And uh, the winter didn't break actually 'til May. So he kept us. And as soon as spring arrived—this is already uh, say end of April of uh, uh, '43, we went back into the woods. Same routine. And uh, we met up again with uh, I think, that man with the little girl. And my brother was young and foolish and he used to talk and tell him where we were and how we're doing and all that, which was a big mistake, which we paid for later. And we—same routine as I told you before. We were in the forest and we saw often, these bandits used to come around, hit people, take whatever we—little we had away from us. So on and so forth. Uh, but we had to be thankful that they didn't kill us, they didn't, you know. They were just bands of uh, hooligans. And when the, the winter arrived again in, say, in uh, end of October of '43, we went back to Mr. Primas. Uh, during the summer months, I think, my brother claims we used to run into him at times at Mr. Yerushka's house when we used to come for food. And made plans with him that he would take us back as soon as it gets cold. And he took us.

Was he also Czech, by the way?

No, he was Ukrainian. There was, there was uh, nice people, all kinds of the Ukrainian or Polish, whatever. It was just a shame there wasn't enough of 'em, but. He was also a wonderful man, *wonderful man*.

You said the six of you slept in the same room.

Mm-hm.

You and, you and your brother?

And his uh, he and his wife and two girls. We, we slept, like, on a top of a, a stove that he, underneath was the, you know, we used to heat.

Uh, so Berel...Pol...Pola...

Berel Pola...no, he wasn't with us. No, no, no.

So it was just the two of you.

Just the two of us.

And did, did, did the daughters ever say anything to you? Did you ever talk to them?

They were little girls. And maybe one probably was my age and one younger. Uh, I don't re...recall to have any conversation with them.

His wife?

As soon uh, very little. As soon as morning arrive or we'd go in the barn or in the cellar. And at night we would come out into the—into that little house and they would feed us. It wasn't that much. They didn't have that much to eat either. Very poor. Potato soup, piece of bread. I never saw any butter, I never saw any milk. And the second winter, I told you, already started. And uh, sometimes during that winter a v...very bad incident happened to us. We were in his house, it was already night. And all of a sudden we heard horses and a, a sleigh coming. So naturally he put us into the basement. They came up to the house, they knocked on the door, he came, opened the door. He introduced himself, he says, "I'm a sheriff from this and this village." He says uh, "I understand you're, you're hiding two Jewish boys here." He says, "What? Who told you that? Where do you get?"

He says, "Mister," he says, "I have evidence that you have here two Jewish boys, and please bring them out unless you want to get killed, you and your family." So what could he do? He opened up the basement uh, the little potato cellar door and here we are. Came out. And he said, "Look, he says, you know this man?" And he, he brought with him that man that we abandoned. That farmer that we were together with that Berel Polapon.

They caught him too with his daughter.

No. His, them he didn't bother. No, no. He was mad at us why we left him without saying anything to him that we're leaving. And he still wanted to get, naturally, more merchandise from us. So he was peeved that we abandoned him without even saying goodbye. And somehow—I mentioned before that my brother used to tell people where we were and all that. Somehow he found out from, maybe even from this Berel, I don't know who. But he found out where we were. So he came in, this farmer, with the sheriff and when he brought us up, the sheriff told my brother, he says, "Look," he says, "I know that you have merchandise here and here and here." He says, "I want you to go with this gentleman and I want you to bring me this and this and that for two suits for myself and two suits for him to make and this and that." Anyway, he gave him a list, a shopping list. And he says, "I'm staying here with your brother," he says, "if you don't show up, I kill your brother."

So you were betrayed, basically.

Right. Betrayed, but like I said before, it was my brother's fault. But he was a young kid himself and he used to, had confidence in people.

What happened?

So what happened, he went, he went with this farmer, went back with the horse and sleigh with my brother to Osawa. And he came to Yerushka and Yerushka saw that, he got—naturally he felt, he, he told Yerushka exactly what happened. So Yerushka, being the saint he was, he gave him whatever they asked for. And he came back to Primas' house and the sheriff told my brother, he says, "Now you had a good lesson." He says, "From now on, he says, you don't talk to anybody, you don't tell them where you are, you don't tell them what you got." He says, "I realize you're a young boy, he says, but now, from now on, if you want to survive, he says, keep your mouth zipped." And he told Primas, he says, "I want you to know that I will not tell anybody about this incident. I will not tell them that you are keeping two Jewish boys. And they are safe with you now as they were before." And they said goodbye and they left.

And the other farmer? He was satisfied.

Yeah, he got his stuff. Whatever they needed—wanted and they left. And uh, naturally we were afraid. My brother thought for sure that Primas would tell us to hit the road. And Primas got yet nicer than he was before, if it could be. He says, "You know," he says, "I'm going to keep you. I'm not afraid." And his wife was very much against it. She says, "I have two little girls, I cannot take chance like that." He said, "You do as I say." He says, "You don't like it, you leave." Where do you find people like that? I mean, this was a...

Has he been designated a, a righteous Gentile?

He wasn't. I never found him.

After the war you didn't find him.

I'll tell you that later.

Okay.

And he says, "You know what else?" He says, "I'm going to tell Mr. Yerushka that I don't want anything else from him for keeping you." He says, "Because I also realize that Mr. Yerushka must be running out of merchandise." He says, "No matter how much your dad gave." He says, "I don't want anything from him for the rest of the time that I keep you." Uh, and uh, a few months after that, we were liberated. This was a prod...we were liberated in March of '44. One day we were in a barn or in a, or in a cellar, his wife came running and he says, "Hey guys, come on out, Russian soldiers are all around the village." He says, "The Germans are gone."

Had you heard any war news up to that point?

Nothing.

Nothing. Not even about Stalingrad?

Nothing. Nothing. Didn't know anything about. We were just like in the dark. We were in the dark. My brother tells me the first thing he did was when he saw Russian soldier, he kissed their feet. That's how happy he was to see them. And what did I do, you ask me? Nothing. Just uh, went along with the flow. Just existed and did everything I was uh, told to do.

What was the day, do you remember? March what?

Don't know. It was in March, probably towards the end of March of '44. Uh, we were so close to the Russian border. But, you know, the front was going on in that

area. And the Russians came in. We went—left Primas and went back to our house.

Did the Russians take you or did you go on your own?

I think they took us. When...

How did they treat you?

Very nice. Very sympathetic, very nice.

So they took you back home to where...

Rozhishche, which wasn't far.

What did you find there?

Empty house.

What did you think you would find?

We were hoping to find somebody else alive. You know, we were hoping. We never saw with our own eyes our parents and our families getting killed. And when there is life there is hope. So we were hoping maybe somebody else survived. Maybe my father ran away. Maybe my mother, maybe my sister, maybe my uncle, maybe my aunt.

But nothing.

Nobody. Found a empty house. My brother went up to the attic, he found pictures that were not disturbed. In fact, some of the pictures that I have. Found addresses of relatives in the States. And uh, we were there, I don't know how long. And a lot of the other Jews that came out of the woods came into our house, because our house was pretty big and pretty nice for those days, even though it sti...still didn't have any indoor plumbing. But it was quite a nice house for those days in

Rozhishche. And the other houses were more dilapidated, some were bombed.

This wasn't, uh.

No one had occupied the house.

Yes, it was occupied by German soldiers. So we were in the house for a little while. And one day I was uh, in, on the outside bathroom and all of a sudden I heard my brother screaming, "Yankel, Yankel, come out." I says, "What happened?" He says, "We gotta run." "Run?" I says, "Run where?" He says, "The Germans are back, coming in." Because the front was still, we were right by the border. So all of a sudden the Germans came back into Rozhishche. And we crossed, there was that river there. We crossed the bridge and got onto Army trucks, Russian Army trucks took us with them to a little town by the name of Keverts. That was, that was on the way to Rovno. I don't know if it's on the map. And uh, then we got on a train and went into Rovno. Rovno was already, again, little, but a lot of bombing going on in Rovno while we were there. And there they had, it was a big city. Over there they had shelters. We used to go—I remember them very vividly. We used to go to the bomb shelters.

Underground?

Underground.

How did you feel about that? No windows?

No windows. [pause] I felt like being in the bunker again. But I did it. I had no choice. And we lived some place, on a big—I don't know if it was a institution. I don't know if it was a hospital at one time or some...A lot of refugees from all over were there. No food. Uh, we used to go around begging to little houses.

Begging for food. And I know we hit one house and they were a real old couple. And it was still cold. Must have been maybe in April, I don't know when. Still cold, you know th...th...over there it was not like in the States where April you already walk in short sleeves. And they still had to heat the house. And we used to saw wood for this older couple. And they used to give us uh, dried up bread, ??? and that's what we ate. Bread and water. And we were there, I don't know. I really don't remember how long. Maybe a couple months. And then we heard that it's, that the Russians threw 'em back farther and that Rozhishche was back occupied by the Russians. So we went back again. Excuse me. And this was uh, from then on, the Germans never came back anymore. That maybe it was May, June, summertime of '44.

So you were liberated.

Yes.

Did you feel joyful?

I don't remember being joyful. I guess I felt uh, I lost too much to be joyful.

Did you feel anything?

Numb. I felt uh, again I have to, I have to quote my brother. My brother says I uh, I was like a person that they put in a freezer for two years and took him out to thaw him out. I showed no emotions. You know, for a kid at this time I was almost ten. And uh, you know, I look today, I look—I have a grandson nine and a half years old. And I think to myself, when I was his age, I already went through all that. And at ten I was already liberated. I cannot picture, or, or even think of

how—I mean, he is a kid. I cannot picture a kid that age going through something that I went through and survive.

Did you feel like a kid?

I don't think so. I was never a kid. I had to be grown up at seven. I had to know that I can't holler and I can't uh, talk too loud and I can't uh, have this and can't have that. And uh, I don't think I ever felt as a kid, unfortunately.

Your childhood was, what?

There was no childhood.

There was no childhood.

Don't remember ever playing games. Uh, riding a bicycle. Nothing like that.

You once told me you felt like a frozen body.

Mm-hm.

As if you were in some deep freeze, is that what you were...

Yes.

And, and how long did it take to thaw out? Or did you?

Sometimes I wonder. Sometimes I wonder. But I, I must have, because I did lead, you know, leading a normal life, life as much as—like I said previously, I don't think none of us are really normal. But as normal as you can be, going through that.

You wound up in a DP camp.

Eventually, yes.

How did that happen and were you thawing out then?

Well, let me give you a few incidents before that. Uh, after we came back from Rovno, after Rozhishche was liberated again uh, came back again to our house, our house was still empty. Uh, the first thing happened that uh, uh, my brother got very sick with typhoid fever. Finally caught up with us and he had to be taken to a hospital. There were no normal hosp...there were no regular hospitals. He was taken to a Army hospital. Then when I was, I used to come to visit him uh, he looked like a, like a skeleton. Just like when you see some pictures of these concentration camp survivors. That's what he looked like. And uh, when it was time for him to come home uh, the Russians decided that uh, young people like that we need in the service. The war was still going on. So, I, I uh, being ten years old, I was his savior then. I went and spoke to a lady uh, that wa...had a Br...she was an off...she was a lieutenant or a captain, she had quite a big rank. And she happened to have been Jewish. And I went to her and I told her, I says, "Look, I says, I'm all alone, I lost my parents, I have nobody." I says, "How can you take him away from me?" And by a miracle, sh...they let him out.

You spoke Yiddish to her?

I spoke, I spoke a little bit of Russian, without having any school. Spoke a little Polish, spoke a little Russian. Just from picking up from hearing.

Let me go back for just a second. You didn't, you didn't contract typhus, is that right?

Yes, I did also, after him. After him I contracted typhus and was very ill. And this also I remember very clearly. And I was very much afraid of being taken to, you know, like to a hospital or to, to any kind of institution. So uh, I remember a

doctor came and checked me and said that I have to go to a—and I was crying. That's the only time I remember actually really crying. Crying and kicking and I said I will not go anywhere. And they left me alone. They left me in a house. They gave me some kind of medication, they gave me some kind of injection, I don't know what. But it took a week or ten days and I revived and never went to the hospital.

So your brother's now out of the hospital. They're not going to let him get away with this, are they?

No, my brother. He thought he was going to get away. But a few months after that uh, the, the, the draft board came, a man came with a slip and said uh, "Anschel Gun," he says, "we need you to report to the draft board." So he went to the draft board. And uh, with the Russians there's no monkey business, they said, "You're a soldier as of now." So he says, "Now wait a minute," He says, "I have a ten year old brother." He says, "we just got through Hitler. He's all alone." He says "Don't worry," he says, "we'll take care of him." He says, "Fine," he says, "but I have to go, at least talk to him, make some arrangements for him in the meantime." He says, "Please give me twenty-four hours." And they agreed. They let him go. And this must have been approximately September—October of '44, I would say. Because I remember, my, my brother doesn't remember this. And I remember somehow that they, we, I was in a little synagogue and it was some kind of holiday. Or Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah uh, went with somebody else. Another lady that stayed in our house, an older woman. And I went to shul, and he knew that I was gonna be there and he found me. And he came over and he

says, "Listen," he says, "they want to draft me to the Russian Army and I decided I'm not going." He says, "If I survived Hitler I don't want to get killed now by Hitler in the war." He says, "I'm leaving town, I don't know where I'm going. But I will let you know."

So you're going to stay alone now.

He says, "You stay here in the house and Malka," an older woman, she must have been maybe sixty, he says, "Malka will take care of you." And he left. I didn't—I don't remember crying when he left.

Did you cry at any time except for that one moment?

Did I, only thing I remember crying is when they wanted to take me to the hospital.

That's the only time.

I'm sure I must have cried some other times. But this one stands out in my mind, for some reason.

Now, did the Russians come for him?

Oh yeah.

So they came to your house.

Sure. Naturally they came looking. "Where is your brother?" "I have no idea."

And the Russians have another technique. They used to come at midnight. Wake you out of your sleep. They figure that's a—your mind is clear. [laughs] I don't know what they. But this is their technique of int...interrogating you at night. And they used to take me out of bed, take me into the KGB. They were nice, they were not, not beating me or any...but questioning. They figured, you know, from a ten

year old kid, you know, you'll get some. "We know that your brother left and that he let you know where he is and." "Don't know anything." And they did it for awhile, a few times. And they noticed that they can't get anything out of me so they—what are you going to do to me. They threatened me, they're going to ship me into Russia to a orphanage home and stuff, stuff like that. But they never did. And they let me go. And the meantime I did receive word where he was.

Where was he?

He went to a different city. Maybe a hundred kilometers away. Vladimir-Volynsk. And uh, changed his name. He had no documents. It was still wartime. Changed his name to Myatik Zimmering. Got a job, working for the Russian Government as an office worker, some kind. And he was there. And after a few months he sent for me. I was outside. That I remember also very vividly. I was outside watching some kind of Russian parades. The Russians had lots of parades, and. And that intrigued me. And I was standing watching the parade, and I felt somebody bump me on the shoulder. He says uh, "Are you Yankel Gun?" I said, "Yeah." "Come with me." Today a little kid wouldn't go with a stranger, right.

And the war was still on.

Sure, this was uh, but the Russians were occupying. Germans were not in our town. This was under Russia.

Yeah, yeah.

But the war was—sure, the war didn't end 'til May of '45. This was probably, I don't know uh, uh, maybe December of '44, maybe January of '45. I really don't know exact dates. But that general vicinity. And this lady says, "I was sent by

your brother and come on get ready." I don't know whether I had no, no possessions to take. I don't know what I took with me to be honest with you. I don't even think I had a toothbrush.

So you joined your brother in Vladimir-Volynsk.

Yeah. Came there. Uh, he lived someplace in a one room. And he used to get uh, little cards to get meals.

Ration cards.

Ration cards. But to a restaurant like, you know. Not to get food and bring home. And whatever he got he split with me. And uh, one incident that happened there was uh, somebody from Rozhishche, a Ukrainian, happened to meet my brother on the street. And he said to him, "Hey, Gun. What are you doing here?" My brother—I don't know what he told him. He, but uh, since he met this guy, he got very, very frightened. Because he was a deserter. War was going on. You know, God forbid if they, if they catch him, they shoot you. And then they ask questions. So he got very, very scared. And even before that, I believe, he got involved to try—they were repat...repatriating uh, Poles, ones that were born in Poland, back into Poland. They could leave the Russian border and get into Poland. But you had to wait, there was some kind of a waiting list. And here he was, you know, kind of worried, you know, if the word gets back that he's—somebody saw him. So he tried to smuggle over to the Polish border without papers. So first he was going to get me and another lady that also wanted to get over. And he would—there were uh, caravans of Russian trucks going, crossing the border to Russia, to—from Russia to Poland. And I don't know what they were carrying. In fact,

the truck I remember was empty or they were going to pick up stuff there to bring back, I really don't know. Anyway, he talked to a Russian soldier and he gave him a couple bottles of vodka. He says, "Why don't you take these two people for me, they have relatives in Poland. Take them over there." They didn't care. So we got into an Army truck. And I went under one bench and this young lady under another bench. And we're on the way to Poland. When we got to the border to cross, the Russians pulled open those uh, the curtains uh, what do you call them on a truck, I can't remember, last time we talked, uh. You know, you know what they cover up trucks, Army trucks.

Yeah.

Canvas!

Canvas, right.

They opened up the canvas and they looked, there's a little kid under one bench, a young lady under the other bench. Come on out. Took us out and uh, took us into a police headquarters and started again interrogating. Why did you do this? For what reason? And at that age I was smart enough to tell 'em why. I have an aunt in—here and here and I just got through the war and I was left all alone. Why didn't you do it another way? I says, I didn't know, the trucks were going to Poland, I figured I'll go. And they kept me about three days, I believe.

And your brother?

No, my brother was still in Vladimir-Volynsk. Him and another gentleman were going to do it after we got through.

Okay and the, the woman?

The woman was a lady that was a, we knew fr...uh, was from Lutsk. And she was also anxious to get over to Poland. Uh, I really don't know what their main reason was. But she and her brother which was older, also wanted to get over to Poland. I know my reason, because my brother was—they were looking for. This other man I really don't know the reason. But

So three days they kept...

Yeah

you in a cell.

Yeah. Me in one cell, her in a different cell. All alone. Again, you know.

Dark.

Dark. Well not as dark as in the, in the bunker. But, you know, enclosed. Uh, they used to bring me food. Uh, didn't mistreat me by any uh, extent. Only thing they did is uh, uh, uh, as they did in Rozhishche. At midnight they would come and get me, and uh, interrogating.

Questioning.

Questioning. But uh, God forbid, no hitting or you know. Really not. They wanted to know the reason why a little kid would try to do something like this. And I stuck to my story. And they finally let me out. And she and I—at the same time. And we went, this was uh, we went back to, the border was right there someplace. And my brother knew somehow, found out what happened to us. So he didn't try it. And uh, then we went—we started to work on it legally. And he went back to that commi...committee to try to see what's going on. And he found the man—all is uh, b'shert, coincidences. Found a man sitting on that committee to—that made

the papers to go, go to Poland, that happened to have lived in Rozhishche at one time. Polish man that knew my father very well. Had some dealings with him, I believe. And my brother told him the whole true story. He says, "I'm here because I ran away. They wanted to draft me in the Russian Army, I have a ten year old brother. I could not leave him after I saved him." And he says, "I need to get out of here as soon as possible." And this man, somehow, got us to go very, very quickly.

You said it was b'shert. We—could you explain what that means.

The word b'shert? Meant to be. That's about the...

That's about right. [laughs]

It was meant to be. Just like it was meant for us to live. Why? Got to ask somebody about, I guess. Why? A lot of us have that uh, feeling uh, that guilt. Why me and not my sister? Why me, not my parents. And so on and so forth. Why.

Do you feel that way?

Not as bad as some other people that I know. But I have thought about it many times. Definitely have thought about it. What is the how and why? You know, it was all coincidences. That my father was able to sneak me out from the ghetto. Somebody would have noticed us, "Hey, send that kid back." Why was my mother not allowed out? A lot of people went out to work that day. But she happened to have been the one that they didn't let out. And if they would have, maybe our whole family would have survived, as...

[pause] You're together again.

Yeah.

You and your brother?

In the meantime uh, my brother also met my present sister-in-law.

Where?

In VI...she is from Vladimir-Volynsk. And she once before came to Rozhishche when we were in—was in our house because our house was like the gathering place of Jews in Rozhishche. She came looking for somebody. And my brother met her and I met her. And I always remember that she was a very, very kind and, I don't know, she sort of hugged me maybe. I don't remember what.

What's her name?

Manya. And I took a liking towards her. Uh, she's a—happens to be a very warm person and uh, I guess that's something I was always missing.

It was like a mother figure.

Right, a motherly feeling. Uh, and I always remembered her. And then my brother in the meantime, he met another young lady that he, he sort of became very friendly with. And he asked my opinion once. He says, "What do you think?" this girl's name was Sonia, I also remember. It was the same name as my mother. And he asked me, he says, "What do you think of Sonia? Do you like her?" I said, "No. I don't like her." He says, "Why don't you like her?" I says, "I—she's not as nice as, I says, as that other girl you once met, Manya." I said, "She was very nice." And I really feel that I probably when...whenever I saw him getting serious with somebody I didn't like. You know, I felt like uh, it would be taking something away from me. You know, he wouldn't pay as much attention to me,

or whatever. But I think that's the feeling I got. So anyway so—well we were in Vladimir-Volynsk there. After awhile he ran into Manya again. And she went with us together to Poland. And she started to be with us. And we got into Poland, we were going in different cities. We were in Łódź, we were in Lublin, we were in Danzig, Gdansk, in Polish, I think it's called.

How did you travel to all these places?

By train.

By train.

Yes. And my brother tried to do uh, some black market business. They used to sell horses, I remember. But we were always scared. We heard of still a lot of, eh, a lot of anti-Semitism in Poland. We heard of instan...instances where Poles were still killing a few Jews.

Did, had you heard of Kielce?

Uh, later on. So uh, but I think Kielce was after we left already. Wasn't it in '46?

'46. Yeah.

We were already not in Poland. We left Poland in end of '45. And we were, like I said, I don't know how many months. But towards uh, in '45 uh, we heard about a organization called the Beriha. And they were bringing Jews over uh, the borders...

Secretly.

secretly. They were paying off guards and, and we were traveling as Greeks. Because there was a lot of Greeks, going back to Greece for some reason. I don't know what the Greeks were doing there. But I only remember that this—we were

supposed to be Greeks. We wore those round berets and you could only speak if you could, if you knew how to speak Hebrew, because Hebrew sounded like Greek to them. [laughs] So anybody, you couldn't speak Jewish, you couldn't speak Polish. That's the only language, otherwise you had to be quiet 'til we crossed. And I remember we had to walk distances to get over a border and then we got into a train. And we got into Bratislaw, Czechoslovakia. And we were there for several days. And then we finally wound up in Vienna, Austria at Rothschild's Hospital. There was a big complex with all kinds of refugees.

All right. We'll stop here, we'll come right back.

All right, you'd been traveling a lot.

Yes.

We left off, I think, in Vienna.

Vienna. We arrived to Vienna. They put us into a, a Rothschild's Hospital complex. Uh, we were not there too long. A few weeks. And from there they were uh, sort of sending people to different places. Some to Austria, some to Germany, some to Italy. Uh, we somehow wound up going to Austria. Uh, well, Vienna's actually Austria. We wound up going to Linz. And in Linz there was a big DP camp called Bindermichel. And that's where they put us. And this was approximately, let's say October of '45.

Okay, the, the, the DP camp was an American DP camp?

American DP camp.

But you're being sent by the Beriha?

Uh, there, I believe. I really don't know who. The Beriha's uh, job was to get us out of Poland.

Okay.

And from there I think it was operated by the UNRRA.

United Nations Relief.

Yes.

Okay. Not the Joint?

Uh, could be. I'm not sure. Maybe both.

Okay. Probably both.

Probably both.

What was it like in the DP camp?

In the D...DP camp was very good. Uh, we got good food. We used to get once a month certain packages from United States with uh, uh, that eagle brand milk. I'll never forget that sweet uh, condensed milk. Taste like candy. We used to get uh, chocolate bars every so often. And uh, we lived like in army barracks. And uh, controlled by the—we were in a American zone. So there were three different zones, I believe, that time.

Now your brother was, what, nineteen?

1945? No, he was already twenty-one.

Twenty-one. Did he go out? Did he go into Linz?

I'm sure he did, yes. And he worked uh, in fact, he worked, I think, outside the, the DP camp, he worked for Simon Wiesenthal had a, had an office then in Linz.

And he worked for Simon Wiesenthal. And uh, I went to school, that's the first, that's the first time I got any kind of schooling. Never went to school before.

You're eleven now.

Eleven, over eleven. Eleven and a half. And this is where I first, and it was a, it was a make uh, how should I say, it wasn't a regular public school. It was a school only for the DP kids. So there were—the teachers were not qualified teachers. Uh, in other words, if there was a man that used to be a bookkeeper, he used to teach arithmetic. Uh, my sister-in-law knew a little bit of Hebrew, so she became a Hebrew teacher. A man that was an engineer was teaching science...

Was she...

and so on and so forth.

your sister-in-law yet?

Uh, she got—they got married in uh, '46 in, in the DP camp, had a rabbi. They got married in uh, '46 in Linz.

Do you remember the wedding?

Yes, I do remember.

Was there a chuppa?

Yes, there was a chuppa and there were a few friends, maybe twenty—twenty-five people.

How did it feel to be at your brother's wedding after

Uh, I don't know. I probably had mixed emotions, I'm sure. Even though, I told you, I liked Manya very much. She was a nice person and I. But as I told you, I

probably never uh, I uh, I always felt that if he gets married there'll be something away from me. So I probably had mixed feelings.

Do you think you thought about your parents and your sister, do you remember?

I've always thought about them. And, uh.

When we last talked you said you started to wake up and coming out of a sleep when you were describing the DP camp.

Oh. Yeah, sure. I mean, we started to live a little bit more, I guess, normal. I mean, as far as for me anyway. You know, going to school. And then I had uh, uh, also started to learn from a rabbi, I remember, was a very nice man. He used to teach me on the side how to uh, read Hebrew, how to pray the prayers and all that, which I didn't know. And as we started sort of a abnormal—a li...you know, try to become as normal as could be expected in uh, those surroundings.

While you were doing all this, since the Beriha had taken you out of Poland, were you planning to go to Palestine?

My sister-in-law was very, very much—she was a Zionist all her life and was very much—and wanted very much to go to Israel, to Palestine—there was no Israel. And uh, my brother uh, wasn't too much in favor of this, because he, he heard that that the hard—was very—life was very hard in Palestine. And also knew about, you know, you couldn't even go legally, they had to smuggle you in again. We were smuggled enough already. And, you know, after what we went through, he was more materialist than idealistic. He was, you know, he felt that after what we went through he would like to have a little easier life. Even though

it wasn't that easy to begin with in the United States either. But, you know, they were talking the United States money grows on trees.

So what was the—what made the, the, the, the final decision?

Uh, I think he convinced her that we shouldn't go there.

And you had family here.

We had family here, and sh...so, so did she.

And, and had you contacted them?

Uh, we contact them while we were in the DP camp. We sent letters with a American soldier who was going back to the states for a furlough—vacation. And we gave him a letter, one to my uh, to my relatives in Pennsylvania. They were in a very small town in Breckenridge. So, my brother knew the name of the city and I don't think he had the street, but it's such a small town that uh, they had no problem finding them. And my sister-in-law had uh, two uncles, her father's brothers that lived in Detroit. So she had their address. So she got in touch with them. And we finally received a—we had to wait 'til the quota was up. Because, you know, at first it went with immediate family like a daughter to a father. So on and so forth. We were nephews, you know. So we had to wait awhile. But the some—not as bad as we thought. And end of '47, after being in a DP camp approximately two years. Uh, we started the process of going to the United States.

Uh, yes.

You c...how did you come?

Uh, we first had to come to Salzburg, I remember, Austria. And s...and we had to make papers there. And from there we went to Munich. We stayed in another

camp called the Funkerzeiner in Munich. And there we went through all kinds of medical tests. In fact, there was a little glitch also, they found some spot on my lungs for some reason. And that—they delayed it for a little while. And uh, 'til we cleared everything. Uh, it was January sometime, January the eighteenth, I believe, we left. We left Munich for Bremen haven. And from Bremenhaven to New York.

By ship.

By ship. Army ship by the name of *Marina Fletcher*. And I also recall very vividly of being sick the whole time, days on the trip. Uh, every time I would go down to the mess hall to eat, I used to—before I got to the table I went back to give cookies back. That's how sick. It was a very rough uh,

Crossing...

yeah, it was in January. Had to cross the English Channel, you know, and a lot of bad water, you know, rough waters.

And you went to Pennsylvania.

We arrived in New York. We also had second cousins in New York from my mother's side. That's the only relatives we had from my mother's side. But we also had addresses that my brother got in contact with. My grand moth...mother's sister, my grandmother from my mother's side had a sister that lived in New York. And she had, you know, grown children. And they were very, very nice also, very nice. They took us in, they picked us up right, they were at the ship to greet us. Took us to their house and uh, made a beautiful meal. And then they took us out and bought us clothing. And then my sister-in-law's cousin came to

take us to Detroit to see her family. And I remember one of the cousins in New York—which passed away already—he made a comment to my brother and he was actually a cousin—a second cousin by marriage. He told my brother, he says, “Remember Anschle,” he says, “if, if you don’t find things right in Detroit or in Pennsylvania,” he says, “you always have a home with us.” which I remember up until today. And they were, you know, very hospitable towards us. And the, the grandma’s sister was also very, very warm. She was just like my grandma. And, you know, she was very emotional to see us, and. And then we went to Detroit to visit my, to see my sister-in-law’s uncles. And they made sort of—they told my sister and my brother that they’d have a room for them for the time being in their house, and they could stay with them. So we were there for a few days and then we decided to go visit my uh, uncle and aunt in Breckenridge...

Now there’s a...

by train.

article about you in the, is it the Breckenridge paper?

Yeah, it was called the, the *Allegheny Valley News*.

Um...

The headline said, “A Boy Mere Fifteen Has Lived A Thousand Years.”

We’ll, we’ll um, we’ll get a picture of that.

So anyway, when we came to visit my relatives uh, my uh, aunt suggested, she says, “Look.” So my brother—she says, “What can I plan, do you have any kind of plans, or...” They wanted them to stay with them too. But my brother says, “Look uh, her uncle has got a junkyard and he told me I can have a job with him,

and they got a room, extra room." So my aunt says, "Okay," she says, "but I think that you should leave Jack with us until you find a job, get an apartment. You're going to live there in one room, you're going to be three of you in one room?" And my brother, he says, "What do you think? What, do you want to stay here, you know?" Uh, I didn't know what to say, but I felt that I might be better off. Because I saw the conditions there, you know. And I felt this is still my family. Over there it's, they're my sister-in-law's family, right.

Except for your brother.

Yes. But what did, my brother has nothing. He has no money, he has no job. Doesn't know the language. It's uh, you know, starting all over again.

So what did you do?

I decided to stay there. And it was hard for me in the beginning. Because here is my brother was six years. He was my uh, my father and my mother. And uh, here I got to part again. But anyway, I felt that's the best thing for me to do and I stayed there. And uh, started school. And used to uh, work after school. They had a little supermarket, plus a slaughterhouse. He had three sons, my uncle had three sons that used to run it. They were all in the business. And they had uh, my cousins had children, some my age. And uh, I felt uh, I don't know, didn't feel great there, but adequate. Let's put it this way.

You missed your brother.

I missed my brother and uh, my uncle was not the most sympathetic man. He was one of these old European uh, Jews that came here in the early twenties. Uh, he wasn't that educated.

Let me ask you a question about this, did, did, did they ask q...questions about your experience during the war? Did they want you to tell them the story?

They did, in a way. Mm, not that much. And I used to sort of—I think it was a combination of both. I don't think they were that inquisitive. Because if they would of, I probably would have talked probably more. But I don't think they were that inquisitive and I wasn't that anxious to talk, so I think that made it that were—we didn't talk too much about it.

Did you tell anyone what happened?

Very briefly. Didn't go into details. Even kids in school used to ask me, you know, especially after I had my article in the paper and I became a celebrity. I was the only Holocaust survivor in the vicinity. And uh, everybody would ask me.

“Hey Jack, how did you, how did you survive?” “Oh,” I said, “it was war.” I said, “I just went through the war, survived.” Uh, first of all, like I say, I didn't want to talk. And second of all, I felt that they couldn't understand me.

What do you mean?

What could they understand if I tell them I was in bunker? I mean.

You don't mean the language problem.

No, no.

You mean they wouldn't understand?

Understand what I went through.

'Cause they weren't there.

They weren't there. An American kid, how could he understand it. Especially even over there it was uh, uh, not that many Jewish people in general. The majority were Chr...Gentiles. Christians, and...

You talk a lot about it now though. You speak at the Holocaust Center.

Right, right, I speak a lot about it now.

Speaking, speaking to me.

But in the last, I would say in the last ten years that I really speak about it.

But do you think that American students—people like me even, that we understand it better now than they might have understood it then?

Then? Uh, probably. Well, you, you can't, I, you cannot, I cannot uh, compare you to the uh, to the kids that asked me in Pennsylvania. First of all, you're very, very knowledgeable about it. You know a lot of things more than I do. About...

Yeah but you're willing to talk even at the risk of having listeners who don't understand.

Yes, yes. I—and, and the main reason is because I feel it's a, a, a duty. I feel it's my duty to do it, today, to—when I talk to schools. I don't mean to you, or eh, uh, but when I go in, into the Holocaust Center, if I go to a school and I have uh, kids coming in listening to me, I feel. Uh, I don't feel good the day before I have to speak, but I feel very good when I finish. I feel that I accomplished something.

Uh, if I talk to forty children, I figure maybe ten, I got through to ten. And that's a big accomplishment. Because they're so few of us left. And I'm one of uh, the youngest Holocaust survivors. There's not many much younger than me.

Do you think that, like so many hidden children, you had to come out of hiding within the last ten years?

As far as speaking, definitely.

As far as telling anyone.

Yes. Definitely, within the last, I'd say within the last ten years is when I really opened up. I never even used to tell my, my wi...I'm married forty years and probably the first uh, uh, thirty years or first twenty-five years I never even told my wife much. She knew I was a Holocaust survivor and she has some com... more compassion than most because uh, she left also just before the war, and uh, uh, her parents had to leave and, uh.

And she went back with you. You went back to Poland in 1992?

Right.

Who went with you?

My, my wife didn't go.

Oh.

No, no, I didn't want her to go.

Who went?

Uh, my brother and two of his oldest children went with me.

Why did you go back there?

Uh, for two reasons. The main reason uh, well I shouldn't say the main. For two very important reasons. Uh, one reason, we always wanted to reach uh, the people that helped us, Yerushka and Primas. Second reason was uh, that uh, uh, some Luts...some people from Rozhishche that live in Israel made contact with the city

a year previous and they made a monument ready. And we put a monument up on a ravine that is still a ravine today empty where, where the 4,500 Jews of Rozhishche were killed. So that's the two reasons that we went back.

And what was it like going back there?

It was very difficult. Especially when we stood and said Kaddish on the spot where they were killed. And uh, even my nephew, which uh, you know, born in the United States and everything and he really broke down seeing that uh, ravine and. It was very emotional, definitely. As far as me remember...I didn't remember a thing from the city. Uh, my brother was disappointed. I don't know what he expected. But he expected it to look different for some reason. He saw a lot of drunks walking in the street. It was on a Saturday afternoon or something, we were there. And a lot of drunks walking out of the bars. And uh, he happened to meet somebody that he knew on the street. And uh, that he used to go to school with his sister.

Now uh, your children didn't go with you.

No, they couldn't. They were both in school.

Oh, and have they, have you told them about your experiences during the war?

Oh definitely, now.

Now.

Now. But never before. When they were growing up and uh, uh, especially my son is much more inquisitive than my daughter. He sort of nags a little. He likes to know everything, and he always used to bug me. "Dad, tell me exactly..." Tell me this and tell me that. And, and I used to tell him, I said, "Look," I says, "your

uncle lives just a little piece from here," I says, "He knows a lot more, he remembers a lot more." And uh, I—that's how I used to put it off. And my brother used to talk to them. We used to go on vacation at times together and my, my son would be—and my daughter also, they used to be all over him and he would sit for hours with them and talk. But my brother wouldn't go and talk to people in school or.

Your children's names, what are they?

Yes, my daughter's the oldest, her name is Sandra and she's now married. Her name is Ru...Sandra Russa. And my son is Sam, named after my father.

Does your daughter have any children?

Yes, she's got a boy that's nine and a half now and a daughter that's uh, five and a half. And my son's got two boys uh, uh, five and a half and three and a half and expecting a little girl in November.

And your wife's name?

My wife's name is Miriam.

I want to ask you one more question before we um, we stop for today. We may want to do more. What was it that turned you around to start talking? Was there a moment that you decided that it was time to break the silence?

Uh, as far as talking to friends or uh, one on one, you mean?

Just in general. You said you didn't talk very much even to your wife before.

Right. I don't know if it was age. I don't know why—I don't know what to attribute it. But uh, it came a certain time when I started to talk. Especially to tell

my wife more or my kids more. But what made me speak to children in schools uh, actually I have to give credit to Erna Gorman.

Oh.

Yeah, she uh, uh, she called me one time and she couldn't speak at the Holocaust Center. And she asked me, she says, "Do me a favor, I need somebody to help me." And I—and she—as you know, she speaks an awful lot. She probably speaks too much. And I, I went and did it. And then, then uh, they started calling me so often and I couldn't refuse. And then I decided that it's—especially since I retired and—that it was a worthy thing to do. That if, if I don't and somebody else don't, who will? And we are the last, the last generation uh, to tell the story.

The hidden children.

The hidden children, definitely. Or—I mean, not only the hidden children, I mean, all Holocaust survivors. Uh, they are the last uh, generation. After we're gone, I mean, it's all going to be from tapes and. And our children, what they heard from us. But it's uh, no more the direct contact. That's what I tell them in the schools. I says, "You happen to be the lucky ones." I says, I says "You are the last, you are the one, last generation that can hear it from the Holocaust survivor." I says, "Your children will not be able to hear it." I says, "We count on you to tell them."

And you think it's doing a good thing.

I feel it's, I feel it's very important. I feel that we're accomplishing something with it. I don't know, like I told you before uh, I don't know what percentage we're hitting. But we're definitely hitting some.

And that will, that will produce what? They'll know about it.

Yes, it will produce a legacy, I guess, of, uh.

Of informed...

Of informed people. And hopefully they will inform their children.

I hope so. Okay, thanks Jack, for this afternoon.