I will start from introducing my name and where I live.

OK.

My name is Nathan Offen. I was born in Krakow, Poland, I used to reside, before the war, this means before 1939, in Krakow, Podgorze, which is the other side of the river Vistula.

Was that a Jewish neighborhood?

Yes, it was rather Jewish neighborhood, yes. I had two brothers. I have two brothers, a sister, and a father and mother. Father's name was Jacob and my mother's name was Gusta.

And I had a sister who didn't survive the Holocaust. Her name was Miriam. And then I have a younger brother who lives in California. His name is Bernard Offen. And then I have my oldest brother, who reside in Michigan. And his name is Sam.

So you're the middle brother?

I am the middle one.

What was your date of birth? The 15/12/1922, which makes me now, my next birthday-- December the 15, 1922, which makes me 69 years old. I'll be 70 next December the 15th.

What was your father's business?

My father's business-- he originally was a shoemaker but then he got tired of it and started a business traveling. And he was selling billiards, pool tables, and all the billiard balls.

And also, he was selling-- he was traveling and all the bars and into little villages he was going and selling his items. Also, all the equipment what in the bars were using, whatever they were using. The chalk for the billiards and so forth.

How did he get into that business from shoemaking? Do you know?

Well, he was capable of selling. He enjoyed selling more than sitting. Actually, he became a shoemaker when he married my mother, when he came out from the First World War. He became a shoemaker because he didn't have any profession. He was a young-- and when he married my mother, my uncle taught him shoemaking. And that's how he got to become a shoemaker.

Did he travel all over the region?

He traveled all around. He carried his wares on his back in a knapsack. And then he had two suitcases that he carried. And he traveled by bus, by trail, by railroad, by horse and buggy. However he could manage to get to a certain destination where he wanted.

But he always managed to come home for Shabbat. In other words, he always came home for Thursday night or Friday morning. He always managed to come home for Shabbat.

Otherwise, he was out traveling?

Otherwise, he was out traveling the whole week.

Right. He didn't have a store?

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No, he didn't have a store. Yes, he carried his ware on his back always.

Was there a particular company he worked for?

No, he was independent dealer. He worked for himself. He worked for himself.

I see. Were you a religious family?

No, we were not religious. But we kept up all the holidays and Saturday, we had to go to shul with my father. And the holidays, we always had to go to shul. But we were not considered at European standard religious. But we kept up all the holidays. The place-- my mother, everything was kosher in the house and everything so forth.

Did you live in a house?

We lived in an apartment.

Was it a large building?

Yeah, it was a large building, maybe 20 apartments or so. A three-story building.

Just to get a little bit of a time frame, when was it that your father stopped being a shoemaker and launched himself into billiards?

I imagine it must have been in 1936 or '37.

Do you remember working with your father at all?

You know, I had to-- no, I had to go to school. I attended school. I attended Polish school. I went to public school in a Kosciuszki. Called Kosciuszki. This was near the bridge, near Pilsudskiego Bridge. It was that new bridge that they built just before the war.

Was this in your neighborhood? Did you cross across the Vistula to get to that school?

No, I didn't have to cross the Vistula. I it must have been maybe 15 blocks to the school. I have to cross the Rynek Podgorski. And Rynek Podgorski through Kalwaryjska. And was down there a couple blocks off Kalwaryjska it was, the school. So it wasn't too far. It was a nice walk to school.

Did you walk with your brothers and sister?

Yes, I walked. Yes, I walked all with my friends. Yes, yes. So I would always we walked with somebody.

What about cheder?

At the cheder-- we used to go to the cheder in the afternoon when we came out from school. I think the school ended at 1 o'clock from 8:00 till 1:00. And then I think we went to the cheder from 3:00 to 5:00. We went to the Talmud Torah. And the Talmud Torah was [POLISH].

That was the name?

That was the name of the street, Rekawka was the name of the street.

What you remember about Polish public school, in terms of maybe treatment by the Poles of the Jewish children or any antisemitism at that time?

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Well, the school was-- there was a class, there were very large classes. And I remember the classes were of, I imagine, about 50 students. And in my class were maybe four or five Jewish children. And antisemitism was very great. I always had to fight my way. I always fought. And I never gave up anything. Anybody beat me up, I always managed to wait for him when he came out from school. I knew where he lived. And I used to beat him up also. But it was that I never gave up. And there was always, always fighting. They always beat me up. And I used to always fight back.

Nothing in particular would provoke them to beat you up? Just because you were Jewish?

It's just because I was Jewish, I guess. The antisemitism was very great. And I remember I used to love sports. I used to love playing soccer. And I was a pretty good soccer player. I also belonged to Akiva, a Zionist organization. This was in Krakow. And also belonged to the Maccabi, to the soccer, to the sports. And I also belonged to the Maccabi Athletic, where I was doing boxing as a junior.

So you were very athletic.

Yeah, I enjoyed, yes, yes. I enjoyed it, yes.

The Maccabi was just a Jewish sports group?

A sports group, yes. Well, they were in the league, actually. But they had the juniors, kids like me, you know. That we are playing, that we were training against other group.

Other Jewish groups?

Other Jewish groups, yes.

I see.

But I also played around the house. All within few blocks from my house, there was a place called Krzemionki, which was just a big field. And we were just getting together. We played against other streets. We were stay blocks, other blocks we were playing against each other. Other Jewish blocks. But when we played with Christian, we always were-- was always a fight sometimes.

And the worst thing was walking through to the cheder, this was-- they were standing, the Christian boys were standing on a cliff and always throwing rocks at us. And many times, I used to get my head, used to get split from hitting from a rock when I was going to the Hebrew school, to the cheder.

So these were substantial rocks, then.

Right, right. They were throwing also, always.

This sight, I guess this was just part of life for a Jew in Poland?

Yeah, this was accepted, yes, yes, yes.

So at home, you wouldn't, say, tell your father.

Yeah, well, I had a couple Christian friends. But we never used to go to each other's house. Only on the street. Because we went to school, we said hello. But otherwise, we were not friendly, we were not going to each other's house.

Was there any particular times of year where antisemitism seemed to get worse? There are these stories about, you know, around Pesach that the Jews would kill little Christian children.

I don't recall any particular time like get worse. But the Jewish youth was very well-organized. It was very-- there were

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many, many different organization. There were Poale Zion, there were Mizrahi, there were Jabotinsky. There were many groups and they knew how to fight back. So they had never fear like in big city like in Krakow. They always, always, you know, defending themselves.

I see.

And there was a Jewish district, [POLISH], where the Christian couldn't walk through because they get beaten, beaten up also, you know what I mean? So they try, made a few attempts, but they were just beaten out.

So let me take this off. OK. Did you speak Yiddish in your home?

Well, my parents spoke Yiddish, and I answered them in Polish.

I see. So you understood Yiddish but didn't necessarily--

Right, right, right. So did my grandmother speak Yiddish. But my parents spoke Polish very well.

How old were you when you joined Akiva?

Oh, must have been 13, 14 years old.

Did you have intentions at that time of eventually going to Palestine?

Well, a lot of young boys older than I, you know, 18, 19, they went on the Hakhshara. You know what is a Hakhshara? And they went to Israel, yes, yes. Older than I.

Right, right.

I was too young.

Was your father involved in any of the Zionist organizations?

Well, he supported all the movements. But you know, he was very busy just struggling. You know, it was very hard to make just a living, to support the family. He didn't have much time to himself.

Were you comfortable as a family? Did you always have enough food?

No, we were not comfortable. We had a depression before the war. It was much worse than here. We have the repercussion, I assume it went through the whole world, the depression, the same thing like you were going through. But it was much tougher to get food. You know, sometimes I went to school hungry.

One thing I didn't get was where your sister was in the hierarchy of siblings.

My sister was between me and Bernard.

OK.

Bernard was the youngest.

Did you have any responsibility to take care of them?

Yes, I had the responsibility. But I was unresponsible because I used to take it for a ride in the carriage. I used to ride with them down the hill.

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I see.

I wasn't very responsible as a child. But they never got hurt, you know. It was just part of fun. And we had to-- I was very ingenious as building my own toys. And you know, you had to be entertained. And I remember building the crystal radio. And we used to listen to the radio. I used to build the set.

How did you get the parts for that radio? Was it a kit of some kind?

Oh, no, you had to build it yourself. Everything, the-- what you call it? Everything, you had to build it yourself, constructing from nothing. You bought-- only you had to buy is the ebonite, I think it was called, a plate where you done all your soldering and everything on the plate. Ebonite, it was some kind of a plastic, a plate that you build on it the whole crystal set.

And it was fascinating. You could pick up at night on the crystal set, you could pick up whole Europe.

Wow.

Especially after midnight. I used to stand up and listen to the radio after midnight. I remember my father was so proud when I built that set. We used to stand up late at night. And I put on that set. And the whole family listened. I put it on the loudspeaker so we didn't have to listen on the earphones so we could listen after midnight.

Did you understand other languages besides Polish and Yiddish?

Well, if you understand Yiddish, you could understand a little German. German. I didn't understand French, I didn't speak French. But English was an unknown language to me.

Right. So did you get some German-language stations on your crystal there?

Germany, yes, you could. Yes, you could. British, you could get at night. After midnight, you could get a lot of stations. All Europe, practically. Czechoslovakia you could understand. The Slovakian and the Slovenian languages, you could understand some of it.

How did you learn to put a radio together? Had you read books?

Yeah, I read the book how to put it together, yes, yes.

And what about getting the parts?

Well, all you have to buy is actually the crystal you had to buy. And like I said, the plate you had to buy. The wiring, it wasn't too expensive. And the soldering kit, yes, certain things you had to buy.

But I always earned my money. I earned my money, you know, like from scrap metal or bottles, or you went and you soldered. And I always managed to fix somebody a lock or something. I was always very handy, very creative. So I always had money.

How old were you when you built that radio?

Oh, I must have been about 13 years old.

It's a great thing.

Yes.

After you finished Polish school, what did you do next in terms of education?

I went to work.

You did?

I went to work.

And where was that?

I went to work in a store where they were selling fabrics.

This was in the city?

In Krakow, yes.

To what grade did you finish? You finished the Polish public school.

I finished public school, yes. Public school. And then I went to work.

So you just chose not to go to a Gymnasium?

Yes. Well, yes. We just couldn't afford it.

I see, right. Did you have the desire?

It was during the Depression. Well, I always wanted to be electrical engineer. This was my desire.

Yeah. What did you do at the fabric store?

Well, I was a salesperson. I was learning, I was measuring, took inventory, and measuring, and what a salesperson does.

Did you enjoy the work there?

No, not very much. Not very much. I would rather worked a little bit on more mechanical, more electricity, something like that. So I also, when I came out from school, I think my first job was-- my father talked to a friend of his, a plumber, who gave me a job.

And I tried out for a few weeks, I worked as a plumber. But what happened was they used me as a horse. They loaded up plumbing, and toilets, and everything on a cobblestone road. And I was the horse. I had to pull that wagon, and push it up the hill, and everything.

And I came home, I was practically crying. I couldn't. I figured that I was-- my feet went into my rear. I think I was a few inches shorter after a day's work.

And I didn't last on that job. Because the guy who was in charge was very antisemitic. He was a Goy. And he wanted-- he wasn't interested of teaching me anything. All he wanted I should pull the wagon. So I quit after few weeks. This was in plumbing.

How old were you when you got that job?

Oh, about 15.

Was the fabric store a Jewish store?

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Yes, yes.

I see.

Yes.

So you worked the plumbing for a few weeks then moved on to the fabric store after that.

Yes.

OK. How long did you stay at the fabric store?

Oh, I stayed at the fabric store, I guess, till the war broke out.

What was your older brother doing?

Sam was a furrier, he worked for a furrier.

Were you all still living in the apartment, your family together?

Yes.

Are there any other memories about your childhood, say, up to the point right before the war? Anything you feel is important?

Well, I remember my grandmother used to receive letters from America. And I remember her receiving the gold piece, the dollars in the letters. I remember.

Who was sending them to her?

Her brother from Detroit.

He would send her some gold coins?

Coins, yes.

Did your grandmother live with you?

No. She lived in the same building but she didn't live with us. In the same building, same apartment building.

All in all, did you feel like you had a good childhood in Krakow?

Yes, a very good childhood. I mean, we were a nice family. I mean, Saturday, we went to shul. And when we came from the shul, we had to bring home the cholent. You know, the cholent was put Friday afternoon to the bakery.

And the Saturday after shul, we took out the cholent when we were coming home from the shul. And then father made Kiddush. And we had the fish and the whole-- no matter what, Shabbos was always plenty of food, and everything was prepared. Mother used to bake cakes and challahs, everything she used to bake.

She worked at home all the time, your mother?

My mother was a dressmaker. She was a-- you know, the people brought a piece of fabric, and she used to make the pattern for it, then she used to make the dress. She was sewing at home.

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So kind of a custom dressmaker?

Yeah, custom dressmaker. In this country, she would have been a designer because she was able to make the pattern.

So sounds like it was pretty busy in your house.

Yes. And what is in my memory now, it comes across now. I remember when the war broke out, and for the holidays, I didn't have a suit. I didn't have anything. Because usually for the holidays, the children always used to get new shoes, new clothing, everything. Was a custom like that. And I was complaining that I don't have nothing. My mother went out--

This was the new year?

This was for Rosh Hashanah. And my mother went and took out one of her own suits. And she went to the tailor. And she told the tailor to make from her suit a suit for me. I remember it was black. And I remember from the skirt, it was long enough to make a pair of pants. I had a join right across my hips. Right across my hips a join because the material because the skirt was short. I remember that.

Did you have certain responsibilities around the house? I mean, you took care of your younger brother. But did you have other things you were responsible for? Since your father was away all week.

No, I didn't have any responsibility. I had a certain responsibility to have my own money so I could buy myself a candy and make my own toys. I mean, there was like you went out and you bought yourself toys. You had to make your own toys.

And no, we didn't have a great responsibility. We lived in a small apartment, there wasn't much to do. The responsibility just go to school, and do your homework, and come back. Otherwise there wasn't much.

Well, we went out whenever we had time. We'd play soccer, and play stickball with the kids on the street, and so forth. Well, the usual thing. I mean, friends come to the house. I went to their house.

Were you ever able to take advantage of some of the culture of the city, any of the theater?

Yes, yes, yes. I think the most impressive things that happened-- I remember we went to a health exhibit. And I must've been about 11 or 12 years old. And I saw an alcohol-- a pair of lungs of a smoker. And next to it was non-smoker. Then I saw a liver of an alcoholic and non-alcoholic.

And I think this stood-- this always stays in my mind through my life that I remember about the smoker, about what damage it does. This is the most impressive thing that I can remember from my youth.

And sometimes, I said to my children, I said, I wish that here in high school, instead of all those football trophies, they should have a display like this so the kids wouldn't start smoking. They would remember that.

That's interesting. I had no idea they did that then. I remember that from school, showing the smoker's lung and the non-smokers lung. That's very interesting.

Oh, you saw that?

Yeah, I remember seeing it.

And this always stood in my mouth about smoking. And I gave up smoking here when President Kennedy was assassinated. I think they came out with a definite link between cancer.

I see.

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And that's the time that when I gave up smoking.

Were you bar mitzvahed?

Yes.

Do you remember anything about that in particular?

There wasn't a big thing to be bar mitzvahed. You said your portion, and it just wasn't a big thing. And they threw some-- I don't know. Did they throw some? There wasn't a big thing, I think, to become a bar mitzvah. You read your portion and this was it. And you were bar mitzvah boy. There was a big thing like is here.

Right, yeah.

It was a natural thing, I think.

OK. So we have you up to about age 15. So we're coming close to the time of the war.

Yes.

What do you remember shortly before the war in terms of Poland mobilizing for a possible war with Germany?

Well, I just remember when the things were building up for the war. I mean, I remember reading in the papers that German gave Poland an ultimatum that--

About Danzig.

About Danzig, that they want a corridor through Poland, you know what I mean? And this was. The next thing I remember, my mother's cousin-- we lived on the ground floor. And he was drafted to the army. And he came, we saw him in the Polish uniform, and he was going into the army. This was the last time that I saw him.

So that was in 1939 then?

This was in 1939. But I saw him, then I met him. I don't know I should tell you this story now, but I met him in Italy in 1945 after the war.

Wow, how do you like that?

Yes.

So between the time he was enlisted, you hadn't heard from him after?

No, he was in Russia. He was in Russia and from there, he went with the Polish Army. This I found out after the war, within this army, through the Middle East to Israel. And he was fighting in Italy on Monte Casino in the whole campaign.

I see.

Yes. And that's how I met him in Italy after the war.

I see. Do you remember your father or discussing what was going on with your family with your older brother or your father?

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Yes. My father said, well, if the war-- the war started. It was September I think 1st, 1939 that the German invaded Poland. And I recall my father saying that if they come in, what can they do to me? I built this house, I was in the Austrian Army in the First World War. What can they do to me? They can only put me to work.

But if I recall before the war, I think a few months before the war, they were sending already a lot of Jews from Germany into Poland. And I remember my father's cousin came up, and he stayed with us a few days.

In 1938, they expelled a lot of Jews.

Yes, but they didn't kill anybody at that time, you know what I mean? So my father used to say, well, what can they do to me? All only they can do to me is nobody's going to touch my house, nobody is going to take me from my home. I fought for the Germans in the First World War. And all they can do is put me to work. That's all. But I'm not going nowhere, I'm not moving nowhere.

Where was your father's brother coming from?

My father's brother?

He came from Germany?

No, my father's uncle.

Oh, father's uncle uncle, OK. Not my father. My father's uncle, yes, he came from Berlin.

I see.

Berlin, yes. And this was the words that my father said because when the war started, a lot of people started to run away because they were afraid for the Germans. So they were starting running away. Anyhow, four days in January-- in January, I'm sorry. September the 4th, the German came in to Krakow.

And I recall that they came in and I was standing in the doorway. This was on Limanowskiego Street, and we lived on Krakusa, this is a side street of Limanowskiego. And we were standing in the doorway and looking out.

And the German came in with on a motorbike with the side car on the side. And one was driving and the other one was with a submachine gun. And he came into our street, and pointing the gun, we should get into the door. "Raus, raus, raus," he was shouting, so we closed the door. That's the last.

Then a half an hour later, they were coming in. The SS came in on Limanowskiego. I saw him. Then they didn't chase us anymore. They were coming in.

Tall, big guys on horses. And practically the feet were hanging down to the ground, so tall they were. They make such an impression, such a psychological impression, that they look so superior, so tall, and so everything.

Maybe they were small horses.

No, they were picked like a theatrical group to make an impression. Afterwards, I found out that they used to come into every town on cars like this. Just before they came into the car, they dismantled themselves from the trucks. And they just parade through to give a psychological impression that they are so superior.

Anyhow. But let me take you back a few days before the Germans came in. The Polish Army opened up all the warehouses so the people should help themselves with the goods so the Germans shouldn't get them.

What did the goods include?

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The goods include chocolate factory, Suchard, Optima, there was Zarno, there was a supply of flour, bread, and Monopol, which is cigarettes. So all those factories. So the people went in. They helped themselves up with provisions.

Do you remember going?

Yeah, I remember Sam, and me, and my youngest brother, we went to Zarno, we took a flour, a sack of flour. We went to the cigarettes factory, to the Monopol, we picked up cartons of cigarettes. And then we picked up chocolate, how much we could grab. And we brought everything home.

So we had a little provision to last us for a few weeks during the beginning of the war. Because in Europe, you didn't have any supplies. You bought daily. You went daily to the store. And you bought it for every day. There wasn't refrigeration or anything.

You were needing milk, you went and you bought for the day milk. They were bringing the milk from the farms. You didn't buy milk in the store. They were bringing milks from the farm.

And you went to Rynek to the market and you bought a liter of milk or five liters. Whatever you wanted, you bought it from the daily supply. And also, a butcher, you bought it, you went every day to the butcher, and you bought meat for the day, whatever you were needing.

So we were lucky. We had the flower, and we had chocolate, and we had cigarettes. And then later on, we were able to trade the cigarettes for some other food. We would trade bartering. And that's how we could exist.

Was there ever any opportunity for you to enlist in the Polish Army? Was there any call for you or your older brother?

No, they were in disarray already. They were in disarray coming from the Silesia, from the Polish-German border. They were already disarray. They were withdrawing. They were just going further out east.

Would you remember any battles?

There were no no battles. Krakow was given up without a shot. Was given up. Krakow is a very historical city. It has a lot of--

It became the capital of the German general government.

--has the Wawel, which is all the Polish kings are buried there in Krakow. Well, then in October of 26, 1939, the Germans put up placards. Is the right word, placards? And the Jews--

Decrees.

--decrees, with a decree that the Jews have to supply forced labor. And November 28, the Jews had to create a Judenrat.

Those decrees, I guess, called for all able-bodied men of a certain age?

Yes. Then they ordered for the Jews to start wearing the Star of David on the left arm. This was in December of '39.

What do you remember about getting the stars?

What do I remember about getting the stars?

Yeah. Where you got it. Were you issued a star, did you have to make it at home?

Well, the Judenrat had to supply them. They manufactured them.

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Now, these were the blue and white armbands?

The first bands were white with a blue Magen David on it. They were all white. Then they issue another decree that the Jews couldn't walk through certain streets, Planty and Rynek Glowny they couldn't walk through. And then in December of 1941, Jews had to move to the ghetto, which was [POLISH].

Which was?

[POLISH]. This is the neighborhood.

That's where you were living?

Yes, that's where I was living. So I didn't have to move. And they could bring only so much clothing and so much. So there was a whole mass of people you could see moving whatever they could get with them on their backs, or whatever they had. Baby carriages, you can load it up. And they had to move.

Did anybody come to live with you?

Yes. Yes, we all had to double up. We all had to double up. Then the first thing from the ghetto, they done expulsion of Jews to Lublin.

That was the first time they actually took Jews away?

In around December, when the snow was falling, they used to-- you couldn't walk on the streets. They used to come and grab you on the streets as you were walking in the ghetto, pick you up, and they'd take you down to clean the snow. And you worked all day there. All kinds of forced labor. And then I recall they sent me. This was the first time that I was away from home. They send me to a rock quarry.

Hold one second, there's just-- OK.

The Judenrat had to supply people to a rock quarry. And they picked me. Everybody from every family, somebody had to there. So they picked me. I was the youngest. I don't know, I was picked. So I had to go. I cannot recall the name of the town. But this was not far from Krakow, maybe 15 miles or 20 miles from Krakow.

There was a rock quarry. And they sent a lot of young boys like me. And we had to sit down there, and with the hammer, break rocks. Sit on a pile of rocks and break with a hammer, like making chips. Making chips with the hammer.

Was this when they first had that decree for forced labor?

Yes, this was the first decree. This was the first time. I know I had difficulty. This was the first time in my life that I was away from home by myself. And I know at night, I cried myself to sleep. And this was supervised, not by the Germans, by the Poles. And I don't know. I was there a few weeks only. Then they sent me back to the ghetto.

Where did you live there? They had barracks set up or tents?

We lived in barracks.

They provided food, something?

Yeah we had some soup.

Was this Plaszow?

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No, this wasn't Plaszow. No, this wasn't Plaszow, no, no, no, no.

Was the ghetto in Krakow sealed? Did they put a fence or a wall around that ghetto?

There was a fence, barbed wire. And the Polish police was outside. And the German police was at the gate. And the Jewish police was inside.

Were you ever able to get out of the ghetto secretly? Or did you ever have any reason to make it?

Then from the ghetto, I used to work in a brick factory. I used to go out from the ghetto under arm, marching every day.

This was after the quarry?

Yes. In a brick factory. This was already the war broke out. The Russian. And I worked in a brick factory there. But I got a job. First, I worked in the brick factory. And then we were loading the clay into the lorry, into the wagons. With a spade, you cut out a block of that wet clay. It was wet, the clay was wet and was very heavy. To load it up and put it into a lorry. And then we used to go to the machines and mix it. And they mixed it and they were making bricks. Anyhow, after working there a few weeks, they were looking for electrician. And into the workshop, in a blacksmith, I got myself a job to work in the workshop. So I became an electrician in a blacksmith.

This was all forced labor?

All forced labor. We used to leave from the ghetto under guard. We used to march with a Ukrainian guard to Bonarka.

That's where it was?

Bonarka was the brick factory.

Can you spell that?

Bonarka. B-A-N-K-A.

OK.

So we used to walk-- down there, I worked. First, I worked as a blacksmith. Now, this was a very good job because I was able to bring in some clothing and trade it with the Poles for food. And I was able to bring home to my parents and my brother some food. So we were trading whatever we had. Or a piece of jewelry, a ring, or something we could trade for food. So this was a good job.

And then I was able to bake a potato on a blacksmith, you know, on the-- what you call it? The fire.

The hearth?

The what?

Hearth.

The hearth, yes. Yes, I was able to bake a potato. And this was a big, big thing. Because I could have a potato, I could eat a potato. Anyhow. But the job was interesting. The master blacksmith was the one who directed like an orchestra. He was the leader.

This was a Pole?

Yes, he was a Pole. He was the master blacksmith. Now, we were making parts for the factory that the parts broke

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down. We were forging those parts, making it. Now, there were three people with three sledgehammers. The master-- what was this?

The hearth?

The thing what you hold the iron.

Oh, the anvil?

The anvil. The anvil. The master was holding with a pair of big pliers. With the big pliers in his left hand was holding there the red metal or the white metal. Took it out from there from the fire, right?

And there were three guys hitting it in a rhythm. One, two, three, one, two, three, one, two, three. Now, the master, in his right hand, had a little hammer. A little hammer. And with this little hammer, he was pointing where to hit it, in which spot to hit it.

And there was one, two, three, one, two, three. The three hammers like an orchestra was with a rhythm. And you had to hit it right. Because if you wouldn't hit it right, you would practically break the master's arm because he was holding it with a pair of big pliers.

And if you didn't hit it right in the anvil in the center, it would just bend and it would just knock his arm over. So you had to be very careful. Hit it with all your strength, pow, down in the center of the anvil.

So this was-- I enjoyed that work. I enjoyed that work. Not only that I could get some extra food and I could do a little trading, but I also enjoyed that that work was very interesting.

And then I done a little electrical work. One of the Ukrainians, who was the manager of the factory-- they were making bricks for the Russian fronts, they were telling us that this was defense work. Was very important. Anyhow.

So one of the Ukrainians, who was a manager of the factory at the time, he built a new house down there. And they were needing electricians. So they asked for electricians. I volunteered that I could do. Anyhow, I never done rewiring the house. This was complicated.

But I had the damn nerve that I said, OK. I thought that-- anyhow, I screwed it up. And then he told this to the German. The German came with the gun. He put the gun to my head. He said, if I won't fix it, he's going to shoot me. And this was real. It wouldn't mean nothing for him to shoot me.

What is it that you screwed up on that?

I didn't make the right connection on the switch. I blew a fuse. Anyhow. I fixed it eventually, and it was OK. But he really threatened me. He really threatened me.

How were the Ukrainians?

Very mean. And they had to prove themselves to the Germans that they are better than the Germans, that they are more cruel and more meaner than the Germans. So they had to outdo the Germans. Anyhow.

Was your brother Sam working? Sam was working for the defense. He was something working on tanks and an ornament for the Germans. In a different-- he was going out somewhere else on a different place.

And your father?

My father worked in Optima, where was the chocolate factory used to be. He worked there as a shoemaker. As a shoemaker, he was making shoes.

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Back to shoemaking then.

Back to shoemaking. And Bernard was also working with the shoemakers. And my mother worked on the uniforms for the Germans. She was making the uniforms for the Germans.

And Miriam?

Sewing. Marian was with my mother. Then somehow, the job ended in the big factory. And they took me to a more important job.

How long did you work at the brick factory do you think?

A few months. Then they took me. I worked. There were needing work. They were starting bringing the Germans from the Russian front, the wounded ones.

So we're in 1941?

Where are we now?

If the Germans are on the Russian front, then we're someplace at least in 1941.

'41.

OK. Oh, no. Because this was 1941. No, so I must have been working longer than that.

OK. You had some time in the quarry, a few weeks in the quarry. And then you went to the brick factory, where you had a few jobs there.

Now, I want to go to '43 already.

OK.

OK? This was the end of 1940-- '42, winter '42. I worked [POLISH]. They were bringing from the Russian front, they were bringing the wounded German. Not so much the wounded, but the frozen one.

And they had lice. And they were bringing him down on the trains to [GERMAN]. You know what means [GERMAN]? To delouse them.

To delouse them, right.

To delouse them because they were all-- they didn't change. For weeks, they were on the Russian front. And they were all-- most of them were frozen or wounded. And they brought them down to [GERMAN] and wash him.

Where was it they brought them?

[POLISH] It was outside Krakow. Zablocie, you want to know how to spell it?

Yeah, please.

Z-A-B-L-O-C-I-E. This is in Polish. [POLISH]. This was a side railroad where they came. They brought them in at night so nobody should know. There were no lights and there were no platforms to unload them.

So what they done was they just put little ladders to the train. And we had to go up and carry them from those trains

down the steps across to the other trains just standing on the opposite side, from one train to another. Carrying them to the [GERMAN]. The Germans wouldn't touch them because they had lice. So the we had to carry them.

But they took them from one train and put them on another train?

Put them, yes. From the what the train was brought in from Russia, the Red Cross train, we took him from that train, carrying them down the steps, walk across the railroad to the other--

Track?

--to the other track. And up the steps and down there. And drop them down there. And there were Germans down there already that they were taking the names and whatever it is. So we just done the carrying. So I worked there for quite some time, for a few months. And this was a job done at night, at night only.

This was all you did was every night you carry these wounded soldiers?

Yes, yes, they were coming in from the Russian front. And they had a lot of gold rubles. Right, gold rubles. And a lot of food, a lot of chocolate, and so forth. You could eat whatever you could eat down there. You could eat. But when we were leaving at night, you couldn't-- there were search. If they found anybody has a watch or anything, they would shoot you right away.

How many hours would you work each night?

Whole night. In the morning, we went there. And in the evening, we work all night. And in the morning, we went, we walked on the guards to the ghetto, back to the ghetto. It wasn't far, was maybe half an hour walk from the ghetto. It wasn't far.

So they did this at night?

At night only.

Why? Just so people wouldn't see what was going on? What was happening.

Not only people, but the trains were pulling in at night so the people wouldn't know, nobody would know. And mostly at night, I don't know. I don't know they had a curfew in the city or what. I don't know about it because I just lived in the compound of the ghetto. I don't know what was. Most probably, there was a curfew, 10:00 at night or whatever. I imagine so. I am not sure. So nobody knew what was going on.

They didn't want people to know.

Yes.

That the Germans were coming back.

That they are bleeding, yes, that they are bleeding heavily.

And that's why they took the Jews. Because this way couldn't-- everything was secretly.

Because the Jews went back to the ghetto.

Exactly. So it was everything.

When you loaded them on those other trains, then where did they go? To be deloused?

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Yes, the delousung. And then they pull in other trains when they were cleaned up. And took into Germany, to the hospitals, all over. This was a embarkation point.

I see. So you take them off one train to get deloused, then you put them on the other train to someplace else?

No, no. Then you have to be taken off the delouse train. It's standing stationary. Then they had to take them on another train and take. The delousing train--

Was in a train itself.

--one comes in. One comes in. And we take them to the delausungstrain, who's stationary. Then from there, he had to take into a-- we didn't take them already. There were the German nurses and everything.

Once they were cleaned.

Once they were clean, they handled it. They handled it. So this was this. And they must have killed a lot of Russians and robbed them because they had a lot of jewelry, a lot of watches. On some, I saw two, three watches and everything. I saw. But we couldn't touch anything because we were just afraid. But if I saw a candy or something, I could eat it. I could eat it. But I wouldn't take anything to the ghetto.

Anyhow. So what stands in my memory is one incident, especially. It was a young, blond fellow. He must have been about 6 foot 2 or 6 foot 3. And as I was taking him off the-- going to pick him up, he start talking to me in Polish.

In Polish, he was talking to me, like he explained that he came from the border town, from Silesia, from the border. And he spoke pretty well Polish. And he called me a friend. Was nothing wrong with him except that his feet were frozen.

And he tells me a story that he was just standing on guard and his legs froze on him. And he called me a friend. And this made me so angry that he called me a friend. He wears a SS uniforms and he calls me a friend.

Usually, we get two guys to handle a big fellow like this to carrying him down the train. I said, no, this son of a gun, I got to take him myself. So I put him on my back, and I dragged him down with his feet dangling on the stairs. And he was screaming. But it didn't matter because the whole train was moaning and groaning, so nobody could hear anything. Because it didn't matter.

I wanted to give him a little pain. I want him to fiddle a little bit. And then believe me, when I put him back, when carrying him across and dragged him across the rail, and he hitting with his leg, and he was screaming.

And I said to myself, damn it, I feel like I am an animal like him already. And I cried. I cried that I lost all my humanity. That I am like him, a beast.

OK. Then it was one of those. In the morning, we were coming back to the ghetto on the guard. As we're approaching the ghetto, I heard a lot of noise, a lot of shooting. And as I got closer, I heard there were a lot of Germans standing outside. A lot of German guards were guarding the ghetto. I suspected something. Something is going on.

As I got inside, I hear shots, shots, and shots. And as I was walking closer to my house, I saw a lot of dead bodies on the streets. I saw a lot of blood, and killing, and killing, and killing, and shooting. I got to Josefinska.

There was something, a little hospital down there. They were throwing out babies through the window. They were picking up babies by the feet and hitting them against the curb. There was killing going on right and left.

I managed to get to my house. I didn't see anybody in the house. I ran outside. I see a group of people being herded towards Plac Zgody.

I saw my mother and my sister Maria, she was holding onto my mother, to the skirt, petrified. And I wanted to walk

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over to my mother. And my mother motioned to me I should run, I should run, I should run. But I didn't listen. I wanted to get closer.

And an SS spotted me, the guard spotted me. And he just came over and hit me in the face with the butt of the gun. I started to bleed I spit out some teeth. And this was the last time I saw my mother and my sister Maria. And I never saw them again. This was March the 13 of 1943. This was the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto.

Then they took me to work. I had to load the corpses on wagons. This lasted a few days. We worked. And they transferred the whole thing to Plaszow. This was the end of the Krakow ghetto.

You and everybody were then transferred?

Yes. We brought the bodies to the Plaszow. And this was the end of the ghetto.

Your mother and sister, where were they sent?

Well, I found out-- after the war, I found out that they were sent to Belziec. They were sent to Belziec. This is what I said. I found out after the war. I didn't know about it.

Anyhow, in Plaszow, they sent me and my brother Sam to Wieliczka. This was outside Krakow, I think 14 kilometers from Krakow. I think it was a salt mine.

What was the name of the town again?

Wieliczka. W-I-E-L-I-C-K-A.

So you weren't at Plaszow very long? You loaded these bodies and you had to bring them there?

Yes. Yes, this was the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, which was in March 13, 1943. This was the end of the Krakow. Everybody was. Whoever lived was transferred to the Plaszow camp. The Plaszow concentration camp.

Did you know about that camp before? Had you heard anything about it?

Yes.

Yeah.

Yes, yes. Because they were building it for quite some time. They were building it for quite some time. Oh. No, before that, now, I recall it. We worked in Plaszow. Before we went to Wieliczka, we worked on the road gang, building the roads in Plaszow.

And I recall an incident where the Kommando of Goeth. Goeth was his name. He was the commander of the SS, the Plaszow. He was in charge. He used to walk around with two guns in his hand and a dog.

And he used to shoot. He used to tell to the dog, Jude so the dog just jumped at the person and just tore out a piece of flesh from him. And then he used to shoot the people. He was a big guy. He must have weighed maybe 250 pounds. He was over six foot. He done it every day before breakfast. He was going like shooting ducks. Every day, he was out like this.

And I recall an incident where my brother Sam, where the dog grabbed him, grabbed him by the ribs. And I think he must have been the only one that survived that. Because he was standing motionless so the dog didn't bother him. He just bit into his ribs. And he must have been the only one that survived that.

Where was your father and younger brother?

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My father worked in the Gemeinschaft, which is-- they transferred him already to the shoe factory in the Plaszow concentration camp. He worked already there.

And your little brother?

Yes, Bernard worked with him, yes.

So you were in Plaszow for--

Plaszow.

--Plaszow for a few weeks before you left?

You know, I can remember exactly the time. You know, there was just roughly speaking, was a few months, maybe. Then we were shipped out to Wieliczka, to the salt mine.

Down there, we worked. They were enlarging the shafts, the salt mine shaft, because they wanted to transfer all the aircraft works underground. And the easiest thing was, the safest thing was in the salt mine. So we were blasting out, deepening the shafts so they could install an aircraft factory there.

This was already in 1944. In the spring, I think, 1944. And then we could hear at night already-- we could hear at night already artillery fire.

What did you think about that?

We realized that it was-- we had some information also from the Poles that they worked in the salt mine. You know. We were in contact already a little bit with them. The Germans were watching us.

But you know, sometimes we exchange a word or so in Polish language with the miners who worked down there. Because they were doing the blasting. They were the expert. We were just doing the hard work, just the laying. But they were doing the engineering and the laying of the dynamite to blast out the shaft.

So all of a sudden, we heard that there's going to be evacuation. The Germans came down and they brought us up in a hurry from the shafts. We made, my brother and I, made some arrangements in case something like this happened, we're going to hide ourself with other two friends. The other two friends were Spielman and Zenek Fuchs.

Somehow, it was-- they grabbed us and they put us into the elevators. And they brought us up. And they started to count the heads. And there were two guys missing. Two guys were missing. And they went down.

At the time, we put away a loaf of bread, a little water in the mine down there just in case we were trying to hide ourselves. So anyhow, my brother and I came up. We didn't get a chance. They grabbed us right away. We were walking near the elevator shaft. And they brought us up.

But Spielman and the other one--

Spielman stayed down, stayed down. And they count the heads, and OK. And they evacuated us. They put us on trucks and took us back to Plaszow.

As I was riding in the truck, there was a young German SS man said to me, you see, we are going to leave this part of Poland. We're going to evacuate. We're going to let the Russians come in. And they are going to kill all the bad people here, all the bad Poles. But then with the V2, we're going to come back. You know the V2, the rockets.

Did you know what the V2 was? I didn't know what to do with it he too. He was pointing out, we're going to come back.

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He was pointing out like that. They took us to Plaszow. A day later, they brought Zenek Fuchs and Spielman. And we had to witness this. And they hanged them in Plaszow.

And a few days later, they were building a transport and they loaded up on the trains. And this was, I think, in July. It was very hot. They loaded it up in cattle train. We don't know where we were going. It was hot. No water, no food for a few days. And we had a lot of dead people. We were grasping for air.

Sometimes, they let us stop on the station. They let us get a little water occasionally. And I don't know where we were looking. Some of us managed to look through the barbed wire, through the little opening in the cattle train. You know, it has on top a little opening. And we lifted up somebody to look. Sometimes we could read, but we couldn't figure out where we going.

We know we were going through Czechoslovakia because we could read the signs. And eventually, I don't know, maybe 50% of the people on the cattle train died.

You and Sam were still together.

Yes. They were drinking I was drinking their own urine. And we got to Mauthausen. We got to Mauthausen. Next thing I remember, I saw my father. I saw Bernard. And Sam and I were all together. We were standing naked, waiting for the showers. All we had on is our belt. They let us have our belt, but naked. And this was the last time that I saw my father.

My father and Bernard went to Auschwitz. But I found out after the war. Went to Auschwitz. And my father, by a point of a finger, he was sent to the wrong side. And he went to the crematorium. That's the story what Bernard told me after the war.

So at Mauthausen, they selected out people to go to Auschwitz.

Yes. Yes, because they couldn't handle the whole thing. So they divided. So me and Sam were assigned to work in the Steinbruch. This is a granite quarry, Steinbruch.

We worked there every day. We had to get up about 5:00 in the morning. Stand up, Appellplatz after we get our slice of bread and the black coffee, ersatz coffee. And we had to march to work, to the Steinbruch.

Bringing back, we had to carry and march through the gate and bring the dead ones who were killed. Because they have to be counted. All the bodies have to be counted at the gate.

Every day there was somebody?

Yes, yes.

Did you ever have to carry somebody back?

Oh, yes.

Let me switch tapes.

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