

Today's day is--

Today is July 12, 1992.

And your name, please?

And my name is Moses Rechnitz, R-E-C-H-N-I-T-Z. I was born in Poland on June 3, 1923, in a town called Katowice, K-A-T-O-W-I-C-E. Originally, my family lived in a town called Bedzin, B-E-D-Z-I-N, which was about 15 miles from Katowice, a major population of Jews and a smaller population of Poles.

It was-- by Polish standards, it was a pretty good sized city. It had streetcars, it had stores, it had a main street. It had, I believe, a couple of movie houses. It had an old castle that belonged somewhere in the Polish history.

Where is Bedzin near?

Bedzin is in the southwestern part of Poland, not-- about 10 miles from Katowice, K-A-T-O-W-I-C-E, in Silesia, which is predominantly the coal region of Poland-- coal and steel works. It is also, I think, about 50 or 60 miles from Kraków, which is one of the oldest cities in Poland and is known as the University City of Poland.

Did you live with your mother and father?

I lived with my mother and father on the third or fourth floor of a building. And I remember the water system was on top of the building, and we were getting the water in our sinks or toilets by gravity. Seemed like it was pumped up into the cistern on the top of the building.

When did you move from Bedzin?

I moved from-- my family moved from Bedzin to Katowice where my father had a wholesale leather store in about 1930, I believe. And it was a relatively short trip between Bedzin and Katowice, which one could take a train to and from, which took about 20 minutes or 25 minutes of a ride. And the town in between Bedzin and Katowice was Sosnowiec, another town that was also populated by a lot of Jews.

What was your father's name? My father's name was Bernard, and he-- they used to call him Berek.

And what was your father's-- well, did your father's mother and father, your grandparents, live in Bedzin, as well?

Yes. Yes, they did. And I remember visiting them almost every Saturday with the rest of my family.

Do you remember their names?

No, I do not remember their names.

Do you remember the-- your grandmother's on your father's side's maiden name?

No, I do not.

OK. On your mother's side, what was your mother's name?

My mother's name was Rachel, R-A-C-H-E-L, and she was called Ruchla, R-U-C-H-L-A, and her maiden name was Lejzerowitz, L-E-J-Z-E-R-O-W-I-T-Z.

And what about her parents?

I only remember her father, which was my grandfather, and his name was Abraham Lejzerowitz. I don't remember my grandmother on that side, because I understand that originally my mother's mother died and he remarried again. And I do not remember her second-- his second wife's name.

Did your-- now, we're talking about your mother's side of the family.

Right.

Were there relatives of your mother's, also, in Bedzin or in that Bedzin area?

Yes, there were relatives in Bedzin, in that area, on my mother's side. She had a brother, who had two children. I do not remember his name.

And my grandfather on my mother's side, after he got remarried, had a child whose name was FisieK, F-I-S-I-E-K, and he was about my age. And I always joked because everybody was telling me that FisieK is my uncle, and he was really my own age. I could never accept the fact that he was my uncle.

What about-- did your mother have sisters?

She-- yes, my mother had a sister by the name of Pola, P-O-L-A. She was married to my uncle, whose name was Max Bolimowski, B-O-L-I-M-O-W-S-K-I. And I know they had two children-- one boy and one girl. And the boy's name was Ziggy, and the girl's name was Lusie, L-U-S-I-E.

Well did your mother have any other sisters?

My mother, I do not remember whether she had any other sisters, no.

So far, we know that your mother had one brother and a sister named Pola.

Right.

And you don't remember the brother's name.

No, but if I remember, I may bring it up again.

What-- so far as you know, what became of your mother's sister-- sister and brother, and their children?

As far as I remember, during the war-- before the war, my uncle, who is my mother's brother, divorced or separated from his wife, and he had two sons. One son's name was Wowik. And the other's was Idek. Idek was the older of the sons.

And before the war started, he was forced to join the Polish army. Wowik was a few years younger, and because of the problem within the family, Wowik came to live with us for a couple of years in Katowice, when we moved to Katowice about 1930.

Now, Wowik's last name was Lejzerowitz, right?

Wowik's last name was Lejzerowitz, and he was a couple of years older than I was. And we got very well-- we got along very well when he was living with us in Katowice.

What eventually became of Wowik to your knowledge?

Wowik survived the Second World War, and I met him a couple of times after the World War. He lived in Konstanz, Germany when I became that he was-- when I became aware that he was alive, and I made a point to go and visit him. He eventually emigrated to Australia, and he married a girl in Germany still, who also survived the war, and whose name-- first name was Mirka. I don't remember the last name.

Now, Wowik's brother, do you know what became of him?

Wowik's brother never surfaced after the end of the Second World War.

What was his name?

Edek. And I believe that he must have-- the rumor, or what people were saying, is that he died somewhere in Russia during the period of the Second World War, and nobody heard from him again. And the same goes for Fisiek. Fisiek ran away-- when the Germans were advancing, he ran away towards the Russian border. And we heard from him a couple of times through the mail during the early part of the Second World War, but then we never heard anything about him again. And I do not know what happened to him.

OK. Let's talk about your-- if that is the end of your mother's side of the family as best that you can remember, what about your father's side of the family? How many brothers and sisters did your father have?

I don't remember how many brothers or sisters my father had, but I can think about one sister and one brother. One brother was a furrier in Bedzin. And the sister's name was Sala, and she was probably in her late 30s or early 40s when a matchmaker found a husband for her.

And I remember as a child of 10 or 12 that the wedding took place in our apartment in Katowice. I also remember that when the war broke out, she was pregnant, and she did have a baby. And after that, because of whatever happened during that period of time, she vanished and I never heard-- and I don't know what happened to her. But I'm pretty sure that she died during the war, as did her husband.

So her name was Sala Rechnitz, and you don't remember her married name.

No, I do not.

What about your father had a brother. You don't remember his name?

I don't remember, no.

And any other cousins and nephews and nieces and things from that side of the family?

There was a-- there was a sis-- OK. My father had this sister. I don't remember what her name was. She was married to an intelligent Jew who-- and she lived in Sosnowiec.

And her mai-- her married name was Wiederman, W-I-E-D-E-R-M-A-N. He was the director of a high school, which was attended--

He? Who's he, her husband?

Yes. What was his--

Max.

No, no, no, there was Max Bolimowski. Febek--

Febek.

F-E-B-E-K, Wiederman, was a director of a high school in Sosnowiec, which was predom-- which was really attended only by Jewish children. They also had two children. One, whose name was Olek, and I don't remember the other one.

And I know that all of them perished during the war, except my Uncle Febek, who wrote a book about the period during the war in Sosnowiec. He was hidden for a number of years in Sosnowiec by a janitor of the high school. And he survived the war, and then came to America and wrote the book. I understand that the

book is in the Library of Congress in the United States.

What about all the grandparents, do you know what happened to them? Did they die natural deaths? Did they die in the war or what?

I do not remember much of the grandparents. I remem-- no, my mother's father died before the war. And my father's father lived with us at the beginning of the war in Kraków where we moved to at the-- before the very beginning of the war. And he died a natural death. The rest of them, I have absolutely no idea.

OK. Let's talk about your mother. Your mother's maiden name was Rachel Lejzerowitz. What was your mother like?

My mother was very, very progressive woman, from what I could judge now, and even then. She was very active in Jewish organizations, like the Hadassah in Poland, and WIZO in Poland. She--

--community--

--she was very socially active. She belonged to a lot of philanthropic organizations and social organizations. And she was really, in my opinion, very advanced in her thinking for that age.

Didn't you-- didn't you say something about your mother going to the World's Fair in 1939?

Yes. In 1939, I believe, my mother went to the World's Fair in New York. And after the trip to New York, she came back to Poland, and we were making plans to emigrate to Israel at that time. My father was in the wholesale leather business in Katowice, and he was doing financially very well.

And he was very respected in the community and contributed money. And here and there, he found himself in a position of having to help out some of the members of the family. I became aware a couple of times that when he was walking home from his business, he got accosted by some Polish youth.

And on a couple of occasions, he either got beaten up or chased already, or something like that. And I believe that that experience prompted him to start making arrangements to leave Poland and emigrate to Israel.

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

I have one sister who has gone to Israel in 1936. She was five-- she is five years older than I am. And--

Her name?

--her name is Genia, G-E-N-I-A. And she was at the last stages of getting her musical education on piano, and she attended the Conservatory in Tel Aviv. And lucky that she did, because of the fact that she lived in Israel, she was really not caught up in the Second World War.

And what was your childhood like? What-- where did you go to school and things like that?

My childhood seemed like a very trouble-free childhood. I was a very normal, pretty strong kid who managed to survive by himself, although there was no big question of survival in the early years. But I mixed very well with everybody else.

And after attending a Polish grammar school, and also a Jewish cheder in Katowice, I started attending a Polish high school in which there were only like three or five Jewish pupils. I became aware of antisemitism at the early stage when one of my teachers started making fun of me because I had the same last name as another man who was building a huge building in Katowice. And he was also always deriding me and trying to poke fun at me because of that relationship.

I was really a rebel at heart, because I wouldn't take any pressure from anybody, and neither from the Polish

kids. And I was involved in quite a few fights in school, but eventually, they started respecting me and I got along very well with them. Although, the teachers didn't like me and didn't like the idea that there was a Jewish boy who fended for himself.

And I remember that at the end of the year, they called my mother in and told her that unless she makes sure that I go to another high school, they will not pass me to the next grade, and I would be forced to repeat the same grade in that high school in Katowice.

Why do you think that they did that?

Because of the fact that I was Jewish, and they were going to cause trouble.

Well, tell me a little bit about the fact that you mentioned that you're basically taller and stronger and the business about your father letting you be an apprentice for mechanical things.

OK.

That's very interesting.

Before I go to that, I just want to mention that as a result of the pressure being put on my mother to take me out of that high school, I ended up commuting to the high school in Sosnowiec where my uncle was the Director of the high school. And I did very well in that high school. My grades were good, and the only problem was that I had to commute by train to Sosnowiec and back, which of course, took quite a bit more time.

During the summers, my father always made arrangements for us to go on a vacation somewhere in the southern part of Poland in the mountains. And till I was about 14 years old, or 13 years old, I did that, and I had a lot of fun because being on vacation, doing things in the countryside of the mountains that you couldn't do in the city, obviously, appealed to me. But when I got to be about 14 or 15, I kind of was-- it didn't appeal to me anymore, and I talked my father into letting me work for a garage in Katowice, because I was always interested in mechanics.

And he made the arrangement with a German who owned the garage in Katowice for me to work there as an apprentice. And my father had to pay the German owner money for me to be an apprentice. And I enjoyed it very much, and I didn't miss my vacations at all.

And I felt that I'm doing something that I really liked doing. Among other things, I learned how to drive a car at a very early age, and I was very proud of myself when I was 15 and could drive a car.

So you grew up, essentially, in Katowice. What was it like there? Were you in the city? Did you live in the city?

We lived in the city in a nice apartment house that had three bedrooms. And it was a stone building in the area of the town which was considered upper class, so to speak.

Wasn't that Jordana Street?

That was-- right, that-- the street's name was Jordana, J-O-R-D-A-N-A. And I believe the number was 17.

Right. And then how did you happen to-- under what circumstances did you leave that location?

Before the war started while my father was making arrangements to go to Israel, he sold his wholesale store and we moved to Kraków. Matter of fact, my mother and I already lived in Kraków while my father was still active in Katowice trying to wind up his business deals. He also-- we also packed all our belongings to be shipped to Israel.

And when the war broke out on the 1st of September of 1939, most of our belongings were already at the

railroad station in Katowice on the way to being shipped to Israel.

Why did you move from Katowice to Kraków?

I really do not know, except it was supposed to be a very short term move. And when the war started, we obviously were caught in Katowice-- in the Kraków.

I see. What was it like being in Kraków? So you didn't-- so when you lived in Kraków, you really didn't know anybody there.

I didn't know Kraków at all because I lived there very shortly. Although, as a kid, I roamed around the city, and I thought it was a very interesting city from a lot of perspectives. And for a boy of 16, with all the castles and all the history and all the walls and everything, stone walls and everything else, I thought it was very interesting.

I did not have any friends in Kraków because of the very short amount of time that I spent there. And of course, I never started school or anything else in Kraków because we were ready to move. And the war broke out in September, which was before the school year started.

When the Germans moved in, and we lived in a pretty well-to-do section of Kraków, about two months or three months later, they took over the whole neighborhood for their military or military families, personnel, and forced us out of our apartment. And as a result of that, my father found a place for us in Wieliczka, W-I-E-L-I-C-Z-K-A, which was known all across Poland as the salt mine town of Poland. And we found an apartment in Wieliczka, which was just about 300 feet from the entrance to the salt mines.

That's where I spent the first year, or first year and a half, of the war. At that stage already, we were forced to do forced labor for the Germans in many ways. And in order to keep out of the German control, so to speak, I joined a group of people that commuted to work near Kraków.

And it was a project whereby the Germans were building a railroad spur to bypass Kraków itself. And the spur was bypassing Kraków heading towards the eastern front, towards the Russian border. I was taking the train to a place called Krakówianka which was just on the outskirts of Kraków.

And it was forced labor, but I did it voluntarily because somehow, the arrangement was, as long as you worked for a German company, or for a German project, the Germans left you alone. My father and mother left the village because they had nothing to do, no work or anything else. And the way we survived, or tried to survive, is by selling off gradually everything that we had in order to be able to get cheese, and butter, and bread, or anything else like that.

Of course, whatever we owned, it was very little and things were really getting pretty tight. At one point, the Germans decided that they don't need any more Jews in Wieliczka, or they don't want any more Jews in Wieliczka, and surrounded the town, and they were going to evacuate all the Jewish population in Wieliczka. Because of my work that I commuted to, and because I got along very well with one of the German foremen, I asked a Polish woman to go to him and tell him that the town was surrounded and would he please try to get me out of that town.

As a result of that, he sent a truck to Wieliczka, and I managed to get my mother, and my father, and myself, and about 30 other people on the truck, and we drove out from Wieliczka, and we ended up on the working project itself. And somehow we made our home in a brick factory or a kiln. And I remember we spent the first few weeks, practically, in that kiln all on our own.

There was no question about running away or doing anything else, because it was almost impossible because of the attitude of the Polish population that we would get any support at all, even if we tried to run away. In order to keep the Jews working on that spur project, the Germans started erecting barracks. And as a result, my father, my mother, and myself eventually moved to one of the barracks and were working for the Germans in different capacities.

I, because of my mechanical background, got a job driving a narrow gauge locomotive with wagons that was bringing up dirt to build up the railroad spur. I don't remember what my mother or father were doing, but I know they were also doing physical work. At one point in that camp, I understand I got very sick, and I believe it was diphtheria.

And my arm was very, very swollen, and I-- I had drains in my arm, although, there was no medical care of any kind to speak of. Somehow, I had drains in my arm, and I was delirious for quite a few weeks before I started recuperating. I was very lucky in the sense that I grew up with both Polish and German, and I seemed to be liked by some of the German foremen, which made life a hell of a lot easier. And I attribute that to the fact that despite the fact that I was sick, somehow I survived that ordeal.

For a period of time myself, there was a small quarters on the location where-- on the location of the job. And I had the privilege of sleeping over in those quarters with my father and mother, unfortunately. And there were like another 40 people doing the same thing, which means we did not have to go back to camp every night and come back in the morning to do the job.

However, there was an accident, and the barn where the locomotives were stored were kept overnight, it caught fire, and of course, everybody started running and doing whatever they could. And I jumped into one of the diesel locomotives and got it out of the barn before it burned down. But as a result of that in the morning, a contingent of SS men came, and they decided that it wasn't an accident, that it was sabotage.

They lined up everybody, and they starting-- they started pulling out people to be killed. I remember that when I got-- when the SS men got to me, that the German foreman intervened and said, leave him alone. That's one of my best men. And that's really why I think, also, one of the few things during the war, that resulted in me surviving that war, because there were a lot of accidents or incidents that, for all practical reasons, I should have been dead.

Where exactly was this?

That was in Krakówianka on the job. They locked about 10 or 12 of us survivors in a shed overnight. And of course, before they locked us up, we watched the SS to shoot all the people that they pulled out of the lineup.

And we were convinced that come morning, that we'll probably be shot just as well. In the morning, they made us load the bodies into the lorries that were used on the narrow railroad spur and bring them out to a location where they going to be bringing in fill. And we dumped those bodies in that location, and I can still remember that there must have been at least one person who was still alive because his hand was coming-- was being raised out of the sand.

But of course, there was nothing that anybody could have done. And we had to go back to the original work place. I'm sure that those bodies are still there, and nobody will ever know who those people were, or what those people were.

The only incident that I vividly remember is there happened to be a couple of young children in that war camp that stayed overnight also with me, with their parents. And because the kids were relatively young, eight or 10 years old, they didn't have anything to do. So they were riding with me in the locomotive that I was driving.

And during the lineup, the SS pulled those two children, and the father and the mother went absolutely crazy. And they were told by the SS men, if they don't keep quiet, he'll shoot them, too. And of course, they didn't, and as a result, the mother, the father and the two children were shot right in front of me.

What happened next?

Next, after the fire, of course, then there wasn't-- there was nobody that could stay on the job, or on the premises where the job activity was taking place except by coming in the morning, going back at night to the barracks, to the barrack base. And just life went on from day to day, hoping that the Germans will start

losing, eventually, and maybe that'll be the end of our misery there. But unfortunately, lasted and went on and on and on.

Across the street, across the road going from Kraków to Wieliczka, there was another camp called Jerusalimska. And in that camp, there was another large group of Jews. It used-- Jerusalimska used to be a cemetery, a Jewish cemetery.

And the function of those Jews living on the other side of the highway in the camp called Jerusalimska was to dig up the corpses and retrieve the gold, whether it's teeth, rings, or any other kind of jewelry, from the corpses that were buried there already for quite a long time. That's the only thing I remember about Jerusalimska. I have never been there. But you could see it from our camp because it was on a hill going up, and you could observe it at times as far as activity going there.

After building the spur around Kraków, we, as a group of people forced to work, were moved to Skarzysko-Kamienne, S-K-A-R-Z-Y-S-K-O dash K-A-M-I-E-N-N-E. It was a place where the Germans took over a munitions factory, and they were adding to the capacity of the munitions factory. When they unloaded us at Skarzysko-Kamienne, there were three camps already in existence-- Camp A, Camp B, and Camp C.

Camp C was considered, after a short time after they unloaded us from the train, we-- I understood that Camp C was the worst camp of all the three of them. And it was the worst because that was the facility where the artillery shells were being filled with the powder. And it was a yellow powder, and somehow the people must have absorbed the powder through their skin, because at the beginning, it was really weird because their color was yellow.

And of course, it was a chemical reaction that made those people look yellow. And I understood that their lifespan was really shortened by very much. And so when they lined us up after they unloaded us from the train, they started sorting us out, and they started asking for people who are electricians, people that are mechanics, and different professions.

And the minute I heard anybody asking for an electrician or a mechanic, I raised my hand, and I was selected to be moved to the other camp. I didn't know which one, A or B, but it ended up being, I believe, A. My father and mother, unfortunately, got stuck in Camp C.

And while we were being led out by a German guard from Camp C on the way to Camp A, which was only a couple of miles, or three miles away, the comment by the German guard was, well, you got yourself another extension of your life by leaving the Camp C. I arrived at Camp A, and I was-- we were get-- we are put into barracks, and our job was to help building a new facility where munitions are going to be produced.

I lost track of my father and mother, with the exception that once a month, there was a delousing facility in our camp, and different groups of people were coming in to be deloused. And so once a month or so, my father, or my mother, came to our camp to be deloused. And because I knew when they're coming, I always made sure that I have the opportunity to see them.

This experience kind of splits into two. Because of the fact that there wasn't enough food to satisfy the people's hunger, and because of the fact that we had the number of Polish employees working at the factory, also, there was already producing artillery shells, just the casings. I found that it gives me a good opportunity to put maybe a few extra hours for a Pole, and as a result, he'll give me bread or anything else to eat.

And all of that worked fine till I realized that with all the additional food and working all those additional hours physically, I wasn't gaining anything, that matter of fact, I was getting weaker. And I came to the conclusion that that idea wasn't such a bright idea. So I gave up trying to work an evening shift besides working myself during the day.

My job during the day was hooking up different cement machines to the electric wires. And I don't know how or why, but I became very proficient at it. And as a result at the later stages, I was getting extra food so there was no need for me to work for a Pole or anybody else to try to get extra food.

The second part of it is that my mother and father were obviously stuck in Camp C, and suddenly, I realized that the people that I was friendly with kind of didn't communicate with me as they used to before. And before long, I realized that something happened. And I found out that my mother got hurt, because one of the people working in Camp C dropped a loaded artillery shell, and the shell exploded, and quite a number of people got injured, among them, my mother.

Because there was absolutely no medical care at all, although, her injuries today would have not been considered very serious, or she would have had a very good chance of survival, because of no medical care or attention, she was having a very hard time. And my father, in order to be as helpful, or do whatever he could for my mother, went to the extreme of having his gold teeth extracted so he can sell the gold and buy my mother the proper nourishment. All of that did no good, and eventually, my mother died.

And that location, again, was where?

That location was Skarzysko-Kamienne. I know my mother died in Skarzysko-Kamienne. I have-- I know she was buried in a mass grave. I really have no idea where or what or how, but I guess she's one of the six million Jews that vanished and that died during the war, and nobody will ever know where she is.

I am glad that I know as much as I know about it, because my father survived. And it's from him that I learned all the details about what my mother went through before she died. I don't remember precisely how long I have stayed in that camp.

I know that, eventually, the Russians started advancing, and the Germans really got worried about it. So they shipped all of us out, which was quite a number of people, to the eastern part of Poland. And I know it was like early fall, or late summer, to dig ditches in a form of a V. They were quite deep in order to prevent the Russian tanks from being able to come across.

We were living very primitively, and we had relatively very poor shelter for the climate. And I was lucky that it was late summer or early fall that were-- otherwise, it would have been horrible. We-- when they were happy having the kind of tank traps that we built, they moved us from there to Czestochowa, C-Z-E-S-T-O-C-H-O-W-A, which also-- they also had a munitions factory in Czestochowa, and they also had two camps.

And I ended up in one facility, and my father ended up at the second facility. By comparison to Skarzysko, Czestochowa wasn't that bad at all. I was active, and I was-- I joined a group that was rebuilding the engines for the German Tiger tanks. And--

Back from the eastern front that broke down or needed rebuilding. And I was assigned to a group of Germans that were in charge of testing the engines after they were being rebuilt. The system was that the whole engine was taken totally apart, and every part was measured.

And only the good parts were going to go into the engine, or replace the new parts. The rest of it was thrown out. Because I was working with a couple of German soldiers, they were kind of taking care of me. I got along with them very good, and they were bringing me sandwiches.

And I even enjoyed what I was doing. So as a result of that, I had absolutely no complaints about that period of time. And contrary to a lot of other people, I looked like a very well managed member of the camp.

My father happened to be in an adjoining camp, also in Czestochowa, working also in some kind of a munitions factory. And occasionally, he had a chance to come over to the camp where I was living, and we had a chance to see each other. He seemed to be dealing pretty good with the overall situation at that time.

Some time at the end of 1944 and beginning of 1945, the Russians were advancing from the east. And in January of 1945, they were getting pretty close to our area, and the Germans decided to evacuate us. And one day, they just made everybody walk out to the railroad spur and loaded us on the freight wagons, and we started moving west.

They emptied completely the camp in Czestochowa. While we were traveling through the night towards the west from Czestochowa, it was almost ironic that at one point, I realized that we were passing the town of Katowice where I was born. And of course, that brought up an awful lot of emotions that I went through that period.

We ended up in Buchenwald after a few days. And Buchenwald was a huge concentration camp that was in existence already, from what I understand, before the beginning of the Second World War. And there were rows and rows and rows of barracks, and we were marched into the camp and were allocated into a wooden structure of a barrack. And we lived on straw mattresses and two meals a day-- in the morning and in the evening.

And we realized that the war isn't going to last too long, so everybody's hope, obviously, was that the Germans will get conquered and we will be liberated.

What did you eat?

Well, we had the-- mostly we ate soup and 1/4 of a European type bread, the German type of military bread. However, fortunately during that period, either the Americans or the British were-- bombed Weimar, which is a city not too far from Buchenwald, and have done an awful lot of damage in the residential areas. So the Germans took us out to the town of Weimar, W-E-I-M-A-R, in order to help clean up the damage that was caused by the bombardment.

We were also-- we were going to Weimar by train and coming back to the camp by train. But being outside the camp gave us an opportunity to get some extra food that traditionally the Germans were storing in the cellars, like potatoes, and jams, and some things, maybe even a piece of bacon, which obviously helped everybody to get more nourishment than they were getting in the camp.

My father also ended up at Buchenwald in an adjoining barrack, which was separated from ours by a fence. And because I was getting enough food during the day while I was working in cleaning up the destruction, I was able to give him some of the food that was allocated to me in the evening when I came back from work, because not everybody was able to go to work in the city to try to clean it up. There were a lot of inmates of Buchenwald that did not have a chance to get extra food.

And I was aware that there are a lot of times the stronger inmates were trying to take away the food from the weaker ones. And it was like a death sentence, because the weaker ones could not defend themselves, or could not have enough food in order to survive. I definitely was a witness to the fact that every day there were a number of corpses that were taken out of the area of people that did not have enough strength, or who could not survive under those circumstances.

The Russians still kept advancing. And at one point, the Germans decided to evacuate all the Jews from Buchenwald. At that point, I decided that being a Jew will probably be more dangerous than not being a Jew.

As a result, I managed to take an armband that belonged to a Frenchman who happened to be in Buchenwald who was dead. And I took his armband and put it on my arm, and I got rid of my armband which designated me as a Jew. And I tried to blend in with the rest of the different nationalities that were left in Buchenwald after the Jews were evacuated.

Two days, or three days, after the Jews were evacuated from Buchenwald, the Germans decided to evacuate the whole camp again. They loaded us on freight cars, and they happened to be open freight cars. And on every freight car on top were sitting on each end a German soldier.

I'm stressing this particular point, because three or four days out of Buchenwald going towards the Czech border, we were attacked by British airplanes on a huge railroad spur. And the train contained like 4,000 or 5,000 people from the Buchenwald camp. And I understood later that apparently the British pilots, seeing those soldiers sitting on top of those freight cars, thought that that was a convoy of German soldiers and they strafed us with machine guns and small bombs that also disrupted the railroad system at that point.

A lot of the people that were in those trains got killed as a result of that incident. And after everything quieted down, we were forced to put the bodies of all the people that got killed into the last three or four railroad cars. And there was really just bodies piled one on top of another.

And the rest of it-- the rest of us got into the rest of the railroad cars and we continued on our trip towards another camp in Czechoslovakia, I'm sure. I don't remember the name of that camp, but it was on the German Bavarian border. And we were there for a few weeks, and then again, just before the end of the war, which was the beginning of-- the end of April, really, the Germans decided to march us out towards Dachau.

We marched during the night, and we rested during the day hidden in the woods so we will not be spotted by any airplanes. It was spring, and the rain was pouring, and it was very cold. And a lot of people could not keep up with it. And every so often, I heard shots in the back and the Germans were killing the people that could not keep up, or fell down and could not walk anymore.

I was determined that I'll do the best to survive. And I always as a result of that, tried to stay up front of the column. The column was a long column of the prisoners from the camp on the Czech border.

How old were you by--

At that time frame, I was 22 years old, and I could feel that the end of the war is near. I-- my father, who was in Buchenwald, and they had no choice, or didn't think of a better solution, was evacuated with the Jewish group a few days before myself, and the rest of the camp in Buchenwald was emptied out. On one of those nights on the march towards Buchenwald, we were supposed to rest during the day. But the Germans apparently knew that there was-- that they were being advanced on, so they got us out of the woods and put us on the road to march towards Dachau during the day, which was totally out of style for the last few days.

We were marching for about an hour and a half or two hours, and suddenly, I realized that there was some kind of a commotion in the back of the column. And I saw the column was kind of splitting and a tank appeared on the rise. And the tank had a star, white star on it.

In the beginning, I thought it must be the Russians, but then I realized it was an American tank, and then the second, third, and so on. The guards that were walking alongside on both sides of us started taking off for the woods. And the tanks were shooting at them, and you could see the tracer bullets trying to get them before they managed to disappear in the woods.

At that point, of course, everybody realized that this is the moment that we waited for years. And although there was not a spontaneous rejoicing, because everybody was really very weak. We were not fed during that march except getting a cup full of grain. Otherwise, there was no bread, and no drink except water.

So when that finally happened, the only thing I can recall now is that a lot of the Russians and people that were really in good physical form took off after the Germans, and immediately the revenge for all that suffering and all those years of misery came to the surface. The first and second tank was shooting at the Germans. The third tank was taking pictures of what was happening.

And then the rest of the tanks were throwing out army rations, K rations, or C rations, which were packages of food that were very well preserved and could last a long time. Obviously, everybody pounced on the rations that were being thrown out by the American crew of the tanks, because everybody was really starving at that point. And people were just sitting on the sides in the ditches, and most of them were totally exhausted-- a lot of them were crying.

And of course, if you had the appetite to eat at this stage of the game, you started opening up the package and started eating some of the food that was contained in those packages. It was like scrambled eggs, little cans of scrambled eggs, little cans of Spam, some crackers. And I remember there was a package of four cigarettes as part of that whole package.

I tried to light up one cigarette, and I almost fainted because I haven't smoked for a few years, and those cigarettes were very strong and they almost knocked me out. It was midday by the time everybody really realized that we are free, and we started looking around as to what to do with ourselves the first day of being free. We were not too far from a small village, so a number of guys, and myself, and a couple of other people that were kind of hanging on to me for survival during the last couple of weeks, we decided to occupy a German farmhouse.

And we-- the German disappeared. There was nobody in the house. It was a farmhouse with animals-- pigs, chickens, and stuff like that. So we organized ourselves and we decided that's what we're going to stay overnight, and decide what we're going to do after that.

The-- and a few of the Polish people that joined us used to be cooks in the camp. And they said, don't worry, tomorrow we are going to eat sausages. And they caught a pig, and all I know is the next day, we were having sausages from the pig that they managed to kill overnight.

And it seemed like we were going to have a feast. And one of the main things that I remember is that they put-- took a pan, a frying pan, threw in a piece of lard or fat from the pig into the frying pan, and when it got hot, they started putting eggs into it. And the eggs, of course, were boiling in that fat, and everybody thought it's wonderful, including myself.

And I-- of course, those eggs were really fat, because they were practically fried in fat. So I had-- I don't know how many I had, but I had a few of those eggs for breakfast. And as a result of that, I had the worst diarrhea in my life that lasted about five or six days because my stomach was not used to that kind of food at the time.

We stayed at the farm house for about five or six days and tried to recoup some of our strength. And it was very nice to have finally a roof over your head and be free to do whatever we wanted to do. But then the decision came as to where do we go from here? Because obviously, we're not going to stay at the farm house forever.

We started on a trek to a small town in Bavaria called Schwandorf, S-C-H-W-A-N-D-O-R-F. And in Schwandorf, because a lot of the Germans were either absent or ran away or whatever it was, we found also an empty house on the outskirts of that town. And we kind of organized ourselves and tried to shed our concentration camp closing by trying to find whatever we could find that would not identify us as a concentration camp inmates.

We basically tried to join the civilian life, and tried to normalize our life. During-- in that town, in Schwandorf, the military police established a headquarters. And because I studied English in high school in Poland, I kind of struck up a conversation with some of the MPs. And also a unit of the Counter Intelligence Corps had headquarters in that City of Schwandorf.

I eventually joined the CIC, because I spoke German, Polish and English. And they incorporated me into their group, gave me an army uniform, a PX card, and all kinds of identification that I was part of the group-- that I was part of that group.

The function of this unit was to try to find the Germans that were active in Poland during the war and were in charge of the concentration camps, or in charge of the forced labor camps, and particularly, the ones that were really abusing their power vis-a-- the prisoners, or the people in the concentration camps. Because a lot of the construction companies that were working in Poland originated in Bavaria, we ended up going to the offices of the different companies and found the names and addresses of the particular people that were really taking advantage of the power that they had during the war in terms of persecuting and killing some of the prisoners.

As a result of that activity, a number of them were found and were returned to Poland for trial. And I understood that quite a number of them were found guilty and were given the death sentence and executed in Poland during 1946 and '47. During my activity in Schwandorf, my father managed to realize that I was alive and I was in Schwandorf.

And at the same time, I also realized that he survived the war. We-- a lot of lists were published all over Germany of the names of the survivors, and this is how I found him and he found me on one of the lists. We were reunited about two months, or three months, after the end of the war. And needless to say, it was a very, very joyous occasion.

The only sad part of that whole period was that my mother did not survive the war. My sister which spent her time, which was in Israel during all of that period, obviously did not suffer as a result of the war, except she was mentally very distressed because she did not hear of her parents or her brother, being me, and she suffered terribly because of what she knew the people in Europe are suffering while she was living in Palestine during those years.

After working with the CIC for close to a year, I was employed by the United Nations Rehabilitation Organization, which was very active in Germany. And I moved to Regensburg, R-E-G-E-N-S-B-U-R-G. And part-- the unit that I was active at the United Nations Rehabilitation Organization was the part of the United Joint Appeal.

And I was very active in Jewish causes going from displaced persons camp to displaced persons camp. I worked originally with a fellow from the States by the name of Joe Levine, who lives now in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and is also very active getting all the facts during the war together. He's active in the Jewish Historical Society in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Eventually, towards the end of 1947, my father emigrated to Israel through an underground organization, and I followed, myself, at the end of 1948 to Israel. And I lived in Israel five years before I came to the States. As far as I know, before the war, there were about 40 members of our immediate family. That means uncles, aunts, cousins, and the only ones that I am aware that survived was Max Bolimowski, my uncle on my mother's side, and Febek Wiederman, whom I mentioned before, who was my father's brother-in-law.

To fill in some of the details, I belong to the HaNoar organization in Poland when I was a young kid. And that organization was active in all kinds of Zionist activities, including collections of money to buy land from the Arabs in Palestine at that time. There was also another organization called Betar to which I did not belong.

During my growing up in Katowice, and the time that I attended the cheyder. I spoke Polish, German, I took English in high school, and I also spoke Yiddish. And of course, I learned to read and write Hebrew.

You didn't mention much about your hobbies growing up. Why don't you--

My hobbies when I was growing up was a lot of different types of sports, including ice skating, skiing, bicycling, and one of the other activities was boxing, which I ended up with a broken nose.

You didn't mention-- you wanted to mention something about the UJA shipping packages.

After the war while I joined the United Jewish Appeal organization, and I was working with a representative from the United States, Joe Levine and Abe Cohen from Detroit, who took Joe Levine's place, eventually, we used to receive an enormous amount of packages from the Jews in America. The packages included all kinds of clothing, which was definitely needed because the people that were liberated from camps had absolutely nothing that belonged to them in terms of clothing or any other possessions.

The other thing that you wanted to make sure and fill in here was the whole connection of the musical talent in your family, where it began, and how it has--

That's right. The musical talent in my family originated with my mother, who was also a pianist. And because of her, my sister was attending the Conservatory learning the piano in Poland. And that's why she ended up in Israel to finish her studies in the Conservatory of Tel Aviv.

As a result of her background, her son now, whose name is Rami Bar-Niv. He's a famous pianist who travels around the world giving concerts in classical music. This is all that I have to say for now about my early life,

and the years during the war. Even though it sounds very cut and dry during narration, I must admit it is a very unnerving, emotional experience to recount those days in detail.

I hope this tape will be of good use to the Holocaust Museum. Thank you. Thank you.