

Today is April 8, 1992. I am Anthony DiIorio, and I'm in Flemington, New Jersey. I'm here on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington to interview Mr. Solomon Urbach about his experiences during the Holocaust. Good morning.

Good morning. I am facing a difficult task, because I have to organize my thoughts and go back into a difficult period bringing me back to prewar-- pre World War II, and the World War II experiences in different concentration camps. I'll do my best.

Where were you born?

I was born in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska in Poland on October 25, 1926.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

We were-- our family was four brothers, two sisters, father and mother. My oldest brother's name was Samuel. My-- next to him was [? Rivka. ?] Then I would be the next in line, Sol Urbach. After that there were [? Hannah, ?] the sister younger than I am, and my younger next brother was [? Haskill. ?] And the youngest brother was [? Shiman. ?]

What was it like growing up in Kalwaria?

The time of Kalwaria as a very young person, I don't remember, other than later on returning on visits. But I remember my youth when I spent some time in Romania, five years, where I was attending Talmud Torah and attending first grade, a public school. And then I remember traveling back with my family to Kraków, Poland where we grew up outside of Kraków, an area known as Borek Fałęcki.

And those were the years in Borek Fałęcki, I spent the years of 1933 to '39. And after 1939, when the Germans already marched in, we continued living in Borek Fałęcki, and even went on living in Borek Fałęcki past the time when the Germans ordered us to report to a ghetto in Kraków, which we managed to stay away from for one full year until the situation got very difficult where the Polish neighbors would tell us that they no longer would be able to keep quiet about us being outside of the ghetto, and we better leave the town and report to the ghetto.

So in 1942, in early 1942, we-- the whole family as a unit, that means father, mother, and six children, went on and reported to the ghetto, or smuggled ourselves into the ghetto because it was no longer-- we were no longer legally able to turn ourselves into the ghetto.

Now, you mentioned that your family moved to Romania when you were young. Was there any particular reason why?

It was because my mother's brother lived in Romania and was doing real well, was able to support his family better than my parents were able to do in Poland. So they have influenced my parents to move to Romania where things would be easy, or easier. Eventually, what happened, really, is that we spent there from 1928 to 1933 in Romania.

And the Romanian government has expelled us as a family. We were not welcome in Romania. The Polish citizen would-- not having a Romanian citizenship, they eventually got to us and expelled us. And I remember vividly where the Romanian authorities brought us to the border of Poland and Romania, and sent us across the border.

And across the border in Poland, the Polish authorities immediately threw us into jail as a family. And I remember vividly the jail on the Polish side where the family of eight of us-- six young children and parents-- were sitting in a jail cell with a high window above, like any criminal. And actually what happened is we return to Poland where we were supposedly citizens.

And it was only through the good graces of some Polish residents in the area on the Polish side that discovered that there was a Jewish family in jail that they were able to influence and release us from jail.

So your first experience in prison, you were only seven years old.

That's right.

And you were imprisoned by Poles after being expelled by Romanians.

Right.

So you lived briefly in Romania, and then of course, you lived in Poland. How would you describe the ways in which Jews were treated in each country? Was it worse, or better in one country versus the other?

I could not make a great comparison of Jews and their conditions of living in different countries. But in my own country in Poland, after returning from Romania, I remember that I had to walk-- I say-- when I say I, it was together with my other brothers or sisters who already went to school at that time, we went from Borek Fałęcki to-- we walked four kilometers daily to a school in the center of Kraków, which known as [POLISH], number 14 public school. And this was-- I did that for six years walking the four mile-- four kilometers daily to that school.

And the reason for that was while there was a school directly across from my home in Borek Fałęcki, this was a non-Jewish school, and I would have suffered greatly, because at that time, I didn't speak the language. And generally, there was an antisemitic feeling. So we couldn't attend that school so we walked four kilometers to a school in the middle of Kraków, which had a total student body-- a total Jewish student body. So this was--

So it was a Jewish school.

It was a Jewish-- non-Jewish teachers and it was a regular public school, but it was composed of only Jewish students, as far as I remember. The walking to that school had to be done rain--

Rain or shine.

--in good-- rain or shine, good weather, bad weather, winter, summer. And it also-- we would also have a encounter on a daily basis-- rock throwing at us by Polish Christian kids, who somehow knew that there were the Jewish kids walking. Or even if I was alone, they still would know it. And we had to go through at times a hail of rock throwers to get to our school. But we did that for six years, as far as I remember.

Well, were you the only one in your family that went to the school, or were your brothers and sisters--

No. One brother and one sister went to the same school with me. The others probably were too young to attend any school at that time.

And this would be Rivka and Samuel.

Right.

And you also attended one year of school in Romania?

I attended the first grade in Romania. After arriving in Poland, the Polish authorities-- school authorities have told us that I would have to repeat the first grade in Poland. So as a result of that, I repeated the first grade in Kraków, Poland.

Did you have similar experiences when you went to school in Romania, that is, rock throwing or were restrictions on Jewish--

I-- but the Romanian experience as far as being Jewish, I could not say much. I don't remember what happened there with the rock throwers or not. But chances are that there were not near as bad in Romania.

Otherwise, I would have been left with some memories of that time.

How would you describe your family's religious life?

We were an observant family, religiously speaking. My father was at times a Cantor conducting services for others. I would at times be his helper.

But we were obviously not religious enough for our grandfather to be comfortable in our home and approve of our grade of religious behavior.

Was this grandfather Urbach?

This was grandfather [? Boldinger. ?]

[? Boldinger. ?]

Right.

Did you live with your grandparents' in the same house?

At the earliest stage of our life, my mother came from Kalwaria and, therefore, we would live with-- we lived at that time with my grandfather in Kalwaria.

But after you moved to Romania, you no longer lived with them.

No. In Romania, we were not living with any other family member other than the eight of us. And the same when we came back to Poland.

What kind of home did you live in when you lived in Borek?

In Borek Fałęcki, we lived in a rundown-- home, actually, where the eight of us in the family of eight of us lived in two rooms. And we lived there for the duration of 1933 to 1942 under these living conditions with two rooms. My father was a tailor and hardly made a living.

And food was certainly greatly appreciated when it was there. Holidays were observed. We managed to go to public school, as well as the religious schools.

But we all appreciated food all the time. It was not plentiful at all.

So times were tough economically.

Economically, times were tough as far back as I remember. We never had it very good where we could move out into different living quarters. We had to stay there. This is-- this was our life up to 1942.

Did your father work for someone else?

No, he was a tailor and he worked for himself.

At home.

At home. But so the shop--

He had a shop in the house?

Right in the house. The shop consisted of a sewing machine and lots of threads and needles. And that was his shop.

Did your mother have time other than raising such a large family to also work?

No. My mother was not working outside of the home. She was totally preoccupied with the raising of the six children.

What languages did your family use at home?

When we returned from Romania, we all spoke Romanian. Those children that were already old enough to speak the language spoke Romanian. I spoke Romanian and did not speak a word of Polish.

When we came into Poland, the-- our language at home was Yiddish, but we also spoke Romanian. When we arrived in Poland, the school authorities advised us that the best thing would be if the language at home became Polish rather than Yiddish to help us get along a little faster and learn the language. And by doing that, one year later, I remember myself speaking Polish and almost totally forgetting the Romanian language.

Your parents, though, they mainly spoke in Yiddish?

My parents spoke Yiddish amongst themselves. And the whole family spoke Yiddish. Yiddish was the language.

Did your father also knew Polish.

My father, mother spoke Polish. But usually, the majority of times they were speaking Yiddish.

What about your father's customers, what kind of customers did he have?

The customers for the tailoring were coming from the Jewish community, from friends and neighbors.

What kind of schooling-- would you know what kind of schooling your parents had?

I have no recollection, no knowledge of what schooling my parents had.

Do you recall whether or not your father's business was affected in the 1930s by any laws that were being passed by the Polish government?

My memories bring me back to the 1933s-- '33, which coincides with the rise of Hitler and Germany, also at that time. This was not too much on my mind Hitler's rise to power. But the antisemitic situation just was getting stronger and stronger, and life was a little more difficult as the years went by up to the war and into the war.

And I remember vividly that my father, who had a groomed beard and had to get outside into the wall to see customers, or walk the streets, he would take with him a pair of scissors and carried them into-- in his pocket. And that was not meant to be there for his need in the trade, but it was in case of an attack by antisemites, he would have a way of defending himself. So that remains in my memory that he took the scissors and put them away carefully if he ever needed that.

So antisemitism is getting stronger.

Antisemitism was getting stronger and stronger every year since the 1933s, which was about the time we arrived from Romania to Poland.

Did your family, your parents mainly, did they ever talk about Hitler and the Nazis?

I have no memories of strong talk about the Nazis, about Hitler, in my childhood. Also, towards 1938, '39, I remember the great concern and reading papers. I did not read the papers, but the adults did, and listening to the radio, and where Poland was raving about its strong army and its ability to defend itself if attacked by

the Germans.

So you were aware that there was the danger of war.

There was a danger of war, and it was in the air as the years got closer to 1939. But I could not say that I had any great idea what it meant to me myself. The Polish authorities kept on hammering away that they are able to withstand any attacks that would come from Germany, and so there was no great concern, really.

Did your parents ever talk about or consider the possibility of emigrating, of leaving?

No, we had no conversations in our house that I would have remembered about emigrating to any place. Of course, if we were going to do that, when we were Romania, this was the time to go towards Palestine opposed to go on to Poland. But I don't know whether my parents had this option, whether they had the means to do these things. They simply returned from Romania to Poland.

Now, would you know why your parents chose to move to Borek after the return, after you got out of prison?

The-- yeah, the reason that we returned to Borek Fałęcki is because we could not afford any housing in the City of Kraków. And in fact, we needed assistance to be able to afford any housing in Borek Fałęcki.

But your parents had never lived there, so they-- the goal was to move to Kraków, or as close to Kraków as possible.

Yes. The goal was to somehow get to Kraków, and that's as close as we could get to is Borek Fałęcki, only because the economical means were not there.

Now, what were you doing on the day that the war began?

September 1, 1939, the war broke out. And as I recall it, it was in two or three days the Germans were in Kraków. And I remember going out with other children to greet the Germans, to get close to the tanks, and to the trucks, and shake hands.

And everybody was jovial and there was no fear, because as the war approached, the conversation at home was that the Germans are more civil people than the Poles, and actually, there wasn't much to fear. So from what I remember from my parents' conversation, we were just free to go and shake the hands of this more civil people, the Germans.

They would occasionally hand out some food to us in those early days. Confusion was rampant. My parents, along with other people, did not even know whether those soldiers that are now arriving in the first days, and now are stationed at the bridges, whether they were Germans, in fact, or whether they were English soldiers. We heard so much about the-- England coming in and protecting us, so that we-- on the day when they arrived and controlled the bridges and all this, we had to go out and take a look and find out whether those were Germans or English.

And we discovered they were Germans, which at that time made no difference to us because we expected maybe better things opposed to the catastrophe that was awaiting us.

So at first, they behaved decently.

In the very first days, the group of soldiers we ran into behaved decently and handed out food and talked to us and laughed, and we all laughed.

And there was no destruction, no combat.

No, no destruction other than the war was affecting us because now the total civil population didn't know-- did not know what to do with themselves, whether to remain home. The bombers were coming over Poland over our area. And we did not know because of total confusion in Polish authorities as to what is best to do is

to stay home or not to stay home, or go, where would you go, and all that.

So we actually as a family undertook to go towards the City of Kraków. What sense that made, I can't tell, and it probably didn't make any sense. But we walked towards the City of Kraków in the unit of eight members in our family, along with many, many thousands of other families.

And while walking towards the City of Kraków, we walked in the hail of bombs that were falling on the roads and streets. And we somehow managed to get to Kraków, eventually. And then only to discover that that was not a safer place, and then returned back to Borek Fałęcki.

How about school, did school open that year?

19-- the school was totally interrupted. There was no longer-- this was when the war broke out was probably vacation time, and the schools never accepted Jewish children after that. So my schooling was interrupted in 1939. The religious school was also closed, so essentially, there was no schooling at all from September of 1939.

So even your school, which was mostly entirely Jewish students, that was closed.

That was closed because there were Jewish students. So there was no schooling at all. It was all interrupted. Everything was in chaos. Jewish children did not have any schools to enter.

How long did the German behavior remain civil?

Very short. The civil behavior was disappearing as they settled down in the city and began to give orders on what Jews can and what Jews cannot do. And it was not much later than entering into 1940 already where there were certain sections of the city off limits to Jews, and we could not walk on certain streets. And later on, the orders came out, again, to-- that all Jews walking anyplace would have to wear armband.

And as the war went on in 1941, possibly, there were no Jews allowed to walk anyplace unless they had business and they would be identified by some armband that would tell whether they work in an industry that is important. I remember that my older brother wore a armband with an R. And I can't even remember where he worked, but evidently, he did work in some important industry.

In Kraków.

In Kraków.

And this would have been when, after the ghetto?

No, this was before the ghetto opened. This was in 1940 and '41. My father was limited in his ability to walk the streets from the earlier days because of his beard, and his appearance, and the neighbor's knowledge that he was Jewish. So he was sort of limited.

My mother undertook the duties of providing for the family as soon as the war broke out by appearing Christian. She was able to still travel on trains and to go into villages and return home with some provisions of eggs, and flour, and other things that would be necessary to survive. The children were also expected from the first day on, each child that was already grown up, maybe 12 to 13, to get into lines and stand on lines, potentially a full night and into the day, and see if they could buy a bread or other provisions that we needed-- coal, kerosene.

So each child would have the duty of getting on line. And I remember myself standing on many occasions in cold nights, winter nights, in lines waiting for bread. And when finally the bakery opened and I got to the head of the line, the bread ran out and I returned home without anything.

Was your brother Samuel the only one who worked in the factory during these--

As far as I remember, he has the-- he had the only armband with an R on it. The rest of us were unemployed. Whether my father still was able to do tailoring, I think, at home and got some pay for that. But life was approaching the unbearable.

Were Germans present in Borek during these years?

In Borek Fałęcki, which was about four kilometers outside of the city, there were Germans but not in large groups. They were in the city offices and managing the affairs of everything. But they were not in great masses there as soldiers.

So it was relatively safer to live in Borek?

It was relatively safer there, and that's what led us to believe that when the order finally came for us to report to the ghetto, that we could survive somehow and maybe wait out the war by living in Borek Fałęcki without reporting to the ghetto, always hoping that the war will be over any day.

Do you remember when this order to report into the ghetto?

The order to report to the ghetto would have been in 1941, middle of 1941. And we did not report till the-- close to the middle of 1942.

So you ignored civil disobedience in the Urbach family.

Yeah, we certainly were. In fact, when the-- my family finally made the decision to enter the ghetto, smuggle ourselves in, a decision was also made that I could potentially stay away and not report to the ghetto, which I did temporarily. And a Polish employer of mine at that time where I began to work as a cabinet maker, because I had lots of idle time, I began to observe a cabinet maker's shop. And I was there often enough to begin to learn the trade, and I was finally employed by this Pole by the name of Kaminsky.

Was this in Borek?

In Borek Fałęcki that led me to an employment with him. And so when my family decided to enter together, he promised that he could help me stay out of the ghetto, and he allowed me to stay over in his shop and sleep in his shop. I can't say whether I asked for it, or he volunteered at this point.

But I did stay over for a number of nights and days, continuing work in this furniture-making shop and staying into the night and sleeping at night. But the situation got to be unbearable. I was dying of fear at night sleeping in this shop of wood and tools, and all alone in a large shop, being the youngster I was. I was simply dying of fear.

I saw shadows walking around. I saw people knocking. I heard people knocking on the doors, which was all not true but the fear was so great that I couldn't survive there, and eventually, joined my family in the ghetto.

So you did not go with the entire family when they went to the ghetto.

That's right.

You joined them after a few days.

Few days, yeah.

What were your brothers and sisters doing in Borek before they went to the ghetto with your parents, besides getting on lines and trying to get food and stuff like that?

The only one that was employed would have been my oldest brother, Samuel. All the other children simply tried to help out at home and do whatever they could in order to bring in some food to the house, bring in

some coal, bring in some kerosene. I remember getting to the railroad station.

And how that was done is unbelievable to me at this point. But we somehow managed with some neighbors, potentially, to get on railroad cars which were transporting coal from Poland to someplace all during the German occupation already. We somehow managed to get on these coal trains and throw off enough coal, and gather it up into burlap bags and bring it home so we would have some fuel. As odd as it sounds, that's how it was.

Do you remember what prompted your parents to go to the ghetto at that particular time?

The situation to-- that made my family rethink their status outside of the ghetto came from neighbors and whom we had known for years before the war that said that the situation is getting real bad, that they no longer could keep quiet and not report us because this was already a crime on their part not to report any Jews live outside of the ghetto. So they advised us, some of those that were friendlier with our family, advised us to somehow get out of there before things get real bad.

So it's fear of your neighbors who themselves were afraid of the Germans.

That's correct. There was not any direct order or roundup by the Germans that made us go to the ghetto. It was fear and the stories that were told to us by the Polish neighbors.

Whereas, the initial order a year before to go to the ghetto, that was from the Germans.

The initial order to report to the ghetto was from the Germans, and that would have been pasted-- notices were pasted on kiosks and some walls. And this was an official report that we simply take what we can carry with us and report to the ghetto. If we did that at that time, we would have had to begin our march much earlier than we eventually did by hiding out.

Were there other Jewish families that ignored the order in 1941?

I am not aware of anyone that-- any other Jewish families in my area. Also, it could very well have been, but I don't remember that.

What do you remember taking with you when you went to the Kraków ghetto?

When we finally reported to the Kraków ghetto, what we were able to gather at home-- and I can't say that we had very much at home, so we did not have much to carry with us. We were not burdened by any extra large amounts of clothing, or valuables, and we simply had just a small bundle of things that we took with us.

And of course, the family had no idea where they would be staying when they went to Kraków. Did you have a particular address in mind?

When we went already, we went to-- we went to the ghetto when we finally reported to ghetto, then we became subject to what the authorities, and that would potentially be the Jewish authorities inside the ghetto would assign to us as our living quarters in the ghetto.

Do you remember how your father managed after smuggling the family into the ghetto, how he managed to explain to them that he needed accommodations after all they-- he had to pretend that he had been there all along, right?

Well, I don't know whether he had to pretend that, whether he did not fall into a category of other people returning to the ghetto a later date. There is a good chance that there were other similar situations. But the problem that we experienced at that time is that we would simply be at the end of the line and the end of the-- in receiving housing. And a room in a basement was assigned to us for all eight of us.

What was it like living in the ghetto?

In the ghetto was a total idleness on the part of all the family members, other than on different days, or different members of my family, along with others, would be rounded up for-- by the Germans. The Germans would come into the ghetto and round up people and take them away for a daily work outside of the ghetto. And this would have been to clean streets, to unload coal under German supervision, to do any kind of jobs that suited the Germans, and then returning to the ghetto.

On many of those occasions, some of those people that were rounded up and taken out to work, people did not return. And this was simply instilling greater fear in us that one of our family members might also be subject to the same thing. But my family members did manage to return whenever they worked outside of the ghetto.

They came back to the ghetto. On one of those roundups that I was speaking about, I was outside of my building when a-- two small trucks with Germans arrived in front of our building almost and simply grabbed anyone they could lay their hands on, and pushed them into the two trucks. And this would have been in the-- towards the end of 1942.

And they delivered us to what I later on found out to be the Schindler factory, which was an enamel works factory making pots and pans. And they simply delivered us to that camp. I remember Oskar Schindler being there when the Germans delivered us to his yard adjoining the factory, and there we were lined up for Schindler's inspection.

Schindler looked us over-- and we were there in a group of potentially 100 people-- and took two of us out of the line. That was myself, and I remember another friend of mine by the name of [? Goathurst, ?] who was pulled out of those 100, and Schindler said to the Germans that he does not need any children. I still remember it in German, ich brauch kein kinder.

And the Germans in those days did not know much about Oskar Schindler, and he wasn't very important at that time to them, because I remember them snapping back to Schindler, you will keep what we delivered. And at that, they parted and we became employees of the Oskar Schindler industrial complex, which was at that time making only pots and pans and peddling those to the Polish citizenry.

And this was when? When did you--

In 19-- end of 1942.

Now, you mentioned that the Germans would round up people to work on the streets. Did any of your brothers and sisters get--

Yeah. My father, my older sister and brother all wound up working on occasion and on different duties outside of the ghetto. And then returned to the ghetto at the end of the day. Similarly, when I was rounded up and delivered to Oskar Schindler's factory outside of Kraków for the next few months, we were simply marched out daily.

The group of 100 was marched out daily under the supervision of SS guards, fixed bayonets. We were marched out of the ghetto in Kraków and walked towards the factory which was operated by Oskar Schindler. I don't know exactly the distance, but it seemed like a half hour to one hour walk from the ghetto.

And this was done daily. We were delivered there. In the evening, we reported back. And they were-- also then, later on, we also broke up into shifts where some of us worked nights, and some of us worked days. I happened to wind up on a shift working at night at Oskar Schindler's.

So you would sleep in the ghetto during the day?

I would try to sleep during the day, which was next to impossible because we were in such living quarters that the noise level and the activity simply did not permit. And this was one room. And what really was happening on many occasions that I was so tired and exhausted, that I remember myself falling asleep while standing and working on a press in the factory of Oskar Schindler, or falling asleep trying to feed the pots

and pans into the ovens out of total exhaustion, a lack of sleep.

What did you get in return for your work?

There was no pay involved. We were fed there at Oskar Schindler's. There was no pay involved.

What kind of food did they give you?

There was a-- as far as I remember, there was a soup during the day, and all the other food we would receive in the ghetto when we returned home.

Would they give you a ration card?

There was some method of rationing, also. I don't remember exactly how the food was received in the ghetto, but there was some food received by way of a ration card.

How did the rest of your family get food?

They lived on what was available in the ghetto. There was no other source. There was no ability. The two older members and my father were possibly receiving some food outside of the ghetto.

And there was-- in the earlier days, there were still some trading inside of the ghetto where you could do some work and receive food in return. And so we managed to eat and survive in the ghetto for the next few months.

How long did this go on?

This existence in the ghetto, to me, it appeared like a giant waiting room. I just-- everybody was waiting for something to happen. We didn't know exactly what was supposed to be happening, but we always hoped that maybe the war will end and everything will turn out all right.

But in March, potentially, March 10 or 11 while working at Oskar Schindler's night shift, I was-- I, along with the rest of my group, were ordered to stay at the factory of Oskar Schindler and not to return to the ghetto. Because Schindler has-- had discovered that there was an action going on at the ghetto-- as the Germans would call it, an aktion-- whereby there was-- Oskar Schindler who brought this information back to us in the factory, but he did not permit--

Now, this was March 1943.

March 1943, the 10, 11, 12, we stayed over at the factory, Oskar Schindler's factory, being fully aware of it that the ghetto is being liquidated. And I personally being fully aware of it that my whole family is in the ghetto, and not knowing what is happening to them. The Kraków ghetto was stilled totally.

And after the three nights were over in-- where we stayed over at the Oskar Schindler factory, we were marched back into-- no longer to the ghetto, but we were marched into a concentration camp outside of Kraków, known as Kraków-Plaszow, a full-fledged concentration camp with barbed wires, watchtowers, lots of busy SS people all over the place-- totally fearsome place.

I came into this camp as a youngster, not knowing at all where the rest of my family is, and being assigned to a barrack with lots of people sleeping one next to the other on three rows high of berth or with some straw on it. During the next few days, the-- I was assigned to work in a stone quarry and worked there full days, received some soup during the day. At the same time while I was in that concentration camp, my beginning in the concentration camp, trucks were still arriving from what was then rumored in the camp as those that were killed in the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto.

Trucks were arriving with bodies into our concentration camp into prepared open pits. The dump trucks were dumping the bodies and returning for more loads to clean up the ghetto. It did enter my mind that possibly

my family-- brothers, sisters, parents-- were among those that were buried in that camp.

But it was also rumored that some people survived by being shipped to other camps. I was not fully aware of what could have possibly happened to my family. One of the-- or word got to me from one person that arrived back from the ghetto into the concentration camp is that he saw my brother trying to run from a line that he was in to join his family and he was shot on the spot in the Kraków ghetto liquidation.

But other than this word and whether this could have been relied totally upon, I don't know. But that was the only word that I got from someone that supposedly saw my brother being shot and died right there. The rest of the family I had no knowledge at all.

Which brother would this have been?

Samuel was the one that would have been shot by trying to join the rest of his family. I remained in the Plaszow concentration camp for a number of weeks observing hangings standing on the appelplatz. During inspection time, which I recall as being every day, during which time Goeth and the sum of his cohorts were marching through the potentially 30,000 people standing outdoors for inspection.

And you could actually hear a pin drop because no one-- no one dared breathe at that time when this inspection was going on. It was total silence, total fear. Everybody standing and numb, totally numb, not being able to speak to one another. Because while we were standing on the appelplatz, we were fully aware of the fact that Amon Goeth, who was the head of the concentration camp, the SS, the head of the concentration camp, was marching through those lines with his cohorts.

And for no apparent reason would shoot certain people and they would fall as he walked by. And at other times, there were lynchings going on while we all stood there and observed. And all this was done to instill more fear into us, and that was certainly accomplished. We simply lived in daily fear.

Did you still wear the clothes that you had with you when you first go on the Schindler or were you given prison garb?

Upon arrival at the Kraków Plaszow Camp, we did not receive any prison-- any prison garb, any clothing. I don't recall wearing any unusual clothing at that camp, because as it turned out to be, I was not a long-term inmate of this concentration camp. And after a few weeks, stayed there and working at the stone quarry, the group of people that was once employed by Oskar Schindler was eventually marched out daily, again, from this concentration camp, and we will return to work at Oscar Schindler's factory, or the enamel factory.

So we would march out daily. Then, again, on the-- upon the return, we would rejoin our people standing on the appelplatz, be subject to nightly attacks by Germans into our barracks to take out some people for some unusual work. But basically, the work at the outside of the concentration camp at the factory was working on presses, steel presses, that is, to punch out the pots and pans.

Eventually, I was shifted into some cabinet work, woodworking shop. Because of my previous experience of working in a furniture shop just led me into some woodworking position in the Oskar Schindler factory. Eventually, I began to be in charge of providing all the blackout shades for the offices of Oskar Schindler.

And was in those duties I entered Oskar Schindler's office on many occasion with the purpose of seeing that the blackout shades were in proper order, working order, or replacing them. I would get to know Schindler fairly well, and on occasion, he would even speak to me and expressed some hope that this will maybe end one day. On those trips, I would also observe-- those trips to the offices of Oskar Schindler, I would also observe that one of our inmates, a fellow by the name Bankier would be sitting in an office adjoining Oskar Schindler.

Bankier was the former owner of this factory. And someplace along the line, Oskar Schindler discovered that he could not conduct business with the Polish population. And the only way to be able to sell the pots and pans, which we were still manufacturing great numbers, was to have this Bankier sit in back of his office and conduct business with the Polish population. And this is how the wares were sold.

So this is the former owner of the factory now being asked to help the new owner of the factory make a profit.

That's right. The former owner of the factory, the Jewish owner of the factory, was brought back to-- he was one of the earlier members that was brought back to work there because Oskar Schindler recognized that he needed him to run the business. There was potentially another owner in that with Bankier whose first name I don't remember anymore. But I don't remember the other people involved. I only remember Bankier.

Would you know when Bankier lost his factory? When did this begin?

With the-- as soon as the Germans got settled in Kraków, they took away this factory from all Jewish proprietors. They took his factory away from him. And as far as I know, they took this factory and gave it to Oskar Schindler as a gift to him for his previous contributions to the Nazi party, or to the Nazi effort.

And Oskar Schindler got this gift but didn't know exactly what to do with it. But to bring back the former owner, or owners, to help him run this factory and help him sell the wares that he was producing.

What was Mr. Schindler like?

Oskar Schindler was a very impressive young man-- tall, handsome. In the earlier days, I remember Oskar Schindler actually still doing some work. I remember observing him one time where he was doing some wood work on a machine.

But in later days, he became an industrialist and would travel in company of very important people from Berlin, bringing in people from Berlin, to show them what he is doing here and what the future plans are in developing this seemingly unimportant complex into a factory that would produce materials for the war effort. And so many times, there were very important engineers with very important high-ranking officers arriving, and he would take them through inspections showing them what can be done in this place. And eventually, it was materialized, whereby, he received monies from someplace to develop this factory.

He built a big office building, and eventually, plans were developed to build a giant hanger like building or a big factory building in which rumors were that there were some parts of bullets, the-- what you call-- the--

The casings?

--the casings to the bullets of different types would be pressed out there and this would be his contribution, again, to the war effort. This work at the factory continued for how long. I could no longer be sure of. But we were marched out daily, as I said before, from the concentration camp.

And on those daily marches from the concentration camps, most of the times we were ordered by the SS guards in the concentration camp to pick up a rock near our barracks and carry it until we got to the gate. Then upon return from work, we would take the same rocks and bring them back from the gate of the concentration camp to a pile near the barracks. This was simply to load us up and make us feel like inmates, rather than free people.

But we did not carry any rocks. We were simply guarded by SS people on the march from the gate to the factory. This went on for a long time, potentially into the end of 1943.

This type of work and daily marching out was going on until one day in the end of 1943, or maybe beginning of 1944 already, an English spy plane-- I have to back off here. I skipped a part. And that is the part where at one point in time, the-- Schindler was given permission to build his own concentration camp.

He somehow received permission from Berlin to build his own concentration camp on the grounds of the factory. And towards the end of 1943, he actually established barracks-- built barracks, and also was told that he can no longer employ 100 people. So the concentration camps that would be permitted on his grounds would have to have a minimum of 1,000 people.

And that connection, as I mentioned before, is the grandiose plans to build this armament-- armament producing factory was already on the drawing boards and some buildings began to be constructed. Eventually, Oskar Schindler pulled off the shipment of 1,000 inmates, including ourselves, the original 100 people in the group, and we were housed now in a concentration camp adjoining the enamel factory ran and operated by Oskar Schindler.

These camps as I-- these barracks, as I remember, were two rows, potentially six barracks, on a very small site where our housing accommodations and life became much more bearable. Oskar Schindler would be amongst us. In fact, I recall when these barracks were being built, the barbed wire going around the camp.

Watchtower is constructed. I remember one conversation with a group of inmates and Oskar Schindler, in which Oskar Schindler described to us the need for the barbed wires and the watchtowers, because it was going to be so good in this camp that some people from the outside would try to come into this camp. Nevertheless, the watchtowers went up and barbed wires because he obviously had to meet specifications to be-- to operate, or to have the privilege of having the 1,000 slave laborers working for this effort that he was going to put on for the Third Reich.

We were housed there and worked there. So it was no big deal walking out of the concentration camp through a gate, and walking into the factory which was totally adjoining. Worked as many hours as the factory operators needed, and then returned back to our concentration camp, which was a bearable place, really, because there was no one dying there anymore. Nobody was being killed in that concentration camp.

I recall many ordinary illnesses afflicting people, potentially dying, but not because of any hangings or lynchings, or abused by the Germans. The Oskar Schindler influence was all over the lot, and the SS guards watching us could not abuse us as much as they did in the Kraków Plaszow camp, or in the ghetto.

How were the 1,000 selected, the 1,000 inmates?

I have absolutely no knowledge on how they were selected. But they came into different transports. At the time, they were still outlying small ghettos, like Skarzysko and Wieliczka. Small ghettos of people where the ghettos were liquidated, some of those shipments from the people surviving those liquidations came into our camp, and potentially, some of them came from the Kraków Plaszow concentration camp.

I could not recall it, for sure. Also, I had some friends that arrived from other camps and from other ghettos. But the total count of people where they came from, I would not be aware of.

You're still wearing the same clothes that you had on?

I still recall wearing the same clothes. Also, sometimes during the time when we were inmates at the concentration camp in the-- now known as [INAUDIBLE] and Emalia, somehow two factories combining and using the people of the 1,000 inmates as their workers. Sometimes during that time, our clothes was changed into stripes-- striped outfits so that we could not escape.

During any of this time from when you first began working for Oskar Schindler, were you still required to wear the yellow star? Remember when-- I think you were back in the ghetto, you had to wear an armband of some sort.

No. During this stay in Oskar Schindler's concentration camp and factory, we were not wearing any armbands. That was a time when the clothes was changed into stripes, and we're wearing inmates outfits with caps. Sometimes during the time when this concentration camp came into being under Oskar Schindler influence, and the SS guards guarding us, there was a time that we underwent-- all of the inmates underwent a tattooing process, whereby the tattoo of a large KL was tattooed on our, if I recall, left wrist.

The K stood for concentration. The L for Lager, concentrations Lager. So this was done so that we could no longer escape the-- we had the-- it was a rather large letters, maybe one inch or larger letters tattooed on the wrist.

I received the same as everybody else. But I also traveled in a circle of friends who still had some hopes of escaping, and we talked a great deal about it. We could never do anything about it, but we always talked about the possibility.

And in that connection, somebody informed me, at least, that if I sucked out the tattooing right after it was done when it was still fresh, it would disappear and, thereby, I would still have a chance of escaping. And being a young person, naively hoping that this could happen, one day I did it. And surprisingly enough, this came out and I never had a tattoo. And to this day, I don't have a tattoo.

And yet the friends with whom I survived together in this camp eventually have this large KL on their wrist. I don't have it. But I know I received it and I sucked it out and it worked so well that there is no sign left of the KL on my wrist.

Of course, escape never came. Escape never was possible. And somehow, I managed to get by without ever having to prove that I belonged there without the KL.

Did Schindler know you by then?

Schindler would know me a little better than he knew a lot of other inmates, other than maybe Bankier and some of the other officials. He knew me by sight because of the exposure that I had to him in that work in his offices with the blackout shades. And also worked many nights there in a building when the construction was going on, and it was going on during the winter.

And I recall my responsibilities also as feeding the big drums with some wood so that there was heat provided from those burning drums. So I had to keep the fire going so the place-- they would be able to work, lay bricks, and all that during the day.

Did he remember you as the Jewish boy that he said was too young to work there?

We never-- we never talked about that. I never brought this up to him again. I was kind of happy to be there.

I already began to recognize that this is a better place than someplace else. So I wasn't going to bring up the fact that he didn't want me as a child in his factory. But I somehow left an impression on him, because when I met him after the war, he greeted me warmly as if he knew me forever. So somehow, he did know me as one of the earlier inmates in his camp.

And how long did you work there?

This-- this existence of the 1,000 inmates in that camp adjoining the enamel works factory-- [INAUDIBLE]-- continued up to a time of very late 1943, or 1944, early 1944, when a English spy plane traveling over Kraków was shot down. And of all the places in the City of Kraków, it landed in our small concentration camp, which I would at this point size up as maybe a one acre site with six buildings housing the 1,000 inmates. It landed in our concentration camp right on top of a building, miraculously.

This happened as far as I remember during the night, and those barracks were vacant. Those barracks were vacant so there was no one of the inmates killed. I lived in the upper barrack, which was a little removed from the site of that plane crash, or plane that was brought down.

But this brought on a new situation, because in that plane that came down on our camp, I of course, witnessed either one or two bodies that were burned in that plane, and the ammunition was popping for a long time out of the plane. And when you finally got a chance to see it, we saw either one body that was totally burned down. The only thing was left is his upper torso.

Either one or two of the Englishmen in it strapped down and still the rest of the body being burned. But the fire that resulted from that crash burned out of the six buildings that were potentially there, there were only two left. So Schindler was ordered to return to the Kraków-Plaszow concentration camp 700 of these

inmates, and only 300 would remain.

Of course, all these numbers I did not know at that time when this was going on. But this was from stories and talking to different inmates later on. The 700 people that were supposed to be returned to Kraków-Plaszow were arrived at a segregation-- or selection that the Germans conducted on the site.

Oskar Schindler was there, but the actual selection of people, unless he has instructed them different or made different requests, which I was unaware of, the selection was done by the Germans. And during the selection time, I somehow sensed-- and I can't say that I knew anything else-- but I somehow sensed that I am in a group of people that would be returned to Kraków-Plaszow. And somehow, my sense also was telling me this was the wrong place to go.

And to this day, I don't know what made me think that I had-- did not have any previous knowledge. But somehow something was telling me that I'm in the wrong place and I had to do something. And my immediate reaction was to step out of my line with the group of people I was with, step forward, run towards Oskar Schindler, which was at this point close to me.

And what you got to remember, the SS guards were very strict, very business like with dogs doing the selection. I somehow was without any fear stepping out forward, stepping up to Schindler practically shouting to Schindler, Herr Schindler, kein tischler ist geblieben. What put these words into my mouth, why this was going to be so important to Oskar Schindler, I have absolutely no idea. I was just a youngster and doing what seemed to me like very unimportant work.

But nevertheless, I did that and Oskar Schindler, lo and behold, instructed the SS guards to place me in the other group. And that's how I remained with the 300 people in the camp that was now 2/3 burned down, 2/3 of the people down to Kraków-Plaszow, I remained with the people in the Emalia work concentration camp and continued work at the factory.

This probably would have been better placed in the early 1944.

Still winter time?

Still winter time. Also, the weather, I recall, as being mild when the plane crashed. I remember that as being mild. So whether this was later into the springtime or early in the fall, I could not be 100% sure of. But I would rather place it into the earlier spring of 1944.

This arrangement with the 300 people only limping along, working, shortage of materials for producing the pots and pans. The buildings, which were undertaken for the larger complex, which was going to produce armaments, or some parts of armaments, was no longer being completed. Things began to come to a standstill, just marking time.

Of course, at the time, we did not know what was happening. But pretty-- after a few months, by October or September of 1944, September 1944, Schindler was ordered to liquidate this concentration camp and ship us all back to the Kraków-Plaszow concentration camps. So once again, I along with the 300 people, were delivered to the Kraków-Plaszow camp. And the factory, in fact, was closed.

And we remained for a while in this-- of the Kraków-Plaszow concentration camp. This was an extremely busy place. Now, when we arrived there, cattle cars were being loaded daily. Simultaneously, the appelplatz was still active like before.

We were there daily. Hangings were at a much brisker pace now. And during those hangings, we all had to-- the inmates that were at the concentration camp had to stand and watch the hangings in progress.

Some of my friends were hung at that time, and I witnessed-- observed the hanging at that time. [? Hilevich, ?] which was the Jewish leader of the concentration camp, or the assistance of the German, was also hung at that time when I was there in that concentration camp.

Why were they hanged?

Only rumors what we could rely on why people were hung. In the case of a friend of mine that went to the same cheder, or religious school that I went to before the war, rumor was that he tried to escape. But these were all rumors. Don't imagine how anyone could escape from this concentration camp.

This was all surrounded by electrified barbed wires with watchtowers. We were at that time underfed, undernourished, just is unimaginable. But nevertheless, that was the rumor that he was trying to escape.

In Hilevich's case, the story was that he was a helper to Amon Goeth, and Amon Goeth had a long history of destroying those people that were too close to him. And so he was one of the victims that was too close to him. And he was hung.

But there were many other people hung. Many other people that were brought in from the outside of the concentration camp were brought in because they found them hiding out, or otherwise at the same time while hangings were going on, there were also shootings going on. An Ukrainian guard serving the Germans at that time was doing-- contributing his killing by shooting people and torturing people inside the camp.

There was a place where this fellow by the name [PERSONAL NAME], a Ukrainian would-- and his cohorts would shoot people on that particular hill. And this was the existence in that camp for the next few weeks until October of 1944. And in one of those transports that were going out of the camp, because this camp was being liquidated because of the advancing Russian army, as we would only hear from rumors.

We were too close to the Russian front, and the concentration camp of Kraków-Plaszow had to be liquidated. Transports and killings were going on, as I said. One of those transports, I was loaded into cattle cars, together with other inmates, which I had no idea who the others were.

Somehow, we had an idea that maybe Oskar Schindler is still alive someplace and will be building some concentration camp and maybe that's where we would be going. That's what some of us in my group at least thought. But we were thrown into these cattle cars.

The SS guards pushing us, kicking us, into these cars. The-- our railroad car, or the rail-- the transport we were on, would travel a few days and food was very meager. There was no way of getting any food from the outside.

I don't recall the railroad cars being opened at any time, although, I recall them being stopped and pushed into different sidings on that trip. But we could only surmise that some important transport of Germans was going through and needed the main lines, so we were pushed off the track. But I really don't remember the railroad car being opened until we arrived in Gross-Rosen.

Gross-Rosen was a concentration camp, quite a gruesome concentration camp. We arrived there in October, cold. We were received by the SS guards there by-- I don't recall-- standing on the appelpplatz again counting and inspections going on.

I remember a latrine that was big enough for possibly a hundred people, the open air latrines. And we stood there for what seemed a very long time. And I believe we were eventually ordered to strip totally, and in the nude, March to a Entlausung showering facility, cleaning facility.

The guards would kick. If I recall correctly, these were Ukrainians that were on the inside of the concentration camp. Ukrainian guards in black uniforms would kick inmates. And their habit was to kick inmates until they curled up on the ground, were either too ill to respond.

I don't know how many people died under these kicking outbursts, but I know that they injured many people in the process. When we arrived at the showering process and lousing, as they would call it, we were going-- we went through a room whereby our heads were-- we were given a crew cut. And the Germans, or the Ukrainian guards at that time, would spit on our heads to give them the ability to shave a stripe from front to back.

So it would wind up like a one to two inch stripe running through an otherwise crew cut, there would be a shaved strip so that we couldn't-- I suppose this was done so that we would not be able to escape. So in the Gross-Rosen camp, we received this crew cut and a shaved strip through the middle running from front to back of the head.

The situation inside the Gross-Rosen camp, as I described before, whenever there was a chance for the Ukrainian guards to kick anyone, they enjoy that. I don't recall any killings or hangings inside that camp. The whole group that I arrived with was in a barrack that potentially could have held a couple of hundred people.

The-- it seemed like all the 700 of us were held in this one barrack. One other thing I recall is in front of the-- or at the entry of the barrack, there was a meticulous room with the-- where the SS guards, or the Ukrainian guards, would be standing by watching us and the rest of the room. And everything in that entry room was meticulous with pots and cooking ware and all this. It just looked like a little showplace until you got to the rest of the barrack where we were housed.

And there was not enough place for people to be housed, all those 700. And the only way we could be in that room would be by sitting on the floor and sitting in one another's lap. The clothes we received now at that Entlausung was simply one shirt.

And somehow I don't recall any other clothing that we received. We simply received one shirt. And we were walking around in that one shirt sitting in one another's lap in that Gross-Rosen barrack.

This lasted a few days, possibly a week. The only food I remember being given in that Gross-Rosen camp. Number one, some of us were woken up at some hour like 4:00 in the morning. This was winter approaching, so it seemed like a deep--