

And marker one.

First of all, could you tell me when and where you were born?

I was born April the 25th, 1929 in Kovno, Lithuania.

And can you tell me a little bit about your childhood before the war began?

It was rather normal. I went to school. I went to what we had-- called a public school, but it was a Jewish public school as opposed to the general public school.

My parents were middle-class people, and my father had a small business. And so did my mom. And I had one sister, and we lived in a rather middle-class neighborhood in an apartment. And I had a dog. That's about all I can say.

My interests at a time when I was a child, especially in the ages between maybe 7 and 10, was to swim in the summer in a river, skate in the winter, and play soccer and ping pong. And this was what I liked to do as a child. And in addition to that, I was an avid reader, and I would read many books during a year.

Describe to me what you recollect yourself of when things changed and the war began? Well, there were actually two changes. The first change was when the Soviet Union, the Red Army, occupied Lithuania, and that change I did not feel. My parents did because they lost their businesses due to confiscation of private property, but I myself did not feel any lesser life.

On the contrary, there was more for children in the Soviet system during different palaces, and groups, and sports clubs, as well as-- schools were upgraded to some extent, so personally, I felt very little. However, a year later, when Hitler's forces attacked, the Soviets, of course, retreated very quickly, and within two days, the German armies had occupied Kovno. And of course, and that's where it began.

My first notice of that was that we lived in a building right next to the river, on the river side, and the airport was about maybe 2 or 3 kilometers on the other side of the river. And I was evoked by explosions. When I looked out the window, I saw wide columns of smoke rising from the airport.

My parents immediately realized there was war, and we turned on the radio. We realized that the Germans had attacked and that they were marching towards our city. As I said, two days later, they occupied Kovno, and the first order of their business was to issue edicts against the Jews and started to tell us what we can and cannot do. The orders came one after the other very quickly.

We had to give up our radios and our vehicles, those who had them, even bicycles and motorcycles. We were not allowed to have any transportation or any communication equipment. All we had, of course, was radios at the time. Also, we had to give up cameras.

Personally, I was still only 12 years old at the time, and of course I was extremely scared of what is about to come, not that I understood all that much but what I heard grown-ups talk. And this fear was constantly with me, and I could always feel some kind of energy going through my body, which I could only describe as my stomach shaking and so on every time I saw a German soldier.

The other thing that I was-- what completely amazed me at that time was the behavior of the general Lithuanian population towards the Jews. It wasn't just that the Germans had-- did to us with their edicts, and laws, and rules, and regulations but rather that the general population, the Lithuanians, picked up arms, first against the Soviet soldiers as they were retreating-- they were shooting them in the back-- and then against Jewish neighborhoods and Jews in generally. Whenever they saw anyone in the street, they shot first simply to kill and not because they weren't allowed to go on the streets.

And some neighborhoods actually had pogroms where dozens of people were taken from their homes and massacred. Several of these people were related to me by marriage, my uncle's family, who was completely massacred during the first two days of the occupation. And so that pretty well set the stage of what was to come, and even though I was only 12, I began to understand, to realize that survival is going to be very difficult.

In addition to that, of course there was a scarcity of food immediately. There was whatever we had in the house we ate. It was almost impossible for us to go out to buy food because in the stores they wouldn't sell us any. So somehow we had to gather whatever we could with our own wits to try to get something to eat, or else we'd starve to death.

And that is part of what I used to do because I was small and young. I would go out and try to generate some groceries somewhere and bring it home. At that time, it was pretty clear to me what the next months or years would bring.

Tell me what happened to your uncle's family.

They lived in a section of the city that was called-- in Lithuanian it was called [NON-ENGLISH]. In Yiddish it was called Slobodka. And they lived very close to or to a rabbinical college or a yeshiva, although they were not extremely religious people, but they were observant. But they were not part of the yeshiva.

When these pogroms started, this is where it started, around to yeshiva area, and many of the rabbis and many of the people that lived around there were the ones that suffered the consequences of the pogrom. And because they lived that close, they also took them out of their home, and they shot them in the streets. And that was his father, his mother, and two of his brothers. One escaped and came to us, and then he told us what had happened. And all I know is what he had said because I was not there at the time.

So when you say you pretty well knew what was going to happen, can you tell me a little more about that?

Well, I pretty well understood that we are in for a bad time with the Germans as well as the Lithuanians. What we did not understand-- and especially me, being as young as I was-- that the day end would be what we call today a Holocaust and that six million Jews would die throughout Europe. That was not something that we understood. That was not what we expected.

We knew that some of us would die because we saw it happen. During the first week, a number of--

Let's stop.

Mark two.

So go ahead and finish this.

Well, my uncle himself, whose family had died, two days later was captured and taken to a place with several thousand other people. It was called up Fort Number Seven. And we called them the-- just to give names to the people that disappeared or got killed, we sort of gave a name to every group of people disappeared.

And the first ones, of course, was the massacres, and the second one was that they were just arrested and taken somewhere. We didn't know whether they would live or die, and we called them the first arrested, in other words, the first group that was arrested. And my uncle was among them, the one who had lost his family, and the reason is because he went to investigate.

And-- mark. Mark.

Do you need to get away?

I'm fine.

Now can you describe for me your recollections of the formation of the ghetto?

Yes, it was rather a simple way. We were told that by the 15th of August, 1941 we had to evacuate our homes and apartments and that we had to move to a predesignated area across the river, that same area where my uncle's family had died earlier. And it was called Slobodka, and it was called the Slobodka ghetto.

And they had formed, actually, two ghettos because that was a main street or road that ran through the city, so they had made one large ghetto and one small ghetto with a bridge that crossed from one to the other. And we had to, ourselves, find a place where to live.

Of course, there were a number of people, Lithuanians, who lived in this area. They had to move out. In some cases, we traded apartments or traded places. They would take the place. Of course, we could take nothing with us, except what we could carry. Like I said before, transportation was forbidden. So whatever we could find in the empty apartments or whatever we could carry with us is what sustained us for the rest of the time in the ghetto.

Personally, we found a place at the very end of the ghetto, in the very farthest part, and we found a two-bedroom apartment that was empty. And we moved in there. Of course, almost the entire family that was left was moved in there. There were as many as, I believe, 14 people, perhaps 16 people that lived in that apartment, in those two bedrooms. And we stay, and of course, whatever we had we left behind. The only thing is since-- a little innovation is that to carry some of this stuff that my mother needed for that new place-- of course, we made several trips back and forth.

We took a table and turned it upside down and made sort of like a sled out of it, and we put some cardboard around the legs and tied it with strings. And we put some stuff in there and then pulled it all the way across, perhaps, as much as 7 or 8 kilometers, and that was an ordeal.

But we managed to take some things that we needed over, and we moved into the new apartment in the ghetto. And that was the way the ghetto started because everyone will have a different story to tell on how they got in and what happened because those Jews who already lived there didn't have to do anything. They stayed in their own homes that they had lived in for many years, and just life continued for a little while because the ghetto was surrounded with barbed-wire fences all the way around. There were gates to come in and out.

And immediately after that, the Jewish community started to form some semblance of organization, with a police force, and ghetto police, and committees, and what I suppose you might call the mayor of the ghetto. And that was Dr. Elkes.

And we tried to duplicate some form of normal life, but it didn't last very long because one of the things that happened then was that they formed brigades of workers that were going out to work in areas, and most of the people who worked where at the airport because the Germans started building an airport that could handle military planes because that airport was very small before them and building runways. And that is what many hundreds of Jews were doing during the first several months of the ghetto until some things started happening very quickly.

And of course, the first thing that happened was the elimination of the small ghetto that I had mentioned before. There were perhaps as many as 2,000 or 3,000 people that lived in this small ghetto, and all of them were taken to the Ninth Fort at one time. I believe that was at the beginning of October, either the 4th or the 6th of October, and they were taken there.

And at one point, they were brought back because-- I don't know why. They were taken there and brought back, and they were telling us that they had seen-- they had seen graves, pre-dug graves or what they thought were graves, but they had brought them back. So we weren't very concerned about that.

But several days later, they took them out and didn't bring them back, and whoever was left in the small ghetto was forced into the large ghetto, and that small ghetto stayed empty for a while until the 28th of October. And that is when the first-- what we called in Yiddish a [NON-ENGLISH] or the large selection, and that is when half the people of the ghetto were separated from the other half and taken to the Ninth Fort. It happened the 28th of October.

And the night before, the guards outside the barbed-wire fences were increased, and we were told that all of us have to leave our homes and gather in a place called [NON-ENGLISH]. And no one may stay in the house, and all the doors must be left open because they were going to search for contraband or hidden perhaps weapons, perhaps communication radios, gold, silver, furs, whatever they could find. We were not allowed to take anything with us except the clothing that we were wearing, and that is what we thought was going to happen.

Well, they took us out to that place, and we stood there for perhaps-- we gathered there at 6:00 in the morning, and we stood there, perhaps, three or four hours, waiting for the third shift to come back from the airport who worked at the airport. And of course, since those that worked the airport most-- many were just men. When they came into this place where we were gathered, they started looking for their families, their wives and their children. And in many cases, they couldn't find one another.

Then the Germans arrived, the SS, and they set up sort of like a platform. And they told us that we had to march by them in a single file by family, every family by itself. At the beginning, we weren't quite sure what was happening, but after an hour or two, it became clear that they were separating the old, and the children, and the lame. And those couples that had, let's say, two or three small children went to the right, and those couples that were with a teenage child or two went to the left.

And at first, it wasn't clear which was the good side, which was the bad side, but it became clear after a while that the left side was the good side. My father, and my mother, and I walked through, and we were sent to the left side. My aunt, whose husband was already dead, killed at the beginning-- she had a little girl, and she walked with her unmarried brother and my grandfather, who was her father. They went to the right.

Many of my relatives went to the right. We lost half of our family during that selection. As those of us who went to the left side were taken, on the other side they had made a--