

So why don't you just back up just a little bit to seeing the buses and knowing what was happening.

It was March the 27th 1944. That was the day that what we call was the Kinder Aktion or selection of the children. I worked night shift that day. And all of a sudden, I heard a commotion and I heard a noise outside the window. Our window faced the gate of the ghetto. When I looked out the window, there were buses lined up in front of the gate. And I could see that the Ukrainians and Germans were taking the children into the buses. They were taking babies, children aged 10 or 11.

And I had a child. I had my little nephew. He was only 2 and 1/2 years old, and I knew they were going to come. And I could see that, and so what I did very quickly I pulled a suitcase out from under my bed and I put him in a suitcase. And I told him that you may not cry, you may not speak, and you may not say anything or shout. Because if you do, the Germans will take you and you will die. He understood that, even though he was only 2 and 1/2. He knew exactly what was happening. He had a feeling.

And I put the suitcase back under the bed and I jumped on top of the bed a couple of times to cause the dust to settle on it so it would look like the suitcase had not been opened recently. And I went back to the window to see what happened. Within a minute, a Ukrainian soldier came through the door of the apartment and he asked were there any children here. And I said, no, there aren't any. He said, I'm going to look. And if I find any, he said, not only will I take the child but you will come of course.

Beginning he examined my papers to see I was only 14. I was strong enough to be able to work, but he looked at my papers and said that since I worked he'd let me alone, but he said that if he finds a child I will go with him. And I said, well, there aren't any. He looked and looked, but he didn't find the little boy, didn't say anything.

He was distracted because suddenly he heard a baby cry. And he walked out into the hall and there was somebody who had stuffed a baby into a linen closet in the hall. And I never knew whose baby that was. I had never seen that baby before. The baby was perhaps a year and a half old little girl. And he grabbed that child and walked out, so he left me alone. I went back to the window. And as he had taken that little child and put it in the bus and then the child was crying. And of course once he got on the bus the voices were muffled.

And then I heard screams and crying, and I looked back and there was another Ukrainian soldier and he was dragging a woman, a mother, and she had two little girls. And she wouldn't let go of the two children. She just held on to them and they held on to her. And he was beating her with the butt of his rifle and she was bleeding from her mouth and from her nose and blood going down. I could see her face. Even today I can still see it. But she wouldn't let those two little girls go. One must have been about three and one about five.

And when they get close to the bus he couldn't take them away and so the German came over. He was an SS lieutenant, and he said, what's this commotion? What's going on? And he said, she won't let go of the children. So I could hear him say-- First of all he laughed with this cynical and terrible laughter. And then he told her that, OK, if you love your children so much I'll let you take one and the other one we'll take. And of course he's asking a mother to select one of her two little girls. She immediately quieted down. She stopped struggling.

And the two little girls understood what he said because they knew exactly what was happening. And both started talking to her, saying, Mother, take me, take me. And she stopped the struggle and took the two little girls by their hands and walked on the bus with them. And of course she died with them that day.

When the day was over, 1,183 children were taken and killed that day. Those were the last Jewish children in Lithuania outside of those perhaps a few dozen that were hidden previously and a couple that somehow got hidden during this selection like I hid my little nephew.

And that was the end of the Lithuanian Jewish people. Most had died. At the beginning of the war, in the first week there were 180,000 Jews, perhaps 140,000 were killed at the beginning, and the rest little by little were killed through selections, massacres, and simply shootings and starvation. And of course the children that we kept as long as we could

died then that day.

My nephew, of course I-- It's difficult to say this, but he lived another four months or so and then he and my mother both died and in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Had it not been for him, my mother probably would have survived. She was a strong young woman. She was only 42 years old when she was killed. And in part, all the years I have sort of blamed myself because if I had not saved that little boy my mother would have survived. I had a choice also. That was begin-- That was pretty well the end of the ghetto. Because after that they-- Whatever hope we still had was gone after that day. And we were resigned to our final destination. We never believed that the rest of us would survive.

It wasn't long after when the Soviet Army started to advance towards Lithuania and they decided to liquidate the ghetto. We walked from the ghetto several kilometers to a train where we were loaded and taken to a place called Stuthof, where my mother and the child were taken off the train. And my father and I continued on this train. We were never taken off the train. We continued on towards Dachau.

Later learned that she and the child were taken to Stuthof, where they lived several weeks and then those women who were strong and by themselves were taken to work somewhere in Poland or in East Germany somewhere. The rest, those children were taken to Auschwitz and the fact is I have the date when they died. They died July the 15th of 1944. And my father and I continued on and finally wound up in Dachau, near Munich, where we spent the rest of the war time.

OK, we're just about to run out. I want to put one more roll on and ask you a couple of other short questions.

Tell me a little bit about the council.

I don't know a lot about the inner workings of the council. I just know that whenever the Germans needed to select people to send out, like to Riga or to Estonia or to other areas, they would come to the council and they would ask them to provide the names of people.

Now, nobody knew whether these people would survive, whether they would actually go to work or whether they would die. And that would be a burden on the council to actually themselves be the judges of who should live and who should die. And that put a great burden on them.

As far as the council itself is concerned, the inner workings and how they-- isn't something that I know very well. I know some of the people that served on it, but nobody was really angry with them because everybody understood that they really don't have much of a choice. What I do know, for instance, is that before what they call the Great Aktion the question was whether or not the council should cooperate with the Germans and ask everyone, all the Jews, to come out to the Democratic Platz.

But they didn't know. There were some who said yes and some said no, we shouldn't have to make that decision. So they went to one of the rabbis, who thought about it for days because they knew ahead of time, they weren't just told the day before. And this rabbi, the way I understand it, what I know was for many days he was studying the Talmud to see whether the council has the right, or the moral right, to ask the Jews to make the sacrifice. Or whether to tell nothing, let the Germans themselves do what they want. Or should they help the Germans? Which would be better for the Jews?

And finally the rabbi's decision, they all agreed the decision would be that of the rabbi-- I can't remember his name right now, but perhaps some of the other interviewees will remember. He rendered a decision and said that, yes, they should help the Jews. It would be better for the entire ghetto population if there is order.

And what about the Jewish police?

The Jewish police was-- It's the same in any police force. Some took their jobs too seriously, but most were pretty decent people who saw that as an easy work for them as compared to going out and working on the airport that the Germans were building, or to go to other working brigades. So they took that job although they knew that this isn't going to be very, very popular with some people.

But from what I know and the policeman that I encountered, they were pretty decent people, most of them, with the exception of a couple who took their job too seriously and became very, very and selfish. Especially those who worked where they had the gate police that worked at the gate of the ghetto. And of course some would ask whoever brought some stuff in, they would ask for a piece of the action. So if you brought in five pounds of flour, you would have to give them a pound or so just for letting you by or getting the Germans out of the way so you could go in. So that is something that happens in every society where you have a little bit of power and authority to use it. But normally they were decent people.

And tell me what happened to the children.

What happened is that at a time I knew there was something wrong with the buses but I didn't put my finger on it. But I later learned that the exhaust of the bus was redirected, the exhaust gases were redirected inside the bus. The driver was separated from the rest of the bus with a partition, and as the children went in the bus, their voices were muffled because they started breathing in the exhaust gases.

By the time these children were taken to the Ninth Fort where they were buried, most of them were dead. And those who were still alive or not quite dead were buried alive. Because during that day I did not hear any machine gun fire so they had to be disposed of or killed in other ways. And that is most likely the way they were killed.

And did you ever talk to any Lithuanians who maybe worked at the Ninth Fort or had any contact with any perpetrators?

Lithuanians who--

Who maybe helped with any of the killings?

Well, I never talk to any, except two years ago I was invited by the Justice Department to come as a witness in Philadelphia where they had caught a Lithuanian who was a lieutenant in what the Germans called the schutzmannschaft, which translated loosely were guard units, but really they were killing units. And he had come to America under false pretenses and he had falsified his records where he was during the war.

And when the Soviet Union fell and Lithuania became independent, the Justice Department started looking for documentation on who were the people that immigrated to America. They caught this particular one, and I was one of the two ghetto witnesses of who he was. But I never talked directly to him. I was just in court presenting my side of the story.

And had you ever seen him when you were in the ghetto?

No. This was not a criteria for being a witness.

And in the ghetto, since you were pretty young, do you ever remember an incident that was fun? Do you ever remember a great time that you had?

Yes. Yes. I formed myself-- You can't see it now, but I was a good athlete when I was young. And I was a good soccer player and I had formed my own team with a group of boys. And there were other teams formed and we were playing even games for championship of the ghetto. And my team won the championship, so that was a big deal. In fact, the team was named after me. So I created a team, I named it, so I used my name. And that was fun.

Beginning to talk to girls and hold hands with girls my age was something that happened under the circumstances. I remember these little girls, and one is in New York today, and that we hung out together with some of my friends who are alive today. And when we get together we reminisce about those times.

It's interesting that the only time we talk about what I talked about here today is when I talk to people like you. When we talk to one another, we always talk about the times that we could laugh at, times that we enjoyed, songs that we sang,

poems that we composed. Looking at the moon and thinking perhaps here's the moon up there. Look, the same moon it shines over America. Would it be possible perhaps to just jump over? These sort of things. And we remember that when we get together. But we have to be together the same people that were there and--