

Can you first tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about what your childhood was like?

OK. I was born in a town called Memel or Klaipeda, a seaport on the Baltic Sea. I come from an educated, middle-class family. My father was a flax export business. He bought flax from the local farmers, graded it, sorted it, and baled it and then shipped to Ireland, Czechoslovakia, any place that manufactured linen. I was an only child amongst a family of two sets of aunts, an uncle, my parents, a grandmother. As a result, I was badly spoiled. I had a maid that took care of me.

I was brought up like a little prince in some respect. My aunts would take me-- I did more with my aunts than I did with my mother and father usually. They took me to cafes and my one aunt was a little more interested in sports, so she took me skating and to the beaches. We had beautiful beaches in Memel. I went to a secular Hebrew public school, which was totally not religious. It was basically a Zionist type of school. But they taught us modern Hebrew and Jewish history, not Bible studies as such. And at the time it was an unusual education also.

We lived in a very nice house. We had a whole floor of a three-story house. I had my own room overlooking the river that passed through the town, saw ships going by all the time, and as a result I still like them. I am now involved in sailing. Sundays and weekends I remember being taken to the little ferry. Across the bay from where we lived was a place called [? Zankou, ?] and I would be taken with my family and lots of older people always to cafes. I really did not have much opportunity to play with other children because I was always entertained with adults somehow. It was just a very pleasant life in general.

And then how did things start to change? What do you remember that you saw and heard?

Well first of all, we had a radio at home and my father would be glued to the radio and you kept already hearing of what was going on in Germany. Even though Memel was half German-speaking, it was not a German town, it was a Lithuanian town. And eventually we heard of invasions of Czechoslovakia. And I could, even as a child, sense the uneasiness of my parents.

Also, I had an uncle and an aunt who had already come to the United States and they kept writing because they were trying to bring us over and trying to bring us over, but there was struggle in getting affidavits and somehow that never materialized. And then finally, this whole beautiful existence stopped a few months before Hitler invaded. I don't know exactly the date, but Hitler invaded, took over Memel, and that's before the war with Russia started.

And we had to move to Lithuania proper and my parents, even though we live in Lithuania, had German citizenship and we were not allowed for some reason to live in the capital of Lithuania, which was Kovno, Kaunas at the time. So we ended up first in Siaulai and then in Panevezys. And suddenly from this where I had my own bedroom, we had a dining room. The living room, breakfast room, it wasn't but it certainly was near that, we lived in very cramped quarters in a backyard near my father's somehow either competition or colleague in the business. And things just changed drastically.

However, my school, I continued going to the same type of a secular Hebrew public school in Panevezys and kept getting this rather interesting education. I also remember, I must have been 10 at the time, the day the Russians invaded Lithuania and the tanks coming through and the first time I saw people from other-- I saw Kyrgyz, who looked like Chinese people, and so as a child for me this was a great thing to see all these tanks rolling through town.

But my father, even though he was a German citizen, was born in Russia and escaped prior or just after the revolution and was very-- I think he was more concerned at the time of what the Russians would do to him than what the Germans might do to him. So he was really quite worried. And I mean as a 10-year-old you always try to have fun and go around with your friends, but you sense this unease in the family at that time.

And then when the Russians came, again being German citizens they did not want us to live in the provinces so they made us go to Kovno or Kaunas proper. And now the whole family, two aunts, another uncle, we all got crammed into even tighter quarters in Kovno under the Russians. The Russians did not allow Hebrew or Yiddish or any sort of education that was other than Lithuanian or Russian, so I was put into a Lithuanian school and I didn't know what was going because I didn't speak Lithuanian. And mainly you could get by with German, which is what we spoke, and the

Russian which my father spoke with his sisters.

Again, as a child you have funny experiences. I mean, in this house that we lived, in the backyard Russian soldiers were quartered. And once I knew enough Russian then the Russian soldier call me over and say, you want to have a smoke? In Russian, [SPEAKING RUSSIAN], she says.

And I said sure. And he rolls the cigarette with the stem of tobacco and he and I smoke. And I come home and I threw up the whole afternoon, and my mother said, what did you eat? Finally, I told her I smoked with a Russian and she let me have it. I mean it's a-- But that was still under Russian occupation.

Then I clearly remember the day when the Germans invaded because it's the first time I heard planes overhead and bombs falling. So you know just this gorgeous life that we had in Memel slowly and surely deteriorated to the point where-- And a lot was hidden from me, but I always saw my parents talk in hushed voices. And [? Eva ?] is coming, stop talking and this kind of stuff I still remember. So even though I wasn't told the specific details of what was going on, I sensed the fear and the worry of my parents at that point.

And then the next thing, once the Germans had invaded it didn't take long that I don't quite remember how but the next thing I know I'm in a ghetto. And now we are really cramped, maybe the whole family in a room, one or two rooms. And that's again the two aunts, an uncle.

And interesting enough, there was a refugee from Germany to Lithuania by the name of [? Karnatkan ?] who became involved in the ghetto gatekeeping police of some sort. And he was a German Jew who knew his way around this Germans. And he was married to a non-Jewish woman who maintained-- He was rather wealthy the guy. He lived with us and he sort of became like a protector of the family because he was involved in the administration of the ghetto and was friendly with the Germans, knew how to bribe them and so--

But anyway, things were really crowded, tight. I always had enough food because I guess as a child they gave me all the food that they didn't have, that the others didn't have. So this protective life in the way continued for me.