

Marker. Marker 20, or camera roll 20, marker one.

So in the first few months of the ghetto, describe how you felt. Were you afraid?

You know, my reaction was always in watching my parents and my surroundings. Because much was hidden from me. I was, at the time, about 10 and 11 years old. And I could see, of course, by the way my parents were, that they were in a constant state of fear, and that, really, a catastrophe had befallen us. And so I was, of course, frequently not allowed out on my own or at all.

There was obviously a shortage of food. Although we were not starving yet. It was not at a point where-- and I know that my mother always finagled something. And the food ended up on the table somehow. But the food-- I mean, there was no meat. There was always, I remember, like, fake, chopped liver made out of peas and things like that. Today, that's considered good.

But as a child, I also remember, occasionally, when things calmed down in the ghetto, I would be allowed out. And I would have friends, and we would go play, we would play soccer. And as a child, we tried to maintain things in as normal a fashion. And my parents sort of helped me in that.

At some point during this period, I ended up in this workshop, where to the best of my knowledge was a continuation of the old schools which had existed in Russia and Lithuania before the war, which were basically vocational schools. And I was trained to become like a locksmith and a machinist.

And in some instances-- I mean, I remember having to-- we were being given a large block of steel, and having to file the thing till it's perfectly square on all the corners. You begin with a big block, and you finally end up with something rather small. I remember having to hand-fashion a lock and make it out of metal. And then, we did some routine work. I would guess some production for the Germans.

Now, from what I understand, in retrospect, is that, because I was in this workshop, doing some of the selections and so on, while these were occurring, I was in the workshop and worked. And therefore, was not-- so this was something that eventually helped me, saved my life.

And yet, as kids, we did nonsense, too. Right in this ghetto. I mean, they had welding equipment. And there was some material called carbide, which is not the same as carbide here. We mixed it to snow in the winter and threw matches in it, and the darn thing would explode, you know. And I mean, I think we made believe we were fighting the Germans with that. But that was of course silly.

Of course, at the beginning-- I remember, as things went on, frequently being hidden. We had a hidden chamber in the house, which was behind like a big chest with a very narrow passage between two walls. And in the house that we lived in, there were, I don't know, at least four or five other families cramped in.

And during some of the selections, I was down there. And there were, I mean, maybe I was 12 at this point. And we were told to be absolutely quiet. Yet there was a woman there with a baby, and the baby would cry, and you know.

And this is where this guy, Karl Notkin came into the picture. During the selections, apparently, one person was always allowed to stay in the house, sort of to watch it or something. And when the Germans came by, he spoke perfect German, and he bribed them with alcohol and whatever else. And the Germans would just come in and very quickly leave the house. So in a way, this guy protected us. And probably, I owe my life, amongst many other people, to him also.

The worst thing that I remember was a hanging where everybody had to show up. And I don't remember the cause. But I mean, this was the first time I really saw. I must have been 12 or so at that time. People just being hung. And you had to-- the whole ghetto was in this open field and had to watch that. And I think at that point, things really dawned on me that things were not just bad, but horrible.

What about the Ninth Fort? Did you know the Ninth Fort was there?

I did not know that of the Ninth Fort, no. I mean, that probably was just kept away from me.

And tell me a little bit more about the trading and the organizing for food. Were you ever able to do anything?

No, I think my parents and this-- mainly, we depended very much on this guy Notkin, who was a bit of a wheeler dealer. And he brought in the food and arranged that both my uncle and my father were on work details, which were-- I don't know if they were better or worse, but they certainly were involved in them. So I do not remember that personally.

And what about books and school?

That's interesting. My mother was educated in Germany. And she bought into the ghetto a lot of books. And she made me read Goethe and Schiller. And so I as a child knew-- here, the Germans were persecuting us. At the same time, she taught-- those were the books she had. So that's what she made me read.

Even the Nibelungen, you know, the whole story of Ziegfried and then all the Wagnerian operas were there from. I mean, it's what my mother sort of taught me at that time. And I mean, looking back upon that, it's ridiculous.

My family was not a particularly religious family. My father was what you would call a Yom Kippur Jew. I mean, went once a year to synagogue. But I was approaching my 13th birthday. And I remember being sent to a rabbi and being taught, be prepared for my bar mitzvah.

And then I remembered that the Germans did not allow any synagogues. But there was some sort of an apartment complex. And in it was a-- they had a hidden synagogue. And I was bar mitzvahed in front of the whole ghetto amongst this whole horror going on.

And then my mother continued teaching me mathematics and whatever she could. And of course, I was in this workshop, where-- the machine shop trade, sort of. And so my education-- I mean, it was not education in the classic, traditional sense. But it sort of continued.

At least until about just until the bar mitzvah. After that, things started to really deteriorate in the ghetto. I mean, there were frequent selections. And I started to become more cognizant of what was going on.

And when was that? When was the bar mitzvah?

Well, that would have been in August of 1947-- 1943.

OK.

I mean, my birthday's in August. And 13th birthday would have been August, 1943.

And tell me more about the changes that you noticed then in the ghetto.

Well, there was you know, here, I came-- I was a kid who came from a family where I had custom-made clothes. And the clothing started to be ragged and dirty. And my parents looked and wore ragged and dirty clothes. I mean, that certainly was something that I noticed.

There was less food. I mean, when there was food served, I remember that my plate was always fuller than everybody else's. There were just the bare, bare minimums of food that were available. And I mean, as a child, I just felt this constant fear of--

Mark?

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Take me back to a couple of those times when you got hidden. Was it like a sudden frenzy and everyone scurried? Or did you know what was-- just describe it to me. Or described a couple of them.

Well, I think that because we had this guy Notkin enough who knew sort of what was going on, it was not a sudden frenzy usually. It was-- we knew that we had to go down and hide. But from just watching everybody around me, I mean, I could see this incredible fear of everybody of being discovered in that hiding place.

And I distinctly remember this woman with this baby. Because I mean, she almost smothered the child because if anybody would have heard that baby, that would have been the end of maybe 15 or 20 people that were hidden in that place.

I remember being in there. I mean, I couldn't tell you how many hours, but it certainly felt like sometimes more than a day, I think. I mean, but ending up there in the morning, and then probably staying there a day or two.

And I also remember that some food was kept in reserve down there just for that eventuality. So that when one had to go down, there was something to keep everybody nourished.

I mean, it was like you were huddled. And you had to be quiet. And you there was no place to sit or to sleep. I mean, we slept on-- it was just plain ground.

Describe the place that you hid most often.

Well, I remember the house being just like a little Russian peasant house, almost. And there was, from what I remember, like a big cabinet against a wall. And I think they had constructed the wall, widened the wall, taking space away from both sides.

Inside the wall was a stairway that went into this basement or whatever that was, into this dugout. And everybody would go down there. And then this armoire would be put back again.

And the man that stayed up there was this guy, Karl Notkin, who then placated the Nazis as best as he could from more and kept them from really searching the place too much.

And how big was the actual dugout, and how many people would be in there?

I would guess about 15 to 20 people how big maybe 10 or 10 by 15 feet. It was very, very small. I mean, you were just body to body in there. It was not that-- it was almost no room to walk or anything.

Could you stand up?

Well, I could. I was very short. You know, I did all my growing after the war.

And the Jewish police, what did you think of them?

I don't know much about them. I mean, as kids, there were people that we are told to stay out of their way, you know. Jewish police, from what I remember. And you just didn't. But I didn't really have any contact or feeling about it. So I wouldn't know.

And tell me a little more about incidents you remember that were fun, like pranks that you pulled or games that you played.

Well, that must have been still in the early part, time of the ghetto, like probably '41, '42. Somehow, in the workshop, we located long, metal tubes. And we were able to get hold of peas, dried peas. And we would use as a pea shooter. And there was an old lady in the house. And we would shoot it against her window.

I mean, I remember that distinctly. I mean, the stupid stuff like this, you remember. And then she would come out, and we would hide in some ditch nearby or run away. And I mean, this was-- and I remember playing soccer with others.

You know, as a child, you are a child. You know, and you behave like one, even when things are horrendous, I guess. Unless you are starving, as happened much later to me. And then the playing is gone and over with.

And so now, let's go to when things got very bad at the end and what happened to you toward when the ghetto was--

Well, I just remember that everybody was more and more despondent. And really, sort of was like a hopelessness in the whole family. Additionally, at that point, one of my aunts died of cancer in the ghetto. And whatever resources the family had, like there was still some jewelry that was not given to the Nazis was sold to try to save her with whatever.

There were some decent doctors, but they obviously had not much medication. And she was a very beloved aunt of mine. And so that was part of the hopelessness, that she couldn't be helped at all.

And it was just that everybody-- I mean, by now, I realized that the chances of surviving were rather slim, I would think. I don't clearly remember every day of the last few months of the ghetto, except that you saw fewer people.

I mean, when I first got into the ghetto, the streets were full. At the end, you hardly saw any people in there walking around. I wasn't allowed out virtually at all, except when I was at the workshop. So it was just not good.

And then how did you leave the ghetto? Well, that I remember rather clearly. Because I remember the whole family being put into one of these cattle cars. And that was everybody. It was my one aunt at this point, and my uncle, and my father, my mother, and myself.

And at this point, I mean, even my parents still tried to say you've got to hope for the best, and you'll survive, you'll be all right, and that kind of stuff. I mean, you could see amongst the people that you were there-- that you had nothing but talk of being sent to the concentration camps and of being exterminated.

How did you get to the cattle cars? Do you remember that?

I think we walked.

And do you remember being ordered to go? Or you just remember that one day you ended up walking there?

I remember just one day going there and walking there and being on the trains. The real things, when I really realized that things were horrendous was when we finally ended up in Stutthof after a few days. I don't know if it was a day or two or whatever. And at that point, my aunt and my mother were taken away.

And I mean, this is where-- I mean, I spent virtually all my time crying from that moment on. And the train then continued to Dachau, where I ended up with my father, and the uncle, and this Notkin. And within probably a week, there was a selection of about 120 kids or so at that point. And they were in Landsberg, my father and uncle. And we were sent to Dachau proper.

And oddly enough, that was a very neat camp, somehow. We had beds and stuff like that. So it was-- but I mean, all I remember is crying. I mean, I was at that point 13 or 13 and 1/2 or so. Almost 14.

And I think I was in Dachau maybe a week and then was put on another transport to Auschwitz. And I do remember going through the selection. Did not know what was right or left. And ended up in one of the camps in Auschwitz,

where they put the number on me.

And then I had some luck, because I was put to work on a farm in Birkenau. And I was given the responsibility to take care of a horse, of all things. So I ate the turnips that the horse was given. And that sort of kept me alive.