

36, marker one.

Miriam, tell me your name when you were born, and where you were born, and when.

My name is Miriam Liechtenstein, and I was born the 13th of August in Memel.

And tell me a little bit about your family background and your early life.

We lived in Memel. My parents came there after the First World War. And my father was from Latvia and my mother from Lithuania. Both my parents have a rabbinical background, generations and generations. I also had an older brother, two and a half years older than I. His name was Marcus.

And we grew up in a very comfortable, nice home. We were on the Orthodox side. And we went to school. We went to the higher-- to the Gymnasium. And for the girls, we were separated. The girls had one school, the boys had another school. And my school was named Auguste-Viktoria Lyceum.

And there we lived until March, 1939. The day, actually, when Hitler came to take our-- not only the town, it was like a region. It was called [LITHUANIAN]. And then we fled. We went in the morning. My mother and both kids, we went to Lithuania.

And my dad still stayed, because he was a director of the big textile factory. And he had the keys. So he had to go to open. The owners of the factory had gone already before to England. And they had brought a British man who was overseeing everything.

And when my dad came to the factory, in an hour or two or three later, Hitler actually marched into Memel. So the director took my dad with his car with a British flag, and he brought him over the border to Lithuania. And then after that, my dad came to the stop where we had made that was in Schaulen.

We had there relatives. There we stayed a few days. And then we went to Ponevezh, because my dad had his sisters there and cousins. And that's where we stayed until January, 1940.

And then we moved to Kovno. If we would have stayed in Ponevezh, we probably-- I wouldn't have probably sat here now. Because mostly all the Jewish population through all Lithuania was killed in all the small towns.

And tell me, in Kovno, what you remember when the Germans came. And also just before the changes that you remember.

Well, for us, actually, it was a big change. Because I mean, I'm talking now for me and my brother. We didn't know the Lithuanian language too good, so we couldn't go to school. So I took a course in typing and bookkeeping, and then also in 1940, the Russians occupied Lithuania.

So I got a job, and they-- they didn't liquidate, they did all the big factories and all the stores. They, oh, what do you call that? They organized it all together. So and my dad was really an expert in textile.

So he got me a job in that office where they were liquidating all those books and supplies. And so I worked under a bookkeeper. And until the war broke out, that was the 22nd of June. And it didn't take them-- it took a day or two and the Germans were there. So we stayed there.

And you know, I was at that time still pretty young. And I thought that I didn't look too Jewish. So I went out a little to see to get some food or things.

And but still, when I stood in line, the Germans or even the Lithuanians, came and they took me out for labor, to clean some were the soldiers lived, or to do other work, to clean the street, so I don't know. They always found me. And that's

where, how long-- and that's how we lived until there was an order to go into the ghetto.

Now, in that time period, were those times when you got pulled out of line, were they humiliating you?

Oh, absolutely. First of all, to work, to stay in the street and to clean the street. And to shout that you, dirty Jew or Schwartz. It is very humiliating. Also, they right away we gave a order to wear the Jewish star in the front and in the back of your garment. And you couldn't walk on the sidewalk, you had to walk in the street, you know, close to the curb. So that was also humiliating.

First of all, everybody knew that you were. And whoever passed by-- oh, you dirty Jew. I also have to tell you that the Lithuanian population were very mean. Before the Germans even came, they had killed already hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of Jews by themselves.

Did you see any of that?

Sure, because it was in the center of town. Or it was-- for instance, one day, I went out to look up my brother's friend. And there, I saw dead bodies on the street. He lived in a section where there were more religious people, you know, with beards and the special clothes what the religious people wear. And those were, unfortunately, the first ones who wear very easily picked out.

And the sound of the war. I mean, when the Germans actually came, where were you? And did you hear anything, see anything?

Well, we were in our apartment. And we were afraid to go out, because we had heard already some very bad stories about the Germans and how they dealt with the Jews. And we were really afraid. So we stuck more to the house.

Therefore, I said that I went out a little bit. Because I felt, you know, because my mother at that time, she was not very sure of herself to go. And so I was the one who went out.

In fact, I had an aunt and a cousin. And the cousin was married. And there was also a brother from-- I mean, another cousin, a male cousin. And both my cousin and the husband from my other cousin, they were taken away. And when they were taken away, my aunt, and her daughter, and the two children, they came to live with us.

And one day, somebody rang our bell, and there was a Lithuanian soldier standing. And he asked for my cousin, you know, for Mrs. Feinberg. And when she came to the door, he said, come with me and you can see your husband. So she was afraid to go. So I went along with her.

And he took us to a courtyard. And there we really, actually saw him. And he, at that time, said that it's very bad, and said he is together with her brother. But he doubted that we would see each other again. And then we went back. And that was really true. We didn't see them anymore. They were killed on the Seventh Fort.

OK.

And then when we went to the ghetto, we all went together. But we had separate-- you know, you couldn't choose your apartment or where you wanted to live. You were assigned. So we were assigned to one place and my cousin, and my aunt, and my cousin's two small children, they were assigned to another apartment. But we were always very close and we stuck together.

Tell me about moving into the ghetto.

Well, that was really not a big deal, because we came to Kovno, and all our stuff, we had left in Memel. So too much, we didn't have. So we rented a little wagon and we took there the few beds what we had and our personal belongings, the clothes. And that's how we went, in a few parts. And that's how we went into the ghetto.

And it was a sight, you know, what you saw. Only wagon, wagon after wagon on the whole street. And the place where we went, it was called Slabodke. And at that time, they didn't-- it wasn't paved. There were cobblestones. And that's how we moved into.

OK, we're just about to run out. We have to put another roll of film.

Seven, mark two.

Did you feel a certain safety after the ghetto got formed? Or did everything turn upside down?

Well, it turned upside down. First of all, I'll tell you, we were also like strangers in that Jewish community because we didn't know too many people. We came from Memel. We lived only in Kovno like a year. And at that time, it was also already the Russians were there. So nobody felt really very safe.

And not safe, but you didn't socialize too much. Because under the Russians, you were always afraid who can talk and who can say something. So we really felt like strangers. We didn't have too many. And there was also no time to socialize in the ghetto. You got up in the morning, you went to work, you came back in the evening.

And the only thing is that-- and that we realized later, that we were all together. And we still had our own clothes. That if it rained, and the next day, you could put on something else. Where later in the camp, you couldn't. So that was. But otherwise, we really-- we didn't, you know.

And at the beginning there were Actions. Did you know about any before the Great Action?

Oh, sure. There was the one when they took out the 500 men. And at that time, I even-- I don't know if you call it boyfriend or not, but anyhow. There was a boy, you know, who I knew, and I went out with him a few times. And he was taken away in the 500. But you know, people, when you live, and you always want to believe the better part.

And at that time, they said that they'll take them to sort books. They wanted more or less like people who are intelligent, that to read books, and to make a library, and to do this, and to do that. And then when I worked-- I mean, I'm going off now.

But when I worked at the commander from the ghetto, his father once came over. And he said, you know, you are working. Ask it might be he could know where he is, or it might be he could even bring him back. So I didn't ask him directly. But the commander, he had like a valet, you know, who took care of this when they were not in one place. Otherwise, I mean, I polished his shoes and all that, that the valet was sitting.

So I asked him, and then he came back, and he says-- you know what he said. First of all, he came back, he said, well, what is he to you? So I said, well, he's my fiance, because I wanted to. So then he came back. And he said-- you know what he said? That he feels sorry for you. So you know that they were gone already, all the 500 men and boys.

Before we go to that job, let's talk about the Great Action. Do you remember that?

Oh, sure I do. Because that is actually after my job. Because that is when I saved my aunt and my-- because we got a order that November. so and so, the 28, I think.

October 28th.

October 28, we should all assemble, 6 o'clock in that one place. So we all went. And you know, at that time, as I said, we still had our clothes. And because my dad was in textile, we were quite well-dressed. And we were, I have to say it myself, we were quite a very handsome family. My dad, and my mother, and my brother, we were all good-looking and tall.

So we were standing, my father and my brother on the sides, and we, too, my mother and I, in the middle. And in the

back was my aunt, and my cousin, and her two small children.

And when we went through-- and that I'll really never forget-- when we went through, you know, when we came closer to the German, he was standing like this, you know. And he said, right, left, right, left. So he asked us, he said, is that one family? And my dad said, yes. And he said, please, straight ahead. So we probably made-- because for a German to say to a Jew please. So we probably made an impression on him, too.

And then so we went to the right, you know. All of a sudden, my dad turned around, and he said, you know, the [GERMAN] isn't here, aunt Sarah. And all of a sudden, I see, and there was a group to the left. And they were surrounded by Lithuanian police. And they were there.

So in the corner, I saw one for whom I had worked. After the commander, I worked for somebody else in that same outfit. So I ran over. And when he saw me running over, he said, Miriam, what happened? Where's your family?

I said, we are here, but my aunt is not with us. He said, come with me. He went with me in that group, and we took them out. And I mean, unfortunately, they didn't survive. But at that time, I saved them.

And what happened to the people who went to the bad side?

To the bad side, there were-- overnight they were taking. Our ghetto was, when we started with the ghetto, there was a small ghetto and a big ghetto. So they were all taken. There were about 10,000 people. They were taken to the small ghetto. And during the night they were taken to one of the forts and liquidated.

Did you see any? Did you see them going off the road to the forts?

No, those I didn't. Because mostly, when transports came, and they brought-- the Germans brought quite a lot of transport from Germany and from Austria. But mostly, it was done during the night.

Only once, during that, they brought them. And probably, they were delayed. So they took them over in the morning. And our ghetto was surrounded with barbed wire. And we had our own police.

So when the police saw so many people going, so they opened a little, you know, the barbed wire. And they said. I mean, they couldn't say to everybody, but you know, a few, come here. Come in here. You will be safe.

But you know, the German Jews, they thought that to them, nothing will happen. They said, oh, no, we are going to, as I mentioned, some kind of a camp. And they didn't come. And unfortunately, they were all killed.

Could you hear machine guns from where you lived?

No. But I'll tell you how we knew that they are bringing people, or that they'll have an Action in the ghetto. They used to come for lime. You know, that white stuff. I don't know, it doesn't make you smell bodies. And there was, in the ghetto, there probably there was a pit from that.

So when we saw those wagons going with the lime, we knew that something will happen. Or in our ghetto, or they'll bring, you know, somebody from another country to be killed.

And now, tell me how you came to work for that officer?

Well, when the ghetto was closed, a couple of days later, they came. And they looked for silver and gold. And so they went from house to house. And it so happened that the commander probably must have come, you know, like fate to our house.

And when he heard us talking in German between my parents and us children, he called me out. And he said, do you want to work for me? And I said, well, I'll have to. So he even said, you know, and he said, don't worry, I won't go to

bed with you, because that's forbidden.

And he came with two big dogs. So I said, OK. So he said, OK, come along. So he took me right away with his car. And he took me out of the ghetto into his apartment. And he introduced me to his valet. And he said, from now on, I mean, you'll be responsible to him, you know. And he'll tell you what to do.

And he wrote a note that I can go by myself to the ghetto from his house. And in the morning from the ghetto to his house. So I actually was the first one who had such a note that I am allowed to walk by myself. Because mostly, when people went to work, they all went in a big group like a brigade. You know, [GERMAN], used to be it was called.

And I was the only one to have that. And the first one. I mean, later, some other people also got jobs individually. But I was the first one of the Kovno ghetto get to have that piece of paper.

In fact, when I came back, when all those things-- now, you'll remember. Yeah, and then that day-- no, I went back by myself. And my parents, they probably thought that they will never see me again. So when I--