

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

I was born in Kovno in 1929. To a family I had two brothers, an older sister. My parents were affluent. My father was the owner of a wholesale grocery. Was the second largest in Lithuania. A normal religious family in Lithuania. We lived in downtown Kovno on [INAUDIBLE] gatvė— later which changed to [? Grodno ?] gatvė— Nothing special till 1939. Then things start to change with the war starting, German, Polish, 1940 the Russians marched in, confiscated the store. We were already uprooted.

At one time we got wind that the Russians wanted to come and arrest us as bourgeoisie because we are rich people and wanted to send us to Siberia. Once we got wind of it, everybody left the house. The children were sent away to different areas, and when they came to get us nobody was home. I was sent away down the Neman, that was the river to a town I should go in the market there and told them what to do. And they came back three days later. And that's what the Russians were doing. If they came a place where they didn't find them, forget it. They did a talk, moved on, and you don't know when they will come back. But this time we were saved.

And that was after they confiscated the store. In the beginning, they put my father as a worker there. He worked there for a few months and then they chased him out. We had enough to live on, but you had to have some kind of an occupation, otherwise, you are already a criminal. So my father took a occupation as to being a watchman. That's the only way you could get away without working on Saturday.

Later on, we saw that this wasn't the answer. We opened what we called a little restaurant in our house. We had a big apartment with a big dining room, so we made a little restaurant. Actually, this was a cover so people can come in without drawing any suspicion. And between them, they did a little business on the side. If any stranger, anybody that is unknown used to come in, everybody was shh, quiet. Nobody would say a word and just eat a meal, pay your bill and get out. That was 1940.

In '41, when the war broke out, that was a Saturday night or Sunday morning, I remember that Sunday evening we had a meeting in our house and they had to decide, my father, a lot of friends came in the house, should we run or should we stay and wait for the Germans to come in? We did not know the realities that you couldn't run. When the Germans were in Vilnius day before Kovno, they cut off any routes to run away. But even without knowing that, they decided not to run because we hated the Russians so much that they were no better than the Germans.

So the decision was not to run. Those that did run, unfortunately, didn't make it. It was a couple of months that the Germans send us to the ghetto. The Germans came in, I think it was Wednesday morning, Tuesday morning or Wednesday morning, in Kovno. The time before we went into the ghetto they used to come into our house to pray in the morning and they needed a minimum, what's called a quorum, 10 people. So people either from the house or from very close by used to sneak into our house to pray.

One day we were in middle of praying and they saw a German officer come in. I don't know what he knew, but he came to Father and looked at him. They were in their garb with the tefillin, that [HEBREW]. And all of a sudden, he comes over said, do you have a [HEBREW]. Which is actually the code of the Jewish law. And my father was amazed a German officer should ask him a question like that. He showed it to him. He put it back in the bookcase and left.

It didn't take more than five minutes, a whole group of German officers came in and questioned was anybody here? Did he demand anything? Did he ask for anything? And this again interrupted the prayers. They didn't say anything and left. A few minutes later, a few high-ranking officers, exactly I don't know what the rank were but there were higher-ranking officers came in and told all of us to get out to the yard. We thought this is the end of it.

We tried to take over the [HEBREW], the scrolls, and the tefillin. And they went, no, no, you should not. Don't take it off. So we thought this is the end for us. They want us the way we look. They took us out in the yard, put us against the wall, take out cameras and took pictures and told us all to get back in. This was Wehrmacht officers. Of course, our lives were on the line. We thought this is the end of us. This is one of the first experiences that I had with seeing the Germans.

It didn't take long, I think in the middle of the summer, and everybody was supposed to find a place and get there. They designated an area and all the Jews had to move there. Looking around where to find a place to move wasn't easy. The Lithuanians that had to move out for that area weren't too happy either. However, my father had owned the building, I think it was a 16-family house, what they called [LITHUANIAN], the Green Mountain, in Kovno.

And in looking for a place, he found a Lithuanian that had a four-family house, five-family house, four-family and an attic. And he said, how about making exchange? I'll give you a big house, 16 families, a real income house, for this little cottage you have without water, without any plumbing, and that's the way they exchanged houses.

So we found a little place in the ghetto. There were four little apartments. Each apartment had a kitchen and a room and a little vestibule in front, and an attic, which was also a couple of rooms. My uncle and the family, my aunt and uncle's family, took one apartment. We took another apartment. And another couple of families, whatever the arrangement was I didn't know, they took the apartment. That's how we moved in together.

Do you remember what you took with you? We took the bare necessities. We had a big apartment at Grodno gatvė— [? katalotika ?] number 14. And where we went is only two rooms, a room and a kitchen. So only the most important things that you could think of we took along with us. Among the things we took along with us was somehow we had a valise with wheat, not ground wheat, and my father foresaw that in case we have to stay there through Passover he will need something to make matzah from, so took along that valise. That was among other things. Of course, we took along [HEBREW]. And a Bible and whatever books, the most important books, we took along with us. And that's how we went to together.

OK, we have to reload.