

Let's talk a little more about food. So you had the tomatoes, but what other kinds of things did you have? And what ingenuity did your mother use, for example?

What actually helped us a lot to me that I said before, three of my cousins stayed with us. One of them was going out to work in a kitchen in Kovno. I don't know what kind of a place it was, an army place or-- But one of the jobs was peeling potatoes. Of course, they're peeling potatoes and the peels they're bringing home. And you imagine that being that they knew that the peels so that they get go home they peeled a little heavier. But this was one of the sustaining things, potato peels that came from kitchens. And that we used to be washed, cooked, and all kinds of food made out of it.

Even if he had to burn a little flour and make [SPEAKING HEBREW], the potato balls, and then put in hot water and boil it and make soup out of it. That was part of our diet. And whatever else you could find or trade. Or people that used to go outside of the ghetto and deliver the Gentile's and they give away a piece of a sweater or a garment or jewelry or whatever they could find, anything for a piece of food. But all in all, we comparatively, we managed for the ghetto standard the best we could.

And earlier you said you had to cheat somehow to survive. Tell me about that.

Well, we did a lot of things to cheat. We stole whatever we could. We needed wood. You asked me about heating. Anywhere you had a piece of wood that you could tear off and bring it home, that was brought home. Anywhere they could find a piece of wire that was brought home. For instance, we made ourselves a what you call it, to make hot water. I took two spoons, wired them up, hold out a piece of cotton on a piece of wood and then you connected it and put it in the water. This is boiling. You made makeshift things.

I want to go back to the Kinder Aktion. I said before when they found us in the bunker they pulled us out and they made a selection and put part on one side, part on the other side. We did not know what's going on, but my father was on one side and I was on the other side. And then one of the officers turned it around and said to send my father on that side and me he pulled it to the side. We didn't know what is the right and what is wrong.

My brother and a girl, a daughter of the neighbors, escaped by a miraculous. There was a game by the Germans had big dogs and they told these two kids, go ahead, run. And they told the dog to chase them. Somehow, as I said before, it was late in the afternoon. The dog chased them. They ran around the houses. A couple of times a dog grabbed my brother by the arm but he had a heavy coat on so he couldn't bite him, and finally they hid behind a door and the dogs were called off and they remained there. That's how my brother survived the Kinder Aktion. That was something that you survived from day to day. Every other day there was something else. Had it not been a minute before, a minute after, you wouldn't have been here.

And how did they let you and your father go then?

My father was taken away with my younger brother in the Kinder Aktion. I was pushed on the other side, so I remained with my mother and my brother in the ghetto. That was in '44, in the spring of '44. Early spring.

How old was your brother who went with your father?

Five years my junior, five years younger than me. I was at that time 14, 15, so he was 9, 10.

And did you see them get on--

All we saw them is on a truck and they go out of the ghetto. I haven't seen him since. And they took them to Auschwitz, as far as I know.

And the great action, how did you find out what happened to the 10,000 people who were--

That was in a few days that it was the day talk in the ghetto. A few days later everybody said that they took him to the

ninth fort, which is down that highway that I just spoke about before. And that was then they dug the ditches and then in front of the ditches they machine-gunned them.

And the mood in the ghetto changed after that?

That-- The big action, most people said that's it, we are doomed. Sooner or later it was a question of time. Sooner or later it will be our time will be up. And as I said before, the religious people, even if they have a knife on their throat don't give up hope. So that's what it was.

And weren't books and religious practices forbidden? Tell me about the rules as if I don't know about it. Tell me about the ghetto rules.

There was a time, I don't know exactly when, that was a command that all books to be brought outside, to be brought in a pile in the field there. And any books we found them and like any there was only one punishment and get killed. If you didn't obey the rules, that's the only thing. The same thing is with the yellow star. Even before they get the clothes every Jew had to wear a yellow star on his lapel, on the front. I think later they put it on front and back.

And what about religious practices? Was that allowed in the ghetto?

I don't think there was even a question. Nothing was allowed. But a few religious people that secretly kept it. Of course if you heard somebody coming you dispersed immediately, but we did practice. Most of the time we didn't have a minimum, means that 10 people that used to sneak in, and pray in a quorum. Many times we didn't have 10 and I wasn't 13 yet. They used to give me a book and count me in that maybe I was close to 13 enough that they put me in the quorum.

What about other things in the ghetto like culture or other social life?

They did try to have some kind of social activities. I wasn't much involved. My family wasn't involved. But as far as religious activities, like there was a few rabbis. So the religious people tried to organize a little learning, a little teaching for the youngsters. There was something called [HEBREW] Oshry who is right here in New York. He organized a group of youngsters to have a group to learn. But of course it was disrupted and it couldn't be on a steady basis. But as much as you could and whenever you can get away there was a little bit learning, but very little.

Did you go to his group?

Yes, I did go for I don't know for how long, but I did belong to that group that's called the [HEBREW].

Tell me a little more about it. Tell me about an average day.

An average day till I went to that work, the [NON-ENGLISH] WerkstÄtten, I actually did nothing except be around the house except around the garden or planting something or things like that. But later on, when I to be in the morning to the WerkstÄtten the whole day and come back into the house late in the afternoon, so that was more or less taken up with this. Very little teaching. The older ones used to get a chance to teach for a while, while my father took a private individual and that they should go there every day and he should learn with me to teach me.

So that was-- It was so much interruptions, so scarce the time that you could feel safe. And you did not want to show your face too much in the street in the ghetto.

Because you were a kid?

Because a kid and because you didn't want it to appear. If you're not a kid, what were you doing? If you're and adult you're supposed to be occupied to do something. You knew that just if you meet somebody's going in the ghetto it was terrible. If you saw a German, you disappeared, you hid.

Tell me about the police in the ghetto.

There was a Jewish police force. I had one incident with that police force, and that is while I was working in the [NON-ENGLISH] Werkstätten and they needed somebody to go outside to get it to work for whatever reason I don't remember but I did not show up and they came and arrested me and put me in jail in the ghetto. There was a jail in the ghetto. And I was miserable. There were characters in ghetto in jail that I guess like in every jail. And I had to stay overnight there. Even my father with all his [? protective, ?] with all these people that he knew couldn't get me out before the next day.

And I think [? Snegg, ?] who was a friend of the family, and he was a member of the Jewish committee, having to win to let me out of that jail that was the next day. That was my personal encounter with the police. All in all, I understand that they were, as a whole, they were helping the Jewish people rather than hurting them, other than giving out. So they were not collaborating with the Germans as I've heard other places. But this is as a rule generally.

Of course, there were at one time I understand the policemen were arrested and they were tortured that they should tell about bunkers, about things in ghetto, did you give out secrets for the ghetto? And a few of them succumbed or did they give out, but most of them stood their ground. This is as far as my knowledge and my personal to do with the police. I didn't know anybody personally that I knew as a policeman, but as a whole, we were not afraid of the Jewish police. For instance, when I was in a concentration camp I wouldn't trust the kapos. They were terrible. But in the ghetto we did not fear the Jewish police, at least not our family.

And tell me about the rabbi of the ghetto.

The [? Kovnorov ?], who was the, Devar Avraham, Avraham Shapiro, that's his name. He died in 1942. I personally as a kid I was nine or 10 years old when I had an incident and I met him. And that was because there was a summer place not far from Kovno called Kulautuva. And he used to stay in a villa there and we were also for the summer in that place. One day I went in the street and I see him going out for a walk. I went over, was a very brazen young kid, and I said, good morning, Kovnorov. He took me for his hand and for an hour he walked with me, asking me all kinds of questions, my family, so I had a big honor and unusual that I had met that known person.

He was a very learned scholar from what I have in his book Devar Avraham, and in general he was very highly respected. But in ghetto I understand that they let him alone when he died and I went to his funeral. This was 1942.

What was the funeral like?

I do not remember details. I only remember there was people, not too many, but there was people nevertheless went today that the funeral. I do not know where the burial ground was, but I remember the funeral and I remember going to the funeral

In the ghetto, did you ever have fun?

Fun? As normal as kids, regardless what's doing outside there's always you live in the present and the present is always you have to have whether it is fun or play or games. Of course, between interruptions, between the black clouds from the outside, we did not constantly live as children. We did not constantly have it on our minds. But we were reminded quite often that we were in ghetto. Quite often we were reminded. My cousins were taken away. I don't remember what aktion. They were sent to Riga or they were sent away. Then there were not there anymore.

After my father and my younger brother were taken away, I remained with my other brother and my mother. We were numb. It wasn't a question, we weren't crying, but we were like numb, just pieces of wood. I remember it was 10, 12 days before Passover, and Passover came, we called in some acquaintance to make a seder, say the prayers for seder, and I think we had a couple of matzohs there. But this was going through the motions. Till after that Passover I remember that the news was that the Germans are retreating, the Russians are pushing them back, and it's only a question what they will do or when they will do liquidating the ghetto and how they'll do it.

The day came. At that time we were already too numb to look for shelter to look for bunkers to hide. Some did hide and survived. Some hid and did not make it because a lot of the houses were burned to the ground. If they had a suspicion anybody is hiding there, they burned the houses to the ground and the ghetto was liquidated, but I understand about 7,000 people that they were liquidated from the ghetto and they took us into the freight trains. And we came to Stutthof. That's what separated the women and children from the other men.

My brother wanted to go with my mother and my mother wouldn't let him. She understood that a better chance even for a young kid to be with a men in a working camp rather than to go with the women. And he wanted to go to Mother, Mother pushed him away. You can imagine how hard for a mother to push away a child, but she figured that this is a better chance. From my mother I never heard since. I mean I did hear about her that she was still alive in the beginning of the winter of '44, '45. A couple of weeks after Sukkot somebody still saw her in that camp near Stutthof, but after that we never heard of her.

My brother and I myself were sent to Dachau. In Dachau, after the second week they separated the younger kids and took away about 120, 130 children and send them back to Auschwitz and my border with them. I remained in Lager 1 till April of '45. During that time, I work in mall and that was building an underground airport for the Germans.

To describe this airport after I look at it and being in construction now, it was fabulous type of construction. They actually created a mountain, put a 10-meter cover of solid cement reinforced with the metal rods, and afterwards dug out the mountain from underneath leaving a big, large tunnel where two large planes can pass by each other side by side. And at the end at the other side of it they had the workshops. That was a fabulous idea. However, they did not finish it.

My brother was sent in Auschwitz. I stayed in Dachau till April. In April they took us back to, when the Americans came closer, they took us to Dachau proper, and from there afterwards we went on the death march in Tyrol, and I was liberated in Tyrol May 5. My brother I didn't find. Actually, I didn't find him till the day before Yom Kippur of 1945.