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Start. Back on the road, when you were coming back. Do you remember that trek back? And did you walk? Did somebody carry your little brother? How old was he?

My father carried my little brother. He was-- by then, in 1941, he was four years old. He was born in May.

Do you remember that walk? I mean, this--

Yes, I remember it. I remember. I remember certain points, like staying in a barn. Some kindness from some peasants, or farmers, rather. Some not so kind. I also remember, on the way to what was-- we were hoping to get to Russia. Like we were shot at. But airplanes were sort of getting in on us.

And we started to run away, like to lie down in the fields to try that. But mainly on the way back, it was a long-- I remember certain points. Not vividly everything, no. But I remember certain kindnesses, yes.

And in general, had your world turned upside-- I mean were you now terrified, or were you protected pretty well by your family?

No, well, we couldn't be protected. We were exposed. There was no way to be. The only way to be protected was to be out of it. We were smack in the middle of it. I remember-- one thing comes to my mind. And this is really on the way back.

And we were already at the outskirts. And everything by foot. We were at the outskirts of our hometown of Vilijampole, or Slobodke, which was where the ghetto was. But the ghetto wasn't established at that time yet.

I remember a young girl, a Lithuanian girl, was surrounded. There were soldiers. But they were having fun. And they saw us, and we were not the only ones coming back. There were loads of people coming. Because a lot of us came back. We had nowhere else to go.

And we all happened to come in droves, as we left in droves. So she was pointing at us. And she said something like that effect that they won't be around for too long. And I remember our head going back and laughing with such glee, you know. That those little, like, that are inscribed in a child's mind.

And when the ghetto was formed and people started moving in, even though you didn't have to move, did you see it?

We did it, because we helped my aunt and my cousin. It was my mother's aunt. My mother's mother's sister-- my grandmother's sister and her daughter came to live with us. So we helped them. I carried. And there was a bridge from the city of Kaunas. Slobodka was actually a suburb, so to speak, which she was connected by a bridge across the river. And they lived in the city.

And I was a very frequent visitor. This lady, my mother's aunt, was like a grandmother to me. Because my grandmother died when she was very young. And I was named after my grandmother. Both my grandmothers. I never knew my grandparents. So she was like a surrogate grandmother to me. And I used to love to come to her very often.

And we said, we were very close with my auntie. And auntie Zalk. That was what we used to call her, auntie Zalk. Not by her first name, but by her last name out of respect. And I remember this lady, she was very highly diabetic. And she had ulcerated legs.

And I remember her mostly-- she was a beautiful woman, with white hair. White, like not gray, but white. And wore it in a bun in the back like this, smooth. And never a complaint out of her. Very poor people. And she would sit with the bandages. Every time I saw her, she would change dressing on her legs.

So she had to walk from her home to our home. Quite a distance. Because there was no transportation. And we helped carry her in pails. We didn't have any baskets or anything, or plastic bags, as people would have today. So in pails, like

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in ordinary pails. With the load up whatever we could. And I would-- and I was very proud that I could carry two balancing together to cross the bridge. We helped them move, I was there.

Were there a lot of people moving?

Oh, yes.

Describe this going on.

Well, there were people constantly going, either through the place of their home, their former home, to get back more things that they could carry. And carrying to the ghetto area across the bridge. The streets are, I mean, they're in my-- I can see them. I can see the name of-- some of the names of the streets, I even remember.

There was, in Yiddish, it was called [YIDDISH]. There was a town in Lithuania called Janovos. And the town-- the street was named after the town. And that town, that-- excuse me, that street, that's where the bridge started, at Janovos Street.

And it went across to Yurburgergas in Yiddish. Yurburgergas. Now, what it was called in Lithuanian, I'm not exactly-- I don't want to kill it. Jurbarkas or something like that, I don't-- and that is the street that the bridge ended.

And the street that we lived on, which was [LITHUANIAN] Street started at this Jurbarkas Street. So it was like you crossed the bridge, you got off the bridge, and you walked a few yards, not far, a few meters or whatever. And you made the right turn, and you came on the street where I lived. But further down.

So how long did the moving go on?

It took weeks, I think. A couple of weeks. They didn't give us too much notice or too much opportunity to move. Like I said, you couldn't move anything that wasn't-- only way you could carry.

And then there were some other decrees soon after the ghetto was closed off.

Well, the other decrees-- the most important one that comes to my mind, because there must have been other minor ones, which are about working and going-- oh, yes, excuse me, I have to retract. I told like my-- they grabbed people on the streets and took them to the Seventh Fort.

Kaunas was surrounded by forts. From 1914, for the tsars, the Russian tsars built as fortresses around Kaunas or Kovno. And we children used to play there. And that's where the people later on, men, one of my childhood friends, neighbors, was grabbed with her father. To the Seventh Fort.

There were many forts, I don't know. But the Seventh and the Ninth became very prominent, infamous. And her father and herself were grabbed and taken to this fort. That was before the ghetto was established. The father was killed in front of her right there. And she was let go then. So she was in the ghetto, too. So all these things were happening prior to the ghetto establishment.

Why was he killed?

Why was he killed? He was not the only one. There were many killed. Because he was a Jew, and they were just at random. Caught the people walking on the street. He had his yellow star. And he was grabbed and taken to this Seventh Fort and shot or whatever they did. Killed. Yes, shot I said. That was it. That's how it was. I wasn't there to see it. But it was a known, well-known fact.

We're just about out of film. I think we have to reload.

Mark.

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Speed.

Let's talk about the Actions that happened.

OK, yes. And that is what I was referring to, the decree. Yes. This here. The big Action that comes to my mind. It was in October, at the end of October. And there was this decree that the entire population of the ghetto, at the risk of being shot instantly if being found at home, by 6:00 the day, the entire population of the ghetto was supposed to gather at this square.

The Demokrato. The Democratic Square, if you please. Very ironic, OK. It was a big, empty area. And you could see. I remember people being carried in beds. Because they couldn't walk. They were sick or they were elderly. And the whole-- from all sides of the streets of the ghetto were streaming towards this Democratic Plaza, or Place, or Square, or call it what you like.

And we were also made aware that it's good to have [GERMAN], which means to show that you're worthy of work, that you're employable, that you are employed. Not only are you employable, but you're employed.

And that you have a [GERMAN], or a paper of some kind to show that you are-- you count, that you can contribute to the welfare of the German Empire, whatever that may mean. That you still were-- they can use you. Simply, they can use you.

My father had one of those. My father worked in the same profession that he was. It wasn't actually a profession, it was more a trade. But he worked outside the ghetto for the Gestapo, if you please. The green uniforms. And they gave him a paper of some sort. Whether it made a difference or not at that point, I don't know. I can't say.

But when we were all gathered at that place, at that Democratic Plaza, and after what seemed hours, suddenly, there was a wall of uniforms. All I remember, really, were uniforms and boots. Black boots and green uniforms.

And it did not take long for even a child. By then I was already nine. But even a child of nine knew that if you were sent to go to the left, you were to live. For the time being, anyway. If you were sent to the right, it didn't look good. Didn't know why it wasn't good. But we knew it wasn't good.

And they didn't look at the papers, they didn't care. Yes, papers. And they broke up families. And they started to-- people, here are my papers, and here are my papers. And they chased, and they just swiped you away like a piece of garbage.

And you were sent to the right, and you were surrounded by guns. And Lithuanian Partisans, they were called [YIDDISH] in Yiddish. They were in uniforms with guns. And they were the ones who were guarding the ones who were sent to the right.

The lucky ones turned out to be-- and we were among those. We were not guarded. And that's how we knew that this is good and this is bad. We didn't know how bad.

By the time the day was through, it was a long, long day in many ways. And by the time the day was through, it was dark but the time we got back to our places, to our homes.

All my neighbors, all our neighbors surrounding our street. On our street, my next door neighbors, and then the same courtyard where we lived. The people who owned the place that we rented of our home.

The children whom I played with for-- because I lived on this street from age three, probably. And we grew up together. We wore each other mother's shoes.

We pretended to be movie stars. We knew the names of Jeannette MacDonald, and Nelson Eddy, and of course, Shirley

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Temple. We didn't pronounce them as well as we should have. Shirley Temple was Shirleh Temple, not Shirley. But we knew. We went to the movies, too, before the war broke out.

So all these people never returned. None of my friends came back from this here big Action. At that point there were, from what we heard, from I remember, we were told that there were 22,000 inhabitants of the ghetto at that time.

After this big, the [GERMAN] Aktion, the Big Action, they took away 11 and 1/2 thousand people. That is what I heard. Whether it corresponds with what later came out, I don't know. And all the people whom I knew, they were gone.

New people-- by then, it turned out that all the people that were guarded by the Lithuanian Partisans, they were put into-- they were taken to this small ghetto across the bridge. And from there, they were marched to the Ninth Fort. One of the forts that I mentioned earlier. And systematically killed, those who made it.

Now, I can not imagine my mother's aunt having been able to walk up mountains. It was up. She would never walk up. I'm sure that she never made it. I'm sure she was killed on the way towards that fort.

And that's when they liquidated the small ghetto, they cleaned the ghetto and took off the bridge. And there was only the big ghetto remained. Also, and they condensed. Even the big ghetto was condensed at that point, too.

Before you get to that, how do you know what happened to the people? Or how did you know that?

How did we know? Because people-- now, that's a very hard question to answer. It so happened that later on, in our city of Toronto, where I'm from, there is a man who survived this very Action. He was there, he was left for dead. And there were witnesses. There were witnesses who knew this is what happened.

And the people never, ever came back. We were surrounded by people, by children-- these people lived in those homes all their lives. They weren't just-- they just came and disappeared. That's where they lived, they were born there. And they lived there, they went to school there. There were older ones than I, there were younger ones than I.

Nobody returned. They were killed as sure as-- they were killed. There was no doubt that's what happened. They were killed.

Describe to me again the beginning of the Big Action.

It's hard. I remember us all streaming to that place, through that big square. I don't think it was even a square, because there were no-- I remember, there was no-- you cannot even compare it to a square that we know now as a square. A big-- Times Square, Red Square, any kind of square with buildings, and it's modern and civilized.

Nothing like that. It was more like a field. But they called it Democratic Square. And people were carried in beds. People were-- like there wasn't old and young.

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