

Five. So we're at the big Action.

We're at the big Action. We're all streaming to be sure to be on time for 6 o'clock. A song that I don't really remember, but a song was written. A ghetto song was written for this event.

And I remember, there were-- now that I think, there were printed. They had printed posters. Small, but big enough to be for people to read in Yiddish. I don't have Lithuanian. German, of course. And about this decree. They didn't just-- they made sure that everybody got to know about this gathering to that Democratic Plaza, to that field, really.

And we were called to come. We came to that Democratic Place, to that field. And there were already a lot of people there. And I'm trying to recapture, really, what I can see in my mind. But what mostly stands out in my mind is that we were sort of lined up. And there was-- we were moving towards the wall.

As I mentioned before, now that I see it. We were moving towards that wall of uniforms. That is the only way I can describe it. Because I couldn't-- I wouldn't look at the face. I couldn't. We were afraid to look at anybody's face. Were afraid to look to see what a person who plays God would look like. Uniforms, boots.

And as we were inching towards our turn, our turn was coming closer and closer. And then our turn came. And my aunt and my cousin were not with us, because they were not allowed together with us, to stand beside us. Because we were designated which groups to be with whom, too.

We were not-- we couldn't just be at random here or at random there. We had to be designated exactly with such and such a group. And they were a different group. And we never saw them again.

And our turn came. And lo and behold, we were told to go to the left. And as I said before, didn't take long to know that the left was the living. For the time being, anyway, for whatever long that may be.

And then after that, what was the mood in the ghetto?

From what I remember, people moved in to the houses that were emptied by those that were taken away. There was a part of the ghetto where our street was. I don't know if I can take the time to sort of describe the layout of that.

The way our ghetto was, that our street was partly one side was the ghetto and one side-- that was our street. And one side, part of it, was the Gentle side. And it extended quite far out. Now, this part, where it was the Jewish-- the ghetto where it was on one side, that part was taken away.

So the people who returned from that part and from the small ghetto, too, that were-- the small ghetto was emptied to come to that Democratic Place, too. To go through the big Action. They never got back to their homes in the small ghetto. The small ghetto was eliminated. And the bridge was taken away. So all these people that remained moved in to the quarters that the previous inhabitants lived.

So I acquired new friends. We acquired new neighbors. And life, so to speak, went on. It did. Every time, there was another happening, a minor, maybe not so major. Because the people that were taken out to work-- every morning the people were ordered to gather at the gate to go to work.

And some people had designated places where to go. They worked. Like my father worked for the Gestapo. In what capacity, I'm not even sure what he did. He was called in German an [GERMAN]. [GERMAN] like an oven. And they made ovens, for cooking or for whatever, or for heating. That was the trade. Whether he made the ovens for them or not, I really don't know. But they called him on his paper [GERMAN], so I suppose that's what he did.

But the big project for work was what they called the [GERMAN], the airport. Numerous, numerous people were taken to build the airport in Kaunas, in Kovno. Which wasn't-- and also in a suburb called Aleksot. I don't know if anyone ever mentioned this, if you ever heard this word. I shouldn't.

Anyway. And so this was most-- where most of the people went to work there, at the airport, and returning every night back. Now, on the return, very often, people did not return. Because either in the morning, before they went to work, they were designated no, no, no, you're not going to work today. We need you someplace else.

And they would just at random take a group and put them in the what used to be near us, the synagogue, and they made it into a jail. And that's where they put the people temporarily. And then they deported them somewhere. To a forced labor somewhere. That was the story.

And it didn't matter whether they were-- it wasn't a young or old, it was at random. So those were the circumstances that we lived under. And we were close to it. Because we were-- we were number 29.

And probably number 20 or whatever, that's where the synagogue was. It was-- the blocks were very small. It wasn't like a street, like you imagine the Washington or Toronto. It was a different time. And the houses looked a lot different. I couldn't believe it when I saw pictures of what it looked like.

What did you do all day?

What did I do? I looked after my brother. The two of us were left behind at home. Also, we had people move in with us, too. Because the ghetto got condensed every time.

So people moved in. And a mother and a son joined us and slept on the sofa in our-- what was sort of, kind of living room. Wasn't really a living room, but it was the sofa in the dining room. The mother and a quite a grown son. But there was no other way. So they slept.

Because the four of us, we slept in one bedroom, too. I slept in a crib-- not in a crib-- in a crib. What you would call a crib now for-- not a cradle, but a crib till we moved out of this place. And I'll get to that a bit later. I slept in a crib. And my brother slept with my mother and father in the middle.

So my father and mother went to work every day. And I stayed at home with my brother. And my mother used to also risk her life very often. And that's where-- I don't want to jump the gun.

She would cover her clothes, her coat, the yellow stars, with the Jew on it on both sides, cover up. And steal away and try to exchange something for food.

By then, we did not have any valuables, because there was something, too. There was a decree that all the valuables must be brought to where that Judenrat, where that the Jewish committee, or the Komitet in Yiddish, it was called the Komitet.

Into the premises of this building, all the belongings-- furs, wedding bands, any kind of-- anything that is valuable that you think is valuable. You must not keep. You must take it. Silver candlesticks. Anything, anything. So perhaps my mother didn't give everything. So she would exchange for food. And at the risk of her life. To try to smuggle--

So just tell me again, how your mother would sneak out.

She would sneak out, either from the work, from the place of work, or while walking towards the place of work. And she was not the only one who would do that.

But it was at the risk of death. First, to get out then to get back in, and then to smuggle in, if she did get something, to the ghetto. Because sporadically, they were searched. You, you, you? Like that, you know. What have you got? Are you bringing? They always knew that somebody was bringing. It's like going through the customs, excuse me. You know, please. But sporadically. Yes.

And she was never caught. And she managed to bring in food for us.

And as in any other society, there were, even in the ghetto, there were people who had it better than others. They had better, maybe their place of work. Maybe they could work where they-- they worked with food. Or maybe they worked with clothes. Or whatever it was. There were even songs on this matter about the nouveau riche, so to speak, of the ghetto, kind of.

And they would probably buy something from that my mother smuggled in. Or I would stand on the corner in the ghetto on the street somewhere. That I would be put out to do the selling. And that was part of my-- this was my duty

So my mother could save some, perhaps, either money. I don't know whether they got money. Or some stamps, maybe for food, or to change, or something. I don't know what they changed for in the ghetto. I mean, I did the selling. And I did get money, I think. I don't recall, truly. I don't remember.

But I remember standing on the corner not too far from my-- there was a special corner and I was not the only one. There were other kids. There were another people. And selling of goods that were brought, smuggled into the ghetto.

What about other parts of life in the ghetto as life went on? What about--

OK, now, previously, I mentioned that I loved-- that I had a curious mind, that I love to read. And I did. Now, when I think back on those days. And books were-- they were among those things that were forbidden. We were not to have books, or schools, or anything like that. Nothing that would humanize us.

Now, I really don't know. But that is unbelievable to me, even. I always had a book. Different kinds of books. I read, I found everywhere. I found books. I read in Yiddish, the Jewish classics and non-Jewish classics translated into Yiddish. Guy de Maupassant, I remember having read. Of course, Sholem Aleichem I knew, I read. I read the Jewish history by Graetz. I read in the ghetto.

I was just 10, 11 years old then. I don't know how I got-- how those books came to me. And it's not like somebody provided them. Or maybe because the way I was going to people, like-- and I'll get to that, to the photograph that is of me in the museum. There's the photograph of me. And I'll have to bring that up soon.

Maybe that's how I-- because I would go to people's houses to sell things. And maybe I would notice a book. Or maybe I would ask for the book, if did they have books. Because I was pretty gutsy in those days. I was. Unfortunately, I'm not now. Quite timid as a person, but that's another story. But I was very, very outgoing and very gutsy. That's the word.

So I always read and I always listened. I remember going to a concert in the ghetto. Now, it wasn't on a regular basis. But there was what you call a higher school of learning for the Talmud. They call it a yeshiva now. A yeshiva, a higher school for students of higher learning.

And the Slabodka yeshiva was a very famous one in the world. There is even one in Israel now that carries the name of that yeshiva. But it's just only the name. It's not the same thing, of course.

And within the walls of this yeshiva, which was still within the ghetto, there were people who got together who played instruments. And they played classical music. And I remember it being. And this was also very risky. But people took chances.

Lithuanian Jews have a reputation of being very cultured, and learned, and very informative, and all of those things. And I think there was something to it. I think there were newspapers being printed in the ghetto. Of course, they were underground.

There were all kinds of songs being written. I knew a lot of the songs. I still remember some of the songs. People's minds just wouldn't die because their bodies were dying. People made the best of what they could under the circumstances.

The children-- they tried to educate the children. There were schools. I don't recall really attending one. I may have, because I remember knowing of it. But not on the regular. You couldn't do it on a regular basis. Life was not regular. You couldn't do it on a regular basis. But certainly, attempts were made. And sometimes, really, they worked. They worked well.

What about celebrations?

Good question. Because again, when I was talking about the concert, I remember-- to the same yeshiva, we went. It was the holiday of Sukkot, which was actually the end of Sukkot, which is Simchat Torah. Now, Simchat Torah means the joy of the Torah. You celebrate the Torah, the finishing of reading it and the beginning of the reading it again. It's like a circle that never ends.

And I remember going there, dancing with everybody. And it was crowded. It was crowded with people dancing because of the Simchat Torah, because of the joy of the Torah. So that was a celebration.

What about religious-- wasn't religious practice?

Well, religious practice-- our home was very traditional. Strictly kosher always. My father never worked on the Sabbath. And my father didn't go to the synagogue on a daily basis. He put on his phylacteries at home. And then he went to work. He had breakfast and went to work.

I remember, on the Sabbath, we walked a lot. But I think I also remember that we took a bus. So we were not-- I think, maybe not so much a bus. But my father, I remember, one time, took me on an excursion on a boat.

Because the city of Kaunas was on two rivers. And two rivers went into the other. And the Viliya. I don't know how to pronounce it otherwise. That's how I knew it. And our street actually was right next to that Viliya. And then Neman, the very famous Lithuanian Neman, that this was the national river. That many, many Lithuanian songs were written on that. And I remember one or two of them vaguely.

We have to put another roll.