

Mark. 10

Marker.

So pretty soon, it was the end of the ghetto.

Right.

Tell me about that.

Yes. Now, before that, there were two camps outside of the ghetto. But within the city are also suburbs of Kaunas, Sanc, Sanciai, Sanciai or Sancai, something Lithuanian is like that. And Aleksot. And there was also a forced labor camp where the airport was. Perhaps it still is there, for all I know.

And just prior to the liquidation of the ghetto, which came about, I think, in June or July, you know. I have trouble. Was this June or July?

Both, it went all through the summer.

Both, it went along, right. Now, in June, if that's the case-- either the end of May or June, so at the beginning of June, for a couple of weeks, my father was ordered with his family to go to this camp to Sanc. So we were taken out of the ghetto by then.

And from then, that point on, we were separated. We were, up to then, until my brother was taken away, our little family was intact. Until '44, until the end of March. And then, towards the end of the ghetto, towards the starting of the liquidation of the ghetto, we were separated from my father, where we were in the same camp, but the women were in one barracks and the men were in a different barracks.

So we could only get to see each other very, you know, briefly. In the evenings for a very-- like because we were working already. By then I had to work, too.

And in the ghetto, too. They installed the workshops in the ghetto where I also worked to learn to sew. So that we would be useful citizens. So we would be able to show them that we are useful. And in this camp, too, we worked, the women and the men. But not together.

And at night, briefly, we got to see my father. And soon after that, we were loaded into the boxcars and taken to Germany, wherever that was. We had no idea where we were being taken. But we were being deported.

And as you were deported, did you see any of the burning of the ghetto?

No. We were not within the ghetto then. I did not see that.

And you didn't go back?

We did not go back, no.

OK I'm going to take you back and ask you a couple things.

OK, sure.

Mr. Rick has told you what happened to him just at the Ninth Fort.

Yes.

Tell me what he told you.

He told me that bodies were piled up upon bodies. They shot them as a threat. Like they just-- there were ditches, there were graves. And they shot them. I don't remember whether I said whether they should undress or not. I don't recall them having told them to undress before they were shot. That I don't remember.

But he was left for dead. Covered with bodies. And that's how he managed to get out from underneath and make himself back to the ghetto. And he testified to that in the court of law in Toronto.

Had he been wounded or had?

You know, I don't-- I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think so.

OK.

Because had he been wounded, I don't know if he would have--

Been able to get back.

--to get back. To get out.

And the photo of you in the ghetto, how did that happen?

Yes, OK. My mother had a cousin, who became a doctor during the Russian occupation of Lithuania. He became a doctor in Italy. When he came back, he was designated to practice in a small town. And so when his parents, who happened to be fairly rich, were deported as bourgeois to Siberia by the Russians, just a week before the war broke out, he was not there to be deported with them.

And he remained in Lithuania. The war broke out, he had friends, non-Jewish friends, who were willing to hide him. And they did. So he lived with the friends in the city of Kaunas.

We didn't know what happened to him at that time. We didn't know that he lived that way until my mother was contacted by one of the officials of the committee of the ghetto, of the Jewish committee.

And he came to talk to my mother, would she be willing to help out in hiding him and looking after him, because he must be in the ghetto, but also hidden. His whereabouts are not to be told to anybody. Because they could very well find him in the ghetto and take him away, too. Well, of course, my mother, she wasn't to tell a soul at that time, agreed.

And she was told where he would be hidden. And the reason I knew about it was because she cooked food for him whenever she could. And I would take it to him. And he shared his quarters with a colleague of his, who was also a professional doctor, and a specialty gynecology.

And by sheer coincidence, he was there when I was born. He was my mother's doctor. And this person, by the name of Dr. Nabriskin, said to me, I want to take your picture. It's for the archives.

And I don't remember whether I came with a small milk can or he handed it to me. I don't remember how it happened. But I remember him taking the picture. And I remember him telling me for archives. By then I was 11. I knew what was going on. So I knew what archives meant.

So he photographed me. But that was the last thing that ever occurred to me was to worry about this picture. I never thought of it. It never occurred to me that it would ever, ever survive and end up in Washington in the Holocaust Museum. I'm shocked now.

What about some of the songs. Could you sing a song or two?

Oh my goodness. Can I sing a song or two? Some of the songs were-- but they were, the words were composed to old tunes. Borrowed tunes of other songs.

Now, there was one song about the Jewish brigades that went out to work every morning and came back every day, every night from work. And it happens to be a Polish melody, I found later. I didn't know that it was even a Polish melody. Not only a Polish melody, but I think it's a very patriotic Polish melody. And it goes to that effect.

Now, forgive me my voice, it's-- it goes [YIDDISH].

Now, in translation, it means that the Jewish brigades go day in and day out to work, to slave, and they are bearing their pain with great, with lots of mood, with good spirits. I don't know. I don't even know how to translate [YIDDISH], because it means with gusto, with feeling. But maybe hope or something. I don't know. It says a lot.

And there is this song that was also not-- excuse me, that's a very important song. And it's about the Kinder Shack, it's about the children. And you may have heard of it. And it's about a mother who takes her child to be with non-Jews, and how he is not to tell. That you know, whenever I think of this song, even I get a lump in my throat.

And it goes, let me think how it goes. Oh, my god, I don't-- I have a mental block because I got mixed up with that other song. Oh, my goodness. [YIDDISH]. OK. Do they have to change a tape?

Yeah.

OK. So maybe it'll come to me now. It will, yes.

Marker.

Now, as I was saying, there's a song about the children that were taken away, and about the mother who tries to anticipate this terrible event, and takes her child to a non-Jewish family. And it goes like this.

[YIDDISH].

Now, there is more. But this tells you what it is really all about. And that's the song. Now, how can I go on from here? What do I say?

What else?

Now, should I translate it?

A little.

OK.

Some words.

Some. OK, now, this is about a mother, as I said earlier, who takes her child to a non-Jewish family. The children look out the window. And there are children with blonde-- the girls have blonde braids and the boys have flaxen hair. And together with them, there is this little child who has got dark eyes and curly, dark hair. And his mother brought him here.

And she explained to him that she brings him here because his life is in danger. And from now on, he must not utter a single Yiddish word or anything to that effect. Because from now on, he's not Jewish anymore. And he better not forget that. He must always remember that he is not a Jew anymore. So this is the gist of it.

Tell me any other things that I haven't asked you about that are vivid memories for you in the ghetto.

You know, I've been worried a lot about lapses. I am going to be 65 this September. See, truly a senior citizen by all standards. Now, I remember having worked within the ghetto, too. This goes back, I think, to the era, to that time, to that quiet time, where they were planting fields of vegetables.

And certain privileged people were allowed to work within. So they didn't have to go out the ghetto. So they were allowed, but they had to work. So they were allowed to work on this field, in these gardens. But the fields were where I said earlier, where the beaches were, too, further on.

And somehow, my mother got me to work there. So I remember working there. I remember singing. Like I always like to sing. And I had an ear. I was like a sponge. I heard a tune and words, and it was-- I got it. It was in me. So we did have the half-hour break, I would gather, and I would sing. But those times were very few and far in between.

What other things do you tell the school kids about?

You know, the thing is about the school kids is like this. My time is usually limited. It's within--

No, I mean, just tell me any other things.

OK. So what I tell them mostly are certain-- I tell them, unfortunately, the bad things, all the bad things. I mean, there are no good things, really. How can you say that, good things? But the lighter times, if you can call them that, as you said. There was a lull, so to speak, for a while. I don't even remember how long it took. I don't know.

I remember the lull, so to speak. Because our ghetto, actually lasted longer than most ghettos did. From '41 till '44.

The Vilna ghetto-- people from the Vilna ghetto, I remember, were brought. When the Vilna ghetto was liquidated before the Kovno from the ghetto was, and they were brought to our ghetto. Those who were not deported anywhere else. And I remember that vividly. So bad times as well as not so bad times. They go.

What about keeping warm in the winter? Do you remember?

Keeping warm in the winter. We had our home, so to speak. We were not in barracks. We were in our own quarters, especially when we had our house from before the war. We lived there. There was always wood to heat. Because that was the way of heating the homes to begin with. You had like a fireplace. You heat a fireplace with wood. Our homes were heated with this kind of wood.

That was my father's trade, actually, now, come to think of it. To build the places where you could put in, and then they would put in sort of units where you could either cook in them or put in wood into them. And it would heat.

The homes were not large. Like the home that we had, like I said before, there were two rooms and a kitchen. And the oven that we had, it was-- one part of it went into the bedroom. And the front-- the back was in the bedroom and the front was in the living room, dining room part.

Let me ask you something else?

Yes.

Did you ever have-- did you get interested in boys in the ghetto? Or did they get interested in you?

Nice and interesting question. Probably. You know, not to that extent where it would really be memorable. I looked after my brother, mostly. I was with my brother all the time.

Did you, and did you--

I had friends.

And you have fun with some of them.

Yes, I had friends. The friends had-- one friend had a cat. As a matter of fact, then, we used to make fun of the cat. And of course, we all spoke Yiddish. And the cat-- and in those days, I loved animals. We were exposed an awful lot to animals.

And this cat, I would hold it on my lap, and I would say to the cat, cat, do you have a father? In Yiddish. [YIDDISH] And the cat would-- and I'd blow in its ear. So the cat would go like this and shake its head. You know, we would think it's funny that we asked the cat, does she/he have a father? And the cat would shake its head and no. So that was-- things like that.

And did you try to keep your brother out of sight, mostly?

Not really, because until that time, when the children were specifically-- so the ghetto was surrounded, specifically take away children. Somehow there was not this threat. So we hung around the house. I cooked.

I remember, I made dough out of water with flour that my mother brought in. The flour, obviously. And I learned how to roll out a very nice round, like you would call it a pizza. And then I would roll it up and slice it thin to make noodles. [YIDDISH]. You know, and there was a potato. With this, it was a meal.

So when my parents did come home, and when I didn't have to work, that's what I used to do. And like I said before, I used to go out to the corner and sell either a trade or sell. I don't even remember that too well. I remember doing it.

Thank you very much. We're just about out. And I'm very grateful. Thank you very much. I know this was very hard.

You're very welcome. There is, I tell you the way I got liberated.

I know. But you can't-- I don't-- I can't.

I know. It's OK. It's OK. And then I'll wish I had you when I made the liberation film. Wait, we have--

Oh, if you have the liberation. You mean, this is a different--