

Is the mic set up?

It's on. Any time.

Today is Thursday, June 18, 1992. We're at Beth Shalom Temple in San Francisco. I'm Mike Ashkenaz, I'm assisted by Emily Rosenberg. And we're interviewing Irving Zale. Mr. Zale, let's just start with where you were born and the date of your birth.

Well, I was born January 27, 1926 in Cologne, Germany. And my parents were of Polish extraction.

What were your parents' names?

My father's name was Jacob and my mother's name Francisca. I had no brothers or sisters. I was the only one.

Did you have family?

Yes. At the time when I resided in Cologne, my father's brother also resided there. His name was Joseph. And my mother's sister-- my father's sister resided in Cologne also. It was quite a big family that we had at the time.

Did they have children?

Yes, they had two sons. Both of their sons immigrated to Palestine in the early 1930s.

What was it like growing up in Cologne?

Well, when I was in my younger years, I still attended grade school in Cologne. But then about 1934, when the Nazis occupied the Rhineland and things were getting a little more discriminatory towards Jews, my parents had to enroll me in a Jewish public school. And then I went to Jewish Gymnasium. So I was excluded from attending the regular private schools or the regular public schools.

Yeah. Was there a point in time where you felt different because you were Jewish?

Yes, it gradually-- it was a gradual process that developed over the years. It started about 1935 or 1936, when Jews became more cognizant that there are laws that restricted them from certain-- becoming public officials. And certainly, the school system had changed because Jewish students could no longer go to public schools.

And it was a gradual buildup of discrimination towards Jews in many areas. And it was more pronounced after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws that life would use was becoming more intolerable for ear to ear.

Was there one incident that you remember, the first incident of discrimination?

Yes and no. I was a little more sheltered because my parents always were meeting with Jewish people. We never had any too much contact with Germans as such. So we led a more sheltered life. We were not exposed to. But I remember incidents of coming home from school, being attacked by non-Jewish kids, you know, shouting, Jew, Jew go to Palestine, and all that thing. That was an ongoing situation.

Did you have any Gentile friends?

No, because it wasn't very advisable in those years. Gentiles already started shying away with having contact with Jews. And we were more or less in our Jewish environment all the time in the early '30s and later '30s.

Did you have any contact at all with Gentiles, non-Jewish population?

No, not that I can remember. My parents probably did, but I as a young boy, I don't recall.

What was the Jewish population like?

Well, Cologne at the time had a very active Reform temple and a very active Conservative synagogue. The population, the Jewish population, of Cologne at the time, I would estimate, I think, was around 15,000, maybe 20,000. It was a very vibrant Jewish community. And I had my bar mitzvah in Cologne in 1937. And I know there was a big turnout at the time. We had a lot of Jewish friends.

What types of activities did you engage in?

Well, I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair, so we would go on-- weekends, we would do a lot of hiking. We also had a Jewish Community Center at the time that was still going-- I think it was deactivated in about 1939-- where we would have monthly meetings.

Youth groups would come together. We would learn modern Hebrew. We would speak to young people who came from Palestine, urged us on to go to Palestine. We would sing Hebrew songs. We would be indoctrinated, so to speak, into the Zionist movement. And we were told what life was all about in Palestine and that if we ever would emigrate, we would know what life was in Palestine in those years.

But unfortunately, my parents were not very Zionist-oriented. Had they been a little more Zionist oriented, I could have probably have been in Palestine in 1938.

Could you describe the Zionist movement?

Well, there were youth groups of all shapes and denominations in the Zionist movement, ranging from the ultra-- from the Orthodox wing of Zionism to the Habonim, Hashomer Hatzair. And they all had one objective-- to train young people to go to Palestine. Most of the leaders had some exposure of having been to Palestine and came back to Germany just for the purpose of training youth, and indoctrinating them, and making them fit to go to Palestine if they choose.

But you have to remember that although the young people might have been willing to go, the parents there, they felt that situation in Germany was not really that bad. But the situation in Palestine was very traumatic. There was malaria, there was unrest. The British did not-- had a quota, you know, where they intercepted Jewish immigrants to Palestine. So the parents put a lid on the young people that prevented them from going.

How many people actually went to Palestine? Were there any guilds?

Well, I don't remember how many. I know one of my cousins went. And he got stricken by malaria. And he came back just shortly before the war because he couldn't tolerate the situation in Palestine. And I cannot give you an accurate number of how many people went. There were some that did make Aliyah in those years.

Physically, where the Jews live in Cologne? Was there sort of a-- maybe not a ghetto, but a section?

Jews, in those years, most of them were merchants. Merchants and they were in the arts and entertainment industry. They lived all over town. There was no specific area where Jews would congregate. They lived in the inner city, and the outer city, in the suburbs. And was it was a very open community. There were no restrictions of where you could live.

How big was Cologne at that time?

About 550,000 population.

And where did you live?

We lived in the inner city, what you may call the downtown area at the time. And then later on, we moved out to a

suburban area. But that was-- we just lived there a year before we left Cologne. It was just a very brief time.

In the inner city, what type of building did live in?

There were apartment houses, you know, like four or five-story-high apartment houses. And the outer cities had a little villas, little detached homes.

Who were your neighbors in the apartment house?

They were mostly people, I would say they were working class people. There were some merchants. But what I remember, there was not very much-- we didn't have very much contact with our neighbors. You know, when you live in a building with 20 or so families, you don't get to know everybody on an intimate basis.

How many Jews or Jewish families?

Pardon?

How many Jewish families were in the building?

The one that we lived in, I think we were the only ones out of maybe 20 or 25 tenants. It was very well-integrated.

Your parents-- would you like to describe them?

Yes. My father was a traveling salesman. My father was-- in those years, he represented several clothing manufacturers in Germany. He traveled quite extensively throughout Germany. He would be coming home only for weekends most of the time. And my mother was a typical housewife. She attended to the chores of a housewife. You know, buying food, taking care of the family.

And my father was very involved in German-Polish relations. He was on the German-Polish Friendship Society board of directors. That is a reason that probably we had left Germany before the mass evacuation of all Polish Jews.

Because my father was tipped off in 1938 by the then-consul in Dusseldorf that the Polish Jews would be rounded up and sent over the border. And unless you had someplace else to go, that would be the place for you to go back, to Poland. And he was active in that society.

My mother was-- she was not very into politics but she was very culturally-oriented. She followed the theater, the arts, and so forth. My father had some non-Jewish friends in his business dealings, but not on a social level.

Did your parents come from Poland, then, originally?

Yes, both my mother and father came from Poland. They were cousins. And in the early 1920s, there was a great influx out of Poland of Jews going into Germany because in those years, the economics in Germany were better than in Poland. So they were part of the mass exodus out of Poland in the early 1920s.

Were they German citizens?

No, my parents never became German citizens.

Were you considered a German citizen?

No.

How religious were your parents?

My father was probably more religious than my mother. My father, I remember, I used to take me to shul. And at the time, we went to the Conservative temple. And I would say today, it would be more conservative, leaning toward Orthodoxy. I, as a young man, did not feel very comfortable because most of the services were in Hebrew.

And I had, at the same time, made acquaintance in my school years at the Jewish Gymnasium and the Jewish high school with German Jews. And they would persuade me to go to their Reform temple, where I felt much more comfortable because all the service was in German and I knew what that was all about. My mother was more liberal. But being married to a more conservative man, she toed the line.

Did your family observe the holidays there?

Pardon?

Did your family observe the holidays?

Oh, yeah, we observed every holiday. Every holiday. And Sabbath?

Yes. We tried to maintain a kosher home as long as it was possible. Yes.

Any other recollections of your father?

No. My father was very stern. My father did not want me to learn Yiddish because most of my grandparents were still alive at the time. And my parents, my father's family, they all spoke Yiddish.

But my father frowned upon my learning Yiddish because he felt always that if I speak Yiddish, I would spoil my grades in German, that I would get inferior grades, that I would not learn the high German, that the Yiddish would interfere with that. So I was discouraged from learning Yiddish. But I managed, still, to catch, get a couple of phrases. I still speak some Yiddish. Though it's a bastardized German today.

Any other recollections of your mother?

Yes, and my mother was-- as a matter of fact, I will be reading later on into the program. I have a article that I'd like to read about my mother at the end of the taping.

Anything you want to say on your own about it?

No, I'll leave that for later.

OK. What about your grandparents? I can only recall my father's father, my grandfather, and my mother's mother. But I was very young when they both passed away.

My mother would take me on vacations, periodically, to Poland because all her family still lived in Krakow. And many, almost every second year, we would go for the summer vacation. She would take me to Poland. And I would live there for about five, six months. Oh, no, five to six weeks, where I learned a little bit Polish.

And my mother would show me around. She would take me to various resorts in Krakow, the city of Krakow. My father would have to stay behind because he had to earn a living. So he wasn't always able to accompany.

And one vivid recollection I have-- my grandmother was a very stern woman. She frowned upon my speaking German once I got to Poland. She insisted that I always speak Polish, no matter how bad or how correctly. And that's all I can remember about my grandmother.

All your friends were German Jews? Were there any who were Polish?

My schoolmates were all German Jews, right.

How did German Jews treat Polish Jews? Was there any distinction between the two groups?

As a young child, I did not feel that there was. No, I felt very comfortable. I don't think, despite what you hear, that German Jews frowned on Polish Jews. In my younger years, I did not feel that. No. Of course, they wouldn't want to go to the synagogue that my parents worshipped. I had to go to the synagogue where they worship. And for me, this was fine.

I have one more question about your family, should've asked before. What was your family's economic status?

Well, we all went through the Depression. My father did not make money the easy way, he had to struggle. I was aware that there was an economic recession going on. I could not have all the toys and all the food items that I wanted. It was a difficult economic situation.

But at the same time, I never went hungry. I always had good clothes to wear. But my parents were comfortable. But they worked for it. It was not an easy economic situation.

How would you describe Cologne in general and the Jewish population?

Well, let me back up a little bit. Cologne, as you may know, is a very Roman Catholic-oriented city. The rise of the Nazis in 1933 did not sit well with a lot of the people in Cologne because they were all Catholics.

They all realized that what is now anti-Jewish later on is going to become anti-Catholic. There was really not very much of the vibrant antisemitism evident that you could have probably detect in some cities in Germany where the population was more Lutheran or Protestant.

There was much more tolerance towards Jews than in the Rhineland, and in Cologne particular, being the seat of the archdiocese. The Archbishop of Cologne was a violently anti-Nazi-oriented head of state. So initially, the Jews did not really feel the brunt of antisemitism from the local population.

Did that change your feeling about that, too?

Well, yes, gradually it started changing because Hitler put more pressure on the officials to toe the line of the Nazi party. People were thrown out of jobs if they did not toe the line. And sooner or later, antisemitism started building up as, in the mid 1930s and the late 1930s, people realized if they wanted a job, they better toe the Nazi line.

How well-off was the Jewish population economically?

Well, there were some very well-to-do Jewish people. There were Jewish people that were in-- there were doctors, lawyers, attorneys, there were people in real estate, there were people in large manufacturing concerns. The Reform synagogue had quite a wealthy backbone of congregants. And there were some well-to-do Jews in Cologne. In areas of-- there were a lot of lawyers, doctors, teachers.

Were there are a lot of poor Jews?

No, I don't think there were. Not to the sense that you mentioned poor. There weren't Jews that were begging, let me put it this way. Everybody made a living.

What about the Gentile population, the economic status?

Well, the Gentile population was also hit because of the economic depression that persisted in the 1930s. They also suffered. There were setbacks, there was unemployment. And as you know, it was because of this discontent of unemployment and economic instability that the Nazis were able to capitalize on and eventually came to power.

And of course, this was all blamed on the Jews. But there were people that were unemployed. It was quite a number of people who lived on subsistence and welfare.

Could you make any sort of generalization about the economic status of the Jewish population versus that rest of Cologne? Were Jews better off than Germans?

I was really too young. But looking back, looking back on this, I think there were as many Jews, probably, out of work proportionately as there might have been Gentiles out of work. And there were many Jews that had to struggle proportionately to the other. It was a very unstable economic depression. We knew that things were difficult to get. Food was available, but the money wasn't there always to buy everything that you wanted to buy.

Do you recall where there was any effort within the Jewish population to help or assist unemployed Jews?

Yes, there was a Jewish organization that would channel loans to Jews, that would give assistance to needy Jews. There was all this in place. There was a very active Jewish community, as I pointed out in the beginning.

How long were you in Cologne?

Well, we left Cologne in 1938, as I told you, because of the tip that we received from the Polish consul that the Jews will be rounded off. And not having had the financial resources to obtain a foreign visa to Bolivia, or Uruguay, or someplace else for several thousand dollars, we had no other choice but to leave.

We were fortunate and we could pack up all our belongings, take everything with us that we owned, and move to Krakow, where my mother's two brothers resided, and where my mother had a considerable amount of friends. And we moved. But we moved from the fire into the frying pan.

What type of city was Krakow at that time?

Well, Krakow, as a young man, was a cultural shock for me. Because many things that I was accustomed to finding in Germany were not available in Krakow.

The most striking difference was, of course, coming into contact with Hasidic Jews, was Jews living in a complete separate borough, almost to speak, was seeing Hebrew posters on the streets, was seeing Hebrew movies, and Yiddish being talked all over the place.

The sanitary condition in the Jewish part of Krakow were so different than what I was accustomed to seeing. However, my mother's family were more already more liberal Jews. We did not live in that borough. We did not live in that section of town. We did not mingle with the very Orthodox Jews. But I've never seen them before so this was a big cultural shock to me.

And of course, the food was different. The clothes, the people was different. And the language was different. How big a city was Krakow at that time?

Krakow at the time, population-wise was about, I would say, about 320,000, 350,000 people. It was a very vibrant city. It was a city that had a theater, had operas. It was a cultural center of Poland next to Warsaw. And it was a city full of intelligentsia.

It had a European atmosphere, as far as people meeting in coffee houses or discussing literary works. There were many cinemas, many movie houses. It was a city, also, that had a old historical background, going back to the 12th, 13th century. The castle and the cathedral.

It also had a very-- it was also typical Roman Catholic. But the Roman Catholics in Cologne were quite different from the Roman Catholics in Poland as far as the attitude towards Jews was concerned. And that I was able to discern right

away.

Could you describe that a little bit?

Well, Roman Catholics, I think, in Poland are more virulent antisemites than they were in Germany. There's no denying that. And they were ignorant about the Jewish religion. Whereas I think the German Roman Catholics had a little more exposure to what Judaism was all about, even in those years.

Were there any--

Pardon?

--incidents that you recall where they had discrimination and segregated?

Well, in 1938, there was a Polish party being formed called the National Democratic Party. The National Democratic Party wanted to structure itself similar to the Nazi party in Germany.

They felt that by becoming antisemitic and a la Nazi, they would eventually become the saviors of Poland, and Poland would remain an independent country despite the overtures that Germany had already made to take over Poland. They wanted to be the good guys and chum it up with the Germans so that Poland would remain Poland. History proved them wrong.

But they became very virulent antisemitic to the point where they almost duplicated what the Nazis were doing, like putting posters in stores saying that Jews are not welcomed here, or this store is only serving Christian people. And they finally managed to elect a president of Poland who was a member of their party.

Any other memories of discrimination in general?

No, those are the most vivid ones that I can recall is the party and the way they wanted to become a spitting image of what the Nazis were all about.

Were you in Krakow, then, on Kristallnacht?

No, I was not in Krakow at Kristallnacht because I pointed out to you, we left Poland in 1938. And Kristallnacht was not until 19-- was in November of 1938. We left we left Cologne in March of 1938. But we heard all about it.

And subsequently, relatives of ours and friends of ours that were being extradited out of Poland forcefully, we finally got to meet them. And some of our more distant relatives also came. And they told us about all the things that went on on Crystal Night. But I was not in Germany at the time anymore.

And did anything happen in Krakow?

No. The only thing we read was in the papers.

Was there any reaction afterwards, the following week or two? Was there an increase in discrimination?

Well, naturally, we were extremely shocked to hear about the ransom and all the things that went on. And we felt extremely powerless to do anything for those Jews that were left in Germany.

Did you see any increase in discrimination?

Oh, yes, the antisemitism never slackened in Poland. If anything else, I think they were-- looking back on history now, I think some Poles might have geared themselves up to help the Nazis get rid of the Jews.

What was the Jewish population in Krakow like besides the Hasidim?

Well, the Jewish population in Krakow was much more vibrant in a different way than the one in Cologne. The Jewish organization had a vibrant Jewish community, with their own president, with their own administrative staff, was supervising all the Jewish welfare functions. It was a much more semi-governmental autonomy to take care of Jewish affairs than they had been in Germany.

They were the administrators of all the welfare facilities, the cemetery facilities, you name it. And the Jewish community in Krakow took care of everything. Culturally, there was a very vibrant community. There were two Jewish theaters that I remember. I've never attended any, but they were always advertising. There were several movie houses where they weren't showing nothing else but but Yiddish films.

It was a very wealthy Jewish community, a lot of merchants. But they also had many, many people who were poor. For the first time, I really saw poor Jewish people who went begging, who were wearing torn clothes. That was something that I've never encountered in Germany.

And this book by Wiszniak, incidentally, captures a lot of this in black and white photography.

Which book is it?

By Wiszniak. And he was a photographer. I think it's called *The Vanishing World*.

How large was the Jewish population of Krakow?

I think that probably, out of the 350,000 population, the Jewish population probably was around, I would say, around 110,000, 125,000. Was a big Jewish population. I would say-- no, wait. Yeah, close to one third of the population of Krakow was Jewish.

Other than the Hasidim, did the Jews live with Gentiles or were there other areas of the city?

To me, the Hasidim were the predominant Jewish population. Whatever other Jews there were-- they were liberal Jews that sort of moved back into the woodworks that the Hasidim really stood out.

Your neighbors were not Jewish?

No.

Did you have much interaction with Gentiles?

Yes, we did. We did. I remember, I used to go to some birthday parties. When I came back to Poland, I did not attend schools, but I managed to make some friends locally, you know. We would go to movies together. And I was invited to some of their birthday parties.

We lived in a newer part of the city where people were a little more-- their outlooks were a little more liberal. And as I said, I only-- once in a while, I would go into the Jewish part of the city. On several special occasions.

So even though the Jewish population was much larger than in Cologne.

Yes.

Would it be accurate to say you felt discrimination?

Yes. They were also more compact, living in a geographic neighborhood, to say.



How would you compare-- we touched upon this a little bit, but compared the amount of discrimination.

To what?

The amount of discrimination against Jews that you'd see.

Well, let's put it this way. The Poles were doing their bit, the Jews were doing their bit. The Jews were mostly merchants. They were mostly merchants. And the Poles needed the merchants. The Poles were mostly craftsmen, peasants, and administrative government officials. So there was a distinct division between what the Jews were doing, what their professions was, and what the Gentile population was doing.

Your family lived in an parliament house in Krakow, too?

Yes. By itself, on its own, or with other families in it?

No, it was the same type of apartment house we lived in Cologne. There were about 20, 25 tenants in the building.

And what did your father do for a living in Krakow?

My father, for the short time he was there, was a salesman. He represented a food company that was selling food items, similar to Kraft. They were selling everything, like cheese, milk. And he became a salesman representative. He traveled throughout Poland for those in that short time.

And what was your family's economic status in Krakow?

It was very similar to one in Germany. We were able to take our belongings with us. My father was making a halfway decent living. And my uncle, who owned a sporting goods store in Krakow, and my other uncle, who was a doctor, I think, helped my parents financially from time to time.

Is there anything else you can tell us about your relatives?

Yes, I had my uncle. My uncle Theodore was a unique man in as much as he was Jewish. And he had a sporting goods store in those years. And he would sell skis equipment, he would sell equipment to Krakow soccer teams. And he in those years had a very avant garde kind of business. Because you wouldn't find too many Jewish people in those years in sporting goods.

And I remember, he would take me to all the soccer matches and all the sporting events in Krakow. And I felt really good about that in those years. And he was a bachelor. And he also would produce his own skis. In those years, there was no ski manufactures. He would engage Polish peasants to select the wood for the skis, to press them, steam them, and prepare the skis for him.

And in those years, you had to be very well-to-do in order to ski. So he catered to a very well-to-do clientele. All those people that were able to go skiing in the wintertime. And it was a fun business.

And I worked as an apprentice for him. He would teach me how to wax the skis, and how to put the bindings on, and I would do all the deliveries to the various sports clubs for their jerseys, and their soccer balls, and whatever else they needed. And unfortunately there, I didn't last very long.

Going back, you said you also had an uncle who was a doctor?

My uncle was a doctor, yeah. He was a general practitioner.

Were his patients both Gentiles and Jews?

Poles. Poles, mostly Poles.

When you say Poles, you mean Gentiles?

Pardon?

When you say Poles, you mean Gentiles?

Yes.

Not many Jewish?

I don't know. Probably a few.

With such a large Jewish population there, any idea why he had so few?

Yes, because we lived in a very non-Jewish neighborhood.

They lived, your uncles lived there.

Right.

What about the relatives who lived in Cologne? Did they move?

They all came to Poland. Six months later, they were forcefully pushed over the border. And we finally got together with them. We got them accommodations, we got them living quarters, and we finally were reunited for a short time.

Any other relatives in Krakow? For example, on your mother's side, of your relatives?

No, no. That's about all. My aunt, my mother's sister, and her husband. He was a veterinarian. He worked for the municipal slaughterhouses. So they were very well off, too. And we all lived in a very non-Jewish neighborhood, you know. And he was also involved in politics, being a municipal employee. And that's about all.

You did not go to school once you moved?

No, my parents wanted to enroll me in a Jewish Gymnasium. And it meant of studying a lot of Hebrew. And I sort of balked. I also would have had to learn Polish all over again, from the first grade. And I just didn't feel like it. And I was very happy working for my uncle in his shop, in the store, doing those things. And I was able to learn Polish on my own, without having to go to school.

And also, I think, my parents, indirectly, were happy because going to the Jewish Gymnasium was a big financial expenditure. And I think I saved them some money. And then, of course, the situation was very unstable, the political situation.

No, my parents did not want to pursue my completing my education.

Could you go into a little bit more detail on that?

Yeah, well, as I said, my relatives in Poland frowned on my using German. And I was being taught to speak Polish as much as I can, as bad as I can. And they taught me how to read.

And eventually, I was young enough, I picked up the language very snappily and very quickly. And there was no need for me to really pursue any further education. We also felt the political situation was very stable-- unstable that I could take a vacation.

In what way was the political situation unstable?

Well, in 1938, there were rumblings about Germany wanted to annex the part leading to Danzig, the corridor question. Germany was making all kinds of military strong overtures against Poland.

We saw the instability of England and France taking a common stand against Germany. We saw the instability in Czechoslovakia with the Munich Agreement. And we felt, my parents felt, and we could sense it in the papers, that it's only a question of months when the war would break out.

How did the Gentile Poles feel about the Nazis? What was your impression of that?

Well, the ones that-- the intelligentsia was probably more afraid of the Nazis coming into Poland than was the peasantry. And as I pointed out to you, the National Democratic Party in Poland thought till the bloody end that they could make an alliance with Germany by copying their Nazi tactics. And they were just in hope that this would not happen.

The Polish population was, however, not prepared to make any kinds of accommodations with Hitler about the corridor issue. And the peasants couldn't care less what's going to happen.

And of course, the National Democratic Party finally succumbed. They could not ward off the Nazi onslaught anymore. And you know, World War II broke out.

How much support was there for the Nazis in Poland?

There wasn't support for the Nazis. There was support from the National Democratic Party. The National Democratic Party in 1939, I think, had considerable support because they appealed along the same lines as the Nazis did.

They appealed for improving the economy, for blaming the Jews, and they appealed to patriotism, you know. And that's how they were able to gain their support. It was almost a mirror of what the Nazis were trying to do in 1933.

Did the National Democratic Party still want a separate Poland?

A what?

A separate Poland. There was no movement for an Anschluss or similar?

No, the National Democratic Party wanted to retain Poland in its original shape. I don't think they were ready to make any accommodations with Germany. But they wanted to become a picture of what Germany accomplished and how they - they started forming their own paramilitary organizations, their own news organizations, adopted all the Nazi philosophies against Jews.

You know, branding Christian stores only. Jews are not desirable here. Trying to eliminate as many Jews out of the civil service and out of government service as they could. So they were copying the Nazi setup.

To backtrack just a little bit. What is your first recollection of Hitler, hearing about Hitler?

Well, my first impression about the Nazis really came at two earlier points in my life. The first one was in 1934, when I saw the Nazis invading the Rhineland, when the army entered over the Cologne bridges, and the military, the cavalry, the artillery, and everything else came into the Rhineland. That was one of the biggest shocks in my life.

My second impression of the Nazis were of course the various rallies that we heard over the radio, that we saw in the movies. But my other impression was, in 1936, my mother took me to Poland. And on our way back, I told her that I would like to stop in Berlin and maybe can take in some of the post-Olympic events in Berlin.

We got to Berlin and the Olympic games were already over. Some of the post-Olympic events were still going on. But what I vividly recall is that you couldn't almost see a building. You couldn't see the stone of a building, because everything was covered with Nazi flags draped all over the building fronts at every conceivable corner. It was just overwhelming to see all these swastikas all over the place.

And then of course, later on, during the invasion of Poland, when I met the first German army advancers, those probably are my most vivid recollections.

Do you recall whether Hitler or Nazis-- how seriously Hitler or Nazis were--

A what?

--taken? How seriously were they taken and how permanent--

How permanent?

--change were they taken to be. Some people we've interviewed have told us that a lot of the adults, and I guess the older the people got, the more they said, don't worry about that, it's just a passing phenomenon. This can't happen in Germany. Well, it can't happen for long.

Well, here again the Roman Catholics in Germany would say that this is a passing phenomenon, that this can not happen, that this immorality that the Nazis are having, not only against the Jews, but against homosexuals, and in general, this is not a German trait, and this is not going to persist.

There were many Jews who also thought that this is a passing fad, that sooner or later, Hitler is going to run out of steam. And he's not going to do all the things that he had written up in Mein Kampf that he would be doing. Yes, there were a lot of those that believed that this can't last. And this is not going to be forever.

Do you recall your parents believed?

Pardon?

Do you recall what your parents believed in the early '30s?

No, my parents, I think, believed that he is going to hold to his blueprint. My parents, however, were in the uncomfortable situation of not having a place to go to. But they knew.

Because every time we heard him on the radio, and we heard the speeches, and they became more virulent, and more antisemitic, and more outspoken. And when the Nuremberg laws were instituted, we knew that there's going to be a turn-around.

What do you recall about the invasion of Poland by Germany?

Well, the invasion was very vivid because when we woke up on September 1, 1939 at 6:00 in the morning and we heard the radio announcing that the Germans have broken the Polish border and have invaded Poland, we knew what the German war machine was like. We knew what the Polish War machine was like. And we knew that when one met the other, it's only a question of days before they would strangle the Polish resistance and take over all of Poland.

We were also aware in 1939, when Ribbentrop made the agreement with Molotov, that there has been a secret agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany to divide up Poland. And there was only a question of who would get to work faster. So we were all very apprehensive. And of course, history bore out what had happened.

And it was only four days before the Nazis finally invaded, came into Krakow. We fled the third day after the invasion. And we fled on foot because we didn't have a car. We made some of our getaway by train. But then the train would stop

and no place else to go but to go on foot, continue on.

Where did you go to?

Well, we went to a-- we got as far as little town called Rzeszow, which must have been about maybe 100 miles east of Krakow. And there, we got overtaken by the German advance military. My mother and I were too feeble to continue walking so we called it quits. My father at the time was still in Warsaw. He was on a business trip. And my uncle, and my father's brother decided to continue on. They were men, they had a stronger stamina. And they finally got over the Russian lines. And they went into what then became Russian-occupied Poland. My mother and myself, we were overtaken by the German military. And we decided to go back to Krakow. It was the only place for us to go back.

What made you decide to flee?

Pardon?

What made you decide to flee?

Well, there were two factors deciding to flee. Number one, there was a slight bombardment of Cologne by the German Luftwaffe. And number two is that we thought that maybe we can get away from the Nazis. We knew that the Russians were going to make a move from the other side. And we had hoped that if, you know, we got out of the German part of Poland and maybe go into the Russian part of Poland.

What did you fear the Nazis would do if you did not escape from them?

Well, we knew what the Nazis stood for because we had heard about Kristallnacht and all the other things that were going on in Germany. We did not expect anything good to come out of this.

What happened after you returned to Krakow?

Well, we stayed in Krakow. We lived in Krakow for another couple of months. Yeah. We went back to our apartment, we lived in our apartment. And my father eventually came back from Warsaw. He knew where to find us. And gradually, things came back to more or less a normal life in Krakow for a short time.

Until the summer of 1940, when different laws were being promulgated. Jews were requested to wear armbands. And there was a voluntary evacuations of Jews that were asked to leave the city on a voluntary basis to outlying areas.

Now, I got to rely on my notes. The winter of 1940 was really a turning point because in the winter of 1940, there were heavy snowstorms, huge accumulations of snow in the city, massive snow.

And who would be asked to clear the snow? But they used the Jews. The Jews had to register. They had to get special ID cards. And they had to report to special stations for snow removal action. And they were being paid nothing for that. So throughout the winter of 1940 was really the turning point that the Nazis turned on the screws on the Jewish population in Krakow.

In early spring and summer, we knew an acquaintance of my aunt who lived in a suburban area outside in a village. And we decided to get out of town. We packed up everything and we moved to this little village outside of Krakow. And we lived there for about, oh, close to nine months.

In the interim, what had happened in the spring and the summer of 1941? The Germans established a ghetto in Krakow. My father would walk from the village that we stayed in to the ghetto just to get an idea of what this ghetto was all about. And he came back with good reports. You know, they had their own coffee houses. They had their own-- they had a theater.

But my mother and father-- my mother did not take too kindly to this kind of a living condition. We preferred living in

the village. We had some nice neighbors. My aunt knew a couple of people there.

And eventually, living in that village also became a little unbearable because we always were identified as Jews by wearing the badge. And in the early fall of 1941, there was a quarry in that town, a brick quarry. And the Jews were asked to report for work in that big brick quarry. And we would work there for six days, six hours a day, and given some kind of minimum compensation.

But we had to be there day after day. And they would check us in. And I think this was the first indication that they were going to use Jews for forced labor. This was sort of we were still being paid, but they knew where we are, they knew how many would report for work every day. And we had to work there.

In the winter of 1941, both my uncles decided to come back from the Russian-occupied part of Poland and join us in that village that we lived. The village by the name was Jelonek.

Now in 1942, in April of 1942, that quarry work at that village was discontinued, and we were to report to another village, in another part of the Krakow region, for continued work at that quarry.

My whole family left. We were forcefully resettled. They picked us up and moved us to this other town, including my mother and my father. And we worked at that village, at that quarry, for about, I would say, six months. Similar thing, making bricks.

So on January 15, 1943, that quarry was closed and all the Jews were finally rounded up and put into the Krakow Zwangsarbeitslager, the forced labor camp.

And at this point, I'd like to read you a brief face of what that forced labor camp was all about. The name of the camp was Plaszow. It was in an industrial suburb of Krakow, just across the Vistula river. It was also located at an important railroad junction for the Silesia-East Poland communication line.

On opposite sides from the railroad tracks, a hilly countryside stretched southward. These hills were also used as a quarry and a limestone excavation. Behind the quarry was the Jewish cemetery and the new Jewish cemetery. There were two. There was the old and the new Jewish cemetery.

It was on that hillside of the Jewish cemetery that the Nazis decided to build this forced labor camp. And the way they did it is by removing all the tombstones, knocking them all down, leveling the ground, and building the barracks for the forced labor camp. And at that point, this camp was really a forerunner of what later on became the concentration camp in Krakow.

The concentration camp was, from what I've gathered by working for the Holocaust Center, established in 1944, this still being 1943 was a forced labor camp. People worked at different locations doing different tasks. Some worked in laundry, some worked in metal processing plants, and some people were later on used on April 24, 1943.

When the Krakow ghetto was liquidated, they were assigned as details to go into the ghetto and clean up all the belongings that people had left behind. And they were all meticulously classified and sent to different locations.

For about six weeks, I worked on this cleanup detail. And this was a very, very difficult job. It entailed to go into each house and packing up all the belongings. And the dishes went here, and the books went there, and the household utensils went someplace else.

But in those years, this was a good assignment. Because we worked with Jews, believe it or not, doing all this work. We were not supervised by any Nazis. The Jewish police knew exactly what the Nazis wanted them to do and they did their bidding. And we worked with these Jewish Kapo or police lieutenants.

In early November of 1943-- you want me to go on now, right? In early November 1943, the place that I had worked was rounded up. They took everybody out of that working location, and we all went to a central plaza together with

about, oh, must have been another 350 or maybe 400 other inmates of the forced labor camp.

And we were left there, waiting for a day and a half. We didn't know what they were going to do with us. We finally were taken to the rail yards and put into railroad cars. And we were sent out of the camp. I had no time to see my mother or father because they worked at different locations.

And we traveled by train to what turned out to be the Hasag-Czestochowa ammunition plant. We arrived there in mid-November of 1943. At that time, there was no machinery in that plant.

That plant was completely naked. Nothing. Machinery started arriving about four to six weeks later. In the interim, we were doing all kinds of cleanup work. There was a plant there, but they ripped out the guts in order to accommodate the equipment that was being brought in by this German ammunition cartel.

So by the end of December, machinery was being installed, and we at least knew that we did not wind up in Auschwitz. Because Auschwitz and Czestochowa are almost suburbs, they're so close to each other.

On about the end of December, we started working in that plant. By that time, there were about 350 prisoners or forced laborers from other camps besides the one in Krakow that had come into this facility. Am I going too fast?

No.

We had-- the winter of 1940-- the accommodations were dismal. We were housed in what must have been at one time the stables. They must have had some stables there. That's where they put all the beds, and the bunk beds, and the sanitary facilities together.

The camp was basically an adjunct of a German industrial combine working for the military. We were producing shells, ammunition shells, of different sizes. Some were rifle shells. There were some artillery shells being produced.

There were some Poles who came from the outside. They also worked on the plants. The Jews, of course, could not leave the plants. We were being guarded day and night. We were not being paid. The Poles got some compensation. And we worked 12 hours a day.

In the camp that was just outside Krakow, did your family live together, did you have an apartment?

No, we lived separate. My mother lived in the women's quarters. The men lived in and had their own quarters at that camp.

Were you in the same building as your father?

Yeah.

Could you describe that? What were the sleeping quarters like?

Very primitive, very primitive. Very primitive. It was cold. There was no heat. Was very primitive. Outside sanitary facilities.

Were they just bunk houses?

Yeah.

How many?

Well, we had two stacked one above the other. And there were-- we just had straw mattresses, you know. Very, very primitive.

Two beds stacked or two floors?

Two beds stacked.

About how many men were in your barracks?

At that location, we must have had about 150, 200 maybe.

In one building? Yeah.

Were there other buildings there in that camp?

No. Everybody was housed in one building.

And there was the second?

The women were in one building, the men were in one building.

Were you ever inside your mother's barracks to see--

No.

--what that looked like? Do you have any idea of what the communities were like there?

I have no idea. No.

Was it about the same size on the outside?

Well, the women were housed in, I think, a little better upgraded facilities. They were brick buildings. I remember our building was a wooden building.

Were there any children?

No. How did the Nazis choose who the Jews to be in that camp? Was it basically all--

Now, which camp are we talking about now?

The one outside Krakow.

Oh, the one outside Krakow. They were being supervised not by the SS, but there were some Ukrainian police. They also relied on a little bit on young German military personnel or what they call Werkschutz, you know, these are sort of like a paramilitary unit. But there were no SS.

Were you allowed to leave the camp?

No.

Now, could you describe the camp itself other than the barracks? What was it like?

Well, it was surrounded by barbed wire. And we were just being-- every morning, we were taken out, and go to our working stations. And then work there and then come back. You worked 10, 12 hours a day and then went back to camp. There was no in between.



The work stations were all located outside of the camp?

Yeah, outside the living quarters.

When you were located at that camp, what type of work did you do?

We worked on a quarry.

That was in the quarry. Were you switched around at all at different locations?

No.

How far away was the quarry?

Oh, that place was about, I would say about two miles from where we were living. So it was a two-mile walk going and coming.

So you got from the camp to work site by being marched there?

Yeah, we'd be marched.

Were there armed guards?

Yes. How were the people in the camp treated when they were marched over to the work?

Well, this was in a very rural area. Weren't there weren't too many other buildings or habitation around the area. So we really never came. And we never saw any traffic except the rail traffic. I remember that was near a railroad yard. And this was a commercial railroad yard. So that was a very desolate area.

Were the laborers ever hit?

Pardon?

Were the laborers ever hit or whipped or anything like that?

No, that I don't recall.

Any threats to work more quickly or keep up the pace?

Yeah, we were kept at a pretty even pace, you know. Not slacking down.

What type of work did you do in the quarry?

We were loading little wheelbarrows with all kinds of stones, and lime, and brick, and moving them around, and moving them into a kiln. It was a lot of manual, most of it was manual work with shovels and picks.

Was that staffed by just the people who lived in your camp and the Polish?

Pardon?

Was that quarry staffed just by Jewish people?

No, they were strictly staffed by Jewish people.

Just by Jewish people.

Yeah.

What did the non-Jewish Polish workers-- were there non-Jew Poles who commuted?

No, I think you-- I think at this point, you're confused because I think I might have run ahead of myself.

That's the second camp.

Yeah, that's the one in Czestochowa.

All right, so in the first camp, it was all Jews.

That was all Jewish, you're right.

Do you know whether there was any other work that the males did besides the quarry?

Any what?

Any other work that the males did besides the quarry.

No, that's all we did was quarry work and brickwork. There were some areas where they produced bricks. There were some areas where they dug limestone. There were some areas where they fired the bricks.

Were these areas all outside the camp?

Yes.

And was it just the men who did the work in the quarries and work with the brick?

Yeah.

Did you know what the women did?

Pardon?

Were you aware of what the women were doing?

No, the women were assigned to different tasks. The women were assigned to work in the kitchens. They were assigned to the laundry facilities because the camp had a laundry facility. That's primarily for the women.

What was the food like? Pardon?

What was the food like at the camp?

Soup and bread.

What was the soup like?

What was what?

Was the soup like?

Watery.

Was it usually a beef soup?

No, it was just a-- might have been a barley soup or a bean soup. But very watered down.

Were there any other buildings there in the camp itself?

No.

Besides the two bunk houses.

No.

Were there any grounds there inside? Or how much space did the camp take up?

The camp?

Yes.

Well, the camp was just as I mentioned. It consisted of just two buildings. One was a wooden building, one was a brick building. That was all there was. This was a very unique situation, it just consisted of two buildings. These must have been some temporary buildings at one time that somebody else might have used.

So it was just a small parcel of land that they built this on?

Yeah, yeah, that's right. And you said they were surrounded by barbed wire?

Right.

And what about armed guards? Were there armed guards around there?

There were. As I said, the paramilitary were the guards.

Did they stay inside the camp or where were they?

They were on the outskirts, on the perimeter.

Was there any gun tower or anything like that?

No, not at that location.

Any other details you can give us about that?

No, this was really a short visit. I was there maybe five or six months. As I said, this was just an interim step to the forced labor camp in Plaszow, which was a much more extended facility.

What type of social life, if any, was there?

There was none. There was none. Just among the men. And the women, I guess, among the women. There was no interaction.

What sorts of hours did you work?

We worked from I think it must have been 7:00 in the morning till about 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening. And you were so doggone tired, you came home and just went back to sleep.

Did you have dinner there at the camp every night?

Well, they would bring in the soup at night, you know. But while you were working out in the quarry all day, all you had was water and the bread. That's all you got there.

Did you ever get to see your mother at this camp?

At that camp, yes, once in a while, when we changed laundry. You know, they would collect all the laundry, bring it over to the women's quarters. They would do the laundry. And that was about the only time.

How often was that?

About once every two, three weeks.

Did you have much of an opportunity to talk with her? How much time?

Very short period because the woman had their own watch service.

OK, so how long were you at that camp, the first camp?

At this one here? About four months.

OK and then you went to the second one, larger one. They had the Polish workers there.

Yeah. Now, that camp with the Polish workers wasn't Czestochowa. I want to make that clear. OK.

That camp came next, though? That was the second camp?

No. The camp we just talked about was an interim camp to the one in Plaszow, which was the forced labor camp. I stayed there for about six months.

OK, can you describe that camp, too?

Well, that's the one that I told you was built on the cemetery.

Were there bunks there, too? Bunk houses?

There were individual barracks being built. And each barracks had about, I think, accommodation for maybe 100, 200 people. And then they had the various places.

The barracks that were for various activities, for metal processing facilities. There were some clothes processing facilities. There were some weaving facilities. There were kitchen facilities. There were laundry facilities. This was a much larger camp. It had his own hospital at the time.

And it was-- that was surrounded by watchtowers, and barbed wire, and had Nazi SS, and the commandant of the camp was a SS official. And continuously, new prisoners came into the camp. It was continuously being expanded.

Did you ever leave this camp?

Yeah, that's where they rounded me up and took me to the one in Czestochowa.

Wait, no, I'm sorry. While you're at the camp to do work, was all the work done within, or on the camp grounds, or were you ever taken out?

Yeah, I went for the cleaning action, I told you, to the ghetto, to clean up the ghetto after the ghetto was being liquidated. That that was about for six weeks.

Other than that, what did you?

Other than that, I worked in a metal processing facility. And I also contracted yellow jaundice in this camp. And they were very nice. They took me to a hospital. I, for one week, I didn't do any work.

But this was a bit of a showoff place, too. Because I understand that in those years, they did have periodic inspections from the Red Cross. But we never saw anybody. But the hospital was just a showplace. And I was fortunate enough for one week to be there being treated and went back to work then. The hospital was within the prison or in the camp?

Yeah, it was a barrack in the camp, special building.

Were your parents also at this camp?

Yes, my mother and father were also at that camp.

Was your father in the same building as you, in the same barracks?

Yes.

OK. Where was your mother?

My mother was in the women's section.

How often were you able to see her?

I saw her almost every day. Because after work, you know, you could walk through the camp. You could walk from one section to another. There was a little more free leisure walking around you. As long as you stayed within the confines of the camp, you could walk around after work.

What were the conditions like in general at the camp?

Well, this camp was much more regimentated. We all had to-- everybody got up early in the morning at the crack of dawn. We all had to be in a certain location, and you got your work assignment for that day. It doesn't necessarily mean that every day, you worked in the same place. Some of the time, you worked at the same. But other times, you could have been asked to do other things.

And it was heavily supervised by Nazis, by the SS. We had inspections in various work stations at a much more frequent interval. Surprise inspections, you know.

And there were executions at that camp. There were people that were caught not working, and they were being hauled away, and there were some mass executions at the camp. There were also executions at the camp of people who were unfit to work, old people.

It was a camp that had a lot of-- it had a lot of anxiety running around because you didn't know from day to day what you're going to be doing. People were being harassed, were being beaten. It was the forerunner of what a concentration camp, what would eventually concentration camp would have accomplished. Only this was a forced labor camp at the time.

Did you see any of the executions?

Yes.

What did you see?

Well, there were some-- the executions were twofold. There were some people who were brought in the camp that were discovered being in hiding in various parts of Poland. And they were being brought up to being punished for being in hiding. And they were being hung.

There were some people who were caught at certain workstations not working when there was an inspection. And depending on who the officer was, if he felt that that person really goofed off or slackened off, he would have brought them for punishment.

And the punishment could have been anything from beating, physical beating, you know, getting lashes, 25, 50 lashes, or whatever they decided, to being shot or being hung. It was at the whims of whoever that SS official was that apprehended that individual.

Was this done in front of the prisoners?

Yes, all the camp inmates would be rounded up and brought to a central plaza in the camp. And they were told that this person was being hung because of being in hiding or because of slacking off at work. I have some of these memoirs. But I haven't gotten around to-- I kept some of these articles in either German or Polish after I came out of the camp. But I'm just in the process of translating some of that material.

But yes, there were executions. And there were firings. And there were people being whipped, you know, depending on what the whims of what the-- there was no rhyme or reason for this.

Can you recall how you felt at the time?

Well, you feel shook up, you know? You felt that you could have been in somebody else's shoes. Because everybody at one time or other goofed off or slackened off.

Can you recall in general how you felt? Not about the executions, but just--

How what?

--day to day how you felt.

Well, they weren't day to day. They didn't take place every day. They were very infrequent. They could have been called at any time of the day.

No, I'm saying aside from the executions, how did you feel in general just living and working in the camp? What did you feel, like you were going to survive?

Well, you felt afraid for your life, you know? And you knew there was no way out of it.

Was there any hope for survival?

No, we didn't have much hope in those years. This was at the peak of the Nazi victories. This was at the peak of what turned out to be their invasion of the Soviet Union. They were going high gear, and Jews were going low gear.

Did you have any thoughts at the time about the future? Were you able to think about the future at all?

Well, we know you couldn't escape. Because if you escaped and they caught you, you know where you wound up, you know? No, it was a very-- it was a time of no hope.

How did you fare physically there? Was it grueling for you?

Well, I was young. And I had some idea of what the outside world could be. But I never know that I would be able to recapture what was going on in the outside world. It was a hopeless situation.

Physically, was it a matter of barely surviving or was it?

Yeah, you lived one day at a time. You lived one day at a time. And you lost track of-- sometimes, you lost track of what day of the week it was, and what day of the month it was, or what month it was. You must visualize that this place was so completely isolated from any surroundings that you couldn't even see any physical buildings of Poles that might have lived in the area.

This was a cemetery on the hillside. There was nothing around the area. The nearest thing that you could have seen was at the other part of the hill. There were railroad yards, that's all. But there were no homes, no trees, no nothing.

They really picked a very, very unique, very desolate area purposely for that camp's location because that added already to the demoralization of the inmates. Had you seen some outside structures, you know, you might have had some hopes. There was nothing. There were no streets, no homes, no trees, no nothing.

Was the work is grueling at the first camp that you were in, the temporary camp?

Well, the temporary camp was also on a desolate area also. You see, they all geared up to having all the Jews in one location that would be so desolate that the people by themselves would already feel demoralized.

We're going to talk about how you felt mentally. I'm talking about physically, was it tougher to get through the day?

Mentally, I don't really recall. We were just thinking of what the next day would bring, you know? You couldn't-- this was not a very pleasant place to be.

Did you do any other type of work there at the camp?

Did you do several different jobs?

No, I was fortunate that I always worked in that same facility until they rounded me up and went to that camp in Czestochowa. What did your father do? Do you know? Did you know?

My father was-- he worked in another part of the camp. I don't really recall what he was doing. All I know is that when we went in the morning, he went to a different work station, I went to a different workstation. And when the day was done, we met at the same living quarters.

So at this time, you were in your late teens? 17, 18, 19.

Yeah, 18.

How old were your parents at this time?

My father was 46 and my mother was probably 43.

OK. That's information I should have asked you right at the beginning.

What did your mother do at the camp?

Well, as I said, the women worked in laundry for-- so I think she worked in the laundry.

Is there any-- can you give us any other description of the camp itself, what it looked like? There were buildings there other than the barracks or the work sites.

Well, I've already--

Cafeteria?

No, there were no. You ate in the-- the food was brought into a central location. You lined up to get your soup. You had your very primitive canteen that they poured the soup in. You had a spoon and a-- no, they didn't allow you to keep any forks, just a spoon. And then you got your bread ration. And you went to your barrack. And that's where you ate your food. There were no communal dining halls or anything of that sort.

Overall, how large was the camp? Did it take up a lot of-- large area?

Yeah, it took up an awful lot of space. And it I had to make an estimate, I think by the time I left the camp, it might have had about oh, maybe 2,500, 3,000 prisoners. Because they were continuously adding to the camps facility. I do have an article that I wrote about the camp. And I don't know if we had time to read this into the program.

Well, if it's fairly long, what I would suggest is you do is--

No, I think it's a little too long.

Yeah.

Do you believe that you were one of the first inmates?

Yes.

In this camp?

Yes. Was it just newly opened in the time?

Yes, yes, yes. Because when they took us from the quarry, which was just on the other side of the road into this camp, this camp was just being established. I was fortunate enough, at the two camps that I have been, that they were in their initial development.

And as I said, the one in Plaszow eventually became a concentration camp. And from what I gathered by reading in various magazines and literature, it eventually had close to 7,000 or 8,000 inmates at one time.

Did you know where the other inmates came from?

Yes, they came from other parts of Poland. They came from Hungary. They came from Czechoslovakia. Primarily from Poland, Czechoslovakia. There were a few Hungarian Jews that came. As I was leaving, they were coming in.

Were there any non-Jews?

No.

Any description you can give us about the Germans who were there at the camps? And any specific individuals.

Well, there was this Amon Goeth, he was the commandant. He would make all these surprise inspections. And it was on



his whims that these people were being executed. The other Nazis that were there, the other Nazi officials or SS, were lackeys of him. They did their bidding.

We had-- later on, there was some Ukrainian guards, Ukrainian equivalent of the Ukrainian SS. But it was primarily Goeth. And he had a dog. And he sometimes set the dog, a German shepherd, he sometimes set the dog on the prisoners who weren't doing the right work. So in addition of being attacked by him, they were attacked by the dog as well. But that's the most vivid individual that I can recall.

Is there any more information you can give us about him?

Yeah, well, as you will see from the article, he eventually got caught up, and the Poles brought him to trial in 1945. And he was executed. I mean, in those years, the Poles made short shrift of him. I mean, he did have his trial, and there were witnesses, and he was executed.

The Poles gave him a second trial. This is not part of the Nuremberg?

Yeah, he was-- the trial was in Krakow.

Do you know whether many Germans were tried by the Poles?

Well, he was the numero uno of the camp. The others were not as powerful as he was. I also recall one other incident for the record. There were some young women being brought into the camp. And they were being housed in a special building on the camp's grounds.

And the Nazi officials were free to use those girls any time they felt like. They were Jewish girls from Poland, from Czechoslovakia, from Hungary. And Mr. Goeth was the one that set up this traveling-- this pleasure station for his semi-officials that he had working under him. And these girls were kept separately. I mean, they were. But we knew about this ongoing situation.

How many of the inmates died there in that camp? What percentage would you say?

I can't really tell you because there were some shootings, there were some executions. I can't give you an adequate number. In those six months that I was there, I think I would really have to say maybe 100, 150 people were being either hung or executed.

The mass executions and mass extermination of the camp took place after I left, again, from what I was able to read at the Holocaust Center and documentation. Must remember, I was there at the initial. It sort of built itself up gradually to that point.

While you were there, what was your observation about the purpose of the camp? Was it to get work done? Was it to torture people? Was it to kill people?

When I was there, the initial impact was to set the camp up. Remember, the camp was situated on a hillside that was a cemetery. There was a lot of tombstones in that cemetery. And they all had to be torn down. And a lot of the tombstones were used as foundations in the buildings. And the barracks had to be leveled. And all this had to be done by hand in order to build the buildings. So initially, it was really a forced labor camp. But once all the buildings were being in place, in later years, it became a concentration camp.

The temporary camp you were in in Krakow, was that in 1941?

It was from 1942 to '43.

1942 to '43.

Right. Oh, back up. January of 1943 till November of 1943.

Temporary camp then?

That was a forced labor camp in those days.

So I'm just trying to trace the time period here. You moved to Krakow in 1938?

Right.

And then when we spoke on the phone last week, you said that you were in a forced labor camp in Krakow from 1941 to 1943.

Yeah, by forced labor camp, you must also include the quarries that I talked to you earlier. Those were considered forced labor camps.

That's where I'm referring to.

Even though there were individual sites. But the overall big forced labor camp in Plaszow developed in 1943 in January.

January '43.

Right.

Before that, you were at--

At the quarries.

Temporary camp quarries.

But they were all considered forced labor camps.

But what was the time period for that? That was the first camp, is that correct?

Pardon?

The quarries was the first.

Right, right, right.

When that what?

These were satellite forced labor camps. These satellites were closed.

When?

They were closed in December of 1942.

When were you there?

Pardon?

When were you there working in the quarries?

From 1941 to '42.

To '42.

Right.

You lived at the temporary camp till then.

Right.

OK. And then you move to be the first permanent--

Right.

--camp.

Right.

And that was late?

In 1943.

OK. What happened between? Was there a gap in time?

No, there was no gap in time. The satellite camps were closed. They closed one by one.

So January 1943, you moved to the first permanent camp?

Right.

How long were you there?

Till November of 1943.

OK. And then?

Then I went to Czestochowa.

OK. Is there anything else that you recall about the camp before moving on to Czestochowa?

No, I've given you all the details.

Any other German officers that you remember?

No, no, I can't. There were a lot of them. But the only one that really sticks in my mind is Amon Goeth.

OK. So I think you mentioned this before, but to keep the continuity going, could you tell us about how you were rounded up, in essence, to be moved to the next.

Well, as I told you, they just came and rounded everybody up that worked in that particular barrack, and told them to go to the main-- we had a main square that we had daily meetings and daily gatherings. And they were just rounded up at random. And just they needed probably 300 people. So wherever they could, they rounded up 300 people.

Was your father in that group, too?

No. As I mentioned to you, when they rounded me up, I had no way of contacting either my father or my mother.

But your father was in the same barracks as you?

He was on a different workstation.

Did you ever see your parents again?

No. No, never got to see them again.

Did you ever have contact with them through letters?

No.

OK, at the time that you were rounded up, how did you feel?

Well, I heard about Auschwitz, and that was one place that I had hoped that they would not send us to. And because rumors were circulating in the camp already about the atrocities that were going on in Auschwitz. We were heard about it. And we were very apprehensive. We didn't know where we were going to wind up. We could have sent us to the Reich, too, you know. There were people being taken out of Poland and sent into Germany.

Before you were in the forced labor camps, did you ever hear any rumors about concentration camps?

Yes. We knew that we weren't unique at that location.

So just before you were put into the first camp, when you were still living in the village outside Krakow.

Yes.

Were there any rumors about it?

No, not at that time. But when we were in 1942, at the end of '42 and '43, we already heard rumors about Auschwitz and extermination camps.

You heard these rumors when you were in camps already?

In the camp, right.

Do you have any idea how the rumors got into the camps?

Yes, they could have come from transfers, transfer prisoners that were taken out of-- they were all taken out of Birkenau and Auschwitz and sent to the Krakow camp. Don't forget, geographically, these camps were almost like a cluster. They were almost next to each other. So possibly, prisoners taken out of one camp and coming to Plaszow brought those stories with them.

So it was January? I'm sorry, I forgot times.

'43.

January '43. Is this when you were rounded up?

No, I was rounded up in November of '43. In November '43, I was rounded up, and we were put in rail cars, and we wound up in Czestochowa. That's where I left off earlier.

OK. Then why don't we?

May have to reverse the tape and bring it up to date.

Well, I think we're doing just fine. Why don't we pick up there? You could describe your experiences from that point on.

OK. We were unloaded at this facility in Czestochowa in November of 1943. There were approximately 350 prisoners that came to this camp, which I mentioned to you was in the process of being set up as an ammunition-producing facility.

At the time we got there, they had blank walls, was no machinery at all. Initially, we were given different tasks, like cleaning out the various buildings, or putting things into place, or setting up latrines, setting up living quarters. By January of 1944, machinery started arriving by train, and we were unloading it.

And under the supervision of German engineers, civil engineers, or people that were in the ammunition-producing business, we were told of how to place the equipment, and how to install it, and how to get it going.

By February or March, the factory became fully operational. It started producing ammunition shells of various calibers, of various dimensions. The camp was supervised by the German military and by the German industrial complex.

The people that were corporation supervisors. We had some Polish people, as I pointed out to you, that came in from the outside world. Those were-- can I have a glass of water?

Yeah.