

All right.

I'm Sandra Bendayan. I am here interviewing Jack Gelb. Today is the 25th of April, 1996. We're doing this interview for the Holocaust Oral History Project and John Grant is our producer. Would you please start by introducing yourself and telling what was your name at birth, if it was any different than it is now.

Well, my name at home was Jacob Gelb. And I haven't changed my family name.

And when and where were you born?

I was born in Lodz, Poland. And when is questionable. I don't really know exactly. It was either 27 or-- 1927 or 28. And the exact date, my papers show June 14, but I had to give a date and that was the date I gave. But it was sometime in June, I believe.

Sometime in June of either '27 or '28.

'28. Right.

So as a child when you were growing up, your parents weren't aware of what particular [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, she-- we did not have a habit of celebrating birthdays, making a big deal out of it. You were just getting older. And also, during the war, you had to have a different age depending on circumstances. Sometimes you wanted to be older, sometimes you wanted to be younger. So in the shuffle, it kind of became problematic.

What were your parents' names?

My father's name was Leon. My mother's name was Priva, P-R-I-V-A. Her maiden name was Kalinski.

And do you have any sisters and brothers?

Yes, I had one sister and her name was the Deborah, or Devorah. She was five years younger than myself.

And what about your grandparents? What were your grandparents names?

OK, my father's parents, his name was Joseph, Yosef. And my grandmother's name was, I believe, Hilda. On my mother's side, my grandfather's name was Isaac and grandmother's name was Bilhah.

Were they alive when you were born?

Yes.

All of them?

Yes. They were alive-- well, with the exception of my maternal grandmother, died several years before the break out of the war. All the others were alive and in good health.

At the time of the war?

At the break out.

At the break out.

When the Germans went and got into Poland they were.

And did all these grandparents also live in Lodz?

Yes. As far as I know, as far as I can go back, my family was all born in Poland and in Lodz.

And did you live in what might be called the Jewish section of the city or not?

Uh, yes, I would say the Jewish section of the city. Yes.

And what kind of work did your family do?

My father started out-- my father came-- my grandfather, his father, was a tailor. And what he do, he take in work from you know, like a contract, and tailored for that, from wholesalers. My other grandfather, my mother's father, had a business where he would buy materials, have it cut, and contracted out to the tailors. And well, my father would deliver the finished goods and that's how he met my mother.

Well, anyhow, there was quite a difference in status and my maternal grandfather was not too crazy about my mother marrying my father. But they fell in love. They did it anyhow. And my father, of course, had to quit school when he was fourth or fifth grade to help out. And my mother, of course, went to gymnasium, which is equivalent to, I guess, like junior college here.

And when they got married, since she disobeyed my maternal grandfather, she did not get any dowry. So the only thing they walked off with was some bedding and a sewing machine. And my father started working as a tailor. And then slowly he started doing the same thing that my maternal grandfather was doing. And then he had a wholesale clothing-- other words, he would have subcontractors to the clothing. He had stores all over Poland, where he was selling to them.

So it sounds like he made a decent living--

Yes. After a while, yes. We were fortunate enough to have a maid that had to take care of me, because my mother had to help my father in order to keep things going. And the maid was a gentile Pole and she was hired when I was about six months old. She was a peasant girl that lost both her parents, and she was living with her stepfather that got her pregnant. And she lost the baby at birth, and eventually was kicked out by the stepfather. She was about 17-years-old at the time. And as far as she was concerned, I might as well have been her baby. She would do anything possible for me.

Do you remember her name

Yes, her name was Yasha [PERSONAL NAME] And she was a very close person to me, almost second to my mother. And as time went on, she was with us till we were put into ghetto. She wanted to come with us. However, we said, no use you suffering. And that's when we lost track.

After the war, I tried to locate her, but she was gone.

Would you say your parents were Orthodox?

Well, in Poland there was no such thing as reform or conservative. If you were following in Jewish faith you were Orthodox. I mean, he was not ultra-conservative, but we had a kosher house. We went to shul of a Friday night and Saturday, observed all the holidays. Yes.

But my father does not wear a beard or payos. He shaved once in a while. But on the other hand, observed everything.

Did you have any friends or good business relations with the Christian Poles?

You mean, when I was a kid?

Yeah.

Not really, no. Because first, they didn't want to have Jewish friends. It just wasn't done too much.

What about anti-Semitism in Lodz before the war, before the rise of Hitler, as a child growing up?

Oh, yes. Even as I was five, six years old, there was always "dirty Jew" or fights. I was very feisty and I always would fight back. And just about every day, every other day I came home with a Black eye or scratches or whatever. I started going to public school and it was just impossible to continue on.

Because of anti-Semitism?

Pardon me?

Because of anti-Semitism?

Yeah. I mean, just the treatment I was getting from the non-Jewish kids. So my parents took me out of that school and put me into a cheder, which was a school where you learned a combination of religion, and also you were getting all the education that you would get in the public school.

Do you have any memory-- I mean, when you were young of your parents talking about Hitler and his policies when he came to power? He came to power of course in '33.

Not really, no.

People weren't concerned?

Well, people were concerned. But I guess they never discussed it with me since I was just too young to-- I knew there was something going on, but being that age, who cares? But did you have any aunts and uncles living in your town?

Pardon me?

Did you have aunts and uncles living in your town?

Oh, yes. Just about all lived in town. We had a family, when we all got together, all-- from both sides, like there was a wedding, let's say, where the whole family got together there was over 100 people that were all related, you know and some cousins, great aunts and so on. Yes.

As long as you mentioned that number, how many people survived the war out of 100?

Um, two cousins and an uncle.

And you.

And myself.

Four out of the 100.

Right.

What was the first that you were aware of the threat from Germany?

Well, when the Germans marched in.

At that moment only, you were--

Well, even before that, they were bombarding the city, the artillery was [INAUDIBLE]. I knew things were happening.

You were about maybe 11 or 12 or something.

Something like that. Yeah.

Do you have any sense that your parents ever considered leaving Poland?

Before the war?

Yes.

Well, not really. No.

Were they Zionists?

Mm, Not-- I myself belonged to a Betar group. We just got together and danced and-- you know. But at that time, I-- you know, like I said, I was too young really to realize, you know, Zionist. I was aware of Palestine and the hope of ever living there or being a Jewish state one day or something like that.

But you didn't really seriously work toward emigrating to Palestine?

No, I was too young to consider of my own. I guess my parents weren't either.

So you were bombed before the Germans actually-- when did the Germans actually take over Lodz?

September, 1939. It just-- from the time the Germans crossed the border, it was only probably a week before they were in Lodz.

Do you remember when they entered Lodz?

Yeah.

Can you describe that day?

Well, the tanks and the trucks and so on were rolling in. And of course, what was happening in Lodz, we had a large population that was of German descent. They were born in Poland, but what they call them Volksdeutsche. And they all came out with the swastikas and welcomed the troops and so on. Yes.

And for the next week or two, things were pretty uneventful. But as time went on, they started picking up Jews, especially Orthodox Jews with beards and wearing their orthodoxy, you know, that were--

They would pick him up and make him cut off the beards, and make him sweep the street with a hand brush, and beat him and stuff like that. And it just slowly happened like that.

Then in December of 1939, which was what, two or three months after they got into Lodz, like I said, we were living in a Jewish section. They surrounded several blocks from where we were living and picked up all the Jewish people. All we were allowed to take with us is whatever we could carry. They made sure that we didn't take any valuables, any jewelry or money or anything like that. And we were put on a cattle train and transported.

First we got to Krakow, stopped there. I don't know, we were on the train a couple of days or so. Stopped there. We got some soup or something from the Red Cross. And then they continued on to a town, Jaslo, which was the south-eastern

part of Poland. And we stayed there in a synagogue temporarily, bedded down on the floor for several days. And then the Jewish community could only take care of so many. So they took I don't know how many of us, and sent us on to another town, Krosno. And we lived there through the winter.

And being a young boy, I had a nice time because it was a little hilly. We went-- there wasn't much bother by the Germans. The food was plentiful. The only problem was there was no money.

What I forgot to say was when we were being resettled, my father had several thousand zloty, which was a local currency. And he was afraid to be found with the money, so he gave me the money. He says, go get rid of it. Well, I went up to the attic of the apartment house and I hid it.

This was your original home you mean?

Pardon me?

Was this your original home you mean? Or once you were--

The original home. Yeah. That was before we were being-- before they took us.

Before you were rounded up.

Rounded up. And I mean, the streets were already surrounded and we already saw the Germans coming into the apartments and taking the people out. Anyhow, I put that money away. And I stuck some money in my shirt somewhere and came back, so that when we got to Jaslo we had a little money.

But then about-- I'd say about March or April of 1945, we heard that some people were going back to Lodz. And my parents decided to send me to check what's going on, because being a young boy-- at that time, we already had to wear armbands with the yellow bands with the Magen David-- but being a young boy, blond and so on, I just went on.

Trains were very hard to get on, but what I would do, I run up to the-- what we go on, on the train. And people couldn't get on, but I'd say, oh, my parents are aboard, you know. And so they let me go.

I remember riding in a car with the German troops. And I got into Krakow and I had to buy now tickets to go on to the next place I already forgot. And I was afraid to go up to the window, that I would be recognized. And I asked this Gentile whether he would buy my tickets. He said, sure. He took the money and he came back with a couple of German soldiers. And they beat me.

They took me into an office or something, put the pat on my head and knocked it, knocked it on my head. I was just black and blue all over. And they finally let me go. I continued on.

Now, Lodz became part of the Third Reich, and it was Poland was divided into a protectorate, which was supposed to be Poland, and one part was actually became just part of Germany. So in order to get into Lodz I had to go, more or less, like a border. And what I had to do was go to a farmer used to smuggle people into Lodz with the-- it was still winter time, so we had to go on a horse-drawn sled. And he used back roads, and I remember spending about four or five hours going on the sled.

Well, when I got to Lodz I found out that people, that the Jewish people, were still living there and so on and so on. So I got the money that I hid and I went back to Jaslo. And then I came back with my mother.

Was anybody living in your home at the time?

No. In fact, the door-- we didn't have a home, we had an apartment.

An apartment.

The door was sealed by the German police.

Did you have to break the seal?

Well, I didn't go in. Well, we'll get to it. I went back to Jaslo. And then my mother and I came back to Lodz and we stayed at my grandfather's place. And my mother somehow managed to bribe the police, the German police. They unsealed the door and we moved in. And then my father and sister came and we lived. Then a couple of months later, this became part of the Lodz ghetto.

So when was this that you and your mother returned to Lodz?

Oh, about April or May of 1945. Oh! 1940.

1940?

Yes.

And it had not become a ghetto yet?

Well, it was just starting, you know. They were just starting moving in the people. And then I remember one day the Germans issued an order that all Jews will move, will leave, if they were living outside the ghetto and move into the ghetto.

Now the ghetto was the poorest part of the city. Most of the apartment houses had no running water, no sewer. And the only way, if you had to go to bathroom, it was like a big biffy in the yard and everybody would use it. So it wasn't too nice a place to stay.

So obviously you had to move out of the apartment you had in order to move into the ghetto.

No. We lived in the apartment. It was already in the ghetto.

Let me just go back and ask you. When you went to this town, Jaslo?

Jaslo.

Jaslo. Well, what were the living conditions like there?

Well, we moved in with a Jewish family. And I guess we just had the next bedroom. We just lived in right with them. In other words, the people shared their quarters with us.

Was it overcrowded or did you have plenty of room? Or can you remember?

Well, it was crowded because you had now two families where one was living. But being a kid, really it was nice, because the people were very nice, very helpful and so on. It was rather pleasant. For me, I mean.

Who provided the food?

Well, we had some money and we bought the food. Well, I don't know all the details, you know. I know there was no problem, food and so on, and nobody bothered us. There was no display of anything.

Of course, later I found out that anybody that lived there a year or two later was finished off, because they never-- they just went in and wiped out the Jewish population.

They murdered them or they sent them to the camps?

They murdered most of the small towns like that.

Were your parents assigned any kind of work when they were there?

No. No. We were just living there, living off what my parents brought along. And we only were there what? About three, four months.

How did your parents spend the day? Do you have any memory of that?

I remember we were playing a lot of checkers and dominoes. They didn't work. I guess my mother cooked. It's--

Yeah. A long time ago.

Yeah. Long time. I don't know all the details like that.

So did the Germans say for what purpose you were resettled to this town? You weren't assigned to work.

If they said, I don't know. All I know is that we were resettled. And I remember, you hardly ever saw a German there anyhow. You know. It was--

Were any other members of your extended family sent there at the same time?

No. It was just my mother, my father, myself and my sister. That was [? sent out ?]. It was just-- it was really a funny thing, because not too many people-- they just took one transport and that was it and they stopped. They just cleaned out one or two blocks. And I don't know exactly how many people were involved, 500 or 1,000. I don't know.

And what about the transport itself? How was the trip? Can you remember that trip in the boxcar?

Well, it wasn't like later on when we were going into Auschwitz and so on. It was a boxcar, but they had a bucket for toilet facilities. It wasn't exactly wonderful, but you know.

Not horribly overcrowded?

No, no. It wasn't-- I mean, it wasn't like going by train. But we had food. And being a young kid--

So obviously, too, at that point you had to stop school?

Oh, sure. Yeah.

You had already done that.

Schooling was over, yeah, as far as I was concerned. You know?

And your sister, too.

My sister, too. Sure.

What was your native language? Yiddish or Polish or both?

Well, both. Yeah. At home we spoke mostly Yiddish, but outside we spoke mostly Polish. In other words, we were bilingual.

Did you speak any other languages at the time?

Not before the war, no. During the war, I learned to speak German and other languages. Yes.

When you went back home to get the money out of the attic, how did you do that without breaking the seal?

Well, the attic was above-- there were I don't know how many apartments in the building. And there was only one attic. And it wasn't locked, it was just-- you know. Nobody lived there. What they used, before the war, was in the wintertime people would hang their laundry there. But I mean, so all I had to do was go up and get that money.

When you resettled back in your apartment, were all your goods and furniture there?

Yes, because the thing was sealed. In fact, I remember we had a duck-- that night before we were resettled we had a duck that my mother was going to cook. It was all prepared and it was sitting on the table. When we got back, the thing was still frozen.

Still frozen?

Yeah.

Through the winter?

Through the winter, yeah.

It remained frozen.

Yeah. In fact, if I remember right, we used it. Yeah. All our clothes and things were all there. Because what they did was took us out and sealed the doors, and that was it. And when we got back, just-- and what I remember, we had a door that was about a 1/4 inch steel. It would be very, very hard for anybody to get in by force, because my father-- we had the apartment and we also had most of our business right there. So that's why, I suppose, my parents pretty much fortified that door going in.

What was happening with your father's business while you were gone? Was anybody taking it over for him?

No, it was just nil at the time.

Did you rent the apartment or you owned it?

No, we rented it.

You rented it. So I guess what you're saying is the spring of '41 you were back in the apartment.

Right.

Did you have permission from the Germans to return to Lodz or you just decided to--

No, no. There was no permission, we just returned. I mean they didn't know. The only thing was the act of getting inside. And I don't know all the details because my mother arranged it. And the police came out and they opened up the seal and let us in.

So I assume you weren't wearing your yellow star during that period.

Oh, yeah. When we were in larger area, yes. There was no star at the time. It was the armband. Yellow star on the chest and on your back came later.



When you were describing when the Germans came in, pretty soon they were beating people up and that sort of thing.

Mm-hmm.

Did you yourself see any of those abuses?

Oh, sure. Sure. You couldn't miss. I myself was not beaten up at that time. Only I remember one thing is soon after the Germans came in, bread was kind of hard to get. There were lines in the bakery to pick up the bread. And I would be sent to go get a loaf of bread or something. And the Poles would be in line and I go up and they would say, Juden, Juden. You know? And you get kicked off the line.

How about your parents? Were they ever abused in any way?

During that time?

Yes.

No.

No. You and your sister--

We had some German soldiers came up and helped themselves to some clothing and so on.

But your parents weren't personally abused or beaten?

No, not at that time. No.

Can you remember about when it was that the Lodz ghetto began?

Well, I think in May of 1940, something like that.

So not very much longer after you got back?

No.

And where did you move to when you had to go in the-- oh, well you stayed in the same apartment because--

Yeah, we went back to the apartment that we stayed. However, when the ghetto closed, we got two other families move in with us.

And when was that?

Shortly after the ghetto was closed. So--

How many rooms did you have altogether?

We had a very, very large kitchen and a room combination. Then we had a large living room, then a bedroom, and then we had another room where my father kept the merchandise.

And those two families, about how many people more were added?

Well, I remember there was a mother and a daughter, and then there was a man and a wife and a child. So one moved then into the area where we had the-- but it was all one entrance to the apartment, then you had to go to through the

living room to get to the bedroom, to get--

So one family stayed in the kitchen and it was like a kitchen and a bedroom or family room, whatever you would call it. And we wound up with the living room and we moved our beds in there. In other words, everything was in there.

How about, how was how was life changed once you were in an official ghetto? Was your father able to do any work?

Yes, my father got a job in the tailor "resort," what they call it at the time. He became a cutter, cutting the materials, because that's what he was doing. He would buy the cloth and cut into forms and send it out to have it tailored, so he was knowledgeable of that. And he was in the central resort. Other words, there were many factories established in the ghetto, and he was in the main central area.

And did he earn money for doing this?

Well, yeah. There wasn't-- everything was paid in ghetto money. And the only thing could use it for is when you went to buy rations. Everything was rationed. Well, in the beginning there was also some food being smuggled in. And things were already tight, but not as bad. And we had a lot of that merchandise that my father had. We would sell it off and have some extra money and eat off of that.

And then in 1941, my father was going to work. And he was just picked off the seat by the Germans, put on a truck and taken away. He was gone for about five, six months. And he was brought back, but he was the dying man. He died several days later. His body was broken. You could hardly recognize him.

Beaten?

Well, since my father was gone, the ghetto had a rule that if an employee died somebody in the family would get a job. So I got the job as a messenger boy. What we had was a Bureau of Statistics and I was working there for a couple of months. Then they transferred me and they gave me a job as an apprentice, sewing. And then a week later, again I got the job as a messenger boy in the central of the sewing resort.

I learned how to ride a bike and I would use it by going to the different resorts, delivering notifications and mails and so on. And then somehow again I was transferred and given a job, what they call at that time the [? provizatsia, ?] which means the main central distribution of the food.

Again, it's as a messenger boy, and I would deliver to the co-op, what they call the stores where the rations were being given out, co-ops. And I would deliver the lists of what the ration would be and so on. And I would come in and since I was the central, sometimes I would get a piece of a potato, or beet, or couple carrots, maybe some chicken, and so on. So we were, besides our top of our rations, we weren't as bad off as the people around us. Because at that time, people were just dying by the gross from hunger.

You know, like I told you, the mother and daughter? Well, the mother within probably eight, nine months, her legs swell up. Here eyes had water under her eyes and she died. And then her daughter, within a few more months, died, too. Just from hunger and starvation, cold. Like in apartment, we had to carry our water. There was no running water. We had to go to well, get a bucket or two buckets of water. Or if you wanted to use the water in the house, you have to break off a piece of ice and melt it, because it would freeze.

My mother and my sister and I were sleeping in a bed together because to keep warm. And I had a cousin whose husband was electrician and he built us a little electric stove. In other words, he wound the wire and he made it himself. It was very primitive.

We were only allowed to use so much electricity, something like we had maybe a 50-watt bulb to light up the house. It was very minimal allowance of electricity. If you used more, you were punished. Either the electricity was cut off or-- I don't remember. I know there was a punishment for that. But what he taught me is how to go into the meter and put the penny somehow behind a fuse, which bypassed the meter. I don't remember exactly. But I was doing it for about a year.

And I had to remove it a few days before the meter was being read. And finally about a year or so later, somehow it was found out what I did. And they were going to take me away and send me away.

How did they know you did it?

Well, it was our apartment.

I see. You had a meter per apartment.

Yeah, every apartment had its own meter. And my mother had some kind of a relative that was working in the electric department and he kind of smoothed it over. Because otherwise I would have been gone with the transport.

By the way, every so often they said, OK, we need 5,000 people for work or whatever and take him away. In meantime, also they were bringing in people from Germany, from all the Western countries, Jews, and those people were really the ones that didn't make it at all. Because they came in from plenty and all at once the food-- they wouldn't even want-- they didn't want to touch what was there. Because the rations we got-- like the meat usually was rancid, many times crawling with what do you call it? Worms. The flour that was being sent in was dirty and the bread they baked was [INAUDIBLE].

For us, we just slowly learned to accept it and eat it. But those people came, just like somebody tried to serve you something like that now.

Well, in 1943, I believe it was September '43, they had what they call a "sperre," which means a curfew. And everybody had to stay in their house and they would come around from one apartment house to the other. Everybody had to pile out in the yard, and they would pick out all the people that they thought were not young enough or not old enough or not healthy enough to work, and take him away. Well, my mother and sister were picked up and taken away.

They were taken to a-- there was a hospital. And they used it more or less like a holding point before shipping the people out. And like I told you, I was working at the central. And what we had in the ghetto was what they called Baluty Rynek, Balucki Ryneck, which was the main place where the Germans had their offices and the ghetto government had their offices. And that's where, being a messenger boy, I was allowed to go in. Only people that were working there were permitted in.

Well, I went in and the man that-- the German that was in charge, the administrator of the ghetto, was a man, Biebow. I saw him standing there with some of the leaders of the ghetto. And I went up to him. I went on my knees and I told him I just lost my father, and now my mother and sister were taken away, if he could help me. And I don't know why, but he said, "Let his mother and sister out." And I was given a pass to go into the hospital and get my mother and sister out.

While I was there, I watched him taking small children, under two years old. They were on the second story. They had a truck packed, and throwing the children into the truck, like you would be throwing parcels.

Anyhow, I got my mother and sister and we went back to our place.

How do you understand that this Biebow did that?

I don't know. I don't know why. But he did it.

Do you know of any other instances where he was--

No. I mean, I didn't know-- I mean, the man was-- to the average Jew, he might have just been God Almighty. I mean, as far as the powers that he had over you. You know, he could have destroyed you just like you step on a worm or something if you wish to. I guess I just got him in the right moment or pushed him right. I don't know what it was. But he did issue the order and it was followed up.

How do you want to stand your own courage in asking him?

I guess when your mother and sisters life is at-- there's no courage. You just do it. I mean, all along, well, my mother had to go to work. My sister had to go to work. Even though she was eight years old, she was working in one of the resorts, the tailor resorts, carrying their bundles from one machine to the other and so on.

This was before they were picked up, you mean?

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

They both had jobs then.

Oh, yeah. You had to work. If you didn't-- by working, you got some extra food. OK? And with that extra food, you could survive. Without that extra food, just depending what the people got without work, you couldn't live very long.

Do you remember roughly, what would be like your daily food ration?

Well, I think we got something like a pound loaf of bread a week. And you got a ration of potatoes, which probably would be like 10, 15 pounds for a month. And most of the time when you got them they were frozen or rotten. And then you got some beets, some carrots, some-- I mean, it was enough.

I learned different tricks, you know. Like, we had to go to the railroad station to get the food off. They would unload it on the rails, on the siding, and people would-- like for myself, my mother, and my sister, maybe it would be 40 or 50 pounds of, let's say, potatoes and vegetables to pick up.

Well, I had a hand-pulled wagon and I had the double bottom there. And before I got there I would load it up with stone so that when you'd go in there, they would weigh your wagon. When I got past-- you had to go another and maybe two or three blocks where the produce was-- I would dump out the stones, go get the stuff, come back, and they would weigh it. And the difference what the wagon weighed and what-- so instead of getting, let's say, 40, 50 pounds, I might get 70, 80 pounds.

Did anybody ever wonder why your wagon was so heavy when you entered?

I don't know. Another thing I had-- we had a Main Street going right through the ghetto. I don't know if you were aware. And it was barbed wire on each side. And through that Main Street, all the traffic was going through. There were street cars and wagons. Well, there were also-- most of everything in Poland was on horse drawn wagons. They would be coming through with loads of potatoes, beets, carrots, and so on.

Well, I had a bag over my shoulder. I had a long string and a big nail at the end. And I would go along the wagon, I'd just throw it. And sometimes it would stick into a potato or beet or something and I would fish it in. And at the end of the day, I might wind up with maybe a couple of potatoes, a carrot. It was a matter of life and death.

Did anybody see you doing this, throwing the string?

Well, I guess people that were living in the ghetto saw it. Yes. But you have to be careful that none of the German guards would see you or they might object. And they didn't need very much encouragement to use their gun. You would see them shoot people every day, for no reason whatsoever.

You would have been shot if they found you.

Probably, yeah. Anyhow, afterwards Rumkowski-- I don't know if you've heard of him, who was the leader of the ghetto-- came around and I guess he decided too many people were working on unproductive things. And he came around and I was working at that central for food distribution. He came around and he decided that they don't need me.

And I was assigned to work in a wood factory. And they were making wagons, horse-drawn wagons. And I was assigned a job of making the hub. And it was wood turning. And what you would do is you picked up logs-- hardwood logs, they were whole-- and you put it on the machine and you had to smooth it out and then form it into a hub, which was processed later. They would cut it and so on. And you had to do so many a day and it was backbreaking.

After a while, I learned that you could also pick up some that were already done, so that took a little load off. Another thing, we were permitted to get a load of sawdust once a week or once in two weeks and take it home. Well, most people had a hand-drawn wagon where they would put that sawdust. When you were going out, the guard would take the bayonet, stick it in, and make sure there's no pieces of wood or anything. You were only allowed the sawdust.

Well, what I did, I built a wagon. I made new wheels and the axles where the wheels went on. And then I made a wagon out of it. And I made out of wood yea-thick heavy, loaded sawdust on the sack. And I come to the gate, and the guard would check, make sure that there's no wood inside the sack. I come home and I chop up the wagon, just save the wheels. And then we had wood to keep the place a little warmer. We traded some wood for food and we got along that way, a little bit better.

How were you able to make another wagon again when you needed it?

Well, in the factory we had the machines and all that. I would only keep, when I came back-- they never checked you when you went in, what you were bringing.

You could bring the wheels back in.

I brought the wheels back in. I brought the axle, which was a little-- but the rest of it would just-- I'd get a board, cut it to the right length and nail it together, and just took me half an hour or so, or even less. And that was-- usually I had a week or two weeks before the next time you were allowed to take out a sack of sawdust.

So they let you use the sawdust for heating or what?

Well, we used the sawdust, too, but it isn't a very good--

To keep warm, you would put it in your stove?

Yeah. Yeah. But most anything that would burn, you know. I mean, the situation of keeping warm was about even with eating. It was keeping warm, getting food, keeping clean, because typhoid fever was going around like crazy. People were dying right and left of typhoid fever. There was no medicine available. Life was very, very rough.

How was the health in your family, you and your sister and mother?

Well, I remember my mother came down with dysentery and she almost died. But somehow, she pulled through.

Just on her own? No medicine, no--

Well, she was in the hospital for about two weeks. And of course, the hospital didn't have much. They had minimal things to help you with.

What kind of work was your mother assigned?

Also in a clothing, I mean a tailor factory. Yeah.

Were either your mother or your sister able to kind of sneak things out for trade? Or--

Pardon me?

Were either your mother or your sister able to sneak items out for trade? I mean, get extra things in any way, to help out?

Other than getting that extra soup a day, you know. I-- somehow I always managed something, you know, finagled something. I don't know how. You had to be clever.

Can you remember any other ways that you were able to, when you say, finagle?

Well, another thing I remember is I befriended the guy that was in charge of the soup kitchen. And he permitted me to get the potato peelings. And I would take it home and my mother would make cake out of it and whatever. And oh, it was a delicacy. And that was very important, because people were mainly getting sick because of lack of vitamins. And those potato peelings had a lot of vitamins.

I guess that just kept us a little bit-- I mean, we all were-- we had no trouble with weight control. You know? Like, my mother, prior to the war, was a little obese. I mean, overweight. But she didn't have that problem in the ghetto.

Speaking back again of your father, did you find out where your father was taken for those six months or so?

He was in some forced labor camp or something like that. When he came in, he couldn't tell you anything.

He never told you?

He was really dead when he came back.

From exhaustion, or had he been mistreated?

From beating, freezing, lack of-- starving. It was just a horrible way to go, that he went.

Do you understand why they let him go back home?

No.

He never could talk about his experience?

No. All we know that many, many of his bones were broken, that he was starved.

Were people actually buried in the cemetery?

Yeah, he was. We buried him in the cemetery, yes.

How did your mother cope after that?

She wasn't very happy, you know. She was just left in a very, very bad situation.

Were you able to have any connection or touch with other members of the family once the ghetto closed?

Not very much, because you had to work 10 hours a day, I think six days a week. And then when you got off the work, had to line up at the store, at the distribution point, and spend hours in line to get the ration. You had to walk to work, like would take me like 40 minutes or an hour to walk to work. And by the time things were over, you didn't have the inclination or the time to be very sociable. But we saw them once in a while.

But like I remember, I have one aunt and she had five children. In fact, that was one cousin that survived. And the whole family died out within a two week period.

The husband too?

Yeah. Husband, my aunt, and there were three sons and two daughters, or three sons and a daughter, they all just went.

Starvation?

Yeah, starvation and sickness and cold. You know, it--

Was your family or any other families in any way practicing Judaism during those months?

Oh, yes. Yes. As long as my father was-- yes. And then I remember after my father passed away, I went to say Kaddish whenever I could.

When your mother and sister returned from being picked up--

Yeah?

Did they go back to their same jobs again?

Yeah. Just carried on from there, you know. Like those who had just experienced where they were in that hospital there, with the people waiting for shipment for, I think, 24 hours or something like that. I don't know exactly how long the period was.

Your mother and sister must have been astounded that you were able to get them released.

Well, I suppose so. I don't know. I suppose so.

You didn't talk about those things then.

Well-- I mean, you brush death constantly. It just-- it was all around you.

Was there any opportunity at all for any kind of enjoyment or pleasure or anything?

Not much. No. There was no time for that. There was no time to read or time to write or time to-- you just-- every moment that you lived was just a struggle to survive. You know? Like I said, I had a little extra time, I would go out and try to get some food off the wagons or do something to work towards survival. It was just a constant. It was a 24 hour job.

I presume it was, say, sometime in the fall of 1939 that your maid-- you had to let your maid go.

Yeah.

And you never had any contact with her while you were in the ghetto? No, once you were in the ghetto, you were-- that ghetto was shut off from the outside world. You might just as well have been living on the moon.

Since you were so resourceful, did you ever think of trying to escape or any other things like that?

If I escaped, and if I managed to do it, there was my mother and sister. How could I just take off and leave them? Because once my father died, I was the man of the family. And I felt like it was my responsibility to keep them alive.

Can you talk a little bit, from your point of view, about the Judenrat and Rumkowski and--?

How is that?

About the Judenrat.

Oh.

And Rumkowski.

Well, he started out, I guess, with the right idea. But after a while, I think the power got through his head and he more or less considered himself like a king or president or something like that. And he did whatever the Germans bid him to do. Like, he made one speech and he said, "Brothers and sisters, give me your children," because the Germans told him they want all the children. Now, you can imagine being a parent and being told give up your children. And he--

In fact, when he got to Auschwitz, from what I understand, he was beaten to death by the people that were working at the gas chamber and so on. So his reputation wasn't too good after a while.

And I presume the Judenrat was pressed to always collect a certain number of workers on a regular basis?

Yeah, they were told, hey, we're going to need 5,000 next week, or we're going to need so many the week after. They told him what they need. We're going to need so much delivery of, let's say, uniforms, or delivery of that. Get your people working and all that. And he was really taking the orders and enforcing it.

Of course they would tell him, if you don't do it, we'll do it our way. So the only way he could get away not doing it was saying no, I'm not going to do it. And they would probably put him away and come in and enforce it themselves, or get somebody else to do it. I don't know.

So after this family of the mother and daughter starved to death, did the other family continue to live with you? You had another family of three people?

No.

No. We just wound up somehow without anybody moving in. But that was later on. I mean, it didn't happen right-- They lived with us for a year or two. You know, time elements are getting kind of hard now, after what's it? About 55 years. Yeah.

Were you or your mother or sister rounded up at any other time?

No, that was the only time that my mother and sister was rounded up, except for the time when the ghetto was being liquidated. But up to that time, that was the only time my mother and sister were picked up.

And could you say again about when that was? You said it wasn't too long after your father died when your mother was picked up.

Right.

And can you remember roughly when that was?

I believe it was 1943.

By then, I presume the starvation was very intense.

Pardon me?

I assume the starvation was very intense by 1943.

Yes, of course. Yes. Food was very, very scarce. Like I said, you were issued so many rations, which was just barely



enough to survive. But most of the time they would run out. They wouldn't have the food. And also, like I said, many times you did get it and it was so spoiled that you couldn't eat it, no matter how much you really wanted to eat it. So the food situation was horrible, probably even worse than the concentration camp.

How did you manage then? How did you and your family manage by 1943, with the food?

Well, I told you I managed. I mean, it wasn't-- it was bad. We were going around very, very hungry all the time. And we were very will shed any fat that we had on our bodies. But somehow we were surviving. Also, I always have a suspicion that my mother was kind of shorting herself and my sister, figuring that me being a young boy, I need more or something like that. But we always fought over it.

However, in some families there were fights over food, where one family member would take some other family members food. But fortunately we were closer than that. We were looking out for each other.

Did you keep on that same job in the wood factory all along?

Until the liquidation of the ghetto, yes. I remember one time, by producing so much, I got a [? award ?] of a cup of milk. And I wouldn't drink it. I was saving it to take it home, to share it with my mother and sister. Well, by the time I got home and brought the milk it was spoiled. But that cup of milk-- we hadn't had milk in years, you know.

Did you drink it anyway?

Oh, yeah. You don't throw anything away. In fact, you never saw a dog or cat or bird that was edible in the ghetto, because it wouldn't survive very long.

Had you heard about the concentration camps at that point?

No.

Nothing?

I never knew there was such a thing as a concentration camp or that people were being sent to their death. I knew that people were being sent out. And from the experience I had in '39, I thought they were just being sent to another town or resettled somewhere. Probably if we had known what is awaiting, there would be more effort to escape or fight back.

But you know, it was a situation where like every time, even like when the ghetto was being liquidated, that man, Biebow that I mentioned, he made a speech to the people. And he said, well, we know that conditions are not good here. Therefore, we decided to close the place out and send you out to territories where the air is clean, there would be sufficient food, and living conditions will be much better for you. So just come on out and report for resettlement as you go along.

And did people believe him?

I-- I guess so.

They did come out?

Sure. Well, they knew-- well, a lot of people were hiding and then the police would come in and make raids at night and pick people up and so on. But finally I remember my mother got together with her older sister and they decided to report together and evacuate, so they could stay together. Her older sister had something like four or five children. And my mother and I and my sister, we reported. And we were put on a wagon.

The boxcar?

Pardon me?

The boxcar, you mean? Or-- are you talking about the train or on a truck?

Train.

A train, like a boxcar, a cattle car.

Yeah. Like the way people were sent out to Auschwitz. And we were sent to Auschwitz.

When your mother reported for so-called resettlement, what was your thinking at the time?

Well, I told you about the attic. We had in attic built up a little area with a hidden door where we kept some of the merchandise. And I said to my mom, I said, why don't we go up in the attic and hide there? Before we left, the ghetto was already pretty well decimated and there was a lot of food around because they weren't in the cooperatives where they were. I said, I'll get a lot of the food and store it and we'll stay there. But my mother said no, we'll go together with my sister and we'll go from there.

Do you think she was tired of the struggle in the ghetto?

[INAUDIBLE]

Do you think she was tired of the struggle in the ghetto?

Could be. She might have been thinking that this was improvement of conditions. Could we cut it for--

OK. You were saying about your cousin that you mentioned.

Yeah. I have-- I don't know why I said two cousins, but I have got three cousins and an uncle left.

Who survived the war?

Who survived the war.

OK. Well, first of all, what are their names?

Their names?

Yes.

OK, I have got one cousin, Alec [? Nasielski, ?] who is a son of my mother's sister.

And what's her name? The sister's name, what's the sister's name?

He's the son of my mother's sister.

But what is the name of your mother's sister? Who is his mother?

Oh. You mean her first name?

Well, yeah. Her first name and her last name, married name.

OK. Her married name was [? Nasielski. ?] So her name was [? Hiagila ?] [? Nasielski. ?]

OK.

And of course, her maiden name was Kalinski. Then I have another cousin that was my father's brother's son, and his name is Paul Gelb.

And what is his father's name?

Abraham Gelb.

OK.

And then I have another cousin whose present name is Dorca Silber-- Silber--? [? Silberger. ?] Dorca [? Silberger. ?]

And who's her parent? Who was her parent?

That's-- I-- skipped my mind right now. Next time, if I do come in, I'll bring in-- I have a little-- it was such a large family and it was so long ago. So I'm trying to make a family tree for my children.

OK.

So I'll bring it in next time where I can give you more detail on it.

Do the name of the uncle that survived?

Yeah. That was Jacob Kalinski. That was my mother's brother, youngest brother.

Where we left off was we were talking about that period when your mother and her sister had decided to--

Well, my sister--

Her sister, I mean.

Oh, her sister. Right. To go ahead and report and for deportation.

What was her sister's name?

Hannah Rivka. And her married name was, I believe, Diamond, if my memory serves me right. That was her oldest sister and she had already married children and so on at that time. My mother had so many brothers and sisters, so there was quite a span between the youngest and the oldest.

How many were they?

Well, like I said there was seven Sisters and three brothers.

And how many on your father's side?

There were three sisters and a brother.

Now, OK, so they've decided now to report for deportation. And as you said, you didn't know about the camps?

No.

But you saw people just randomly shot all the time?

Oh, yeah, that was a normal occurrence in the ghetto. Yeah. I mean, they wouldn't just line up people. But you were walking near the fence, and if the guard took a fancy to it he just took off the gun and shot you. I've seen them do it quite a few times. Yeah.

Did you ever experience any kindness from any of these guards?

Well, I hadn't-- we had no contact with the guards at all. I mean, you would never speak-- the only thing you had to do if you saw a German walk by, you would have to take your hat off. You know? You wouldn't speak or be spoken to or anything like that. No.

And you had no contact with the Christian Poles, I guess?

No. Not [? whatsoever. ?] In fact, where the ghetto was, the established like a no man's zone, where even the non-Jews couldn't come anywhere near. So we were absolutely isolated.

Did you ever get involved in any black market or any attempts at trading with the Poles outside the ghetto?

Well, at the real close, when the ghetto first started, the first few months or year, I used to sneak out once in a while and go out and buy some food and bring it home. But after a while, it just became impossible.

How did you sneak out?

Just get underneath the wire. At that time, it wasn't this as closed in as later on.

Did people ever wonder that the people who were deported or resettled never wrote back and you never heard from them again?

Well, what they did, they had some people they made them write postcards and say, we are here and here, we are doing fine, and stuff like that. Some post would come back and people thought, things are not so bad.

So here you're all--

But being the age I was, I wasn't as much aware as if I was in present situation. There were no newspapers. There was no radio. You know? And even if the grown ups knew something, they didn't exactly sit down with a kid and discuss it.

So what happened then, once your mother and her sister decided to be deported?

Well, we're loaded on cattle cars. You probably heard that many times over.

But describe what your trip was like.

Well, we were loaded into the cattle car. There was probably 100, 120 people in the car, just enough room to stand up, not even room to sit down. The only thing they had a bucket in one corner where people could use it for-- And there were, of course, men, women, children and everybody in there. And we were on the train for four or five days, something like that. I don't know. Time is irrelevant after a while. No food.

Nothing?

Except what we took along with us, you know. Nothing coming in. I mean, if some people had something they had it, but if you didn't have it, there was just no food.

And one day we arrived. And the doors were thrown open. And all at once, we saw the SS with the whips, and the dogs barking and jumping at you, and "raus, raus" and beating you and so on. And OK, line up. Men on one side, women on the other side with the children. And we went through the process where--

We didn't know what it meant, but after a while we found out that if you went that way, that was the last day you were on Earth. If you went the other way, you maybe, maybe had a chance to survive or just suffer another few months and die.

Were you shocked when you saw?

Of course. Well, being separated from my mother and sister, that was bad enough. And then we were marched to a place where we had to take off our clothes. They had some chemical that they put on you, under your armpits and around your genitals. They said that's delouser. It burned like-- I think was some kind of acid. I forgot what the name of it was. I forgot the name. It was an acid that they used.

And then we took a shower and they gave us the prison uniform. Whatever you had on you, when you came out, you were just like newly born. There was nothing, nothing on you other than your body. OK? And you were given that. Shoes were wooden clogs.

And then we were marched off and put into a barrack. There was probably 1,000 people in that one barrack. There was just a cement floor. And right away the kapos started out with a beating and mistreating. No food that day. Then when you-- was time at night, they decided to let us lay down. They lined up in a row and you lay down on your side and the guy was on the side and so on, like sardines in a can. If you ever got up at night to relieve yourself, there would be no place to lay down again.

There was one big biffy. It was just feces all over. It was just horrible. And next day you had to fall out for what they call appell and the counting. And that took sometimes an hour or two, sometimes five or six hours. And I was really in Birkenau, not Auschwitz. And finally they had me tattooed.

Hold up your arm so maybe we can see it on the tape.

What is your number? Can you read it, please?

I'll put on my glasses. I should remember it, but I try not to. B10205.

And we're send out to a camp, which was, what would you say? A branch. And that was about 10, 15 miles away from Auschwitz, it's name, a town named [PLACE NAME] What they had there was a oil refinery. And for some reason or other, what they were doing is building brick walls around the gas and oil tanks, you know, the big oil storage tanks.

And what they had us do, they had the Polish Gentiles lay the bricks. And what we had to do was carry the bricks and the cement up to the bricklayers. And every so many feet was one of the kapos with a rubber hose and make sure that you kept the proper pace.

The living conditions were better than Auschwitz.

What were they?

Well, the barracks were halfway heated. We were sleeping four double-decker bunks, two to each bunk. And there was straw in the bunk. We were allowed to take a shower once in a while. The food situation was no good.

What was the food? Say, what of a day, what would you eat?

Like in the morning, after the appell and the counting, they would give us a cup of ersatz coffee and a piece of bread, probably what? Probably about three or four ounces of bread. Then during the day they would bring out to where we were working soup, which was mostly water with a few pieces of potatoes or whatever swimming around. And then in the evening we got another piece of bread.

Were you with anybody that you knew in this camp?

Yes, my cousin. One of my cousins wound up in the same camp. And one day he got sick. He came down with the flu or something. And they had like infirmary. And he had a high fever so he reported in. And next day came an ambulance from Auschwitz. And they take him back to the hospital in Auschwitz. And that was the last I've seen of him.

They had funny games going on about camp. Well, for one thing I got into a little problem one day. They took me in and took me up to the door. And you know when you open the door, where the door is hanging and you get a crack? They put my finger into the door and then slowly closed it. And then the other finger. And they said they were going to get all my fingers like that. But somehow they got distracted with something and let me go.

These are the two fingers. I don't know if you can see the scars.

I can.

Then--

Why was this? Was it a punishment for something?

Yeah. It was something so minor that I don't even remember what it was. Just a very minor infraction of something or other. That was besides the beating, the hoses and the whips or whatever.

Were the kapos Jewish?

Yeah. No. The kapos? No. The kapos in that camp were German. And most of them were either criminals or homosexuals. But they were Gentile German.

Then another game they had, they had the dogs. The dogs were trained, if they sic you, they would grab you by your throat or grab you by your genitals. And they hold you till the SS men would say, let go. So what they would do, they tell you to run. They let you go about 100 feet, 200 feet and then let the dog after you. And one day it was my turn to play the game and the dog got me across the neck. Well, that's going back 50-some years. But-- and he held on.

Is that skin [INAUDIBLE]?

Oh, all of it. I don't know if you can see it on the-- right across.

I see a white line there.

Yeah. Well, it looked much worse then. But I was bleeding like a pig. Finally the SS man came along, kicked me, and he says to the dog, OK, man, let that dog go.

Well, we had-- we were working with the cement and so on. I cut up some cement tape and I wrapped it around to stop the bleeding. Next morning, I had to go to work.

Wasn't the cement--

Pardon me?

Wasn't the cement powder--

Yeah.

--going in the wound?

I guess so. Yeah, I guess so.

And with the fingers being crushed, were the bones crushed?

Hmm?

When your fingers were crushed in the door, were the bones crushed?

I guess something must have been cracked. I don't know if you can see. There's not much light here.

I see scars there.

Yeah. Well.

That means that the flesh was cut too?

Yeah. Yeah. Well, I wasn't at camp till January 18. Well, that day

January 18?

'45.

So how long were you in that camp all together?

Oh, I guess about five months, something like that.

And how soon after you got to Auschwitz were you aware of the gas chambers?

Oh, right away.

Right away?

Yeah.

First day.

Yeah. Because the chimney, the smoke was coming out, the stench of burning flesh. People-- they didn't have enough room in the crematoria to get rid of the bodies. They were burning bodies in open pits. That was the time they were sending in the Hungarian Jews. They were coming in 5,000, 10,000 every day. It was just-- if there's hell on Earth, that was it.

And how soon did you find out what was happening with your mother and your sister? And your aunt?

I realized from the others the ones-- the Jews that were there for quite a while already, some of them were working in different areas. And they pretty much explained what was happening. By that time, I really knew that this was no picnic.

How do you think you coped with all this?

I guess with difficulty. I mean, you didn't even think of it. It was just surviving from one hour to the next hour. It was just getting a spot to warm up, or getting an extra piece of food, or avoiding this, avoiding that. I mean, it just-- you didn't think of tomorrow. You just thought the next 5 minutes, next 10 minutes, next hour.

A lot of people, you wake up in the morning and you go out for the counting, and there would be people that just walked up to the fence, the electrified fence, and just finished it off. You wake up in the morning, the guy next to you is dead.

Did you ever think of walking to the fence?

No. No. Mm-mm. No, I would never give up. No. I felt I had to survive. And I had to tell the story what happened.

Well, anyhow, we'll go back to January 18. Like I said, we already heard the cannon fire and we realized that things were getting close in the war. That night, about midnight, we're told to fall out, and take your blanket with you, and go. We marched all that night and most of the following day and we went back to Auschwitz. Anybody that couldn't walk any further, all you had to do is just sit down and a couple of minutes later, we heard a few shots. And that was it.

We got to Auschwitz. They gave us some soup. And then they said, OK, whoever wants to stay here can stay here. And whoever wants to go on, let's go. Well, most of us that could work left. Because we knew what Auschwitz meant. Then we started walking. We walked the next three nights and two days.

I had a kapo. Since I was a young kid, he kind of took a liking to me. He said, OK, I'll tell you what you do. They had a horse-drawn wagon where they had the supplies for the guards, and also the guards took their turn riding in the wagon so that they wouldn't have to walk all the time. You go up there and you help push.

I had a rope that was holding up my pants. It was a little long. So I tied the rope up to the wagon. And at times I was actually sleeping and being pulled. And I was walking in my sleep and I was being pulled along with the wagon.

Finally, we wound up on some railroad siding where there had a train, which was open. Again, like open wagons, you know. And they loaded us in again like sardines.

Had you had any food along the way?

No.

Nothing for three days?

Nothing Nothing. When we got there they gave us a piece of bread. Now, imagine that is in January in Poland. The temperature was cold. That's all I've got to say.

Did you have anything to wear besides your striped uniform?

No. We had a blanket.

A blanket. And the clogs.

Yeah.

What about sleeping on that march? Did you stop for any rest?

No.

No.

No.

Were people freezing to death?

Yes. Yes. Anyhow, we were on a car. We were on the train for something like five or six days. We would be going maybe for a half an hour, a few miles, stop on some siding, and a few hours. And it was slow. A slow boat to death. By the time it brought us to Sachsenhausen, which is a concentration camp not far from Berlin--



Had they fed you it all on this trip?

Pardon me?

Did they feed you at all on that trip?

No.

Nothing.

No. We had cups or pots that we used to eat out of. We would go down, put it down and scoop up some snow. There was some people coming by, we would beg him, you know, something. And no, nothing.

When we got off that car, I would say 2/3 were dead. In fact, what we did when somebody died, we got the clothes and doubled up, and used the bodies as seats. It wasn't pleasant.

We got to Sachsenhausen and were put in barracks. Food was very, very scarce. They wanted people to volunteer for work. They take you to Berlin. I volunteered. I think I get some more food or something. They took us and there were bombs that-- Berlin was being bombed-- bombs that didn't explode. We'd dig it out. And the Germans have somebody come in and disarm it. But we would be-- you never knew when the damn thing was--

Well, while we were in town we got a little bit more food. Also, there were dead horses. We would cut off a piece of the meat and bring it back and so on. And I went out several times. The one time I went out, it just so happened I had to go relieve myself. And I walked away maybe 100, 150 feet. The thing went boom. There were eight of us in that group. I was the only one to come back.

Just by the accident of--

Yeah, of having gone to relieve myself. And I was hit by rock, but nothing-- you know. Just a little. Well, then I didn't do that anymore. That scared me enough where I didn't volunteer for that anymore.

But then they wanted somebody go to the kitchen and pick up-- carry something from the kitchen. So two of us volunteered. And a couple barracks away from where I was, there was infirmary where the guards, when they got sick, they were staying. So what we had to do is pick up their food, it was like a milk can, and carry it back to the infirmary for them.

So what they had us do, they had a basement that was really like a half basement. Half of it was below street level and half of it was above street level. And there was window like that going out to the level of the street. And there was nobody there. They said, OK, leave the food here and go back. Hmm, food. Good food. So I had this-- so after the guards that went with us left, I doubled back, went down the basement. I had a pot. We all carried a pot, a spoon. And I went to go down the bottom, you know, to pick up the good stuff. You know? And I sneak out. And oh, boy, that was a meal I haven't had in years, because it was meat and potatoes and you know.

Well, next day they wanted somebody and there I was. That went on for about three or four days. And then one day I did that and I'm just down there digging in and German comes in. And then I just dropped my pot and out I go. And he said, hold, hold! And I'm going out through the window and he's shooting at me. And I just run across and I hid under one of the barracks. They were looking for me. I mean, I guess he never saw my face. But that was a closey.

Well, after about two, three weeks there, they got I don't know how many, several hundred or thousand, and loaded us on the train again. Sent us to Bergen-Belsen. Well, Bergen-Belsen was about the worst I have seen. We walked down the street between the barracks and there were bodies piled like wood, you know, cords of wood, just going maybe four or five feet high, and just going down for blocks along. Thousands and thousands of bodies just laying out in the street.

The lice were just crawling. People were sick of typhoid fever. I mean, it was just horrible. I was there about a week or 10 days and they wanted people to volunteer for work. Put me on a train and took me to a camp, Neuengamme, which is not far from Hamburg. I was there several days a week and they sent us out by truck to a small camp. I don't remember the name anymore, but I believe it was Fargo.

What was Neuengamme like?

Neuengamme wasn't-- Neuengamme was mostly non-Jews.

Political prisoners or prisoners of war?

Russian prisoners. No, no, no prisoners of war. Russian prisoners, there were some Frenchmen. There were some Dutch. In fact, there was one camp for, I believe, they were Norwegians. But they had a separate camp. And I guess they must-- they were getting a lot of Red Cross packages and so on. In fact, they threw some food over to us, I remember.

And the condition in the bunks, was that any better?

Yeah. That one, it wasn't so bad. Yeah, it was better than the other camps. I mean, the food was-- the food situation was bad. But there was no corpses laying around or anything. In fact, while I was there, I got a half a box Red Cross package. And I remember we weren't getting much food and I would eat a little, like there was different things in there. And finally I had everything eaten up except a can of peanut butter that was in there. And I waited and I waited. Finally, I had to have some food. I opened up the peanut butter and I ate the whole thing. And I haven't eaten peanut butter since. Just--

Why is that?

Oh, I got so sick.

Too rich for your body?

Yeah. Anyhow, after about 10 days or something like that, or two weeks, I was sent out to a camp where, how I said, I think the name was Fargo. What it was was a submarine base.

I'm sorry, I think that we're going to have to change the tape.

OK.

Can we stop here and then--

Yeah.

Thanks.