

In seconds you can start. Oh, Mr. Gordon, I just want to--

Kobel.

Kobel. I just wanted to say, if-- pardon?

How long-- how much time do you take for the interview?

We would like--

Already.

All right. OK.

It was difficult to make time to get here. But once I'm here already, [INAUDIBLE].

OK, great.

OK.

So I would say, Evelyn, any time you want, you can begin.

All right. Today is July 10, 1990. I'm Evelyn Fielden, interviewing Aaron Kobel for the Oral History Project of the Northern California Holocaust Center in San Francisco, California. With me is Barbara Harris as a co-interviewer. Good afternoon, Aaron.

Good afternoon.

I'd like to know a little bit how you grew up, and where you grew up, and where you were born. Would you like to tell me about that?

Sure. I grew up on the-- I was born in 1932. And we grew up-- my parents at that time, they lived in Ubermemel. It's a little city right across the river, from the Memel, from Tilsit, on the Lithuanian side of the country. After several years until Hitler came to power, they lived there. And in 1938, they decided to move. And they moved deeper into Lithuania. They moved to the city of Kovno until the age of-- to 1940.

When 1940, the Russians came in and occupied Lithuania. And about a year later the Germans came in and occupied Lithuania. And we lived in the ghetto for about approximately a year or two. And from there we were transported to Dachau, to Germany, where I spent the next couple of years in Dachau.

And just before the liberation, before the war ended, before liberation, we went in marching to the mountains of Tyrol where we were liberated in May 2, 1945, where we spent about next six months or so in Germany and Bavaria. And from there I spent some time in Munich and traveled throughout Germany looking for my family.

And 1947, beginning of '47, I joined the aliyah and I went to Israel. On the way to Israel, we were captured by the British. I spent one year in Cyprus. So in 1947 we were liberated-- I was released from Cyprus. And I went to Israel, where I spent approximately about a year in the kibbutz in Kinneret and Afikim. And then I volunteered into the Israeli Army, so just about, I guess, in '48, the beginning of '49.

And I spent the next couple of years in the army until 1950. And I was discharged. And I lived in Tel Aviv for about a year and a half, almost two years, doing miscellaneous jobs just to survive. In 1952, I received the affidavit to come to the United States. And I was reunited with my mother.

So I lived in New York for about 10 years and did miscellaneous jobs and opened up my own glass business, where I learned a trade was in New York. And after 10 years in New York, I decided to move out to California. So I came to California. I've been living there since, for the last 28 years.

I'd like to know a little bit more about your hometown, how you grew up, and how your parents-- what the occupation your father had.

OK. Well, we grew up, originally, in Memel, my parents had a grocery type business, where as a child, I can remember it was a large building. And I believe they sold mostly to the-- was bulk, I believe, that I can remember. We used to sell beans and sugar out of sacks. And this was back in the '30s.

And then when we had to evacuate the Germany, when Hitler came to power after the Kristallnacht, when my parents began-- whatever they were able to salvage from there, they reopened again another business in Kovno. We lived in city of [? Chanse, ?] was outside of Kovno, or it was a suburb, for a while. And I remember my mother, to make a living, we had a border we took in. And she was cooking for different people. Till we moved into Kovno, when my parents reopened another grocery store.

The surroundings was a big apartment complex not far from the main street. And I went to a school. It was a Jewish education school, where I learned Hebrew and Yiddish, until the Germans came into-- well, the Russians first and then the Germans. And this was where my education stopped. I had the first and second grade. The surroundings, I remember the complex where we lived was this square block and inside was a big courtyard. And most of our neighbors were non-Jewish.

And I remember the little kids-- my age at that time, I was about eight or nine-- eight probably-- calling me Jew. I could go to Palestine. And so I kind of got a taste of antisemitism before the Germans themselves came into Lithuania.

When the Russians left Lithuania, in 1941 I believe, our neighbors have arrested my father and took him away to the police station, as they were rounding up all the Jews in that city. I guess we were fortunate that he was released a couple of days later. And then we were moved to the ghetto. The ghetto was right across the river in Slobodaka.

We had to leave most of our possessions behind and we were kind of moved into an old house where we shared with many other families. And the grownups were taken to different jobs during the day and come home at night. And the children did not have to work at that time.

And they had different actions during that time-- aktions where they used to come during the day and line up the children or line up different individuals and take them away in buses and trucks. We never saw them again. And one we used to call the largest, the Yiddish was the [YIDDISH], where they round up the whole ghetto, and was like in a plaza, and they separated people left and right and left and right. And nobody knew what left is good, left is bad and.

Fortunately, for my parents, we wound up on the same side, on the good side, then where we stayed a little bit longer. On the other side, people they moved and with them away where they moved them to-- I don't think anybody knows. But they're no longer here with us. They were killed, for sure.

Till-- I guess these things went on quite frequently. And then we were moved to another camp outside of Kovno, the labor camp, where we lived in barracks and the adults worked. And then one instant-- the children didn't have to go to work. They kind of spared the children.

But if you went to work in the morning, you volunteered, you had to go back to work for the whole day. We used to come back for lunch, supposedly-- whatever lunch meant in those days-- back to camp. You left in the morning, came back at noon.

And one day, I decided didn't want to go back to work in the afternoon. But the number of people that left in the morning had to return to work at night, go in for the afternoon. And I asked a friend of mine, and I said, gee, would you please like to take this afternoon and go to work for me? And he said, no, my little brother is sick. And I would prefer to

stay in camp.

So I had to go to work to fill those numbers in. And when we came back that afternoon, that evening to camp, they had evacuated the rest of the people that were there in camp and taken the rest of them to-- I guess wherever they took them to. They killed most of them or all of them. So it was a lucky break that day that I did go to work and didn't stay in camp.

Until, I guess, situations were getting a little rougher, and you had to work. And food was scarce. And one of the instances I remember, I used to work in a supply depot for the German Army, in their food department were like a big barracks. And I used to steal eggs and make a pinhole on each side and suck out the yolks on the inside-- a trick we learned-- and put the shell back in the container so they would not catch us.

I don't know the exact year, but we were taken from there into Germany by train, where my mother was taken off and she was in Stutthof. And my father and I continued on and we were taken to Dachau.

In Dachau, a similar situation happened again where we came we were in lager zwei number two. Dachau had different-- the main camp and different outside camps that were part of Dachau. And we were in lager two. And they rounded up all the children in front. And they had them all lined up. They want to take the children away.

And the German commander of the camp, I guess, looked us over and called me over and another young man about my age, my height-- maybe because we were taller or bigger or-- and he hit me with a stick. And they hit him with something else over the head, and they said, go, [? Marty, ?] go on up with the adults, where there were 163 children that went and was sent to Auschwitz from there. So I had another lucky break, at this one.

Well, we survived that ordeal. And we lived on for another I guess a year or so. And we worked in different places, different jobs-- building, whatever the job was required, building a factory. And then it was working chopping wood and whatever-- I was about eight, nine years old by that time, or 10. And I worked hard. And I guess maybe that's what kind of kept me alive.

And they kept me alive till '45, when the last march-- the Allied armies were getting closer. They were walking us on the highways through the mountains of Tyrol. And we were guarded by dogs. And the food was scarce. And I was getting to a point where I had just no more strength left and was very weak.

And we were left one night in the forest. And it was snowing. I had one little blanket to cover me. And woke up in the morning and all the German guards were gone. I guess they knew the American Army was so close by. And they took off.

And I had an uncle who was with me at that time in lager zwei in number two. And he went out and was able to round up some food when he saw the American Army coming in and throwing different foods on the road. And so he went to round up some food. But he didn't let me eat any of the food. He took me to a barn. And I stayed in the barn.

They kept me warm. And he brought me some food and kind of spoon-fed me, to a point where next to me was another young man who went to the highway. And he was a little stronger and older than myself. And he brought back different cans of condensed milk and sardines and sprats, whatever he had. And I guess he ate a little bit too much too fast and didn't make it. But he died with a smile on his face. So my uncle came back. And he kind of brought me back a little milk and a little food at the time. And he kind of nursed me back.

And then we left the area. We were evacuated from the forest about 20 or 30 miles from there. And we spent some time, a couple of months, in a-- they were German SS barracks where we kind of recuperated with the help of the American Army. We were nourished-- food, clothes.

And then we were sent to Munich. There was another camp that we stayed at for a while. And we decided to go to different locations and look for their parents. By that time I believe my father was dead. My father died about six months-- he died in December of '44.

How did you know that?

I had my uncle, who was with me. And there was another uncle of mine who was also in another camp with him. We were separated at that time. one uncle was with my father. And the other uncle was with me in the same camp I was in.

But he-- we still kind of go back and forth on jobs, where they used to bring in different clothes to be repaired-- the clothes that we wore. And he was a tailor. And he found out that-- he told my uncle, he wouldn't tell me-- that my father died in Lithuania. But I understood. So I found out what happened.

I hadn't seen my father before he died for at least almost a year. We were in the separate camps. He had bleeding ulcers. And he had ulcers just throughout the war. And the diet that we had, the prescribed diet, did not quite go along quite with ulcers. I'm surprised he made it that long.

How old was your father?

He was 40-- 40, 42 when he died. He was born 1902 or 1903. And he died in '44.

And your mother? My mother, she was in Stutthof all that time. And I found her later, after the war. I found her in Berlin after the war was over, and by coincidence. I found her in Berlin in 1945 or '46.

In my travel I decided when I was liberated that we wouldn't travel back to Lithuania, to my hometown. Well, not my hometown but my town where I lived, the last place that we lived. So maybe I can find her. And I found some people in-- we got as far as Poland and I ran into somebody from Lithuania. And he called me. And I guess-- my name used to be Koblikowski before I shortened it.

Somebody's calling my name. And I turned around and he said, are you so and so? You live so and so? Yeah. And he said I've seen your mother-- no, how's your mother? Said, I don't know. I haven't seen her. He said, oh, yes. I have seen her. And she is in Berlin. And she was ill and so forth. And he didn't have the exact details of where she was. But he gave me some more information where you can go to near Berlin and find her.

So from Poznan, I got on one of the trains. And I made it to Berlin without any money in my pocket, without any clothes or any food. The clothes that I did have, a little bit saved up, and some food-- had in a little rucksack. And I fell asleep on the train, and somebody stole it. So when I came to Berlin I was penniless, and no money for car fare for the trolleys or anything. But I managed to get into-- and we found her.

When I found her, she was very ill. She was in the hospital. And I guess the exact nature of her illness, I don't know. But I found out that how she had the breast removed due to cancer or whatever, I wasn't sure. And I stayed there for a while. And we left Berlin after three or four months, back to Munich.

We decided that the Russian regime we didn't like. So we decided to go back to the American zone of Germany, where we spent about a year-- a little over a year-- in a place called Feldafing. It's about 30 miles outside of Munich, where was a DP camp. And they provided us with food, and clothing, and shelter.

Until I decided-- I joined up to go to Israel, because I didn't want to stay in Germany. And I didn't want to go anywhere else. And I decided I wanted to go to Israel to help to establish a Jewish homeland with a bunch of other little children of my age. I was about 13 about that time-- by the time I joined up the different organizations. And we went illegally to Israel.

How did you find your mother in Berlin? How did you go about looking for her?

Oh, I had some ideas where she was at. But I wasn't quite sure exactly where. And I really don't remember all the details how I found her. But I know I didn't have an exact address. But I asked people. And I guess I-- I worked with my-- I know she was working with a Russian group where the Jewish man, who was a Russian officer, who we had a lot of

Jewish people working for them, I guess in different positions. And there were other survivors that were at that time in that area. And some that were with my mother during that time. And I really don't remember all the details how I found her. But I did find her.

She must have then been being in the Russian sector of Berlin.

In the Russian sector of Berlin. That's right.

Did you know that? I mean, did you know that sector--

Oh, sure. I knew. I lived-- at that time I stayed in the Russian sector. Then I left. I stayed in the French sector for a while. And then before I left, we couldn't get out of Berlin unless you went to the American sector and by transport. You had to be transported out from Berlin to Munich to cross with a caravan.

Did your mother know about your father at that time?

I believe she did, yes. She had met other people, other survivors from the area where I was from-- from Dachau and so forth. And I think she had known but then that he died.

You did not have a brother or sister?

No, I was the only child.

Only child. What about your other relatives-- you uncles and aunts? You mentioned one uncle you were with.

Well, yes. I had one uncle that helped me during the days of concentration camp in Dachau. He had a son that was about my age. And he was taken away during that action when he first came to Dachau. So he had nobody else. So I guess he helped me out as much as he could.

Nobody had enough food for anybody but even for themselves. But he worked in the kitchen. So by working in the kitchen he had a little extra here and there-- was able to help me out. He was always a go-getter. And he knew where to find enough to survive. And he was-- like I said, I say to a point, helped me out quite a bit. Without him, probably wouldn't have been here today. Little extra food helped, especially for a small child. I wasn't that small, but.

Was another uncle-- that I kind of mentioned briefly earlier-- that we met later on, after the liberation. When we left the American zone to go to the Russian zone to look for my mother, my one uncle kind of left.

And this is a story I have kind of held back for years. He kind of left me. And the uncle that I never spoke about, who kind of disowned [INAUDIBLE] had left me in the middle and took off because I was a burden on him. So he was a man that I ran into him later on, about a couple of months later. But we never kind of-- I never acknowledged him and kind of let him go. So, what's there to talk about?

Did you have a large family in Lithuania?

My father came from a large family. My father had about 11 brothers and one sister. And they were all married. And they all had their own families. And the only one that survived-- those two that survived, was the uncle who I never kept the contact with and the uncle who was helping me out-- and we kept in contact-- who lives now in Brazil and had his own family. But from the original family before the war, none of them survived, the children or their children.

How many would you say were there who did not survive?

Well, who didn't survive? At least for every-- on my father's side-- for each son that my grandfather had who was married and had at least two or three children. So I figure 12 times four-- figure 48-50. And on my mother's side, she had three brothers, and she had her parents. And they didn't survive either.

There was a large Jewish population in Lithuania before the war, right?

Yes. There was about-- I believe a quarter of a million people. Was the largest-- in comparison, was the largest percentage of Jewish people in Lithuania-- in Europe.

In Europe, yeah. Can you describe life in the ghetto when you first were taken to the ghetto? Can you tell us a little bit about that? How large the ghetto was and the situation.

The ghetto was not a large ghetto. It was a small ghetto. It was a section of town that was wired off and squeezed in as many people as they could in one home. Most of them were homes-- no apartments in those days in that section of town. I remember the home. The house we lived in, must have been at least four or five different families. It was crowded.

The conditions were bearable. They were not as bad as the camp themselves, the concentration camp. The food was scarce. The adults had to go to work during the day. And the children at my age, at that time, did not have to.

The only thing is, was every so often the Germans came in during the day into the ghettos and removed certain amount of people and elderly and young children. And that was enough to scare you, and to hide out during the day.

What kind of work did the adults have to do?

Well, my mother, she was a seamstress. And I believe she worked in the place where to repair the German uniforms with the soldiers. And some were cooks. And some were just working in the fields or in the woods, chopping wood, or construction work, whatever. The work that needed had to be done.

Were you physically mistreated?

Many times. I was beat for not going fast enough or going too fast or going too slow. And when-- occasionally where I found some potatoes, and then put them in my pocket, and I was caught with some extra potatoes in my pocket, the German officer beat me up to the point where I just-- almost of no return. And if people take, they they were taken away. Beat-- yes, I got-- regardless how fast you worked and how hard you worked, they always had somebody that-- with a stick come and beat you up and trying to show the power over you.

But you were only a child at that time.

Yes. I guess they didn't care, were you a child or you were an adult. That was from the age of 8 to 12 and 1/2, when I was liberated.

All right. So you ended your schooling in second grade?

I ended my schooling in second grade. But I resumed later on when I came to the States. I worked during the day. And I went to school at night, and went to high school at night, but almost graduated-- graduated high school.

When you were sent, did you know about the concentration camps already when you were in Kovno?

No, well maybe people knew. But I did not. I was probably too small to realize. I knew what was happening in the ghetto but I did not know what's happening anywhere else.

Yeah, I wonder if you heard the grownups talk about it?

No. Well, maybe the grownups did, but I did not hear that at the time, no.

So when you were sent from the ghetto, the Russians first came, right?

When we-- no, when we were sent to the ghetto to Germany the Russians were close. But they were not that close. They were getting ready, I guess, to move the slave labor or whatever into Germany and to organize it.

I see. And Dachau was your first camp?

Dachau was the first and the last stop. We were not-- in the main part of Dachau for a while. Then we were shipped to lager tsvey. That was a outside camp out of Dachau, was like Landsberg.

Would you care to describe a day in Dachau-- how you spent the day in Dachau?

Well, a day in Dachau-- getting up early in the morning, it was around 4 o'clock or-- still dark, whatever the time it was. The accommodations were sleeping on straw on the ground. In the wintertime they had a tiny little stove. The clothing was very, very paper-thin clothing. We had to walk to our workplaces for at least a couple of hours one direction.

The work was construction work or it was very hard work, the different areas. Because I was small, I had different jobs I had to perform because I could only fit in. I was working in a machine where only a small child would get in there and to clean the machine out. And this was my job, where sand and dirt fell in my eyes and all over my body.

But this was my job for a long time, or carrying the sack of cement and loading cement trucks, railroad trucks and carry them for about 100 yards, 200 yards. They were anywhere from about 50-pound sacks or more.

The food was division of a loaf of bread, was about a kilo of bread, two-pound bread. And we used to divide it for 12 people, divide it equally. And there was the ration of food for the day. At night, when you came back to camp-- was again at dark or almost dark-- where the dinner for the night was some hot water, basically.

It was supposedly supposed to be some potato soup, but no fat and vegan diet. And the soup was just like hot water with the potatoes, when you cook them long enough, the few in there, they kind of disintegrate. And then some black ersatz coffee once a day. This was the diet of the day-- 1/12 of the bread and the potato soup, whatever.

How ingenious, we used to slice up the loaf of bread. We used to mark the bread in 12 parts. And one person had to turn around. And he used to call out each name, because god forbid if one got a piece that's a little bit larger than the next. So everybody was equal to get that piece of bread. And this was every day of the year.

And at one time, later on, just before we were liberated, I guess the Red Cross had sent in some supplies. Or we had some visitors from the Red Cross, so we got some tiny pieces of margarine, and a slice of salami, in this little care package. But that didn't last long, for a short time.

Were you with a group of Lithuanians in that particular section?

Mostly, in our camp, the majority were Lithuanians from our city, from the ghetto to the right into lager.

You, of course, spoke German, didn't you?

Yes.

So that was a help.

Sure. I spoke German. I spoke Yiddish, and I spoke Lithuanian. And then I learned-- being we had a lot of people from Poland, I learned Polish, then learn some Hungarian from some Hungarian Jews that came from Hungary. And surprised how you learn because they didn't speak our language. So we learned theirs, or vise versa.

Because you had to-- the Germans gave orders, right?

That's right.

So you had to understand what they were saying.

Well I grew up at the border. I grew up along the border Lithuania and Germany. So I spoke German. I understood German well.

Were your parents Orthodox. Did they keep an Orthodox household?

We had a kosher home but my parents were not-- they kept-- they were not ultra-Orthodox. My father used to go to synagogue on the weekend but not on a daily basis, not that I can remember. Remember my mother lighting the Friday night candles. But I don't remember really being in a real Orthodox home.

You were just at the age of your bar mitzvah, weren't you, when you were encamped?

When I was liberated.

When you were liberated?

Yes. When the war broke out I was eight years old. And then when I was liberated, it was just-- it was six months after my liberation. We were liberated in May. And my bar mitzvah would have been like in November on my birthday. But I didn't have a bar mitzvah.

I celebrated my bar mitzvah about-- it was 6, 8 years ago. I had a bar mitzvah with my youngest son. We both went to Israel. And we had a proper bar mitzvah at the Wailing Wall, on the Western Wall. And it was quite an experience to do it together, my youngest son and I.

I'm sure. Must have been a very moving ceremony.

It was an experience, right.

Well, coming back to liberation day, can you describe your feelings when that day happened?

Well, the day of liberation, we weren't quite sure what was happening that day. And we saw tanks rolling in. And they had a white star. And didn't know what different insignias meant at that time, could have been the Russian star, or somebody else's star, or whatever. But didn't know who was coming in.

And we really didn't know. Could have been Germans, as far as we knew, just try to come to finish us up in the last minute. But after the tanks came in and the American soldiers was-- throw food-- and so we knew that we were liberated.

And I guess probably too numb even to-- I was basically too numb, or too tired, or too weak even to really appreciate what was really happening. I just knew we just-- I didn't have to march anymore. I was right there. And I was-- didn't have to-- I think the suffering was basically over. And this was what we were waiting for.

I think what made me or most of the people survive was that we didn't care if I die tomorrow, but just to wait for the day it's over-- the war is over, to see the Nazi destruction. And then you didn't care how it happened. Just to see at the end of the war and the destruction.

There wasn't like the joy of-- we didn't jump from joy. We didn't-- nobody had the strength to jump from joy and to celebrate. I guess everybody kind of just, on the quiet note felt, well, we survived and made it. And they just probably just relaxed.

Did you hear rumors before the liberation, whether in the camp? Were there are rumors going around-- the Americans were coming or the Russians were coming?



Yes, we did. There were a lot of rumors that they're coming closer, and they're coming closer, the Americans. And we could see the Allied planes bombing the surroundings. And we knew the war is coming to an end. But we didn't know if we're going to make it.

The rumors were quite frequent as the Allied Army was coming closer, and especially in the last couple of months. We were led from the camp away from the camp into the mountains. We were led in this direction, then we'd turn around and go back another direction. So we knew that the armies were closing in. But if we can survive long enough to hold out, that was a question.

Did you know which armies?

No, we did not know. The rumors were the American Army or the Russian Army or we just we didn't know exactly which army it was. Just, basically, we heard so many rumors on a daily-- everybody had the story, and nobody knew what.

Mr. Kobel, may I ask you a question about, did life in the camp change as liberation day approached? Did the Germans start treating people more harshly? Or did they start seeming fearful themselves?

No, life in camp had not changed, because the last two months of the liberation, we were basically walking and marching. And they have not really changed. If you could not keep up and march in your stride and the walk, if you fell, they shot you.

And so you try to keep up your pace as much as you could. And if you start limping or falling, and they had the German Shepherd dogs that they let loose on you. So you did everything in your power kind of just, how weak you were, just to kind of stay in line and be the best you can and just hope and wait for the moment.

How many people began the march?

There were thousands. There were thou-- the whole highway was full of people, I believe. I honestly don't know how many people there were. But there were in the thousands.

And do you have any idea what percentage of them made it until liberation?

No, I don't. I know as you were walking, there were piles, literally piles of people on each side of the road as you were walking further and further. They had five, 10 bodies in piles as you would-- dead bodies.

When you were marching, did you come in contact with the local population?

No, not at all. We were basically walking on the-- not through the city but through the roads, and not even coming close to the city.

You didn't see any Germans?

No. Other than the guards, you know, because they had the roads blocked off, probably. They wouldn't let anybody go through. But we were walking five abreast on the highways and the roads were-- there were no wide roads in those days. So there was no other traffic other than us walking five abreast or more. And for miles you can see people walking.

Now that was already at the end of winter, right? The spring--

It was in May. There was still snow on the ground. The last day when I woke up, May the 2nd, I was covered with snow when I woke up in the morning.

And you did not have adequate clothing?

No, I had a pair of wooden shoes with the canvas top that were kind of torn, no socks. I did have frozen toes. My pants were the standard uniform. And they were kind of raggedy and with holes in them. Just a jacket, but no shirts or anything.

How much would you say you weighed at the time?

I think I weighed about 60 pounds. Think about 35 kilos at that time-- I think I weighed myself right after, when we came to a place called Bad Tolz. And there was the German SS barracks and a scale. I weighed myself.

The SS barracks, but that was already--

After we were evacuated. After the war.

Yeah, yeah. OK.

Not during. They wouldn't let us sit in there.

I know. So when you were liberated, of course, by the Americans.

Led by the American Army, correct.

What did they do with you the first day?

Well, they came in, and I guess they trucked us to this SS camp about 20, 30 miles away from there. And they fed us and clothed us and kept us there for a couple of months to nourish us back to health, to get our strength back.

There from there, after a couple of months, they were moving us to a DP camp. And it was close to Munich. But they were, well, helpful, very helpful, during the first couple of months, and very understanding of feeding us and nurturing us and cleaning us up.

All of us were dirty and filthy. We haven't showered and cleaned-- for years not only months but years. The only shower I remember having was about once there was an epidemic in camp, typhus epidemic. That's the only thing I remember that we had a shower.

Lice were crawling over your body. And your clothes was full of lice. And our pastime was killing the lice and you're-- from your clothes. And after a while, if you had any sores on your body, the lice used to crawl in. And had to dig them out. And it leaves scars on your body. So the treatment, as far as being a camp with water and cleanliness and clothing was not top priority on their list at all.

How were the sanitary facilities, the toilets?

They had, in our camp they had a outhouse, a large outhouse. And that was it. And they had a water system where you can wash your face and hands but no showers.

And you have to report morning and evening for counting, did you?

Every morning, yeah. In the morning when you got up, you had to report-- stand up outside each barrack to get up for counting, and then at night, before you retired. At the barrack we stayed in, I remember was-- it's ingeniously made with a small-- like a tent in the ground. And there were about 50, I believe, inmates in each barrack.

And when you got up in the morning and you probably-- not probably, but were-- when you woke up you found one on each side probably dead of you. And people didn't-- in their sleep they died. And they got up. You went to work. Then a group came in and cleaned them out. And when you came back at night there were new people in there. So that was just

the normal thing. I guess that's what happened.

How did seeing that affect you, when you were just a child, seeing people?

How it affected me? You mean today or then or what?

Then.

I guess-- memory, I guess is a wonderful thing. You can erase a lot of stuff out of your mind, and especially in children. I was able to block it out of my mind for many years, and always talked about it. And I would never-- never was hiding it or trying to forget it. But you keep up living your daily life.

And, again, you leave and go from one situation to another where you have to fight for survival and make a living, and trying to support yourself and support the family and your children. I think it becomes secondary, you know, and-- unless you sit down and you think about it.

And I preferred not to think about it because it really doesn't do that much good. If you think about it on a daily basis, that gets you down. So you have to kind of keep up and continue living your daily life and put this thing on the back burner.

You said something very important. You said you always talked about it.

Yes.

Did you right away talk about it? Or were there periods or years before you actually--

No, always talked about it. I never did hide the fact or tried to forget the fact. And that's the reason when the war was over, I volunteered to go back and to go back-- to not go back, to go to Israel and helped establish what I felt-- at that time I was 13 years old before-- 13 and 1/2 years old-- to help to establish fight for Jewish homeland.

And I volunteered in the Israeli Army-- I was 15 and 1/2 years old-- because when I was discharged, I was 18. So I really felt strongly about it. I felt strongly that the Jews should have a homeland of their own.

When you were in Israel, did you tell your story to people there?

Certainly. Well, because most of them were there. I mean, most of the people in Israel at that time were people that survived the camps, and the majority were.

But too, though-- did you meet any of those people who had lived there, did not go through the camps?

Well, no. We never discussed it. There was some other things too. At that time, I was mostly with people who, when we came to Israel, I was in the group of younger people my age. We kind of stayed together. So we never had the opportunity to discuss it, or there was no need to it. We all knew our backgrounds. To discuss it with the people that were-- lived over there or were born over there-- they knew. So there was no sense to discuss it with them.

When I came to the States, I never hid the fact that I wasn't-- well, and when I couldn't-- I had an accent that was thick enough to-- that they knew exactly where I was coming from. But when people talked about it-- or even today, I belong to different service organizations. And I make it a point to let people know that when the-- it comes around to May the 2nd, then I make a donation to the organization. And now I have my second birthday-- look like I was reborn, you know. And so I always keep it open. I never denied it.

Tell us a little bit about Israel, what you did there.

When I first came to Israel, we were in the kibbutz. And we were put to work, and to school, and to learn how to fight--

fight for survival, because the British were still there. I worked in the morning in the fields in the kibbutz, doing different chores from gathering bananas in the fields or cutting hay, grass.

And then around noontime or afternoon we had a couple of hours of Hebrew education or some kind of educational programs. And then we had some army training. That lasted until May. And then the war broke out.

When Arab and the British have left and the Arabs attacked, I was unofficially inducted into the service, because each group, each kibbutz, had to donate so many people to the services. So I guess I was chosen. And I spent quite a few months in the service. Until came to point I decided, well, I will join the regular army. And I joined the regular army, was in about October of 1948, and where I spent two years. And I was discharged about two years later.

I was in the infantry. And in infantry I was wounded several times. Then I was transferred to a school. And I learned how to drive, and then became a mechanic. And I did miscellaneous jobs-- repairing vehicles, and driving different vehicles, working in the transportation department until the war was over.

Then in '40-- was in '50, when I was discharged, I went to work for the army as a driving instructor. I worked for about nine months to teach new immigrants how to drive. And it was a challenge in itself. And I did different other jobs-- construction jobs, driving. My background was driving-- lot of things left to do things with the vehicles and trucks and stuff. So I drove a taxicab. And I drove a truck, and-- just to make a living, to survive, basically.

You spoke, by that time, fluent Hebrew.

Yes. I knew a little Hebrew I remembered from when I was in the ghetto when we learned, and also from before that, when I went to Hebrew school. So it was easier for me to pick it up.

Mr. Kobel, after the war, did you have a-- was it difficult to integrate back into day-to-day routine after what you had been through? Did you find the transition difficult?

After the First-- the Second World War?

Mm-hmm.

Yes, it was-- it was difficult. There were-- you had no, really, a place to call your own, and traveled from place to place. You did a lot of things to survive. And that wasn't normal. Was not a normal life. Just like a gypsy-- travel from place to place with your possessions in your pocket. And that's the reason I was anxious to leave and go to Israel. I figured, I'll go and settle down.

Were there any people who tried to help you get re-established after World War II?

After World War II, there were the UNRRA and the HIAS. And there were different organizations-- the American Jews and the American government helped you. Not so established, but to kind of to survive, to put your life back to normal as much as possible, living in Germany. But I decided that after a while, I went to Israel and permanently.

Can I ask you to go back a little bit?

Sure.

Let me ask you one question about your childhood. Tell me, was it a happy childhood? What do you remember about your relations with your mother and your father and your large, sprawling family?

Well, I remember from the age of three, four, or five, till the age of eight, we had a comfortable home. We had a-- lived in a nice area. My father was pretty comfortable.

What I remember, the surroundings-- there probably some here in this country that wouldn't matter, but in Europe in

those days the bananas or oranges were the premium. And remember my mother taking me across the bridge to the market in the city of Tilsit to buy me an orange or a banana. But these things were like the greatest luxury in the world. That was the relationship between my mother and my parents.

But Tilsit was in Germany, wasn't it?

Yeah, but we lived on the other side.

Yeah, so it was-- where was the border, actually?

I was born in Tilsit. But we lived on the other side of the Memel, Ubermemel. It's like crossing the bridge from Oakland to San Francisco.

Right, right. Yeah. Interesting.

Do you remember anything about prior to the war, when things began to change? Did you notice any tension?

Yes, there were tension about my parents. My mother had to kind of go in and help with the family support, and moving from place to place, and uproot, and losing a lot of the possessions. And things were not quite as they were prior to.

The area I was born, remember we had a maid, or not a maid or, nanny, was it called, that took care of me. But then as we had to move away from there and parents lost most of their possessions. So as time went on, it got tougher and tougher and tougher until the war.

When the Russians first came-- the Russians came first, right?

Right.

Yeah. How did it change? How did your life change?

Our economic life has changed. They took the business away from my father. And he had to go to work for a government factory, in the factory store. I do not remember if my mother worked at that time or not.

I remember we had to stay in line to buy bread or buy other items. So start to realize that life was not as smooth as it has been. And it's kind of getting-- deteriorating.

But you continued-- you were about three-- you continued, then, after the Russians left, you entered in school didn't you?

No. When the Russians left, that was it. When the Russians left, the Germans came in, there were no more school.

There was no more school.

During the Russian occupation, I was going to school. Was only for one year in Lithuania.

You were too young, too.

Yeah. So when the German came, I was about eight years old. So that's when the schooling stopped.

How were you notified the first time that you had to move?

The first time when we had to move, I really vaguely remember. I remember that we moved middle of the night. That my parents have hired a truck, like a van, and packed our belongings and left middle of the night. And was kind of like spur of the moment.

What did they sense was-- this was prior to the Russians coming?

No. It's prior, yeah. This was in '38 when the Germans started to harass or to kill Jews in the streets. And so this was when we left, two years before the war officially started.

When you went to Kovno.

No, before Kovno.

Before Kovno.

Yeah. And we left the Ubermemel to go to Kovno. That was in '38. We got to Kovno in '38. Then the Russians came in in '40-- '40-- 1940. And the Germans came in '41 I believe, a year later.

So the first place you went when you moved that time was-- what was the name of that first city you moved to?

We moved from Ubermemel. But we lived to Kovno.

To Kovno. And you moved on your own.

We moved out on our own. Correct.

And did you move into the ghetto area?

No. We lived in the city. In the city of Kovno. And to the ghetto area, we moved later, when we were made to move into the ghetto area.

Can you tell me about how that occurred and when.

To move to the ghetto area? The people received orders to evacuate their homes and their apartments and to move physically into the part of town that was called Slobodaka. I don't really recall all the details how they were arranged. I was about eight years old. And it's kind of difficult to remember or didn't know the details.

The only thing I remember is that we had to move. We moved from one place. We had to give up our apartment that we stayed-- were quite comfortable in-- in the actual city of Kovno and move into the suburb on the other side of the river, where the smoke-- part of town was closed in with barbed wire. And it was one main gate to get in, to get out. And was guarded with towers all over the place and the German or Lithuanian guards all over the area.

That was my next question. Who administered the ghetto?

The ghetto was administered by the Germans with the help of Lithuanians, Ukraines, and other nationality that joined the German Army and the SS uniforms.

And how did they treat the people in the ghetto?

Well, they were not treated with kind thoughts. They used them, whatever they could for the labor. And then every couple of months came in and took some more out-- the elderly, the younger ones, people that could not produce or could work-- and just eliminated them.

Did you know that?

Yes, we knew that.

How did you find that out?

Well, I guess through the network, people coming and going, or from different sources of information-- people running away and bringing back information, and news, and maybe also through the people on the outside.

Did you have contact with Gentile people, Lithuanians? And were they helpful at all, or were they--

The Lithuanian people, to my knowledge were not helpful at all. They were antisemitic and they submitted to the Germans, the Ukrainians. I shouldn't say they were everyone, but they were-- the majority of the people were not friendly to the Jews. And they were not helpful.

There were some that you could buy. If you gave them your possessions, and then maybe later on they turn you in anyway. After they got your possession they turned you in. And the Germans came to pick you up. You couldn't trust them.

Where did the food come from and how was it distributed?

Oh, boy. I just remember. The food in the ghetto, I don't remember how the food got in, how it came, when it was distributed. But in the concentration camp, it was brought in on a truck, on a hand truck that we had to go pick up from the warehouses. There were people that worked in the kitchen. They went and got the food. And then the [INAUDIBLE] would eat, delivered it to each barrack. And head of the barrack had to divide it up among the people.

I have a question going back to Lithuania. Since there was such a large majority of Jews living there, were they comfortably or were they in leading position to the Jewish people more so than the Lithuanian people? Do you--

What mean by were they by leading?

Were they-- well, let's see were they better off than the average Lithuanian?

Yes, they were. As an example, the leading physician in the city of Kovno was a Jew. It so happened he was supposed to have operated on my father just before the war broke out. And he had a sore finger. And he couldn't operate. But he was the leading surgeon in the city. Business people. Professional people.

Kovno and all the Lithuanian-- I think among the Eastern European Jews it was the cultural center of the Jews. The Jewish cultural center of Europe was in Lithuania. And the city of Slobodaka, they had the biggest yeshiva. And the biggest yeshiva, I think in all of Europe, was in a Kovno and Slobodaka. Most of the writers, I think, came from that part.

That may, in a way, account also for strong anti--

I beg your pardon.

That may, in a way, account for strong antisemitism.

Sure.

On the Lithuanian part.

That's right.

How did the leadership, Jewish leadership, react to the Nazis? Were they outspoken? Or did they-- do you think there was a sense that if you'd be quiet maybe they'll all go away.

Ah, no. There was no-- nobody spoke up, I believe. And like I remember, I think it took everybody by surprise. And I

think nobody believed it. And they thought, well, it was going to go away. And I don't think anybody believes it's going to come to that-- to that situation where be annihilation.

You mentioned that in the ghetto during the day, your parents would go off to work. And during the day, there would be selections. How, as a boy, did you avoid being selected?

Oh, I used to kind of go out and never stayed in the house itself, used to go out somewhere. And we had the river that divided between the two cities, where the ghetto was in Kovno. And I used to go out to the river.

Or then they also had a place where you can go to work inside the ghetto. There was a place you can go to work or work on-- I guess the biggest industry we had, if I remember as a child, was the German Army were to repair the uniforms or to clean the uniforms from the dead soldiers, they used to bring back from the front lines, and the shoe repair and whatever. And I used to kind of keep myself busy to go to work.

Did you have some instructions from your parents about--

No.

Was it ever discussed, how to stay clear of the Germans?

No, but you had to kind of keep busy or do something. Or some days you had no choice. You had to go do something.

I'd like to know-- I'd like to come back to Israel, now.

Sure.

You did not want to stay in Israel?

Yes, I did. I did want to stay in Israel. I didn't have anything. And I didn't need anything. And I was happy. I was really happy there. And the reason why I came to the States, my mother survived. And she was here, and I came to see her. And the first year was difficult. I was very homesick for Israel. And if I had the money at that time to go back, I would. But I didn't have the money. So I stayed. And then I got the taste of American life. And I changed my mind. And I stayed.

Have you been back to Europe since?

I been back to Europe on several occasions. Went back to Israel on several occasions. Back to Israel about three times, I believe. The last-- 38 years. Back to Europe a couple of times.

Where in Europe?

Well, not to Germany. We went to England, to Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, Italy. Went to Spain, Greece. Went down into Turkey. Took a cruise to Egypt, Turkey, Israel and-- on the cruise.

Would you go back to Lithuania if you could?

I have no desire to. Some of the people I know who came from there want to go back home, to see the homeland. I didn't really feel it's my homeland. I think my home is here. If anything, I would go to Israel. But I have no desire to go back to Europe, to Eastern Europe, or to go back to Lithuania. I haven't left anything over there. I don't have any relatives. I don't have any family. And there's nothing for me to see over there.

Do you have hoped for Lithuania, fighting for their freedom now?

I really don't care. I shouldn't say that. But they were not nice people. And so I really-- I think they'll get their



independence sooner or later. But I hope it takes a while.

May I ask you a question? In the camps, did you think you had any special survival skill or attitude to survive the entire war? What was the [INAUDIBLE] thing to do?

Survival skills-- maybe. I was never afraid to work. And maybe that was kind of a skill that-- I was never afraid to go out and do something. So when I kept myself busy and when they picked up people, maybe they picked up people that were idle, rather than people that are working. And I think that's probably why I survived. Or maybe that's my skill, not knowing if I had the skill. I don't know. Maybe it is a skill.

Did you want to survive?

Oh, definitely. Yes I wanted to survive. I wanted to see the last day of the war, definitely. I think everybody wanted to see the last day of the war. They didn't care what happened after that, but I wanted to survive to see the end of it.

Did it ever occur to you to escape?

Yes. And I rationalized that there's no place to go because in Lithuania, the Lithuanians would not hide you out, if you had money to buy them off or to pay for your hiding. I didn't have the money to buy them. And number two, I didn't trust them because they did take money from other people. And they called the Germans and turned them in.

And then when you were in Germany, the Germans were not going to hide you. So there was no place for you to go, unless-- some people did run away. They went to the forest. And they joined the partisans. But I was too young. And probably wouldn't want me anyway, at that time. So I just kept the thought. But really, I felt the only way to do is just kind of hang around and do the best I could. And running away was not the answer at the time-- no place to run.

Were there any escape attempts when you were in the ghetto or at Dachau?

There were. There were quite a few attempts. And they were caught and killed. And a few ran away. There were quite a few attempts.

What was the react-- you said that the people were caught and killed. Was it a big public spectacle? Can you tell me about any particular incident?

Yes, they used to bring them back to camp. And just to hang them and bring everybody together and watch them hanging in the courtyard. And they told you, if this happens again, this what happens to you. You really had nothing to lose. But if you really want to survive and wait, just to see the day-- the day of liberation or the day of victory. So you think, well, I'll hang in there one more day, one more night, or more week.

What was your uncle's name? And how instrumental in your survival was having someone there, can you?

My uncle's name was Motl and Max. He was instrumental to the point where he gave me some hope. And he also-- besides hope, you needed nourishment, and his encouragement and the extra food he was able to provide for me. And that was very important.

Did you say your name at that time was Kobowski?

Koblikowski. K-O-B-L-I-K-O-W-S-K-I. I shortened it.

That's a long name, isn't it?

That's right.

I don't blame you for shortening it.

I kind of cut it in half.

Yes, I know.

When I came to this country, people said, how do you spell it? How do you spell it? So I got tired of spelling it-- cut it in half.

Did you have any contact, after the war, with the black market operations in Europe?

Well, after the war, to survive-- I was in Berlin. We used to buy, for example, buy chocolate from American soldiers and sell them to the Russians, and buy vodka from the Russians and peddle them back to the American soldiers, and back and forth.

I was in the position where I worked in the Russian sector. I worked in a slaughterhouse. And we had a lot of access to food. And we used to smuggle out some food from there, and salamis, and meats, and sell it to the German hungry population for articles. They didn't-- the money was worthless. And we used to get items from them and sell it to one party, the next. So I was involved, kind of, in the illegal market, so to speak.

Was that common, for people to--

Sure.

--do that back then?

Well, to survive, it was common. I made a lot of money for a short period of time. Then I, like youngster, lost it all.

[CHUCKLING]

Where did you lose it?

Oh, playing cards-- blackjack.

How did you feel about-- in Berlin-- about the Germans, meeting the Germans?

After the war?

Well, when you looked for your mother, yeah.

Well, how I felt about them, like I felt about the rest of the population of Europe. I was free and didn't think really of them. I just was trying to accomplish my goal at that time, trying to find her, and trying to find my way out, and my way out of there.

So I felt good that I could see the end of the war and their defeat and their suffering. But they did suffer after the war. They were hungry. They were hungrier than I was. I mean, I was hungry before then. And so the tables turned. We were supported by the American government and by the UNRRA. And they were not. So they had to kind of-- the shoe was on the other foot. And so it was kind of good to see them on the--

Were you angry?

No, I don't think I was. I think I was too busy to be angry. I was just too busy looking for family, trying to organize my life. And I think I-- I don't think I was angry. Even to this day, I'm not angry. I mean, I'm not happy with this whole situation. But I don't think I'm really out there angry.

You mentioned you have two children, did you say?

Yes, I do.

Two sons. Did you tell your children about your experiences right away?

Yes, I do. I never told them right away. I figured it'd take a while before they grow up, before they can understand. And even when I think today, one of them really wants-- is old enough and wants to understand, he's 21 years old. I'm sure he does. But I don't think-- I tried to tell them. I told them on many occasions part of my story. And to them, it's just a story.

I don't think the impact is there, that they really understand. I told them, I try to make it as light as possible. But told them about my story about being the new black marketing and stuff like that. And I didn't-- to them it's like a joke. And I didn't think they really understood the real meaning of it, let's say.

My younger son once wrote an essay in school, I believe, on the subject, that he's proud of his father. And I didn't exactly what he meant. But he-- I forgot the exact details, but he had in there, what I did and so forth. And like I don't think he really took it or understood the real meaning of it.

Did they ever ask you questions?

Sure.

Did they ever ask you questions?

No. No. Never. I volunteered, let them-- tell him different things. But I always try to-- I see a movie or see an article, I tried to put it in front of their face so they can see it.

You haven't talked about your flight to Israel and your capture by the British. Would you tell me about how you first made your connections to get to Israel? And then, step-by-step, how the capture took place and your internment in Cyprus.

The Jewish organization Haganah and the Aliyah, they had a lot of people out trying to recruit people to go to Israel. And then that was an easy thing to do, because most of the Jews wanted to go. And we went to different camps for a short period of time until they were able to organize a transport, to organize a ship load of people to move from one place to the other.

And from Germany I spent about several months in, like in a detention camp, where they were organizing a group of people to go to Israel. And we were trucked from Germany into France, into Marseilles, where we had a place we were waiting-- like a villa. We stayed there for about a week until they were able to get enough transportation and get enough people to fill up the ship.

The ship was an old freighter. And there were stacked people, like four high, and like bunk beds, very primitive. The whole flight was-- the whole crossing wasn't supposed to take more than a week. And after a couple of days out at sea we saw planes in the skies. And we knew right away that we were spotted, although they flew a different flag. They flew some kind of a flag from some other country.

And about a day short out of Israel, one night, we saw two big ships in the dark and closing into us, like two elephants I guess, and a cat in the middle, and two giants. The British told us to surrender. And we didn't. We put up a fight. The fight was minimum. And we were throwing cans at. And they were trying to land on our boat. We didn't let them. They overpowered us with their water guns. And there was no contest. But at least we put up a token fight.

And then they towed us to Haifa. When we got to Haifa, we were transferred on the prison ship. And from the prison, ship we're taken to Cyprus, where I spent a year over there.

What was the date that your crossing?

Sorry?

What was the date of your crossing and the name of the ship? Do you remember?

Yeah, the date was-- I remember it was Passover. So it had to be around April or March of '47. And what the name of the boat was Theodor Herzl.

And what was the mood on the ship when you left harbor?

Well, it was a great mood. Everybody was happy and joyous. And finally we're to go and have a chance to find. And everybody was hoping that we would be able to smuggle in without-- we knew the consequences. But everybody was hoping that we're going to make it. And we were told story that how many ships get in there, and they're going to be waiting for us to smuggle us in at night, and all that.

Till the reality came, and all that we knew, we had a pretty good feeling. I know I did. When I saw a plane hovering over us every day, you know, and they knew exactly where we were going, the direction we were going. So it's just a matter of time. They were spotting us. And then the middle of the night, the two big, huge ships on each side of the little boat we were in, about 2,000 people or 3,000 people were on the ship, and women, children, and adults. And they could have squashed us, basically.

Tell me about the interment in Cyprus, the conditions. Can you describe them?

The conditions in Cyprus were, compared to a concentration camp in Germany, were good. We lived in tents for a while. The food rationing was bearable. There was water to shave and shower and could get cleaned up. And it was boring.

The Jewish organization that basically led us to Israel, they organized schools. And they organized Hebrew lessons. So they kept it pretty much occupied and busy and wash your own clothes. So they kind of kept, constantly kept going until they built some Quonset huts and had little better facilities.

It must have been very difficult, emotionally, to be-- realized you were going to be penned up again after.

It was difficult. But it wasn't as bad as it could be, because there's a different surrounding with the Jewish atmosphere, was a freer atmosphere. Your life was not threatened. You can concentrate on different things. Was just closed in, without your freedom to come and go.

But the Jewish organizations from the Haganah and so forth, they had access coming and going legally or illegally. And they made life interesting. So it really wasn't that bad.

How did you get out of the camp?

Every year, I guess, they allowed only so many people out of there. And then my turn came up. So it was actually the exact nine months from the Passover holidays until November, because we just left just about the same time they announced the state of Israel. And they got approved in the UN, the state of Israel.

By that time you must have put on some weight, right, a little bit.

Yes!

How were the food conditions in Cyprus, in camp.

Conditions were fair. We had enough food. It wasn't plenty of food. It was enough food. I always wanted a little bit more than the norm. So I took a job. I was offered the position. We used to get the food in bulk and we just supply among ourselves. And that's when guards, they guarded the food at night, that people shouldn't take it away and squander it or steal it.

So I took a job at night, and the second job-- was nothing else to do-- and to get an extra ration of food. So that was trying to keep myself busy doing something.

Did you, during all that time, have one close friend with you, a person your age?

No, I did not.

You did not.

I had a different friend, but not-- I always met people. And I got along with people. But I never had a single friend that I kept with me.

Is there anyone that stands in your mind from either the ghetto or the camp or from Cyprus as--

Once I had a friend in Cyprus, a friend of mine. His name was [PERSONAL NAME] Berkovich-- blonde young man who was from Czechoslovakia who was a close friend of mine in those days. And then I had another friend of mine that was in Israel, somebody who was with me in concentration camp in Germany. And I saw him again after the war. And I was close with him when I was in Israel. And so I always had a friend, but not necessarily the same person because I moved around too much to keep up with the same person.

Were these people more or less your age group?

I'm sorry.

Were those friends your age group?

[BOTH TALKING] my age, yeah. Within a year or two apart. One friend that I was close with for years in Israel and even before that, and I went back to find him a couple of years ago. I can't find him in Israel anymore. So I don't know if he's still alive or not. But there's no-- wasn't in the phone book, because without a telephone, you can't find him.

What was his name?

[PERSONAL NAME]

[BOTH TALKING]

Yeah, it's [PERSONAL NAME] I looked for him. I couldn't find him.

With being a young man in the camp, was there any danger to you from either the guards, from any kind of molestations, or--

No, I never had that.

You never did.

Did you hear about anything of that nature when you were interned? That wasn't a threat?

I, personally, never had that.

Do you remember-- can you tell me a little bit about the transport from the ghetto to Dachau and when your mother got off? And did she ever talk about Stutthof after the war with you?

No, my mother has not talked to me much about that. I guess she talked to my wife.

When we left Lithuania, we were kind of put in cattle cars and the normal transport of those years and during the war for the Jews. And we were cooped up in those trains for weeks. This was one time I did feel like escaping. But then you jump out of the train, where do you go? Some people did jump out. And if they made it or not, you don't know.

Then when the train stopped in Stutthof, they asked the women and children to get off. And my mother told me, now don't get off. So I stayed with my father. And she got off. And then we moved on. So the people that had the children, had the mothers, and I think they had less of a chance to survive. Or they took the children away then at that time.

So I had a better chance, being with my father at that time, among the men. And, as I said earlier, that the women did come to Dachau. And the children were again taken away. This was when I was spared with another friend of mine.

How do you think your mother knew that it wasn't safe for you to get off with her?

Maybe instinct or-- my mother happened to be a very bright woman and a realist. And she probably figured out that probably that I'm better off to be among the men where-- for working purposes or whatever.

Your mother was taken off the train?

All the women. All the women.

All the women.

All the women were taken off. The women were taken off on the train. Only the men moved on to Dachau.

Can you tell me a little bit about-- you said you were in a DP camp in Munich. Did it have a name?

Yeah, Feldafing.

Feldafing.

Yeah, Felda--

In that camp, were there any agencies that came around and tried to give you any assistance?

Yes, the UNRRA, basically. There was one. The DP camps were run by the UNRRA of the United Nations, whatever organization that was. And also, there was some direction from the Jewish--

American Army.

Yeah, American Army and then some Jewish organizations that helped run it.

Did you have any inclination to come to the United States at that time?

No, not at all.

No.

No, not at all. I didn't even think about it. I just wanted to go to Israel. And I did. And if not, my mother at that time, she remarried. And she came here. And if she wouldn't have sent me any papers, if I wouldn't have come to see her, I would

never come.

Is your mother still alive?

Yes, she is.

How wonderful.

Yeah.

How old is she now?

She just turned 78.

You mentioned that there were opportunities for religious observances in school and in Cyprus. Was there any way in either the ghetto or the camp that you marked religious holidays or acknowledged their significance?

No. I did not. Not in the camps. In the ghetto, for a while, yes, I did go to cheder during the day because they had-- in that yeshiva, Slobodaka yeshiva, they had some classes where you were in the synagogue during the day.

But I remember telling my mother, you know, what's the sense going to school right now and learning because tomorrow I'm going to be dead anyway. So that she couldn't really disagree with me. But I did learn. And I would say a lot that I learned in those days I still remember today. The young years, very impressionable. And most of my religious education and what I've learned were in those days in the ghetto.

How do you feel about Judaism having gone through what you did on account of it? Did it change your feelings about Judaism, living through the Holocaust?

No, it has not. I would say Judaism has not-- I would not change it. I was born into it. If I had to choose between different religions I don't know if I would choose either one of them. I am not a religious person. I'm a Jewish nationalist, not a religious person. I'm a traditionalist rather than a religious individual.

It's kind of difficult to believe in God after you go through a Holocaust, and you see what's going on, and you see children being killed or slaughtered like sheep. And then they say, gee, where is God? God would have been, if there is a God, would he let things like this happening?

Did you ever think about writing your story down?

No, not really. I did one day. I sat about the computer and I wrote. I started a couple of pages at night in the office. And then I accidentally erased it on the word processor. I never got it back again.

Well, you're well documented. You have your tape, and--

Thank you.

--the video now.

How did the war affect what kind of profession or occupation you chose?

I don't think the war really affected me. I just needed a job. And I accidentally got into the type of business I'm in.

Which is?

I'm in the glass business. And I needed a job. And I was offered a job in the glass business. And I learned the trade. And

I stayed with it. And if I had learned something else, I probably would do something else.

My education was limited. And so I had a chance to go to school. My mother wanted to send me to school. And I think when I was the age of 20, to start all over again, went to school, and I just didn't have the patience after the war and after Israel. So I went to work in the trade and a few years later decided to try it on my own and become my own employer.

When you say glass, what type of glass?

Do all types of glass for cars, for homes, for buildings-- anything has to do with commercial glass.

Everybody needs glass.

That's right. At one time or another. At one time or another.

Yeah, true.

How have your experiences affected your values and the values that you wanted to transmit to your children?

Well, the war has taught me one thing. I try to preserve and save and to never be hungry again. And this is basically my motto, that I'm saving and accumulating because once you're hungry once-- hunger is a great pain in individual's lifetime. And I try to preserve. It shouldn't happen again. And the only way you can do that is by just preparing yourself for the next day and save from one day to the next. So that taught me a lesson.

I'd like to go over, just make sure we have all the exact names of your family members.

Sure.

For the record, your father's name was Hurtsel.

Hurtsel. And your mother?

Rachel.

Rachel. And your Uncle?

Max.

Max. And the same last name?

Same last name.

And the uncle who you don't communicate with.

He passed away.

OK. All right. Do you remember anything about any particular guards or the Kommandant of the camp you were in or guards--

Names?

Names, or particular incidents that you would like to have on the record for history.

Well, the only thing for record history, I can say I was lucky one day that I did not meet the Kommandant. There was one incident, we were working on the road. And there was an elder gentleman with an oxcart going down the street and



a wagon full of potatoes. And I snuck up from behind. And I stole two potatoes and put in my pocket.

And one of the German guards saw me and came and picked me up and took me to the Kommandant's office. And if the Kommandant would have been there, I wouldn't have been here today. So we waited for a long time. And Kommandant never showed up at his office. And so he gave me a big beating and let me go. But so, the Kommandant would have been there, I wouldn't have been here. So that's one of the things I like to forget about.

But you couldn't remember his name, do you?

Beg pardon. No, I don't.

No.

Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like to add, any anecdotes?

I just can't think of anything. Everything is pretty much covered.

Well, thank you very much for sharing your story with us--

You're welcome.

--Mr. Kobel. We sure appreciate it.

Yes.

And we wish you the very best of luck.

Thank you.

And a good long, healthy life.

Thank you very much.

Also, if you think of anything you'd like to add, you are free to just call us and we'd be glad to come in and just add a little segment. I mean, that's one of the marvelous things about technology.

OK.

Feel free to call us. Thank you for coming.

Thank you.