

It's July 18, 1990. We're in San Francisco with Harry Lawton. John Angel Grant on camera. I'm Anne Feibelman. Harry, let's start at the beginning. Where were you born and when?

OK. I was born in Berlin, Germany, June 16, 1920.

And tell me a little bit about your family life-- brothers and sisters, shul. What was your family life like?

OK. I have no brothers or sisters. I was an only child. My parents were not born in Berlin. Both came from small towns but lived in Berlin most of their life.

And my father, originally, was in the-- what kind of business was it? After World War I, I think he worked at a clothing store, men's clothing, which later was taken over by a big company, Hermann Tietz. But, naturally, you wouldn't know anything about that.

And then he and my uncle-- my mother's brother-- started a theater business. My uncle grew up-- he was an actor originally, before World War I and during World War I, I think. And then they started a theater in Berlin, kind of revue type.

In other words, it was a variety theater. And became quite famous in Berlin. It was called the Komische Oper, which is comic opera. And matter of fact, I just heard that in East Berlin, they have the same-- apparently not the same building, but they continued it.

They're now bringing operas and-- but similar type. So it's still in existence. But my uncle was killed in France by the Nazis. And so this eventually went bankrupt on account of the takeover by Hitler.

Harry, what was your uncle's name and your father's name and your mother's name?

My father's name was Arthur Levison, spelled L-E-V-I-S-O-N. Arthur, but in German they pronounced "Art-ur." And my mother's name was Gertrude. My uncle's name was James Klein. And there are many books written about him. He was well known in Germany.

So if you talk to German people, they will-- I mean, my age and older-- they will remember. James Klein.

Did you know your mother's maiden name?

Yeah, Klein. Oh, right.

Yeah.

Right. Now, what kind of religious life?

OK. First of all, they were very modern people, very progressive-- both my parents, being in the theater business. My father came out of a very Orthodox family. My mother did not.

I grew up-- I went to synagogue. But it wasn't really a reformed. It was an in between. They called it Prinzregenten Strasse, named after the street where the synagogue was located in the Western part of Berlin. And so I didn't grow up under very Orthodox conditions, no. Was strictly a almost reform type.

Did you ever go to religious school on Sunday or Wednesday? Or what kind of training--

As a child? Yeah. I had to go to Sunday-- we had Sunday school at our temple.

And then what was your schooling like, your regular day school?

OK, I had what we called-- I mean, similar to grammar school, four years of grammar school. Then I went to what we call gymnasium, which was the equivalent of-- I mean, it's a high school. But we started out with Latin and Greek, because, originally, I wanted to-- or, rather, my parents wanted me to become a doctor, naturally. Never turned out. Never worked out that way.

But I had, actually, only eight years of school because I was the only Jew at that particular school. And in 1930-- well, 1935 I was thrown out. See, we had what they called sexta, quinta, quarta, which is the first three school years of the gymnasium. And then I had to leave.

They just said, we don't want Jews in our school. It was called the-- school was called Mommsen Gymnasium after-- there was a famous poet and writer in Germany, Mommsen. I think he was it.

Harry, tell me about being told to leave the school?

Did you know it was coming? Do you remember the day?

Oh, yeah. Sure. Because after all, I was already almost 15 years old. And it was two years after the takeover by the Nazis. So, naturally, I could see the handwriting on the wall.

But in those days, naturally, you tried to stay in school as long as possible. Now, I know some of my friends went over to Jewish schools. We had a few in Berlin. But I never did. I just-- till they threw me out, I stayed there.

When you say you saw the handwriting on the wall, do you remember any specific examples of antisemitism of those two years?

In our school or in general?

In your school and in general. Well, I mean, I noticed it in our school, definitely. Like I said-- matter of fact, there were a lot of well-known children of Nazi families in our school because it was a very well-known school in Berlin and a good school. So everybody likes to send their kids there. Definitely, there was-- I even remember my teacher, one of them, the Latin teacher, Dr. [? Roche-- ?] I never forget that name.

And he-- right after 1933, he wore his swastika on his lapel. And so I remember that. And he was the typical German tough guy. And he was definitely an antisemite. So I don't know who actually threw me out of school-- I mean, who made the decision. But I'm quite sure he was part of it.

What was it like being in his class?

Well, naturally, this is hard to say now. I mean, it's so long ago. But I'm quite sure I wasn't very comfortable anymore, the last few months, certainly.

And, Harry, what happened after you left there. When did you leave that school? And what happened next?

OK, this was in 1935. My father, at the time-- see, I would have to go back because to-- like I told you before, the theater collapsed. And there was a bankruptcy declared. And my uncle left Germany.

And my father, who was the manager of the theater, was responsible for the-- there was a certain amount of debt. And in those days, it was a little different than today. Bankruptcy was not a very-- you didn't just go on with your life. I mean, he was very embarrassed about it.

I remember he had to sign that he would make a monthly payment, because I think, mostly, it was a matter of all these actors had to be paid after the bankruptcy. And Social Security and all these things were involved. And my father said he's going to pay it.

So then he started all kinds of different business. He became a salesman for a while and did all kinds of things just so that we could survive. We had to give up our house. We had to move into a very, very small apartment.

Then he said the best thing-- oh, and a friend of his had a automobile repair shop. And he got in touch with him. And they decided the best thing would be for me to become an auto mechanic. And that's when I started as an auto mechanic.

When was that?

1935.

And why did the theater-- why did it go bankrupt?

Well, they bought some political place and decided to go all on-- this was before 1933, shortly before, a year or two. And they decided to buy a huge tent, a circus tent, and go all over Germany. And later on, they wanted to go all over Europe but playing variety shows.

Matter of fact, they were very similar to the Folies Bergere in France, in Paris, a very progressive type-- I mean, risqué type shows. But also, very known German actors started at the theater. So it was pretty well known.

But, anyway, the first show in that particular tent theater, which was-- I'll never forget this-- was in a small town about two hours away from Berlin called Magdeburg. It's a town near Berlin. And they called the theater the Theater of the 5,000 because it had 5,000 seats. So you can imagine how big.

And the show was supposed to start on Easter day. And I remember I was with my parents. We were all there when it started. And the mayor of Magdeburg, this town, who was-- later on, we found out that he was already a part of the Nazi movement. He belonged to it.

And he didn't-- he started, within a couple of days, in all newspapers, a campaign about the Jew James Klein. And we found out that they hired some kids. And they would cut the columns of some of-- you know how a circus tent, how the seats are going up? And they cut them. And part of it collapsed.

I mean, we noticed that afterwards. We didn't know it before. And, immediately, he closed the show. And that was the end of it, because they invested so much money into this whole idea that they just couldn't continue. And then they noted-- apparently, they said, well, there's no sense in going on with it.

Now, in 1935, when you became apprentice to the auto mechanic, what was-- tell me about that. What was your job? And how long did it last? What was happening politically?

Politically? Well, I mean-- now, I'm not quite sure. You mean in our family or in general?

Both. Both.

OK. Well, number one, my father was what they call the Frontkämpfer, which is-- he was in World War I. I mean, he was the typical proud German Jew. To him, Germany was the most important thing outside of his family. And he fought for four years in World War I.

So, consequently, to him, this whole Nazi movement-- this will pass. It won't last very long. It can't last, not in Germany. Some of our friends left Germany-- in those days, already-- and part of the family. But he said no. He had a cross which was given to him during World War I.

And so he said nothing can happen to us. And the job I had was-- I mean, I worked as an apprentice. And at that point, I personally didn't notice anything. I mean, nothing happened to me at that point.

So I can't say that-- sure, I mean, we saw the papers. We read the-- what did they call it? Der Sturmer, which was the famous Nazi newspaper. And they had several. But, besides, I was 15 years old-- By that time, 15, 16 years old.

I was not-- I knew what was going on. But I was more interested in sports, because we still belong to a Jewish sport club. And I was more interested in girls. And so, I mean, that's-- so I can't say at that point that it was affecting me. And probably-- my parents were probably affected by it. But they didn't really show it too much to me.

And what about your job? Or the internship, the apprentice-- whom was it for? Was it for Jewish? Gentile?

No, gentile. It was an automobile repair shop. They were importers for French Peugeot cars. And then they had some German cars.

But, I mean, it was just a regular neighborhood repair shop. So I actually learned for almost four years. In Germany, you have to make an exam and after four years, apprenticeship. Then you become a full-fledged journeyman. And I made my exam at that time. So I was basically a full-fledged auto mechanic, which-- you will find out later on-- which saved my life.

What year did you pass the exam?

1938.

All right, and then what happened in '38?

OK, first of all-- in June, 1938, my father was picked up by the Gestapo in Berlin and put into-- they took him to Buchenwald concentration camp-- Buchenwald. I don't know how-- I mean, we pronounce it "Boo-ken-wald." It's pretty well known.

Anyway-- and the reason was-- going back to the theater because-- they picked him up because they knew our family life was connected with the theater. And especially on account of some of the political jokes they made in those days. And so he was picked up.

And my mother and I went with him to the police station. In those days, they were taken to the police station. And then we had to leave. And we didn't see my father till April or May 1939.

He was in Buchenwald. We had, naturally, a very tough time because they confiscated everything we had. I mean, the Nazis did. And we went on welfare.

There was a Jewish welfare in Berlin. A matter of fact, I remember, which was-- see, in those days, everything was so much more embarrassing because some of my friends were very well-off. And all of a sudden, practically from one day to another, we were poorer than poor. No job, nothing, no money.

And we moved into a one-room apartment paid by the Jewish welfare. And then we actually-- we tried to get my father-- we tried to get him out of the concentration camp. I remember that we were allowed to write a letter once a month through the Red Cross, German Red Cross, or international Red Cross.

And I think we got one or two letters from him too. But he had a tough time. They had to amputate his toes because he got blood poisoning. When he came back, he only had, I think, one toe left on one foot. And it was, apparently-- he had a tough time.

What else do you know about his time there?

Well, they had to-- he told us when he came back-- I mean, first of all, he was a pretty heavysset man. He was a little shorter than I. But he was heavier.

And when he came back, he was under 100 pounds. I mean, he was just skinny as I still see it. And when he came back on a cane-- and he wasn't that old yet, really. He was-- at the time, he must have-- he was born in '83. So that was '38. And 17, 48, 50, 55 years old.

And he looked like-- I remember he looked like an 80-year-old man. At least, that's how I remember it. So then he told us that they had to carry all these heavy rocks from one place to the other, everything by hand. And very little food. And so that-- but, I mean, at least he survived.

He came out. And why they released him, we never found out. All of a sudden, they released him. And that's when we started, seriously, to think, we have to leave Germany.

And we got in touch with the-- well, I think it was a Jewish organization in Berlin. I think it was the-- I don't remember now which organization. But there was one. And we wanted to-- I think my father-- I'll be honest with you. I don't remember exactly.

He got a visa to Shanghai. How he got it, I don't remember that. But somehow, he got it. And he wanted to leave.

And we got a notice-- now, this was in July 1939-- that we-- yeah. Well, in the meantime-- by the way, in the meantime, my father had to work for the railroad. It was a forced labor. And they had to put all these ties for the rails. He had to work-- and it was very tough for him, naturally. But at least he would get a little bit money.

So then he signed at the, I guess-- for the Gestapo, they forced him to leave. And said, well, you have to leave by August the 20th, 1939. And we went to this Jewish organization.

And they gave us tickets, railroad tickets, to go to Italy. And from Italy, we were supposed to go to Shanghai. And this was just a few days before the war started. The war started September the 1st, right?

And we arrived at the border station between Germany and Italy. And the German border police gave us-- stamped our-- I don't know if he had a passport or if he just had paper. No, he must have had a passport. They said Jew. I don't know if they had it in there already at that point or when we came back that-- I don't remember.

But, anyway, he had a visa to go to China. And the Germans let us go. But the Italians stopped us and said, no, we don't take any Jews anymore. And the reason was-- my father could understand a little bit. My father spoke several languages. So he could and he spoke fluent French and some Italian.

And he could understand that he said, well, we don't know whether Italy is going to go with Germany or against Germany. At that point-- this was a few days before the war started. And they stopped us.

So we left the train. And I still see this. My parents wanted to commit suicide. They wanted to throw themselves in front of the train because they said, well, if they send us back to Germany, we'll-- they put us into a concentration camp again.

And then we tried to-- somehow, we got away from this station. Now, mind you, this was-- it's called Brennero, Brenner, which is the border between Germany. And it's about, probably, several thousand feet high.

And there was snow. And it was inland in August. There was already snow up there. And we tried to walk away from the station because we thought-- my parents said, well, maybe we can just walk. I mean, it would have been ridiculous anyway.

But we started walking. And all of a sudden, there was a three or four Italian, I guess, border police. And they caught us and brought us right back to the German border police.

And they took us back to Berlin. And first, they put us in the prison. But I mean city prison in Berlin. And coincident, one of the Gestapo men was a former friend of my father back from the theater time. He knew him.

And he saw us. And he somehow released us. How? I don't know how he did it? But anyway-- matter of fact, that man was, later on, shot by the RSA for helping Jews.

Do you remember his name?

No. Yes. Yes. Sure, I remember. I'm sorry. The name was Michaelis.

But he was not Jewish. I mean, he was-- yes, I remember that. And so then they released us. And we were allowed to rent a one-room apartment.

My father continued working for the railroad, continued this job. My mother worked as a maid for another family. I think it was a family where the husband was Jewish but the wife was Gentile. And, under the law, since my mother was apparently over 50 years old, she was allowed to work there as a maid.

And I got a job-- also, this was zwangsar-- I'm sorry, forced labor. But since I was a mechanic at one of the biggest electrical companies in Berlin, which is called Siemens-- they're still a big company over there. Siemens.

And I worked there, first, as a mechanic, and then I supervised some-- there were all Jewish people in our hall, in our room. I don't know how many-- hundreds of them. And I worked there. I don't know if you have ever heard this. There was a group of people in Berlin called the Baum group. They did a lot of sabotage.

And all of them-- matter of fact, all of them were killed, shot by the Germans. And some of our people-- and I did this to help them. I was never involved in the actual sabotage. But we would go between-- we would bring messages and all that.

So I was very fortunate, again, that I-- and I worked there. Eventually, we had to wear a yellow star.

What year was it?

Well, this must have been-- OK, '39. Probably 1940, I would say, it started. Then we were only allowed to buy food between 4:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon. Jews were not allowed to-- and there was a reason for it, because the Christian people and all the other people could buy in the morning, when-- see, there was already a shortage of food. And they could buy the food when it came in.

The Jews had to go between 4:00 and 5:00. And there was hardly anything left, only the leftovers. So that was-- and everything was tougher. You couldn't-- I got a so-called passport to go to work.

So you knew exactly you were allowed to go by street car or bus from your place, house, or from your apartment to work and back. And then I worked there till-- this was 1940, '41. I was still in Berlin.

Well, then the bombing started in Berlin. And we were allowed to go in our apartment house, into a shelter. But the Jews were on one side. And the Christian people were on the other.

We're not allowed to be together with them. But we were allowed to go in the shelter. I think it was more-- they were afraid we might use a flashlight.

Then it started, gradually, that people would be deported. We would hear about it. And I was engaged to a girl in Berlin at the time. And she was deported in 19-- I think-- 41. Yeah, must have been then.

What was her name?

[? Rogodzinski, ?] Lottie [? Rogodzinski. ?] Matter of fact, I tried-- years ago, I tried to find out if she's still alive. But I've never-- I even wrote to all the different agencies. Never heard of her.

I know she was deported to-- at the time, I think, to Poland somewhere. Now, you would-- in those days, you would get a notice from the Gestapo. It was a postcard. And this postcard was actually sent from the Jewish organizations.

The Gestapo would not call the Jews to be deported. They would let the Jewish organization, which was at the-- the street was called Grosse Hamburger Strasse. I think that's where the organization was for all the Jews in Berlin, like a central Jewish agency.

And they had the files of all the Jews. And they would pull out so many cards for the next transport. And I had a friend there. And she called me. She talked to me three times. And she said, listen, your parents are now on that list.

And she would always take that card and put it in the back so that my parents wouldn't be deported. I was, basically, at that point pretty secure. The job I had was called-- they called it-- it was an important job because it was for war production. So they needed us at that point.

So I was not in any danger. But my parents were. So then one day, apparently, either she was deported-- I don't remember what happened, this girl. And we got the postcard that my parents should be ready for deportation.

When?

That was on October-- I know exactly. October 13, 1942. I was that long in Berlin. And I didn't even have to go then. I was a-- matter of-- I went to this factory where I worked, Siemens, and talked to the manager and said, listen, my parents have to leave. I want to go with them. So I went with them. So we were deported on October 19, 1942.

What did you do in that week?

Well, we had this one-room apartment. I still see us. Everybody-- see, so several Jews lived in one apartment together. They would all put them in one apartment. And we were the last ones in that apartment. There were three other families. And they were already deported.

So, actually, the strange thing about it is that we were told that we are being transferred to a labor camp and that we will-- if we work, we will get food. And everything will be OK. This was what we were told by all kinds of other people.

And so, basically, those last few days, I remember we were just thinking what to take along. I mean, we didn't have very much anymore. But we took a few blankets.

And I still see my mother making a big-- like an afghan out of a blanket so that she could-- because we didn't know where we are going. But she figured one should have warm clothes, especially-- it was in October. So this was probably most-- we didn't have-- see, we were-- from our family, we were the last ones to-- everybody else was deported. Or some of them-- one uncle lived in Israel.

And we were in touch with him. But we couldn't get out anymore. There was no way. So I'm quite sure mostly we talked about what to take along. That was probably-- but, I mean, look, it's very hard to remember exactly what we did. But it was very-- naturally, it wasn't easy. But we wanted to stay together. That was the main thing.

And then-- then go on here. What--

Well, then we were picked up by two Gestapo men. I remember it was about probably 5:00 or 6:00 in the afternoon. And they were very polite. Just said, here's the car. And you have to leave now.

And at the corner, there was a big truck. And there were about, I don't know, 10, 15 people on that truck, covered. And they put us on that truck and took us to a synagogue.

It was called-- in Berlin, they would bring all the people to that synagogue. And from there, they would put us on the

train to leave. But we had to stay at that synagogue for about two or three days.

Yeah, so that's right, because we-- that was on the 16th we were picked up. And we stayed till the 19th. And on the 19th, they put us on the train. And we left.

I think it was called-- well, I think Synagogue [SPEAKING GERMAN] or whatever. It was the name of the street.

What were conditions like in the synagogue?

Well, it was-- first of all, you had to go-- when you entered, the first thing-- they would take everything you had away except one suitcase. You were allowed to keep a suitcase up to 40-- no, 20 kilograms, so about 40 pounds. I think that's-- if I remember it.

But you were not allowed to keep a belt. They would take a belt away from you. You were not allowed to keep a pencil or pen. In those days they had-- not a ballpoint. They didn't have-- a regular pen. All kinds of things.

See, the Jews in those days didn't have much anymore because we had to give up our radios before already, all silver and gold. This was a few years before that already, when one of the Nazis was killed. And we had to-- I think it was the one in France. But I'm not sure now exactly when it happened.

So we had to take everything down to a certain point. And if somebody had a fur coat, they had bring their fur coat in. If they had, like I say, silver, all jewelry. So we didn't really have anything. We personally didn't have much anyway, but there were some people that were rich. And they had to take everything down there too.

So whatever was left, they still would take certain things away from us. And then we would get very little food. In those three days, they never turned the lights off. We were all sleeping-- they had taken all the-- I think all the benches out. So it was one big room.

And we would all sleep on the floor. And then they took us to a train station, which is not far from there. I mean, probably not more than a mile or so. They would march us over and put us on those trains.

Now, in my case, they were a regular train. But we were in our compartment about, oh, I would say, 20 people. So the older people-- I mean my parents, and there were some others-- they would sit on the benches. But we were the younger ones. We would all sit on the floor.

But we were not allowed to go to the outside. And the windows were all covered up with wooden-- I guess they nailed the plywood or whatever against it so that we couldn't look out. But, still, I mean, we didn't know where we were going. And then the train left.

And I still remember they gave us each a piece of bread. That was still in the synagogue. We had to take that along. A piece of bread, which was a very small piece of bread. I mean, like-- and nothing else, just bread.

And not even water. I remember that, because why I remember is, about a day later, they stopped somewhere, and they screamed-- always dirty language, naturally. You know, you god damn pig Jews. and some of them had to run out. Apparently, there was a well, water well.

And they brought some water and buckets. By the way, we didn't have any toilets there. We had to go-- there was a bucket. And, apparently, some of-- and that was the first time that I saw somebody getting shot, because one or two of these people who were supposed to get water, whether-- what happened, I don't know-- whether they weren't fast enough or what. Anyway, they killed them right there.

That I still remember. That was the first time that I saw anybody getting shot. So, naturally, we-- and the reason why I could see it-- in our compartment, there were two girls and another boy about my age or maybe a little older. And, naturally, young people, we wanted to see what was going on.



So one of them-- I don't know whether the girls or one of the boys had a knife. Somehow, they smuggled it in. And I still see us working on that wooden cover and carve out a little hole so that we could look out. And that's why I remember that.

So then we-- I think it took three or four days on that train. And we arrived at a-- naturally, we didn't know where. But we arrived at a railroad station. And it was called Skirotava. Nobody never heard of it-- Shirotava or Skirotava or something. Except somebody, apparently, had been in Latvia before.

And he says, oh, this must be-- this is Latvia. So when we stopped, all of a sudden, there was screaming going on. We saw all the doors open. And now all these mostly Latvian SS-- I mean SS troops, they were standing there with guns.

And every one of them had almost like baseball bats-- long, round sticks. And they would scream in Latvian. And, naturally, nobody understood. But we knew what to do-- jump out.

And, naturally, for the older people, they were just pull them out and throw them on the ground. And so that was how we arrived in Latvia. And then, all of a sudden, several cars arrived and trucks. And the German stormtroopers, SS men, all in uniforms.

And they, naturally, screamed all dirty language and hit us kicked us and said, all the men on one side and the women on the other side. Oh, and then we had to-- the young people had to go back to the train and clean the train up. So we had to clean all this.

And my mother was-- there was a women on one side. And my father and I were still together. And then they were starting to load all the women on those trucks. And my father and I were standing there.

And all of a sudden, an SS man-- later on I found out-- matter of fact, I have all the names of all these people. Anyway, a Dr. Lange, who was one of the so-called-- later on, called him the Butcher of Riga. He was well known. He and a couple other guys with big dogs-- naturally, they were always running around with their big dogs.

And he called in German, auto mechanics. I need auto mechanics. So a lot of people walked up, naturally, because that was-- and I didn't want to go. My father said, listen, don't be stupid. Why don't you raise your hand? Then you have a job already.

See this was always-- we all felt, as long as you have a job, you're OK. So I said, no, I don't want to leave you here. And he said, come on now. Go.

And I had one of those satchels hanging here with some stuff, whatever I had. And I gave it to him to hold. And I went. And I raised my hand.

We were about-- I don't know how many people. And there were older people and young ones. And this Dr. Lange said-- looked around, looked at us, and he says, you, you, and you. The three youngest, he pulled out, and all the other ones, he sent back.

And then my father was also-- they put all the people on trucks. And they were killed the first day, right then, in a forest not too far from there. And the reason why I know it, because that same evening when I was at this-- when they took me to the garage where I worked then from then on, they bought the clothes over. There was a big building.

And they would collect all the clothes of the killed people for the German-- for the families of the soldiers and SS men and the whole Gestapo in Riga. And all the clothes would go to their families. And the Jews had to-- some people were in charge of that, to clean these.

And I saw not only my parents' clothes but also pictures at the time we had-- my father had with him, And then later on, I talked to one of the drivers, because, like I say, then-- I'll tell you that later. I worked as an auto mechanic there.

And he told me, yeah, that transport-- there were about 1,000 people an hour, about. And he told us, yeah, sure, they were all shot. So they're all somewhere buried. And, I mean, we know the area because later on-- a couple of times, we had to go into that area. And we saw these mass graves.

We could see that something happened there. It was all covered up. But I remember that. So at least they didn't-- this went pretty fast, I'm quite sure. But that was the end for them.

So then I worked as an auto mechanic there. There were--

So, Harry--

Yeah, I'm sorry.

Only two of you were--

Three.

Three of you--

Yeah.

Only three of you lived.

Yes. I even remember the names. There was a fellow named [? Kurnika ?] and [? Carmen. ?] Those were the two. But as far as I heard later on, they didn't survive either. But I'm not sure about that.

Well, and then they took me to this workshop, this auto repair shop. They were in charge of all the Gestapo cars and trucks for the whole area there. And that's really what saved me. My first job was-- I don't know if you ever-- the reason-- I'll be very frank with you.

The reason why I wanted to-- when I heard about this, this interview, the reason why I wanted to talk about it is because very little is known about the Riga area. Everybody is talking about Auschwitz and Birkenau and Theresienstadt and all the well known. But Riga is not that well known.

And yet, I remember the-- number one, they killed 30,000 Latvian Jews in practically one day in order to make room for the German Jews, or other German, Austrian, and Czechoslovakian Jews.

How were they killed?

Part of them were shot right then and there because when the first group of German Jews-- matter of fact, my wife-- I met my wife in Riga. And when she arrived, she came from West Germany. When she arrived, there were still-- in some of the houses in-- she went to the ghetto. I was only a very short time in the ghetto.

There was a big ghetto in Riga. There was a Latvian ghetto and a German ghetto. And when she arrived, there was still food on the table where they shot them. And then they just carried them out or whatever.

The majority, I think, were shot. But then some of them probably were taken-- maybe they were taken to Auschwitz. I don't know. That I couldn't-- I don't know.

But when they moved-- when the first German Jews arrived there, everything was still the way these people left. And like I said, the Latvian Jews-- there was about 20,000 of them-- were killed. And then the German Jews and Austrian and-- they were-- a lot of them died of starvation.

Some were-- in the ghetto, they had a gallow. We watched them several times-- to hang people. Some of them died in other so-called work camps.

Some of them were by the army. And some of them belonged to the Gestapo. Some of them were deported-- rather, not deported but transferred from the Riga ghetto to other areas. One was called Stutthof. One was called West -- there was a woman's camp in Germany.

They brought them back. And they died there. And, I mean, there was-- but there were very few survivors of the Riga area. I belonged to an organization in New York. It's called the Survivors of the Riga Camp or Riga Ghetto.

And we are now about not more than 250. Probably, all together, there were about 800-- 800 or 1,000 survivors. I think that's all. I would say, all together, Latvian and German and Austrian Jews, maybe 40,000 or 50,000 were there. And that's all what's left.

And that's why it's not really well known, because there's-- I understand-- I have a picture with me of the entrance of the ghetto. I brought that along in case you're interested. And I also have a picture of myself, which was everybody that took pictures of everybody.

And when the Russians took over Riga, we had to leave together with the German army. And I broke into the office and stole some pictures and mine. I found mine too. So I have that at least, which I thought was-- because so many-- as you know, so many people say, well, this never happened. So I can vouch for it. It happened.

Good.

It sure did. Well-- Oh, I'm sorry.

I was just going to ask you, because I really don't know anything about Riga, so I wanted to--

That's right. Very few people, really.

Can you describe it?

Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah, sure. OK.

Number one, the most important thing was that people worked. As long as you worked, you would survive. Or rather, you felt you would survive. They killed a lot of people in between for all kinds of reasons.

I mean, I remember one of my very good friends-- you were not allowed to shave because you were not allowed to have a razor blade. But if you were caught that you grew a little bit of a beard, they would either give you 25 lashes or-- it all depends how this particular SS man, this guy, how he felt-- or he would shoot you. It sounds dramatic, and it sounds like I'm making this up. But that's how it was.

You never knew-- people say you live from day to day, right? That's [MIMB:ES]. Over there, you lived from one minute to the other because you didn't really know what's going to happen in the next minute. And if you didn't make a mistake, and that was it. So it was-- I lived for a short time in the ghetto. That was from around December 1942 till May '42.

When did you first arrive in Riga?

I arrived in Riga on the 23rd of October 1940-- oh, wait a second. You are right. Wait a second. No, that's true. 1942. October 1942. In December, I went to the ghetto.

Yeah, I'm sorry, where did you live from October?

In this particular automobile repair shop. We were about 25 auto mechanics there, Jewish auto mechanics. And, naturally, in charge was-- what they call the title of these SS men-- they were not very high-ranked people. He was a Scharfuhrer.

Now, a Scharfuhrer-- I don't even think it's-- might be a corporal but maybe even less than a corporal. And his name was [? Michelton ?] He was in charge of the repair shop.

And we had all the well-known people over there. I mean, even Eichmann was at our repair shop at one time, when he was in Riga. I don't know if you ever read the book by Frederick Forsyth, *Odessa File*.

Yes, I did.

OK, there is an article about Riga, about our camp. That's one of the few books written-- a part of it in there. There's a man named [? Roschmann. ?] I remember, hundreds of times, working on his car.

Well, like I say, I have a whole list of these people. And they are all well known. Some of them committed suicide. Some of them got caught. Some of them are still around.

Matter of fact, right now, I think one of them is being tried in-- I think somewhere here in the States. So some of them are still around.

Who?

There's a man named-- a Latvian. The German title-- I mean, his rank was an Oberscharfuhrer, which is one of the real high officials. His name was spelled A-R-A-I-S, Arais.

He was well known. Real miserable SOB. And I understand that they never caught him. And like I say, I have a list there of all kinds of people. And a man named [? Wiedemann, ?] a man named-- this Dr. Lange, I think he was the one who-- basically, I'm alive today on account of him, but he was a real miserable man.

A man named [? Scherwitz, ?] who was-- later he was a pretty high official in Paris, under the occupation. So, I mean, I have several of them. And the Survivors of the Riga Ghetto, this organization in New York, they are always looking for these people.

And some of them got caught. Some of them went back to Germany and nobody bothered with them. So, anyway, that's--

So you spent October to December, you lived in the automotive building.

Right.

And then why were you transferred to the ghetto?

OK, I wanted to better my conditions. This was-- when you are young, you are adventurous, naturally, even with what was going on there. So I decided I would like to-- everybody told me how many people are in the ghetto.

So, also, I wanted to see if there are some people I knew. Matter of fact, I met several from Berlin. And I wanted to see these people again if there was a chance.

So I told the man who was in charge of our repair shop, this SS man, I said, I don't feel so good. I have, I don't know, some pain or whatever. And there was a doctor in the ghetto, a Jewish doctor, Dr. [PERSONAL NAME] Matter of fact, I even have a picture of him. I stole that, too, at the time.

And a couple-- there was, I understand-- I remember there was a Latvian doctor and two surgeons from Germany. But

they all got killed, except this one Latvian doctor. He survived. But he died a few years ago in Los Angeles. But most of the doctors were killed later on or died.

So I wanted to go to a doctor. That's what I told him. And, naturally, you couldn't just go. So I had to wait till one of the trucks we repaired-- would go to the ghetto. You see, they had trucks going every day because some people worked in the ghetto. Some people worked outside.

So there was a constant movement going on because, after all, there was a war going on. So I went to the ghetto. And went to the doctor. And the doctor said, yes, yes you have a-- I think I faked it, gallbladder, you know, something. Anyway, so, yes, you stay for a short while.

And they gave me a room in one of the houses in the ghetto. Now, the ghetto is part of the city they had a fence around. And you had two entrances. One, there was a Main Street. And you would have to get into the ghetto through those gates.

They had a ghetto police, which was Jewish. The men in charge-- I mean, the Gestapo, they had, naturally-- I mean, they had a beautiful building there. And they lived there in the ghetto. But, basically, everything was handled by Jewish police.

Now, naturally, some of them were very nice. Some of them were miserable because they figured it would be to their advantage. So we had both, which is normal. Everybody wants to survive.

And that's where I met my wife, by coincidence. She was in the building. And I went over there one day. And started talking to her.

She was already no hair. And we just, once in a while, would see each other and talk to each other. And then I got caught coming back from a-- then, finally, I was still staying in the ghetto. But I felt better. And I got a job-- but staying in the ghetto. But I would go out every day to this particular job.

Was this a new job? A different--

Different kind of job. But it was also as a mechanic. And then-- let's see, what happened there? Yeah, coming back one day-- see, we had very, very little food. I mean, we would try anything to get food because what you got in the ghetto was usually-- was when you came home from work-- I mean, first of all, in the morning, you had to-- there was a huge area. And you everybody had to stand there. And then they would select the people for the job.

And then when you came home, you would get either a couple of slices of bread and a soup. This was usually what they would provide. And there were women in the ghetto, Jewish women. They would cook this for people.

But you couldn't survive on that. There was no way. I mean, in the beginning, where people didn't have anything, that's how they died, the older people. There were very few children. Most children were killed because they didn't want children there.

A few survived but so few-- I don't think there were more than maybe 15 or 20 children. I don't think there were more than that survived. So you would get this-- the way to survive was that you would try to steal something on your job. And then you would take a chance during the night, climb over the fence or what, and deal with some of the Latvian people.

Now, that's how a lot of our people got killed, by this nightly trading. But everybody-- I don't want to say everybody. But the majority of younger people definitely took chances because that's-- what else could you do?

You weren't sure whether you survived anyway. So you might as well get something. So you would see if you could-- let's see. One of the favorite things was a roll of yarn. Now, you would-- if you had a job somewhere where you could-- an army job, where you could get into the office somewhere or wherever and you found some yarn, you would get

maybe a half a loaf of bread for a roll of yarn. That was fantastic.

So, anyway, I got caught once bringing some-- I had a loaf of bread. And I had a certain vegetable. I forgot that, what it was. We don't have it here. Anyway, it's not-- it's like a--

Turnip root?

Well, it's similar to it, which was well known, and a couple of potatoes. And I got this for whatever I traded it for. And I bought it in. And I was caught coming into the ghetto.

See, you had to march up-- there was a long road. And the truck-- they brought you back by truck from your job. But they would leave you up front. And then you had to walk into the ghetto. Those trucks wouldn't go into the ghetto.

And on one side was a Gestapo hospital. And those people-- somehow, they would always be at the window in the evening. The wounded soldiers. And, naturally, they hated the Jews.

And they would always make remarks and scream and-- you know. And we were three people coming from our truck and walked up there. And they were screaming and saying, hey, they got all kinds of food with them. They didn't know it, but-- so the police at the gate stopped us.

And we had to empty all our pockets. And, naturally, they found this bread. So they put me in-- we had a jail in the ghetto. And then I was called-- they brought me over to the commander of the ghetto, this [PERSONAL NAME] He was the commander.

And he said, well, shoot him. But they wouldn't shoot you right away because they wanted, first of all, to talk to you because they wanted to find out if you-- thought maybe there would be some deals. You would say, OK, if you don't shoot me, I'll inform some other people.

So they put me in jail for three days-- no food, nothing, nothing. And brought me up to [PERSONAL NAME] again, to this commander. And he started talking to me. And he said, oh, I know you, don't I?

So I said, well, yes. I worked on your car many times. Oh yeah, I know you. Sure. You're a Jew, Levison. At that point, my name was still Levison.

So he says, well, hmm, OK. You get 25 lashes. And I had told him that I worked before at the repair shop.

He says, you go back to [INAUDIBLE], which was the [MUMBLES]. I don't want to see you again in the ghetto. So then I got 25 lashes, which is not fun. Believe me, it's no fun, but it was better than being shot.

Then I went back to that repair shop and work there. Well, there's so many-- it's almost impossible to talk about all these little things. I mean, one day-- this day by day of-- I got pneumonia and really got sick. And they wanted to take us from our place to-- this was a famous camp where they killed most of the people.

It's called Salaspils, which is, in Riga, a famous area. I mean, if you talk to somebody who survived, that area was unbelievable. I mean, hardly anybody. And I was very sick. And they took me there because they apparently wanted to get rid of me or whatever happened, wanted to do.

And I had to March about 25 kilometers with some other people. And I was there for several weeks. That was one of those camps where they had people walking around with chains. And they had to bury the other people.

And this was your job there, to bury the people who died or were shot. And I survived that. See, when you're young-- when I look back today, I always say, it's amazing. But, really, when you are young, you have a tremendous amount of resilience.

Tell me about that camp though. What did you do there?

Where.

Not at Riga but--

You mean Salaspils?

Yeah.

OK, when we arrived there, it was half empty. There was still some women on one side. And there were very few people there.

We never found out why they took us there. We didn't have a job at all. We were practically, day and night, just no-- there was hardly any food at all. We were just lying there and doing nothing.

And the only thing was one day, one of the people got killed. And we buried him. But that was the only person in that camp I ever had to bury-- well, at that particular-- another camp was a little different, but at that camp.

So at that point, I didn't have too much-- that wasn't-- for me, personally, I didn't have anything to do with that. But some of our other people that I remember. Then I-- what happened then? Well, Riga was taken over by the Russians.

Oh, there was another thing, what happened to me. One day, we had a-- in a different kind of-- there was a different workshop. It was called Lenta, L-E-N-T-A. And the commander of that workshop-- I mean auto repair shop-- his name was [? Appel. ?] He came from Western Germany or somewhere.

And he was constantly drunk. That's another thing. You see, these people were-- most of the time were drunk because they gave them-- there wasn't much food, not even for the Germans, but plenty to drink.

So they always-- they were hardly ever sober. And so one day-- and they tried-- they wanted to make all kinds of jokes with their Jews. See, they called us their Jews. We were always-- in German, it's mein Jude, "my Jew." That's how they talked about us. Because, basically, we were the ones who saved them from going to the front lines against the Russians.

They wanted to keep us. That was their way to survive. Otherwise, they would have been fighting the Russians. So that was a very important. My Jew was very important.

So one day he was drunk. And they were playing around. They were always shooting and all this. And why it started, I don't remember. They decided, we want to put the Jews in a coffin and close it up and see how long it takes till they knock at the lid that they can't survive.

So they put me in a coffin. And I was-- I don't know how long, five or 10 minutes. But it's a scary thing.

You don't know if they're going to open it. And you can't have any air in there. And then they opened it up. And they-- ha ha ha-- it was fun. I mean, that's the kind of people they were.

So we had all these little-- the only reason why I bring it up is these were the little things, which were from one minute to the other, never know what's going to happen. And then, again, they were all of a sudden-- they would be very nice to you for-- they would say, oh, yeah, here, I just got a sandwich. Here, eat it-- if you, let's say, I did a good job. They would all of a sudden-- you know, I mean, these things.

Tell me more incidences.

OK. Well, for instance, in the ghetto, one of the big things-- like I told you, you had to stand in line in the morning to get your job assignment. And it was a huge area. And in the middle of it was a prison. It was called the-- well, Tin

Plaza. In German, it's [SPEAKING GERMAN], which is really, yeah, "tin plaza."

And behind there was a gallow. So, many times, let's say somebody did something-- run away or was caught, was caught stealing, was caught-- whatever reason. In most cases, you would get either your lashes, and they would put you in jail, or if it was a more serious thing-- I mean, like running away or something like this-- they would hang you. And that was right behind there.

And in the morning-- usually, they would hang people in the evening. And they would hang there all night. And then, in the morning, when you were walking about then you saw them hanging there. That was in the ghetto. This happened several times.

What else can I think of? Like I said, I mean, people would-- oh, we were in that workshop I told you, the first one where I worked. They had a Latvian foreman. His name was-- in German, it's Peter-- Peter.

And every time you did something wrong-- now, and something wrong could be you were supposed to put a couple of screws into a certain part and, for whatever reason, you didn't do it right, the foreman of the repair shop, this [? Michelton ?] would call this Latvian guy, Peter, and would say-- in German, it's only [SPEAKING GERMAN]. [SPEAKING GERMAN] means "upstairs." Because upstairs, they had a loft above them.

And you would get beat. The guy was a powerful-- he was actually a former prisoner, I mean, for whatever crime he committed, murder or whatever. And this guy was absolute a sadist. So you would get-- he had a leather strap. I still see this-- about this wide, that long.

And he would put it in water. And when you get hit by a strap, a leather strap, which is wet, it hurts 10 times as much. And what happens is that, immediately, you would start bleeding.

So he would hit you. And depends what your crime was. So sometimes you would get only five or 10 or whatever. And the bad part about it was that you had to take your pants off. And he would hit you so that he could hit you between your legs. And he was good at it.

This is one of-- I mean, I don't know if I want to talk about this. I suffered from that very much. I got cancer from it. My doctors found that that was the reason, because I got beaten so much, at the time, in certain parts. But that's-- well, no, I don't want to talk more about that.

OK.

So, I mean, then-- now, Riga was taken over by the Russians. And the Gestapo would take us to Lithuania.

Yeah. When was this, Harry? Tell me--

This was in 1940-- must have been '44.

Did you sense that the Russians were coming?

Oh, we knew. Yes, matter of-- oh, absolutely.

Yeah.

Yes. Because, you see, by-- maybe not everybody. But in our workshop, where we saw these trucks coming back from the front lines and we had to repair them-- by the way, that's another thing I forgot about. One of my jobs was-- I don't know if you ever heard of that.

We built trucks. And they were closed like a van. And we would put steel plates on the inside, cover them. And they would put benches inside. We had to build all those.



And then we built a contraption from the exhaust pipe, which would go into-- from both sides, would go into the van on the back, which was completely enclosed. And a lot of people would get killed. That's why there was a lever up front where the driver was.

And they could change it so that instead of-- that the exhaust fumes wouldn't go outside. And they would go inside. And I know several people who were-- they were just driving from one area to another. And by the time they would-- and they would be killed. That's why I built three of those trucks.

And, naturally, we-- see, there was something very interesting what they did. For instance, if they would-- let's say you did something wrong. Now, this happened many times. They wouldn't kill you.

They would say, now you name one or two or five people that should be killed, which was-- in a way, it was worse than anything else because so many of these people-- I mean, were, really, your good friends. And sometimes they would do this, which was another way of sadism, that you yourself wouldn't get killed. But you name this guy or that guy.

And you had to do that. Now, I don't know if this happened in other areas. But it sure happened in Riga.

Harry, will you tell me a little bit about the layout of Riga. You said there was the city with the Jewish ghetto.

Can I show you one picture?

Yeah, would you?

Sure.

Yeah, that would be good.

[INAUDIBLE]

We will. At the end, we'll take a picture of all your pictures.

Oh, I see. OK, yeah.

And then we'll put it in the appropriate place.

See, this is the picture I was talking about.

Oh yeah.

See, now--

God, that's so--

See, I was in Lenta still in 19-- see, I wrote this down. In '44, I stole this. So we were still in Riga in the beginning of 1944. And I brought a picture along if you can use it.

Absolutely.

I've made a copy of it.

Thank you. Thank you.

Because this I want to naturally keep.

Yeah.

OK, your idea is good. At the end of the tape, we'll [INAUDIBLE].

OK. All right. Then I'll show you those later on. But this would be the ghetto.

Feel free to refer to any of them as you go along. That's fine too.

Yeah.

OK. Now, see, I mean, it's a typical-- now, you can't read it. But it says on that sign here in both in German and in Latvian that you get shot if you go over the fence there.

Good. Save these.

Yeah.

And, see, now here's a group of people going to work. See, now when you look at it, it could be-- it looks all very pleasant. I mean, doesn't it? And yet, it-- it's so hard to explain that a whole group of people walked through a city. And the people there, they were not very nice.

Believe me, the Latvians-- I mean, I know that Latvia is so much in the news right now. But as far as I'm concerned, I have no sympathy for the Latvian people because there were not just a few. By the hundreds, some of them were much worse than the Germans were because they wanted to prove to the Germans how loyal there are. So I have no sympathy.

What did they do?

They spat at you. I mean, they couldn't get too close to you. The only time they would really be interested in talking to you-- if they spoke German. And a lot of Latvians speak German and Russian because they were close to Germany and to Russia.

Russia occupied it in those days over there one time. And the only time they would talk to you would be if you had something to trade, where they would get something for it. That was their thing. Otherwise, they were really-- and they wouldn't-- very few would help the Latvian Jews. There were some, naturally.

I mean, I don't want to say nobody. I'm quite sure there were. But they knew quite a bit about it. They knew what happened to the Latvian Jews. And I don't remember-- in all these years there-- that I met a Latvian. There were some German people in the army, for instance, they were not as bad as the Gestapo people-- in the German army, in the army. You see, there was always a difference.

Some of them were bastards. But, I mean, and there were some nice ones. At least when I say nice, they weren't kicking you. But the Latvians, you could see the hatred of Jews.

That's why I say when they're talking about today and what's going on, this Russia-- they don't deserve anything better, really not. But that's my opinion. I may be wrong. Right?

But it's your opinion.

That's my opinion

Harry, can you tell me a little bit-- I'm trying to get a picture--

If I talk too much, don't--

No, if I talk too much, you can shut me up. There's the town of Riga.

Yeah.

And then there's the ghetto inside the town.

Right.

And then the area where you were working in the automotive shop when you had to live there, was that in the town or--

Yeah, that was inside of the town but surrounded by barbed wire.

Inside the ghetto? Or no?

No, no, no, no. Like I said, I was in the ghetto only those few months. Otherwise, most of the time-- no, all the time, as long as I was in Riga, I was in one of those-- it was more or less like a building where we slept. There was a two-story building surrounded by barbed wire. And they had a guard at the gate.

Just like you would take a big house in our area-- let's say the house was 10, 15 rooms, that type of a house. And we would have these-- excuse me-- these double beds, which we built ourselves. Have seen them. It's typical for all-- just like in the ghetto we had that, you didn't have any real beds.

You had would put straw into like a potato sack, that kind of material. And you slept on that. But that was the same in the ghetto or else. We would build them ourselves.

And they were always two-- like a double bed, up and down. But I was surrounded by barbed wire. Also the garage where I worked. And they would take you over-- one of the Gestapo men would take you over in the morning. We had to start around-- well, most of the time, 6:00, 6:30 or so and work till it got dark.

And were there several-- in Riga, there were the Jews that lived in the ghetto. And then there were the Jews that lived in buildings the way you did. Were there several buildings like that?

Well, the thing is this. There weren't too many Latvian Jews left. See, like I said, the majority was killed. There were very few left in the Latvian ghetto, very few. And that was very small by that time.

I don't know how many, but I don't think there were more-- I might be mistaken, but I don't think there were more than a couple of hundred, 200 or 300. That's all. Everybody was either killed at the time or they brought them to Auschwitz or somewhere where they you know, that way.

So there weren't too many Latvians left. It was mostly now German, Austrian, and Czechoslovakian Jews.

And did most of those Jews live in the ghetto?

The majority, yes. Most of them. But then there were smaller camps. One was called Kaiserwald, which was famous.

One was called [PLACE NAME] which was a army work camp. One was called Jungfernhof. I mean, these are separate camps. They were like small-- well, they were concentration camps that were separate.

But the main reason was that these people worked there. And it was closer to the jobs they had. For instance, my wife worked in, for quite a long time, in a-- for the army. They had to clean the uniforms from the front lines. When they came back-- people got killed.

And they would bring the uniforms back by trucks. And they had to clean them. And then they would repair them. And

they would then give them back to the army again.

Now, the people who worked in the work camps, did they live in the ghetto or they lived in the work camps?

Again, no. In the work camps, they lived in those camps. Yeah.

OK. I've got the picture then.

That was separate. They were in different-- they weren't really in the-- most of them were not in the city of Riga. They were out on the outskirts and outside.

I don't know how many camps they had in the surrounding areas. There was a camp for, if I recall it, for Hungarian people. There were only Hungarians there, if I remember. I mean, there were several different camps.

OK. Now, I wanted to hear about when you started to sense that the Russians were coming.

Oh yeah.

How did you-- what changed? How did you hear about it, first of all? And what was happening in your day to day life?

Well, first of all, like I said, we heard it from these drivers of the trucks. And because, let's say, we had to repair a truck and the driver was standing there. Well, naturally, they would start talking to each other.

See, under those circumstances, you are very-- you do your job. But at the same time, your ears are open. You always want to hear what's going on.

So you were fairly well informed, even though we never saw a newspaper or anything. But you more or less-- and when we heard that the Russians would come closer. Naturally, we were-- somehow, we would-- I mean, that would give us a lift, morally.

But at the same time, there was something which-- in one way, we didn't like it. And then again, we were happy about it. The Russians would bomb-- see, Riga has a big harbor. And they had a tremendous amount of ship traffic, troops and everything.

So they would bomb the harbor quite often. And many times, we had to work-- and a matter of fact, I have a-- I was hit by a-- right here, hit by a part of a--

Shrapnel?

Shrapnel. I mean, fragment of a bomb one day on one of the ships unloading-- once in a while, we had to unload ships or load them. We did this too. I mean, you never knew from one day to another what kind of a job you had.

So once in a while, even an auto mechanic had to unload a ship. So I got hit once. And so they would bomb-- the only problem was-- I don't know how they ever won on the war. I mean, that sounds like a joke. But they hit everything except the areas they were supposed to hit.

We made jokes about it. I still remember that. I mean, the bombs would be next to the ship on both sides. Hardly ever would hit the ship.

So what I meant is [INAUDIBLE], in one way, we were naturally very unhappy that they would-- we never knew whether we were going to get hit or not. And that's another thing I'll tell you in a minute, what happened to us. But at the same time, it seems like the Russians came closer and closer.

So we figured, well, if we could only survive, because maybe there is a chance now. Why would they be already that

close to Riga? So we always felt that way. And then one day, we had to leave Riga because they came closer and closer and occupied.

When?

This must have been middle of '44, I imagine, because this picture is-- that's when we left. I'm not now-- I should have brought it along. At home, I have a list of the dates. But I didn't bring that along.

But it must have been probably in probably May or June of '44. And then they took us to Libau which is a town-- it was now in the news-- in Lithuania, when they had all these things against Russia now, when they wanted to-- so I don't know how it's called in-- "Lip-ee-ahn-ah," or something like that. Anyway, in German, it's called Libau.

And we worked there, again, mostly taking care of bombed houses. Clean up the areas. I didn't work as an auto mechanic anymore. That wasn't necessary anymore because this was now all on the way back now, now that the retreat started.

And one day we were in our-- we built ourselves air raid shelter by digging a whole trench and putting trees over it to-- just for our people then. We were about-- I don't know-- by that time maybe a couple of hundred people left. And one day we were in that shelter. And the shelter got hit. And 13 people got killed, including the commander of that particular building.

And he was really one of the few decent German soldiers. And we were very upset about that, because he really he was the type where you would-- after the war, sometimes you hear about it. They bring-- like the [INAUDIBLE] brought this man over.

Well, I most certainly-- so my wife would have-- and we talked about this many times. We would have talked for this man. I mean, we would have said, because--