

Flexibility of the lens is not great. We have when people have--

Yeah. We should do eye exercises, shouldn't we?

Hmm?

We should do eye exercise.

We should do all sorts of exercises-- mental, emotional, everything.

I have enough mental exercise, thank you.

All right, let's-- any time you want to lead in.

My name is Constance Bernstein, and I'm talking to Henry "Lebecky?"

Libicki.

At the Holocaust Center, and it's July 26, 1990. Henry, what I'd like to do is just take you all the way from the earliest memories you have of your childhood, and your family, and your grandparents, and your life-- where you were born and what life was like for you and just to go along and help you tell me the story of what's happened to you.

If you don't get enough information, you want to ask questions?

Sure. I'll ask you along the way. Sure. So where do we begin here?

Well, I was born in Poland in a place named Klobotsk or "Klo-bots-ka," depending how you pronounce it-- Jewish or Polish. To describe the town is the best to see Fiddler on the Roof. It's that kind of a little town.

To the best of my recollection, there were about 30% Jewish people. The total town might have had 5,000 people, or shtetl, I call-- I refer to it. 30% of the people were Jewish people.

I remember very vividly the shul or the temple. I very vividly remember on high holidays or on any holiday, there was a festive thing because the predominance of the Jews congregated not necessarily in a ghetto, but they were closer to each other in certain areas. And I remember such things as taking the chickens to the slaughter, and the shochet as they call them in Poland.

I was attending a cheder, or a Jewish school, when I was four and a half. By the time I was nine years old, I left the shtetl for a larger city, which is Czestochowa. And you might have heard about the town because that's where the Pope goes to visit.

That's the Polish shrine. That's the Jasna GÅ³ra, as they call it. And from nine years old I stayed in that little town till the War.

OK, so let's go back to your childhood. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had one brother and two sisters.

And what were their ages?

I was the youngest. My older brother was three years older. My sister was five and a half and oldest sister, seven years older. So I was the baby in the family. I was called baby until I was about 20.

You were called Baby? That was your name?

No, no, no. When you looked for me, and my mother would ask, where is the baby? It's kind, kind in Yiddish. You speak Yiddish?

No. Ok, kind in Yiddish is the same as a baby, child. Where is the child? Because I was the youngest.

Yes. What did your father do?

My father was in the wholesale of wheat and flour. In other words, he would contract for wheat through some landowners, and get it to the mills, and grind it up, and sell it to bakers. Sometimes, he went to the mills and bought wholesale wagons of flour. And then distribution was by 220-pound sacks which he sold to the bakers because they couldn't afford a large amount of flour. So this is basically his business-- wholesale of wheat and flour.

And were most of the Jews in the shtetl occupied in these kinds of middle-men positions?

No. I would say my father would probably rank among the richer people in town. I probably would not exaggerate if I would say he might have been maybe 30 or 40 people were about as well-off as we were. Most people were not as well-off as we were in the town-- Jewish people I'm talking about.

What did most of the other Jews do?

Everything from having a horse and a buggy and carrying people around to one of them was a lathe operator-- a wood lathe operator who made things out of wood on a lathe. Some people were shoemakers, tailors, a rabbi, or a rabbi-- which means a teacher. I was just called a baker. Practically everything.

But I remember there was a lot of people that were quite poor, and did nothing. In other words, they did whatever they could to make a living. They had no profession-- whatever they could buy something, and sell something, work for somebody for a while. There were a lot of people were not the happiest situations.

How did all these Jews-- was it normal for the shtetl to be-- the village to be 30%-- so high in Jewish population?

The Polish population was pre-war, and that might not have been when I was still in the small town. Was pre-war, about 33 million. Out of that, a little bit over 3 million were Jewish people. So obviously, some places would have had more and some would have had less people. There were places where there were very few people. There are many places where there were large concentrations of Jews.

Do you know how the Jews got to your little village?

I read some account of these things. They trace them back as far back as-- and again, this is so questionable, whether the tracing is exact. But it could be several hundred years ago that they first came. Somebody came in there because of a reason, either he dealt with somebody or had some special profession.

But the town has already had Jews-- a good community established-- for over 100 years. When I was there, it was already. So the Jews must have been coming there in the early 1800s.

And your father was one of the more successful ones. Was that because he was dealing with the Poles and not just in the Jewish community?

No. The success was probably his own entrepreneurialship. This was the success. My father-- let me maybe go a little history of my father. His mother died when he was nine. His father remarried. He never did get along with his mother-- stepmother. So around nine years of age, he left home already on his own.

Where was he born?

Wreczyca. That's a town about four miles from Klobutsk. I happen to be--

Four miles?

Yeah, I happened to be there. But you're talking four miles in Poland in those days-- four miles was a different world. Again, it isn't-- I remember going, walking towards this little town when my grandfather was still alive. And it would take me about an hour and a half to get there.

But we would walk because then we stayed with our grandfather. He had a bakery. He was a baker. So matter of fact, after the War, I was there on business, and I asked to be taken there to look over, and the bakery was gone.

But getting back to my father, when he was nine years old, he had to find his own way in life. So at first, he joined as an apprentice to a shoemaker in the hope he can make a living as a shoemaker. But when you were apprentice you're nine years old, the first thing you do is help the lady of the house with the babies and with everything. And this did not appeal to him, even as a nine-year-old child.

And a year or so later he changed into-- he went to be a tailor. And the hours were very long, as I can hear him explain. He always used to tell us those stories. Anywhere from 14 to 16 hours a day you worked with the needle.

And to my memory, he was always high-strung. And no one could take advantage of him. He wouldn't let anybody take advantage of him. So he liked it better, but then the War broke out in 1914. He was 14 years old. He was born in 1900.

So when the war broke out he started looking for some other means of income. He didn't like the idea of being cooped up all day long in a little room. And it wasn't-- the conditions of work were not like we are used today. It was very stuffy in a small, little room. You could hardly move.

You mean he was a tailor at this time?

That's right. That was until he was 14.

Until he was 14.

Oh, yes. That's right.

And when he was 14, he started looking to get into some sort of business. Now, this might sound very odd. And my daughter still tells as some sort of attitude of pride. I hardly know what to say about it-- that her father was a smuggler. Because he started-- the borders re-established themselves during the War. And so you could carry things from one place to another and make money, but you had to do it in darkness of the night.

And so he became a smuggler, basically. He smuggled cigarettes, carrying them on his back from one place, which was the German side, to the Russian side. And this was going on.

So this what he was doing, and different things that were not really legal in those days but they were morally legal to the people. Moral legality and immoral legality became more understandable to me when the War broke out and when I was involved in concentration camp.

So when he was 14, he was smuggling cigarettes from the Russian border to the German border because-- where was Poland here?

Well, Poland didn't exist anymore for 150 years because Poland was split up between the Russians, Austria-Hungary, and Germany, under Catherine the Great.

So which side was your--

My father lived on the Russian side. Poland-Poland-- ancient Poland-- was the Russian side. And he was a few miles from the border. So all he had to do is find a way to get it across, and you got the same thing. These things exist always in abnormal times.

When there is a normal economy, like we enjoy in the United States-- even here, you might have heard that certain States have cigarette taxes and certain states don't have. And there is smuggling going on, even in the state of the United States. It's also illegal.

But this was a completely different situation. And then when the War ended, he was 18. And within a year or so, he married my mother.

Was he still in the same village where he was born?

No, he left that village coming to Klobutsk, which is where I was born. That's where he was, actually, as a child when he ran away when he was 14. There wasn't an awful lot in that small village. I don't think there was-- there were a dozen Jewish people in that other village where my grandfather had a bakery.

And he then settled, at first, in my mother's little village, which was [PLACE NAME] which you wouldn't be able to pronounce it even. But it's a small town. And within about a year, he moved to Klobutsk where I was born later on.

So my older sister was born in that small town where my mother comes from. Because when you got married, you didn't go out and look for a house. You stayed with your in-laws. That's the best you could hope for.

And eventually, he wanted to go and get on his own. So by the time he was 20, he was very much on his own already in business, married, had a daughter. And then the other three children were born in Klobutsk.

And is that where he started his business when he was around 20 or something?

Yeah. The legal business-- the legitimate business.

So he had made money so he could set himself up.

He could set himself up. And it was always a struggle, like any business that you have. But all I'm trying to say, my father was always very well-dressed. In other words, he had new suits, always two or three. For Poland, that was rich, to have two or three new suits.

He needed it for business, number one. Because when he went to visit mostly people that he made deals for buying more than selling. For selling, he didn't need to be. But he always was well-- as far as I can recall, I remember mostly in a tie, in a suit.

We were comfortable. I never knew what it means not to have food on the table. I never knew not to have meat on the table, except on the nine days where we don't eat meat, dairy-- you're familiar with the nine days.

It's before Tisha B'Av Shabbat, as a matter of fact. It's right now. It's the period. We did not lack food on the table. But I don't think that we just had money to throw out.

No, no.

But that was a way of life. And the children got a normal education. I remember, then, when the nine days would come around, I just moped around because if there was no meat so once during the day, I felt the day is lost. I don't know why, but I remember vividly that situation.

So it was in the small town. Then in 1936, by the time I was nine years old, we moved to the large town.

OK, and tell me about your mother.

My mother comes from the [PLACE NAME] which--

It's a little village.

It's a little village. It's no use to pronounce it. And she was one-- I have to figure it out-- I think, of six children. She had two brothers and three sisters. Yeah, six children.

She was four years older than my father. By the way, she's still alive and is at the-- she's at the Silver Street in old age home. I just came from there. I visit there several times a week.

How old is she?

She is going to be 94 in December.

94, how fantastic.

She went through concentration and all the other things. She was the one in the family that, from a very early age, took care of cooking, cleaning because my grandmother was involved always in the business. Because the grandfather was not a businessman. He was rather the kind of guy, whatever he had, he would give away.

This is your mother's father.

My mother's father, my grandfather. He was a very charitable individual, very good, very handsome-- as far as I know-- individual. But he liked the different things in life. Business absolutely didn't interest him. He was a glazier, and even that he didn't go to do much business.

So really, to raise a living for everybody, it was my grandmother's job. And my mother was the second-oldest. And she took a liking to take care of the house. So since she was seven, eight years old, she took care of the family-- cooking, and cleaning, and taking care of the younger brood.

So she was a real mother at seven.

She was a real mother and continued to be a real mother until late ages, yeah.

So what did you what did your grandmother do?

My grandmother had a little grocery store. That was the way they made a living out of. And then, eventually, when my mother and my father moved to the shtetl that I'm talking about, Klobutsk, where I was born, a year or two later she also moved to the town and opened up the same grocery store.

So you had your mother's parents right there?

Yeah. As a matter-- the whole-- not the whole family. That's the wrong thing. Most of the family was in that little town. My mother's sister and my father's brother eventually got to know each other, and they married each other. They were 10 years junior to my folks.

And they lived in the same building-- not house-- in the same building because it was an apartment building. They lived next to us. So my cousin was more like a brother, sister to me.

So you had a big family, then, that lived--

We had a big family in Klobutsk. And then we were the first one, again, to move out. There was also family in neighboring areas. And I remember, too, we used to visit them as kids.

So you went to Hebrew or Jewish school?

I went to a Jewish school, or a cheder, as you call it-- you know what a cheder is, I assume-- when I was four and a half.

And what was the attitude about-- the people in the village about Jews? Do you remember?

There was a lot of anti-Semitism. I remember very vividly. I can give you scenes that I still see. I must have been about five or six. Whenever there was a Polish wedding, there were fights. They got drunk.

And that might sound prejudicial, but I'm talking-- this is what happens. I'm not saying every wedding because it depends whether they were intelligentsia, or whether they were the peasants, or whatever. But I remember mostly when there was a Polish wedding, our parents would keep us inside the house because there were fights. And the fights-- you don't know who got lost. And there was bloody, stabbing, and so forth.

But whenever there was some anxiety among the Poles, the Jew was the first one to be taken out. I remember when I would go to school when I was already seven years old, I remember running to school. I rarely walked because I had to outrun the people that would try to beat me up. That means my age kids would beat me up. They would recognize me as a Jew.

And when there was a break in school, I would not go out in the yard, in the court to play unless a teacher was nearby because there was always fear of being beaten up.

By--

By the Polish kids.

Who were not at your school, but who were--

They were. They were. There was a-- let me explain. The cheder, or the Jewish school, was independent. You still had to attend an official Polish school. That is in the small town.

In the big town, there was a sort of segregation. The government still supported the regular school, but only Jewish people were going to it. Now, we had a curriculum of regular Polish-assigned curriculum. We did not learn Hebrew or anything of that sort. But it was separated because there were enough Jewish people to have a full school of Jewish kids.

But in the small village, how many hours a day did you go to Hebrew school versus regular school?

Well, before I started going to school, which was at the age of seven, I would go anywhere from 6 to 8 hours to school. I remember when I was-- yeah, when I was five or five and a half-- and I couldn't tell you exactly-- I remember, and everybody remembers in the family, my father was praying.

You know what mincha is and ma'ariv? That is the evening prayers. And he would stay, and he would pray three times a day. He was not a Hasid, but he was Orthodox. And I stood once next to him. I was five years old, and I was continuing with that movement, as you do, when you're praying-- Jewish praying. You must have seen this.

And after he got done praying-- we couldn't interrupt because it's a silent devotion where you don't interrupt for any reason. He took me on his knee and says, I shouldn't do things. There is no laughter. This is no joke. I said, I wasn't joking. I was praying the prayer.

He said but you didn't even have a book. I said, I know it by heart. He said, I want to see this. He put me on a chair. I wasn't tall enough to listen to. He put me in a chair. And I said the whole service. I knew it by heart when I was five,

five and a half years old, because there was a continuous repetition.

If you remember, there are songs about-- if you sing it or not sing it. [NON-ENGLISH]. Have you ever heard this? But anyhow, it says about the little room where the children was the rabbi are learning alef-beis, A, B, C. I was learning it repetitiously until I had it all in my head thoroughly.

And then when school started and I was going to school from like 1:00 to 4:00 or whatever-- I don't exactly remember the hours-- then I would go in the morning to cheder, in the afternoon to the regular school. And that continued, more or less, even in the bigger town where I was in a Jewish surrounded school but officially sanctioned by the Poles-- Polish government. And then either in the afternoon or in the morning, whichever was free, I would go to a cheder until I was 13.

A lot of school for young kid. But that was what you did.

That's why, if you look at a lot of Jewish people-- and I keep hearing this-- the Jews are smarter. I don't believe the Jews are smarter any more than any other nationality. The Jews, however, did put always an emphasis on learning, whether it was just learning the Bible or learning the laws.

We have to remember that I took some of the Talmud when I was about seven or eight years old. Picture a little child studying the philosophy of a Talmud. But I did. So it's not that the Jewish people are necessarily smarter, it's that the Jewish people emphasized learning.

And whatever any group of people will emphasize, that will succeed. If it's beauty, you're going to have more beautiful people because this is-- genetic follow-up.

Coding. Right. So it was difficult, though, in the village, in terms of being afraid of-- there was no contact between you and the Poles.

Very little. Very little. If you ask me whether I had a Polish friend, the answer is no. There was only contact enough where this was not a ghetto. There were two or three Polish families living in a corridor with 12 Jewish people.

So it was predominance in certain areas of Jews, predominance of certain areas of Poles. And people tried to congregate where they felt safe. So yes, I had contact but nothing like you would see in the United States where I have a lot of Gentile friends ever since I came to the United States.

What made your father move?

The kids were starting to get older. He felt a strain by having some of the children sent to the big city for education. My oldest sister was getting-- studying bookkeeping. My other sister, in order to get into some sort of a job, she had to be in a big city. Just worked out that, he says, may as well go to a big city. Because the children are getting older. They're not getting younger. He wanted to see that we get a break in life-- whatever he could achieve. So that was the reason for moving to the big city.

So how did your mother feel about that? Do you remember? Or how did you feel about that?

I don't know how my mother felt about it. She might have had hesitations, but that's strictly speculation. To me it, was exciting, just going places.

But she was leaving her parents. They didn't move, too.

Yeah, but this was, again, 10, 10 and 1/2 miles. And while it is only 10 and 1/2 miles, I assure you, she didn't go as often as I go to Ohio, right?

Right.

Because if you took a horse and buggy, that was a four-hour ride. If you took a bus only 10 and 1/2 miles, it was even a full half hour. You didn't chug along like you-- oh, sure. It's not a good-- wasn't a good at all.

The bus was going, but if you ever see on some of the South American movies, those buses go on the side-- but that's more or less what it was. But you just didn't go on buses back and forth. I do remember, for the summer, my mother would send me to a little town to be with my cousins, and I would spend two or three weeks there. And I always liked that.

Life in the big city changed for me. In the little city, I would never go around without a covering of my head. Keep our-- hat. Mostly a hat.

To show your Orthodoxy?

Yeah, the Orthodoxy. When I came to the large city, well, this disappeared pretty quick. But then when I went back to the visit, I remember vividly a situation where I didn't have a covering on my head, and I was going cross the house where my previous Hebrew teacher, rabbi, or rebbe was living. And I felt very naked. And I'm not sure, but I still, today-- till today, I have dreams of being naked.

Oh, really?

Yeah. It might have been from that. It might not have been. But it was a-- I didn't feel good in the small town being without a hat. In the big city, it was no problem.

How else did life change for you in the big city?

Not much more, except that anti-Semitism was still there. There were sections in the town where I felt quite safe because there were very few Polish people living. Even so, there were pogroms that we lived through. And then all the houses were locked up, and nothing was safe.

Like in 1937, there was a case where a Jewish person in defence, killed somebody-- a Pole. And for three days, there were riots, killings, and looting, and you name it. So everybody locked themselves-- barricaded themselves in their houses. And for three days, no one would go out.

When they caught some Jewish people that would have arrived in the city by train or something-- in the big city, I'm talking about-- they were beaten up very bad, and some of them had to go to the hospital. Some of them were crippled.

So life was not that pleasant for me as far as the social situation. How

Many people-- sorry, go on.

No. The economic life was fine. No problem.

How many people were living in this larger town?

Large town was 100,000 people before the War. I am not sure how many were, before the War, Jews. I could guess about 20,000-plus. In the middle of the War when the selection started and the actions-- you know what the action is? The action is akcja. This is Polish, but I'm translating.

But that's what they were selecting, you go here, you go here. We called it akcja. And there were 30,000 Jewish people. So before the War, I would estimate-- I am not 100% sure-- but it must have been 20,000 out of 100,000 people.

And what year was this that you moved?



We moved 1936, September.

And your father did the same work?

He did the same thing, just the dealings. The only thing he had to do is rent different facilities. But he had the same dealings with the same bakers and the same-- it wasn't that far removed-- with the same people that he bought.

Mostly the purchases were the big things-- where you bought the things, what contracts you made on wheat. Very often, had to pay money, but it was still in the field. Taking a risk, whether it'll-- it's like--

The futures.

Same thing as futures except not sophisticated. The futures were his own futures. He would bid on it and either lost or gain. But he was entrepreneurial, and he wasn't afraid to take risks.

And did you have a nice house?

We never had a house. We always lived in an apartment. It was rare to have a house. And my father probably wouldn't have bought a house because all the money he could, he would rather invest in the business. But we had a very nice apartment. And I guess-- matter of fact, I went back after the war in '79, and I looked at the place.

It's still nice?

No. By the standards of Poland, of Poland pre-war, we had a very nice place. By standard of what we expect today, number one, it's not so nice. The number two, the houses and the places deteriorated badly during the War.

We had a court, which was the first court and the second court. It's hard to imagine. If you know the European way where you have a main entrance to a apartment house, and there is one court and the second court. In the first court, we had concrete road where you could turn around in a car inside the yard.

It was all broken up, chipped out. No one took care of it. We used to have a nice garden there, but no one took care of it. So it was depressing to go back and see it. I still wanted to see it.

How long did you live there?

We lived there until the selection took place, which was in '42.

So tell me, when was it-- you moved there in '36-- when it was the first inkling that things were getting bad for the Jews? I mean, worse. I mean, they were always bad for the Jews in Poland.

To my recollection, they were never good. And this might be my own memory, but that's what I retained. They were never good for Jews. I mean, and again, not economically. Some economics were very good, and some of them were poor.

But it's the social standing. The envy-- why couldn't I be free? Why do I always have to run away? I like to go to-- and I'll answer the question.

I like to go to movies. I loved cowboy movies, but the cowboy movies were in a section where Jewish kids usually wouldn't go. But I would go there on daytime. And as soon as I saw that the ending is coming, I would run out so that no one catches up with me, run home. I would never walk home. I ran home.

And were you wearing a skull hat so they could have identified you as Jewish?

No. They identified-- they identified very easily Jewish people. I don't know. I didn't have any particular Jewish look or

Polish look. I just-- but they identified. I don't know why. It wasn't a question.

Wasn't it of the clothes, maybe-- by clothes that you wore?

I was dressed in all the clothes as my neighbors that are Gentile would have worn. I don't know why. It's the same thing, if you would take some of the Black people-- what we call them Black people in the United States-- and place them in Poland, no one would recognize them. They would say, he's tanned or so forth. We recognize him.

Yes, OK.

You take some of the Black people. They really don't look any different than white people. But it's hard to tell, but I know I was recognized. There was no question in their mind.

So you always had a feeling of not being free.

That's right. I never was free. And to the question how long I stayed, '42 was the point when they--

The question was, when did you first feel things were getting worse there, and when did your parents feel it? When was the first time you--

Well, that's a curious situation. Because when the Germans came in-- and the Germans did come in on the, well, Friday the War broke out. My mother woke me up that there was a war.

Friday when?

Friday, the 1st of September, 1939. That was the first day of the War. And it was about 6:30, 7:00 there was machine gun fire outside. And she woke me up to lie down on the floor, still remembering the World War I war situations, what you're supposed to do. And then it quieted down, then more machine gun, than airplanes, and different things.

The Germans were in your town?

No, they were by plane in our town-- the planes, German planes, were already in our town the first thing in the morning. And the national defense was nonexistent, but policemen with rifles would try to shoot down an airplane. It was almost ridiculous.

And when they finally shot down, as I remember, they shot down a Polish small biplane, the two-winged planes, a very old plane. They wouldn't be able to shoot down a German Stuka or any of these other planes. And so this was--

So your mother woke you up at 6:30 in the morning and said there is a--

There was a war. And I laid down on the floor, and we wait until the shooting stops. Then Saturday, of course, there were rumors back and forth. The Germans are here. They are there. Some Polish people started coming back, or Polish soldiers-- could have been also Jewish-- but Polish military people were coming back and telling horror stories how they being overrun.

I remember one story. They were saying that the tanks that the Germans are bringing in were facing cavalry. Can you imagine? This isn't a joke. There was lances, too. They were slaughtered. They were slaughtered.

And then Sunday around 11:00, the Germans came into our town.

They were there?

Yeah. Very friendly, very-- they didn't fight in. They just marched in, very coordinated. And they came, and they were dirty. And they asked for water, and people went out, gee, they are not monsters. They are wonderful people.

They gave them water. And they were better educated than the Poles, there is no question about it. There were smiles, and everybody says, it's not going to be so bad.

Well, Monday, mid-morning, there was all of a sudden some shooting, some chasing, running. And at that time, I was 12 years old, but I recall the incident without recalling exactly every little detail. But what happened is that the Germans accused the Poles, or Polish people, or Jewish people, or whoever that they killed one of theirs, a soldier.

And they started shooting people. A lot of people fell in the middle of the square, killed. And they rounded up a whole number of prominent Jewish and Polish people, but predominantly Jewish people, and then jailed them. And then they released the rest of the people the next day or so. And they kept the other ones for ransom.

Kept who, the Jews, or the--

The Jewish people, the prominent Jewish people. And they knew whom to get, and they knew where to get them, and so forth.

They kept them for ransom?

For ransom. It wasn't really ransom. It was the first indication where they show that they want the money from the people. So they got some money that was collected, and they released the people after a few weeks.

And then they started putting laws into effect. Thou shall not this-- you cannot bake. You cannot use white flour. You can only use dark flour for baking. Now, I don't remember exactly whether it was first, second, or third, but the laws kept changing. Every day, you added.

I happened to be outside, and I was reading these things, how Hitler right away started initiating laws when he took over. All the same thing he did in Poland, except a much faster pace. And you cannot slaughter, and you cannot do this, you cannot do this.

And pretty soon, it was thought that you didn't question anything. Whatever was against you was against. So the question of a lot of people that were not there say, how could 6 million people let themselves slaughter like sheep? That's the word very often used.

Well, first of all, through his psychological efforts, they brought the people down to become animals, whether they were sheep, or whether they were dogs, or whatever it is. He killed the resistance to fight little by little. If this would have happened all of a sudden, everything would have changed. He would take out people to kill, people would have fought.

But the morale was so low that the people were depressed. People were-- all could think is some survival, but not fight. The fight was out of the people by the time-- came time to kill the people.

And the fight started going out when all these laws would come in, and one day you could do one thing and the next day you couldn't?

You couldn't. It was more restrictive all the time. So that became very used to the authoritarian--

Absolutely. But this started on the second day after they came into our town.

And so you became used to obeying rules, sounds like.

It wasn't obeying rules. It's just no choice.

Whatever they were--

Not obeying meant beating, or arresting, or both, or so forth. There were a lot of incidences of things. If they needed, for instance, 100 people to do some odd job, they'd simply go in the streets and stop everyone and pick out the first 100 people. You go with us. There was no excuse.

You just went, whether it was to unload a train of coal, or shovel snow when the winter came around, or whatever. They just arbitrarily took anybody that was in the street. That was a way of life.

It's just like if you would see-- have you ever seen rounding up of sheep? Even in a picture. You chase out the dog and just round up the sheep. And they round it up. That's the way we were rounded up.

Do you remember any discussion about this among your family or between your parents?

Not an awful lot. We only-- the discussions mostly centered on survival, what we should do to survive. We, again, were lucky as a family. One of the people that owed my father money, a baker, went bankrupt. And whether it was a bankrupt like bankruptcy like here or not, I don't know.

Anyhow, he went out of business. And he owed us money. And he gave us a choice to take over his bakeries.

There were two ovens. That was supposedly a good-sized bakery. And it was before the War. It was 1938. There was already a lot of talk of, war will come out, break out.

And I remember discussing-- this is before the War-- my father and mother discussing. And my mother told my father, if we would have a bakery and a war breaks out, you always survive as a bakery. No one was thinking of extermination. We're just talking economic survival-- a baker, prosperous during the war.

And that was really the truth. Because by the time the War broke out, we couldn't deal anymore in wheat and flour because my father couldn't do the contract or anything. He was restricted in travel.

You mean Jews were restricted?

Right away. Yeah, you couldn't travel beyond the ghetto.

When were when were you put into the ghetto?

We were put in the ghetto either 1940 early or late '40. I don't recall exactly, but it wasn't too long later we were in a ghetto. That ghetto, still, you could go out of the ghetto, provided you came back before the evening. A curfew was always existing.

And later on, they closed off the ghetto, and you couldn't go out at all except by special permit. If you wanted to go out, you had to get a special permit. You could only go where the permit will allow you and go back.

But when we were put in that ghetto-- we weren't put. We were living where the ghetto was created. Because, usually, they closed off the area where most of the Jews were. And so in that particular ghetto, you had to stay. You had restrictions where you could travel.

My father-- the business was not something the Germans would have allowed him to continue. So our preoccupation and occupation for my father was the bakery. And we prospered.

By prospering means we ate. I still ate normally like before the War because we could afford the food, but others could not. People were starving. And that bakery also saved us, our lives-- the whole family.

This is a very little involved story, but let me just try to describe you as best as you can understand it. When the Germans started selection, they went section, by section, by section. It took three weeks to make the selection. Because they had so many trains only they could get to take out the Jews.

Can you tell us about the selection?

Yeah.

But OK-- come back to that, then. Well, I'm just saying how the bakery-- I can go back to it later. But basically, we were saved because of the bakery. That's the basics. And I can go back later to it.

Oh, OK. Because I'd like to find out about the selection process and how that worked. But we haven't gotten there yet, have we? Your father couldn't continue his business. Is that when he started concentrating on the bakery?

He was the baker. Yeah, that was our livelihood.

And was there anything else that happened before the selection that--

Well, there were a lot of things happen. First of all, the school stopped for all children. There was no school, no official school. And the school that was official Polish school for Jewish people just completely was closed down.

So people, if they wanted to have school, schools at all, if they could afford to get a private teacher or tutor, could have in their homes. So I was going to school with other kids. I was 12 at that time. And we had so-called regular schools but in every day in another home. There were five-- anywhere from five to 15 kids, depending how many you could accommodate in a private home. And the school took all the place in our home.

And you got a teacher from the--

We got several teachers that got together and they organized the school. It used to be the teachers from a private Jewish school in our town. These teachers got together and organized sort of a school of different grades, and I was in one of them. So I was learning through, actually, through the eighth grade. I finished the fifth grade before the War, and through the eighth grade, I was still learning part of the eighth grade.

What I also recall is that most of the kids never got an opportunity to go to school during the War. And there were several kids in our court-- when I refer to a court, picture a big apartment house-- that never got to go to school. They were seven years old. That's the time we were supposed to go to school, and they never got a chance.

And this just came back to me recently-- I'm not going to divert, but anyhow-- that I got kids together of that age, and I was teaching them A, B, C and adding and subtracting. I don't remember how long I did it, for how long, but I know I started this. I wouldn't be surprised other things probably took preference, and I stopped it after a few weeks or months. I don't remember.

So there was a restriction. And 90% of the kids never got any more education than they got before the War. So there was a real gap in education, formal education. I was one of the lucky ones that got education.

What about the economic situation in the ghetto?

The economic situation for most people was very bad. But the Germans-- and don't ask me how this happened-- still allowed for instance for us to bake matzahs. So the bakers were baking matzahs, but everybody couldn't get a permit. Not every baker, but they allowed so many bakers to bake matzahs.

So during the War, we had practically a factory for matzahs in our bakery. And needless to say, whatever business you did, if you did business, you made money on it. So money was not money as a value as much as you ate. So we baked matzahs.

And I'm not sure this was legal, but I remember for a while we even baked bagels. Then things got so bad that you couldn't get an allowance for bread. And the way you bake bread for people is people bring in their flour, and you traded

so much flour for so much bread. That was, those people had to find their own flour.

You weren't allowed to-- your father wasn't allowed to buy flour?

Wasn't allowed. That was a period of time, and I couldn't exactly remember. But I remember the fact that this was a way of doing things.

And sometimes you got some flour from people that people were cheating because they were buying from some sources or other flour. And I remember one time, we had gypsum in the flour. We baked a whole load of bread, and everything was spoiled because they mixed up gypsum with flour to sell it for more weight.

Yeah, yeah.

There were a lot of--

And sawdust, too, I would think.

Well, sawdust you could detect. Gypsum, you couldn't detect. You could also detect, but how much testing can you do? Somehow, a few pounds of gypsum got into the flour. And by the time you got 150 pounds of flour to make a load of bread, you had gypsum in it.

And the whole bread had to be thrown out, which was very difficult. We knew it could poison people. But there was starvation. People would love to get their hands on the bad bread.

And we had a tough time. I remember my father discussing with mother, how do you get rid of it not to poison anybody? Because you couldn't sell it. It was a crime to sell it.

So what did he do?

We finally arranged to get somebody with a wagon and dump it into the river. We just dumped it in the river. Had to be watched so no one steals some of it because they would-- sure enough, they would get sick from it. At least, that's what my father felt. He just got rid of it somehow.

So those were the sort of incidences. The War broke out. I was 12. The following summer, I was going to be bar mitzvah. I remember training for the bar mitzvah.

I don't remember my bar mitzvah because it wasn't much of a-- it wasn't like you have a party here and so forth. You're called up to the Torah. You had your Haftorah, and that was the bar mitzvah. So it wasn't a big-- nothing followed, social event, whatsoever. But I do remember--

Because nobody had the money for that?

It was a War. And bar mitzvah, really, even before the war wasn't that big of a thing. But you would have had a small party. I don't remember any party. I know that I was bar mitzvah. But if you ask me, what do you remember about your bar mitzvah day, nothing.

But I remember very vividly being prepared. And the reason for they prepared me because I was learning Sephardic-- I'm sorry-- Ashkenazi. And for the bar mitzvah, the rabbi that taught me taught me Sephardic. And I remember the switch.

Well, what else about life in the ghetto do you remember before the selection? How about your brothers and sisters? How did they survive?

Well, they were all at home. And let me back off. In 1940, in December 25, my oldest sister got married. My younger

sister was supposed to have gotten married on the 31st of December of the same year within a week.

On the Saturday between the two weddings, my father had a stroke. I don't know what to classify, but eventually it showed up years later in the United States as a brain tumor. And so weddings were not made in a hotel. We made at home. In other words, you cooked and with women helping and neighbors helping.

And I remember, for my older sister, there were about 150 people guests, all in our few rooms that we had. You squeezed in everybody you could, and they did that cooking for days. It was a very exciting time for me. I was a youngster looking all the things that were going on.

Soon as they stopped with one wedding, they started preparing for the next wedding. Both of them were getting married close to each other. And when Father had the stroke, we just scaled everything down.

And I remember that the wedding took place next to the door where my father was in the room sick in bed. And I'm not sure he was quite with it. He recovered enough where he carried on a relatively normal life.

But he never was the same anymore because he kept getting nervous of another seizure. It was sort of like a seizure. And those are the things that I memorized from that period.

So two sisters got married.

Yeah. And my oldest brother was-- he learned before the war in a trade school, which was here like social engineer, or licensed mechanic, or how to compare. And he tried to do something in that area, and he couldn't because he was only 15 years old. So he did some sort of dealings on the outside, mostly illegal.

That's what I say there are illegal, morally legal things. Everything during the war that the Germans forbid was morally legal, even so it was illegal. So it's very difficult--

What did do?

Well, for instance, he would go with a few friends and sneak out of the ghetto illegally and buy from peasants potatoes and rent a wagon and horses and bring it in clandestinely to the ghetto and resell it. Little things like this that I remember.

Like your father with the cigarettes.

Yeah. But you see, this is the thing that my daughter likes to talk to her friends about it and says, gee, whiz, my grandfather was a smuggler, like it was a big thing.

And so was my uncle.

Yeah. And it wasn't anything. It was a way of making a living. And morality-- the best I can describe it, you're not supposed to drive 70 miles an hour in a 55-mile zone. It's illegal. Is it morally illegal? It's not.

They tried to make a moral issue out of it when the gas situation was a problem. And it worked better. Once it's a moral legality, people react to it definitely.

The same thing was during the War. You would never think of stealing from your fellow citizen. But you could steal from the Germans. There was nothing wrong with that, if you could.

So everybody was busy. In the ghetto, I also remember they were trying to, since there was no movie-- movies were forbidden for Jewish people-- people always tried to entertain themselves regardless of the conditions. They had little theaters.

My younger sister was more inclined for theater. And she always loved movies, and she liked to act. She was a beautiful woman. And she was also rehearsing for some of these things. The show never came because she became pregnant.

And that's another story if you want to hear it, how she had a baby during the war and the baby survived as a Gentile.

Sure. Yeah. Yeah, I would like to hear that.

Yeah. So that's the sort of things that I remember. I remember, with my friends, when there was an imminence of, something would happen. We didn't know what. We would talk that we'll meet on a certain day someplace, some day, the date that I all forgot what the date was.

Like in Paris, some dream of kids walking around. And if we don't come the first year, we'll go the second year. But sooner or later, we'll make it. And we'll see each other. We never did, because I knew some of the guys got killed. I was one of the few survivors of my age.

So all of this was before that. The selection was the kind of turning point.

Yeah.

What was that all about?

We already knew that they are taking people from different towns and sending them away. That's all we knew.

You didn't know where they were going?

No. There was a lot of rumors that they take them to some Eastern places and settle them under bad conditions. There were a lot of rumors that send them to labor camps. People wanted to believe it more than-- as I child, I just was going around with whatever they were saying. I was only at that time 14, 15.

But the way it was happening, the SS-- the stormtroopers, the black uniforms-- would come to town. I mean, hundreds of them. And when they came to our town-- this was Yom Kippur and eve. And they came to town. As best I recall, it was Yom Kippur. I know it was during the high holidays.

And they started surrounding the ghetto was military people and the black-- the SS in the black uniforms were the people that carried out all the work, but they used also military. And surrounded the whole ghetto. No one could go in or out. Except for a while, they let the Polish people go in and out, yet-- the Polish Christian people.

In and out of the ghetto?

In and out of the ghetto for a few hours. This was in the evening. We already they knew it. At that time, a friend, a Polish friend, a rare thing as it was. My brother-in-law, the husband of my younger sisters, had a friend, and he was Christian.

They were childless. He and his wife were childless, and they knew that my sister had a baby two weeks before. And they came and says, look, [? Yannick, ?] I could take your daughter with us you know. And if the whole thing blows over, you'll take her back. But in the meantime, let's save the child.

And they came in that evening with a stroller, and she just walked out with the child from the ghetto to keep the child. Because we knew if there will be a selection-- we already knew that there's going to be a selection the following day or two. And they took out the child, and next day, it was completely locked. No one could go in and out, and they started right away selection.

How did there was going to be a selection?



Well, there was a lot of things going on. They there was the-- the Germans did tell-- there was a Jewish-- bear in mind, this is a Jewish administration in the ghetto. Jews administered everything. And the guards helped those people.

They were under continuous pressure from the Germans. We need more money. We need more this. We need more that. We need 50 people to send them over here. They had to make the decisions.

It's a terrible thing to put on these people. But they took it, and somebody had to do it. And they must have found out because they gave them some information. We're going to close it off and do this and this. And rumors spread very quickly.

People watched-- people knew that the black uniforms came to town, so we knew there was going to be a selection. Because this was going on in other towns, already. Ours was a little later. That's all.

And what year was this?

1942, in September.

And how long had you known about the selection?

It would be hard to reconstruct, but I would say it could have been as much as a year. Because some of the little towns they eliminated by not-- they didn't have all the facilities to burn people yet in the beginning. So what they did, they eliminated some towns and sent the people to the bigger towns to have a more concentrated.

So when they get ready-- this is my speculation right now-- with the ovens, which they called Vernichtungslager, or places where they destroyed the people, they eliminated the people, by the time they would have them, they have an easier way to load them up on trains. So a lot of people came to Czestochowa where I was at that time.

Is that how the Jews in the ghetto expanded from 20,000 to 30,000?

Oh, sure. We got, after the War broke out-- and I don't recall what it was the second, or the first year, or when-- we got two families to take into our apartment. We had to give up rooms. And they moved in because they were chased out from other places.

One husband, wife, and their mother came from Lodz, if you heard of the name. But it's a big industrial-- second biggest town in Poland, an industrial town. And one family came from outside the ghetto area when they pushed them all in.

And this was two sons, a daughter, and a couple. They had one room. And in that room, they cooked, they ate, they sat, and everything. Conditions started getting very bad. But what is bad, by comparison, of death?

Now, you knew a year before they did the selection process. But at what point could people have left, and they didn't?

Leave were? Where to?

Well, that's what I'm asking. At what point was it too late?

There is no-- unless you were very young and you were willing to endure risk, danger, cold, whatever. And some people did. Some people went through Romania, through Romania got out to Israel. Very few, far between. Families could do nothing.

I mean, let me change this, also. A lot of people left in the first days of the War, the first year of the War--

'39?

--'39, '40 to the Russian side because the way things were in Poland-- and again, I'll give you my best description-- the

Germans occupied swiftly Poland. The Russians had an agreement with them that they'll occupy part of Poland. But the Germans advanced much further.

So where my wife was-- which is Lwów, or near Lwów, the Germans came in first. They were there for a while. And the Russians says, OK, let's go on our agreement. Let's move back. And they moved back, and the Germans moved out from Lwów.

People from the German side, fearing that they are not safe under the Germans, went to the Russian side. They had to be the daring, or it was a single person, or a husband, they would leave and then see-- call the wife later or whatever. But a number of people left that way to the Russian side.

My wife, as I was explaining to you, was already on the Russian side. But these people, after a while, starved there, and they were very disenchanted. Life was a little better on this side as far as economically. It wasn't better from freedom. There was no freedom there, either.

But relative-- the freedom over there was bad for Poles, Christian Poles, or Jewish people. On this side, the Polish people had more freedom. But the total economic situation, availability of food, was better than on the Russian side.

So after a while, people didn't know what to do. They came back. Some of them stayed behind. Some of them were taken by the Russians into depth of Russia. My wife, her mother, cousins--

Your wife or your mother?

My wife, and her mother, and her sister, and some cousins, and her aunt were taken in the middle of the night by the Russians because they were very well-off. They had the lumber mills. And her father found out that the Russians would be looking for him. He escaped.

But they didn't look only for him. They want to take the whole family-- take them all to Siberia. And so they took out all of them to near Siberia-- somewhere in Russia beyond the Europe.

And they were there. And the husband of my wife's father was sending some packages to them from the good Russian side. He was in hiding, but he had money and he could still do things.

And then he died-- and I don't remember when-- and they stayed in Russia-- starved, had very bad situation, very little food. But they survived in Russia. So a lot of people, if they escaped, they went for a short while, what they call from the frying pan in the fire.

From the frying pan into the fire.

In the fire. And from what my wife tells me, she starved more in Russia than I did here, especially before I got to camp.

In the camp? Or no, in the ghetto.

No, in the ghetto. Even in the camp, I was one of the very few lucky ones because we survived through the bakery-- another story which I didn't get to-- we survived there. And we had an ability as a family to help each other. At one point or another, somebody could help the other person. We were in a labor camp.

Well, listen, we're not there yet. I just want to go back to the day of the selection. I was just wondering--

To answer your question, there wasn't any place to run. You could run to the woods and the partisan, and some did, but mostly young people, 18, 19, 20. Families didn't do that.

You could hide. That had plenty of dangers with it, because the Poles-- while you hear of some people that hid out-- the Jewish people, more often than not, they sold them to the Germans back. They didn't sell them. They took all the

money, and then they told the Germans, they're hiding out here.

I'm sure you heard a lot of these stories. And there were some that did hide out during the whole War. So basically, we, as a family, didn't go anyplace.

Now, you knew about Hitler, of course.

Oh, sure. And was there ever any fears before '39?

Sure, sure.

Did people start leaving from the town when Hitler came to power? And was there an opportunity then, and if so, was there any discussion about that?

There was an opportunity. And one has to remember, you couldn't go to the United States because the quotas were always overloaded. You couldn't go to Israel because the English didn't let you. You went to-- some people might have gone to France. Well, France fell prey to the same thing.

Some people went anyplace, maybe, to Australia or something. But the numbers were relatively small. I don't think you could say that there were 2% of people that ran away.

Because people just didn't believe--

It's-- no. No one believed it's going to be death. People believe it will be bad. It will be discrimination. No one didn't move. When I say no one, I mean the majority just stayed where they were.

Yes, we knew. I remember, I was a little child and I would put some soot on my face and put my hair down and look like Hitler and imitated Hitler as a child. I must have been six or seven.

Yes, we knew about all of these things. My uncle came in 1938 from Germany during World War I. Again, you could go on with stories. But in World War I, he came to Germany as a prisoner of war of the Germans from the Russian side.

And the Germans put him on a farm. World War I Germans were a different breed of Germans, or the government was different. They put him to work on a farm. And he and the daughter of the farmer fell in love, and they married, eventually.

And she inherited the farm, and he became German. He felt German, acted German, and everything. But 1938, because he was Jewish, he was chased out to Poland. So he stayed with us.

So when you talk during the War, how many people we had in our apartment? Plenty. I'm sure nerves were being rattled quite often when you live that close. But as a child, I'm not sure I paid that much attention to it.

So rather than escaping, you got more people from Germany. There were hundreds of thousands of German-- called Polish but German-- consider themselves German Jews right now in Poland.

And they came back to Poland?

And they came back to Poland.

They were kicked out Germany.

They were kicked out of Germany. They had some rules. If you didn't have a father, a generation, you couldn't. Then later on, everybody went, of course, so there was no difference.

OK, so we were at the-- your niece got out, little baby got out the day before the--

The selection.

--the selection. When the gates were closed, nobody could come in or out of the ghetto.

That's correct.

Well, did your sister survive? I mean, how did she-- what happened to her when-- how old were you at the time-- 16 or 17?

I was 15.

Was there joy about this? Or I mean, what was the feel--

There was great fear, great apprehension.

No, I mean, about the child.

Oh, the child. Yeah, that was joy. But this only lasted two weeks. And two weeks later, I mean, after the birth of the baby, the selection started.

Yes. I mean, when she had to give the baby up, that--

That was the best choice under the circumstances to save-- we knew that children are not surviving. We knew that the best chance of survival are for people between 18 and 25 if they looked healthy. Because the selection was very, very selective.

Did that child survive? The baby.

That child is, right now, living in Walnut Creek. But that's another long story.

And what about your sister?

My sister is living in San Francisco. My oldest sister passed away of cancer a few-- a year and a half ago.

But the sister of--

The mother of that baby is living in San Francisco.

When did they meet again? I won't take you into the whole story now, but I'm just curious.

I'll give you a quick sketch without going into it. The child was never returned after the War. Because the War was raging, we went to concentration camp, went different places. After the War ended, my sister went back to the people to give me back the baby.

He says, well, we cannot give you back the baby because you lost your husband. We took it from your husband. And her husband lost in another incident, also, which is a different story, again. And he was executed with other-- in a group of 25 people for avenging for some other situation.

And so they didn't want to give her back the baby. But she was fighting them, and she started to look into some-- what means she could take to get back the baby, and the baby would disappear with them. Wouldn't find them. And then when things cleared up again, they came back and we-- and so it was a cat-and-mouse sort of situation.

And meantime, we couldn't stay in Poland. If you remember, there were very bad situations for Jews even after the War in Poland. People were killed in Poland by Poles. You remember, the escape from Sobibor, what was the--

We'll have to get to that. I mean, that's probably in the next sessions.

Anyhow, so we finally had to leave Poland in 1946 because we weren't going to stay in Poland. So the baby stayed with them. When we tried to make contact with them, it wasn't easy.

Then when she was 14 years old-- the child-- we made contact with her, tell her you have a Jewish mother. That, obviously, didn't do an awful lot good for the feeling of the child. But the fact happened, we let her know that she is Jewish.

She was being brought up. And then when she was about 21, maybe 22, we again made contact and started sending her things from the United States. By that time we, were in the United States.

And then my sister met her in Hungary-- her and her husband-- in Hungary. I don't remember. Could have been in the early '70s. She was already a woman, wasn't a child anymore.

Then in 1978, in spring, her husband came over for a visit to San Francisco. We sent him money. He came over, and he was overwhelmed, obviously-- the difference between living in San Francisco and the life in Poland is like day and night.

And after a few months being here and visiting me also in Ohio, where I used to live, he went back home and told her, his wife, you should go to visit the city. It's a different life. And finally, she want-- she didn't want to hear anything about anybody. How could a mother leave me and all those sorts of things.

Besides, those are my parents, the Polish people, the Christian people. She was Catholic. And she finally got talked into it and came to San Francisco for a few months visit.

And after a month, she left with the idea of, the way I see it, there's no reason for me to postpone things. I'm going to come as soon as I can-- went home to get prepared. And then they left within about a month on the pretext of going to Yugoslavia on vacation. They packed up everything in their car, and they left to the Czechoslovakian border. Instead of turning left to Yugoslavia, they turned right to Vienna.

She came into Vienna, looked up HIAS, and said, my mother is a Jewish woman, and I would like you to help me get to the United States. A little bit later, I went to visit her in Vienna. There was also a complication because she was a communist. She was a passive communist. When you want to go to college, you become a communist, or else you don't go.

And so that complicated things. We wrote letters to President Carter and all sorts of things. And I was there and cheered her up. I found some people that would look after them, also. There was a co-worker of ours that had his in-laws in Vienna [INAUDIBLE].

Anyhow, after all the letters, and writing, and clearances, in April-- I think it was April-- of '79, they came to the United States.

How long did that last step take?

It might have taken six months. I would have to reconstruct, but it was longer than it should have because having a mother here, she could have been here in a month. But the fact that she was a communist caused problems.

So she was united with her mother. How wonderful.

Yeah. And then she was united. And now, while she's still Catholic and the kids are Catholic, and so forth, they are in

very good terms. And we all talk to each other, and we all see each other.

And as a matter of fact, my grandson's going to have a bar mitzvah. And they are going to be on the bar mitzvah, the children, and so forth. The relationship is close, but it's still-- it's a different faith and different religion, and it causes-- not friction. It's just delicate situations.

Separation causes something.

Getting back to the selection, the selection simply took place where house by house, court by court, they'll close it off. And the Hauptmann, which translates into a captain, of the SS would stand and say, left, right. There were a whole bunch of soldiers, and people had to single-- in single groups, file by.

And he would show, you go to the left. You go to the right. And I don't know whether left was this or right was this, but to make whatever this would be, it would-- you either live or die.

And children were sent with their mothers unless they, for some other reason, they wanted a mother, then they would take the child and give it to somebody else. Take the child. The mother goes here. There were tragedies of all sorts.

I was not witness to this because I was in the bakery. But I survived, but the things that I heard is from sufficient people-- my brother who went through the selection. Because he was, at that time, 18 years old, very well-built. And he had almost 90% chance of survival.

Because we couldn't keep everybody in the bakery, either. How many bakers do you need to bake the breads? So we took the people that would not survive.

One of them was my sister, who took ill after the baby was given up because she was breastfeeding and then she had problems with the breasts, which is if you stop abruptly feeding. But all sorts of small things that took place.

So who was in the bakery during the selection process? You, just--

Well, from our family, there were a few families. But ours was my father, my mother, my oldest sister, my brother-in-law-- who would not have passed because he wasn't tall-- my younger sister, myself, and that's about from our family.

And who was in the-- your older brother was out there?

Older brother went facing the selection. He survived the selection. And he was taken to camp. Some people were taken to camp. Some people were taken to the small ghetto.

Because from the big ghetto, they shrunk it to a small ghetto for those that survived because they had a need for all of those people to do work. And some of the work was emptying the houses where people lived-- selling off the furniture, selling off whatever was there. So they gathered into the small part of the ghetto.

And the other people were sent off in trains already?

The trains sent-- they went to trains, went to Treblinka. To the best of my knowledge, all of these people that went went to Treblinka. The reason I say, I know they went to Treblinka. But to tell you 100% went all to Treblinka, probably I couldn't tell you right now. But the people that have survived Treblinka that were sent out were telling us that all of the people came to Treblinka.

And one of my-- on the court, there was a guy that was about two years older. He escaped from Treblinka. He came back to tell the horror stories.

A lot of people did not believe him. They refused to believe it. How could you kill thousands, and thousands, and thousands of people?

And he, in small detail, told what-- when people came to Treblinka, they selected some of them, again, out from there-- the strongest ones to work on the things that takes to take care of disposal of clothing, and jewelry, and you name it. Because people packed up the best things and took it because they went to a new place. We are going to go to another labor camp or another something like this. And so he, after a while, managed to escape.

How?

I wouldn't even dare to tell you how. Because again, I listened to the stories, but he did escape. People did escape from a lot of these camps. But they were very daring. And the percentage was very small. But he made it.

And he came to the--

He came back to the town because that's all he knew, that's all the people he knew. He came back. He was telling the story. At the beginning, he had a tough time. People were willing to kill him. How can you spread such rumors that everybody got killed? He tried to tell me, all those thousands of people are dead.

They thought they were off to labor camp or something?

That's right. You just refuse to believe it. It's hard to tell, but you refuse to believe it. They refused to believe it mostly because you know what's waiting-- expecting you.

It's just like we refuse to believe that we'll ever die. This is-- as a child, I knew I'm going to die. But I just couldn't imagine myself dead. I couldn't be dead.

At the same time, when the bombardments took place when I was in the camp and the Russians came in with airplanes bombarding, we were praying for being bombed instead of killed by the Germans. I'm not sure whether the wish was sincere or not, but that was the talk that was going on. So the selection was--

So where did your brother go?

My brother was taken to a camp, the same camp where I was later on.

How far away was this camp?

We could walk there. Might have been two miles, two and a half miles. We walked every day to the ghetto, and to the camp, to the ghetto. Until they cut off the ghetto completely, we stayed in the camp, then barracks.

See, that camp didn't have sufficient places where to house people. So took a while to build up barracks. And then they closed the camp, and everybody went into the-- they closed the ghetto, and everybody went to the camp.

OK, so your brother went off to the camp, and the rest of the family survived in the bakery.

Yeah.

How did the Germans let you be in the bakery?

That was the question that my brother-in-law questioned. He is about 12 years older than I am. And he was sitting there and says, why would they leave all leave all the bakers here? How long is that going to last? And he was afraid sooner or later they'll take the bakers. After we baked enough bread for everything, for keep the things rolling, they'll take us out.

And I told you there were groups of people, Jewish people, that walked through the houses to clear out, sort out these things, and Germans were selling it. When they were doing that work in our yard, one of the lead men of the Jewish

group people-- because they were all the SS people-- saw my brother in the bakery.

He came downstairs, and he asked him, is there any way we could go get to the small ghetto? I have gold. I will give whatever is necessary. That guy talked to the SS man. He said, he has gold. Would you take him?

Take him to where?

To the ghetto-- the whole family.

Your family-- to the ghetto?

To the little ghetto. That's the survival area. See, the big ghetto was shrunk to a little ghetto. The people that survived went to the little ghetto.

So he talked to the SS man, and they negotiated. And he says, OK, I'll take him alone. You'll give me the gold, and we'll take out this group to the ghetto.

The way they did it, we pretended to be workers cleaning up the houses. And they had a truck. They put some stuff on the truck. They put us on the truck. They took us to the ghetto.

And how cheap life was. They could have killed my brother-in-law after they took the gold. There was no guarantee. But they didn't.

The reason, I figured, they didn't because they were looking for other such deals. That Jewish person that made the deal with him wouldn't have made any more deals if he knew that they would shoot him. I mean, so they simply stood by their word because they needed more deals.

And my brother-in-law had buried either seven or nine-- there was a controversy-- of 20 gold dollar pieces. They dug it up. They gave it to the SS man, and they took him also to the ghetto. So we survived.

The following day, or second day, I don't know-- it couldn't have been more than three days-- the news came out they took all the bakers, shot them on the spot. They didn't even bother to take them to Treblinka.

They didn't need them anymore.

No. So you're talking of luck. You're talking of, a lot of people can brag how I did it all myself. I can see everything that happened to me was luck, nothing else. I mean, how closer can you get?

Obviously, you have to be thinking, not wait and be passive. And my brother wasn't one of those guys, a passive individual. But that's how you survive. So we went to the little ghetto. From the little ghetto, about half a year later-- no, it's not half a year.

These were workers-- the people who were in the little ghetto, they were--

Everybody had to do something.

So these were the young men, I guess.

The young men and a few older people that snuck in by one, just like we did.

And young women who were strong?

And young women, yeah.



But no old people or kids.

No. But there were some kids. I was a kid-- considered a kid, scrawny, little 15-year-old. But I wasn't too-- I was always thin. And there were, also, some older people.

Now, older, you don't mean 70. Older mean 45, 40. So there were some people. But 90% were young people. And a few would sneak in.

And then in that little ghetto, a lot of young people went to the partisans in the woods and to fight the Germans.

Snuck out to--

They just snuck out and they routed them near the Germans. They wanted to fight the Germans. Those were usually guys 18, 19, 20, 21, not older people.

On one particular day, a few of them came back to the ghetto to replenish money or something-- the little ghetto. They snuck in. It was also guarded, but you can get in any place. The Germans must have been notified about it. Somebody squealed because they surrounded the little ghetto. They took everybody out on the square in the little ghetto.

Those two people or three people, whatever they were-- I saw only two later-- pulled guns to shoot the Germans in the middle of the square when they gathered them up. The guns never went off, and they were shot. One of them was shot next to my feet. And the first time in my life, I saw a quivering body dying-- a young man.

And he just loaded the pistol until-- if you have never seen it, it's nothing pleasant. And that was the time I was very impressionable. And I remember it for the rest of my life.

And after that, they pulled out the best-looking 25 men, and they executed them on the spot in view of the few thousand people, a few-- maybe 1,000. I don't remember. But there was a whole square full of people. Among them was my brother-in-law, the one that survived, the one that went through because he was well-built and he also had a good chance of going through. The father of the baby was shot. This was the 3rd or 4th of January of 1943.

Then they took out a few 150 or 200 people. I wouldn't remember. And they took us to send out to Treblinka, also as a punishment. My father, I, and my mother were picked to go. So we were sent out to go to from Czestochowa to Radom. From Radom, they would get together a train sent to Treblinka.

My sisters, my brother-in-law-- the one that remained, the one that raised the gold, and so forth-- started hitting every place they could to get some help to get us out, to save us. And somehow, they succeeded because they took out like 20, 25 people from the people to bring them back to the ghetto. Like this guy was making very good boots for the soldiers. There were such.

What they explained about my father and mother, I don't know. But I wasn't on the list. But when they called my father and my mother, I just said, I'm also Libicki. I don't know why, but they let me go through, and I was safe. And that was all it takes between life and death. So again, I was saved. From there, I went back to the small ghetto.

You never found out what it was that you brother-in-law said?

All I know that I wasn't on the list and my parents were called out. And I just went with them. And they said, who are you? Because they counted everyone. I'm a Libicki. They counted-- could have been confused a little bit.

But I wasn't on the list, I know. Because I was a kid, they couldn't even come up with a silly excuse why they want me out. But I got out. And then when I came back to the little ghetto, I started going to the camp where my brother already was. And I would go in the morning and come back in the evening to the ghetto because--

You would go in the morning for what?

For to work there in the camp.

Oh, they sent you there.

Yeah, but they didn't have buildings yet. So that took another half a year before they closed the ghetto and took all the people back to the camp, which was HASSAG-- H-A-S-S-A-G. Hugo, Schneider, or [INAUDIBLE], or some such.

So for the year, you lived in the small ghetto?

No. I lived there from about the beginning of October-- because we were as bakers for about two weeks or so. And yeah, in June, actually, we went back to the camp. So no more small ghetto.

So you were working in the camp. What were your parents doing during that time? Where were you living?

Everyone had to be employed with something, whether-- for instance, when I was in the ghetto, between time they took me back to the small ghetto and between the time when they executed my brother-in-law was a period from October to first part of January. I did all sorts of job, whatever I was assigned to do by the Jewish administration. I was emptying latrines, collecting garbage. I remember. Anything they told me to do, I did.

And when you were in the small ghetto, what did your parents do? Did they have--

Same thing. They had to be assigned to something and do something. Either they worked in a kitchen or whatever jobs. The idea was, the Germans absolutely insisted that everybody has to have a job. Maybe some jobs were made to look like jobs, but there was no one without a job.

And where did you live?

In the ghetto. We had a small, two-room apartment for the whole extended family at that time-- my brother-in-law, my two brother-in-laws-- you lived wherever you got. And then the brother-in-law's sister survived, also, and she was with us. So we had 12, 15 people in various-- the two rooms were smaller than this room here.

And then things went from bad to worse when we went to the camp because all you had there is like a drawer. You slid in in a drawer.

Tell me about that when they sent you to the camp. What happened that day?

They simply announced that we are not going to be home. They took us to the camp and said, you're staying here. I remember very vividly, one of the vice presidents, a German, said that you're going to live as long as you work-- not work as long as you live. You're going to live as long as you work.

It was sort of a catchy word to everybody. You make fun of it after awhile. I mean, otherwise, you might as well kill yourself.

And he says, you're here. You're not going to go back to the ghetto-- as soon as we came in the morning. And you're going to live here as long as you work.

And this is your whole family?

The whole family was in the ghetto, which is a rare thing. Because most people were one or two out of a family. And ours was one of the-- there might have been two or three more families that survived intact in that camp.

And had you left your furniture?

Sure.

In the big ghetto

You take whatever you can. Yeah, in the big ghetto, we left the furniture, but we took with us things that we can take. From the small ghetto, I came with nothing because I went to work.

And you had nothing? What about your parents? Were they--

The same thing.

So you had absolutely nothing.

No. But you always kept valuables with you.

Carry them around?

Carry them around. Valuables means gold, or golden watch, or something. And those are things that helped us to survive.

What did your parents have with them?

Well my parents might have had pieces of gold, again, were either Russian gold pieces or something. Because that's all you had to cash things in that has a very real value in real terms. You couldn't have Deutschmarks, zlotys, they don't mean anything.

Had to be a real value. Gold always had a value. As a matter of fact, gold is the only thing that's worth anything when everything collapses.

And I had nothing. I never had anything, and I never took anything. So I came-- whatever I had on me, that's all I was. Lucky it was winter, so I had more clothing on me. It was January the 4th or the 5th.

But then I left some of it here. And then when they finally closed it, it was around June. Whatever I had on me, that's all I had. The parents had some gold with them-- always well-hidden.

Where?

You'd be surprised. Basically, they had a belt underneath the clothing. This is where you had. And they didn't have searches continuously. Sometimes, they did.

I remember that going home was boring. It was about three and a half to four miles, as I can remember. And the first time I learned The Stars and Stripes Forever, by Sousa, because we were whistling. What do you do? You work.

So the young people would whistle. As you saw Bridge on the River Kwai, that's not unnatural. That's what you do. I mean, life has to go on, or you try to make the best of it. So that's where I learned The Stars and Stripes Forever.

How did it help us to survive in the ghetto? Because we were a family, if one could do something, one did. If the other one could do, the other one did. I came in, and I was lucky enough to become a mechanic. This is at the--

At the camp, yeah. And my brother and I-- he was a mechanic, a natural, because he learned the profession. I didn't. But some friend of his noticed me, took me in with him and says, you're better off to be here rather than working outside on some other job. And I was working as a mechanic.

My brother was a mechanic already from before the war. So for instance, he would steal brass tubing from the German

supply and make carbide lamps. I'll explain to you, this is the stone that you put in water. And when it hits water, it gives out a air that is like methane. And you heat this. This used to be a lamp.

So he was making those lamps, selling to the Poles that were coming in and going home every day to the same work camp. They were employees there. They would buy it for very little money, bring bread for it.

So for this, he could trade something. So he had money at that point. At times, we sold a piece of gold and then we had, again, supplement of food besides what the Germans gave. At one point--

In the camp?

In the camp.

But who did you sell it to?

The Poles. The-- I keep using the wrong word. The Christians. See, keep in mind, whenever I say Pole, it isn't Jewish.

Here in America, you're an American, whether you Jewish, something. Over there, I don't consider myself a Pole. Jews never could consider themselves Poles.

You could sell it to the Christians? You could sell the gold to Christians?

At the reduced prices, but for the gold, they'll bring in bread or whatever. That was our supplement to survive. So we could get away without starving for quite a while. My brother was making those carbide lamps. That helped.

We even opened up a restaurant, which is a very fancy word for saying that we could buy potatoes, peel them, put something in-- whatever-- to make a soup. I would cook it on the stove where there was a blacksmith. And I would sneak in with a bucket of the potato, and water, and onion, whatever we could gather up.

And then we would sell this to other people that also had some money. So they had supplemental hot soup. It was snuck out. The thing-- you have to picture it. But it was all clandestine, but you did it.

What kind of quarters did you live in the camp?

We had barracks. And the barracks had three levels, three rows. And you put in as many people as you could squeeze in in a row. It was not individual. But it was three levels, and you just snuck-- you went into the end of the-- it was like drawers, except they didn't close. And you slept, and your neighbor was your neighbor.

How many were there?

In our barracks-- this was the barracks from the mechanics. That was a privileged barrack with 120 people. Small barrack-- wasn't anything big. And the others had more like 500 to 600 people in it. There were a total of about 7,000 to 8,000 Jewish people in those camps.

Was it surrounded by barbed wire?

Barbed wire.

You weren't allowed to go out?

Yeah, but you could have relatively free access in and out from the barracks to the plant, relatively. There were always soldiers standing, but they didn't check you. You could mill in and out, except during the working hours.

They'd probably check you. Where are you going? You're supposed to be working. You can't go back in. And unless

you had some excuse, you couldn't get into the barracks.

Unless you were, like I was for a while, an orderly in the barracks just to keep clean, sweep up. And I had free access in and out because of that. We try to take advantage to see what we can do to survive, again. And that's how I could come in and take buckets of cooked soup. And in the barracks, people would come, and they would buy it. So we replenish some money.

And you literally did-- if you had some ingenuity to do something, you did it. My mother and my sisters worked in a part where they were making bullets. Anti aircraft bullets. Those bullets had to be coated with a paint, and then they were baked going through an oven.

Well, they opened up a panel in that oven, and that was a baking oven. So they would bake their things. Goods-- if you could buy flour, you could get an egg, and you bake something. And you sell it-- a cookie or something, whatever you made. Because no one saw a cookie, so whatever you made, it was value for your next day's living.

I once was taking those cookies to the barracks, from the factory area to the barracks. And one of the guards stopped me. He was a Ukrainian. And he asked me what I have there. And I was always prepared with a cockeyed sort of explanation to lie. Because if I tell them, we bake it, my mother would be implicated and my sisters.

So as soon as he stopped me, I said, here is the man. What did you do? Where is he? Like somebody gave me-- says he promised me a few cookies if I take it over from here to there. And I was willing to do it. I'm hungry.

And he beat me with a club. Until he took me to the guardhouse-- I don't know, was maybe 5 minutes-- he kept hitting me was the club of the rifle. By the time I came to the guard, I was insensitive to hitting or beat because you didn't feel it after a while.

And they got me in and started hitting me in the face to tell them where I got those cookies. And I kept repeating the same story. There's no way I could have changed my story.

And I remember this very vividly that I wondered why they didn't hit me from the other side to balance it. Because I was bleeding, and they kept hitting the same side.

And after I was-- and again, again, my sisters and my brother start to intervening, who knows the guards people? And there was always somebody that knew somebody that could intervene. And someone intervened on my behalf. And since they couldn't get anything out of me, and they wouldn't have-- killed me or not, I wouldn't have talked.

And they took me into a bathroom to wash myself off because I was bleeding all over. And I washed up and stopped bleeding from my nose and every place. I was released back to the camp. So there were a lot of such things.

I don't remember what for, but my brother got 50 lashes once. He couldn't stand for two or three days. I mean, they were cut. Have you ever seen on film where they have those-- he couldn't move. Terrible, terrible. I don't know what for. He could have overslept or-- you don't know. I don't remember, anymore.

So this was life. Life over there was not secure at all. Any guard could have shot any prisoner without having to make any explanations.

One incident, I remember, one guard was taking practice shooting in a men's room. The heads were sticking out. He just shot somebody sitting on the bathroom. It was a big joke. Yeah. But you could distance. He just really lined up his rifle and thought it's fun.

A little story-- that guy that took me, his name was [? Jusik ?] in Ukrainian. We'll call him Joe for the sake of what happened. In 17th of January, we were freed by the Russians.

The first few days, the Russians could do anything they want to the Germans, like to the first two days, killing them or

whatever. Then the Russians put a stop on it. The Russians couldn't do anything to the Germans. They had to take them as prisoners.

This was 1940--

--5. January 17, 1945. But the prisoners from camp that they released, they could do anything they wanted. They caught that guy that Joe, that hit me at that time. And people knew about the beating that I got from-- took me with the club and he hit me over the head until I got to the guardhouse. That's about the cookies.

And some people got hold of me he says, we found Joe. And all I could think of my-- this is my chance to kill the guy. And I was already prepared. And the closer I went I said, how can I kill a guy? I cannot kill a guy. But they expected me to. Everybody was egging me on to kill him.

And I came in the place where he was standing. This was about three or four days after the liberation. He had a heavy beard. He looked like hell, was dirty, already beaten up by other people.

And I approached him. And the closer I came, the worse I felt. And I felt very sick. And I went over and I pushed him out and away.

And for years, I felt that I'm weak that I couldn't have killed him. I understood later on, I was not a murderer. I couldn't murder a person, no matter what.

But it took me years before I overcame the thought that I'm not weak. I'm just maybe stronger than somebody else. Not a murderer.

What was the response of the people watching you when you just pushed him away?

I don't remember. I ran away. I don't remember. I know I didn't feel good. Here, I had people watching me. I couldn't do it. I felt sick to my stomach, and I ran away, I guess. I just gave him a push, and I ran away.

What about the-- Sorry. Go on.

That's all right. Everybody's not a murderer. That's the whole story.

What about the guy who whipped your brother? Did somebody--

This wasn't a guard house. They simply took him to a guard house, and he wouldn't even know who-- you stripped the person, and then two guys were line up. And he wouldn't know.

But this guy arrested me. This guy did directly something to me, and he didn't give me a chance. I wanted to show him where the guy is, and he started to hit me with the club over the head. And you keep hitting a guy like this, by the time I got to the guardhouse, I didn't feel anything. I was oblivious anymore to beating.

The only thing I remember when they started hitting me on the face and the guard house, I couldn't understand why they didn't do it on the other side. Not that it would have helped, but at that time, I thought it would help if they hit me from the other side. Those are little things that you never forget. It's little.

Were there very many guards who were killed that time?

I'm sorry?

Were there very many guards that the people-- the prisoners-- killed?

I don't think so because most of them ran away. The reason this camp survived-- the reason as many people survived in

this camp as they did is because the offensive started on the other side of the Old Warsaw, they called it, on the river Vistula where they stopped the Russians. They started offensive on the 15th of January.

And this was on a Monday. And by noon, some tanks-- and this was by design. The Russians did that. They broke through with some tanks inside the territory where the Germans were still to create some sort of a scare for the Germans that the Russians are already here.

They came into our town. And this one must have been about 100 or better miles inwards. But they broke through with three tanks. They were killed, the Russians, and the tanks were disabled and burned. But they created enough of an uproar for the Germans that they started packing and leaving.

They were trying to get us to go on trains. They said, we will kill everybody who doesn't go on a train. We'll stay here, we'll explode, and we'll shoot them, and so forth. But they didn't have a chance to do anything.

But among the people that they took out was my oldest brother-- my older brother. And he never returned. He was gone, pushed from camp to camp, and eventually he died walking between camps. He was starving, and he couldn't take it anymore. He walked out, and they shot him. I talked to a man that was working with him after the War.

But the rest of the family decided, we are not going to go anyplace. And the reason he went because his department-- that was the group of mechanics-- they wanted to get out. So they forced them to go. I snuck out.

Whether I snuck out by consciously-- my sister tells me that I went to get myself to another cabinet somewhere. We were all these cubbyholes where we could hide things. And I went to get a pair of socks, she says, but I never went back because she says, don't go back. They'll take you out.

He left. He never came back. And the rest of the family survived because the following evening around midnight, Tuesday evening, 16th-- the night of the 16th and the 17th-- the Germans left already the guardhouse.

And a few young people got in, got the rifles, came back to the places where people were congregating-- hiding or worrying what's going to happen next-- and in Polish said, Jews, we are free. The Germans have left. They started shooting the rifles up in the air.

That's another moment which you remember all your life.

Yes. But this was just a day and a half after your brother was--

That's right. That's right. He left at noon, Monday, and Tuesday midnight, Tuesday, they were ready. We were free. And didn't know if-- France had a way of going back and forth. But we were lucky they didn't come back, the Germans.

And the next thing I remember, all of us walking out from the camp. That was my exodus. I always associate this was an exodus, I mean, like from Egypt.

We were marching-- I don't know how many people. Not in any organized way-- abreast, walking through the gate. This is January, cold, Polish winter. I remember the snow squeaking under our feet. But I don't think I knew what cold is. We were just so elated to leave that nothing mattered.

From there, if I can--

Excuse me. It's 2:30.

I don't think-- continue up at your convenience.

OK. Do you want me to have another introduction or just continue?

No, no, no. Just pick it up.

OK. Now, we were talking about the camp. When did you go into the camp?

I started working there the first part of January, either the 3rd, or the 4th, or the 5th, or something like this, of 1943. But I was locked up in the camp in the summer, the best of my recollection, June of '43.

Of '43.

And that means locked up, not going back anymore to the small ghetto.

June of '43.

Yeah.

And then you were freed--

The 17th of January, 1945. Actually, it was the 16th or the 17th. It was about midnight between the two dates. Right after midnight, we walked out of the camp.

So it's about 18 months.

Locked up, yes. But I was working in this camp, for all practical purposes, like two years here.

I feel so-- I mean, I feel so ironic that you lost your brother just a day and a half before everyone was free. And also, I'm wondering-- your sister whose husband was shot. Tell me how people reacted to those things at that time? I know that your feelings must deaden.

Feelings do deaden. You don't have the same reaction. I was often thought about it that we live in a period when something strange happens to us-- strange, I mean, catastrophic of any sort-- we fall apart. I think people, 200 years ago, when a loss of a child was an everyday sort of situation because you had 10 children because you lost five of them before they grew up. People were more hardened.

We just-- and I think we were hardened, also, in camp. You took it differently. You cried. You were sad. You were upset. Everything ended for you, but you go on.

I believe that today because we expect everything to fall in a certain pattern, everything is normal. And when something big happens to us unpleasant, we fall-- tend to be more falling apart.

Fall apart.

I remember in Poland as a child, happened to be a Jewish poet-- but he wrote in Polish. He was assimilated-- that, I'll try to translate as good as I can, if you ever were once made out of steel, you never break again. What he meant, if you were hardened, you don't break that easily.

But I'm not sure this is necessarily true the further you go away from those bad happenings. You never get used to tsuris or to problems, or to a situation where you say, well, it's OK. The only thing is I probably try to rationalize that randomness exists in life.

We will have to accept things as they are. But you never accept when it happens to you. It's easier to explain to somebody else than accept yourself. The death of my sister hit me very hard when she died of cancer.

That was just recently.



That was a year and a half ago. We were very close.

This is your older sister.

Yeah. That's the oldest, yeah.

And you had survived--

She was really almost like a mother to the family, to the whole family. She always was. A very unusual person.

What about your mother? Why was your sister the mother?

She was more of person-- my mother was more in a feminine way-- and I don't mean to discriminate, but the feminine way as we understand it, more taking care of kitchen, and cleaning, and things like this. The sister was an entrepreneur, also. Ever since she was seven years old, she helped my father in the business. And she always continued. And she more of a person of take charge.

Your sister was like her grandmother-- your mother's mother.

Yeah, that's right. Exactly. And just like my son would be more like my grandfather-- one of my sons.

Oh, Really?

Yeah.

Kind of laid back?

Laid back. An awfully dear person, an awfully good person. He'll literally give away the shirt off his back and think nothing of it.

But he's not an entrepreneurial type. doesn't pretend to be. Material things don't mean that much to him. At the same time, he is willing to give anything away if somebody needs it, to his own detriment at times.

So he doesn't know how to take care of himself, do you think?

He knows how to take care of himself. He just-- it's the nature of the individual. He just-- I don't want to criticize it because you read about people like this in books of heroes. That's what it's about.

But he's, to a great extent, like my grandfather used to be. He also used to be the same thing. Anything anybody wanted from you, you could get.

The same name, did you say?

No, no.

So your sister was the entrepreneur of the family and the nurturer--

She was the godmother of the whole family, extended family.

I was going to ask you, in the camp, who was the strongest person of the family. Would it have been your sister?

Would have been my sister. One incident, every so often they would take a number of people-- take them out, either shoot them or take them some other place. And there was an incident where they pushed some people, a bunch of women, into a special room because they were going to take them out.

And she all of a sudden felt, this is happening to her. And there was a guard at the door. And she knocked him over-- hit him, knocked him over. She got bruised head from hitting. And the family, my mother, my sister, and a few others of the family broke through and they ran out, and they saved themselves. She did a lot of these things.

When was this? Was this--

In the camp.

In the camp.

Yeah. She knocked the guard down?

She knocked the guard down.

And got away with it?

There was a lot of commotion there. And you wouldn't have known who did it, but she felt something happening. And they did. They took out some people, and they had them executed. So she did a lot of those things. Her husband was the one that got the gold to get us out. So she was always looking out for the family.

And did that-- she survived, and did her husband-- no, her husband--

Yeah, survived.

He survived.

That's the oldest. He's the one that survived. That's the one that was in the bakery with us.

Right, yes.

The one that did get killed went through the selection process and survived.

And then your brother and your older brother.

Yeah. So tell me about the roles, then. Your sister was the kind of matriarch.

She was a matriarch of the family.

She was a strong one. What about your father? How did he survive in the camp?

My father, as you remember I told you, in 1940 took ill with the seizures. He never was the same person he was before the War. He was an entrepreneurial-- very strong. Very strong-willed individual.

While he still might have been strong-willed, he was not well anymore. He survived the War. And after the War, he was still doing a lot of things. And because we got back a bakery after the War from some other debts, and he was still an entrepreneur until we came to Germany in 1946.

'47, he started declining. '48, he hardly could see from the pressure of the tumor and some cells in the eyes got killed. And so he became aged at the age of 48, 49.

But in the camp, was he a strong person in the camp?

No, no, no. It wasn't his environment. The amount of work that he had to put out-- he was never a well person. He was

an entrepreneurial. He had some bronchitis condition.

So we always had to look out that he doesn't get abused. And even then, he was once taken out to be shot, and we got him out. Again, my oldest sister--

How?

You pull so many strings. I, again, I was a child. And I was more passive with a lot of things. My sister, she went to this foreman, and she promised this, and she ran around, whatever. And they finally pulled him out from the group that got killed the following day.

A mother of mine-- what they did, they pulled out some of the older people. They took another little, mini selection and pulled out all the old people. My father looked old. My mother was older, but she didn't look old. My father, after he got ill that night, just started aging.

And he was pulled out. A mother of my best friend was also pulled out. She was shot. My father was taken out. And we survived the war, except for my brother.

But tell me about the feelings, now? This is difficult, but I'm interested in knowing. After, first of all, your brother-in-law, after he was shot, I mean--

It was a big tragedy. It was-- we all were broken without any question. I started explaining how feelings dull. Doesn't mean that we were dull.

Feeling dulls more if you're not touched. But yourself, you still have the same traumatic experience. You still feel depressed. And it was difficult.

But the pressure of survival starts taking precedent much quicker. You're familiar-- do you know psychology? Familiar with the Maslow's hierarchy of needs? That's probably as good a place to start as any.

In my own mind, I added a lower level to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Before the food is instant, immediate, or imminent life danger is below that. You're not hungry. You're not cold.

When there is an imminent danger of survival, other things will get blotted out. So the food is one level higher. But I know normal life in American industry, you don't have to deal with that thing. You're dealing with the shelter and all the other things of hierarchy of needs.

So the best I can describe to you what I'm saying, what's happening when something great-- something terrible happens to you is that you deal with it. It is no less painful. But it's just like one pain blocks out another pain. And the need for continuous alertness to watch out for your life, the continuous vigilance of how you survive the next day erases some of the pain.

And that's basically how life is. It's much easier to commit suicide when everything goes well. Yes, it is. We didn't have many suicides in the concentration camp. This was the amazing and alarming thing.

Because survival doesn't let you go and commit suicide. When everything goes well and you have nothing to look forward to, then you commit suicide. We had a lot to look forward to-- survival. That takes such a precedent.

And that's the mystery of life. That's the mystery of the human being more than any other animal. But even an animal-- we are saying of some animals will bite of their own foot if they're trapped in a trap to survive. That's what life is.

We just hope that most of us are built in a way that we wouldn't sacrifice somebody's foot for our survival. That's maybe what civilization is supposed to bring to us. It's questionable. But that's what we hope for.

Interesting.

So the feelings aren't completely different to my own way of thinking. I have several things which are call them hang ups, call them lessons, call them whatever you want to. I will not throw out food. And even so, it's not a question of us having the food right now financially or materially. We'll get guests, and we try to prepare just enough what they eat.

And I very often explain-- like for instance, we buy bagels, and we freeze them. We take out the bagels and warm them up. I'll usually ask people, how many will you eat?

It sounds a little funny to people that have never experienced it. And I'll take out exactly so we don't throw anything out. That's one hang up.

The other one is not as much a hang up. But every so often when things go bad, I say, I had worse and I survived it. And I'm not going to worry about. I don't mean loss of life. I'm talking things that happened to you, whether I lost this, or didn't make this, or didn't get the promotion.

That must bring you back to some kind of perspective.

That's exactly what it is. The perspective is a lot different for me than it is for people that have never experienced this. The appreciation of things-- I think I do appreciate more things than normal people do. I don't take things for granted. Those are the different ways by which life has taught me.

I think-- and this can go both ways. I understand that Holocaust has made animals of people and built others closer to an angelic stage. I did not become an animal, which was immediately shown right after the Russians freed us.

I think I have a better appreciation of people. As a matter of fact, I retired early, and most of my work goes into different things in the community. I always was involved in the community when I was working. And I'm still, right now, involved in many things, so my day is pretty well filled with those things that I do.

And you took an early retirement so that you would have time to do these things?

I couldn't say directly that. But part of it was that. I took early retirement, number one, my kids all went to college, got all the degrees that they can get. They all have doctorates. And they all make a living. They are on their own. I had an opportunity to, because of the company--