

--make sure-- you're going to ask me questions--

Oh, yeah.

--so that I can--

I'm going to start out.

Yes.

And then it's my job to ask you questions, so don't worry.

Mhm.

And also if I--

If I kind of get stuck, you will--

Absolutely. But also, feel free. You can be talking on a subject, and maybe if something else occurs to you, go right onto that, so you won't lose it.

Mhm.

OK, Sandra.

I'm Sandra Bendayan. I'm here interviewing Anna Cooper for the Holocaust Oral History Project. Today is the 31st of August, 1995. And John Grant is our producer.

Would you start please, Anna, by introducing yourself, and telling if your name at birth was different than it is now, and where and when you were born.

Mhm. My name is Anna Cooper. And my maiden name, before-- I was born Chana Kopec-- C-H-A-N-A K-O-P-E-C, with a little hyphen on top, which made the C a "tch" sound. I was born in Goworowo, Poland, in February 1937.

February what?

Well, it's really not clear. I mean, on my documents I have it as February 1, but I really haven't-- it was sort of like Tu BiShvat time, and that's how they kept track of when someone was born.

I see. So it was more by the oral tradition rather than--

Mhm.

--a fixed date entered in the city hall or something.

Right. Yeah, they probably went to City Hall at some other time, when they had time to register. I was born at home, so there wasn't this formal kind of a birth date.

And what happened was that, later on when I came back from the orphanage, they made me two years younger, because I hadn't had any schooling at all and they thought it'd be a better idea to put me down as two years younger so I would have two years to start-- or head start on schooling. And they did the same thing with my brother.

Was there any problem about that? I mean, did you look older than your age?

No, I never did. I really never did. And it kind of helped me, especially when I came to the United States and had two more years on my side [LAUGH] to do the things I wanted to do. And I took advantage of it [LAUGH] and--

In what way?

Well, in a way that I always felt I was two years younger and had two more years to [LAUGH] fool around and enjoy life. [LAUGH]

And so now what do you take as your birth date?

Well, right now my birth date is September-- I mean, February 1, 1939. But I was actually--

You were actually born in '37.

Yes.

But currently you go as if you were born in '39.

I go-- yes. Yes, I do. That's how my birth certificate is now. When I became a citizen, that's how it stayed.

What were your parents' names?

My father's name was Leib, and my mother's name was Ita. And we called him Leo, later on. And my mother died early, before we came here.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have. I have one brother, and he lives in Kansas City right now.

And what's his name?

His name is Abe-- was Abraham.

Is he older or younger?

He's three years older.

And so this town you lived in-- where in Poland is it?

It's not far from Warsaw, 40 kilometers from Warsaw. It was named Goworowo. And my father was from R<sup>3</sup>zan. And they were very close villages, next to each other. And they met through a cousin.

And then, when my mother and my father married, my father's brother fell in love with my mother's sister. So they ended up marrying, too. And then we had two brothers who married two sisters.

And the family was very close. And we always stayed together, throughout the war, and helped each other out.

And this-- you say "a village." Was it like a farming village?

It was a small, very, very small town, like. And they had little shops and bakeries, and a tailor and shoemaker and little shops. And that's what the Jewish people did.

My father was a merchant. He was a wheat merchant-- all sorts of corn, rye, wheat, barley. That's what he dealt with.

And he was doing wholesaling.

And they also had a flour mill in Goworowo. And I think they may have had one in RÃ³zan. I'm not quite sure. The grandfather had one.

And they would ship carloads all over. They would get them from the farmers and sell them wholesale to the big cities.

And your mother-- was she at home with the children?

Yes. Yeah, she was at home with the children.

And what about your home? Did you live in the Jewish quarter-- Jewish section?

Oh, yeah. All the Jews lived in the Jewish section, I guess. And was one part of town where all the Jewish people lived. And most of the non-Jews lived on the farms or a little further away.

Did you own your home?

I don't know. I really don't know that.

Do you have any memories of that home?

Oh, no.

No.

No.

So you don't know how many rooms it might have had?

No, I only know that my father had the mill, and he had a warehouse-- like a silo, I guess-- where he kept the corn and where he kept all the stuff before they would ship it to places. My father always talked about that.

Was your family religious?

Pretty much so. They were traditional. They kept the Sabbath. They kept kosher. My father always wore a hat, in the old country.

My grandfather took a picture-- and that was sort of a very unreligious thing to do-- for a passport. He really didn't want to do it, and he was almost forced to take the picture for the passport.

What about your grandparents? Did they live in the same town?

No, my grandparents lived in RÃ³zan.

All four of them?

No-- my father's side.

Your father's side.

My father's side. They lived in RÃ³zan. And they had several children who were living there. They had two daughters who lived there.

Their younger son, his name was [NON-ENGLISH]. We called him Harry, my Uncle Harry. He actually was enlisted in the army, just as the war broke out. And he helped us all, because he was in the army. Somehow he was able to do a lot for the family.

Do you remember the names of those grandparents?

My grandfather on my father's side was Yakov. And there's a Yakov in each family. [LAUGH] And my grandma was Bluma Rivka, and she survived the war and went to Israel and lived out her life there.

And what about your mother's side?

My mother's father had died earlier on. And my mother's mother, her name was Gisa. ? And she lived with us. She lived with my mother and my father. She helped my mother take care of us, and she was a very loving and caring woman.

And what was her last name?

Her last name was [? Sieniak. ?]

[? Sieniak. ?]

Yeah.

OK. And did you or your family have any doings or social relationships with the people in the town who were not Jewish?

Yes, my father had dealings with some of the merchants. He would sell them his products, and they were always very cordial, and they had a fairly nice relationship going. There was a sense that everybody was different, but it seemed like everybody respected the other person because they had to deal with them on a business level. And they all got along pretty well.

Were you aware or do you remember any instances of antisemitism before Hitler?

Well, I wasn't aware, and I don't know, but there were some things. It seemed, from what my aunt was telling me, that things were getting better. Because for many years, Jewish kids could not go to school-- to public school. And by the time my aunt started going to school, she was the first one in the family to attend public school and she went up to eighth grade and she was an honor student and was very accepted among the gentiles. Although her close friends were Jews, she was cordial with the non-Jewish kids in the classes.

And which aunt is this?

This is my aunt Faye-- Fayge.

Fayge? And what's her last name? Well, her last name was also Kopec, because she had married my Uncle Moishe. And of course, later on, she remarried, when--

Of course, you were very tiny when war broke out. I suppose you-- do you have-- you wouldn't have any memories--

No, I don't have memories, but my father used to tell me stories. Whether I wanted to hear them or not, he always had the stories that he would like to tell. And he told me the story of how, when the war first broke out, the Jews were gathered into the largest synagogue in the village, and they were all there and didn't know what was going to happen. It was very crowded in there. And they stayed in there for-- I don't know how long, really, but they stayed in there.

And the kids were crying, and the older people were crying, and it was quite uncomfortable. And the Germans surrounded the shul. And then the Germans set fire to the shul, as the people were in there. And people had fled the shul.

And by the time they turned around, the whole city was on fire. They had set fire to everything. And then they were chased onto a field, and they spent some time in the field. And a lot of people just died, because there was no food and nothing to eat.

And they spent a couple of days in the field. And then the Germans were shooting at random at people. If somebody got out of line, they would shoot at them and kill them. And my aunt was telling me that, at one point, one of her friends and the girl's mother had gone to get some water, and Germans shot them as they were going to get some water.

And then, after they were in the field, they somehow escaped back to the village. And my aunt went to these people who had a grocery store and who were Polish. And we had good relations with them. They hid us in their basement for about two days. And they gave us food and took care of us.

And then the Polish police came and they said, you'll have to leave. You can't stay here. Everybody has to go.

So my family went back to their house-- my father's house. And it was a brick house. And he said that what happened was, they went down to the basement and they dug up some of the stuff that they had hidden, before. They had dug up some silverware and some clothing and a siddur and a silver goblet-- wine goblet-- and some quilts. They had two quilts, bed covers, that my mom and dad had gotten as a wedding gift.

So they had dug those up and some other things that they had. And my father also dug up his bookkeeping book that he had kept. So he had all these things with him and made a bundle. And we went out into the field at night. We crossed a forest, in the middle of the night.

And the Germans just wanted to chase us out and take us wherever they were going. And we decided to deviate from where they were going, because we didn't know what they were going to do with us. So we deviated and went our own way. We decided to-- they were going westward, and we decided to go east towards the Russian border.

So we went through the Russian border at night. My father put me in a burlap sack and carried me on his back. He gave me some brandy-- put some brandy on a wet handkerchief and let me suck on it, so that I wouldn't cry and make any noise.

They did the same thing with my aunt's little child. She had about a six-month-old child. His name was Yiddle. And my other cousin's name was Mendel. And Mendel was about four years old.

And my aunt was with us. Her husband had gone to Warsaw, the week before, to collect some money for some kind of a deal that they had-- business that they had going. So he wasn't with us. And we had lost track of where he was.

And we ended up-- oh-- and before this, when we went back to the house, after we were at the Polish lady's place, we decided to spend the Sabbath there. And we thought maybe my uncle was going to come back. So if we spend the Sabbath there and he comes back, then we could be together.

My aunt, at that time, decided that there was nothing in the house, so she went to buy a loaf of bread. And as she went to get a loaf of bread, the bombs were all over. The airplanes were coming down like birds, blackbirds, in the sky, and bombs were all over. And the people were just falling, left and right.

And she was holding onto that bread and saw a man with a woman. The man was in the wagon, and the woman was walking beside him. And the woman got hit by a bomb, and she just fell down. He didn't even look to see if she was alive or dead. He just went right ahead and went on.

My aunt finally got back with her bread. And she was happy to feed us [LAUGH] some bread.

And then, going back to where we were, in the forest, walking in the forest-- my mom and my aunt and my grandma on my mother's side were walking together, and my aunt was holding the baby. And my mother was talking to my aunt.

And my mother said to my aunt, I know that you will survive, but I may not survive. So I want you to take care of my children. [CRYING] I want you to promise me that you will take care of them. [SOBBING]

So aunt-- my aunt did. She promised her she would take care of her children-- and she did. [CRYING]

Do you have any sense why your mother thought she might not survive and your aunt would?

Well, my mother wasn't very healthy. She had medical problems, at the time.

Do you feel open to saying what her problems were?

Well, she had a heart condition. She had a rheumatic heart. So her heart was not working that well. She was very weak and had a heart condition.

So she felt the strain alone might not--

Yeah. Right.

So hard to move.

Yes. And my grandfather was walking with my big cousin, Mendel, and my father was walking with me, in a burlap sack on the back, and my brother at one side, and a bundle in his hands on the other side. And there were 10 of us, all together, at that time. And we stuck together.

And we ended up at this farm, in this-- I guess it was a city-- where we knew these people who we dealt with-- had business dealings with. And we ended up with them, and we stayed with them for a little while, thinking maybe my uncle would come there. And--

Do you remember the names of those people?

No. No. I just know that they were very helpful, in taking us in and helping us out.

At risk to their own lives--

Yes. Yes. But they couldn't keep us very long. And they gave us a wagon. They gave us a wagon, and they let us-- you know, helped us go. And we ended up taking--

I think we ended up taking a train to Bialystok. And on that train to Bialystok-- I think-- I'm not sure, but I have to check my notes. I think my uncle met us, at this point when we were at these people's farm.

Did you ever know how he knew to go there?

I was told, but, right now, I can't remember.

You said you were 10. I was wondering who all the people were. There were 4 of your family--

There were 4--

--3 in Fayge's family--

--yes.

--your grandmother--

Yeah, and my grandfather.

OK, so that's 9.

Yeah. And my other grandmother, on my mother's side.

Oh, your other grandmother, too.

Yes. And then, when we were on the way to Bialystok, we were in these freight trains, I guess. And we ended up there, because we just want to get away from the Germans.

So we were in this train, and we were in that train for, like, three days. And my aunt had just finished weaning her baby, who was about six months old or somewhere around there-- six or eight months old. She had just finished weaning him. Because she felt that she wasn't getting enough food, on her own, to feed him any more. So if she would wean him, then he could eat on his own and be independent of her.

But when they were in the train, there was no food, and he was very dehydrated. And when they came to where they came-- they came to-- they came to a place-- I think it was called [? Liegnitz. ?] It was a resort town, outside of Bialystok, I think. And because it was a resort town, it was very nice, but it was getting to be winter and it was very cold and there was no heating facilities there.

So we were in there, and she was holding her baby. And the baby died in her arms. She was watching it. And the last thing he said was "Mama." And she was watching him, as he died in her arms, feeling very helpless.

And then, at that point, the family was together, but my father had gotten sick. He had encephalitis. And there was no way to-- there was no medicine. There was nothing that he could get. And he was getting worse, and he looked like he was going to die.

And the doctor said, if we don't get the prescription, he would just die. So my uncle Moishe went on a train to wherever the big city was. I think it was Bialystok. I'm not sure.

And he didn't have money for a ticket, so he rode outside on the train. And it was bitter cold, and his fingers almost froze. He had no gloves-- held on to the bar and somehow made it and got there and got back with the medicine. And that's how my father was able to survive, at that time.

Now, when your family dug up some of their valuables, back in Poland, I presume they were hoping to sell them or--

Yes. Yes.

--get some money, that way.

They did that. They did that. And that's one of the ways that they also survived, having all these things that they had. They would sell, slowly, something here, something there. And that helped them a lot.

And in fact, my aunt used that money to buy-- what happened was, they would bring a shipment of, let's say, pots, and people needed pots. So you--

Who would bring a shipment--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

The people who were in charge-- I guess, the Russian authorities-- would bring a shipment of pots. And everybody was allocated a certain amount of pots. And if you got in line first, you could say you're getting a pot for this one and this

one and that one. And my aunt would get about five pots, and then she would sell those pots for double of what she paid for, later on, when there were no pots available.

And she would do the same thing with other things. She would get in line and get whatever there was and get as many as she could and then sell it whenever it was no longer available. And she ended up with a storehouse of stuff that helped a lot to keep the family going. But then they chased us out of there, and we had to go.

Was this in Bialystok, or--

This was in Ignatki, I believe. And then--

I wanted to just ask you one thing-- that, when your father was telling you about being locked in the synagogue, do you know how it was that he escaped the burning synagogue-- your whole family?

Well, I think the synagogue was burning, so it was easy to get out, you know, when the smoke and fire was all over. And--

You mean, They ran through the flames?

I don't think they ran through the flames. They found place how to get out. The whole synagogue wasn't burning right away. But--

And was this right in 1939--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah, that was in 1939.

So it was in '39 that you all fled Poland.

Mhm. Yes. Yes.

Do you remember the name of the Polish family that first took you in for a few days, there?

No.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

No.

It wasn't mentioned to me by name, just -- maybe it was, but I don't remember.

And so I'm assuming that food was very hard to come by, on this whole trip that you were taking--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Mhm. Yeah. And bread was the most valuable possession one could have. And then--

Do you know whether the Germans were already trying to take the townspeople off to camps and sending them off on trains?

Well, we heard stories, but we didn't really know. We just heard stories that things were very bad in Warsaw, but we didn't really know. It didn't seem-- it couldn't be that bad. Nobody knew that it could possibly be the way it was. Nobody could imagine that it could be that bad.



But we had-- some of the relatives were in Warsaw. My aunt had a brother and his wife. And I'm not sure if they had kids. But they were in Warsaw, and they got killed. They didn't survive. We had other relatives there who also didn't survive.

Do you remember any of these names that you could say, who didn't survive?

Well, my Uncle [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH]? I think that was his name. I don't know. I don't know him, so--

It's OK.

I never knew him.

OK, so now you're having to leave this--

Yeah, we had to leave, because the Russians wanted us to become citizens of the Soviet Union, and we didn't want to be citizens because we knew that, once we would become citizens, we could never leave. And we didn't want to commit ourselves to that. So we didn't.

And because we didn't take Russian citizenship, they sent us off to Komi ASSR, which is pretty far up north, west of the Urals. And it's a very cold place. And that's where we lived for a while. My mother died there.

What did your mother die of?

Well, again, she had the heart condition. And there was no medicine, and she didn't have food-- proper nourishment. And she died, I guess, in 1943.

All of you were sent to this town? Your whole family?

It wasn't a town. It was sort of a village.

Is this the equivalent of Siberia?

Yeah, it is, but it's west of the Urals. And it's pretty cold up there.

Were you grandparents along, still?

Yeah, my grandparents were there, too. And actually my aunts and my uncles were there, too. My Uncle Sholem-- no, my Uncle Sholem was there, and my Aunt [? Molly ?] and--

Are they married, those two?

Yeah, they got married around that time. They were--

And who-- Sholem-- is that a brother to one of your parents? Or--

That's my father-- no-- my Aunt [? Molly's ?] my father's sister. And she's the only survivor, right now, from my father's family. And her husband just died, last year.

Do you remember any other aunts--

My aunt Rachel and her husband, Israel.

And how were they related?

Also my father's sister. She was my father's sister. And there was another brother that my father had, and he died, I think, in the concentration camp.

Do you remember his name?

No, I don't remember his name.

Did any of those other aunts and uncles have children?

Yes-- not at that time, no. In fact, my-- well, after my mother died, my father was taken to a labor camp. And I think he was in Arkhangelsk. And my Uncle Sam went-- was with him and, I think, my uncle Sholem. And I think my uncle Israel was there, too. I'm not sure. But I know my uncle Sholem was there, and the two of them were living through a lot of difficult times. They fed them soup, a very thin soup, and a piece of bread, and that's all they ate. And they worked very hard.

What kind of work were they doing?

They were-- they were-- I did know, at one time, what they were doing. They were assisting the front. They were doing some stuff to help the front-- to fight the war-- some kind of work-- right now, it escapes me.

Do you know what their living conditions were like?

They lived in barracks. And they were--lice infested. And they had no shoes. They would wrap their feet in cloth, so their feet wouldn't freeze. And--

There was no boots?

There were-- no. And my Uncle Sholem-- Sam-- was a shoemaker, and he was able to get some leather and make shoes for them-- or fix shoes. And that's how he helped a lot, because he was able to make shoes or fix shoes that people needed, after he would finish a whole day's work.

And my father almost died there. There was one point where he said his bones were sticking out. When he sat down, it hurt to sit, because there was nothing there to sit on.

And they were very crowded, and it was very cold and just very difficult. And the work was very hard. They worked from 6:00 in the morning till 6:00 at night. And they were-- pretty harsh situation.

Did they ever have any time off?

No. No time off. They worked seven days a week.

Do you know what-- the village that you were settled in-- what was that like?

Well, the people in the village were Komis. They--

What's that?

They were sort of like Eskimos. They lived in these little huts. And they were very friendly. They spoke Komish, and they taught me Komish.

And they were very friendly. I still know how to count in Komish. [LAUGH]

I was going to ask if you know remember any of the language.

Yeah, well--

Can you count a little bit in that?

Yeah. [SPEAKING KOMI] And the most important thing was, if you would come to visit them you would ask them, do you have any bread? And they would say [SPEAKING KOMI]-- no "bread."

Were they starving, too?

They were living very meagerly, but they would live off roots. They would dig up roots. And they had the strangest habits. But it probably was very useful.

If I would come to visit them, they would comb my hair and look for lice, and they would eat them. They would eat the lice. They would just sit there and clean my head out and eat the lice.

Protein.

Yes, protein.

So you had lice, obviously.

Yes. Yes. And then the one thing that I remember-- the way they ate-- they had a big bowl of soup, in the middle of the table, a wooden bowl, and one spoon. And every person would take a sip from the spoon, and they would go around-- they would sit around, and everybody would take a spoonful and put the spoon back. And that's how they ate.

And they were really very friendly. And they didn't know about locking the door. What they would do-- they would put a broom by the door, and that means that nobody's home. And everybody respected that. If the broom was on the door, nobody was home.

And in the-- they had a very communal way of living.

Yes, very communal.

Were you always invited to eat with them, also, when you would visit?

Well, I was really very young. I just have little impressions of that one situation with the spoons. And I remember them eating my lice. Those are the two things I remember.

So were they a kind of an oriental people?

No, not really.

Is there anything else you know about this village? What year was it --

No-- all I remember-- I don't remember very much. I just remember seeing my mother in a blue robe, a blue corduroy robe that she had. And I remember her-- I don't remember her face, just her figure, in a blue corduroy robe.

And I remember looking at my father's accounting book, with the blue and red lines-- the blue going across and the red going up and down-- for columns, I guess. I remember those two things.

And I remember visiting my grandmother. My grandmother Blum Rivka lived, like, next door or-- I don't know-- very close. And I remember visiting her, one day, and she was making--

She had a fire burning in the stove, and she was making pletzel, which is like pita bread almost. And she was making it with her hands and putting it in the oven. And I said, you know, Grandma, if you'd give me some I won't tell anybody. I won't tell my brother Avram, and I won't tell my cousin Mendel. Just-- I will not tell them that you gave me some, if you give it to me. So I guess it was just-- you know, if she would give me something, she might want to feel that she has to give them something too.

You were so hungry then.

Yeah.

Do you have any sense of how much food you were getting per day?

No. No, I just remember saying that to her.

And how was she able to get grain, do you think?

I don't know. I don't know.

Did she give you a piece?

I can't remember. I just remember me telling her this.

Do you think that probably you might have lived in the same kind of a hut as the other native people?

I don't know. I can't remember.

Would this be the same winter of 1939?

No, no, this was a little later. This was around the time my mother died. This is in '43.

'43.

Yeah. This is '43.

So you were about six years old then.

Yeah.

Did you go to any schooling?

Well, no. There was no schooling. But after my mother died and my father went to the labor camp, my aunt couldn't afford to take care of us. And what we used to do-- my aunt would go to the forest and collect blueberries. We used to go behind her and collect blueberries and collect mushrooms.

And we would go picking blueberries and mushrooms with her in the summer. And then we would come home, and we would hang the mushrooms up. And we would always eat the blueberries, as we went, along the way, while we'd pick them.

And then it came to a point where she-- my uncle-- my uncle was-- I can't remember what happened. For a while, he was doing well, because he had some in with some of the people there. And then I guess he got-- he was on the outs with them or something, and he ended up--

They ended up not able to take care of us. So my aunt decided that we should go to the orphanage. And before we went to the orphanage, we went on a trip. I passed by my mother's grave, and I remember her saying, this is where your

mother is. And we were in the woods. We just passed through it. And then--

There was something I wanted to say before the orphanage. And then we went to the orphanage. And my aunt just took us-- took me and my brother there. I ended up-- it was a Polish orphanage. And a lot of the kids were Polish.

But on Russian territory.

Well, I don't know. At that time-- I don't know where the orphanage-- it was just an orphanage. I really can't remember. Later on, in Poland, that was the Polish orphanage. But at this time, it was just an orphanage.

And because our parents weren't around, we were eligible. And my cousin was not eligible, because both of his parents were around. So he didn't get to go. But--

It must have been very difficult for you.

My aunt brought me there. And I will never forget how she got me to play with all the toys that they had. And I hadn't seen toys like these before-- all sorts of colorful toys and things that you stack up-- rings stack up, and all colorful.

And they had a phonograph. And I had never remembered seeing a phonograph ever before. So I was just enchanted with all the toys.

And I was playing with them, and then she was leaving. And I said, take me with you. And she said, no, you're going to stay here. And I couldn't believe that she was going to leave me. And she left me. And I started kicking whoever--

Somebody was holding me, and I was kicking and crying and crying and kicking. And I just couldn't stop crying. I just kept crying and crying. And finally they put me to bed. I wouldn't eat.

They put me to bed. And I remember crying all night long and just crying and crying and crying. And I wouldn't stop crying. And then I realized that this was how it was going to be.

And the orphanage was-- once I got used to it, it was OK. We had food. We didn't have a lot of food, but we had food.

Enough?

Well, I was too young to really know, but I know that my brother would eat very fast so he could get a second portion. And I developed a strategy to eat very slow, so I could still keep the food for a long time. And that was my way of dealing with it. As long as I had food, I was happy.

But you took your time.

I ate it very slow, yeah. If I ate it very slowly, I still had it. And he ate fast. And there's a story about one boy who ate so fast that he burned out his stomach. And I don't know if that was true [LAUGH] or if that was just the story that was told.

But he apparently died. He must have died. I don't know if that was the story, but he died.

Was it any comfort to have your brother there with you?

Well, yeah, I guess he would be there, and it must have been some comfort. And then there was one point where summer came and my aunt came to visit. And I told her that I had a dream about wearing my blue dress and my red sweater. And I asked them how-- you know, could I wear them? And she said, oh, they wouldn't fit you anymore. You've grown out of them. But she said, I sold them for some potatoes.

And I was crying. I was really upset, that she sold them for potatoes. But that's how things were.

She wasn't able to visit until summer.

Well, she was able to visit, but I think she had to cross a river. There was a river to cross. And I would go, on my fingers-- now, I guess by then I had learned Polish, because I used to speak Yiddish first. But I used to say [SPEAKING POLISH], which means "She'll come; she won't come. She'll come; she won't come." And you know end up on either "she'll come" or "she won't come" and be happy or sad that it won't happen.

But I guess she used to come fairly frequently and always bring something. She would always bring some food. One time, she brought some peas, some dried peas. And had a little brown bag, and I put it under my pillow.

We slept on a big mattress, on top of the stove. They had these big stoves, and we were on top of the stove. And that's how we kept warm.

And I don't know if we always slept that way, because I do remember having other beds. But I remember sleeping, at one time, on this stove situation with about five or six other girls.

And I opened my little bag and started eating the peas very quietly. And the bag broke, and all the peas came down. [LAUGH] So everybody else had a little bit of a feast, [LAUGH] eating the peas-- sharing the peas with me, because I couldn't say they're mine. I had lost them. So it was kind of something that I remember, because it happened that way.

About how many children do you think were in that orphanage?

I don't know. I don't really know. I only know the room that we were in, and there were probably about-- I don't know.

What were the living conditions like in the orphanage?

Well, I can't really remember the original situation. I just remember that playroom, that first time. After that, it kind of went out of my mind.

I remember that we all had jobs to do. And I had to make fire in the fireplace, at one time. And I got a piece of-- I got a splinter in my finger. And it went pretty deep. I still have a mark from that.

And I always know which my left hand is. I always had a hard time with my left and right hands, because I was left-handed and everybody wanted me to be right-handed, [LAUGH] and I got very mixed up about left and right. So, that way, I always knew which one [LAUGH] my left hand was.

The splinter hand.

Yes.

Were you able to see your brother often?

Yeah, because he was sort of not too-- he was in the same orphanage, at that time. And he would come-- you know, and we would see each other. But as time went on, we ended up getting separated.

Oh-- there are two incidents that I'd like to mention. In the summer, when my aunt found out that her mother was dying and very ill, she decided to bring us home for a short visit. So she came-- she came and picked us up. And they gave me this red jumper-- brand-new red jumper.

And we were crossing the river, and I was wearing this bright-red jumper and blue, blue river. And we were going across in a boat, a rowboat, to the other side. And when I came there, my grandma was very glad to see me, and I was glad to see her. And my cousin Mendel.

And then one of the things that I remember while I was visiting was that I asked my aunt if she would give me some noodles, and I would cook them. So she gave me the noodles, and she showed me how to do it. And I cooked the noodles myself. And I felt like I had done something wonderful-- that I had made it all by myself.

Well, you were very young, then-- maybe seven, by then?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Somewhere around there. Six or seven. And then my grandmother died.

This is your mother's mother?

Yes. My mother's mother died. And she was very, very close with us. Before, when we were visiting her, she put me on her lap, and she would always sit with a siddur. She always prayed. And she would teach me alefbeis. And I still remember her doing that-- still remember looking at the alef in the siddur-- alef. And she would make me repeat.

So you felt close to her.

Oh, she was wonderful. She was just a wonderful, wonderful grandmother. And--

Did you ever eventually learn Hebrew?

Yes.

So you started out speaking Yiddish at home?

Mhm.

And then, did you have to learn Russian also?

Yeah. I learned Russian, and I learned Polish.

And Polish and then eventually Hebrew.

Yeah. And eventually relearned Yiddish.

Relearned Yiddish. And you learned the language-- what did you call them-- the Kami?

Komish.

The Komish.

Yeah. And then my grandmother passed away, and we went back to the orphanage. And at one time, when the orphanage was going somewhere else-- I can't quite remember where we were going. We were probably moving away from there.

You mean, the whole orphanage--

Yeah, I think so. We were moving to some other place, and I don't know where. And we were on a boat-- on a large boat. We got on this large boat.

And as I was going on the boat, getting up on the boat, a lady grabbed me and she held me in her arms and hugged me. And she said, [? Chanele, ?] [? Chanele. ?] I didn't know who she was.

She was my aunt Rachel. And she had a little baby in her arms. And she told me that this was her son Yankele-- which means my grandfather had already died.

You hadn't heard about that.

Well, I don't remember that. I don't remember that-- my grandfather dying. So that was my aunt Rachel. And I didn't see her again until I was in Israel, visiting her, many, many years later.

This orphanage-- you said it was Polish.

Well, I don't quite know how-- I don't quite know if it-- originally, it may have been a Russian orphanage, because we were learning the Cyrillic alphabet. I remember having it spread out on the floor. So it was originally Russian, when we were in Russia.

And then it was in Russia, but then when we got to-- when we got to-- when we went on that boat, we ended up going to a place called Michurinsk, in Russia. And my family went to Krasnodar.

They had moved also?

Yeah.

Why had they moved?

I have no idea what it was. They probably wanted to get away from the cold. And they were able to go.

They had the government permission probably.

I guess so, yeah. So they moved to Krasnodar, and that's where my cousin Jack was born-- my aunt [? Faye's ?] son.

That's her second child.

Yeah. That's her third--

She lost one child.

She lost one.

And she had one.

She had one, yes. And that's where he was born-- in Krasnodar. And we were in Michurinsk, my brother and I, but we were separated. He was in a different orphanage, and I was in a different orphanage.

And we didn't see each other very often. He came to visit me once, and I forgot who he was. I mean, I knew him, but I didn't know who he was. And I had a hard time thinking about what a brother was. I had no concept anymore of what-- who he was. He was just someone I knew.

And he brought me some berries-- a bag wrapped in paper, like a cone, with berries. And he brought them to me. And when we were having--

He was invited to dinner. And we were having dinner. And I guess because I had eaten the berries, I wasn't as hungry anymore when the soup came. And I didn't want to have any more soup, and he wanted it. And I didn't know if I should give it to him or a friend of mine. I had a hard time making that decision. I don't know what I did, but I know I didn't feel that close to him anymore, because I hadn't seen him very often.

A rupture there.



Yeah. And then, after that, the orphanage-- the second orphanage was-- I can remember it a little better. We had this big place, and there were rows of beds. When we first came in there they told us to get a bed. And everybody grabbed a bed as fast as they could.

I ended up with a bed that had a terrible mattress and the springs were broken. So I wasn't comfortable with it. And the next day, I decided I wasn't going to stay there, so I ended up going to bed early, the next day, and finding a bed in the corner that was really good.

And I went there, and I got myself all ready and went to bed. And the other person complained. And I said, well, it's mine today. It was yours yesterday. And I ended up keeping that bed.

During all this period, had you heard anything from your father?

No. Not at all.

Nothing?

No. No.

Did your aunt have any news of him at all?

No. At that time, we'd lost contact with my aunt, too. We didn't know where she was.

And in the previous orphanage, had you heard from your father at all?

No.

He was in the work camp, all that time?

Yes. Yeah, he was in the labor camp.

And so there was no touch between your aunt and your father-- or you and your brother and your father.

I think there might have been some contact. They had some contact but not very much, because it was very expensive to mail anything. And then you never knew if people got it, because if there was something in it that somebody didn't want you to have, you didn't get it. And I really had no idea where my father was.

Throughout all that time in Russia and in the orphanage, were you having any Jewish practice?

No.

No.

No.

What about your aunt, at home?

I don't know. I don't know.

Being in Russia, maybe there was no religious practice allowed at all.

Yes. Well, that's true, because my grandfather had a lot of difficulty with that. I don't quite know what the situation was, but first of all, they kept kosher, so they couldn't eat any meat at all. So they couldn't get any protein. But all my grandparents ended up being vegetarians all the way through the war.

And there were other difficulties that my grandfather had, because he was-- even though he was an older man, he was still asked to work on Sabbath. And he didn't want to work on Sabbath.

Do you know how he was able to deal with that?

I don't know, but he didn't work on Sabbath. He just didn't.

And when you moved-- the orphanage moved, and then your aunt moved to another town, do you know how far away these two towns from each other? Where your orphanage was and where she was.

Well, probably, I'd say, about 300 miles.

Quite a way.

Yeah. But the only time we did see each other was when the trains crossed back, when we were going back to Poland. Somehow the trains crossed, and we met-- we met her at the train station. It wasn't a train station. It was a train passing, some kind of a train passing. Their train stopped, and our train stopped, and they found out that there was an orphanage going, and she came, and she had some--

She had a can of salmon. And she gave me the can of salmon. And I still remember the red can of salmon-- holding it in my hands. And--

This meeting was obviously a total accident.

Yes. Yeah, it was. She found out, though, that there was an orphanage being transported.

About when was this?

Oh, I guess this was already, I would say, '45, probably-- early '45 or before the war was over, or just around the time the war was over.

Well, why would you be sent back to Poland while the war was still on?

Like you say, probably was after the war was over.

Had you heard from your father, by then?

No. I never knew what happened to my father. I didn't-- there was no-- I didn't know what happened to him.

You never know what happened to him

No. Well, I did find out that at one point, when he was in the labor camp, his mother was sick and he wanted to go and see her. So he rented this car, with some other people, to go to see her. And he got--

It was an illegal car, and they shot at the car. And they got one man's leg, and then got into his leg and came out of his leg-- ended up in a third person's leg. And he felt his foot was feeling a little numb but didn't know what it was and then ended up that he had hurt himself very badly. And he was on crutches, when we came back.

When we came back from the orphanage, he was on crutches. And that's why he couldn't go and pick us up. My other uncle, my uncle Moishe, went to get us.

You mean, when you arrived back in Poland?

Yes.

So what had been happening with your father? Did he stay in the work camp, the whole war?

Pretty much.

Except he was able to make this one trip, to go see his mother.

Yes.

Was he able to get there to see her?

I think so. I think he did get to see her.

And then he went back to the work camp?

Yeah.

Do you know about how far away the work camp was?

No. No.

Did he ever get any medical treatment for that shot wound?

Well, probably did, but it was probably out of his own pocket. My uncle Harry, [NON-ENGLISH], who was in the Polish army, helped him somehow, financially, to get some medical care, I think. And the family pitched in, and he got some medical help. Because I don't think he could walk by now, if he hadn't gotten appropriate medical help.

Do you know of any other ways that your uncle Harry helped-- besides money?

Well, he helped-- there was one time that my father was at the end of the rope. He just couldn't go on anymore. He couldn't go on working. He was just worn out, working, and not having enough food and all that.

So somehow my uncle Harry was able to get him some money, so he could buy off the people so he wouldn't have to work. So he could rest up a little and then get some food into him, in order to get himself back on his feet and survive. Because he wouldn't have survived, like, the time when he couldn't sit on a chair because he was all bones.

So this helped save his life.

Yes. Yes.

And your uncle-- at this point, the Polish army, I presume, has totally fallen apart--

Mhm. Yes.

And so--

Somehow, he still had some kind of a role, because he was in the army all the way through. I don't know--

Was he in Russia, also?

Yeah. He was in Russia.

Perhaps they exiled--

Yeah. Right. Because the Germans had occupied Germany completely, at this point.

And your uncle, I guess, Moishe, who is staying--

Yeah.

--what kind of work was he doing?

Well, he was always wheeling and dealing. He was always, as they said, handling. He would buy this and sell this and buy this and sell this. And he knew people, and he was able to wheel and deal, that way. And he was really good at it.

Why wasn't he taken to labor camp?

Because he had a son to support, and-- because he was in this wheeling and dealing. He knew people, and he was able to get out of it, somehow.

Kind of bribed somebody, maybe?

Yeah, right. He was able to get out of it, somehow.

So it sounds like all of you spent the whole war in Russia.

Yes. Yes, we were, the whole war, in Russia.

Were there any other Jewish people in that original village you went to-- with the Komish?

I don't-- yeah, there were other Jewish people who were in the same situation we were. Wherever we went, there were always some Jewish people who were in the same situation.

And one of my uncles, he was my uncle on my mother's side-- my mother's other sister, who was-- her name was [? Sara ?] Ruchel. [? Sara ?] Ruchel's husband, I think his name was Baruch. I'm not sure.

He was speaking-- this was in Russia, when they first got there, and he was a very outspoken intellectual. And he was originally a very liberal person. But when he saw how the communist regime was working, he made a negative remark against the communist system, and somebody heard him.

And they came at night. They took him away, and nobody ever saw him again. We never knew what happened to him. He just disappeared.

So I imagine that was common.

Yeah-- just disappeared. So, people learned not to speak out. People learned to keep quiet.

You were very young, but you-- or did you learn it all, through your other relatives, what was happening in Poland to the Jews, during the war years-- the concentration camps?

No. No.

You knew nothing about that.

No. Not until I came back to Poland and we started looking for people.

When you were there in the orphanage, can you remember any teacher or counselor person that you had any particular

attachment to?

Well, there was one lady who was always very nice, and she had always something nice to say and was very positive. We had a very active program. We drew a lot of pictures, mostly of the Kremlin. [LAUGH]

We put on plays and performances. We sang a lot. So I learned a lot of Russian and Polish songs that I kind of kept up. And that's how I remembered a lot of the vocabulary, through the singing.

And I remember-- must have been the last Christmas, when we had a performance and the soldiers came, and they put us on our laps, and they held us. And we put on a performance for them.

So this was honoring their religious holiday?

This was honoring Christmas, and it was considered, I guess, a new year. There wasn't any religious attachment. The tree was sort of a new-year, pagan kind of a whatever. But there wasn't anything religious.

I recited a poem about a cat. So there was no religious-- we had a forest scene. The play was about a forest scene, with a rabbit, and I was the rabbit. And there was a bear, and there were all sorts of other creatures of the forest that were in the play. So it wasn't anything that pertained to Christmas.

Was this orphanage in a village or--

No, this was in Michurinsk.

Is that a--

Yeah, it's a fairly big city. It's south of Moscow. It's about 100 miles or so south of Moscow.

So you were way out of the north area where you had been.

Yeah, right. Yeah, right. Yeah, and I don't know how they decided to move us to one place or another. But that's what they did.

And then, I remember when the war was over--

You do-- can you remember when you first heard the war was over?

Yes. Well, the only thing that I can remember about the war being over was that they had the sky lit up and they had fireworks, all night long. It was-- all night long, we were looking out the window and watching fireworks.

Can you remember what meaning it had for you, that the war was over?

I didn't really know. I just saw beautiful fireworks, and it meant a change-- that there was something different coming up. That's all.

Was that positive for you or not?

Yeah, it was positive. It seemed like everybody was in good spirits and everybody was very happy. And there were parades.

We had a lot of parades, that we were watching through the window. There were soldiers coming from the war-- dead-- coffins and coffins of soldiers, with lots of flowers, constantly. Every so often, they would have a parade of all the dead soldiers going through the street. But this last time, there was a parade with no dead soldiers.

Living soldiers.

Living soldiers.

Did you think it would mean you might see your father again or any of your relatives? Or did you not--

I don't know. I think I lived from day to day and didn't anymore have those expectations that I had in the beginning, where I would say "my aunt will come-- she won't; she'll come." I didn't have that anymore. I didn't have it happening frequently enough to--

So it kind of extinguished, in my mind, and I had no more thoughts about anybody coming. I was just living in the present, more or less.

Clearly, that's a very good strategy for survival. Can you think of any other ways that you were able to cope with all that?

Well, I think all the singing. You know, we did a lot of singing. And we did a lot of reciting poems.

The kids were, I guess, fairly nice to each other. I don't remember having any anger or animosity towards anybody. People were just cordial.

We didn't go out very much. In the wintertime, I remember going out once. We went for a chest X-rays. And they would dress us up in groups of six.

They had different sizes of rabbit-fur coats and galoshes. And they dressed us in these clothes, so we could go and get our chest X-rays. And so we got to go outside in these wonderful outfits-- [LAUGH] in the snow, and play in the snow actually. So that was one experience I remember having in the wintertime.

So does that mean that you didn't go out because there weren't enough coats for everybody?

I don't know whether it was that. It could also be that my memory wasn't-- that I don't remember the other times when we did go out. I did have one person who really took a liking towards me, and that was--

I always had ear infections. My ears were always infected. And that was because I had the measles when I was very young. And my ears got very infected, and my eardrums kind of deteriorated. And I always had running ears.

So when things were really bad, I was taken to the hospital. And I was in this ward with a whole bunch of screaming kids. And I was very uncomfortable, and I said something to someone about this.

And they said, well, what do you want to do? And I said, well, I want to be in the hall, where it's nice and quiet. So they put me out in the hall.

And I was in the hall. It was cold in the hall, but in the hall people would pass. Soldiers would pass, and other people would pass, and they'd pay attention to me.

And there was one nurse that started paying attention to me a lot. And one wounded woman soldier who had lost her legs, and she was walking on her knees. They must have stuffed her knees with certain something so she could walk on her knees. And she would walk on her knees, and she would come over to me.

She would bring me boiled eggs, and we would have chats. And she was such a nice, young woman and had lost her legs. And everybody was really nice, at that hospital, to me.

And the nurse who I befriended ended up taking me to her house for two weeks. And I spent two weeks at her house. And she was on a farm. Her parents were farmers.

And she had a dog. And she had, I guess, nieces and nephews. And her husband, the nurse's husband, was in the war. And I spent time with the nieces and nephews, running around with the dogs.

And this was springtime, and it was very beautiful-- very nice to be out. And we saw the apple blossoms come up. And it was just very, very memorable, being on that farm.

And she wanted to adopt me. She wanted me to stay with her. And I said, I don't think I can do it. I have a family, and they may want me back.

So that's when I probably did have a sense that I couldn't just go with her because it was nice to be there. So I said no and went back to the orphanage.

Was that hard for you?

Yeah, because I remember liking being there so much. It was like being something-- being in a home environment, which is something I didn't know. And of course, she always had a lot of good food. She lived with her parents. And it was very nice there.

How long had you been in the hospital? Can you remember?

I was there-- I don't know. It seemed like, in the hospital, it was cold and always freezing. And then, when I came out, it was springtime-- or beginning of springtime.

So maybe a few weeks?

Yeah. And this was just before we left for Poland.

Do you know why the Russians allowed you to go back to Poland?

Well, we weren't Polish citizens. I mean, we weren't Russian citizens. So, as Polish citizens, we could go back to Poland. And they thought they had Poland, anyway, probably.

Sounds like the whole orphanage was sent back to--

No, only the Polish kids in the orphanage.

I see.

There were Polish kids and Russian kids in the orphanage, and only the Polish kids were sent back.

And where were you to be sent?

Well, I don't remember the name of it. I really don't.

But was it going to be another orphanage?

Yeah, it was another orphanage. They took us to an orphanage. And when we came to that orphanage, it was quite nice. They bought us pink-and-yellow dresses. And we were really feeling like it was spring. We were prancing around in the green grass, and it was very memorable.

And then we had Passover. And they asked-- a man came around, with a sack, a burlap sack. And he was wearing a hat, and he was very hunched back and looked kind of not very appealing.

And he came around, and he asked who was Jewish. And he had matzah. And I didn't know whether I should say [LAUGH] I was Jewish or not. Because it meant that I might get criticized by my friends, because they already had all sorts of songs about Jewish--

They had this one song that went [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], which means "This Jewish lady [NON-ENGLISH] was selling eggs." And it was sort of not a very nice-- I don't know why, but it just didn't have a nice connotation. So--

But I said I was, and he gave me a piece of matzah. And I remember eating the matzah but also feeling that maybe other people won't like me because I'm Jewish.

When you were in the Russian orphanage, did you let it be known that you were Jewish, or--

I don't know. I don't-- I don't know. I don't think it ever came up. This was the only time that I remember that it really came up, that I was Jewish.

Is there any other things that you can remember you would like to add, from your time in Russia?

Not at this point. I don't--

If something occurs to you along the way--

I remember also, around the same time-- Passover-- it was Easter, and we went to a big, huge church for mass on Easter. And we were again dressed in these nice dresses and went to this church. And I had never seen a church like this. I was just overwhelmed-- what a wonderful place it was.

And I remember people kneeling down and doing their praying. And I didn't think I should be doing this. And I wasn't sure whether I should-- and because everybody else was doing it, I was doing it, too.

And that's when they really started sort of working on religion more. And I remember at every meal, they crossed themselves, at that point, when we came to Poland, and they would say the prayer. And whenever we would pass by the roadside and see a cross-- and in Poland, there are many places where they have Mother Mary and other religious icons on the road. And people stop, and they cross themselves. And I guess it means a good journey. They pray for a good journey ahead, or something to that effect.

Also, you mentioned about having earaches.

Mhm.

How was your health in general, during that period in Russia? Did you have any other health problems?

No, I didn't have any other health problems, except for my ears. My ears were always infected. I always had running ears. And in fact, it felt comfortable when my ears were running.

[LAUGH]

I was used to it. I was used to the feeling of wetness. When it wasn't wet, it didn't feel comfortable.

Wasn't it painful?

No. I mean, not really. It was not-- by then, the eardrums had gotten deteriorated. It was just uncomfortable.

Have you had hearing problems ever because of that?

I have, yeah. I've had ear hearing problems. I had to give up nursing, as a result, later on in my life.



You seem to hear perfectly fine now.

Well, I've had three myringoplasties.

What is that?

It's eardrum grafts-- eardrum operations, where they take skin and they graft it in your ear.

Did you ever have any other kinds of more anxiety problems, like nightmares or that sort of thing?

Well, if I did, it was probably a continuous state of being, and I wasn't-- it wasn't-- once you live a certain way, you don't know-- it's like a fish being in water. It's hard to tell whether you do or you don't.

So you didn't have nightmares that woke you per se.

No.

No? Just whatever level of anxiety--

Yeah.

--you might live with has become part of yourself.

Yes. Yes.

Now, when you were crossing the border and, quite by accident, met your family--

No, not the one. We were on the train.

You were on the train.

Yes.

And was it just your aunt you met?

Yeah, I think my aunt was the one that came from wherever she was and she found us. She was the only one that I can remember. There may have been other people, but I was so glad to see her.

She was the one that I remember. And I think she may have told us about my father, at that time, that he was wounded.

And where was your father then?

Well, my father had gotten back with my family.

So he was--

you were on a different train?

At that point, I don't know. But when they went to Poland, somehow they had gotten together. He had gotten together with them.

It could be that, when he got wounded-- because he got wounded, they could take him home and take care of him-- because he couldn't work. So it could be that that's what happened-- that he went back to Krasnodar with them and

stayed with them there. Because I think he did help raise my little cousin. And my aunt would go out and work in the fields.

And her husband was still--

Yeah.

--wheeling and dealing, too.

Yes.

And then, they all were going to go back to Poland, at the end of the war--

Yes.

--from that town.

Yes.

When she came to you on the train, was there any talk of your reuniting with them after you got to Poland--

Not that I--

--or how would everybody get together again?

Not that I know. Not that I know. They wanted to know where we were going, but they didn't get any information. They were told, we don't know. So they didn't have any knowledge where we were going.

And at that point, my brother went to one place and I went to another. And we were--

He wasn't on the same train with you?

He may have been on the same train, but at that point we got separated.

And where did he go?

He went to a boys' orphanage, and I was in a girls' orphanage.

In what town was this?

I don't know. I don't know the names of those towns. I really haven't--

Just somewhere in Poland.

Yeah. Right. It probably was somewhere not too far from L<sup>3</sup>dz, because my uncle ended up leaving me-- well, what happened was, my uncle came--

Which uncle--

--my uncle Moishe, Faye's husband. My uncle Moishe came to the orphanage, one day. And this was at the time where a lot of kids were being-- every, like, once a week, somebody would come and find their child. And somebody else would come and wouldn't find their child and would be told to go somewhere else to look for them. And so, one day--

And there was this little girl named Fayge also, who was in my group. And she and I were hoping that somebody would

come to get us soon. And she had a mother. And I must have been with her for quite a while, because she was someone I knew quite well.

The two of us would kind of hope that somebody would come and get us. and we would talk about it. And we had this game of, if a bird would come to our window and peck three times, that meant that somebody would come. And we would say, well, today somebody will come for me or for you. Her bed was here, and mine was here, and the window was in between us.

And one day, my uncle came. And we were sitting down to eat. And he came at the door, and he stood at the door. And I saw a familiar face.

And I knew it was him. I knew it was him. And I don't know how long I hadn't seen him, but I knew it was him.

And we stood up and did the blessing. And I crossed myself. And I sat down, and I kind of looked at him. And he looked like he wasn't approving of what I was doing.

And I guess, after dinner, I was asked to go and see him. And we had a private meeting. And he said he was going to take me out and we were going to go. But he said he didn't know where my brother was.

And he asked the people at this orphanage if they knew. And they may have given him some leads, but he couldn't take me all over to go and get my brother. And so he took me to L<sup>á</sup>dz, to a kibbutz, a Mizrahi kibbutz.

Where was your aunt and the family, at that time?

I think they were in [PLACE NAME]

And that was a distance away?

Yeah. I think that's where they were. And my uncle took me out of the orphanage, and we walked. I remember walking with him to the train station. And as we walked to the train station, there was a little icon of Mary. And I stood there, and I crossed myself.

And he slapped me. And he said, don't do that again. We don't do that. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. So--

Must have been terrible for you, though.

Well, I was confused. I mean, I didn't know what was what. You know, in one culture, this is what you do. In another culture, you don't do that. So, from then on, I just decided that wasn't going to be what I was going to do.

And then we went on a train, and we went to-- I'm not sure where-- went to stay-- we went to-- we ended up staying with some people overnight, some people that he knew. We stayed overnight there, and then we went to L<sup>á</sup>dz, and he left me in the kibbutz.

How was that?

What?

How was that, for you?

Well, I-- yeah. Pardon me.

Mhm.

Before he brought me there, he got me a-- I had this thing. I kept saying, buy me this and buy me that, when we went

shopping. we were on the streets, and everything looked so wonderful.

And so he bought me an ice cream. And that was the first ice cream I remember ever eating. And it was the most delicious ice cream I've ever had.

And he was holding my hand, and the two of us just walking, and walking, and walking. And he bought me a horse, a wooden horse-- a stick with two handles. And I would walk with the horse. And that was really very fun. It was, like, a toy I hadn't had in a long time.

I found out that he had gone all over the country, looking for us. And he would travel at night, because it wasn't safe to travel during the day.

Why was that?

I don't know. It wasn't safe for Jewish people to just travel.

The antisemitism was still strong in Poland.

Yeah. Yeah, it was very-- it was very strong. So he would travel at night and go from place to place. It could also be that he had no money and he could travel, this way, free. I'm not sure what the reason was.

But he went from place to place and asked if anybody knew where we were. And they would always say no. And finally he found me. So he had been looking for a long time, like, for over a month, every day, in and out.

Did you learn about your father and the rest of them, at that point?

Well, what happened was-- yeah, I guess he told me that everybody was home and that I would go home. But right now he had to go and get my brother. So he left me in the orphanage-- in the kibbutz.

We came to the kibbutz on Friday night. And everybody was taking showers. Friday afternoon, actually. And everybody was taking showers and washing up. And everybody had got white blouses and navy skirts. That was the uniform.

And we all sat down to eat, with white tablecloths and candles and challah, and singing Hebrew songs. And it was something very, very unusual to me. That was my first initiation into Judaism.

And I think I must have stayed there for about two weeks or so. And all these kids from this Mizrahi kibbutz were going to Israel. They were all orphans. It was easy for me to adjust, because they were just like the kids I had known-- you know, the conditions.

Was it hard for you to leave another orphanage?

No.

No. You didn't miss anything about it.

No, no. No. No, I had my uncle with me. [LAUGH] I was happy to go with him.

So you were there for about two weeks. And you--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah, something like that. Yeah, we stayed there for about two weeks. And then my brother came. And my brother stayed for another week, until my uncle got whatever he had to straighten out to get us to go. He had some things that he was handling.

Did you have any relationship with your brother, at that point?

Yeah, we knew who we were. We got together, and--

Did he talk to you at all about his experiences over those years?

Yeah, he was telling me that he worked a lot. I didn't do any work, but he-- like, when harvest time came, they would work in the fields. And they would put in-- like, 6:00 till 4:00, they would work. You know, harvest-- whatever there was to be harvested, they would bring them. They were the field workers.

So he worked hard, and he never had enough food. He was always hungry. He was always hungry. And really, we all felt that there would never, never, ever be a time where food would be on the table and we wouldn't grab it. It just didn't seem like that was ever going to happen-- just seemed an impossibility.

Can you remember when it was that you felt that you had enough to eat?

Well, I think, when I first came to my family. I--

So your uncle came back to the kibbutz?

My uncle came back--

To pick you both up.

--to pick me-- us, both-- up.

And you stayed there what? About a month or so?

We'd been there probably about three or four weeks.

And then how did you travel to get back to your home?

We were on a train. We went on trains.

Do you remember arriving?

Yeah, I remember arriving. And I remember-- I remember opening the door. And it was a very sunny day. And my aunt was there, and she hugged me.

And I don't remember if my father was there. I remember-- he probably was there, but I don't remember. But what I do remember was, my little cousin Jack, who was about a year old, he was standing by the window, in a long nightgown, and he was pointing-- [NON-ENGLISH], [NON-ENGLISH]-- was pointing at me-- [NON-ENGLISH], [NON-ENGLISH].

And that was his first word. He had a little friend whose name was Chaim, and he couldn't say "Chaim," so everybody-- he called everybody [NON-ENGLISH].

And I remember him pointing at me. And I looked at him. And I said to my aunt, in Polish, who is that? Because I don't remember him from-- you know-- didn't know who he was.

And she said, that's my new son. And I couldn't imagine-- couldn't imagine how he ever got there-- had no idea how he ever got there, where she took him, how he got there-- had no idea. I was just overwhelmed.

And he was just so cute. And I just really always felt a very special place for him in my heart.

You must have been just thrilled to be back home again.

Yes, yes. Yes, and my father was still on crutches, and he didn't go very much. He didn't walk very much. And my aunt also had something wrong with her foot. I don't know what it was, but there was something wrong with her foot.

And there was a wedding that we had. Some friends were getting married. And my uncle took me to the wedding with him.

The others didn't go.

The others didn't go. And I went with my uncle to the wedding. And I'll never forget. It was so wonderful.

It was just such a beautiful event, of seeing a bride and the groom. It was in a house. And then afterwards, of course, they had all the food. That was just [LAUGH] spectacular!

So here again, you could have plenty to eat.

Yes. Yes. It was just a very happy occasion. And I felt very special that my uncle took me with him. And of course, he was showing off to everybody and told them how he had gotten me out and repeated the miracle of finding us.

Were you able to resume a close relationship with your father, after all those years?

Yeah. Yeah. Yes. I was very close with my cousin Mel, also-- Mendel. And we started school, and we went to this--

It was a Jewish school that met-- in the morning, we studied Yiddish, I guess, or something like that, or-- and in the afternoon, we studied Polish-- or the other way around-- something like that. We brought a plate and a spoon and a cup with us. In the morning, they would feed us hot chocolate. And in the afternoon, they had a soup, a nice soup, for us.

So I don't remember what I was learning. They put me in second grade, because they thought I could speak Polish so well. But I couldn't read anything and I couldn't write anything. I could just speak it.

So I was just sitting there, looking at everything, not knowing what was going on. How people could read, I had no idea.

Did you learn to read eventually in Polish?

Polish? Not really. No, we were there probably for about a month until we left. And we went to Czechoslovakia first. We crossed the border--

Your family was wanting to emigrate?

Yes, we didn't want to stay in Poland.

Do you know why?

Well, because Poland was communist, at the time, and we had lost everything. There was nothing that we had there.

You had mentioned about trying to look for relatives when you got back to Poland that--

Well, I think-- I don't quite remember how that went. But people were looking for each other, and people found-- I need to relieve myself, just--

Why don't we stop here?

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