

So, Ellen, in about 10 seconds, you can identify the people and the date and the location and begin at your convenience.

Today is August 14, 1990. My name is Ellen Szakal. And today, I will be interviewing Lucille Eichengreen for the Holocaust Oral History Project in San Francisco. And assisting in the interview today is Maria Jensen.

Lucille, would you please begin with your former name and your maiden name, your birthday, and your place of birth?

My name was Cecilia Landau. I was born in 1925 in Hamburg, Germany. My parents were Polish nationals living in Germany at that time. And I lived the first 16 years of my life in Germany and Poland ultimately. We traveled back and forth for reasons of family and partly business and to retain citizenship, which was mandatory that you return home to get your passports renewed.

I had a younger sister, five years younger to be exact. We lived a very comfortable life. My father was a businessman.

I went to a private Jewish school. I started school in 1930. I'm really not sure why my parents decided not to send me to public school, but to parochial school. It could have been for religious reasons. It could have been that there was just something in the air that they sensed and rather enrolled me in a private school, Jewish school.

Life at home was very easy, very comfortable. My parents did not travel, did not go any place without us. We traveled all over Europe with our parents, sometimes with a maid, sometimes without. And the first inkling that something was not right came in 1933. I had been sick that entire winter previous to April 1933 when Hitler came to power. And the doctor recommended that I go to a resort that had the cure facilities, like the mud baths and some other waters that were supposedly beneficial.

So we traveled for the summer of 1933 to Bad Schwartau. We rented a house on an estate. The owner of the estate was German. And he had several other houses. And we became sort of friendly to the extent that my father would sit down and talk to him.

My father was tall, blue-eyed, not very Jewish looking, spoke fluent German. My mother's German had an accent, but my father's did not. He was very outgoing. He was very charming.

And the day we were supposed to leave in the summer of 1933, the owner of that estate invited us for coffee in the afternoon. And we sat down. And out of the blue, he said to my father, isn't it amazing what Hitler has done in these short three months for the Germans? He is working on unemployment and other social ills. And last but not least, he is taking care of the Jews. Just a minute.

My father got very angry. He got up. And he said, I'm a Jew. The answer was, I don't mean you. I mean, the others.

And from that point on, things changed. The German children living in the same street on the apartment would not talk to us. The boys would hit us. Some of the children in our school would leave for Palestine.

It was a slow change. And yet, it was a sudden change. It is contradictory. But it was very strange. There were days when you forgot about it. And there were times when you were very aware of it.

This type of life became progressively worse. Personally, it didn't touch us because we were considered foreigners with a permit to live in Germany. Jews, we were not considered as Jews. It did not appear in our passports. We were just treated like an American or like an Englishman would have been treated living in Germany.

School was difficult. I got into a lot of trouble, mainly because I just was too lively and just couldn't listen long enough. I couldn't sit still long enough. And the grades were B and C.

And once my sister started school, she was a model student with model grades. And that's all I heard. So it was very, very difficult.

The other thing that was very difficult in school was the fact that it was a fairly religious parochial school. We learned Chumash and Gemara and Ivrit. But most of the children in that school came from German backgrounds. Out of the 500 children, 20, maybe 25, had parents that either came from Hungary, from Poland, from Russia.

And in the mid '30s when it became-- when the German authorities requested that the Jewish children state their parents' date of birth, place of birth, nationality, it became very obvious to everyone who was Polish and who was German by nationality. And there were children, Jewish children, in that school that made very derogatory, very ugly remarks. Some for a while wouldn't talk to me or wouldn't play to me.

And I remember coming home and asking what's the difference between a German Jew and a Polish Jew. My parents couldn't answer it. And this has really been one of the major problems in Germany before the war, during the war, in Poland during the war, and even in Israel. I mean there is this separation, this ethnic separation, which just we can't overcome. There is resentment on both sides. There's anger on both sides. And I'm not blaming either party, but it is so unnecessary.

In 1938, a month before the Kristallnacht, the German police, not Gestapo, just general police, came to the house at 6:00 in the morning and asked that we get dressed and come downtown, whatever that was. My mother was after surgery, and my father talked to the police lieutenant, I think it was, I'm not sure. And he said, I'll come, leave the family at home.

And by afternoon the phone started ringing. And people told us that the Germans had rounded up all the Polish Jews in Germany and were shipping them back to Poland or rather pushing them over the border. The reason for this, or the cause of this action was that the Polish consuls in Germany refused to put a certain stamp into the Polish passports. And this act-- this was only reserved for Jews. So it was antisemitic on the part of the Poles.

By late afternoon, somebody told us where they were holding those people-- men, women, children. And we should bring a suitcase with clothing. And they said not to send my mother because they would keep her, but to send the children.

So a cousin and I-- his father was also taken-- lugged those two suitcases downtown. We went into the courtyard of what seemed like an old school. We found, after much searching, my father and my uncle. And we gave him the suitcases.

And I remember looking around and saying to my father, the gate is open. It's not guarded. Why don't you walk out with me?

And my father said, no, you can't do that. That's not honorable. I don't do those things.

So they shipped these people to Poland. I'm not sure exactly how many, from all over Germany. And they pushed-- physically walked them over the border and pushed them across. The Jewish community on the other side, which was Poznan, took them in for a while and then distributed them all over Poland. My father went home to where the family lived, which was Sambor and stayed with them until May 1939.

In the meantime, we had to move. And we had to find new apartments. And the restrictions were more severe. A maid could not work for a Jewish family.

We tried to obtain a certificate for Palestine. My father had two brothers there. They left Berlin in '34. And when they asked my father to come with them or to follow, my mother said, I don't want to go to Palestine-- too many Jews.

And my parents were fairly certain that as Polish nationals, they would leave us alone. We were comfortable. Money was no problem. There were bank accounts. There was real estate. It was a comfortable life, an easy life. My father gave up the business voluntarily in '37 because he really didn't need it. He could live without it.

My mother decided to ship the contents of the seven or eight-room apartment to Palestine. And it was packed and shipped under the supervision of the German Gestapo. We shipped everything legally. We didn't smuggle anything. And we waited for certificate, which was supposed to come any minute.

In May of '39, my father came back with a 4-week pass to Germany with the permission from the Germans to stay four weeks and then take all of us back to Poland unless we receive a certificate for Palestine. Time elapsed. He got an extension. We got a second extension. The certificate still was supposed to come tomorrow or the next day or the next week.

We lived in a small, furnished room, four people, used somebody else's kitchen and bath. And we still believed that we would be able to leave. My father knew the Italian consul in Hamburg. And he suggested that he pick us up. He could give us a 3-day visa.

My father said, I can't go for three days. I need to stay. And he said, just go, don't ask any questions. And my father said, no, I can't do that. I can't have a visa to give me permission to stay. I can't go on a 3-day visa.

He in effect told them in that many words that take your chances. Nobody is going to do anything. They'll let you stay. But he didn't want to. He was afraid.

In the meantime, most of our friends, acquaintances had left. I remember Martin Buber coming to the house just shortly before he left and saying, it's time to go. He was a friend of my father's. And my father said, we'll see. He didn't say yes. He didn't say no.

War broke out on September 1, 1939. The Gestapo was at the house an hour afterwards. They picked up my father. They interned him in a county prison for a couple of weeks. And we brought him laundry every week. And afterwards, all those Polish men that they had interned, they sent to Oranienburg, to Sachsenhausen and then to Dachau.

We got mail very, very seldom. We had to move again. We lived in another furnished room. We had to wear a yellow star. We had food rations. We bought our food in a specially designated store. We were not allowed out at night.

People were beaten. People were arrested. Some people managed to leave.

We practically pitched a tent at the Jewish Community Center just trying to get some sort of an exit permit for my father-- not for us, just for him because they would have let him out had he had a permit. I know on one of those visits in December of 1940 there were whispers and people were very excited. Jacob Linefeld had been released from prison. He was a friend of my father's.

We rushed home. My mother called them. He didn't really want to see us. But he consented to let us come that afternoon.

I was very worried about going out in the late afternoon. It was December. It was dark very early. And I talked to my mother about it. And she said, oh, don't worry. It really doesn't matter. We'll be back in plenty of time.

I wanted to take the star off the coat. And she said, no, don't bother. It's not important. It's more dangerous to take it off than not.

I reminded her that a week earlier an elderly lady had been found dead one morning. And to the yellow star they pinned a note that roughly translated, out at night, dead at daylight. She was dead. They'd beaten her to death.

We rushed to Jacob's house. And we went up to the third floor to the elevator. He opened the door. A thin, 6 foot tall man, who used to be very stout, gray skin, his front teeth were missing, his hair was shaven. And we just stood and stared at him. We didn't recognize him.

He didn't even ask us to sit down. He said, Beno, which was my father's name, is fine. He's working. Don't worry. I

leave for Italy tomorrow. And I will see what I can do.

He couldn't wait for us to leave. He couldn't talk to us. He just couldn't.

We had overstayed our visit. We got outside it was dark. And Germany was blacked out. There were no lights from the windows in the streets. There were no lights from streetlights, nothing. Streetcars, no lights. Streetcars, we couldn't use. We had to walk. Jews were not allowed. And it was cloudy and dark, no stars, no moon, nothing.

As we were walking, we heard steps behind us. They were sudden. We didn't even hear them coming. By the time we heard them, they were close. We saw also the beams of flashlights.

We panicked. Mother ran to the right. I ran to the left. And the lights and the boots kept coming closer. And I twisted my ankle. I fell and landed in a gutter. And gutter was wet.

The boots kept coming. And I could feel them step on my hand. I had a badly bruised hand. And they were yelling, halt, stop, stop. And they kept going. We saw the flashlights disappear in the distance across the street.

And then I heard my mother's voice. And she helped me up. And we slowly got home. My ankle was broken. It took a long time to heal. It was a nasty fracture. But the nightmares remained. I couldn't get rid of them. I still don't.

In February of 1941, the Gestapo came to the house. They rang the bell. I happened to open the door. They had their hats on, long leather coats and boots, standard uniform. They asked for my mother. My mother was in the kitchen. And they dropped a cigar box on the table.

It's easier to write than to talk. And the cigar box had a rubber band around it. It was fairly small. And they said three words, ashes from Dachau.

Something was burning on the stove. My mother was screaming. And that's about all I remember. The next thing I remember was an Orthodox funeral by Chief Rabbi Carlebach, who was killed in Riga.

And after that, we just had a few more months. I went to school. They combined the boys school and the girls school. I got a job at a local department store doing some sewing at night. I couldn't really sew. The sleeves were backwards, and the skirt was sideways. And after about three months, they said they really couldn't use me. But I gave it a try.

My grades were fair. I graduated from school. It wasn't much of a graduation. And everybody really either had left or was leaving. A lot of those people who were arrested with my father died or were killed.

And then in fall of 1941, we received notification that in two days we had to report to a downtown location to be shipped East, no details other than East. It was labeled relocation. Relocation to us didn't mean a thing. We assumed that if it would be Poland, we would manage. My mother spoke fluent Polish. I probably assumed I could learn it, which I did eventually. But no details.

We were allowed a suitcase each and sort of a duffel bag. We didn't have many belongings anyway out of that one furnished room. And there were about 1,000 of us.

We were put into railroad cars. The cars were guarded and sealed from the outside. It was still sort of stuffy and warm outside, sort of Indian summer.

It took a couple of days. It was not a fast train. When the trains were opened, the Germans almost stepped back. We were confronted by men in black uniforms with black hats and orange band around the hat and a star. And the moment we got out of the train, my mother asked the first one, who are you? What are you?

And he did not understand German. My mother switched to Polish. And he said, I'm the Jewish police. And they walked us into the ghetto. It was not much of a walk by today's standard. But in those days, it was a 2-hour walk.

The streets were unpaved. The beginning of the walk was almost country-like. And then it became more of a city, cobblestone streets, old dilapidated houses. It became very obvious that it was the slum of a city. The city was large we were told. And the Baluty was a slum before the war. It did have some Jewish inhabitants. But it mainly had the underworld.

And the luggage came later on in a wagon. And as we walked, some of the inhabitants of that place passed us. Some were ragged looking. There were some children. Instead of shoes, there were rags tied with string. It was a scene out of a movie. It was not real.

A huge drum past us on the street. And as it passed us, the smell was just unbelievable. We asked one of the police, Jewish police, that was walking along with us and making conversation with my mother, what is that? And he said, it's a fekalia wagon. We don't have toilets. We have outhouses. We don't have running water. We have pumps.

They brought us to a school on Mlynarska 25. The school is still standing. It's not being used. But it is there. And they kept us there for a few weeks, probably four or five weeks.

We slept on the floor. The suitcases came. We got a little bit of food, not very much. Outside the school, the Jews that had lived in the ghetto already a year prior to our arrival had little piece of cabbage and butter and bread and tried to sell for whatever valuables or currency we had, which was very little.

Next to us on the floor was an elderly couple. She had bright red hair that was turning gray. And we used to have some mutual acquaintances years ago, parents of a classmate of mine. And when we were assigned rooms in the ghetto, we shared the room with four other people, small room. They were assigned a room on the opposite side of the ghetto.

The ghetto was divided by a wooden bridge at various points. We were on the right of the bridge. They were on the left of the bridge.

And this lady, whose name was Julie, said, if you come to New York before I do, call my son. I didn't call him. Those people were transported to a death camp three months later. I couldn't cope.

I met him at a party. And somebody evidently had told him that I knew his parents. And I did tell him. We got married in 1946.

When we got the room on Pawia Street number 24, room number 9, we shared the little room with four other people. There were wooden bunks, a little iron stove with a long pipe, but never enough coal to heat it. We cooked on it.

The room had one window that looked down on the Polish side and on the barbed wire on the guardhouse. And the guard was marching day and night back and forth. Every two hours a new one. We saw the Poles carrying bread and food. But it might just as well have been 1,000 miles away. There was no contact. There were no underground sewers. There was no in and no out. We were sealed off without the possibility of any contact.

The four people who shared the room with us were childless, two elderly couples. And it was very difficult living this way. They were very intolerant of two children. We had a bucket in the corner, which substituted for a toilet. They made us carry it down every day because after all we were younger. We were supposed to take turns cleaning the oven. But it didn't work out that way. It was difficult.

In about January of the following year, which was 1942, they started harassing me, go out and get a job, go out and do some work, because they couldn't find work. They were old, probably 60 or 65. That was considered old.

I tried finally to get a job. But at age 16, where are you going to get a job? I was not trained for anything. I did not speak the right language. I learned a year later, but at that point I didn't.

I went to the Department of Labor. The director at the Department of Labor was, oh, maybe seven, eight years older

than I. He had come to Poland from Hanover in 1938 when they pushed the Jews across the border.

I waited for hours till he granted an audience. It was not easy to even get the audience. You put your name on a sheet. And if you didn't get the audience today, you came back tomorrow. And you sat and you wait.

Do you recall his name?

I'll give you his fictitious name. I will not give you his right name. I call him in my stories Leonard Luft. His right name I can-- I will not give you. He lives not far from New York.

He did not ask me to sit down. He was very brisk. He spoke with me in German. And he said there are no jobs, period-- in spite of the fact that the ghetto was full of factories. Metal, wood, hat making, uniform making, carpentry, you name it, there was a factory. We made the straw boots that the German army wore over the snow in Russia.

I asked him whether I may come back in 4 weeks and ask for a job or maybe he would find something. He said, it's useless, but if you insist. I left. I came back in 4 weeks. And he greeted me with the words after long wait, I told you it was useless. You waste your time. Go and don't come back.

I waited a couple of weeks more. And I did go back. And I said, I really need work because work meant an extra ration of soup. I also would like some sort of work for my mother. She can sew. And they had sort of schools tucked away in the factories for children. And I wanted my children-- my sister to go to the hat factory or wherever there was a possibility to at least have her attend some sort of make believe school and get the soup.

And he was very angry. He said, I told you I have nothing. There is nothing. He got up from his chair. He had his feet with black boots on the desk. He opened the door and he said, raus, German-style.

I saw him ride in his carriage, which was drawn by a horse. He had all the food that a person needed. He had no shortages or anything. His sister was one of the right hands or one of the go-betweens between the German administration and the ghetto administration because she was bilingual. And she was young, and she was very capable, not necessarily a decent sort of a person. But she was very capable.

I can either tell you that I saw him one more time after the war, or I can tell you at the end, whatever you prefer. What would you like?

I think it fits now since you brought his name up.

I worked for the English army for war crimes in 1945. I gave them a list of 42 SS, which we arrested. They stood trial. But it entailed going to Hamburg because I was in a camp not far from Hamburg at the end of the war. And we were ringing doorbells and picking them physically up, putting them into jails.

We took time off for lunch. There were four officers, a driver, and I. I did the translating mainly, the German part. And we were walking down one of the main streets, the equivalent of Fifth Avenue, in Hamburg, which was pretty shabby in those days. And we had had lunch, I think, at the officer's club. And it was slightly uphill, and it was drizzling.

And as we were walking, somebody walked towards us with a cap, a sort of a Burberry trench coat, except it wasn't Burberry in those days, and a briefcase under his right arm. We passed on the left side, he and I. His left arm and my left arm practically touched. Our eyes met maybe for 30 seconds, but there was instant recognition on both parts. He turned. He ran down the hill and around the corner.

The English asked me, anybody you know? And I said no. And that's the last time I saw him. I could have met him now in New York or in Minnesota. But I said, no, I don't care to.

I finally found a job through a former neighbor of ours who had convinced Rumkowski, who was a Jewish head of state of the ghetto, that the ghetto needed beautification. It needed parks and schools and trees and buildings and God knows

what. Rumkowski thought this was very attractive, after all he was king of all this empire.

And he gave permission for this man, whose name was Adolf Goetz-- he was an engineer by training-- to hire people to draw plans. We were an office of paperwork only, drawing up plans. He was a former neighbor of ours.

He heard through somebody that I needed work. He came one evening to the house. And he said, I give you a job. I was delighted.

He must have been in those days about 70 years old. He was very short. He wore glasses, steel rimmed glasses. He was very nervy and very lively and a dreamer. Like any artist or any creative person, he was an absolute dreamer.

We sat in this office for six months drawing up plans. I was a so-called secretary. I could neither write nor type, nor anything. But I sat there.

What had his profession been?

He was an engineer by training. I think he had an only son who had left for South America. I am not sure. It was 1942.

Did he come in the transport with you?

Yes, but I hadn't paid any attention. There were 1,000 people. You couldn't talk or know everybody. He came with his wife.

And when he hired people, he hired a great many Czech Jews from Prague. There was a director of Skoda, who was really not used to sit and draw up plans. But it was better than not having a soup. There were a great many other people with all the credentials and all the academic titles you could possibly imagine. And we sat there and we drew up blueprints. And we got our soup.

We got thinner. There was a lot of typhus that summer. And towards fall or early winter, it started raining before it started to snow. Rumkowski called out of Goetz's office and said, I'm closing your office next week. It's useless. I've changed my mind.

He pleaded. And he begged. It didn't help. He was-- Adolf Goetz by then was just a skeleton, just skin and bones. He cried when he told us. And he really couldn't help. There was nothing he could do.

When I said goodbye to him and thanked him, he said, I'll try and find you something. But I can't promise. He was dead a week later. I went to his funeral. He's buried in the cemetery, no marker. There were no markers. And it's one of 70,000 graves.

I started looking for work. And it was difficult. It was Catch-22. You had to know somebody to get a job, but how do you get to know somebody?

When I tried to get my sister into a little school that was operated out of a factory, the manager of the factory said, what will you give me in return? Naive as I was, I said, I have nothing left, the Germans took all the jewelry, all the money. I have nothing. He said, that's not what I'm talking about.

So then I realized that in the ghetto there was nothing free. You received something for something, as a rule. There were exceptions.

I had a co-worker in that building who worked on the second floor. I went down to the second floor and wanted to talk to her. She was not in the office. She was sick, or she was out.

But the office had a stove, also a black, potbellied stove. And I put my arms around the black pipe that went through the ceiling just to get some warmth out of it. But there was nothing left. It was cold. There was no coal. There was no wood.

And I stood there. And on my right side, I could feel that somebody was staring at me. But I didn't look up. Eventually, he walked over. And he stretched out his hand. And he said, I'm Yeshiahu Spiegel. And he said, I know who you are. I've heard your name. You're looking for work.

I said yes. He said, I've been ordered to start a new office in two weeks to fill out the applications for coal rations for the German Reich. They'll send in the individual household applications. We will compute them. And we'll send them back. The same way we sold their clothing or the uniforms and send them back, we did their office work.

He has been asked to head this office. The head of this office was Henryk [? Neftali. ?] He was a lawyer before the war. He was also so he could handle Rumkowski. He was hard to handle, temperamental and very difficult.

I didn't believe that he would give me the job. He said, come on Monday in two weeks. For two weeks, I didn't sleep. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't function because I didn't believe he would give me the chance. I walked in two weeks later. I did get the job.

I worked as his Secretary. I learned a little, but not a lot. But he didn't mind. And I worked for him probably for about nine months, from the fall of 1942 till 1943, probably summer.

But in the meantime, what I forgot was 1942, my mother died. She did not just die. She blew up like a balloon from hunger. There was nothing we could do. She stopped talking.

I saw the little black wagon on the streets. And eventually, it was in front of our house. They didn't bury the dead in July of '42. They didn't have enough people. My sister and I walked after a week to the cemetery. The old man in front of the buildings said, go home, nobody buries the dead today.

We didn't go home. We entered the building. The building is still standing. It's right outside the cemetery gate.

And inside the big hall were bodies piled from the floor to the ceiling. The bodies were between two wooden boards tied with a string. And on the feet were name tags.

We found two shovels. We went outside. We eventually found a little space on a walkway. And we spent most of the day digging. We dug a grave. And then we went looking for my mother. We found her, and we carried her outside and we buried her. No Tears. No prayers, nothing.

About six weeks later, the Germans decided to effect a curfew. Nobody was allowed out of the buildings. Nobody was allowed to work. The curfew was supposed to be lasting a week. Rumkowski had the proclamation pasted all over the town, on walls and buildings. And we waited.

One of our neighbors, Shmulik, kept going up on the roof and look out. We contemplated running away to different building. But there was no hiding. They went street after street. They had dogs.

What were the dates? Approximately.

September 1942. I have the exact dates at home. I don't have them. It's in Lucien's book.

On the third day, they came to our house. It was warm. We still put coats on. I was worried about my sister. And I put makeup on her face. And I was really the only reaction I got out of her. She smiled. And she talked. Since my mother's death, she didn't talk anymore. She was totally apathetic.

This happened six weeks--

Yes. Right. Right.

And how old was your sister at this time?

11. We went downstairs. Our neighbor upstairs had a little baby, which was rare, but there were still some pregnancies, some children, newborn children. She came down without the baby. She had hidden the baby.

And downstairs the Germans had an amplifier. And they said, everybody out of the building. We stood in the courtyard. And then they went into the building with their dogs. And they brought out a father and a son and one other man. They immediately put him on the truck, which stood in front of the street.

And then they looked at us. You, to the right. You, to the left. Selection.

The older people and the very young people were pushed onto the truck so fast. It took seconds. My sister was among them. I tried to go to her. They didn't let me. They hit me with the barrel of a gun and the truck took off. And never heard again from these people, none. I'm not sure of the exact figure of how many they deported during that Aktion. But I think it was the one single largest number of all the deportations.

I moved next door and shared a room with two girls, who had lost their parents. Our co inhabitants of the room had also disappeared on the trucks. And they asked me to join them in the room. It was probably mainly a matter of sharing coal or lumber or whatever could be shared, not necessarily food.

And you are now alone?

I was totally alone. And shortly thereafter, I lost my job. I went out of sequence. And then I found the new job working as a secretary.

And all jobs had a lot of politics involved, a lot of favoritism, a lot of-- you call it [YIDDISH] in Yiddish, which translated means shoulders or means connections. Knowing the right people, having the right connections, that was all that mattered. Nothing else really mattered.

I worked for Spiegel. He was a very quiet man. But slowly, I found out more about him. He was a writer. He wrote in Yiddish, although he spoke German and English and some French.

And after a few months, he asked me to stay late after work. And he wanted to read some of his stories to me. They were poems, and they were ghetto stories. They were first drafts. They'd never been printed.

How old was he?

He was about 38 or 39. We were very good friends, maybe more than friends. He walked me back to the room every night. There was a lot of talk. There was a lot of resentment. There was an estranged wife. There was talk of marriage. But it was a time when you really didn't think about tomorrow.

He was on Rumkowski's blacklist. He had written a poem about a child. And the father told the child, there are no raisins, there are no almonds. And the story told of the father not being able to work, or not getting work. It was indirectly a reflection on Rumkowski's rule. And Rumkowski got very angry when he heard the poem. And he said in Yiddish, as long as I am here, he will never write again.

He was ready to deport him. With the intervention of Henryk [? Neftali, ?] he changed his mind with the understanding that nothing would be written about him. And in the 50 years that passed since, I have never read anything on the 20 or 25 books that Spiegel wrote that had any reference to Rumkowski, none. I mean in conversation he called them terrible names. But he never wrote about them.

So he survived the war?

Yes, he died three weeks ago. Work was not difficult. It was strange. We had 300 or 400 people filling out those forms,

computing forms. We knew that the job was of limited duration because once the forms are completed, then this office would be superfluous.

And so Rumkowski knew the same. Rumkowski had a habit of making inspections of his factories, "his" in quotation marks, of his offices. He could dole out favors, which were few. He could also take people and say, you don't need people in offices. I need them in factories, which was much harder work, physically. If you worked in the straw factory, you handled the wet straw. The room was damp and wet. So it was very bad.

He came to our office because he evidently knew that there was an end in sight. He interviewed practically each of the 400 people. It took seconds. But he said, you do this and you do that, 1, 2, 3. And somebody took notes.

Spiegel sat in the main office. And they ignored each other. It was very strange. They did not-- one knew of the other, but they did not speak to each other. Henryk [? Neftali ?] did the talking. Rumkowski spoke Yiddish. Henryk's Yiddish was fair, but he mainly spoke Polish. Rumkowski could understand Polish, but he didn't speak Polish.

I tried to hide. I tried not to be called in. And I managed till pretty much towards the late afternoon. And then my luck ran out, and somebody said, she hasn't been in yet.

They called me in. Rumkowski asked me my name. He asked me about my parents. He asked me what kind of work I did. He asked me how old I was. And then he said, you'll stay here, but you'll hear from me. And that was it. But--

What were your impressions of the man?

At that point? At that point, I had a childish dream. I always thought-- you know, you saw him on the street in a droshky, in a horse-drawn wagon. And what would I do if I ever met him? I would ask him for bread. And I would ask him for sugar. And I would ask him for some boots that didn't let the water in. And I would ask him for a better job.

You know, I had these daydreams, almost hallucinations of what I would do. Yet when I stood in front of him, I trembled. I couldn't talk, nothing.

He made fun of me in a few words that my Yiddish was more German than Yiddish at that time. And he said, you are a German. I said, no, I'm a Polish national, I'm a Jew.

But I had no impression really at this point. He was a white haired gentleman, very well dressed. And that's all the impression I had at that point.

Was he emaciated?

No. He was overweight. About a month later Henryk [? Neftali ?] came into the office. And he said, I would like you to transfer tomorrow morning to the statistical department. I said, why? I didn't really want to leave. This was a place I knew. I had friends. I didn't want to leave Spiegel.

And he said, don't ask a lot of questions. You have to go to the statistical department. It was not a matter of choice. It was a matter of were asked, you did it.

I walked into the statistical department the next day. And Oskar Singer, who was the director, introduced himself. And he spoke fluent German. His Polish was bad. His Czech was good.

And he told me what he wanted me to do. He said, I'll have daily reports, try and rewrite them or type them, depending if a typewriter is available. Go down to police headquarters on Plac Koscielny and get the daily statistics-- so many died, so many were deported, so many committed suicides, and keep a log of it day by day. I won't be much in the office. I'm usually all over. And he hobnobbed a great deal with the ghetto elite, the Jewish elite, because that's where you got the information, or any information if you wanted it.

He was a very brilliant man. He got extra food rations because of his position. He was well liked. He had two children, a daughter my age and a son a couple of years older. He introduced me to his daughter. But it was just hello, how are you. And I worked for him probably for six months.

Was he a kind individual?

I would think so, yes. He was busy. He was preoccupied. He was making plans for after the war. He was a very creative person. He was a journalist by training. Kindness never really entered into that relationship. It was more a relationship of boss and secretary.

And was he well fed?

I wouldn't say he was well fed. He was considerably better fed than I was. Well fed, for that he wasn't high up enough. It wasn't-- he got a [? beirad, ?] which was an additional ration. He got an occasional allocation of some gift or something of that sort. But I don't think I would consider him well fed. I knew that he lived with his wife, his two children, his sister, and two elderly ladies from Prague in a small room.

I worked for him for six months. When the telephone in the building rang-- it was just an inter ghetto telephone. The pharmacy had a phone but, no medications. Some of the offices, the bigger offices had a phone. Some of the factories had a phone.

You operated it through a central switchboard. You got an operator and say, give me the factory on Zgierska Street. And you would get it.

The phone rang. And the girl who answered started screaming. When she had calmed down. She said it was Rumkowski and you're supposed to come to his office tomorrow morning.

So I went the next morning. And to get to his office, you had to go through the Jewish police, or the German police, through his varied secretaries. It was probably as involved as getting to the president of the United States.

You in the same building?

No. No. Rumkowski was in the Baluter ring of Balucki Rynek. And opposite the ring was a Jewish police station. In front of the ring was a German sentry, or sentry house. The administration was surrounded by barbed wire. And you couldn't get in and out unless you either worked there or you were summoned.

I came in. And he said, you know that there is a-- in Marysin at the end of the ghetto, there is a house for children or young people, either with or without parents. And they get some schooling and a little more food than the average. So now I have decided to open another branch. And the branch will be three kitchens in the ghetto. I need personnel to staff the kitchens and the offices. And if a worker has done very good work in a factory, he'll get a coupon to come two weeks to a designated kitchen and get an extra meal in the evening.

He wanted me to run one kitchen, not--

Was this for the young people?

No, this was only for old people. But the staff were young people. They were all teenagers, except for the cooks. Those were older people.

He said, I want you to run the office.

So this was an opportunity he was giving you because you--

For the extra meal. I don't know for what he gave me the opportunity, for whatever reason. It was sort of a hobby of his

to come every afternoon and inspect and see the people come in with their little coupon and get this extra meal. Of course, we got the one meal extra too.

And I had to compute how many grams of the total food allocated would go per person. I couldn't figure that out. So I found a young man at the kitchen down the block, and he helped me. But Rumkowski didn't like that. He was very upset about it, very angry-- because he came every afternoon. You could hear him coming.

He shuffled, and he carried a cane. You could hear the shuffling. You could hear the cane. So you had a minute or two warning to either clean up the desk or do something. He also used the cane to hit people if he was displeased. And he was displeased rather frequently.

My friend Spiegel was very unhappy about the job. He said, be very careful. He can do you a great deal of harm. He also has a horrible reputation. He was known as a child molester. He ran an orphanage before the war, and he would have gone to trial had the war not broken out. Rumor has it that he is impotent, but he's still a molester. Be very careful. I rather you wouldn't work for him.

You don't turn down Rumkowski because if he was displaced, he would ship you out of the ghetto. He didn't care.

He came every day into the office for a visit. He was friendly enough. He had several things on his mind. He wanted me to move to the upstairs apartment above the kitchen.

And I started crying. And I cried so hard that I couldn't talk. And he couldn't talk anymore. And, no, I don't want to move. I like where I live with those three girls. No, I don't want to move.

He was very displeased. And as he left, he hit me over the head with a stick. He came back the next day, and he wanted to know whether I had family in Palestine. And I told him, yes, my father had two brothers. And were they will off? And I said I really didn't know, but to my knowledge one of them was. Would I make a promise? I said, yes, I'll make a promise.

After the war, I want you to promise me that your family in Palestine will help me financially and also out of Poland. And I was sort of surprised. I mean he was so sure that there would be an after the war. I was not. He was. There was no doubt. None. If anybody survived, he would survive. He assumed I would survive. I was young enough. I was 17, 18.

It was a strange request. And in the subsequent evenings that he kept coming, he kept repeating that I had made a promise and not to forget that promise. And--

And again, in return you would what?

Tell my uncles to bring him to Palestine and to support them financially.

If you--

No, just because he was decent, because he'd gotten me the job. Above the apartment above the kitchen, we didn't talk anymore. But somebody else occupied it in my place, a woman much older. And she really didn't care. She laughed about the whole matter. I didn't think it was funny.

In the kitchen, I met Oskar's youngest daughter, Ellie. She worked there. He had secured a job for his daughter, and we became very close friends.

You had met her once before--

Once before, but we only became friends in the kitchen. We walked home together. And I could never ration my bread that I would only eat a slice a day. So I gave her my bread, and she would bring me a slice. I trusted her that much that she kept my bread.

Would you normally eat your bread right away?

Yeah. A day a day and a half it would be gone. It had to last eight days.

How large was each piece? Ration.

Well, it was by weight. And at first, bread was for four days. Then bread was for five days, and for six days. And I think we went up to eight or nine days for a round loaf of bread. It sounds like an awful lot of bread. But if there's nothing else-- the soup was water.

The potatoes were frozen, mushy. And I don't know what you call it. You know, it had turned into alcohol. It had fermented. That's the word.

The turnips were vile. That's all I can say. I mean, if weren't frozen, they were vile. If they were frozen, they were not edible.

We cooked whenever we had heat or with soda so it would act as a tenderizer and cook fast because we had no coal or no wood. A great deal of this stuff we ate raw.

And while I was working on the kitchen, I turned yellow. The whites of my eyes turned yellow. And I had terrible pains on my sides and a very high fever. And I finally couldn't get out of bed. It turned out I had jaundice, which I didn't know.

Rumkowski sent his doctor to come and look at me. And he sent somebody home each day with a soup. And he gave me a ration of 2 pounds-- a present of 2 pounds of sugar and something else. I forgot the other item. It wasn't bread. It was something else.

And there was really nothing to do. There were no medications. The doctor said, against jaundice and gallbladder trouble what would help would be atropine. The only atropine I had heard about was for eye examinations.

Rumkowski arranged through somebody who brought in provisions to bring in atropine. And I got four plastic, or whatever you call them--

Vials?

Vials. And I got the shots. It didn't do any harm. It didn't do any good. It just took its course. And after about four days, I decided to go back to work. I was afraid not to work.

I looked funny. My neck was very yellow. My eyes were yellow.

But before I went back to work, while I stayed alone in this room, the girls went to work. I locked the door from the inside because people were stealing. People were desperate. They were stealing anything that wasn't nailed down for firewood. They were stealing food if there was food. They were stealing clothing. So, you know, it was understandable.

I locked the door from the inside. And I had a fever. I really felt miserable. And the knocking on the door was very loud, very noisy. Open up. Open up. I didn't open up.

When I went back to work and Rumkowski came back to the office, he said, I came to visit you with my driver. You didn't open the door. I was very glad I didn't open the door. But I didn't know it was he because I had no way of telling.

You were afraid, of course, that he might molest you?

Yeah. I was very afraid. Oh, from one day to the next, he closed the kitchen because he ran out of food. There was no

food coming in from the German side. And he closed the kitchen.

But something happened. I don't know why I skipped it, probably because it's painful. When I first started working in the kitchen, at the very beginning, one morning at 5 o'clock, there was a knock at the door. And a Jewish policeman stood at the door. And he said, you have been summoned. And I said, summoned where?

And it was winter. It was snow outside. He said the Gestapo. He called it Kripo for Kriminalpolizei. And I said, why? He said, don't ask me any questions. I don't know. Just get dressed and come because we'll have trouble if you don't hurry.

We walked in the early morning to the Gestapo. We had to go over the wooden bridge to the little red house. Many walked in, few walked out. The little red house still stands. It's still red.

He got me to the front door. He opened the door. He yelled out my name. And he ran.

When we pass the building, we passed on the second side of the street, or we didn't pass at all. It was just not a place to go.

The German behind the desk-- the room was warm. It had a big, green tiled oven, a little lamp on his desk. It was still dark outside. The German behind the desk wore a coat and a hat. It was warm. And I couldn't understand why he wore a coat and a hat.

Was it cold outside?

Very cold. It was snow and frost, but not inside. Inside was fine.

He was alone in the room. He asked me my name and my address. And he said, it has been reported that you have a radio. I said, no, I don't have a radio.

And for about two hours, we went through this game of you have a radio, no, I don't have a radio. And every time I said no, he would hit me on the side of my head. I had a couple of open scars on the head and was bleeding.

With his hand?

With his fist, closed fist. He also hit me on the left side of the head, which was very painful. And I got to a state where I just hoped I wouldn't faint. I was doubled over. I didn't stand anymore.

And then just as sudden as all this started, he opened the door and he pushed me out into the snow. I eventually made it back to the room. And a friend of mine cleaned me up.

And things healed pretty much in due course. But Spiegel, one day, put his hand on my shoulder and said, you know that you don't hear. I talk to you, and you don't turn your head. And when I talk to you, you look at me. You better see my doctor. It was Dr. Kronenberg.

And. I made an appointment to see her. And she asked for the story. She looked at the ear. And she said, it can't be repaired, maybe after the war. I don't hear on the left side, just on the right side.

The one thing that haunted me for a long time was the Gestapo's remark, somebody denounced you. I never really could figure out how, why, for what reason. I never had a radio.

One evening going home from work, somebody followed me. And I stopped, and I turned around. And I came face to face with a woman in her late 30s, I guessed. Her hair pulled to the back, sort of reddish brown, blondish brown. She wore black coat that sort of hung on her. And she looked terrible. You could see the wear and the tear and the hunger.

And she said, you are Cecilia? And I said, yes. Who are you? Because I didn't know her. She knew me.

She said, I'm Spiegel's former wife. You stay away from him, or you go back to the Gestapo. So there was my answer.

I looked at her. I was so incredibly angry. I don't know-- I probably would have been capable of hitting her because I knew the damage she had done. I turned and ran.

The result of this was that I didn't see much of Spiegel anymore. And we sort of passed occasionally, but not very often. But we didn't talk. We didn't see each other. He didn't pick me up at work anymore.

I saw him one more time in the ghetto after that. My name appeared on a list. I think it was January '44 to be deported. I didn't want to leave the ghetto.

And my friend Ellie, who was Dr. Singer's daughter, suggested that why don't you talk to Spiegel. And he knows enough people of influence, maybe he can intervene. I said, no, you go see him. She did.

And just hours before I had to report, the name disappeared from the list, and I could stay. He had used his influence. The name who-- the man who actually helped was Pulawski. He was the director of the leather factory. And he had some influence. And they used to be friends from before the war.

I went to see Spiegel and to thank him. And he gave me a scroll of poems, probably a dozen or more poems. And we said goodbye. And we really never saw each other again till after the war.

Had you explained to him what his wife had done?

No. I did that last year.

What was his understanding about your not seeing him anymore?

He-- nothing, nothing. He just accepted it for what it was.

He didn't try to see you again?

No, I don't think so.

Had he gotten back together with his wife?

Towards the liquidation of the ghetto, yes. But before that, he lived with his parents.

And had he come into the ghetto with her?

Yes. Yes. And with a child, a one-year-old child. And the child died.

And after Rumkowski liquidated the kitchen, we went to work in the saddlery, sewing the frames into which you put a spade, which a soldier carries on his belt. And we worked there until August 1944 when it was announced that the ghetto would be liquidated. We had no warning, no idea.

And they said they would send us to another camp. And they would close off certain streets. And those people had to report. Mine was one of the first. And there was really no reason for me to wait.

I packed one little suitcase. I knocked at the door of one of my friends, who shared the apartment with one of the high Jewish police officials and his wife and her mother. I knocked on the door early in the morning. And he came to the door and said, get lost. He didn't want to let me in.

I knocked on the door of another friend. And I could hear them inside. They didn't open the door.

So finally, I made my way to the railroad siding. And there, I saw Dr. Singer and his family. And he said, come stand with us. We'll get into the same compartment.

Were you alone?

Yes. He didn't know there would be no compartments, but cattle cars. And we boarded the cattle cars together with a each loaf of bread. The cars were sealed from the outside. And they started moving slowly with stops and starts because troop trains or whatever had preference.

Where did you believe they were taking you?

No idea. Not the vaguest. We didn't where it was north, east, or south, nothing.

Can we move back just a little bit? When did the first wave of deportations begin in your remembrance?

Well, I came to the ghetto in '41. There could have been deportation between '40 and '41. I am not entirely sure. The first major deportation that I was aware of was in winter of '41 when they deported a lot of the elderly Jews that had come from Western Europe. And then there were deportations on and off for various reasons, if you want to call it that, all during the time.

Our name was on the first deportation list. But somebody told us that--

That was about when?

Three months after arrival, '41. Somebody told us that it was mainly meant for either German or Austrian Jews. So my mother gave me our Polish passport. And he said, go to any of-- all of the ghetto administrations and tell them we are not German Jews. And eventually, it worked.

I mean, here this little 16-year-old started running around with those passports arguing. They thought I was crazy. I probably was. But we stayed. And the people that left on their transport, nobody survived.

Where did you think they were being taken?

To another camp. We never really knew. And if somebody had any kind of a notion, there was no way to prove it. And--

Did that continue until you left or was there any inkling--

No. I have an acquaintance who now lives in Australia. He's probably 10 or 15 years older. He claims he had a radio. He claims he knew. He worked for the metal working factory.

If he knew, Rumkowski would have known. If he knew, maybe we would have acted differently. Maybe there would have been resistance. I don't with what.

I find it very hard to believe that any of us really knew of a place like Auschwitz. I have asked people who've done research. I have asked Spiegel who left on the last transport out of the ghetto. I have asked the daughter of Moishe [? Kaho, ?] who was the director of the school system and who was hidden after the liquidation for a few weeks until she was found, whether she knew. nobody knew.

Rumkowski himself went on the last train with a letter of recommendation from the German SS Biebow saying, when you arrive, accord him all courtesies. And he believed it. So if he didn't know better, how could we have known better? So until the trains, the cattle cars opened in Auschwitz, we had no idea. Nothing.

It has been reported that after certain deportations, that shipments of clothing and possessions would come back--

And some was bloody. Still unknown, two and two wasn't put together.

Were you personally aware of these shipments?

Mm, hmm. Yeah. Because some of these shipments came into the basement of Rybna 8, where I worked. They had sort of a depot of sorts there. I'm not sure what you would call it.

What was your personal reaction to that?

Oh, well, I didn't know whose clothing it was. I did not recognize any piece of clothing that could have belonged to anyone I knew. Reactions in the ghetto were strange. They were not your norm. They were not the reactions that you would expect out of a normal human being. You become callous. You become selfish. You become like a thing without feelings because it hurts too much to feel.

I had good friends in the ghetto. I had few enemies, if any at all. And still, I had one friend, Spiegel, who said to me, don't ever talk about bread or food. It's demeaning. It's vulgar. Don't talk about it. And yet you were thinking about it day and night. It never left you.

Hunger is difficult to describe. I mean, we think we fast one day and we are terribly hungry. But to have food on-- or a unbalanced variety of food, I mean, either people swell up. People lose a tremendous amount of weight. It's a sensation which you can't put into words.

You close your eyes, and you see bread. You open your eyes, you still see bread. But there is no bread. You keep talking of what you're going to do after the war. I'm going to sit down and never stop eating. It's almost an insane reaction. It's not rational.

When your mother died, did you need to report her death?

Yeah, you needed to report. And you needed to hand in the cards, the ration coupons. There were people who did not. And if you got caught, it meant instant deportation. I mean it was a felony, so to speak.

Did this happen a great deal?

I wouldn't know whether it happened a great deal, but it did happen. I mean, it's hard to put figures or numbers on it. I don't know.

Now, why would people not report the death of family member?

Because you could cash in the rations for food. There were instances where a father would eat the food of a child, or vice versa. You know, we are surprised now at child abuse or parent abuse, as you call it, when you have an elderly, incapacitated parent or bedridden parent. There have been horror stories. Well, in a war, you have the same horror stories.

You have other stories as well. But anything is possible. I mean, you have parents who went to their deaths with their children because they wouldn't give it up. But you have the other side of the coin.

Were all the deportations done in an orderly fashion?

Orderly in what way?

You were called. You could take your family. You could take so much luggage. There were less or--

I would say more or less, more or less, not entirely orderly, but more or less. Yes. The lists were drawn up by various arms of the internal ghetto administration. The Germans said, you can either do it yourself or we'll go in there. So Rumkowski said, we'll do it.

So at times, a factory would draw up a list. Other times the department of labor would draw up a list. It varied. It was sometimes by age, sometimes by gender, sometimes by occupation. It wasn't always a person who was expendable, or who did not produce. It was hard to really predict in which way they would draw up a list or who would be on the list and who would not.

Now, at this time during deportations was this the time that the Germans would come in and conduct these deportations?

No, they only did that once, during the Sperre, during the one-week house arrest. They actually physically came in. At other times, they left it up to the Jewish police.

So the Jewish policemen would collect--

Yes--

People--

Yes--

And bring them to the railroad siding in Marysin.

What was the name of-- was there a name for that station or that place?

Marysin. It's where the cemetery is. It's the area of-- it's like a city quarter, you know, like-- it's pretty much out of the city, out in the country. And that area was called Marysin. It still is.

Was it nicer than the rest of the ghetto or was it the same?

It was pretty much uninhabited. It was not built up. It had a couple of buildings there. Rumkowski had his house there. It had this little orphanage there. It had another sort of, what would you call it, a recuperation house where you were sent if you were very deserving for a couple of weeks to get three meals and not work. It had the railroad sidings coming into the ghetto.

All the food came in Marysin, the train loads. It was unloaded by the Jews, or mainly by the Jewish police to a large extent, and brought into the ghetto in horse-drawn wagons. It had a lot of green, open spaces. And it had an enormous cemetery, one of the largest cemeteries I've ever seen, even before the war, very old, very large.

And this is the cemetery where people were taken--

Yes--

To be buried, although there were frequently not enough people to do the burying?

Right. Right. And they were no longer buried in the central part with the walkways. They were buried wherever you could find a spot, really. And if you look at the hill now, it's full of weeds. It's grassy. It's overgrown. There may be a dozen or two dozen markers, stone markers, of which people placed for relatives right after the war, '45, when they either knew or could identify.

When I went to the Jewish community, I gave them the dates and the names. They couldn't identify because nobody kept records in that particular period. And even if they had given me an area, it would have been impossible to find. It is 60,000 or 70,000 dead. You can't find it. It's impossible.

I did an interview with one survivor whose family was in Lodz ghetto. He talked about how he spoke to another survivor after the war. He said that his father, mother, and sister went on the trains because they felt that it had to be better than what they were going through there.

That's very true.

And did people talk about, well, maybe I should leave? Did you hear people saying maybe--

Some people say maybe the next place will be better. Although there were an equal amount of people who said, it never gets better, it always gets worse. But being human, you hope. You think if it's a work type situation, it has to be better. I mean, nobody ever imagined that one human being could do to another human being what the Germans did.

And when you reported to the station, and with the Singer family, do you remember what your frame of mind was when--

Blank.

Just blank?

Nothing. Nothing. It didn't matter. Whatever.

At this point, were you even wondering-- you had lost your father and your mother and your sister. Were you wondering or were you feeling, was death something that you had come to terms with at the age of 17? This time you were 18.

Death was something that was all around us. It had lost some of its horror, I should say. It was not unusual.

We came to realize that we had lost control, that we were not in control of our destiny and there was really nothing we could do. So whatever happens, happens. You know, you become numb. You try not to think.

It's a strange frame of mind because after living like a normal human being, this frame of mind leaves you. It's gone. You become somebody else again.

There are some who did not change, who lived in the past. The damage was permanent and who've never come to terms. And it's understandable.

Were there ever any thoughts of escape that you had heard of?

Yes, there were thoughts of escape, especially out in Marysin. That people wanted to crawl under the wire. But the guards were stationed at such regular intervals that you had to walk. And to get away was difficult because it was an open field.

I think in the beginning, there were some escapes. During the time that I was there, there were no escapes, because it had become so impossible. People killed themselves because they didn't want to live. But escapes were so few.

And if you were caught, you were hung. It was a public spectacle near where I lived on the square. And the bodies were swaying or swinging in the wind for days before we were allowed to cut them down. So we were pretty much intimidated.

You lost your family. Do you have any sense of community with anybody where you lived, the people you lived with, the people you worked with?

Mm, hmm. I had friends. I still have the same friends if they're alive.

Was this one friend, two friends, many friends?

Not many. There was my friend Felicia in Minneapolis. There's my friend Ellie in Israel. There is my friend Spiegel-- was my friend Spiegel in Israel. They were friends then, and they remain friends, not a great many. But you don't need many friends if you have good friends.

It has been said by some survivors that you couldn't get through any ghetto or concentration camp experience without a buddy.

That's true. It depends on instances. It depends on luck. It depends on being at the right place at the right time, or the wrong place at the right time, whichever.

But you need friends. A human being does not stand by itself. It never will. It never has. People rely on you, you rely on people. Yes, I owe my life to Spiegel.

I think the camps, it helped a great deal to have Ellie for a friend. I think friends are essential. It's as important as breathing.

Before we leave the ghetto, do remember services in the ghetto and holidays in the ghetto?

A couple of them, yes. But those were Hasidic services. And they were in somebody's house, you know, ultra, ultra Orthodox.

Did you go to them?

I went. But basically they didn't want women. They wanted the man. Yes, I did because I had a young woman who worked with me. She wanted to become a dancer. She never did. But her father and her brother were ultra, ultra Orthodox. And she took me home. And I attended services several times.

I attended a concert in somebody's house. I attended a dance in the basement of the offices once. Several poetry and prose readings.

Was Rumkowski present at any of these?

No. He wasn't supposed to know. We would have had trouble if he had known.

Wasn't there a library as well? Wasn't there a--

I don't know. There was one at one point. I never used it because I have trouble reading Polish. I only learned to read Yiddish. And I could read Hebrew. But I couldn't read Yiddish until '43.

And there really was no time to read. We worked 12 or 14 hours. And there was no time to. There was no light. There was no energy. And there was no desire, which was the worst part.

Was there any noticeable change? Or was it, in terms of atmosphere or a mood or anything else, or on Holy days, for example? Or were there any days where people were particularly afraid? Anniversaries or--

No. I remember when I lived in Germany that Jews were afraid during Hitler's birthday or other anniversaries of German importance. But other than that, we lived pretty much without a calendar, without a watch.

So Hitler's birthday, for example, which was--

It didn't matter in the ghetto. It mattered in the work camps because the SS personnel was very in close proximity to us. So if they wanted to punish or to hit or to do something, they could. Whereas in the ghetto, the Germans were outside.

They didn't come inside. And if you stayed away from the barbed wire, they stayed away from us. So it was not a close contact.

One thing I wanted to know in terms of the rationing of the food, what was the system? Did you go to soup kitchens? Did you--

Well, there were really two system. One was the soup kitchen, which brought these milk cans of soup to the factories. And you got the one soup at lunchtime.

The quality of the soup varied with the rations. It could be just pure water. It could have one potato swimming in it. It could have a handful of peas in it. It could have nothing.

The people that scooped the soup out of the cans into your little bowl, which you handed them, were also Jewish people. And working in a kitchen, of course, you never went hungry. And if you knew one of those people, you got a little more potato in your soup. They went to the bottom of the barrel. If you didn't know them, you ended up with water.

The other system was at irregular intervals the Jewish ghetto administration would post a proclamation saying that on such and such a date, or between the 1st and the 15th, you can go to a certain ghetto-- I wouldn't call them stores, but the equivalent of a store, where they would parcel out the portions. And on these proclamations, they would say, everybody will receive between the 1st and 15th on coupon number five, or whatever the name was, 100 grams of sugar, 200 grams of baking soda, a kilo of salt, in those proportions. I don't know, 5 kilos of turnips, of whatever the ration was.

But you would never know when you would get the next ration. It could be two weeks. It could be four weeks. It could be six weeks. It depended when the trains with the new supplies would come in.

The new supplies were allocated in various ways. A great deal of it went into the soup kitchen. Some of it went into the extra rations for the privileged. And some of it went to the rest of us.

What-- I'm sorry bringing up food.

That's all right. That's OK. Food is very important.

Did you keep your food with you if you had extra food? I mean, your loaf of bread was to last you--

You kept it in your room. But you were careful to lock the room very well. You wrapped it in a towel. And you hoped that your roommates wouldn't steal from you.

Did you ever carry it with you in your rucksack? Or did you ever feel--

You couldn't. You didn't have the strength to carry yourself, much less anything else. It was too hard to walk just on your own.

You come from a very nice home.

Yes.

What are the things you used to think about? I mean, here you are a teenager.

Well, I used to think of a lot of bread. I mean any kind of bread, white, like anything, just bread. I was a terrible eater as a child. I was very thin, and I didn't eat. My mother had to beg me to eat a slice of bread for breakfast.

What would I think about? I would think about a birthday cake. I would think about a real five-course dinner, from soup to nuts. I would think of the things that I could cook or would cook had had the material to cook with.

Do you remember a moment where you had something different other than the turnips and the potatoes and the bread?
Do you remember an event surrounding something-- a piece of fruit?

No. Fruit, I didn't see.

For how long didn't you see fruit?

Probably from 1940 to 1945. My cousin came from England to see me in Bergen-Belsen. And he brought me apples and oranges.

So for five years--

No food, no bananas. No milk. A little bit of horse meat. Three times I recall eating horse meat, which is horrible. It's sweet.

How do you fix it?

Like you fix beef.

Just boiled it? Is it tough?

Tough. Tough like a horse.

So you can recall three times eating meat--

Horse meat.

Vegetables were potatoes and turnips.

Few potatoes. Turnips, some dried peas and beans, not too many. Potatoes were very often frozen. That means they were soft and mushy. I remember cabbage. I remember red beets. And I remember potato peels.

For five years-- and bread.

And bread. And I remember, you had to have special connections to get a bag of potato peels from the kitchen.

Did women seem to have any gynecological problems as a result of--

No, everything stopped. Women didn't conceive. And women didn't have children. And nothing. It just-- three months down the road, everything stopped. It was sort of strange to understand. We didn't know why. It never dawned on us that it was malnutrition until a medical person told us.

Do you remember how much you weighed when you were in Lodz ghetto?

I pretty much weighed the same before the war and during the war. I gained a lot of weight after the war. I would say it hovered between 100 and 110 pounds.

And how many hours a day did you were you work in the--

Roughly 12 hours.

So what was your schedule like?

It varied. Sometimes I worked evening. Sometimes day times. As a rule, I went 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning till 8:00 at

night.

What happened to the children in the ghetto?

Well, there were different kinds of children. There were the street urchins, which in the beginning stood in their rags on street corners and would sing a song about Rumkowski and sell saccharine, 10 for a mark, or 12 for a mark. It was like the gold market, up and down, like the stock market. You could buy that. Those kids ran wild. Nothing.

Do you remember their songs?

Some of them.

Can you sing one--

No, I can't sing. You have to ask Gila Flam in Washington. She'll sing them for you.

Do you remember what the words--

Well, the words were spontaneous, like a street singer. They were made up right then and there. They would sing, for instance, saccharine, buy 10 for a mark, 10 for a mark. They'll make your life sweeter than Rumkowski.

They used to sing song-- in the beginning of the ghetto, they used to sell-- it's called in Yiddish, ptcha, which is really the meat of the legs of beef or veal. And then you sort of gel it and cut it in squares. And it has a lot of garlic in it. It's a Jewish dish. You can get it in New York. And they used to sell that on the corners. I don't know what was in it, but you could buy that. And there were songs to go with that.

There was a street singer in the ghetto who went around and made up songs. And there's a great deal of literature and information on him in Jerusalem. [? Yehiel ?] [? Sheintuch ?] has done a lot of research on his songs.

Was this the fellow who had a fiddler as an accompaniment?

Mm, hmm. There was also a boy-- well, they were brother and sister really. And they had come I think from Vienna or from Prague. And they were very musical. And they went around, stood on street corners singing, trying to earn a few-- but the money was worthless.

You couldn't buy anything for the money. My salary would not buy a slice of bread. The salary was only good to pay my 10 or 20 marks together with a coupon and get the ration. That was all it was good for. You couldn't buy anything else.

Anything else you bought, you either sold some food and didn't eat. Or you sold some belongings you had that you thought you could spare. Ah, but otherwise, you couldn't buy a thing.

There was no rent?

Rent? No. No such thing. There was such thing as electricity. And you were allowed one bulb from the ceiling. But you never got a bill because the ghetto had a central electrical department.

But if you knew somebody-- and I had a friend who knew somebody-- you could get a wire, a spiraled wire, which you find sometimes in a cooking element, in a heat plate. And you could get a heat plate like that if you could afford to pay for it in the black market. Or you could get a wire, about 1 inch in diameter, and string it from one side to the other and just hook it up on two electrical poles and have the wire come in above the meter, so they couldn't tell that you were using extra electricity. And my friend could afford to get such a wire.

So that could be done. There were ways and means. And if you have to, you become very inventive.

Before we move out of the ghetto, I'd like to go back to your family and find out whether yours was a religious family.

Yes. Grandmother's side was very, very religious. My father went to cheder before he went to public schools. We did not write accounts Saturday. We didn't write on Saturday. We went to services. We had a kosher house. We observed the holidays. It wasn't ultra religious, not Hasidic. But it was a religious house.

Where was your father-- were your parents from in Poland?

The name of the town is Sambor. It's not a very small town. It's on the map.

What part of Poland is that?

It's what was called Galicia. It's now the Ukraine. My father lost his parents either to typhoid or cholera, I'm not sure which, when he was very young. And he came from a very well off family. His grandfather had a great deal of property, either in his name or in a non-Jewish name, I'm not sure. But nobody took care of the three little boys.

So eventually, the boys were apprenticed, were taken out of cheder and apprenticed. And they slept in the store, or wherever they were apprenticed. And one day, my father ran away and made his way to Vienna. And there was a distant relative in Vienna, and he went back to school.

And that's where he was educated?

Mm, hmm, in Vienna.

And when did he go to Germany?

Well, he joined the Austro-Hungarian army, or was drafted-- I'm not sure which-- in 1914. He was four years in the army. He was wounded. And he came to Germany, I guess, 1918.

And he had met a young man who had a brother in Dresden, in Germany, import and export of wines. And he offered those two young men a job. And he worked for him a couple of years, maybe even longer.

And this man brought his sister from Poland to go to school in Germany. And my father met the sister. And they got married in 1922.

Where did your mother's family come from.

Same place and moved to Hamburg.

Do you remember Hamburg as a child?

Yes. Yes.

Is it an industrial city? Or--

No, it has a port. It used to be very big city. Now, it seems like a very small city. It's on an inlet on a bay, similar to the San Francisco Bay, not as grand. It's a very clean city. It's one of the three Hanseatic cities. It was supposedly more liberal than the rest of Germany, although I didn't notice that. It had a substantial Jewish community.

Affluent?

Yes, I would say so, probably not as affluent as Berlin and not as large as Berlin, but affluent.

I'd heard that in Hamburg much of the Jewish community was so assimilated that there was very little Yiddish used. Is that--

Well, in Germany, you don't use Yiddish. You use either Hebrew or German. Yiddish is not a language that basically was used in Germany ever.

Did you speak it in your household growing up?

My grandmother did when she came to visit. My parents spoke it. But they spoke Polish or French at home when we weren't supposed to understand.

Hamburg had the first Reformed Temple, I would say, in Western Europe. I was not allowed to go there. It is now occupied by the German radio stations. It has a plaque.

The temple had an organ. The prayer books were not in Hebrew. So it was something very, very new and unusual. And it was either liked or disliked. There was no--

Was there much discussion in your house about this new--

Not really. My father thought it had no place. He didn't approve of it. And if he didn't approve of it, you didn't go there.

Now, what was your father's line of business?

He imported-- he was a wholesaler, imported and exported wines.

So he had occasion to travel around Europe as well, France, so he spoke French.

Mm, hmm. My parents did. I didn't learn it till much later.

Now you mentioned Martin Buber before.

Yes.

Can you tell us who he was? And how did your family come to know who he was?

Well, Martin Buber is now regarded as a writer, as a philosopher. And he had a tremendous influence on Jewish thinking. He used to be on the lecture circuit in the '30s. He traveled around a great deal. He came to Hamburg. He came to Berlin.

I don't know how my father met him or who introduced him. My father was a Zionist from way back. His family had left for Palestine before the First World War. So I guess there must have been some common ground. I know--