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-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
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00:00:00 Introduction
Where were you born?

00:00:30 I was born in Poland in a town called Gdynyach(ph). Today
it is in the Soviet Union, the Russian name is Vyadimar (ph)
. The Yiddish name was Ludnir.

00:01:00 When were you born?

A: 1932

Q: Your parents had lived there for a long time?

A: Yes, My father Was Prom there, and my mother from a small town
about 25 miles away.

00:02:00 Q: What did your father do?

A: He was a grocer. I had a younger brother. Did not come from an
Orthodox background, though my grandfather was.

00:02:30 I lived there from '32 to '45. Until the war I went one
year to a Hebrew kindergarten. Then it would have been the Tarbut,
which is a Hebrew school.

00:03:00 I went to the Tarbut until 1939. Then the Russians came
in and there was no more Hebrew school. So we went to a Yiddish
school

00:03:30 From '39 to '41 the teaching language was Yiddish. Then
the Germans took over the town and there was no more school until
the Russians came back in '45. At home we spoke Yiddish.

00:04:00 We spoke Yiddish at home and school until 1944, when the
Russians came back, then it was a Russian school. I spoke a little
Russian before that, but most I picked up in school.

00:04:30 It was the same for my brother except he started school in 1939 when the Russians came in. The town had about 40,000 people of whom about 25,000 were Jewish.

00:05:00 There were several synagogues, a Jewish school and a Jewish gymnasium. There were many trades people, some merchants and professionals. Yes, I encountered anti-Semitism, mostly beginning around 1936.

00:05:30 I remember an incident from the grocery store. Most of the customers were peasants. Around 1938, there were a lot of Polish people standing around, we called them Piketnekis (ph) . telling non-Jews not to go in to shop.

00:06:00 And the police supported then. And you would see signs next to the movies, "Jews, go to Palestine." There were incidents, like if people were wearing nice clothes, they would be cut with razor blades.

Q: Did your parents ever think of leaving?

00:06:30 My parents did not, but two of my mother's sisters did leave for Palestine.

Q: How big was your family?

00:07:00 The extended family was quite large. In our town my father had his parents, a brother and a sister, she had her own family. My mother had a sister who had a child; she had a brother with a wife and a child.

00:07:30 And a younger sister. And her parents came to live with us after the Germans burned their town. Altogether I would say there were close to 30 people.

Q: Did any of them perish?

00:08:00 All except us four. Of the 25,000 in our town only 70 survived. Only two families - husband, wife and children. The Germans set up police that were Ukrainians, led by the Germans.

00:08:30 The work was done by the Ukrainians with the assistance of the Germans.

Q: Describe for me how you lived

A: We had a home. It had a small kitchen, then a large room with a closet; on the other side, a stove and behind that the bedroom. There was an outhouse. Next door was the store.

00:09:00 Would you say you were comfortable?

A: Middle class. The store was beginning to do well. Except for the war, it would have become a good business.

00:09:30 Until '39 I was in Hebrew school. Under the Russians, Hebrew was forbidden, but they did have a school. It was Yiddish. They were against Hebrew because it was Zionist.

00:10:00 There was Yiddish poetry, a paper, it was encouraged. This was between '39 and '41. The day the Germans took over, I was at my grandfather's, which was about 25 miles away.

00:10:30 The Germans went from house to house burning the town, so we went back to my home.

Q: What did you hear, before that, about the Germans?

00:11:00 Not much. But in our town were many who had fled to Russia from Germany, because our town was only 10 miles from the border. Those Jews were called B and the Russians wanted to settle them further from the border.

00:11:30 But some stayed. My grandfather's sister and two children came. They lived with us, on the store. The store was liquidated by the Russians, closed.

00:12:00 What did you live off?

A: My mother was the manager of a restaurant. My father worked with housing in an office that managed properties.

00:12:30 There was no danger from the Russians at that time. Many people looked forward to the Russians because anti-Semitism was pretty strong at that time, and running away from the Germans, it was a savior.

Q: So you actually welcomed the Russians?

A: At that time, many people did.

00:13:00 At the same time, those with larger stores were picked up and sent to Siberia as bourgeois. Our store was small enough so we weren't sent to Siberia.

Q: So how was your life as a boy?

00:13:00 I went to school, my parents worked, and life was fine. The trouble started when the Germans came in. As I said, my brother and I were at my grandparents. It was the 22nd of June, 1941.

00:13:30 Around 4:00 a.m. we heard what sounded like thunder and then we realized it was artillery shells falling around the town. That evening the Germans came in and systematically burned the town.

Q: Did the Jews live in a special area?

00:14:00 It was a heavily Jewish town. That evening the Germans came in and the people went to the banks of the river. I remember the Germans, just to scare the people exploded shells that made a tremendous noise.

00:14:30 A few homes remained, so as many people as possible crowded into them. Then three days later, my mother walked from our home town to find out what happened to us and then we all walked back. There were some round-ups that night.

00:15:00 The women were afraid. I don't know if it happened. But the women put on some kind of black on their face and they wouldn't go out on the street. So we came to our home town and our grandparents

00:15:30 moved in with us. Also my mother's sisters. So our house that was small for four, now had seven. There was no school. My father would go out to work in an agricultural area, and later he worked where they stored food.

00:16:00 Every day, the Germans would come in and take people to do this kind of work. Then one day - I don't have the date but it would be in this book about the town.

00:16:30 (He searches for the information)

00:17:30 Q: How did the Germans come in?

A: In '39 it was the Russians. They came in on tanks. On the 22nd June the Germans attacked and this is when they came into my grandparents' home.

00:18:00 We returned to our town four days later. Then was the first order to turn in radios and books. The books were burned there and then in big piles.

00:18:30 on the 5th of July there was a roundup - they would just go around the street and pick up men. They picked up my uncle, and took him and others to the prison.

00:19:00 They took in 150 Jews. All kinds of rumors were spreading. Some said they were taken out in trucks; others saw them here and there. Later we found out they all were tortured and killed, right there.

00:19:30 On the 7th, the Germans set up a Judenrat, a committee to manage Jewish affairs. Then on the 31st of July was the second round-up and they picked up two hundred people.

00:20:00 My grandfather, who happened to have stepped out to go to the bathroom, was picked up and we never saw him again. Then they gave out ration books for bread. A person would receive 1 kilogram.

00:20:30 This was the official amount but people would exchange things for more coupons. On the 30th of August was the 3rd round-up of Jews -we didn't have any family involved.

00:21:00 Then I remember an incident mentioned in the book. The Germans requested 350 men for work. The Judenrat set up a list. Mostly they were single men, but some had families and my father was among them.

00:21:30 He went to the railroad station, and the train left. The next night there was a rumor that they were back in the railroad station. We never found out why they came back.

00:22:00 So my father came back and (he looks in book) - then they established a Ghetto, our home was inside the Ghetto.

00:22:30 Two more people were moved into our house but they stayed only a short time. Then, about a year later. August 1942, they took out the men from the town.

00:23:00 I don't know how many, about 10 miles out of town, to dig pits (?) they said they needed for an airport. People were suspicious. There were rumors that pogroms might take place.

00:23:30 My younger brother was sent to a Ukrainian farmer about 10 miles out of . We also knew a Ukrainian woman about a mile from the Ghetto, a woman my father met when he did agricultural work for the Germans.

00:24:00 One evening, we had a feeling that something was going to happen. My father said I had better leave. The Ghetto was surrounded with barbed wire about a foot apart and all the way up high.

00:24:30 You could squeeze through. That night I went out, and there was the road and then the non-Jewish population. We knew a Polish woman there who was the middle person in wheeling and dealing. I asked her to let my parents know that I had gotten out.

00:25:00 So I went to the Ukrainian women, we had arranged to go there if something happened, and I stayed all night. Next morning she said the town was quiet and my parents wanted me back so we walked home one kilometer back.

00:25:30 When we got back she left me, but when I got to the Polish woman I could see that things were not right. I asked her if she saw my parents and she said no, the pogrom is on, run.

00:26:00 So I ran to where my brother was, with the Ukrainian peasant. But the Polish workers chased us out, and now we were barefoot, because often we went barefoot.

00:26:30 He beat us with a whip and we ran away. In that area people knew us from the store, so they would feed us but they didn't want to keep us.

00:27:00 We walked around for about two weeks staying in barns. Meanwhile, we learned that they were liquidating the Ghetto and killing all the people. They rounded them up, put them in the pits, and machine-gunned them. I have a friend who lives now in Israel.

00:27:30 She was my age, and she was shot in the neck in the pit, and they had been made to undress before going into the pit. But she survived, was able to get out of the pit and some peasants picked her up.

00:28:00 In the village, a son of a Ukrainian family, he spread the rumor, he said he saw my parents being put on a truck. He knew us since we were children, and we felt he wouldn't harm us. My parents had built a hiding place under the floor

00:28:30 in the basement where we kept potatoes for the winter. I knew that the hiding place was there. Anyway, that Ukrainian picked us up in the village and took us

00:29:00 to his home. His parents tried to intervene, but he shouldn't protect a Jew. Next morning he walked us into town, to the German headquarters.

00:29:30 Then, after a few hours, another Ukrainian officer took us out to where the Ghetto used to be, let us in through the wires into the Ghetto.

00:30:00 We met some people and it turned out that the pogrom lasted for two weeks. Anyone who survived was left alone, but the Ghetto was reduced in size. The first thing I did was

00:30:30 look for people we know and we found my grandfather's brother. We spent that night in what used to be a school. The next morning, we walked to our house. The hiding place was open and broken up.

00:31:00 But you could tell that people had been there for several days. We sorted out the things we would need to survive. On the third day, I went back into the house because in the kitchen, under the floor, the parents put some of our belongings.

00:31:30 Like silver wear and a fur coat. When I came into the kitchen, I saw that someone had tried to open it. I called my brother in.

00:32:00 Then I went into our room, and my father put his head out from the hiding place, and we found out what happened. When I left, that night the pogrom started. Seven people all went into the hiding place.

00:32:30 They were there for seven day. They heard the Germans and Ukrainians knocking on the walls, breaking the furniture, but they succeeded in hiding out.

00:33:00 Then my father decided they would be found and he and my mother and sister got out that night. When they got out of the Ghetto they went to the Ukrainian women where I was supposed to be.

00:33:30 The woman screamed at them. My father tried to find out where I was. The woman thought I had been killed in the Ghetto. They realized they wouldn't get anywhere with her so they ran across the field to a river where a Polish man lived.

00:34:00 He knew my father and hid him in the attic, where there was another Jewish man hiding out. There was a false wall to the attic. Not more than 10 or 15 minutes after he hid them

00:34:30 the police came, warned by the Ukrainian woman. He gave them a story. However, that man wanted to be paid and my father had nothing with him, so he thought he would go back to the Ghetto.

00:35:00 He tried to open the door to get things to sell but he heard someone walking - it was my brother and I. So we were reunited, and since the pogrom was over, we took out whatever belongings we had

00:35:30 and took them to the Polish man. But there wasn't much room and he wanted too much, so we said to him that my father and I would go into the village and see if we could find someone who would take us. Meanwhile, the second Ghetto

00:36:00 the Germans gave the people special registration, and my mother's sister decided to move back there. At the end of September, it is cold already, so my father and I walked back to the village, and we found someone who was willing to put us up. Meanwhile, we hoped the war would be over, the Russians would get the upper hand.

00:36:30 He had a big stack of straw next to the barn and we dug out a hole in it. By moving some boards on the barn we could get in, and the boards would cover the hole. So we went back and picked up my mother, my brother

00:37:00 and all four of us came back at night. We were there about three months. We were always there - he brought us food. Then he said he was becoming concerned.

00:37:30 He was afraid. So we told him to keep my mother and brother, and my father and I began to march again at night.

00:38:00 Every peasant refused, but they were willing to keep us overnight. I remember, one night, we were in an attic, and it was so cold, we could only keep warm by keeping our feet in each other's chest. We walked for six days and could not find a peasant to keep us.

00:38:30 So we returned and we didn't know what to do. Then my mother had the idea to return to the women where I went the first time.

00:39:00 So she and my father went back. When she realized we were all alive, maybe she was afraid that when the Russians came back, we would tell our story and she would be punished, but she agreed to keep us.

00:39:30 When we came to her place, we made a hiding place in the cellar. There was a false wall, and a lot of potatoes. This was in Jan. of '43.

00:40:00 Let me look in the book to check the date.

Q: Who published the book?

A: It was published in Israel by the survivors of the city.

00:40:30 I have seen a number of such books. People must have been interviewed and the books prepared. They have all the dates in here.

00:41:00 On the first of September the pogrom started and on the 15th it stopped. Then on the 13th of November they had the pogrom where they destroyed the remaining Ghetto.

00:41:30 They only kept alive those who had special trades - carpenters, steel workers, shoemakers. Then made a special Ghetto, and you had to have a special card to live there. Otherwise, you were taken away and executed.

00:42:00 About 4,000 were executed the second time, so five to six thousand were executed the first time. At that time, they used the people to collect all belongings in what they called the red brick school.

00:42:30 This way they kept the people working, sorting out clothes, shoes and gold. The Jews did this. At that time, there were 17 buildings and 1500 people.

00:43:00 About 500 Jews were hiding with Christians in the surrounding area. In the winter of '42, the Poles and Ukrainians, began to set up partisan groups to fight the Germans. Meanwhile the Russian front was around Leningrad and hopes were still high. That winter there were about 500 Jews living in the third Ghetto.

00:43:30 My mother's sister survived in the 3rd Ghetto. Meanwhile, the woman we were living with had to abandon her house. So she had to find a house where we could also hide. She moved to the center of town in a basement.

00:44:00 There was a window that was at ground level, and it was a three-story building. Adjacent to her quarters was a barn with a dirt floor.

00:44:30 She took the place and we moved at night. What we did, we dug a hole in the ground that was about 10 by 15 or 18.

00:45:00 We covered it with brick and left room for one person to go in or out. You could sit there but not stand. The cover was like a pail, with a hole so that you could pull it after you and smooth the ground out.

00:45:30 We only had enough money to buy food for us and the woman. But there were people in the Ghetto who made contact with my mother's sister. They wanted to have a place where they could run and hide.

00:46:00 They were professionals and had identity cards, and they gave us money to maintain the place so that they had the privilege of hiding if necessary. So there were two sisters and a fiance

00:46:30 We stayed in hiding and they stayed in the Ghetto. Meanwhile, the Germans were retreating and we knew the Germans might evacuate the non-Jewish population.

00:47:00 So she knew she would be evacuated with her two children, or she would have to run to the village while the Germans were moving through the town. Meanwhile we kept digging our place, a tunnel

00:47:30 under the house to the field. We were afraid that if the building collapsed, we would be killed. Then, after the tunnel of about 20 feet, we dug out a place where we could hide for a day or two.

00:48:00 We dug a well, because if she was gone for six months, we would have none. The soil was sandy and I learned something - now I am a water engineer - as we dug the sand fell in and the hole got bigger.

00:48:30 We got to the point where we thought the building might collapse. So we had to reinforce that thing. We made another hole to use as a toilet.

00:49:00 The chimney of the building came down to our hiding place. So we had a little plate for cooking, and the smoke went up the chimney. The Russians stopped advancing about 60 miles from our town - this was about Jan. 1944.

00:49:30 They stayed there 5 or 6 months. The Russians would advance for a while and then stop to reinforce. To our bad luck, they stopped about 60 miles from town. She left for the village with the children, so nobody was with us. She would come in once in a while.

00:50:00 We had some wheat, some potatoes, and straw and wood, that we used to cook. When someone upstairs cooked, we would cook so that the smoke would be in the chimney. We lived for about five months on the wheat

00:50:30 and a few potatoes. We could hear the artillery. The Germans picked outside of our house to dig in a tank. I remember, every so often we would open up a little door

00:51:00 to see what was happening, and I could hear the Germans talking, and then I found out about the American landing - it must have been in Sicily. So we knew there was another front opening, but that is all we knew. To make it short,

00:51:30 we lived without air for five months. Then one day we thought we heard Russian being spoken outside. My younger brother, we knew that the Germans were not around but we didn't know if the Russians were back, so we sent him out.

00:52:00 He was gone for about half an hour, and he came back and said the Russians were in town. So we went out, but because we hadn't walked for so long, all of our feet got from the first few steps of walking, and we were warned not to eat suddenly. We got a home from the Russians.

00:52:30 My father got a job doing what he had been doing before and I went to school. This was in June 1944. We were there for a year. Then we got correspondence from my mother's two sisters in Palestine. The Russians would let

00:53:00 former citizens of Poland move back. They were already in Warsaw. So we had permission to leave but our real objective was to get to Palestine because that was the only place where we had relatives.

00:53:30 So we left with horse and buggy, and we lived just across the border, in Poland until 1945. It was supposed to be temporary but it dragged on. In the meantime, my father got involved in buying wheat and tacking it to Warsaw.

00:54:00 But there was the Polish underground that was against the Russians and the Jews - they kept killing the Russians and the Jews. Our name originally was Berger but we took the name Biernaski, which was a Polish name, because my father was concerned with being stopped on the road.

00:54:30 This way he would have some false papers. In 1945 we moved to a suburb of Warsaw. Warsaw was bombed out after the uprising and because the Russians stopped on the other side of the river.

00:55:00 We lived in Prague and I resumed my schooling by going into the 10th grade of high school, as a Pole. One day the priest came into class and took everyone to communion.

00:55:30 I didn't know what it meant or how to behave. The priest walked around with the wafers and the water. I thought it was a wooden stick for the holy water. When he gave it to me I started to give it back to him.

00:56:00 And he said to take it. That was just one incident. At the same time, there was a Jewish community center. So I had some friends who knew me as a Jew, and some who knew me as a Pole I lead a double life.

00:56:30 I made good friends. All this time we hoped to go to Palestine, but the British wouldn't let anyone in. My mother's sisters, with the help of relatives in the US, were able to buy false papers of a Hungarian family that had left Palestine before the war on a visit to their relatives in Hungary.

00:57:00 They sent us their certificate and we were supposed to come in as them. Our name at that time changed to Schwartz. We went by train to Paris, and there HIAS helped us and we went by ship from Marseilles.

00:57:30 From there we went to Palestine on a small ship. This was 1947. The British inspectors couldn't speak Hungarian, so they didn't try to make us speak it.

00:58:00 We stayed with one of my mother's sisters. I resumed my schooling; my mother and father got jobs. School was very hard. I didn't know Hebrew or English. My first class in English was Macbeth. I didn't know any Bible or Jewish history.

00:58:30 But they gave me a chance, and they said that after a year and a half, I would have to take the subject tests that people took before the 11th grade. I worked very hard and the war started in 1948, I was 16.

00:59:00 We were mobilized though the parents were promised that we would not be sent to fight. But when things got real tough, it was different. Of our class of 16, 3 did not come back. After the war

00:59:30 we graduated from high school, and then went back to the army. And I continued In '52, I came to study engineering in the States.

Q: When you hid with the Polish woman, did you have to pay her?

A: Just for her food and our food.

01:00:00 The question was why she did it, after she led me to my death. I can't answer that. But, to a woman like this her possessions were precious. We hid them with us. We told her that if she turned us in

00:00:30 we would burn her things with us.

Q: Did you keep in touch with her.

A: Yes, after the war, for a while, but then contact ceased. Mail got erratic. We sent her packages for three or four years.

01:01:00 Q: When you dug that elaborate hide-out, where did you get the tools, and when did you dig?

A: We just used spades, and because it was inside we could do it during the day.

01:01:30 She got the spades for us. At the other place, we could go up to the house at night. Another thing, the Polish woman got a lover, a Russian, and he used to come and go.

01:02:00 He never knew we were there. So when he was around, we couldn't go out of hiding. We were in that house about a year and a half.

01:02:30 INTR: That's a long time to live like that. I can't visualize how you were able to live in those places. When the 3rd Ghetto was liquidated, one of my mother's sisters perished, but a number of those people were able to come and hide with us.

01:03:00 They were with us all this time, so there were actually seven of us. In the 3rd Ghetto, the program was . . . let me look . . .

01:03:30 . . . (flips pages). . . On the 13th of December, 1942. My mother's sister, and my grandfather's brother perished in this pogrom. From the 13th of December, until the summer of '44 we were together seven people.

01:04:00 The Russians came back on the 22nd of July, '44.

Q: Where did your relatives perish?

A: We know they were all taken in trucks and shot where they had the pits, its called . . . None were taken to

camps.

01:04:30 I think all of the Ukrainians were executed like those at Babi Yar. As far as I know, from our town, no one was sent to concentration camps.

01:05:00 Q Did you hear about concentration camps?

A: There were rumors, but people just didn't believe. Like after the roundups, people would say that they were coming back, that they had been seen here or there.

01:05:30 Q: When did you find out about concentration camps?

A: I really can't tell you. It must have been after the war.

Q: How far did you live from Warsaw.

A: About 300 miles, I would say. Maybe 300 kilometers.

01:06:00 We all four went to Israel. He went to school there too, and then came to the United States to study engineering. I work in water resources. I studied in New York.

01:06:30 Also in Detroit. (break) (reassemble)

01:07:00 My brother is three years younger. His name is Ralph. In your town, do you feel there was more or less discrimination prior to 1939?

A: It was prevalent. There was beating up, slicing breaking of windows.

01:07:30 Q: Did your mother ever warn you about things?

A: No, because we lived in a Jewish area and we went to Jewish schools, so we didn't have contact with non-Jews.

01:08:00 I only went to first grade before the Russians came in. Then, in their school, the Jewish holidays didn't have a big meaning.

01:08:30 So we didn't celebrate holidays in school.

Q: Did your mother try to celebrate holidays while you were in school?

A: No

Q: Do you remember helping your father in the store?

A: I sure do. I used to run to get things they were running short of.

01:09:00 Q: What did you sell?

A: All of the staples - herring, butter, sugar. We didn't carry clothes. I don't remember matzos.

01:09:30 We did celebrate passover, but I don't think my parents carried anything kosher. My parents were not observant at all.

01:10:00 In 1939, when the Russians came in, I was speaking Yiddish, Hebrew, and I understood Polish and some Ukrainian. In the Russian school, first and second grade, they didn't teach other languages.

01:10:30 When the Russians came back, teaching was in Russian, Ukrainian was compulsory, and German. By the end of the war I spoke Yiddish, Russian, German, Polish, Ukrainian Not Hebrew - I forgot most of it then.

01:11:00 Q: Do you remember walking back with your mother from your grandfather's house? Yes. Yes, I knew what happened because the Germans came into our town too.

01:11:30 There were a lot of refugees on the road. The German planes would fly low to see who it was. I can't remember what we were talking about- We were scared, especially by the shelling.

01:12:00 Q: As a boy, did you ever feel that you had to be a good boy?

A: Until '41, I had a normal childhood. After, I'm sure I had my frustrations like when we were hiding in that basement.

01:12:30 I could see the apples growing outside and we couldn't have them, that was frustrating. In the place with the potatoes and the straw

01:13:00 you could sit but not stand up. As a child I could stretch my feet but my parents couldn't. In the third place, we were seven, and we could stretch out but we were touching.

01:13:30 With time, the straw disappeared, for cooking, and my father would use the straw to smoke. We were lying down.

Q: Did you get along with one another?

01:14:00 A: There was friction on and off but we stuck it out.

Q: Later on, were you and your family able to look back and laugh about things.

A: In hiding, we played cards, we had little carbide lamps. There were humorous moments.

01:14:30 We had quilt covers, and in each little hole, there were . . . bed bugs, and we used to spend time killing them. Also, there were rats in that hiding place.

01:15:00 Q: Describe your day.

A: The fear was always there because if anyone had discovered us, we would be dead. There were neighbors in the building - we could hear them but they didn't know we were there. Another incident

01:15:30 when we dug the tunnel, we had a little extra room to sit in for a couple of days. One of the neighbors was trying to make a little moonshine vodka. It didn't work, so they poured it out next to the house, where our tunnel was.

01:16:00 It went into the area where the toilet was. The yeast began to grow in our direction, and we had to fight it.

Q: Did it affect your parents, not being able to keep clean?

A: At that time, the main objective was to survive.

01:16:30 Hope that the Russians would come before the Germans or Ukrainians or someone would discover us.

Q: How old was your grandfather when he died?

A: I don't know. He was picked up just after the Germans came in '41. He must have been 50.

01:17:00 Q: How did you find out what happened to people?

A: We never really found out. After the war we learned that they were tortured and killed inside the prison. This was after the liberation by the Russians.

0~:17:30 Q: There was this rumor that your father was coming back on the train. How did that news travel?

A: When the train was back in the station, then the news travelled quickly.

Q: Did you ever find out why the train came back?

A: no They didn't know.

01:18:00 The train just came back.

Q: Do you know how long it took for your mother to find out?

A: It didn't take too long. The station was only a kilometer away.

01:18:30 Q: When you and your brother were wandering around for two weeks, how did you get food?

A: The peasants knew us, there was no question, but they didn't want to keep us overnight.

01:19:00 Sometimes when they told us to go to a neighbors barn, we would go into theirs; and they wouldn't know it.

Q: How old were you and your brother at that time?

A: I was 12 and he was 9.

01:19:30 I guess I felt responsible for him, as an older brother.

Q: Do you feel you grew up faster as a result of this experience.

A: I definitely missed the three years. The other loss was education.

01:20:00 Q: Did you miss not being in school?

A: O yes, but at the same time, I mentioned that of the whole class I was the only one who survived. I found out about it later.

01:20:30 Q: When you dug the tunnel where did you put the dirt?

A: We took it inside and just spread it evenly. Yes, there was a lot of dirt, but the basement was substantial so you could spread a lot of dirt.

01:21:00 I don't remember, she may have taken some of it out at night. Yes, she had two children. Yes, they saw us and they knew us.

01:21:30 We saw them after the war - we lived in the same town for a year.

Q: What did you and your parents think of her?

A: She did turn us out at first, but somehow she did it and I don't know why

01:22:00 Another incident - that Ukrainian policeman at the police station. After the war, I ran into him and his wife. I was so upset I started throwing stones and yelling at him. I went home and told my father he was back in town.

01:22:30 The Russians arrested him. And they executed him, maybe two, three months later. They executed everyone who cooperated with the Germans. The Russians treated them pretty roughly. They would take the school kids to public hangings.

01:23:00 This was in '44. I was 12 years old. They would take the whole school to watch.

Q: How did you hear the Germans talking about Sicily?

A: I didn't know where. They were reading a paper and discussing it in German.

01:23:30 There was a tank dug in front of the house. They were sitting there, two of them reading the paper. I told my parents. Every time there was such news hopes went up.

01:24:00 Q: When you went back to the Suburb of Warsaw, you said you had a double life. Explain.

A: My father was traveling. Poland had two governments in exile. The underground, the por-Andras underground was anti-communist and against the Jews. Because he needed the false papers.

01:24:30 And I went to school under the false papers. And I had some friends who came to the Jewish community center. I don't know if you remember from the literature, but in 1946, 47 there was a pogrom against the Jews in Keltz (ph).

01:25:00 There was a building downtown in Prague which was the community center. We had socials and other events. It must have started right after the war.

01:25:30 There were classes for young people. I remember Samerof (ph) the father of Esperanto, one of his siblings was teaching a class. I have forgotten it.

01:26:00 My mother's sister was in Palestine and we got in contact through mail. It took some time, but we even got clothes packages in Russia.

01:26:30 One sister lived in Tel Aviv, and another not far from there. I can't remember whether my family ever talked about whether they also should have left.

01:27:00 At that time not too many people left.

Q: How long did it take you to learn Hebrew?

A: What they did, I went into the 11th grade, which was difficult because they had finished the English grammar and they just had two years left. What really saved me was that after six

months, we were mobilized and this gave me time to study.

01:27:30 When I went to school, my class was about 16, they put me next to an emigree who came a year ago from Iraq. They figured he wouldn't know any Yiddish or Polish so I would have to learn the language.

01:28:00 I left Israel in '52. I married in '59. I have a son and a daughter.

Q: How did you tell them what you went through?

A: I told them from time to time but they always complained that I never did.

01:28:30 Q: Can you tell me a little about your parents' background?

A: My mother was from a small town about 20 miles from our town. A town of about 5,000 people. My grandfather was a good looking man, tall, with a short beard.

01:29:00 He was orthodox but not fanatic. He also dealt in wheat which he transported to the larger cities. My grandmother had a store for material. They had a very nice home.

01:29:30 On my father's side, his mother died before I knew her and his father remarried. They lived next to us. I don't know about the pogroms they went through during WWI.

01:30:00 My wife was from Warsaw, but they ran away in 1939 to Russia, and she was there during the war.

Q: Do you feel in your relation with her, because you share certain experiences, you don't have to explain yourself?

01:30:30 Our experience was different, but when she returned to Warsaw. She found that all of her family had perished. We met in college in Detroit. I have no desire to go back to eastern Europe because there's nothing left there for me.

01:31:00 A couple of years ago, we drove through Czechoslovakia and Hungary but I had no desire to go.

Q: Are there any monuments where these pits were?

A: Its in Russia now - I understand there is one stone there but it doesn't mention Jews.

01:31:30 In other places, you can go to the cities, in the cemeteries, all the tombstones were taken and used for sidewalks.

Q: You said 70 people survived from your village. Have you been in contact with any of them?

01:32:00 I am in touch with some who are my own age. When I go to Israel, and I go quite often, I see some. My mother-in-law moved to Florida three, four years ago, and by chance I met someone from my town there.

01:32:30 I found out about three more friends from after the war, and when I go there, we get together. We met for the first time, had dinner, and reminisced a lot.

01:33:00 Q: What do you think of the political situation in Russia today?

A: I have a hard time believing its going to succeed. My experience with the Russians was under Stalin, when I was a kid. In spite of the propaganda, I knew different.

01:33:30 Its amazing to see what is happening. After all, the Russians saved me, but there were incidents, of anti-Semitism, although it was against the law.

01:34:00 I don't know that anyone was punished.

Q: What about present day Poland?

A: Poland was a democratic country between the wars, and it probably will be.

01:34:30 Q: Its my impression that many of the Ukrainians welcomed the Germans because they disliked the Russians.

A: That is true. They had an army, and many joined the police.

01-35:00 There were even Jews. During WWI, the Germans occupied the area and treated the Jews well. Many Jews, were persecuted for socio-economic reasons. They looked forward to being free. No one could comprehend what was going to happen.

Q: Did you hear rumors of what was going on in the East?

0:35:30 Q: What can you remember of what you heard; when?

A: Not until the Germans came into town. Until '41, there were persecutions, but no pogrom!

Q: Your parents stayed in Israel?

01:36:00 Yes. They are both dead. The liked it there. They worked very hard.

Q: Did they change because of their experience; did they ever talk to you about how it changed them?

01:36:30 About religion - many of the people in Israel are Jewish but secular, and they fell into that group. Coming into Israel wasn't much because they were so busy with every day life.

Q: Did they talk to you about what might have been?

01:37:00 Yes, they put their heart into that store and it was beginning to do well and would have. And of course they wanted us to go to school].

Q: Coming back to the Ukrainians, I've heard that in the camps they were feared the most.

01:37:30 I don't know about the kapos in the camps. But in the Judenrat the Jews were the kapos and they had the job of doing what the Germans wanted. Some were rougher than others - the perception of power.

01:38:00 Some would use it. In our town, in the 3rd Ghetto, the head man behaved like a small king. The Ukrainians - the one who picked us up even though the others said that they knew us.

01:38:30 I can't answer what made them like that. I felt angry and hurt and I still remember it.

00:39:00 Q: The area where the pits were dug, what is it called?

A: Its called Pietyden, I guess. You asked about knowing, when people were digging the pits, some knew, but others thought it was going to be an airfield.

01:39:30 About the 9-year old girl who survived, I think some Ukrainians came to cover the pit at night, and they kept her.

01:40:00 Q: All this experience you had as a child, did it make you a better person?

01:40:30 A: I think it has made me more sensitive to the problems of other groups, than I would have been without it.

Q: Do you have a message you would like to leave?

01:41:00 The message would be to spread the word so that it can't happen again. We know it can - we saw it recently with the Armenians. Things can get out of hand. You hear about this organization in Russia - the Pamyat - which is again building an anti-Semitism.

01:41:30 You don't really need Jews to be anti-Semitic. In Poland there are about 5,000 Jews left and I read that recently they had a demonstration in Gdansk that there are too many Jews in the present government.

01:42:00 Q: Do you think they inherit from their folks if there aren't Jew around?

A: How else.

Q: What did you tell your own children about anti-Semitism?

01:42:30 I pointed out what went on, but I don't think they can really understand it.

01:43:00 They grew up here in a mixed society and my daughter would say she couldn't see any difference between her and others.

Q: But then you read about how someone had his Holocaust paintings burned. If they knew about that, how would they feel?

01:43:30 I think they would say that was then, now is a different generation.

Q: But what I am saying happened two weeks ago.

A: Suppose your children would hear that, how would they react?

01:44:00 I really don't know. Someone once asked, who is a Jew. My answer is, that if you read a paper, and you come across a Jewish name, you'll read it twice. That's a Jew.
.END.