

Vilna, which I think I'd like to think bring out. The size-- and soon as the Russians marched in, it became-- if you push it in the middle--

[INAUDIBLE].

As soon as they marched in, it became a shortage of food. And we used to stand in line, and they used to give you a pound of bread a day. And you had to get up like 2:00 in the morning to get into line, and they would open up the bakery like about 7:00 in the morning. So you stood--

Can you tell me your mother's trip--

From where?

From Japan or Manila. And then the thing that I want is--

What do you want to--

The Japanese bombed--

--bombed Pearl Harbor. Oh, I see, that part. OK. My mother was in Japan, got to Japan through the same way as we did, through the Trans-Siberian railroad and then to Japan. And she had to wait for quite a long time until her family were able to make out affidavits for her to get a visa to come to join us.

And during that period, the Japanese government was evacuating all refugees from Japan to Shanghai since Shanghai was an open city, and she was sent to Shanghai. She was there for a number of months, and then finally they were successful in getting her the visa.

And the family made arrangements for her to get transportation on this particular boat, and she left Shanghai around December 1, stayed in Manila a few days until she was-- she was waiting for the boat, which was President Pierce. And she left Manila and December 5, 1941. And then December 7, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and the war broke out.

Could you start that over again?

Yes.

[INAUDIBLE].

No, no problem. I'm with you. My saliva went down the wrong way. When my mother arrived to Japan?

Yes.

My mother arrived to Japan about a year later after we did, the same way as we did, and she stayed there a number of months while her brothers and sisters were trying to make out the affidavits for her to come to the United States to join us. In the meantime, the Japanese government-- what shall I say-- decided to send all the refugees-- evacuate all the refugees from Japan to Shanghai as it was an open city.

And she was there a number of months until she got her American visa, and the family made arrangements for her to leave. And she left Shanghai on December 1-- I'm almost sure it was December 1-- 1941 and went to Manila. And then in Manila she waited a few days for her boat, which was the President Pierce.

And she boarded the boat on December 5, 1941, and they were on high seas when, on December 7, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. And of course, they were at war with the United States. And then they joined this-- President

Pierce joined a number of other boats in a convoy to be protected from being attacked by the Japanese and went through then the coast of Australia all the way up, I guess, or down-- I don't know. I guess it's up-- to San Francisco. And they arrived in San Francisco on December 25, 1941, Christmas day.

And how did you find out about your [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, all this time we knew that-- we knew that Mother got on the boat on December 5, 1941. When the war broke out, of course, we didn't know what happened to her for all this time, and then at that time, there was a broadcast by the name of Gabriel Heatter, and he used to have his news program at 7:00. And my uncle who owned the candy store always used to listen to him.

And I was there helping him. When he was listening to the broadcast-- and he used to get out and start his broadcast as good news today and as bad news today, and when it got on the 7:00 news, he said, well, there's good news today. A boat arrived in San Francisco full of refugees from-- no, I think it was, the President Pierce arrived at San Francisco with a number of refugees from Manila.

And we knew she was on the President Pierce, so we let out a scream. And we knew she was alive and well. But until then, we didn't know that she was-- where she was or what was happening to her.

That was-- I love that story. Can you try it one more time? Because you kind of fumbled.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah, I did. I did fumble because I knew it so well. I remember that scene. Here we were in a old-fashioned candy store. My uncle and I-- I was helping my uncle that time. OK, I'll start from the beginning. Where would you like me to start?

Well, you can start from the beginning, or you can include that you were in the candy store with your uncle.

Right. On Christmas day, I was helping my uncle in the candy store, and he used to listen to Gabriel Heatter on the radio at 7:00 news. And he used to start up his broadcasts with "There's good news tonight, and there's bad news tonight." And at that particular time, he says, well, there's good news tonight. A boat, the President Pierce, arrived in San Francisco with a number of refugees.

And my uncle and I just let out a yell because we knew-- a scream because we knew that my mother was on that boat, and that's how we found out that she was well and alive. It was a wonderful experience, very wonderful news, and I ran all the way for about five blocks to tell my aunt the good news. So was that better?

That was great. That was fantastic. When did you find out about the holocaust, and what was your reaction? Did you know that all of this happened?

Well, when we were in Vilna just waiting around and all that, every once in a while, some people used to come through, either they were hiding in the forests-- oh, they used to just-- or they were just able to get out from somewhere. And they used to tell us about the concentration camps, but we never really knew what it was, and about the gas chambers and things like that. We never heard about that while we were Vilna.

It was not until we came to the United States that we were in touch with people in Israel that we learned more about it but still not the real horror that all of us found out later on. Of course, how did we feel about it? Everyone we knew-- and everyone was part of it, was in the Holocaust.

Did you feel particularly-- what role did luck play in your escaping?

Oh, there's a Jewish word, beshert. I don't know if [INAUDIBLE], meant to be. I'm a great believer in that. Luck was very much part of it. It was a question that-- and perseverance, I think that was, on our part. We were fighting so hard to get out, to do something.

It's like the trip to Kovno. We didn't give up. If we didn't try on the third, we would have tried again and again. Of course, we might have missed-- the whole thing about getting the visa at that particular time was-- we had to make that train a certain date. Otherwise, our family would have lost the money that they paid in for us. That was the thing.

So if we didn't get it, they probably would have lost the money, and they would have done it again. They would have probably paid again because they were so wonderful and so helpful to us. But luck had a great deal to do with it.

We were not any smarter than some of the other people that didn't survive. Getting the visa was certainly-- I think that was the luckiest thing that happened to us during our escape. We couldn't have done it without it.

We have an airplane, so.

Were we OK for that [INAUDIBLE]?

Yeah. It was all right. There was an airplane, [? though. ?]

You would have preferred [INAUDIBLE]?

Can you tell me about getting that Sugihara visa that day? Could you tell me that story again, why it was so important to get it that day?

On the third try that we went to Kovno to get the visa, it was so important for us to get it at that time because it was coming very close to the date that our family arranged for us to get the particular train, the Trans-Siberian train. You had to make reservations because it only went once a week. It only left Moscow once a Week

Had we not gotten on that train, they would have lost the money, and I believe it was \$750. That was like \$375 a person, I think, as I recall. That was an awful lot of money. We're talking about 1940. And people who were not of means-- so they would have lost the money.

And there would have been probably a whole chain of circumstances that might have gone wrong as far as getting our papers in Japan and a lot of other things. So that's why it was so important for us to get the visa that time. Had we not gotten that, we probably-- I know we would have tried again and again until we got there.

But on the other hand, there was very little time left because I believe on August 18-- we got our visa on the 12th-- they shut Mr. Sugihara's office down, and he left. They made him leave Kovno. So had we not gotten it on that day, who knows if we would have made it during the next few days. And then we wouldn't have gotten it. So it was luck and circumstances.

Did many of your friends not make it? Did you lose a lot of family and friends in Poland?

Family-- sorry. We didn't have too much family left in Poland because all of my mother's and father's family were in the United States. We had some distant, distant relatives like distant cousins. They were all gone. None of them survived.

None of my friends, our friends, survived. I have pictures of a group of boys and girls, and my sister and I were the only survivors. No one that I call, that I know who was in Vilna with us survived because then the war-- the Russians were fighting the Germans, and Germans occupied Vilna. And they the Vilna Ghetto, and nobody survived the Vilna Ghetto, very few, none of my friends, of our friends or relatives survived.

And one of the things is that you sometimes wonder, why you? Why did you survive?

Do you have the answer?

No, I really don't have an answer to that. A friend of mine, a rabbi, said to me, maybe you survived in order to do the

good that you've been doing. I really don't have an answer for that. It was meant to be, beshert.

Why don't we take a little break here?

And there was one incident where we had a pogrom.

We'll start with that.

OK. Pretty good all this time and no tears. Where shall we start?

Tell us about the pogrom.

The pogrom?

The cultural pogrom, I guess.

A pogrom is-- you know what a pogrom is?

Well, tell--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Oh, I see. Well, how should I explain that?

Yeah, take a second.

Most of the time when a pogrom happened, it was some instability in the country, and there were always some disenchantment with the government, or with maybe unemployment, or with whatever was happening in the country. And the easiest way to take out your frustration-- it was through anti-Semitism and through attacking the Jews. That was in Russia, and then it was in Poland, in Poland as well.

During the war, there was a lot of disenchantment and frustration for the Polish people for losing the war, and they were unhappy. And most of the time, it used to happen-- it used to get organized by students, the more intellectual people, and they used to organize it through-- the students just used to go out into the streets rampant, and if they'd find Jews, they beat them up, sometimes killed them.

Or they used to go in the neighborhoods where Jews lived and try to destroy the homes and, oh, beat people up. And one of the-- in the small towns, they didn't have it as much. You used to have it more in the bigger cities where there was more of an intellectual society like college students, mostly college students.

I lived through one of them. When we were living in the boarding house, during that period, all of a sudden, word got around there was a pogrom going on in a few streets away. And where we lived-- Vilna was built like-- they had clusters of homes or buildings, and there were gates. Like they would say a gated community, but this is how the buildings were built. There were like three or four buildings of the street, and there would be a gate.

They came-- and we all, of course-- the people used to put furniture against the doors or against the windows so they wouldn't be able to get in. They boarded up-- well, we were at the boarding house. We brought up all the furniture, and beds, and things against the windows and against the doors, and we all sort of were sitting and practically waiting for them to come.

And they closed the gates, and they were able to-- they couldn't open up the gates. They were just wild. There was no rhyme or reason for doing it. They were just so frustrated and angry. And they couldn't get-- they were iron gates, so they couldn't open them. So they climbed through around the buildings, over the roofs, and they were able to get into one of the buildings where they broke windows.

And the people from the particular-- either they were hiding-- maybe they went into the cellar or something like that. So there were no people in that particular apartments on the top floors, so they took feather pillows-- that's what they used to use-- and they just tore them up and just threw them through the windows. So it was like snow in the middle of-- it was spring or-- it was not wintertime.

Were you terrified? Were you--

Oh, were we terrified. We were under the beds. We were hiding, all of us, and we were just waiting for them to come through to the next house. There was like four houses in sort of a semicircle.

And lo and behold, either they got too tired or they saw there were nobody in that buildings. They just turned around and went to the next street. And then when it quiet down, we all got up and put everything back, tried to put back everything the way it was. And we went on, go and started the next day. But it was a horrible, horrible, very terrifying experience, just waiting there for them to-- and there's nothing you could do because it's a mob.

Yeah, it sounds horrible.

They had no guns, sticks, bat. And that was the-- it was a frightening experience, but we lived through it.

Can you tell me about the bread lines and what it took to get a loaf of bread while you were in Vilna?

Well, when we were-- during the period that we-- that was also during the period that we were in the boardinghouse. There was a shortage of food. I couldn't get any. Of course, there was some food to be gotten on the black market, but we had no money for that.

So you got along with what you were able to pick up in the lines. But every day they would have bread, and they'd give you a pound of bread a person. And so we'd get up real early in the morning, 2:00 3:00 in the morning, and go out, and form the line, and get into line at the bakery. And the bakery wouldn't open up until 7:00 in the morning. 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning they were first baking it.

And when they opened up, the bread was hot out of the oven, and they would slice it, cut it up in pound pieces and give everybody a pound of bread. And then the next day, we would go again. And we'd usually they were to find something, maybe. Sometimes we'd find some eggs. Sometimes we'd find-- I don't recall even finding any-- milk, we used to be able to get some. And we got along.

Then when we moved to the internat, to the hostel, it was better because, by that time, the relief organizations were able to get food, and they opened up kitchens. So it was much better.

So I just had a question about your family. You grew up-- and you'll talk to John. And you were raised pretty much by your mother. Your father had died and--

Three months [INAUDIBLE]. I really-- yeah, go ahead.

So really my question has to do-- and your mother made a very bold, dramatic decision, and I'm curious to know what kind of words or acts of encouragement she gave you before you took-- in this process. Can you tell us anything about that?

Well, I really would like to say something about my mother. Would you like to hear that?

Sure.

When my father died-- my father was a jeweler, and he had a man working for him. And when he took sick, the man was running the business. When he died, my mother took over the business with a man working there, and she tried to

run it. And she was a very, very strong, unbelievable woman. She was only 28 when she became a widow.

So she ran that business for quite a while, and then the young man decided to get married. And there was not enough for two families, so he took over the business. And my mother was left without any source of income, but her family used to send her some.

She decided at that time to go to Vilna and learn to become a corsetiere, and it became very fashionable in Europe to wear girdles and [NON-ENGLISH]. They used to be custom-made. And she was away for six months and learned the trade, and the family housekeeper was taking care of us.

Then when she came back, she opened up a business of that, and she was able to support us and to have a very nice middle-class type of existence. But not only that, she was strong in other ways. In Europe, in those days anyway, a widow was almost like the stigma. You were treated differently. You were referred to as "poor widow," "the poor widow" because usually a widow was very poor. She had no means of-- but my mother was strong enough to be able to earn her own living.

She was very active in the school board. She was active all places where women didn't have much of a role, but she insisted on being very independent. And she raised us that way, to be independent, to be self-sufficient, to strive for better.

And when it came time to let us go, when she sent us away, the first time-- there was all this decisions, should she, or shouldn't, and asking for advice, and all that. And I don't think there was enough time for her to even-- as I told you, there was not enough time even for us to say goodbye to each other.

The second time, when we left her on the railroad in Vilna, she said to us, never give up, and always take care of each other. Those are my only advice she-- take care of each other, and don't give up. Those were her words.

And that's the way-- that's the way we lived, my sister and I, and to tell you the truth, I still do that. I don't give up.

Why do you--

[INAUDIBLE].