

--with Theresienstadt, too. So listen, I came into the camp in '41. So so I happen to know.

You could not live if you were six years old. It's impossible. It's impossible.

But when you see the numbers when they're marching out on the--

Well, they lived, because they were also part of these hospital experiments. How do you say this?

Wroclaw

Wroclaw. That's where you--

I was born there, right.

Wroclaw. OK.

Right. In Germany, it's Breslau but I go by the name when I was born. Right.

We're rolling?

Yes.

Of course, because now I can hear the saw. I just wanted to tell the tape people that we are with Simon Rozenkier. And it is December the 12th, 2002, Thursday. And this is tape one of our interview. You tell me when.

Yeah.

OK. I actually want to start with the movement from Wroclaw if I'm saying it right-- into the ghetto. When did that happen? And what was that experience like, and who did you go with?

This is what happened in 1939, when the Germans marched into Poland to Wroclaw. And two weeks later, what they did is they forced us to go to the ghetto, but that was out of town. But before that, they closed all the stores, closed all the stores owned by Jews.

In the beginning, I had to-- my two brothers left. We didn't know where they went. So in the beginning, I had to go over the Vistula River and get some food for my family. When I got some food-- with somebody, but I didn't know that his father was a German descent.

As I got across to the river, Vistula River, and I walked up the hill, and I found a place where they gave me kielbasa. I paid for it-- in zlotys. And I got some brown sugar, and I got a loaf of bread.

On the way back, I was approached by police, German police. And one was a translator. He was an SS man. But he must have been Polish or Ukraine. I don't know myself.

And he asked me in Polish, [POLISH]-- if I'm a Jew. Now, I wouldn't answer that. [POLISH] And I wouldn't answer that.

So they took me to [? Lahat, ?] and then start beating me. One hit me in the back, so I fell to the front. So the other guy hit me in the front, so fell in the back-- like playing football. You know what? They beat me to a pulp, and they took me down in the cellar.

Now, in the cellar-- in Europe, they didn't have no frigidaires. They had like keep some food to be not to get spoiled. That's where they had me. Finally, when I was bleeding and everything, they took me-- they dragged me to a top of the

hill-- on the peak, on the top of the hill-- and then they threw me down. And I was rolling down to the Vistula River.

But I was not going in deep, just to the end of it. And they believed I was dead, but I was not. I washed my blood and everything, and then I tried to get home. There was a kayak there, but it was filled with water. So I emptied it.

And I had a bloody shirt. So I tried to-- what would you say-- to try to-- and there was a hole in that kayak. So I had to, with the shirt, I tried to-- how would you-- what?

You tried to fill the hole?

Yeah, fill the hole with the shirt as much I could, but I didn't have anything to paddle with. So I did it with my hands. But the Vistula River was not far from one end to the other.

But then I came home. And they looked at my face, and my mother fainted. She had never seen a face like this from beating.

And how soon after that were you taken to the ghetto?

Oh, after that they came to the house. We didn't know. It was kind of very, very, very quiet. It was kind of-- you could hear something in Jewish or praying, oh, my God, help me.

But we didn't know what happened. Because, you know, something-- we realized that something is going wrong. Something is going wrong.

So finally, finally, my father said, let me shut the lights and put a candle. It didn't take long. They knocked on the door.

Juden? We say, yes? He says, come raus. Come out.

When my father had to go with them, so we all start to cry-- you know, little kids five years, seven years, six-year-old start to cry. So he says [NON-ENGLISH]. It means, don't worry about him. We will bring him back.

So as they opened the door, they hit him so hard that he fell from all the steps down. There broke his bones and everything. So my sister-- when they hit him, my sister got very mad. And she said something in Polish, a very bad word in Polish.

Why are you hitting my father? He didn't do nothing. So they shot her.

They shot her. And then in the corridor was kind of a window, you know? I don't know what happened. She was thrown down or something, because I couldn't find her after they took my father.

I was looking, and I couldn't find her. But the problem is they could never find the house-- never. It was so hidden all the way in the back, but somebody must have snitched on us and showed where the Jews live.

My father, they took my father to the-- oh. They marched my father to the jail, Polish jailhouse. Early in the morning, I went to see what happened. And I was a little boy. So probably blond and blue eyes. They probably wouldn't know I was Jewish or not except the ones I lived with.

And what happened now, so my mother wanted to know what happened to my father. So there was sitting in a bending position, and then you could see baskets all around. And they want him to throw a watch. My father had those watches with the chain.

He threw in one basket. And everybody, whatever they have, the rings and this. Then they asked for ransom. But half of the people in Wroclaw already left, and the poor people didn't have any money. So finally, they took him to a-- they marched him to a place where the Polish soldiers used to station.

We have to-- I want to go, again, to talk about the deportation to the ghetto, the movement of your family to the ghetto.

Yeah, OK, but I want to tell you what I did. When he was marched away-- my father had those big scissors. He was a master tailor. And I cut the wires so I could let him out, and I let him out.

So a lot of people came out. With big scissors, I cut it. And I said, come on, Dad, let's go. He hardly could walk. His bones and everything was broken.

A few days later, they asked, we have to move out. So we moved out not far. I would say about maybe two miles from the house. There was little shacks, little homes. I don't know who lived there before.

But it was next to a Jewish cemetery. And 20 people in one room was much too much. You know, we had little kids. There was a problem. But I decided not to be home.

Because I had to feed the family. And when I have extra food, somebody else got it. But I didn't live there for too long in the ghetto.

My mother came to Wroclaw as a young girl. She was maybe 15, 16. She had a sister who had goiter. She came to see a doctor, and her sister died.

So she was buried in that cemetery. Her name was Tanenbaum. So she gave me a big coat, put on, and says-- well, in those days, they didn't have stone and so. They had-- what you call it-- like a piece of plywood in the name.

And she told me, you sleep there, and she's going to watch you. And I listened. I don't know. The only thing I could hear is the boots going around the ghetto.

But I kind of-- I don't know. I cannot explain to you if I was scared or not. But I had the chance to go to the city, get some potatoes, tie up my pants on the bottom, get some bread, and whatever I could get. Even I worked for the Germans in the kitchens.

You know why? They didn't know I was Jewish, except somebody recognized me. That's what happens.

And then finally-- and this was going on and on. In 1941, I believe in the beginning of '41, one of each family has to go to work. So my father couldn't go, because he was in terrible condition.

Hold on one second.

Yeah.

Two things-- why don't you take a drink of water. Is the banging on the table a problem, or are we OK with that?

It didn't bother me. [INAUDIBLE] be aware of it. [INAUDIBLE].

I mean, we've seen it a fair amount, but now I'm a little bit tired.

[LAUGHS]

All right.

Now, the thing I want to know-- can you cut for a second?

Yeah.

The thing I want to--

--whenever I had a chance. But I did not, I did not, want to go into the ghetto. I just had a place where I could bring food. And my sisters are the ones who were waiting for me and take away from me. whatever I can give them.

But you would go into town and work?

Yeah.

And get food?

Get food. The Germans--

And you passed as a Polish?

Oh, yeah, definitely. You know, listen, I was blonde. And except nobody recognizes me, because I don't believe the Polish people worked there.

Let's start up again.

Yeah. Finally--

Wait. Before you start, what I need to know is I want you to tell me, explain to me, how you were living outside the ghetto, and passing as a Pole, and taking food back here to your family, and that sort of thing.

Well, listen. They had stores that they wouldn't sell to Jews, but they would sell to the Polish people. Some butchers used to make the kielbasa and different kind of bloodwurst, whatever, and have it cooled outside the store. So I picked up some.

I'm talking about I tried to do whatever is possible to feed my family. You see, they used to-- they had wurst. They used to cool it off in the-- what do you you call it. If you're in the back, in the back they had a yard, whatever. They used to leave it there.

And then bread-- I used to get some bread from the Polish people. But whatever I did, you see, everybody, they was hungry. And so my mother had to share.

But I couldn't-- there was times I couldn't do it. There was times I did. But I make sure that they have something to eat. But when I left them, I just didn't realize what I was doing. And this broke my heart when they took me to a camp.

OK, well explain to me-- you were going to explain to me, and I interrupted you, about how they took one person from each family to work.

Yes. They took one family to each person, or sometimes two-- whatever. And they gave you a list and so much, so many, like a couple hundred. I'm talking about, over 100. I don't know.

And they marched us to railroad. And we-- it took us about two days, so a day and a half. And we arrived to Poznan. It was a big city.

But we marched up the hill. And then we see Gestapo, SS men. Before we marched up the hill he says, we appreciate, because you're going to work for us so we can win the war.

And he spoke to the people outside the Poland. He says, thank you. Look, we have people-- Jewish people want to help us to save the war. This was like the beginning. I didn't know what he's talking about.

But we marched into a fortress. You know what a fortress is? Surrounded by water, and maybe 100, 200 years ago they used to fight between, I don't know, other countries. I don't know what it is-- because it was so huge. And this wall, well, maybe five feet thick-- you know, a fortress.

From there we went to work. We had to wear a star-- a star on the front and a star on the back-- a Jewish star of David. And then we walked to work, and we're digging-- I don't know. We're making-- we're just shuffling to the little cars, railroad cars, very little ones. And a little machine was there pushing it.

And every day, marched back and forth, and back and forth, and we're working. And this was taken quite a while till an epidemic. People were dying of typhus.

People were dying so much of typhus that it was unbelievable. They were thrown down from the window. They're thrown down, and it's something shocking when it comes to my mind what I did.

And I had, too, typhus. I had typhus, and I was coughing. And I didn't know I ever going to make it.

I had like a bronchitis, whatever, and I was trying to walk and walk, come back to myself. But I lost everybody. All my school kids who were with me, they died.

It's unbelievable what I did, and maybe 25% survived from a few thousand. 2,000, 3,000? I don't know. I didn't count them.

And then after, they closed up the fortress. And we had to walk to another railroad and back in the box cars, and we were going to another camp. From there, from that camp, we were staying for a while.

Finally, somebody came over to me and says, you know something? There is a camp here, [Place name] [Place name] and your sister is there. I says, my sister?

How could she get there? She's young. She's not even 11, 12 years old. She's there. Her name is Leah.

And this guy used to be-- this guy used to-- the commander was on a motorcycle. I don't know. It has nothing to do with it. And finally, when I left, I didn't stay too long in the camp. Only my two friends went to work like cut grass and everything. They disappeared.

That was [Personal name] one friend of mine, and then was Sam, Samik [INAUDIBLE]. They disappeared. And I was kind of upset, because they were neighbors of mine, especially Samik.

And he didn't tell me anything. Because I didn't look Jewish, and he didn't look Jewish. But [Personal name] looked like four Jews. That's unbelievable. [INAUDIBLE]

But they scared us. They showed us dead people laying there. They said, we got him. This was just baloney. I didn't realize after I've seen him alive.

And from there, they shipped us to Krasnik. Now, let me explain you about Krasnik. Now, Krasnik was a camp.

The commander from Krasnik was a very bad man. He used to hang people for nothing. Just if you grab-- if he sees you have a carrot in your pocket, you already want to overthrow German government. You're a criminal.

But then we started to build-- the Russian prisoners were there, too, next to us. And they built, I would say, a big, big, big, big project. And then I worked on the railroad.

We have to move, and measure, and everything, with a hammer. They were making aeroplanes-- not the whole plane, but some of it. And the number on that plane, I will never forget, was 109 Focke-Wulf.

Latter on, I realized, but I had no idea what it is. But it used to come out from the factory on box cars, I mean, flat cars. They used to move them out.

So I worked for this company on the railroad. And we worked on the railroad. And I got in touch with my sister.

She came once with a guard. And I could not get close to her. He says, I should say away from her. She wanted to kiss me. He says, Nein, nein, nein.

Because if they catch him, he gets killed. You know that? You're not supposed to.

And she gave me like this-- she gave me tomatoes, flour, bread. And she says, don't worry. Soon the war will be over.

So she was smarter than me. I didn't know who was fighting. She's smarter than me. I didn't know who was fighting.

Physical work, she didn't do over there. She was cook, as a cook, and she took care of their commander. She cleaned the house, because she was too little.

She was too little. Leah was too little. And she had a good job.

You know, the people I just met recently in Florida in Marco Polo. So one girl, one woman, said to me, if not your sister, I wouldn't be around here. I says, OK, thank you. Because she used to help with food and everything.

So how did you come to be deported to-- was it Auschwitz? Was that the one?

Yeah, yeah. Well, let me explain something what happened. This was in 1943, in 1943. Oh, before that, I was-- my job was to, when I worked for them-- and then I don't know what happened.

He punished me and says, I have to bury some. They didn't have a crematorium over there in their labor camps. So I had to bury some people who died.

So we had-- what you call-- two-wheel pushcart, whatever you call that, right? We go outside. And we--

I'm sorry to interrupt-- just one second. What camp was that?

That was Krasnik. And there was a-- we have to dig a pit and then throw them in, like sometimes 10, 15, 20. Their heads were hanging like this. You know why?

They died I don't know of what. Maybe of typhus. But to me, it was not-- to me, was that I was immune to it. I have no-- I didn't pay attention.

But finally-- I have two brothers over there with me. Finally, I looked to the left and then I see a little house. And I see smoke coming out. I says, let me-- so the guy says, you know something? He says, [? Shimek, ?] let's find out who it is.

So who is going? Me. I'm easily influenced. I knock on the door. She has two kids.

And she tells me in Polish that her husband got killed in some places, I don't know, in Danzig, or whatever. And she's alone. And I says, I'm going to bring you some fuel next time. If you have something to eat, we appreciate it. We're two guys with us.

So she was cooking potatoes. So they were half raw, but we take it. I said, give me some of it. Believe it or not, as I opened the door, police, those police have two-- what do you call it-- the German police with another Volksdeutsche, another one who translates. That tied my hands with wire, and I had to march to the camp.

But then they put me in a confinement by myself. But two days later, they came to shave my hair. So then they called

my name.

And you see, for hanging, it looks like they hang laundry. You know something? You know, the gallows. You know what I'm talking about?

And they marched me out. OK. Those young Gestapo, maybe 20, I would say 19. Now, I know with the ropes. From the suitcase, they take them out and just hang them one by one. There must have been about 20 of them, and they had the German doctor, a Jew, which is ready with this-- what do you call it-- with the [INAUDIBLE] of the dead, where they wear--

[INAUDIBLE].

[INAUDIBLE], right, to check with the dead. After, I realize. And they called my name. He says, Simon Rozenkier-- that I went over to the German [INAUDIBLE]-- and you are convicted to hand. But I didn't have the rope on me yet.

Five minutes later, the commander comes in. He says, Rozenkier-- they didn't know pronounce my name. I says, yes? [GERMAN] from the bench. I come down.

He says, [GERMAN]. You know what that means? "You have to work and die working." That was a kind of gimmick to show, right? And by punishing, I had to go around the gallows like this, jump around.

The two brothers were hanged. And when they put the rope on them, both of them he says, [NON-ENGLISH]. It means, today, I'm hanging, but tomorrow you're going to be hanging, and spit on them. And they both lost their lives.

I think they both were from Lodz. I'm not so sure. And I was spared by a pimple. It was by a pimple.

But finally, finally, I did meet my sister once more. And sometimes she would send some food to somebody. His name was [? Fpepsinski. ?] I couldn't even pronounce it-- with an F.

I know his wife. His wife was named Tesha or something. He was delivering shoes to the woman. He was in charge of something that he could get in touch with them.

So I used to get-- so he probably got in touch with my sister, now I'm going to hang or something. Something happened by an hour, you know? But I would say maybe in the middle '43 or maybe-- I don't know what's it called. No, what's not that called?

Oh, I was, at that time, around the factory. We were making-- what do you call it? We're digging air raid shelters.

We're digging air raid shelters. And finally, I see a horse and buggy approaching. The called, Shimek, Shimek, Shimek-- called my name.

So a girl, a beautiful girl, comes out. And she says-- now, I know she was nice-- my name is Sabina. And she gave me a ring and a note, and it just broke my heart.

And that note says, I'm going to meet you very soon. And I could not live without you. And this, I just fell apart. And she didn't meet me. We were ordered out from the--

Who is the note from?

The note from my sister, that you're going to be moved out, and we're going to meet you soon. We'll be together. And then finally, the screaming over there-- [NON-ENGLISH].

We had to-- something. They lined us up, you know? And we're walking to the railroad. They put us on the train, those boxcars. It was terrible. They urinated.

Hang on one second. We're hearing a lot of noise outside.