

And so he got me the job. He employed me. On the second day, and what-- oh, yeah. So what was I doing? He was the student museum manager. And so kids used to come to the school museum so they could see how animals look or fishes or whatever when they were having botany or something. He had all kind of butterflies collections and so on and so forth.

So when I came, I used to fix his-- he had a lot of doors, and doors wouldn't close. And and he had it locked under locks and keys. He didn't have keys and this. So on the second day, when all the Jewish people-- and he had a number of girls working. They had to clean the rooms and dust. And during the war or before, they were neglected, and on the floors too.

So he asked me one, the second night, to stay a little longer. And he said, how do you get food? He was listening. And the goyim knew how bad it is for the Jews. And he had-- he was sympathizing. Where do you live, and how do you get food and this? And what do you eat? So I said, all I need is bread, bread and maybe a little piece of butter, and that's all. And I said, so I haven't got this.

So he said-- and like that. And he find out-- he knew that I live in the neighborhood, and I told him where. So my window, from my room-- and we had Venetian blinds like that-- was across, you know, like this building. He said, come in tonight for a warm meal, to our place. And he said sometimes I have visitors. Nobody should know. But I'll have, he said-- I'll put a piece of paper here, and the light will come through this, and you come in.

So we came in. I came in, and it was already probably a couple of weeks-- warm soup or this. I didn't have, but I didn't care. I was young. And as I said, bread, it was enough-- bread water and a little piece of butter because you're aware the danger. You felt it's so great that the food was nothing. You didn't imagine. There is no enjoyment. There is-- you were obsessed with the future, what the morning will bring, what the next day or the next hour will bring because the radios from the goyim, they said that this shtetl is already judenrein, clean of Jews and this.

And they were telling how Jews did this and that, all kinds of, that they found a family was murdered by Jews and-- you know, to incite hatred and wrath against the Jews. But he wasn't like that. So anyhow, I came in. And here his wife brought me a-- I remember it was mushroom soup, something with milk. And I sat down.

They were sitting, and she was crying. And he was sitting there. He said-- and you know the war was on already for a year, and Hitler had so much success. You would have to read the history of that time. He was going from victory to victory. And we were talking. I said, well, it looks very bad. I don't know what the future will be.

And he said-- he was an old man at that time. I was 20 years old, and he, in my eyes, he was old because he must been 60 years old. He said, no, he said, justice will conquer, he said. And he said, that Hitler, he'll break his neck. He said he's taking one country after the other and suppressing them. But he said, one day the people will get-- even if he'll conquer everything, he won't be able to hold. And to me it was, in a way, at that early age and I didn't know how things work out, it was unbelievable. But he said-- And it did gave me courage, on the other hand, because I thought he knows what he's talking about.

And then I stopped to think. And I stopped to realize. I'm thinking like afterward. He was the first man in those days I heard something encouraging because the Germans-- oh, yeah, the Germans had-- the German soldiers who were working with us, they said, oh, Stalin is kaput. And it will be in Moscow. In fact, the Volksdeutsche, they had reached Moscow and Leningrad only the first 10 days of the war, or two weeks. And Russia, it will fall apart. And we'll be all over and this. They were-- the Germans were-- had so much belief in the Führer and in the future.

Anyhow, so I-- I was there. Then I went home. And the next day, he said, we'll come again. Here what happened. One day, it was the second or third day, he said, sit down. Let's-- let's talk things over. And at that time, the ghetto was forming. What it means "the ghetto was forming," they already-- the Germans set up a Jewish-- a Jewish gemeinde. It means a Jewish rab, a Jewish advisory committee.

And the Germans told them where there'll be the ghetto, in a suburb. It was called the Moscow suburb. It was a

dilapidated suburb. Before, Jewish people didn't live there. But they took out, chased out the habitants. To some they gave Jewish places. And they were fencing it up, and the Jews had to move over there.

And that-- so, yeah. So the ghetto was formed. And he said, listen, my wife is Jewish, the woman, you know. And he said, some people, my coworkers, knew that she was Jewish. And some reported her, that all the Jews has to go in ghetto. And he got a notification that he has to send his Jewish wife in ghetto. He said, what do you think?

I don't know, I said. I can't tell you, but-- he said-- I said, well, if the way you think, and the war will be over, maybe she'll be in ghetto till you get her out. Or maybe you'll be able to visit her. Oh, he said, no. Soon as I let her go, I won't get to see her anymore, he said.

Anyhow, so here what he did. Since he was working with the schools, and in Latvia, it was a big, big position to have. And he had friends in the university. In the university, all the professors-- in those days, Latvia didn't have intellectuals of their own because Latvia was independent only 18 years. And they didn't produce any professors. So they were all Germans, the higher in the university. In fact Latvia, during their independence, they made the university. You know, it wasn't-- in Riga, they didn't have a university.

So he went those, the Germans, and talked. And with bishops he got papers that, yes, he didn't deny that she was Jewish. She was one eighth of a Jew, that her grandparents or part of a grandfather was a Jew, and [INAUDIBLE] So-- so this man befriended me. And I had it-- oh, yeah, he used to go in the store and buy, for me. He would bring me what-- I would give him the money. Then, when we had to go to ghetto, in ghetto we had to leave everything. And I was living-- my sister and I and my brother, we had-- our apartment was on the fourth floor because it was next door, you know.

So my sister had furniture and silverware and this. Everything was left. So he said to me, he said, well, the Germans will take it away. he said, better let's bring it here. And if you will survive, it will be yours. So sure enough, it was-- and we gave him everything. And he had another goy, a helper. And I helped him, and we moved over all this stuff to that place.

And he was so interested on the day I left to the ghetto. I went, you know. He went with me, and he said he wants to see how does it look there and how [INAUDIBLE]. So I told them already, I knew where I'll live and how many people are. So he went there. And I said that already they have guards in most of the places. In a few places, the fence weren't ready, so you could go in and out.

But he insisted that we can. And he had a hard time getting out, exactly, because it was a-- you know, I was from the last one to get here. And but he went out.

You say your sister went with you There

No. My sister we put on the train.

Before you went to the ghetto.

Before. Yeah, before the ghetto.

Before the Germans even--

Right. Before the Germans.

So, who went with you to the ghetto? Your brother?

No. And he was there, but wasn't coming. No, I was all by myself. When the war started, in fact, the last day, when the Russians were still in town, a lot of people used to come with them. Young people used to jump on their trucks, you know, troop trucks, and go, just like on the street. And I was busy working, you know. And I was reading the paper or listening. And I-- I remembered from the First World War what people were told, how-- how, even the first-- you are

poor, but you have enough to eat to survive on.

My heart wasn't to run because I knew the Russians. I observed. There is no order, no discipline. So somehow I told my brother, well, listen. World War we won before, and we won't have so much. But they won't kill people for just being Jews. You know, I didn't believe it.

Then-- oh, yeah, another thing I argued with him. I said, listen, if we were communists, we should be afraid. But we were not communist, neither he or I. And everybody knows that. But he said, no. What I hear, and what people tell me is we should escape. So at that last day, I decided I would go.

So we took blankets. And we didn't have, like here, every house had suitcases and this. But suitcases would have been bad, you know, because all the goyim, if they would have seen a Jew walk with a suitcase, they want to take away because it was-- they were-- they were told whatever the Jews have, it is yours, for the goyim. So we did like a lot of people. We took a blanket, put on our clothing, what we have, and whatever we wanted to have with us. And we tied the four corners, made a pack, and we went.

And we went to the railroad. And we didn't live far from the railroad. OK. There was a train, steam-- steam engine. And it was no-- no engineer. And people are already packed. Some say that train won't go anymore. The Russians all went away already. It was chaos. The streetcars, the wiring is off, and on the road, all of the streetcars not going, no, no traffic. The only you see horses abandoned, you know. They were from-- evidently they were already worn out. They abandoned because the horses are-- you drive a horse for a couple days and no food and no drink, he-- so Russian horses.

And people, you didn't see. You could see-- so some who left, who were left over and they want to escape, so we went to the train. We got there. And that train was full with people who are trying to escape, not only from Latvia. They were already from the neighboring, Lithuanians or from villages, some were bombed out or they want to go to Russia.

And there were that all the men should give the seats to the women. And after a while, more people come in. It was not a place to stand. And I said to my brother, I don't know what we're doing, and we're doing right by escaping. I said, here we-- we know the language. We know this. We know the character of the people. We might-- what it'll happen or [INAUDIBLE]. Here is a certain death. He knew more than-- he was older.

So anyhow, we are waiting there. We are waiting, and nothing is doing. Once I said, oh, that, the last train left already. This will remain in city. And all of a sudden, bullets start flying, like machine guns. And it flies over in the train. And I told it, the fifth column of Germans, they dropped overnight on the roofs. They were shooting in the train.

And the people start jumping out of the windows, and they're spreading out, and spreading out. And some got injured and were crying and yelling. And not everybody could go out because of everybody wanted to go out through a door, you can't. And finally-- and you couldn't stick together already. It was such a panic.

Anybody-- I don't know, I didn't see where he is, went out or where. And how, before all the people were-- they went out, and they were running to hide away from the bullets. And there was continuing shooting. So after it calmed down, try to find Max, my brother. He's not there. So I figured, when it was shooting, maybe he went back home. We lived about two blocks away. Maybe he went home.

So I take my-- no, the bags were in inside there. So I go home. I go home. I go in, try to look for him. He's not there. So I go back to the station. The train is gone. So Max [INAUDIBLE] and that was the last train. There were no more. In fact, I saw Russian women with children on their arms. And they said their husband told them to wait, they'll come to pick them up. You know, the street were-- they sat down here. And they asked me, where is the way to Russia, to walk with a child in hand. And they went to it.

I could see how. In those days, I was too. I was so compassionate, how they were left without. And so I remained by myself. And later on I heard what happened to my brother. That he was-- when that train came near the Russian border, the Russians sealed the border. They wouldn't let him any except the Russians. And he was left at the border. And there

were other Jews from other places. And he said they were going without food.

One man came back from that train. So he-- when I met him, I said something there. And Max, how he was worried about what happened to me. I was worried what-- anyhow, and then I didn't hear from Max, from my brother.

Here what happened. After I was liberated in Germany, and after a long time, I could not-- I knew I have here another brother and uncles. And I wrote to them, and I didn't get any, any answer. I was liberated in Bergen-Belsen. And I thought-- and at that time, the Haganah used to come already in Bergen-Belsen. And they-- and they said all the Jewish people should go to Israel. And so I had registered myself to go to Israel.

And at that time, the immigration was illegal. And if you read about it-- you are young, and you didn't live at that time. The Haganah, the Jewish Brigade, part of it, used to come and organize groups. And they would come-- we would come under illegal immigration on boats. They hired boats in Europe and took them to Israel. And the English wouldn't let them off of the boats. So during the night, refugees used to wait on smaller boats from a bigger boat. And they used to swim to the shores.

And if you read later on, the English used to the boats with the refugees and bring them to Cyprus and put them in camps until the United Nations decided to divide Palestine in an Israel and an Arab state. And it became legal to immigrate. But what happened? So I registered to go to Israel, because I wrote a few letters. I didn't know exactly the address, but I knew Bellaire, Ohio and Tulsa, Oklahoma, anyway. But I didn't get any answer.

So I registered to go to Israel. One time, after-- that was already after the liberation. One time I had a girlfriend, a Hungarian. So I came to her barrack. And I see a little girl writes a letter. She writes a letter. So this friend of mine said-- I asked her, to whom is she writing. She said, well this girl has a father in America. And she writes to him. I said, does she get any answers? So she said, oh, yes, she gets answers.

So I said, do you think she would mind if I gave her a little note? Maybe he can find my relatives. She said, why not? So I wrote down the names of my relatives and this and that. And I give it to her. And you know, in a couple of weeks-- In a couple of weeks, they called my name. In Bergen-Belsen, we had the English after the liberation. It was in the English zone. So all the letters or communications, they used to drive in a truck with a loudspeaker and announce what came in. They couldn't deliver letters like delivered there.

They had at place, a little office. And that office, in fact, was an English chaplain, a rabbi. And they called my name too. In fact, I didn't hear it. And later on, when I met the same girl, she said, you know, she said, that they called your name. Did you hear it? I said, no.

She said, yeah, they called a name for you. So I, right away, ran to that office. There were a line of people with letters for [INAUDIBLE]. And I glanced at the statement, and saw right away. I recognized my brother's handwriting. And so it came my turn. I got the letter and I open up. And he writes that-- he writes to me. Probably you know that Hilda, my sister is alive. And it was, for me, like you know. And she and her husband have children, and they are alive in Siberia. They went.

And then when I came here, after a year-- after the liberation, I came to the United States. And I asked about Max. So she said, yes, Max was alive almost the whole time. He was in the Russian army. You know, they mobilized it. And he got in touch, through other people, with my sister. I didn't know it, all the four years, that he was alive too.

However, he-- at Stalingrad-- that was at the end, in 194t-- he was helping to defend Stalingrad. And he fell. He was wounded badly. And then my sister didn't hear from him anymore to him. Evidently, something happened. But he was there.

Right. So for me, it was entirely new. You know, I thought Max is gone. [INAUDIBLE] if this chapter. Now what happened to that Gentile, who were-- who had the Jewish wife and who befriended me? And he helped me out quite a bit. When-- when-- now, when the Germans came in, and we were in ghetto, then in ghetto they sorted the people. We were 40,000 people in ghetto.

They sorted the elderly, the women and children, in one ghetto. And the single, able-bodied man, and then which trades they are sorted, in other part of ghetto. In-- in one day, I don't know the date or when, but all the people who are from this certain part of the ghetto had to-- and it was wintertime, I remember-- had to get dressed, take a minimum of the things, they said, and they'll be resettled in another place. And they called the name.

There is food is easier, and space is easier. And who will be able to work a little bit will be able to work, and they'll resettle them. And people were going. And then they gave an opportunity to husbands who wanted to go out with their families come join them. And that was maybe 25,000 people, I think. Instead of resettling them, what they said-- and a lot of people doubted. But they took them out. And what we heard later on, people who were going out of the ghetto, that they killed them in mass graves.

After they took them out and quasi resettled, they brought postcards and letters from the people to say, we are having it nice. It is nice here, and roomier, and this and that. What the Germans did, they made them write postcards. Goyim used to tell us that it was a terrible thing.

Goyim used to come and tell us that there was a massacre [INAUDIBLE]. And not one was left-- left alive. So the one who used to get the cart, and you know, everybody was high strung and nervous. And they would say, oh, why are you spreading panic and this. Look, there are postcards and this. And you know, the Germans mixed up the way of thinking. And [AUDIO OUT]

Some are alive or some are dead. And meanwhile, the able-bodied people, they organized in groups for work. And work, that was allowed because they had cheap work and-- and dependable work. The Jews, first, every Jew spoke German, not only Jews, because Jewish is similar to German, because in Riga, there were German schools. And all the Jewish people went to German schools. And it was the-- instead of Jewish, in fact, when I came from my shtetl and where I worked, it was German. And we learned. So.