

The liberation had its dramatic moments, too, but here's what-- we just went to bed, and we knew something is going to happen, because-- and that the Front is closed. Because here what happened-- a lot of Polish people, mostly, used to go and go through the line, go to the Americans.

The Americans were there. And with the Americans, they would give them chocolate and these and come back. And the Germans would let them through. They would let the communication between the civilians and the American Front-- not so with the Russians, because the Germans actually were begging. They wanted to be occupied by the Americans, not by the Russians. They were afraid of the Russians.

And here what happened-- we went just to bed-- not to bed, on the floor lie down. And In the morning, people come in-- the Russians are here. Russia came in when we were liberated. And it was, it's called Burg instead of-- Burg near Magdeburg. That's a town. And that town was famous for-- they had shoe factories.

And they said the Russians came in. And here what happened-- a lot of the foreigners, as soon as they heard the Russians are there-- went to the-- went to town, to downtown, and broke in and started to get material, to rob, or how do you call it when-- after a riot?

Loot.

Loot, yeah, were looting stores. And the Russians would let them. And the Russian soldiers did the same. We, the three Jews, we were afraid, because our life, we saved it. We didn't want-- we stayed there. And they used to bring in. And then they said that the Russians wouldn't let them anymore doing. And they were shooting, in fact, in the air, not to let them loot.

And we were staying. And we stayed there at the school till about 12, 1 o'clock. And the most of the people got out to the street and these, we were. And again, here, we went out. And we-- then we went already, three together. And again, we needed food. Somehow, it was disrupted, the feeding business and this.

And they're going. They used to go and loot or, I don't know, they had money. They weren't-- we didn't have anything. We were like prisoners. So we thought-- and we knew the Russians came in. The best is to meet a Russian, a Jewish Russian soldier. They would start walking, and a lot, when occupation, there's a lot of soldiers on the street and going.

And we look at their faces. We look at their faces, you know. And here, we detected one. You know how a Jew look-- his black hair, face with a little nose, maybe or-- [LAUGHS]

Semitic?

Semitic features. And here we detect one. And we go over. And we speak Russians, too, Russian, too. And we said, are you Jewish? And we are the only one-- the Jews who saved ourselves. He said, no, I'm not Jewish. But he said, my commander who is the commandant of this town is a Jew. He said, and said, I'll take you over.

And sure enough he brings us with-- to a house. And he goes up. And here comes out the Russian Jewish commander.

What was his name?

I don't know. But I'll tell you what he said-- that is-- and he said-- and when he looked at us, he was so stunned, like that. And he said, he said, you are the first Jewish people I encountered. And he says, you know-- and he put his hand around us. And he said, and that's important. Listen, he said, [NON-ENGLISH]-- that he speaks Yiddish with us-- I'll set you up well, and I'll feed you well.

And [NON-ENGLISH] means I have them in the ground-- not of the Germans, of his Russians, and [NON-ENGLISH]. And he said, [NON-ENGLISH] on his Russians-- [NON-ENGLISH]. He felt that he, too, is hated by the Russians. And he said, they knew that I am-- know that I'm Jewish, but I don't care, the hell with them-- about his Russians.

And he said and I'll set you up, he said, in this house, together with me, I'm going to tell the landlady. It was like a little apartment. They should fix a room for you, and you'll be with me, and he said. And he talked, and he said how and then oh, he said, what they do to the Germans, the [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] mean the SOBs. And he said, we'll give them.

And he said, [NON-ENGLISH]. And he said, I'm going to tell the landlady to fix a room. You'll stay with me, and you'll have it good, he said. And he said, meanwhile, go to town and find-- I want a good photo camera-- if you find a photo store, you come and tell me, and I'll go in and I'll get a camera.

It was still on the next day. And the next day, that looting and this is allowed by the army and these, and especially, the Russians were so mad at the Germans. But the population, the foreigners, they gave them a few hours until they wanted everything for themselves that they would-- and they had to-- probably, it was orders not to let them.

So we went to town, and we look for-- oh yeah, another thing. And before we left, we told him we are hungry. So he goes in and brings out an American can with armor-made you know, American-- he was a Russian, but the food was American-- and gives that conserved meat, a loaf of bread. And for us, it was good, and it tasted good in those days.

When I came to America-- it taste so good-- when I came to America, I asked for this. I want to see, did they sell it? And they said, yes, and I open-- it was salt, too salty. And it wasn't-- but then it tasted like cold chicken or something. And we were so hungry, and we were eating it in a small slice with bread.

So and we went, and we found a camera store, and we're trying to tell him. It took us a couple hours. And he said, he'll go over, but he said, I have some news for you. He said, you can't stay with me. What is the news, he said, it's an order-- the war isn't over yet. You see, the war was over in that place. We were liberated, but the Germans were still resisting.

And he said, there is an order-- since we are Latvians that are Russian citizens, because Russia occupied Latvia before the war started, so that all the Russian citizens have to get in uniforms and help fight. And nearby was a movie theater. And he said, here is the gathering place. And [LAUGHS] and in we go.

And in we went, and out you couldn't go anymore. And there were already Polish people and not Latvians. And Russian people, somehow, where they lived. And we are to be. And we lost contact with him. That was the first and the last we saw of that guy.

And on the next day, they started-- so that was towards evening. And we slept over there. And they had, like a movie, the soft chairs, almost like on the chairs. And it was a good, probably 150 people there or maybe more. On the next day they put us out in rows like young recruits and were marching with us with the Russians. And the Russian soldiers over-

Did they give you uniforms?

No, not yet. They were marching us to a camp. And they march. But the others were, you see, workers, , and they were fed well, well enough to go on living. You know, they looked right. And we were already so worn out. And they march us, and we were marched together. And we said, eh, that this no, not for us.

Finally, and they marched fast. And we were weak already from those marches and not eating that. And then our spirits were low-- who wants to go and fight again? We barely remained alive on the-- so and one of us, the Kovnat really got, like, diarrhea, and he had some ulcers, and he got sick.

And we say to the guards, leave us, we'll come. We know where it is, we'll ask the Germans, and we will come, we can't keep up. And there were a few who wanted to carry us on their shoulder. They said, we help one if we can, we can. But finally, that other one, Kovnat, got so sick. And we said, we'll come, and they let us stay. And it was in the country.

Where were you staying?

They let us on the--

Highway?

Stay on the highway, of the highway. It was a smaller country road. And we went-- after we rested good, we walked, and we walked. And we saw a house. We came in in the house. And we thought it is a farmer's house. And here, we came in. And it was a house, all right. And there were Danish people, Danes.

Our group-- and they organized themselves to go home. And young people with-- they had the, like scouts wear, the bags on their shoulder, shoulder bags. And here what they were doing-- in the kitchen, they had a killed pig. The Germans escaped from that area and leave. And cattle were roaming around.

Later on the Russians got them in trucks were taking them to Germany-- to Russia with a sign-- this is a gift, [NON-ENGLISH] from-- to this and this-- kolkhoz. A kolkhoz is like a-- you know what a kolkhoz is? A communal, like a kibbutz and this, like cows and a bull and a sheep and pig.

But they had killed a pig. They were butchering it and making-- because they were marching home. There were no communication. And they're young. So they-- we came in, they were pretty nice to us. So the head of the pig, if you want, they would cook. And oh yeah, they had a German kitchen. It wasn't with an electric stove. They have with the firewood. And they-- so it was hot.

And they-- and they told us-- they were talking German-- that they this, they'll cook it, and they'll have food on the way, they say, if you want to. So oh yeah, and we told them, we are hungry. They gave us little pieces of the cooked food already.

And so we stayed there. And the next day, I think, they left. We remained. Finally, we find out that the Russians had some headquarters, and Yugoslav soldiers worked there a lot, which were fighting with the Russians.

And the Yugoslav soldiers that-- they are distributing food for foreigners. And they were having already oil there and meat, distribute-- and bread. Because here what it is, the little towns were all full with some German inhabitants. But on the outside, the Germans left. They were crowded in-- and a lot of foreigners there were. And people have to eat. And they organized right away.

Well, how did you find this out if you were in this farmhouse that the Danes had just left?

Yeah, well people used to-- people were on the march. We used to go out and ask for this. And we came to a little town. And again, we came to-- and there was the commandant was Jewish we didn't see anyone who was-- But they sent us to the Yugoslavs. And the Yugoslav were very sympathetic to us.

They find out that we are Jewish people-- we're only three. So for the bigger groups, they would weigh the food, and then us they used to give a piece of this. They would-- didn't bother weigh, because they have those scales-- the big scale, you know, what you would weigh-- and give us oil and from here.

So oh yeah, so they said that we should go and find a place where to live with a German family. And we were walking and walking, and we find a house where a German, he had, he had in the backyard, like we have garages, they had a little, like, a workhouse. He had there all kind of supplies. And in the front, by the way, he was a storekeeper. He had a store. And he let us stay there.

Well, did you just knock on each door?

Right, right, knock on each door. And they-- oh yeah, that, that-- they said that the Germans have orders to take in foreigners. And if they'll find out-- yeah, that was an order-- if they'll find out that they had the room and didn't take in, they'll be punished. Always was with, always with punished-- that was the German way and the Russian way. If you

don't do that, you'll be punished.

So they let us in and assigned us a place in that little room. And we lived. And here what we did-- since we used to bring food, meat and oil, and we arranged that a-- the storekeeper's wife used to cook for us when we used to give her. And she was probably glad to do it. And she would knock at the door and bring us in a meal from the food we got.

Did she know you were Jews?

Oh, I'll tell you a story, too. No, she did not know. She did not know. And in that, in that, where we lived-- so in the evenings, we would go out and sit near, between the garage and this. And a lot of Germans used to come over.

And they knew that we are Latvians and that we know the Russians. They wanted favors. We should-- for example, there was a lady, the Russians took away her sewing machine. We should go with her to reclaim her sewing machine. And how the Russians will be and oh, they were so afraid.

And as soon as the Russians came in in the store, he would run and bring us-- we should talk to the Russian, because they were afraid the Russians would take something for nothing or this. Then he's afraid-- in fact, he told us, that man, that he was an SS man, SS, he said. But he said everybody had to be SS-- means a Hitler.

And the Russians were trying to find out who worked for that. And always they want-- and we didn't know that we are Jews-- they didn't know that. We lived there. And we had, in fact, we had pretty good a rest place, and they had--

What was his name?

I don't know. Even when I lived there, I didn't know, or maybe I did know. And such things I don't keep in mind. Only I knew the Germans, we worked together, and in Riga, I know many names.

So and then a bath we could take there. There wasn't hot water. Again, you had to heat up water, put in, and it was a wooden tub. And we lived there until-- oh yeah, we lived there for quite a couple of months, probably. And here what, meanwhile, happened-- that all the foreigners could repatriate. Italians went to Italy, Hungarians to Hungary, Romanians and Czechoslovakians, everybody were.

And we thought-- we told the Russians, instead of being Latvians, we told them we are from Palestine, Palestinians. And you know who gave us-- this gave us, a little, a young soldier from the Crimea, a Russian soldier-- young, you would think that's assimilated-- but he said, don't tell them you are a Latvian, tell you are Palestinians.

We ourselves couldn't say it. And we saw it, and it went. So they used to gather all the foreigners in groups of 120 and put them on a train, whatever communications they could, and send them to. With three Palestinians, they didn't even know. A lot of Russian soldiers, if you say we are from Palestine, he would say, where is it?

In fact, one time, two soldiers said, where is it. They said-- [RUSSIAN], don't you know we were fighting there. The Russians weren't fighting in Palestine, but [LAUGHS] you know.

So anyhow, then it came that the whole town emptied of foreigners. And the Yugoslavs left, too. And the Russians moved us to another place, and before moving, you know. And in fact, we had to gather in a certain place, so one of the German women which, she looked very sympathetic, too. She was afraid of the Russians, but of Hitler-- some places-- still Hitler.

So when we took-- lived there, we told her we are Jews. And here what happened-- Kovnat was a tall, slender and blonde. And I was-- I don't know if I look specifically Jewish or not. But to have another one, he was shorter than I am, and he had curly hair. And he looked, we called him the Negus. You know, the Negus was the Ethiopian King. He looked like him. You remember the King of Ethiopia?

I remember Haile Selassie.

Haile Selassie, how he looked. He looked like that, curly hair. So he said, he said-- she said to me, we didn't know, but she said, of that little one, he said, we thought maybe he is Jewish. [LAUGHS]

So but we treated him good. And, and we told her, you see what hatred and what Hitler did, that he thought the Jews are devils or the worst of everybody, because we got a good name on account we used to give the food to the lady, and food was scarce when the Russians came in.

Did you tell the Russians that the fellow was an SS man?

No, no, no, no. But he told us, he said, I belong to the party, but he said, I'll go and talk to what we can and then-- and we were sitting there in the place, and we could see that he is not an active-- he wasn't a Jew killer or this. And if you, as a sympathizer to Hitler-- they were, all of them.

You know what happened once in Russia-- in Germany, and I don't remember at what time, but anyhow, we were already close to leave Germany. And we were in the country. And an old German was sitting near the river, and I think he was a shepherd and had there and was taking care of a herd of cattle.

You see, in Europe, isn't like an America there is plenty of land, and you have a fenced-in, and the cattle graze by themselves. There you need a shepherd, because there is no fenced-in from one farm to the other, or the cattle can go in the corn or other. So there is a shepherd.

And we talked to him. And he was a shepherd, because he was old. And he didn't know that we are Jewish, too. And the Russian, it was in the Russian zone. And he said, and we're talking.

And we tell him, did you see how destroyed, and why did Hitler start the war, and why did the other Germans-- how did all the Germans follow Hitler? You know what the guy told me-- he didn't know we are Jews, it didn't come to his mind-- he said, there wouldn't be any war if not for the Jews, he told me.

They were so-- that Hitler, he was a devil. But he knew-- and I know this in all the dictators-- he knew how to lead the people to-- and to believe all what he says. That is-- Nasser was like that. Nasser was-- were for talking about the Jews or about Americans or this or what is Khomeini, now, or a few of those fanatics.

They know how to lead the people in believing all the bad. Another thing what they do is you seed with hatred. You can feed the masses until they accept it better, you know, willingly, more than with love, with hatred. And that was all the dictators.

So you were the three Palestinians getting back to the--

Yeah.

--in this little town, and the Yugoslavs left?

Right.

And where did you do the--

And here then the Russians took us over in another camp.

What was the name of that?

That was Furstenwalde. And it was like the camp was made from a-- in a villa of a rich German family. There were real impressive buildings, brick buildings, 2, 3 floors and a lot of buildings for their help-- smaller buildings. It was on a nice hill. And we lived there with other people.

And there were Yugoslavs and Polacks and some Italians. But they lived already, they had already a band. They were dancing and living it up. And then a Yugoslav man said-- and we got acquainted, and we told him we are Jewish people. And he said, you know what I heard, that in Berlin, they have a Jewish center, like a Jewish Gemeinde, it's called.

And Berlin was 60 miles from that place. And it was civilians couldn't use the railroad yet-- only for soldiers, for the Russians. And the war was still on somewhere. It wasn't. So here what happened-- oh, I remember. No, it was already after the liberation, because it was already-- Berlin was already divided into four zones-- the Russian, French, English and American.

So we decided that we have to see what is in Berlin. We cannot sit there. So I was the one, they sent me to go to Berlin. And I got in into the train. And the train was filled with Russians. But I told them I'm going to-- I have to go to Berlin or somehow.

We-- I got about 10 or 20 miles until they got me out of it. I talked to men, and then I had to walk. And I remember I was walking and walking. It was so hot already. It must have been May. And I remember my face was soaked. I was sweating. And when I came to Berlin, I remember my hair was bleached. I couldn't recognize when I saw my hair. I had not very dark hair, but I couldn't recognize, it was so bleached.

And I remember, I was going by, and I saw a little, like, a puddle where kids were swimming there out of this. And I thought, oh, if I could go in-- and maybe I should go in with the clothes. Since the sun shines anyhow, it'll dry up. And I was afraid. I would have done it, it was so hot.

Finally, I came to Berlin, to that place. And I saw Berlin, you know, where a lot of buildings were destroyed. But what impressed me more, I never knew or saw the underground subways. And here were holes, and you could look in and see the rails underneath. And I came.

The holes were where they were bombed out?

Right, from bombs, yeah. And finally, towards evening, I came to that old synagogue where they had the Jewish Gemeinde. Gemeinde means the Jewish circle. And I'll show you-- I think I have a document what they give me. I think let's, let's finish this with today. And I'll show you the paper what I got from.

All right.

OK. So we were in a camp, Furstenwalde, the three boys of us. And it was a Russian camp. There were Polish refugees and Italians.