

Transcription details:

Date: 06-Nov-2019
Input sound file: Matti's Interview with Father Part I - WWII 1938-39.mp3

Transcription results:

S1: 00:00 [inaudible].

S2: 00:02 Well, yes. More or less. I'm okay. Don't worry about me. But my voice is a bit hoarse today.

S1: 00:11 It's fine.1938.

S2: 00:17 What about 1938? I was 20 years old.

S1: 00:21 Do you remember?

S2: 00:22 Of course, yes, I certainly remember it. There's a lot to remember in 1938 because 1938 is the year when the Germans occupied the Sudetenland. And it was also the year when they occupied Austria next door. So you could see--

S1: 00:40 Do you actually remember that incident occurring?

S2: 00:42 Yes, of course, I do. Because in 1938 I was a student at the Masaryk University in Brno. I studied medicine, and we saw the refugees starting coming in from all over the place.

S1: 00:59 So did you hear about it or you saw the refugees? First, did you hear the news, you read by a newspaper?

S2: 01:06 There was a crisis on of course, which you followed actually, day by day. There was a crisis of negotiations that were going on behind the-- it was pretty secret. Not much transpired in the press of the real thing. You see the Czechs, of course, said they are not going to cede one inch. They are going to make arrangements with the German minority for greater autonomy. But, of course, the Germans didn't want to talk to them, the majority. There was a small social democratic German party which was ready to cooperate with them. Incidentally, there were many Jews in the German Social Democratic Party, but they were really irrelevant. So it was the headline parties, which were actually affiliated to the Nazis. The majority of Germans were with them. And they, of course, wouldn't negotiate because their plan was to give her to go back to Germany, to be annexed by Germany. And they didn't want to stay in Czechoslovakia.

S1: 02:20 How did it affect you personally and did you feel something was going to happen? Did you at that point have any idea that it was going to affect you personally? Were you afraid for yourself in any way?

S2: 02:31 I wasn't afraid. I was too young to be afraid, but I knew that it would affect me personally as it actually did. Because once the Germans occupied the Sudetenland, I was kicked out of the university because, at that time, the so-called second Czech Republic started slowly anti-Jewish measures. One of--

S1: 02:54 Did it happen right away? How--

S2: 02:56 Well, a few weeks. They weren't too severe, but for instance, they will not let students, Jews that were not born in Czechoslovakia, continue to study. Now I was not born in Czechoslovakia. Actually, I was born in Galicia, which was-- when I was born was Austria, later became Poland. It was by chance, actually, because neither my father nor my mother are from Poland. My mother is from Russia, and my father was from Bohemia. But during the war, my mother happened to be there and I was born there because my grandfather who was a Russian, worked in [Droho? beach. That was the place where I was born in the oil fields.

S1: 03:42 He worked in the oil fields?

S2: 03:43 Yes, he was an oil--

S1: 03:44 [crosstalk] grandfather?

S2: 03:45 Yes, yes, yes, yes. He worked in the oil fields. He was a Russian citizen. He was actually interned, but he was allowed to work during the day, only in the evening he had to go back to sleep in camp. That time internment was not really very severe and very restrictive.

S1: 04:03 Why was he [inaudible]?

S2: 04:04 Because he was a Russian citizen and this was Austria. Russia and Austria, during World War I, were enemies.

S1: 04:11 This is during World War I?

S2: 04:12 Yes, of course. I was born in the last days of World War I.

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- S1: 04:16 In 1918?
- S2: 04:17 1918, September, yes. A few days later, the Austrian government-- well, the Armistice was November 11th. But it was pretty clear that this part, where my father came from, would be no longer in [Austro?]-Hungary. And, therefore, the Austro-Hungarian empire, I think, much to the detriment of the stability of Europe, would disintegrate, which it did.
- S1: 04:45 Let's get back to this [inaudible] for one second. Do you remember what month in 1938 this [inaudible]?
- S2: 04:51 It must have been in September, yes. I think so.
- S1: 04:55 So you were about to begin your second or your third year of school?
- S2: 04:58 I was about to begin my third year of school.
- S1: 05:03 So now, did you ever--
- S2: 05:03 [Fifth?] semester.
- S1: 05:04 Did you ever go to your third year of medicine school?
- S2: 05:07 Well, I didn't.
- S1: 05:08 So you never actually started your third year before?
- S2: 05:11 No, I didn't start it, although I could have. Because since my father was a civil servant - he was a high school teacher - I really could have protested the expulsion, and they would have taken me back. This decree would not really have applied to me.
- S1: 05:31 Where did the decree come from?
- S2: 05:33 The government.
- S1: 05:34 The Czech government?
- S2: 05:35 Yeah, of course. The Czech government.
- S1: 05:36 Why did they make that decree?
- S2: 05:37 Well, they started slowly, as I said before, to institute anti-Jewish measures. And that was one of them.
- S1: 05:45 What other ones did they institute?
- S2: 05:47 Actually, the weren't any other anti-Jewish measures. Yes, privately, some restaurants and some cafes started putting up signs that Jews are not welcome.
- S1: 06:01 Did you ever go to cafes like that, or did the cafe that you frequented still serve Jews?
- S2: 06:06 Well, the cafe that I frequented, which was a very nice place called [Esplanade?], actually catered almost exclusively to Jews. Had done so before. And [laughter] so the question never arose that they would put up such a sign. No, I didn't go to any place where they said the Jews were not welcome. I didn't go to them.
- S1: 06:27 Was the cafe, [Esplanade?], near your house?
- S2: 06:30 Yes, it was very near my house.
- S1: 06:31 Is that why you went there?
- S2: 06:33 No. All the Jews went there even if they [laughter] didn't live so close to it. It was a typical what you call a Jewish coffeehouse, a Jewish cafe.
- S1: 06:43 What was typical about it?
- S2: 06:44 Well, it was frequented by Jews. That was--
- S1: 06:47 Was there anything in terms of the way that the decor or the kind of food that they serve [there?]--?
- S2: 06:52 Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Neither the decor nor the food was in any way different from the other modern coffeehouses. It had been redone a few years before in a very fine manner. Actually, it was very, very well done.
- S1: 07:05 Was it open on Saturday?
- S2: 07:07 Yes. It was even open on [inaudible].
- S1: 07:10 Did they serve food there?

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- S2: 07:12 Yes.
- S1: 07:12 Could you get pork?
- S2: 07:14 Oh, yes. Definitely.
- S1: 07:15 So there was no kashruth there or anything?
- S2: 07:17 No, no, no. Of course not. Of course not. You could get ham and everything you wanted. Look, the Orthodox, which were a small minority in my hometown of Brno, never went to a cafe. Neither to this nor to any other.
- S1: 07:34 So these were all Jews that were-- they were only culturally Jews really.
- S2: 07:38 No, no. They used to go to synagogue. You didn't have to belong to a community. In a way, you belong to the community by paying taxes. It goes under the system that was enforced in Czechoslovakia. Anybody paid a religious tax, which was added to his income tax, unless he declared that he was without any religious affiliation. Then he didn't pay the tax.
- S1: 08:08 Did your father pay the tax?
- S2: 08:09 Of course, he paid the tax.
- S1: 08:11 He paid it as a Jew?
- S2: 08:12 He paid it as a Jew. He was a declared Jew, which incidentally, the overwhelming majority of the Jews in Brno paid the tax that belonged to the Jewish community, as it was called. It was really called the Jewish Religious Community. That was the official name, and the state kept it, actually. There were additional voluntary gifts if you wanted to, but the state paid everything, the upkeep of the synagogue, the salary of the rabbi, the salary of the shohet, the salary of everything that was connected with that community.
- S1: 08:56 How many synagogues approximately would you say they were in Brno at the time, in 1938?
- S2: 09:00 Well, I can tell you exactly how many they were, not approximately, excluding some few Hasidic shtiebel that were hidden somewhere. I don't even know where. There were three synagogues. Two that today would probably be called reform. No, one that would be called conservative, which was in the courtyard of the house we lived in. Then there was one that was a reform, so to speak. At that time, it was called Neolog. They had an organ, and it was a very beautiful service. For [inaudible], half of the people that were, they were non-Jews to listen. They had a very good cantor who was a fantastic tenor. Then there was the so-called Polish synagogue, which was Orthodox but not Hasidic.
- S1: 09:48 Did you say there was a synagogue in the courtyard of your house?
- S2: 09:50 Yes.
- S1: 09:51 Your apartment building?
- S2: 09:52 Well, this apartment building belonged to the Jewish community.
- S1: 09:58 So you paid rent to the Jewish community?
- S2: 09:59 Yes, we paid rent to the Jewish community. There were a number of apartments there. On the first floor was the offices of the Jewish community and also the offices of the Zionist organization. Then two cantors had their apartments too. These were so-called [inaudible] apartments, and the others were rented simply to private parties.
- S1: 10:26 Did you go to that synagogue? Did you go there regularly or did you go to the other synagogue?
- S2: 10:31 No, no. I sometimes went down there on Saturday because I went to a Jewish school so I didn't go to school on Saturday. I did go to school on Sunday though for half a day. And I used to go in there. It was fun to see our friends. We used to go to the synagogue almost every Saturday, just to look in, what's going on.
- S1: 10:53 How long did you live in this apartment building? Do you remember when you moved in there?
- S2: 10:56 No, I was too small to remember, but we moved in very soon after the war when my father got a job as a teacher in a high school in Brno. Later, he became a teacher in the Jewish high school. He started out in a non-Jewish high school. And he ended up in a non-Jewish high school.
- S1: 11:16 Do you remember the first time you realized that the headquarters of the Zionist movement was in the lobby of your apartment?
- S2: 11:23 Not in the lobby, it was on the first floor.
- S1: 11:25 The first floor?
- S2: 11:26 Yeah. Well, I knew that all the time.
- S1: 11:28 Just something that you grew up with that it was there?

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- S2: 11:30 Sure. We knew that.
- S1: 11:31 Do you think that in any way influenced your Zionism, the fact that it was right in your own building?
- S2: 11:36 Not in the least.
- S1: 11:37 Did you ever go into that office?
- S2: 11:39 Yes, yes, I did go into this office because we used to collect money in such little blue boxes, which were made of carton. We used to go around. And when they were full, we went there to hand them over and get credit for how much we collected
- S1: 11:59 so okay, back to 1938. So in September, you were-- there was an ordinance that you were not allowed to study anymore, and you decided that you weren't going to contest it. Why not?
- S2: 12:12 Because I was sure that things were going to go from bad to worse, and I was sure that I wouldn't be able to finish studies anyhow.
- S1: 12:23 What gave you that feeling? Based on what, was there a report? Did you read it in the newspaper?
- S2: 12:27 Well, I'm a natural pessimist, so I thought there would be war sooner or later.
- S1: 12:35 Based on what? What happened that made you think that?
- S2: 12:37 Because I was sure that Hitler is not going to stop with occupying Sudetenland, which actually was the consequence of the union agreement. So if anybody wants to check the exact date, it shouldn't be too difficult to find out. I think it was in September.
- S1: 12:54 Wasn't the Sudetenland one of the first pieces of land that was annexed to Germany?
- S2: 13:00 After Austria.
- S1: 13:01 So you had heard about Hitler's anti-Jewish policies?
- S2: 13:06 Well, everybody had heard about Hitler's anti-Jewish policy. You must have been a moron not to have heard about it.
- S1: 13:12 But there were no camps in 1938?
- S2: 13:14 In Germany? Of course there were camps.
- S1: 13:16 Weren't people already being annihilated in 1938?
- S2: 13:19 Well, no. But people dies in camps. People died even if they were not--
- S1: 13:25 These were so called labor camps, weren't they?
- S2: 13:28 Well, no. They were called concentration camps. [foreign] for short, in German.
- S1: 13:35 But you had heard about these concentration camps?
- S2: 13:36 But everybody knew about them, not only the papers reported about it, but there were people, refugees from Germany who gave lectures about conditions, some that had managed to get out. And we listened to some of the lectures. I went to some of the lectures.
- S1: 13:50 They came to Czechoslovakia?
- S2: 13:52 No, the camps were in Germany, of course.
- S1: 13:54 No, no. They came to Czechoslovakia, these people?
- S2: 13:57 Yes, yes, as refugees.
- S1: 13:58 [inaudible] were originally from Czechoslovakia?
- S2: 13:59 No, originally from Germany, they were Germans.
- S1: 14:01 Did they think they'd be safe in Czechoslovakia.
- S2: 14:03 Right. They were safe for the time being, before the Germans moved in they were safe. They were usually either in Prague, or in Bernard, so they were definitely safe. And there were a very active human rights commission there, which was also heavily Jewish, and they of course saw to it that the knowledge about the concentration camps spread amongst the population, both Czech, and non-Czech, I mean Jewish.
- S1: 14:35 Do you remember what year the first time you heard the term concentration camp was, approximately what year?

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- S2: 14:41 Well, I know it was before 3'8, but I couldn't pinpoint the date.
- S1: 14:46 Not much before though, maybe--
- S2: 14:47 Much before, much before that. When Hitler came to power in '33, after that we heard about concentration camps. I remember even that we learned about the song that the inmates of the prisoners used to sing in a concentration camp in Oranienburg, near Berlin.
- S1: 15:08 Were they Jewish prisoners?
- S2: 15:08 I remember this. They were both Jewish, and non-Jewish prisoners.
- S1: 15:11 What was the nature of the song?
- S2: 15:13 It was just a song about prisoners going to work in the [pit?] fields.
- S1: 15:19 Do you remember the song?
- S2: 15:21 Very vaguely.
- S1: 15:22 Can you sing a little bit?
- S2: 15:23 I'm afraid I'm not sure I can remember it.
- S1: 15:26 Do you remember any of the lyrics?
- S2: 15:26 Yes, I remember [foreign], something like that. I don't remember the rest. That was the song. We knew about it.
- S1: 15:39 What did you feel when you heard about that? Were you worried? Did you make the connection that it would have anything to do with you at that point? Did you think it would any way touch you?
- S2: 15:47 Well, at that time not. When I first heard the song, not. I thought that maybe that time maybe some changes could occur in Germany, but 1938 I had given up any hope that the German regime could be either overthrown or that the pressure from the big power, so to speak, the recorded Democratic nations would be able to change the course of the regime. By that time I was convinced that Hitler's expansionist plans will be executed by him which definitely meant the [foreign] thrust towards the east and it would roll over us. I was sure about it. But my father, for instance, did not believe that. He thought that Hitler would just take in the German lands inhabited by German nationals, but that it would leave these Slavonic countries untouched.
- S1: 16:53 In 1937, 1938, was there any anti-Semitism before the annexation of Sudetenland in Braunau?
- S2: 17:03 Yes, definitely. But you see, the Czech type of anti-Semitism was a kind of let's say, I would call it beer barrel anti-Semitism. They didn't like the Jews because they considered the Jews as exploiter of the Czech citizens and people who don't do manual labor and who are the bosses, and whereas the Czechs are not the bosses. That, therefore, they were not enamored by the Jews. Also, the Catholic church actually fostered anti-Semitism accusing the Jews of having murdered Christ. As a matter of fact, they had Easter processions there during I think Friday, Easter Friday or something like that where they carried an effigy of Judas which was then publicly burned. And in the small towns where Jews used to live, they never went out on these days. They kept in their houses and apartments. This is one of the open manifestations of anti-Jewish propaganda by the church, but I'm sure that most of the priests, especially in Slovakia which was very anti-Semitic, very anti-Semitic. Eventually, the fascist party that took over Slovakia under Hitler's [inaudible], most of them were Catholic priests. And it's very interesting to note, which very few people did, the Vatican never reprimanded any of the priests for being part of such a regime. Not only part, they really started it. The men who started this party, the founder of this man, a guy by the name of Andrej Hlinka was a Catholic priest. The president of this fascist regime was a Catholic priest.
- S1: 19:11 What fascist regime?
- S2: 19:12 The Slovak fascist regime.
- S1: 19:14 Were they in any way affiliated with the Nazis?
- S2: 19:16 Of course. The Nazis put them in power. When the Nazis occupied Bohemia and Moravia and turned it into a protectorate in March '39--
- S1: 19:27 They turned it over to them?
- S2: 19:28 The Slovak part was constituted as an independent state, a Slovak state, which of course was all the doing of the Germans, of the Nazis.
- S1: 19:40 Okay. Let's go back to-- let's go back to 1938 and the beginning of Winter. You weren't going to go back to school. What were you going to do?
- S2: 19:50 I didn't do anything.

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- S1: 19:52 Did you live at home?
- S2: 19:53 I lived at home, yes. All the time I lived at home.
- S1: 19:55 Did you work?
- S2: 19:56 I didn't work, no. Yes, I pupils. I tutored some pupils. I did, at that time, actually, get some money which I was given from my grandmother. She gave--
- S1: 20:12 Your paternal grandmother? Or your maternal?
- S2: 20:14 Maternal grandmother. She came into, not kind of an inheritance. She got some lump sum.
- S1: 20:21 And what was her name?
- S2: 20:23 Her name was Eva [Budrastka?].
- S1: 20:25 She was from Russia, right?
- S2: 20:27 Yes. She definitely was from Russia.
- S1: 20:29 She had died?
- S2: 20:31 No. No. She lived. She died later. She died in Lemberg [Wolf?] already under the German occupation. That means after the Russians had come in and then the Germans had come in back again.
- S1: 20:49 Where was this that she died?
- S2: 20:50 It was actually Poland, but then under the Stalin and Hitler pact, the Russians occupied it and when the war broke out, the Germans occupied it. But she died a natural death, actually.
- S1: 21:06 Do you know how old she was when she died?
- S2: 21:07 I have no idea. I have no idea.
- S1: 21:09 What town was it that she died in?
- S2: 21:10 She must have died, I think-- I don't know, maybe under the Russians. '41 I think she died. In Lemberg. She stayed in the same place.
- S1: 21:20 Is that a connection with your name, that place?
- S2: 21:22 Actually not, because that is my father's side.
- S1: 21:26 It's coincidental.
- S2: 21:27 It's quite coincidental. Quite.
- S1: 21:29 So this would be in Russia today?
- S2: 21:30 Yes. It's called [inaudible] today. It's what is called the Western Ukraine. I always used--
- S1: 21:37 Was she Ukrainian?
- S2: 21:39 No. She came from somewhere totally different. She came from Ukraine. Yes. Yes. They all came from [inaudible]. They all came from there. But I usually used to tell this story, look, my grandmother, it's not quite true. I said, she was born in Poland, which isn't quite true, but she came there as a little girl. She was born in Poland. No, she was born in Austria. She lived in Poland and she died in the Soviet Union. But she never left Lemberg.
- S1: 22:10 So you had gotten some money from Eva Budtraska?
- S2: 22:12 Yes. She had a, what do you call it, a private pension, from--
- S1: 22:22 Like an IRA?
- S2: 22:23 No. No. No. They didn't exist. She got it as in the testament of her aunt, which happened to be my wife's grandmother. And they left a certain amount. She got a certain amount of money every month. And that's what she lived on all her life, actually, after she became a widow, which was in 1918, or '19 perhaps. And then, because she wanted to give us some money, so she approached the family and said could she get the lump sum, and they gave her a lump sum. And she gave this lump sum from me, assuming that I would have to emigrate, so I should buy some equipment and have some money.
- S1: 23:13 Who assumed that you were going to emigrate?

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- S2: 23:15 She did. Well, I did. I did. I actually tried to emigrate before.
- S1: 23:20 What year?
- S2: 23:21 I tried to emigrate actually in '37.
- S1: 23:27 Why?
- S2: 23:27 Well, I felt the situation was deteriorating. What I wanted to do is, I wanted to go to a school-- there was this famous school in the Sudetenland for glass manufacture because this was an area where there was a lot of glass manufacturing. And I wanted then to emigrate into-- emigrating to Palestine, British Palestine, because my very distant relatives, which also happened to be my wife's relatives they had opened a glass factory there. So I wrote to them I said they had some special courses for people who had finished high school, a high school diploma, one-year courses where they learned about glass and administration of glass making. And I said, "Would they hire me?" And also, this would have enabled me to get an immigration certificate to go into Palestine because immigration of Jews was actually limited by the British at that time.
- S1: 24:36 Because you had a trade, that [crosstalk]--
- S2: 24:38 Yes, yes, they had the special category because they could have asked for me, such a kind of a request that I'm a specialist that they could work there.
- S1: 24:46 So in other words, your interest in glasses really spawned by your interest to go to Palestine--
- S2: 24:50 Absolutely.
- S1: 24:51 --[crosstalk] care about the glass at all?
- S2: 24:52 I had no inclination for glass, but that seemed as a good idea.
- S1: 25:00 Why didn't it work out?
- S2: 25:01 Well, they answered they didn't need me. They said we can get trained glass engineers to work on the factory floor. We don't need special people to learn something. We have of them. Actually they did that. And they actually took a non-Jew who actually fixed them in a terrible manner.
- S1: 25:21 Were you raised from the small from childhood of thinking of immigrating to Israel? Was that part of your upbringing?
- S2: 25:28 Well, let's say, to be honest, we were all raised a Zionist. My father was a Zionist, so I was raised as a Zionist. Zionism did not necessarily include this the determination to go to Palestine, but it was always within the purview of, let's say, of the ideology that actually this is what one ought to do. But there are always enough arguments why it is not practicable at that time.
- S1: 26:01 Did your father know that you wanted to go to Israel? To Palestine?
- S2: 26:04 Well, of course. We discussed it with him, and we wrote this letter to our relatives. It was on [crosstalk]--
- S1: 26:12 What was his feeling about you emigrating into Palestine?
- S2: 26:14 He was very positive about it.
- S1: 26:15 And your mother?
- S2: 26:17 My mother, no. My mother was a very lovely woman but a bit on the naive side, because she believes nothing is going to happen in Czechoslovakia--
- S1: 26:28 But actually, you wanted to emigrate to Palestine, regardless of anything that happened. It was something that was already in your mind.
- S2: 26:35 It was in my mind, but I'm sure that the European situation definitely pushed me towards making some kind of a, what--
- S1: 26:45 A committed decision.
- S2: 26:47 Yes, yes.
- S1: 26:47 Okay. So here we are, the winter of 1938. You've gotten a lump sum of money from your grandmother. You're sitting around, you're going to the cafe, you're not going to school. What happened? Are you in contact with members of the Jewish community? Are you a member of any organization?
- S2: 27:02 No. Every organization wanted me as a member, including the revisionists, the [inaudible] people who came and actually offered me to be the president of the students' organization.
- S1: 27:16 Why?

- S2: 27:17 Because my father was a well-known person in the Jewish community as a professor, as they call high school teachers in Czechoslovakia, in the Jewish school. And also, in the community, he was very well known. He also belonged to a small but very active Zionist Party, which was called the Zionist Realists. And so, he was very well known. He was one of the personalities. He was not too active in the community because he really wasn't too interested in being active.
- S1: 27:58 Why didn't you take revisionists and their offer?
- S2: 28:01 Because I wanted to know what their ideology was. And when I learned what the ideology was, which seemed to me a bit fascist, so I didn't like it.
- S1: 28:12 In what way was it fascist?
- S2: 28:14 First of all, they had an authoritarian structure. They had paramilitary units, the big [inaudible], who strutted around in brown uniforms, and who had some secret military training, not really, because they didn't have any weapons.
- S1: 28:32 What was their goal?
- S2: 28:33 Their goal was to go to Palestine and fight the British.
- S1: 28:37 And they actually started around in uniforms in [inaudible].
- S2: 28:40 Oh, definitely. Definitely--
- S1: 28:42 The police didn't mind that?
- S2: 28:44 That was legal. Why should they mind that? It was a Jewish organization. It was just legal--
- S1: 28:49 They were kind of like Boy Scouts, really.
- S2: 28:51 Well, in a way, yes. There were youth organizations--
- S1: 28:56 And so you weren't interested in that because you didn't--
- S2: 29:00 No, I didn't like it. Of course, actually, the students did not go in uniforms although they could also belong to this paramilitary organization, as I mentioned, but I didn't really like that.
- S1: 29:13 What other organizations offered you to be a member?
- S2: 29:17 They're all after me. There was one that was called Blue White, which was the general Zionist, and there was the more leftists. They all wanted me as a member, but we were brought up not to join, no to be [join?]
- S1: 29:33 How many people or population was the Jewish community [burna?] 1938 approximately
- S2: 29:42 12,000.
- S1: 29:43 And so how many different organizations would you say existed for those 12,000 people to join all in all?
- S2: 29:49 Well, there must have been, I think, quite a few. For the young people, there were three main organizations, but the Zionists were split up in a number of parties, you see, and then there were non-Zionist Jewish parties. You see, the Jewish community was an elected community. There were elections and each party posted a slate of candidates and there were elections, and you elected the deputies who then set up the Jewish community council.
- S1: 30:23 What was the most popular party?
- S2: 30:26 Actually, well, I would say the Zionists were about 25%. Then there were the German Jews, who had their own party. There were the Czech Jews, who wanted to be Czechs at their own part. I think there were five parties that ran in the elections.
- S1: 30:46 What do you mean they wanted to be Czechs?
- S2: 30:48 They said, "We are Czechs of the Jewish faith," and the German said, "We are Germans of the Jewish faith," because you must remember-- I mean, not remember. Czechoslovakia was set up after World War I, after the peace treaty. It was, so to speak, a nationalities state. It means that peace treaty included a clause for the protection of minorities. This happened in other countries too. In Poland, it was the same. The minorities would have been able under-- they had to put into the Constitution paragraphs that protected minorities, gave them the right to a certain culture autonomy, and the Jews were recognized as a national minority, but not all Jews. I think about only one-quarter of the Jews wanted to be part of the Jewish national minority. Others wanted to be part of the German national minority and some wanted to be part of the Czechs, which are not a minority, but it was a recognized nationality, of course.
- S1: 32:01 So did you end up joining any of these groups?
- S2: 32:05 No. No. Well, that was during the war. I joined the [foreign]. That is the pioneers.
- S1: 32:15 That was later on, though. Right?

Transcribe Me!

- S2: 32:16 That was much later on.
- S1: 32:17 Okay. So 1938 is winter. I imagine that you started spending the money your grandmother gave you.
- S2: 32:23 Well, no. I spent the money on equipment. Yes, definitely.
- S1: 32:27 What equipment?
- S2: 32:28 Well, I bought suits. I bought shoes. Very nice shoes. I still remember this wardrobe by [crosstalk].
- S1: 32:35 What did you need the wardrobe for?
- S2: 32:36 Well, I wanted to try to go to England, actually.
- S1: 32:40 Why?
- S2: 32:41 Because you didn't need a visa to go to England.
- S1: 32:44 How would you have gotten there?
- S2: 32:46 I needed an invitation from somebody, a written invitation.
- S1: 32:50 Would you have taken the train?
- S2: 32:52 Well, that is exactly why I probably didn't manage it. Also, I was not a very adventurous person. I always wanted to do the straight-- to go the straight and narrow path, to do the things that are in order, legal, and not strive to get around things or to get ahead of other people. So I didn't want to take the train, A, because the train went through Germany, and I was a bit fearful of that. I wanted to go by plane, but the train was sold out for many months ahead of time because many people took many-- I mean, the planes were small-- took advantage of going to England. Also, you were better assured of a reception of a favor of a reception in England because the immigration officers in England actually could refuse you, even if you came with this invitation. They could refuse you, but they refuse more people that came in by train than that came in by plane. So the plane was a better bet. But, first of all, the planes were sold out. People bribed the clerks to get the seat. That, of course, would A, never occur to me that you should do a thing like that because I was brought up in the idea, "All right, you sign up for a plane ticket. When your number comes up, you take it." You don't do anything to get favorable treatment, and certainly not bribe anybody to get on a plane.
- S1: 34:37 Did you ever sign up?
- S2: 34:38 Yes, I did. I did. I did sign up. Then, of course, I had a difficulty because I wanted a passport. So they gave me a passport that was only good for three months, because I was, in principle, due for military service.
- S1: 34:53 In the Czech Army?
- S2: 34:54 Yes, in the Czech Army.
- S1: 34:55 They were taking Jews into the Czech Army?
- S2: 34:57 Of course.
- S1: 34:58 Although there were actually already measures against the Jews?
- S2: 35:01 No. No. No, officially, the Jews were full citizens. It was only in education in the universities. Otherwise, there were no restrictions, as I said, about the private restaurants and coffee houses.
- S1: 35:17 So you had gone out. You had bought a new suit and some shoes, and you were planning to make a journey to England? In preparation, what else did you buy? Do you remember?
- S2: 35:26 Well, what else do I need?
- S1: 35:28 Did you buy a new suitcase?
- S2: 35:29 Well, of course, I had to buy a suitcase, and a pretty big one, too.
- S1: 35:34 With this suit that you bought, did you have it made, or did you buy it off the rack?
- S2: 35:37 Nobody bought off-the-rack at that time. Only the proletariat bought off-the-rack. Everybody had [crosstalk].
- S1: 35:43 So you actually went to a tailor and had the suit made?
- S2: 35:44 Yes. I always had suits made at the tailor. That was par for the course. Everybody did that.
- S1: 35:53 So how long - when you signed up for the plane ticket - how long did they give you? Do you know how long it would take for your number to come up for the plane?

Transcribe Me!

- S2: 36:00 Well, they said a few months.
- S1: 36:02 Okay, so what happened? Obviously, you never [got on the plane?].
- S2: 36:04 First of all, what happened is that I went for a passport, and there I found out there's a catch 22. If I get the passport for only three months, the British will probably not accept me because officially these [papers?] were visitors, not immigrants. If I come as an immigrant, then I would have to get an immigration passport, which had the longer validity. But on an immigration passport, I couldn't come as a visitor to England, you see? So I talked to the Police office, and I asked to see the boss, and I said, "Listen, I'm a student - I was still a student then - I said, I certainly will get deferment because they all defer the people, so why don't you give me a longer passport?." He says, "I'm afraid I can't do that because the regulations don't allow that." So then I had a passport for three months. I really thought that I would try it, maybe, but the chances were before I get the ticket, the passport will no longer be valid.
- S1: 37:15 At this point, you didn't really think there was going to be any kind of mass annihilation of people in Czechoslovakia, did you?
- S2: 37:22 Well, let us say this way, I always used to tell everybody that I don't think Hitler will keep his promises to the German people and institute the Thousand-Year Reich, but I'm sure that what he promised the Jewish people, he'll keep. I already had this so it was in my mind from the very beginning. Cause I read Mein Kampf, of course. I saw what those--
- S1: 37:47 Do you remember what year you read it?
- S2: 37:48 No. I don't.
- S1: 37:49 Was it before '38?
- S2: 37:50 Yes. It was.
- S1: 37:52 Why did you read it?
- S2: 37:54 Well, I thought it was interesting to see what this Mister Hitler had to say.
- S1: 37:59 Do you remember your response to the book?
- S2: 38:01 Yes. I just told you what my response was--
- S1: 38:05 That was it?
- S2: 38:05 Yes.
- S1: 38:05 You knew that--
- S2: 38:06 I was convinced [crosstalk]--
- S1: 38:07 --other purists had read Mein Kampf?
- S2: 38:09 Very few.
- S1: 38:10 Do you think that it would've made a difference if more people had read it?
- S2: 38:13 No. Because see, the general attitude of the Jews was all where we had such [inaudible] in our history. That wanted to destroy the Jewish people. Way back from Hammon in old Persia. And very little parts will survive. There will be some anti-Jewish measures, we'll be able to live with them. This has happened before. So they expel a few, they kill a few maybe. There are some programs. But by and large, you can survive it. That was the attitude of the Jews.
- S1: 38:47 So here, you were ready to go to England. And you knew things, you had an inkling that things were not going to be good. What happened?
- S2: 38:55 Nothing happened. Because see, I must tell-- frankly, I didn't have enough courage, go to say, "Okay, what the hell. I'm going by train. What are they going to go to me passing through Germany?"
- S1: 39:09 --done anything to you?
- S2: 39:10 Probably not. Because the passport of course, at that time, the passports had notice of religion, see. There was a rubric of which religion-- which said religion of course. There it says, in Czech-- in Czech it's a mosaic religion. They called it the religion of Moses. So I was a bit afraid that you don't know what they're going to do to you. I don't think they would've done anything because at that time, a foreigner was a foreigner whether he was a Jew or not.
- S1: 39:44 So what happened? How did it--
- S2: 39:46 Well, I didn't do that. I didn't have enough determination to get out--
- S1: 39:51 Did you end up getting a job? You obviously never--

Transcribe Me!

- S2: 39:53 No, no. I didn't get a job.
- S1: 39:55 So here--
- S2: 39:55 I couldn't have gotten a job. I said I did tutor some students in Latin and math.
- S1: 40:03 How did the year progress? Okay? That was--
- S2: 40:05 Nothing--
- S1: 40:05 September 1930. Do you remember 1939 rolling in?
- S2: 40:09 Oh yes, of course. Of course, I remember that.
- S1: 40:12 What was the-- the next important event in terms of you realizing that something was even wronger than it had been before?
- S2: 40:20 Well, quite obviously when the Germans occupied the rest of Bohemia and Arabia.
- S1: 40:28 Do you remember where that was?
- S2: 40:29 Yes of course, that was on the 15th of March, 1939.
- S1: 40:34 Now, would you remember where you were when you heard the news?
- S2: 40:37 Yes. I was of course in the cafes [inaudible].
- S1: 40:41 Who were you with?
- S2: 40:43 Well, we were-- there was a student association of university students in which I was not really a member. But I always ran around with them. I mean, running around means sitting in the cafe. And that's where we were. And also, well, I must-- there is of course-- no, that was until Munich, I did work. After Munich, I was a student [inaudible]. I was in a first-aid station on the-- at the main railway station of Brno. But not after--shortly after-- yes! Now I remember. I did do some things. I worked as a volunteer to help refugees who were stranded in the no man's land between Czechoslovakia. I mean, secondary public, post-Munich Czechoslovakia. And so that can be-- that was then and next to Germany.
- S1: 41:42 How did you help them?
- S2: 41:43 Well, I went out there to this no man's land. We brought them food. We smuggled out some people from there.
- S1: 41:51 How far away from Brno was it?
- S2: 41:53 Oh. It was about one hour's drive. One hour's drive.
- S1: 41:57 Was there any danger to that?
- S2: 42:00 No. Not really. No. There was no danger because we brought out the food to these people. The Czech border guards let us pass. It was a certain place where we went to until these people were allowed to come in and there was a camp for the refugees built-in [inaudible]. Until that, I went out almost every day. Now I remember that's what I did.
- S1: 42:30 That's how you passed the time.
- S2: 42:32 Well, it was a job to do.
- S1: 42:33 Right. You didn't get paid for it though.
- S2: 42:35 No. It was a volunteer job.
- S1: 42:37 Okay. So here we are. It's March 15th, you said?
- S2: 42:40 Yes.
- S1: 42:40 You're sitting in the Cafe Esplanod. Was it nighttime or daytime?
- S2: 42:44 It was the evening, yes.
- S1: 42:45 What? Did it come over the radio or did somebody come in and say the news--
- S2: 42:49 Well, two days before there was already something afoot, namely the Slovaks were already preparing for their independent state. Of course, this was of the German [inaudible] in corporation with the Germans. But the Czechs decided for some reason that they would send army towards Czechoslovakia, towards the Slovak border, and we went on a trip with some people in a big car, and we saw this army moving so we saw that something was afoot. Now the theory amongst the Jews-- I mean I'm generalizing, of course. The theory among the Jews was that evidently the Czech government of the second republic would not move without German agreement. That the Germans must have agreed that they move into Slovakia if the Slovaks would try to secede the Germans, the Czech Army would try to prevent it. So

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but we didn't really-- I didn't quite believe that and finally I remember when the guy came in, it was raining. He always came into the coffee house, into the Esplanad, selling the next day's edition. It may have been the 14th really. I'm not quite sure. Maybe 14th in the evening, I think. Yes, that's what it was.

- S1: 44:27 What was the general response?
- S2: 44:29 Well, everybody was totally stunned. This coffee house, of course, was humming always with big-- with voices. It was like in a cemetery because the headline of it was that the Czech, the German Army had already occupied [inaudible], which is in the Silesian part, which was closest to the border to the north. So they were moving towards Brno. Because no one really believed it because they didn't want to believe it but that was of course indisputable. That was the--
- S1: 45:07 What was your personal initial response?
- S2: 45:12 Well, my response was that you see, yes, there were also the Germans are also starting marching so Brno and all that was before there was another uprising. They were in the German house. They had such a culture house. So they were there and they were under siege because you see they, under the Second Republic, had the right I had to celebrate certain of their own holidays and to put out the flags with the swastika. And they [but?] the Czech population actually rose against them so to speak. They didn't occupy the German house, but the population was around it held back by Czech [inaudible] [Marie?]. It's a kind of police. And they were shouting. They were throwing stones at them because they were in there all ready preparing for the takeover by the Germans. And I know I was on the way to the esplanade. I saw them all ready marching out in SA brown uniforms and singing German songs. They were marching down out of this German house, [foreign] house and marching down a certain road. And I saw that this was all ready coming.
- S1: 46:46 Okay, so you found out that Czechoslovakia had been annexed, correct?
- S2: 46:51 Yes.
- S1: 46:53 What happened that week? Do you remember? Was there panic in the Jewish community?
- S2: 46:57 No. No. There was no panic. Well, no. There was no panic because the Germans went very slowly, you see? Because at the beginning, this part was under army occupation.
- S1: 47:11 Was there any fighting between the Czech Army and the Germans?
- S2: 47:14 None?
- S1: 47:15 Why?
- S2: 47:15 Because well, the Czech's knew they were betrayed in Munich. They had lost all their strategic positions.
- S1: 47:25 They could've fought though. Couldn't they have tried to fight?
- S2: 47:28 Well, they could've fought, but the Czech's are not fighters you see? Maybe there was a place where some shots were exchanged, but it was-- look. Before the Czech's [really alone?] never thought they would be able to fight, but they were members of two military [packs?], one with England and France. And the other was with Yugoslavia and Romania. After Munich, both [packs?] really became invalid. So there are rumors all the time that the Russians would come and help them.
- S1: 48:04 Why did the [packs?] become invalid after Munich?
- S2: 48:06 Well, because the principle allies of Czechoslovakia, which were England and France, let them actually [came?] advice that they're not going to help them. So that they better give up.
- S1: 48:20 Why did they do that?
- S2: 48:22 Well, that was the-- I can only. First of all, they [weren't?] ready. Second of all, as Chamberland said, he believed that by sacrificing Czechoslovakia, he's going to save the peace. Whether they actually believed that, I don't know. I have a suspicion that actually the Western powers had two motives. One is they were unprepared. One, they were unprepared for the war. I also think that they somehow thought maybe Hitler could be diverted to fight the Soviet Union because he always, in his program, said that he needed the Ukraine as his [inaudible] [realm?] as the breadbasket for the German master-race. So, I think that was one of the motivations. They thought they would be able to divert him to fight against Russia. And so these two rather strange regimes, both the Soviet and the Nazi regime would fight each other to death. And that would be very advantageous to the western democracies. Well, of course, it didn't happen.
- S1: 49:29 It didn't happen that way.
- S2: 49:30 No, it didn't.
- S1: 49:31 So, here we are-- okay, now. Do you actually remember German soldiers marching into [Budanem?]?
- S2: 49:36 Of course.
- S1: 49:37 Do you remember when that happened? What the date was?

Transcribe Me!

- S2: 49:39 Why that was the fifteenth.
- S1: 49:41 Oh it was actually happened on the [crosstalk]--
- S2: 49:42 Yes, yes. It happened [crosstalk]--
- S1: 49:43 Now, were they just troops, were there armored cars?
- S2: 49:47 Yeah, sure. there were tanks.
- S1: 49:48 How many troops?
- S2: 49:50 I couldn't tell you how many, Of course, we saw the German soldiers.
- S1: 49:53 Did they march down the main street?
- S2: 49:54 They marched down the main street-- well, there wasn't really a main street. There was a main square. And they--
- S1: 50:01 What was it called?
- S2: 50:02 It was called Freedom Square. [foreign]. They occupied, of course, first the railway station and the radio station and the public buildings. They were everywhere. Of course, they were everywhere. They all--
- S1: 50:18 Was [crosstalk] measures taken against the Jews right away?
- S2: 50:21 No. No. No. No measures were taken right away. As a matter of fact, German soldiers came to the cafe at [foreign] because they came everywhere. They were very greedy because they couldn't-- they were ordering everything with whipped cream and they went into the deli's-- so what is a deli? No, they were buying salami and all kinds of sausages, which they didn't have. And of course, they could buy it very cheaply. Germany instituted an exchange rate of 10 korunas, Czech korunas to one mark, which, of course, was totally unrealistic. The koruna was worth much more [laughter]. So they bought everything cheaply. They paid for everything. They paid for everything. And on the contrary, there were rumors that actually the German army talked to a few Jews and did not-- they were not anti-Semitic. They told stupid stories that there were German officers that came to Jewish parties and were shouting shalom. This, of course, not true. But these rumors went around. Rumors, the most incredible rumors went around in Czechoslovakia. Before the Germans came in, and after the Germans came in, during the war. Incredible rumors.
- S1: 51:50 Who were these rumors started by?
- S2: 51:52 Nobody knows [laughter]. They said this is the press agency. One woman told me. They said one woman told me who knows somebody who is very well placed, and she said this and this and this. So that was how it was. They were very peaceful. They didn't do anything.
- S1: 52:18 When you saw German soldiers walking down the street, were you in any way afraid of them?
- S2: 52:23 No. No.
- S1: 52:25 Why not?
- S2: 52:26 Well, it was known that they are not-- it is not their task to persecute Jews. That was known. And there were public announcements on the walls, printed, that everybody was to be quiet and no popular assemblies, nothing. It was meant to protect the Jews. It was meant to keep the Czech population quiet. And you saw that they weren't interested in it. That wasn't their job. Of course, the Gestapo already started working immediately, but they had a list of people they picked up. So the Jews said, "Oh, this guy, he was picked up because he was a social democrat." They always found a reason why the man was picked up.
- S1: 53:18 So they were picking up Jews?
- S2: 53:20 Yes, yes. Of course. I saw a guy who was a very well-known Jewish playboy in Brno, who was very rich. [inaudible]. I saw him carrying rifles from a truck to the Gestapo headquarters in Brno, I saw him, and I saw how they kicked him. I saw that he wouldn't survive very long. I saw him, I saw him.
- S1: 53:48 What exactly were they getting him for? What did he do wrong?
- S2: 53:50 Well, he was very wealthy, and he was a known playboy, and he was on the list. The funny thing is that in this café-- I must mention that in the Czech Republic, there were programs in the café. Not very severe ones, but from time to time, the Czech fascists came in to shout, "Židé ven", "Out with the Jews." They didn't do much harm, they didn't do much harm.
- S1: 54:24 They break any plates or anything?
- S2: 54:25 No, no, they weren't breaking the plates. The Jewish usually used to run away. But when you stayed there, they didn't do anything to you, actually. Incidentally, the police immediately came. And they didn't arrest them but threw them out. And

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one of the people who worked in the café, a guy by the name of Hayek, who was selling cigars, he was one of the big fighters against these fascists, and he was very courageous, and he hit them, and he kicked them out. And then it appeared that he was a Gestapo informer already many years before. And he then became one of the officials of the Gestapo [laughter]. And he had lists of people, they say, or maybe some others too. They'd compiled, they came in with ready lists of people that should be picked up.

- S1: 55:24 Where did they get these lists from?
- S2: 55:26 From such informers.
- S1: 55:27 Informers? Well, now how did this guy [Wise?] get on the list?
- S2: 55:32 Well, he was known as a playboy, you see. He was a typical debaucher of the Arian race because he was very well known that he was playing around with a lot of women. He had a very bad reputation in that respect.
- S1: 55:50 He wasn't a gangster, was he?
- S2: 55:52 No, he had a lot of money because he inherited a big textile factory.
- S1: 55:58 [inaudible] he was putting guns into the Gestapo-- I didn't understand that.
- S2: 56:02 Well, you see, everybody had all private guns, privately had guns licensed, or rifles. These are regular hunting rifles. Had to be given to the army, had to be delivered, you see. Nobody was allowed to [crosstalk].
- S1: 56:23 He delivered his guns?
- S2: 56:24 No. So they started collecting these guns, and they were unloading the guns from the lorries, and they had prisoners to carry them in. And he was among them.
- S1: 56:34 And he was one of the prisoners?
- S2: 56:36 Yeah.
- S1: 56:36 And you happened to be walking by?
- S2: 56:38 I happened to be walking by.
- S1: 56:39 And you recognized him?
- S2: 56:41 I recognized him. He was a very well-known figure.
- S1: 56:43 Now, when these people were picked up by the Gestapo, do you know where they went? Where were they sent to? They didn't stay in [Czechoslovak?], did they?
- S2: 56:50 Oh, yes. They did, they did. Well, some of them went-- they put up a prison up on the [inaudible], which was a-- there was a kind of a fortress - an old fortress, it went back to the Austrian times - which had a very severe prison, which of course was no longer used. It was abolished on Joseph II. This must've been in the 18th century. We used to go there to see the old torture instruments and things like that. That's not where they kept the prisoners. But there was small military barracks where they kept them in these barracks because they immediately disarmed the Czech army, and everybody was sent home.
- S1: 57:36 Now, these prisoners, were they killed there?
- S2: 57:38 Yeah, many were killed there.
- S1: 57:40 So this was 1939.
- S2: 57:42 But they were not systematically killed, they were killed.
- S1: 57:45 They just died there?
- S2: 57:46 Yeah. Some, of course, were also sent to Mauthausen. I know the husband of a relative of mine, they were sent to Mauthausen a few weeks later.
- S1: 57:56 Who was that?
- S2: 57:57 That was in Germany.
- S1: 57:58 No, who was that?
- S2: 57:59 He was a dentist.
- S1: 58:01 You said he was a husband of a relative of yours?
- S2: 58:03 Yes.

Transcribe Me!

- S1: 58:03 Which relative?
- S2: 58:03 Well, she was a distant cousin of my father, I think. She was my father's--
- S1: 58:13 Okay. So now it's--
- S2: 58:14 And then a few weeks later, people received their ashes from all kinds of concentration camps, that people were definitely murdered there.
- S1: 58:23 All right. So they weren't really rounding up Jews on mass, but there--
- S2: 58:26 No, [crosstalk].
- S1: 58:27 --had been Jews picked up?
- S2: 58:29 They had certain Jews picked up, which quite obviously there was a list ready. Some prominent lawyers. There was a lawyer who was the chief of the Communist Party in Brno, he was picked up, and he didn't live long. Then not long after, they started picking up Jews that were not Czechoslovak citizens, that were Polish citizens, because evidently, they were planning the war already against Poland. I think they thought they were Polish citizens. But that may have-- no, that was later, actually. That was already after they had defeated Poland.
- S1: 59:10 Did the Jewish community start to get worried at this point?
- S2: 59:13 Well, they started to get worried, quite obviously, because they were kicked out from the house. We had moved before because particularly at this time, the Jewish community decided they needed more space. They had a new guy coming in, one of these new dynamic technocrats, and we had to move out. And so we found another apartment which we then proved an advantage because the people that still lived there had to leave within 24 hours. Whereas, we could--
- S1: 59:47 So in your new apartment, was it in this same neighborhood?
- S2: 59:50 No.
- S1: 59:51 Was it in a particularly Jewish neighborhood?
- S2: 59:54 There were no particularly Jewish neighborhoods. Jews lived everywhere.
- S1: 59:57 Well, except for that your house was owned by the Jewish council, right?
- S2: 59:59 Well, no. This was in an area where many Jews lived but there was no ghetto, or [even in?] Prague, the First Prague District, was mostly Jewish. There was no such thing in Bernau and Jews lived everywhere, all over the city.
- S1: 01:00:22 So now what were-- so the Jews started to get concerned, they saw people being taken away. What did they do?
- S2: 01:00:29 Well, they did what they always do. They tried, some people that had enough influence, they tried to get them out, you see? There was immediately some Jewish Gestapo, I mean, Gestapo people that their task was to [inaudible] the Jewish question. So they were in touch with them, and they started, the head of-- the secretary of the Jewish community - the head was a layman, was not a professional, but the secretary was a professional - and they started to making arrangements for the people that were left without houses. Some were kicked out from the apartments.
- S1: 01:01:09 Who kicked them out?
- S2: 01:01:10 The Germans, of course, who.
- S1: 01:01:12 Why? They just needed the apartments?
- S2: 01:01:13 They needed. They wanted the apartments. They needed them that is really not the right question. They wanted them, so they needed them.
- S1: 01:01:19 Now were the Jews in Bernau ever at-- were ever forced to wear yellow stars?
- S2: 01:01:24 That was much later.
- S1: 01:01:26 Okay. That didn't happen.
- S2: 01:01:26 That was much later than the yellow stars were instituted. I think it, well, I can't tell you exactly because I actually very rarely wore the yellow star. When the yellow star was instituted, I already was preparing to go underground so I didn't wear it.
- S1: 01:01:47 All right. We'll get to that. Okay. So 1939, the Jewish community's pretty worried. You're living in a new apartment with your parents, right?
- S2: 01:01:54 Yeah.

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- S1: 01:01:54 And was your father still alive at this point?
- S2: 01:01:56 Oh, yes. Of course.
- S1: 01:01:57 Okay. What was the next thing that happened that really put up-- that made you realize that it was going to get worse, that?
- S2: 01:02:05 Well. I thought it all the time. And actually, I told always to people, to everybody, "Don't say why this guy was arrested because he's a social democrat, and this guy because he's a rich lawyer, and this guy because he's a well-known playboy and was known for his amoral or even immoral way of living." I said, "These people are essentially being taken because they are Jews. You don't have to be anything except a Jew to be arrested by the Gestapo." And I was very pessimistic. And, as a matter of fact, they came to complain to my father to tell me that he should tell me that I shouldn't go around spreading panic that my pronouncement--
- S1: 01:02:52 Do you know who it was who actually complained?
- S2: 01:02:54 Well. Some people that were also-- I don't know exactly who, but these were people who frequented the coffee house because since I wasn't working I was very often sitting in the-- and I had some pocket money. You didn't need much because in a central European cafe you buy one black coffee and you can sit three hours there reading the paper, playing chess. You can do anything there that is the-- it's in Vienna even today like that, not in Czechoslovakia, but you can do that, so we did that. So you met your friends. Now, of course, suddenly a lot of people were out of work. They were kicked out. Not workers, but the white-collar workers were out of work, see? So there was--
- S1: 01:03:38 Was there any kind of organization at this point, or all in terms of--
- S2: 01:03:42 Yes, the Jewish community.
- S1: 01:03:43 And the Jewish community, they were the people that basically complained about your pessimism, right?
- S2: 01:03:49 Well, yes, it must have come from them. Then came the other thing is, they started sending out questionnaires to the Jewish community, and everybody had to fill them out, every Jew. I told my father, "Please don't put me on this questionnaire. I think I'm better off I'm not registered. I'm better off I'm not registered."
- S1: 01:04:19 Did he do it?
- S2: 01:04:20 No.
- S1: 01:04:21 He put you on?
- S2: 01:04:21 No. He said, "I cannot do that." Because you see the Czech and the Moravian Jews, they were very so-to-speak law-abiding citizens that if the official representation wants you, you have to answer honestly. You have to tell them exactly how much money you have, what you owe, all on this questionnaire, which of course, the Gestapo needed. And the Jewish community did it for them like it did the other things for them later.
- S1: 01:04:52 So this questionnaire was put out by the Jewish community?
- S2: 01:04:55 Yes.
- S1: 01:04:55 And it was for the benefit of the Gestapo?
- S2: 01:04:58 Of course. The Gestapo ordered this.
- S1: 01:04:59 So the Jewish community was cooperating with the Gestapo?
- S2: 01:05:02 Of course.
- S1: 01:05:03 Okay, so the questionnaire was filled out, and--
- S2: 01:05:05 As the others were cooperating with the Germans also. Everybody was cooperating.
- S1: 01:05:09 Do you think they did it because they figured if they'd go along with it, they'd wouldn't get in trouble?
- S2: 01:05:14 Yes, definitely. Not only that. I would go further than that. They were convinced that if they go along with the Germans, in the end, the Jewish community will come out-- well, not unscathed, but they'll survive.
- S1: 01:05:29 Okay, so the questionnaire was filled out. What happened next?
- S2: 01:05:33 Well, then I saw that something has to be done about my future, so maybe--
- S1: 01:05:40 Could you still have gotten out of the country at that point?
- S2: 01:05:43 At that point?
- S1: 01:05:44 Yeah.

Transcribe Me!

- S2: 01:05:44 Only by crossing illegally into Poland.
- S1: 01:05:47 Did it occur to you?
- S2: 01:05:52 I mean, it occurred to me, of course. I thought about it, but as I said, I was even at that point, I thought it would not be the right thing to do illegally--
- S1: 01:06:05 What happened to your airplane ticket to England?
- S2: 01:06:09 Well, after Bohemia, I didn't have a ticket yet--
- S1: 01:06:12 [You were on the list?].
- S2: 01:06:13 --the moment Bohemia and Moravia was occupied by the Germans, you could not longer go to England because the British government immediately canceled the free-entry agreement, which it had with Czechoslovakia. It didn't have a free-entry agreement with Germany, so that was out. We were really trying to get on to some, what were called illegal transports to Palestine, which they were organizing.
- S1: 01:06:46 Who was?
- S2: 01:06:47 Well, there were two. First of all, there were the [revisionists?], they organize transports.
- S1: 01:06:54 Were they boats mostly?
- S2: 01:06:56 Well, they were boats, of course, but not from Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia is landlocked. They went down on the Danube, and to Romania, they were supposed to go-- very few actually left. This wasn't an easy organization, but some people did leave. But I thought that this wasn't the right thing to do. That I should sign-up with the HeHalutz; the Zionist pioneering organization
- S1: 01:07:23 what-- why did it occur to you suddenly to join this group when--
- S2: 01:07:26 For everybody joined, yes.
- S1: 01:07:27 You weren't a joiner though, and--
- S2: 01:07:29 Because Halutz said that they would first prepare the people for agriculture. And so-called [foreign], in the plural. And then they would organize them, this illegal transports to Israel. They took people only until a certain age. I think the limit was 35 if I'm not mistaken. But I'm not quite sure about that. And so we signed up--
- S1: 01:07:55 Who's we?
- S2: 01:07:57 The young people. Most-- a lot of-- there were long lines of people standing in front of their Halutz office, to sign up.
- S1: 01:08:05 Wasn't it an illegal thing though, really?
- S2: 01:08:07 No, it was legal. The Germans, of course, they encouraged it, actually.
- S1: 01:08:11 They wanted to get--
- S2: 01:08:12 The Germans wanted to get rid of the Jews. They wanted to get rid of the Jews, as many--
- S1: 01:08:17 Do you remember what year you signed up? Was it in '39?
- S2: 01:08:20 It was '39 for sure.
- S1: 01:08:21 Do you remember what month?
- S2: 01:08:22 I don't know what month. But was shortly after the occupation. When they started the registration, I signed up. And they gave you another questionnaire. Which--
- S1: 01:08:32 The Halutz gave you a questionnaire?
- S2: 01:08:34 Yes.
- S1: 01:08:35 [crosstalk] Were they cooperating with the Nazis as well?
- S2: 01:08:37 Well, not directly. Not directly. That wasn't their task [crosstalk]-- no.
- S1: 01:08:42 --the head of the Halutz at that time?
- S2: 01:08:44 I can't remember. But I remember some of the people because I used to know them before. These were the people that were active in the youth movements, you see?
- S1: 01:08:56 They were socialists, weren't they?

- S2: 01:08:58 What?
- S1: 01:08:59 They were socialists.
- S2: 01:09:00 Not all of them. There was-- no. Blue-white, I think I made a mistake before. Blue-white was actually socialist. Then there was Yank Maccabi, who was so-to-speak, bourgeois. I signed up with Blue-white, they're sponsored. But then they took in others which were called non-affiliated Halutz in. That I was among the non-affiliated Halutz.
- S1: 01:09:24 It was sort of a pioneer group, yeah? And it was the--
- S2: 01:09:26 Yeah, there were--
- S1: 01:09:27 --train you agriculturally--
- S2: 01:09:28 They would send us out, and they started organizing agricultural groups that work in agriculture. Which, when they were ready, they would-- were supposed to be shipped.
- S1: 01:09:39 How many members of the Halutz were there in 1939, do you know?
- S2: 01:09:42 [laughter]. Thousands.
- S1: 01:09:44 --but only 12 000 members of the Jewish--
- S2: 01:09:46 --well, the Halutz was in other cities too.
- S1: 01:09:48 But in [Budono?], do you know?
- S2: 01:09:50 I don't know. I don't know. But--
- S1: 01:09:51 Did you ever learn any agriculture with them?
- S2: 01:09:54 Of course. I worked in agriculture. So the intermediary, I remember they put up a-- also you had to fill in a big questionnaire. Which, I didn't take too seriously. Because I remember there was a question, "What are your inclinations?" So I wrote, "Manic-depressive," on it. Which wasn't very serious of me. But I was known-- so, they didn't have enough groups. They first sent me out to work in a village as a-- where there were already three different members of this organization working with three different farmers. So they sent me there because there were some problems, very interesting problems as a matter of fact.
- S1: 01:10:47 What happened?
- S2: 01:10:49 And they sent me out, I can tell you exactly that, was in July 1939. They sent--
- S1: 01:10:54 You went out there to do what?
- S2: 01:10:55 To work as a farmhand with this farm--
- S1: 01:10:58 To learn agriculture?
- S2: 01:10:59 Yeah. They tried to place people in big farms, small farms, anywhere, to get-- to acquaint their members with physical labor, mainly.
- S1: 01:11:12 Was the farmer Jewish?
- S2: 01:11:13 No. I don't think there were any Jewish farmers.
- S1: 01:11:15 Were you working for free?
- S2: 01:11:17 No, they paid us wages. They were little but they paid us, and they gave us food.
- S1: 01:11:20 Did you live on the farm?
- S2: 01:11:22 I didn't live on the farm because we had no room for me. But in each village in Czechoslovakia, they used to have a so-called poor house. If people that belonged to the village were picked up somewhere vagrants, the police could put them into this poor house in the village from where they came. So I stayed in this poor house.
- S1: 01:11:48 Now, this was a big difference from the bourgeois life that you had come from. Suddenly you were on a farm sleeping [laughter] [crosstalk]--
- S2: 01:11:54 Yes, it was a very big difference, but if you--
- S1: 01:11:56 Were you shocked?
- S2: 01:11:58 No, I wasn't shocked because I-- My problem was that I wanted to show that I can manage to do this physical labor. It was very difficult.

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- S1: 01:12:09 Now--
- S2: 01:12:09 It was very--
- S1: 01:12:10 --were you driven by the ideology of Zionism at the time?
- S2: 01:12:14 Well, of course. That was part of--
- S1: 01:12:15 So you were getting ready to go to Palestine.
- S2: 01:12:18 Yes, yes. Definitely.
- S1: 01:12:19 You were going to learn to be a farmer. And you were swept away by that.
- S2: 01:12:22 Not swept away. You really didn't have much choice. What [was I?] supposed to do?
- S1: 01:12:26 Well, did you figure that you were safer on the farm than you would be in town?
- S2: 01:12:30 At that time, that didn't occur to me, actually. But in town, I really had nothing to do. There was nothing I could do in town. So this seemed to open up a glimmer of hope that you'll get somewhere.
- S1: 01:12:45 Now, how long did you stay on this farm?
- S2: 01:12:47 Well, this farm we only spent one month because there was the mayor of this city, he proved to be anti-Jewish. I think the [foreign] exaggerated it because we could have gotten along with him. But they then decided they had to remove us. It was very funny, [I guess?], because this guy was very confused. As a matter of fact, he became a big fascist out of fear. Because when Hitler came to Prague and made his big speech to the Czech people, he cut the electricity in this village so that people shouldn't listen to him on the radio. And then he became so much scared that he had done such sabotage the Führer's speech so that he joined the Czech fascists - it was the Vlastka Party; vlastka means pennant - and he started talking against Jews. He never did us any harm. Because I was, so to speak, the head among this four people that were there. And he always used to send the village herald that had the little snare drum - who stood up in front of the entrance to the farm where I worked - and he always used to call, "The Jew should go to see the Bürgermeister," you see. And he had very funny ideas. He was a very strange anti-Semite. First of all, once he called me that we had to fill in again a questionnaire, and he was very much surprised when I declared that I had no property, which was the truth. I didn't have any property. He said, "That couldn't be. Jews are all rich. They have property." So I explained to him, "I have no property." He wouldn't believe it. But we had a very funny incident with him. One day, the young men in the village, they had the dance in the village inn. So they invited us to the village inn. So I was the first to be hesitant because actually, the Jews were not allowed to go to the village. But these people said, "Don't be silly. Nobody's going to ask. And besides--"
- S1: 01:15:34 Were there any German soldiers in that village?
- S2: 01:15:36 No, no, no, no.
- S1: 01:15:37 It was far way?
- S2: 01:15:38 No, [way?].
- S1: 01:15:39 How far was it from [Burno?]?
- S2: 01:15:40 Oh, that was actually Bohemia. There was a city nearby, not far - I would say about 10 miles - where there were German soldiers. But in the village, you didn't [crosstalk].
- S1: 01:15:54 What was that city called?
- S2: 01:15:55 It was called Německý Brod. It's now called Havlíčkův Brod because there's a famous Czech nationalist by the name of Havlíček who was born there. So after they war, they changed the name.
- S1: 01:16:12 So you were at this dance Do you went to the dance?
- S2: 01:16:14 So they said, "Listen, you have four guys and they come from the neighboring village." There can be a fight. And four guys is a big help for us. So I said okay. So I talked to these other three guys. We were all sleeping in one room in this poor house. So I said, "Listen, you can do whatever you want. It's fine. But be careful, take care of this mogul master. He had two beautiful daughters. I said, "Don't dance with his daughters because he'll accuse us of [foreign], that we are debouching area girls, which could land you in prison or in a camp." So I said, "Be careful not to dance with them." So everything went fine. There was no problem. There wasn't even a fight. The next day, the town crier came again. "Ratatatat [foreign]." This is, "[inaudible] due to the burger master." Okay, I go to the burger master and he says, "What is it, you Jew boys? My girls aren't good enough for you [laughter]? You can't ask them to dance? You shame them in front of everybody?" Because of course, they called us not Jews. For them, we were actually students. They knew we were Jews, but they saw us as students and they really had a great deal of respect for us. Although the others actually were not students. I was the only student about it. The others, one was a very funny guy who was a half-Jew. When I came there, he had Hitler's picture on the wall, which I told him to take down. His mother managed to convince the-- his mother was German, convince the German authorities that he really was not the son of who was officially his father and he

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became a German. I don't know what happened to him. His name was Rashevski. And his brother who went to school with me actually, at one time, was in Palestine. He was a sailor and he died in some accident in Spain.

- S1: 01:18:39 So you came back from that village. What was the village called?
- S2: 01:18:44 [Mikullovci?].
- S1: 01:18:45 You came back from there after a month only?
- S2: 01:18:48 Well, I didn't come back. After a month, after this incident, which I, of course, reported. That was my duty to report to the headquarters.
- S1: 01:18:56 Which incident.
- S2: 01:18:57 Well, I told you about the incident of--
- S1: 01:18:59 About the ball?
- S2: 01:19:00 Yes, the ball and this--
- S1: 01:19:06 They decided that he was not a good guy this [crosstalk]?
- S2: 01:19:09 Yes, they decided that maybe we are in danger, that one day he may denounce us to the Germans.
- S1: 01:19:16 So where did you go next?
- S2: 01:19:17 Well, they called me to Prague, to the headquarters of [inaudible] because they thought of me as leadership material. So they invited me to a special leadership course, which actually I found out what it was all about because the traditional leadership actually had decided to leave. They saw things were too dangerous and they didn't want to be caught there. They all had certificates. They all had the possibility to go legally to Palestine and they simply decided to prepare a succession--
- S1: 01:20:02 They were bailing out.
- S2: 01:20:04 They were bailing out. Yes.
- S1: 01:20:05 Well, how did they get legal permission to go to Palestine?
- S2: 01:20:07 They had it because see, they're a, so to speak, [foreign] functionaries. For them, the organization had certificates that means-- certificates are immigration permits, British permits to immigrate [crosstalk].
- S1: 01:20:24 Did they bail out?
- S2: 01:20:25 Yeah. They all bailed out.
- S1: 01:20:28 Now this new group of leaders, were you among them?
- S2: 01:20:31 Yes. I was chosen to be among them. I'm sure I was a great disappointment to them because I didn't--
- S1: 01:20:39 Why?
- S2: 01:20:39 Well, I didn't go along with the policy of what I would call the establishment because I thought their policies were wrong.
- S1: 01:20:50 What was their policies?
- S2: 01:20:52 Well, I think that's too-- we should stop here now. It's too much. We've been here a long time.
- S1: 01:20:58 Okay. Absolutely. [inaudible]. Great.
- S3: 01:21:03 [inaudible].
- S1: 01:21:11 Okay. 1939 and you came back to Prague and you want to see the people [foreign] and they were grooming you to become a new leadership because they were going to take off.
- S2: 01:21:34 Right. There was a special course for that.
- S1: 01:21:37 And you took the course.
- S2: 01:21:39 Yeah.
- S1: 01:21:39 But you said they didn't like your point of view. They wanted--
- S2: 01:21:42 No. That was later. That was later.
- S1: 01:21:44 When did they begin to not like your point of view?

- S2: 01:21:47 Well, at the beginning, I was the blue-eyed boy. They sent me to some place in [inaudible] because they were problems in a group of people that were there working on a large farm, I mean, large by Czech ideas, not by American conditions. In America, farms are much larger. And then I came actually back and I was the head. I was the director of the home for [foreign] that were out of work, for whom no work could be found. So they stayed there and I was running that place.
- S1: 01:22:29 When did you first clash with the [foreign] leadership?
- S2: 01:22:35 Well, I first clashed with them when the Zionist organization became part of the Jewish community organization in Prague. I was opposed to that because this way, we became a social institution of the Jewish community. I didn't like this idea because I didn't think we were a social institution. The pioneers were supposed to be avant-garde more or less, not -
- S1: 01:23:09 Were you afraid that it would have some kind of ramification in terms of the Nazis because linking it to the Jewish community?
- S2: 01:23:15 Well, we were linked in a way, but it would cut down our economy [inaudible] for instance, it had a very practical consequence. The people that lived, for instance, the people that lived in this home for the [inaudible] suddenly became social cases. They were carried on the roles of those that received support, social payments, and support from the Jewish community. So whenever there was some action like eventually there was, they built a work camp near [Lipa?] which happens to be very near the place where I used to work as a farmhand. It happened to be a few kilometers away on me. So they send these people first because they were on the social roles and thought they send them out.
- S1: 01:24:20 Okay. We're jumping the gun a little bit here though. So you were working in the [inaudible] leadership. That was the first clash you had with them but it didn't do you any good because the [inaudible] did become a part of the Jewish community.
- S2: 01:24:34 Well, of course, it didn't really do me any good.
- S1: 01:24:36 You didn't get what you want.
- S2: 01:24:38 Well, that I really couldn't get in a way because that was done actually either with the consent of the Gestapo, the Jewish Gestapo. There was a special section of the Gestapo we just called Auswanderungstelle. That means immigration office. And I suspect actually the Jewish community suggested it and actually the head of the Zionist organization, Jakob Edelstein, became a bigshot in the Jewish community. He was the guy that invented Theresienstadt, the ghetto of Theresienstadt. He was the guy that was one of the leading men that brought the thing about.
- S1: 01:25:32 Where were you living at this time?
- S2: 01:25:36 They gave me a room somewhere in a family not far away, which was renting out rooms. They had to rent out rooms because they were restricted of how many rooms the family could have.
- S1: 01:25:51 In Prague?
- S2: 01:25:52 Everywhere. Everywhere, because they wanted the Jews to move together and get more apartments free for their own people, for the Germans.
- S1: 01:26:00 Were you free to walk around Prague as you wanted?
- S2: 01:26:02 Well, yes. Of course. Of course.
- S1: 01:26:03 There were no restrictions? No curfews?
- S2: 01:26:05 There was a curfew later, eight o'clock curfew, but I don't remember really when it started. Anyhow, I had a pass. I could go after eight o'clock.
- S1: 01:26:15 Where did you get the pass?
- S2: 01:26:17 Well, the Jewish community had passes for the workers that had to work in the evening, they had to go around. So the more or less important people had passes.
- S1: 01:26:28 So now because the [inaudible] was now affiliated with the Jewish community, you were actually a part of the Jewish as an official.
- S2: 01:26:36 Yes. Definitely. I got the salary from them. I was an official of the Jewish community.
- S1: 01:26:42 And how did that affect you?
- S2: 01:26:44 I didn't like the idea that I was an official because I didn't like the people who ran the community and I saw things they did which I didn't like. Like, for instance, they manipulated things so they should get money into their black-- they had black money which the Gestapo didn't know about it. That was alright, actually, that the Gestapo didn't know about it. But, for instance, they made money on their [inaudible] which they put into a black account, so to speak, but they didn't use it for us, you see. They used it for other purposes. I didn't like that.

- S1: 01:27:25 What do you mean "other purposes"? Illegal things?
- S2: 01:27:28 They were not illegal-- I mean, they were illegal from the German point of view. That didn't bother me. But they gave it to other organizations, you see, as some subsidy. And actually, I thought that this money should have gone to the pioneer movement, to the [inaudible]. It did go to some homes for leadership and it did go to improvements in the apartments of Jewish community officials. I didn't think that was the right way to do it.
- S1: 01:28:08 So how long did you work in this capacity?
- S2: 01:28:11 My memory isn't really that good, but I didn't work very long because I then became sick. And while I was sick--
- S1: 01:28:22 What was wrong with you?
- S2: 01:28:24 They never found out really what was wrong with me. It was something with the heart evidently. We had a little-- well, it was not really quite the hospital. It was a sickbay and I stayed there for some time and while I stayed there I published a kind of manifesto against the official leadership, claiming that the pioneer movement, which are young people, should not go along with the program that the Jewish community was mapping out for for the Jews.
- S1: 01:29:05 What was that program?
- S2: 01:29:07 Well, that program was actually to go into the ghetto, into the ghetto of Theresienstadt.
- S1: 01:29:16 Theresienstadt was part of Prague?
- S2: 01:29:18 No.
- S1: 01:29:19 Where was it?
- S2: 01:29:20 Theresienstadt is a city that is not very far from Prague. But it was a city which was originally a military city. It had barracks built by the Empress, Maria Theresia. And it was always a garrison city. So they moved out, everybody, from this garrison city, mainly from the big barracks. There were big, enormous buildings, and that's where they set up the ghetto.
- S1: 01:29:56 In 1939 when you were in Prague, were there actually already Jews that had been moved to Theresienstadt?
- S2: 01:30:03 No, not in '39, not in '39. That must've been '40 or '41.
- S1: 01:30:09 Well, we were talking about 1939. So did they already plan in '39 to move them?
- S2: 01:30:14 No, I think the plan started in '40.
- S1: 01:30:17 Okay. So here we are in 1940. And was this plan public? Did everybody know about it?
- S2: 01:30:25 Yes. Yes, of course.
- S1: 01:30:27 Now, when they actually started to move people, was that at the decree of the Gestapo?
- S2: 01:30:33 Well, everything was at the decree of the Gestapo. Whoever came up with the idea, it was at the decree of the Gestapo because they were the people that were actually the German authorities responsible for whatever the Jews did. It started out, as I mentioned before, that they sent people from HeChalutz to this place in Lipa which was called a work camp. It was not a concentration camp, it was really a work camp.
- S1: 01:31:03 Now, who sent you there?
- S2: 01:31:04 Well, not me.
- S1: 01:31:05 Well, who sent the people from the--?
- S2: 01:31:07 Well, it was always the Jewish community that sent out the summonses and gave the marching orders. But of course, behind that was the sanction of the Jewish Gestapo.
- S1: 01:31:19 What would happen if somebody didn't go to the work camp but they were sent there? Or did that not happen?
- S2: 01:31:26 It did happen. You see, they had to come up with a certain number of Jews, and the same thing was later with the transports to the ghetto or the transports to other places. They had to-- let's say they should bring 1,000 people, so they summoned 2,000 people. If you didn't go, for instance, you simply ignored the summons, but the quota was met, nothing happened to you because they didn't bother about that, they had that quota.
- S1: 01:32:01 So they weren't just specific names, they were just [inaudible].
- S2: 01:32:04 Oh no, there were names, of course.
- S1: 01:32:05 So they knew if you didn't go?

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- S2: 01:32:07 Well, they knew if you didn't go, so they caught you off for the next one. They had the names, of course. They had a big place--
- S1: 01:32:20 Do you remember the first time that you actually knew somebody personally who went to one of these work camps?
- S2: 01:32:26 Oh, I know a lot of people that went to the work camps, and there were also some people that were sent not to the work camps, they were sent immediately to the ghetto in Łódź. Some work conditions were much worse than in the work camp. Actually, also much worse than eventually in Theresienstadt. Much worse.
- S1: 01:32:46 Do you remember when the first time you actually knew somebody that was sent to either one of those ghettos was approximately what year, what month?
- S2: 01:32:55 Well, I don't really remember. The dates are very vague about the dates.
- S1: 01:32:59 Do you remember who it was?
- S2: 01:33:01 Well, I know. These were people that lived in the [inaudible] home, of which I was the director.
- S1: 01:33:08 So they would get a summons from the Jewish community--
- S2: 01:33:10 They would get a summons as each--
- S1: 01:33:11 Did you ever issue the summons?
- S2: 01:33:13 Oh. Later, yes. I was issued 16 summons, actually. Now, that was later.
- S1: 01:33:17 Wait. No. No. No. I'm saying, did you ever issue any summons?
- S2: 01:33:20 No. That wasn't my job. That was a different department.
- S1: 01:33:23 Somebody would get a summons in the mail?
- S2: 01:33:25 Yes. It came in the mail.
- S1: 01:33:26 And it would say, "Go to such and such a place at such and such a time. You'll be picked up."
- S2: 01:33:30 Not only that. They told you exactly how much luggage you can take and what you should take with you, more or less. And then they gave you--
- S1: 01:33:41 Where did these people think they were going?
- S2: 01:33:44 Well, they knew they were going--
- S1: 01:33:46 But they'd never been to the [inaudible].
- S2: 01:33:48 Well, euphemistically, it was called a transfer of population. The rumors that the Gestapo spread and said actually, is, that they want to move all the Jews to what used to be Poland, and there they'd be able to work and live.
- S1: 01:34:07 Did people believe that that was so?
- S2: 01:34:08 Oh, at the beginning, they certainly did. At the beginning they certainly did. First of all, there wasn't much news coming out from these places. There was some and it was bad. But the majority did believe it because actually they wanted to believe it. But I never did. Now, for instance, you went to the workcamp I mentioned, the people came back because this was only a preparatory camp.
- S1: 01:34:36 What kind of work did they do there?
- S2: 01:34:38 Well, I think they wanted them to learn how to work in a ghetto. How to set up things. How to set up wooden barracks and things like that. These people went to this work and after a few months actually came back from the camp. And the camp wasn't really that bad. And actually the food wasn't very ample and not very good, but by and large, the situation there wasn't bad. So when they came back, they said, "Well, of course, it's a camp and you're not free like you were when you lived in Prague, even in the home for the [inaudible]. But nobody got killed. You get punished sometimes if you do something wrong. But it wasn't by and large so bad." So they came back and--
- S1: 01:35:34 Was the mentality really a people who had been conquered by a nation? The Germans had come in and conquered their country as opposed to their nationality and they had been sent to a workcamp. So it was something that they accepted are you saying?
- S2: 01:35:49 They did accept it, but I don't think this definition is correct. That definition would have probably applied to the attitude of the Czechs, but the Jews were immediately separated. They were not Czechs, although they used to be so officially. There was quite a distinct category Czechs and the distinct category Jews.
- S1: 01:36:16 Were Czechs sent to workcamps?

- S2: 01:36:18 To different camps. Czechs were later, I don't think in the beginning-- so the political prisoners were sent to concentration camps and many of them died. The others were sent to workcamps in Germany as foreign workers. But these were not camps the way this Jewish workcamp was because, although they lived in the camp, they were actually free to go out. They received wages. They received the yearly vacations and they could write to the people-- there was a censorship, but they could write home and they could receive mail. They could go to the cinema. They could go to a restaurant. They could go out of the camp, there was no problem about that. They had to work. Now work conditions in Germany weren't very good. Besides, then they started the air raids and, of course, these work camps were vulnerable because they were near industries that were important for the war effort. So, that was a certain risk. But, they were not really slaves. Although they called them slave labor, they were only slaves in the sense that they had no choice where they were sent. They were sent through a labor office in Czechoslovakia - in all the cities there were labor offices - and they also had quotas which the Germans gave them, and they had to fill up these quotas, and send these people to different camps where the Germans [told?] they were to go.
- S1: 01:38:01 How long did you work-- until what year did you work for [Erholungs?]?
- S2: 01:38:08 Well, I'll tell you, the questions that I don't remember the dates very well. But I know--
- S1: 01:38:14 Is there a significant event that had you stop working for Erholungs?
- S2: 01:38:18 Well, they really didn't want me. And, at a certain, point they brought me to a kind of tribunal, internal tribunal, where they were dealing with my case, so to speak. Because I had protested in this, and I was talking against them and I had written this manifesto--
- S1: 01:38:46 Was the tribunal as a direct result of the manifesto?
- S2: 01:38:50 Yes. Yes, definitely.
- S1: 01:38:51 Do you remember what the manifesto said in slightly more detail? You don't have a copy of it by any chance, do you?
- S2: 01:38:57 No, I do not have a copy of it, neither do I have a copy of the illegal weekly that I put out--
- S1: 01:39:06 What was it called?
- S2: 01:39:07 [foreign]. It means, go up to Isreal.
- S1: 01:39:10 Go up.
- S2: 01:39:13 That was stopped by Mister [Edelstein?]. He stopped it himself. He said that you can not do that. this endangers the Jewish community. It's an illegal publication. All publications, Jewish publications, have to be okayed by the Gestapo, this evidently wasn't. And we mimeographed it at the office. You can not do that.
- S1: 01:39:38 Well, did you have some friends who did this with you?
- S2: 01:39:42 Oh, yes. There were a few people. There was actually a guy there who had lived in Palestine for a long time, and he ran our Hebrew and Arabic language corner. We had a Hebrew and an Arabic language corner. Because he had come back from Palestine some years ago - he was not a Palestine citizen, he was a Czech citizen - and he had done what some other people had because they were all volunteers. The people that lived in the--
- S1: 01:40:13 Do you remember any of those people by name?
- S2: 01:40:16 No. Not really.
- S1: 01:40:17 So now, in this subversive weekly that you published, [foreign], did you voice their anti-nazis propaganda?
- S2: 01:40:27 No. No.
- S1: 01:40:29 Why?
- S2: 01:40:30 Well, that, actually, we didn't think was the right thing to do because we sold this paper. We sold this paper in the Jewish community. In the building where we were, there were not a number of Jewish offices. We went to other buildings to Jewish offices and sold it.
- S1: 01:40:49 Did it have a wide circulation?
- S2: 01:40:52 No. I don't think there was more than 300 copies of that. But there were articles about Palestine, there were articles about Jewish culture--
- S1: 01:41:03 This wasn't Czech?
- S2: 01:41:04 --it wasn't-- Yes, it there was actually no political propaganda involved at all.
- S1: 01:41:12 Was there articles against the Jewish community?

- S2: 01:41:14 No, no, no.
- S1: 01:41:16 So really the only reason Mr. Edelstein was it was against it was because it had not gotten the endorsement of the Gestapo and he was afraid of that.
- S2: 01:41:23 Yes. Actually, his number two, a very nice guy by the name of Dr. Khan, He supported this. He tried to convince Edelstein that nothing is really going to happen. This is, so to speak, a house organ of the [foreign] home and nobody would have any objections to that. But he prevailed, of course, like he prevailed in most of things. There was a great deal of misunderstanding between Dr. Khan and Mr. Edelstein because Dr. Khan was more inclined to resistance against the Germans. Edelstein's philosophy was that if you go along with the Germans, first of all, you can always get the better of them here and there and you can try this and you can try that. And in the end, this is the only way the Jewish community will survive. He thought so honestly. It's not that he was dishonest.
- S1: 01:42:19 What happened to Mr. Edelstein?
- S2: 01:42:20 He died in the end. He was the head for a long time of the [foreign] but there was an intrigue against him by other Jews, but it was much later and he was sent-- I don't know whether to Auschwitz or to any other camp in Poland, and there he perished. He was a very honest man because this man, for instance, went twice to Switzerland and always returned because he thought his duty was with the Jewish people.
- S1: 01:42:54 What happened to the tribunal?
- S2: 01:42:58 Well, it was actually not a very formal tribunal. There was a number of representatives of the [foreign] from the different movements and they were accused. They said that this is a breach of discipline because the [foreign] are taking decision to go along with the Jewish community and also to go along with the idea of the [foreign] which they presented, like everybody else did, as the continuation of Jewish life, under the circumstances, the only one that was possible, and I was against that. So they said they ought to be-- that it's a breach of discipline because [inaudible] is taken. It has to be followed by all the members.
- S1: 01:44:00 Actually, you were actually against the idea of moving the Jews to [foreign]?
- S2: 01:44:04 Definitely.
- S1: 01:44:05 Was that--?
- S2: 01:44:05 No, no. Let us say, to be precise, I knew that it was impossible to oppose the movement. You can't get the Jews out on the barricades in the city of Prague. That would be possible. But I claimed that the [foreign], which was the organization of pioneers, young pioneers [inaudible] that young [always?], but still, they were young and vigorous people. These people should seek to join the Czech underground and go into an active resistance against the German regime.
- S1: 01:44:42 Did you actually publicly state this?
- S2: 01:44:44 Oh, yes, I did.
- S1: 01:44:45 Where?
- S2: 01:44:46 In this manifesto.
- S1: 01:44:49 Now was that a completely foreign idea in terms of the Jewish community?
- S2: 01:44:56 Not completely. There was a small section, those organized in [foreign] which is what's the most leftist of all the Zionist youth movements or pioneering movements, if you will. So they had the same idea, actually. But you see, they actually, in the tribunal, their representatives supported me in a way.
- S1: 01:45:22 Were they communists?
- S2: 01:45:24 No. No. They were Zionists. How could they be communists? A few of them were really very close to the communists. Very close. And a few of them after the war actually went over to the communists, and they are still in Prague, some of them, or in Czechoslovakia, let's say.
- S1: 01:45:42 So this idea of yours to join the Czech resistance, was that even a real possibility or was it just an idea? Did you know anybody in the Czech resistance?
- S2: 01:45:51 It was definitely a real possibility. It was a real possibility.
- S1: 01:45:55 Were you ever approached by members of the Czech resistance to join?
- S2: 01:45:58 Well, [inaudible], they had connections.
- S1: 01:46:02 That was later on though.
- S2: 01:46:03 But you see, you didn't really need this Czech resistance. One shouldn't make too much of it at that time. There wasn't really very well-organized resistance. But we could have really created our own groups and eventually we would have

found the connections. We didn't need them to help us, actually. We could have done it on our own, as we in the beginning actually did.

S1: 01:46:28 Now, the tribunal was in 1940?

S2: 01:46:35 Yes, I think it was in 1940.

S1: 01:46:37 Had you been back to [inaudible] since you had come to Prague?

S2: 01:46:42 Well, yes. I went for the funeral of my father, who died in October '40.

S1: 01:46:49 Was the situation in [inaudible] different from Prague?

S2: 01:46:51 Not at all.

S1: 01:46:52 Same?

S2: 01:46:53 It was the same situation. Except that there were more Jews concentrated in Prague now because they had taken the-- many Jews from surrounding cities moved into Prague. They thought they would be better off there. The situation was the same except that Prague was the center and [inaudible] of course was a provincial center. So there were less Jews. All of these Jewish organizations, they had their headquarters in Prague, and actually, the Jewish community in [inaudible] was dependent on the Jewish community in Prague.

S1: 01:47:37 What was the result of the tribunal?

S2: 01:47:38 Well, they suspended my membership, against which I protested because I took out the constitution, so to speak, and I said, "There is no such thing as suspension. If you look at it, at the text, you can either expel me or just exonerate me. There's no way of suspending because it doesn't appear in the articles of the constitution of the movement."

S1: 01:48:10 So what did they do?

S2: 01:48:11 Well, they said, "Circumstances are different so we don't want to expel you. We only want to suspend you."

S1: 01:48:19 Which means that you had no more responsibilities?

S2: 01:48:21 Well, eventually I came back to them and I wanted to go again and work in a group, which I wanted to form myself. For some time I was living with a friend and we worked here a bit, we worked there a bit. This [inaudible], very interesting guy. And I stayed in his house and we went out to get some occasional jobs as workers, and we kept-- he had some money, so he was married to a German, a non-Jewish German, and we lived together until one day the Gestapo came down and said that I wasn't allowed to live in the house or tenant Aryan part. So then I found some other place to live.

S1: 01:49:17 So the Gestapo actually came to the house?

S2: 01:49:19 Yes. It came to the house by chance. It wasn't looking for us.

S1: 01:49:26 Were you at home at the time?

S2: 01:49:27 Yes. We were at home at the time, not only. The father of this German lady was also at home. And he was a guy that worked in the German War Ministry. And he behaved very briskly to these two Gestapo agents to the point that we were eating. We were sitting at the table when they came in. And they asked everybody's identity card. And this they asked him too. So he said, "I don't speak to people who keep their hats on in the house. So they saw that they were running some-- they don't know who he was. They actually did take their hat off. And then he showed them his card which identified him as a fairly high official of the German War Ministry.

S1: 01:50:24 And did they tell you at that time?

S2: 01:50:25 At that time, they said everything was fine except that I could not live there. So I said, "I'm going to move out." And I moved to the home. To the [Halud?] Home. So in this respect, actually, my suspension helped me that I was still a member, I was only suspended. So I could stay there.

S1: 01:50:49 How long did you live there?

S2: 01:50:53 I think a few months. Then I had the idea that we should create a new group of agriculture, a new agriculture. A group which would be base on the few principles of maybe Gordon, A.D. Gordon. For instance, most of these groups were structured. There was a head of the group and there was every day everybody has certain chores to do. And I had a different idea that we should have people that go well together. And there was another revolutionary idea, that I wanted to put into practice. Namely, most groups had very few women because the employers wouldn't hire women. They only hired men. They only for each ten men, they allowed one woman to cook and to keep house. And most of the groups were not that big. So I insisted and I thought it was a good idea. This created a great deal of tension that there were few women around because we lived in enormous rooms. And so some people had a girlfriend so they got a little corner or special room or something like that. There were a great deal of tensions which is not surprising. So I said to the [Halud's?] at that time, "Listen, why don't anybody that has a girlfriend, let him take this girlfriend. So let's make a deal

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with the owner that we'll pay. He doesn't have to pay for them, nothing. He just should allow them to live there. That's all they ought to do. Allow them to live there. And if he wants them to work he'll pay them. If he doesn't want them to work, we'll be

- S1: 01:53:05 so was this actually a new group that you were forming?
- S2: 01:53:08 Yes.
- S1: 01:53:09 What was it called?
- S2: 01:53:10 These groups didn't have any names. The names went by the farm-- by the name of the farm or estate.
- S1: 01:53:16 So how many people were in this new group?
- S2: 01:53:19 Well, I think in our group there were only 10 people. You see, I went around-- I had some friends and I talked to them about this idea. Actually one couple that went there, I'm still a bit in touch with them. They live near Detroit.
- S1: 01:53:37 What are their names?
- S2: 01:53:39 [Betchkey?]
- S1: 01:53:40 That's what they go by now?
- S2: 01:53:42 They always went by that name. That's their name.
- S1: 01:53:44 What is their full names?
- S2: 01:53:46 Arthur and [Hoinade?]. They came from [Potka Putska Russa?]. They were actually, basically, also Hungarian speaking people. Very nice people.
- S1: 01:53:56 They were in this group?
- S2: 01:53:57 They were in this group--
- S1: 01:53:58 Together?
- S2: 01:53:59 Yes. Everybody went with his girlfriend. That was the principle.
- S1: 01:54:04 Who was your girlfriend?
- S2: 01:54:05 Well, [Chia Rote?] was my girlfriend at that time.
- S1: 01:54:10 So now, did you go to the-- did you find a farm to go to?
- S2: 01:54:14 I beg your pardon?
- S1: 01:54:15 What farm did you go to?
- S2: 01:54:16 Well, the chaltz founders, they were responsible-- they had an office that was looking for places for chaltzim, for members to work and they negotiated a contract with the employer.
- S1: 01:54:34 So where was the farm located?
- S2: 01:54:37 This farm was located, it was called Obora, it was located not very far from Plzeň. There was no village in it, there was only a farm. Again, a fairly large farm by Czechoslovak standards, by Czech standards. A large farm which actually belonged to a German. It used to belong to a Czech who was a very high-ranking Freemason, so they confiscated it. And this guy had three farms all in the vicinity. Big [inaudible], what they called big estates. Not farms.
- S1: 01:55:12 At that time, weren't you still getting summonses to go to ghettos?
- S2: 01:55:19 No, at that time we didn't. We didn't get any summonses. Because they hadn't started taking in the people that were working in this [chakshalot?], In this preparatory groups. They were taking mostly people that lived in the cities. [Prestofor?] they took people who lived in the smaller cities because the Germans wanted to make these cities free of Jews. So they were-- the [Prague?] came last, the others. There were some, also, transports from Prague. But they started around, in the smaller cities and villages--
- S1: 01:56:00 Were you on the farm by the end of 1940?
- S2: 01:56:06 It was in winter, I think it was in '41. I was there in '41.
- S1: 01:56:11 So all of the year of 1941 you spent in Prague? And you weren't involved in any kind of underground activities?
- S2: 01:56:19 No, there was no possibility for me to do that. I was in the middle of so sick, I was in hospital, I had some heart trouble--
- S1: 01:56:28 During 1941, did you receive any summonses to go to any different places?

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S2: 01:56:33 No.

S1: 01:56:34 So by the time you were on the farm, how long did you work on the farm?

S2: 01:56:39 On this farm-- it's very strange that I can't remember. But in this farm, we really started out arranging to go to the underground. Because not far from us was also such a group which belonged to the [Hashamel Hasaier?] and today--

S1: 01:57:02 Hold on a second right here. We're going to have to change the tape here.

S2: 01:57:05 Okay, okay, okay.

[silence]