

NATIONAL

Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY**

HENRY KOHN

Interviewed by Cyril Wiseman

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



IMPORTANT

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FIO42 Side A

18th October, 1988. I, Cyril Wiseman, *****, am interviewing Henry Kohn, on his experiences in Europe.

Tell me first of all, Mr. Kohn, do you mind if I call you Henry? What is your full name?

At home I used to be called Hendel, that means Henry.

And Kohn?

KOHN.

And your address at the moment is?

1 Headley Drive, Gants Hill, Ilford, Essex, and I shall tell you the day I was born - 1921, on the 1st December.

So, where was that?

In Czeladz, in Czeladz, next to a big town what we call, we used to call it the main town, Bendzin. Next to Bendzin. Now they call it the County of Katowice, Upper Silesia.

Could you just spell those towns for me?

Chelag is C Z E L A D Z.

And that was near another town which was?

Next to what we call B E N D Z I N. Next to Katowice, all those towns, there were near to each other in Upper Silesia.

And are they, do you know if they still have the same names today?

Yes. Bendzin is called still Bendzin, and Czeladz is still Czeladz, as I have been lately in touch with them, to get a Birth Certificate from them, for the first time when I got to, in the 1960s, I could not get a, just a paper stating that I was living there, for myself, from the time I was born until 1928, or as when the time approached for my pension, there are, wanted, demanded, a Birth Certificate, so I had another try, and I mentioned to them exactly my family, as they have been very known, they have been a very big family, a large family who lived there for generations.

So, you were born, what year was that?

1921.

And the place that you were born, what was the size of it?

The Czeladz town was about 26,000, the population of 26,000. The Jewish population only of about 1,000. The town next to it was only about three kilometres away, and the Jewish population of about 45,000 - Bendzin.

So, your mother and father then. Can you give me your father's full name?

My father's name was Hyam Kohn. Hyam. My mother was Liebach Jachet Kohn. So, just keeping to your father for the moment, on your father's side for the moment. Where you were born was his family town? Where his family lived, presumably?

Yes. My grandfather was born there, and my father was born there.

Your father was born there, and your grandfather?

My grandfather was born there.

How far back to they go in this place?

I could not go back any further than this. I mean, I was too young to ask questions.

And what did your father do?

My father, he was a merchant.

What sort of merchant?

Anything used to come along to earn them a living.

Did he have business premises?

Yes, in later years. First, he used to have, what you call, not open business, he used to have horses and cart, and he used to go around selling fruit and vegetables round this, round turnings, roads, in the roads. Or later, in 1928, we moved to Silesia and he opened up a grocery shop. My mother ran the grocery shop, and my father still carried on with the fruit and vegetables on the wagon.

At the time that you were born he was a merchant?

A merchant.

He used to buy and sell.

And sell, whatever he could get hold of to make a bit of a profit.

So, how well to do, or not well to do, and I mean, this is a fairly small Jewish community, wasn't it?

Yes.

Was he comfortably off?

My grandfather, he was quite comfortably off.

What was his name?

Meier Kohn.

Also spelt K O H N?

Yes.

Meier, he had, I mean, a house where I was born in, and my father, I think, I'm not quite sure if he was born in the same house, that was a three storey house. He had several tenants in it and we were one of them, after my father married. A few years ago he had an inn, in the same house, he had an inn.

So, he was a fairly comfortable man, your grandfather?

Yes.

Did he have any children other than your father?

Yes, he had five sons and one daughter.

Really? So it was a big family.

Yes. Very large family.

And these were your uncles and aunts, and you remember them from your childhood?

Yes.

So, he was fairly well.

My grandfather, I wouldn't say he had ... He had a hard life to make ends meet. Cos till 1926, he still worked in Germany, Gleiwitz, Gleiwitz, he used to stay there the whole week, and he used to come home for weekends.

What sort of man was he, your father, was he, was he religious?

He was non-religious, he knew, oh, he was brought up very Orthodox, and that was one of the, only one of the brothers was strict Orthodox, he wore the usual clothes, as they were in Poland, the black Liebetz Shtramal, and the others were a bit more on the modern side, they never followed the Orthodox way. They have kept Saturdays...

Did he go to Synagogue, your father?

... Friday night, and Saturday he went to .(inaud)

And your mother used to make a Friday night?

Always kept a Kosher home, very Kosher home.

And your grandfather, was he more religious?

He was also more religious, he wore what you call Shtramal.

What's that?

What you call the special Liebitz. You know what a Liebitz is?

No, just tell me.

A coat, a black coat, a black long coat.

Made of silk, or gaberdine, or ...?

Black silk, silk, with black shoes, they used to all, the Orthodox, wear them, wear black, with a, like a Russian cap, used to ...

With fur on?

No, no, no. A Russian round little hat, with a small ...

Peak?

Peak, yeh. Yes.

So he was, your grandfather was more religious, more Orthodox?

More Orthodox, yes.

Than your father?

Yes.

But nevertheless, your father kept a Kosher...

Kosher in the Jewish home.

And went to Synagogue?

Yes.

How often did he go to,

Yes, and he also made us to be there as well.

But he went to Shul, to Synagogue, on every Friday evening?

Every Friday evening and Saturday.

I see, and obviously all the holidays?

All the holidays, naturally.

So, you used to say prayers at home?

Yes, I have been doing, I put on Tefillin, until about 14 years of age, until I started going to, what you call, till I begin to go to work.

And did you wear a Tsitsis?

Yes.

So, in the home, what language did you speak?

Indoors, only Yiddish. Only Yiddish, when we came out, we spoke Polish. Polish, and after we lived in Silesia, there used to be spoken also German there, as well.

But within the family?

Only Yiddish, indoors.

I see. What sort of dress did you ... Did you dress with this?

No, I wore, I wore what you call traditional European clothes.

Ordinary clothes. So that you would not be distinguishable from other, from non-Jewish people.

That's right, from the other ones, as we were already. We went to school, I don't know what you call it, an elementary school? Elementary school, I mean, we mixed.

But so far as your father is concerned, he was brought up in a more Orthodox ...

In a more Orthodox Jewish way.

Did he go to a Jewish school?

Yes. Yes. The only school what, in my father's time, as I've been told, from him, he was not allowed to go to any other school under the, it was under Russian Occupation then, in his days.

When would that be?

1885, something, '88.

1885?

1885, or '88, or something, until 1914, when the War broke out, and Germany occupied most of the town.

But up to that time, it was Russian Occupation?

Russian Occupation, it was Russia.

And that was the time of your father's childhood?

Childhood. But there's no, for those youngsters, there was no, what you call schooling, national schooling. The only schooling they did have there ...

Jewish, you're talking about Jewish?

For Jews, is only Cheder, like Jews Schools.

So, your father then, lived in this place, with a fairly small Jewish population. Did he have any experience of anti-Semitism there?

Oh yes, yes. It, when we used to go out ...

I'm talking about, not in your youth, but do you perhaps remember anything that your father may have said?

My father, of course, what my father told me, in others, people were (inaud). As it happens, my father's family, they were very strongly built, well-developed boys. And as it happens, the Christian population there, they become friends, as they could defend themselves. They were afraid to start on anybody, especially the family.

They could look after themselves?

Yeh, and anybody, they knew, my father's family knew, they would not start either, because they were just plainly afraid of the boys, they could look after themselves.

But in general terms, was there very much, did your father speak of much anti-Semitism, while he was growing up?

Yeh, I mean, he used to tell me, that when the Cossacks, in the Cossacks time, they used to be worse than the people, because they had the power. And they had occasions where they used to try to develop a pogrom, or as it happens, not in that town, they never had no problems.

So your father didn't have any personal experience?

Of a pogrom?

Of a pogrom.

It has been known to them in the other cities.

So, your father, being well-built and could look after himself, became friendly, to some extent, with the non-Jewish people?

Non-Jewish population, yes. I mean, he was born with them, and went round with them.

He didn't go to school with them, though?

No, no. The thing is, they lived, they knew each other, near enough.

And he lived his youth in the same house that you did?

Yes.

And, so that, is that within, we'll come to your youth, when you were growing up, in a minute, but generally speaking, was that, were you surrounded by the other thousand or so Jewish people, or were you spread out?

Spread out the whole town.

So you could have had Catholic, or Christian neighbours?

Oh yes, neighbours, neighbours. And we used to live quite friendly amongst them.

So we're just talking about your father's experience. I mean, when you say he knew, and was friendly with the non-Jewish neighbours, would he, for example, say, spend an evening with them? Or would he, was it just a question of being acquaintances during his working day? I mean, how close was he to...?

There would be certain people he would visit, he'd stay the evening with them. He would not have a meal with them as he was kosher, he would have a drink with them, drunk with them alcohol, and things like that.

Would he go to a wedding, their family occasions?

Yes, he would, he would, yes. He had also, on his wedding, he's told me, when he got married, they had a lot of what you call non-Christian ...

Non-Jewish?

Non-Jewish, coming there. Mostly, especially they used to be, people used to be on the Border Guards, they used to come into my grandfather's inn, they were invited to the wedding.

This, just tell me a little about this inn, it's interesting. This was on the ground floor of the premises where he lived?

Yes.

Just describe the building to me, first of all. You said it was three storey?

Yes. The three storey building, with probably about six flats in it.

How big were the flats?

The, all the flats, never more than two rooms. A large kitchen and a large bedroom.

And no bathrooms, obviously.

No, no. They used to use what you call the Council's Baths, the Public Baths.

And the toilets, was it a communal?

The toilets used to be away from the building, what you call a pit, a pit. What certain people used to come and empty every few months.

So, if you needed to go to the toilet ...

You had to go out through the yard.

Even at night time, or whatever?

Yes.

So, you'd got this three storey building with perhaps two flats on a floor, or three?

Yes, there were two flats to each flat.

And on the ground floor was an inn.

An inn, yes, with a shop parlour, with the living accommodation, where my grandfather used to live.

And he used to sell in the shop?

Alcohol. Alcohol and beer.

Wine?

Vodka, and spirits.

Just vodka, mainly. Local wine? Or did ...

I would, I couldn't tell you, it wasn't in my time, you know.

And in the back of the shop was a place for people to sit and drink?

In the shop. In the shop, it used to be like a bar. You come in, you walked in, you walked straight to a bar, and there was seating for, probably for about 20 people, or 30.

So, it's, people used to come and stay there, like they do in an English pub?

Mostly. Not, not sleeping, just come in there, and probably just spend the evening drinking.

Any food provided?

Only like, what you call, goose, goose, or duck, roasted, roasted, roasted duck.

Cold portions?

Yes, or some herring, Dutch herring used to be very popular there, like snacks, snacks.

And they used to drink the drink,

Yeh, and they could have a snack.

What sort of beer was it, do you remember?

Like a lager, a light beer, lager beers. And there used to also be a sweet beer they used to serve as well, malt beer, malt beer.

And your grandfather used to have this, what, in barrels?

In barrels, that's right, they used to have a tap on it, and he used to draw it off.

And the vodka, presumably, was produced locally, I suppose?

That was a Monopoly.

What's that?

Monopoly, only the State.

Oh, a monopoly.

Yes. The factory owned by the State.

I understand. So, I don't know if I can ask you, how I can ask you this, but when you were born, your father was what, in his twenties?

He must have been about 28. He married 26, and he had my brother, I have an older brother.

So, he was getting settled in business at that time, presumably his father was still alive, and he was living in this, in this six-flat apartment house, which your grandfather owned?

Yes.

And your father, I suppose, paid him rent?

Paid him rent, yes.

For one of the flats.

For one of the flats.

Do you remember how much the rent was?

I could not say.

So, what would be your father's ...

I know he made him pay!

Perhaps he had a mortgage or something.

Yes, the other sons, and a daughter to keep.

What would be your father's vision of his future life, at that time. I mean, he was there, his own father was running a business downstairs. He, your father, had a little business of his own, he's beginning to have a family, do you think he was looking forward to staying in this community for the rest of his life, or did he have ambitions?

They have never told of, think, in those early years, of emigrating, or anything like that. No, anybody leaving the town, or the country, they didn't think much of it.

Why not?

They thought he's low life, or something.

Leaving, a deserter.

Yes.

So, your father was, saw the future ...

He was a family man, and they concentrated on the home. There was no other country for them.

And he was happy living there?

As it happens, they had to be happy! Saying that, he had to be happy. They were happier than under the Russians. Under Poland, they were a bit happier.

Did they have any civic rights? Did your father vote, do you know?

I could not tell you. Under Poland, my time, we had a vote. Under the Russians, I could not tell you whether they had the vote or not, because really, they were under occupation by the Russians. For the last 100 years or something.

But the schooling was, both your schooling and your father's schooling, was organised by the Jewish Community?

In my father's time it was by the Jewish Community. In my time, we had to go to Polish Schools, some would call it a State School. We had to register, we had to go, we, I spent seven years in the Elementary School.

In your father's time, so there was a fairly strong Jewish community then.

Yes.

They looked after, I don't want to put words ...

Mostly, they used to look after themselves. At the time, any welfare, they used to do amongst themselves. Anybody needed any help, we would go out and make our collection to help the person. There was no State Benefits, or anything like that, especially Jewish people, I do not, other people, I don't think even the Polish people had any State Benefits.

Did your father get involved in the Jewish community, in organising, or being a Member of a Committee?

He always has been a Member in the Jewish Committees. It was not special, because I don't think he took special interest in the running of the community, although he belonged to the community, he belonged, he was a member of the Synagogue, a member of the Jewish community, and as I say, if it come to any work they do, they used to organise amongst themselves. They used to get a few men together, or a few women together, and used to go around the other communities, and said "that person is ill", or needs some help, or even if there was a marriage come to it, even if a marriage used to come to it, and they needed for a shidduck.

To make a match?

To make a match, and they needed some ...

Encouragement?

They done it.

Was your father, what sort of education did he have? At what age did he leave school?

Oh, I would not know. I don't know. Probably about 14, 15 years of age. As it happens, those days, they worked before that day. There was no such special other things, such as school that they had to go.

So he left school at 14, or 15, and then went to, presumably he went to work to help his father?

To help his father, yes. While they were with the parents, there used to be a tradition at that time. While they were with their family, all most of the money used to go into the family. There was no such thing like selfishness, there was no selfishness. Once they got married, or they were getting married, then they started working for themselves. And then they had to help as well, the grandparents.

Did your father have any interest in political matters in Poland?

I know he used to read a lot of what they call Jewish newspapers.

Yiddish, is that?

Yiddish newspapers, yeh, in Yiddish. And that's what he read, he never wrote, my father never wrote any Polish, he could, I think, he spoke well Russian. I don't know exactly if he could write Russian. I know he spoke well Russian, and he spoke German, Yiddish and Polish.

But he was, he was growing up at a time when there was, if he didn't experience anti-Semitism, there was anti-Semitism.

There was anti-Semitism, yes.

And he was restricted in some ways as to schooling and so on.

That's right. They were as restricted, even I believe, the Poles could not go to another school. There was a lot of education under the Russians, under the Austrians they had ...

But did he have any aspirations, your father, as to better himself, or for his children?

Oh yes. Oh yes. He always, while he was in business, he tried, he tried. But it was not easy those days. Some made it, only some.

So, that's your father. Can you just tell me a little about your mother? What was her name?

My mother's name, from home, was Hercberg.

That was her ...

That was her maiden name.

And what was her first name?

Liba.

And how do you spell that?

L I B A.

And Hercberg is?

H E R C B E R G.

And where did she come from? Did she live in this town?

Yes. My mother lived in this town. She was born next town, about three kilometres away.

What town is that?

Bendzin.

And, so, what sort of upbringing did she have? Did she ever speak to you about her life? What was her father?

Her father, he was more, what you call, more educated. More, more Orthodox, more Orthodox, also modern in dressing. More like educated, more refined, shall we say. He used to be well-dressed, with a beard, what you call, like a, they used to call it a Trotsky Cut! With Anthony Eden hat.

So, was he a businessman?

He wasn't business.

What was he doing?

He was, at a time when he moved to Czeladz, and there was a coal mine there.

When did he move there? The dates, roughly?

I know he lived there from the time the War broke out, in 1913.

He lived in Czeladz from 1913. So your father got married, when he did he marry?

As it happens, he lived there after he did return from Canada.

Who, your grandfather?

Yeh, my grandfather. He went in 1905.

To Canada?

Yeh, he emigrated, his wife and he ...

End of FIO42 Side A

FIO42 Side B

Staying with your mother's father, he went to Canada in, when?

1905.

You said, because he was getting worried about the pogroms.

The pogroms.

How old was he then?

He was about, he must have been about 35, something like that.

And your mother?

Early thirties.

And your mother?

She was about five.

And she went, obviously with him, to Canada, with his wife?

With him, yes. She had a, also, a younger brother as well.

Yes, the whole family went?

Yes.

And he stayed there for some years?

He stayed about seven years.

Till about 1912?

1912 he returned.

Why did he come back?

He did not like the way the Jewish people, the Jewish life, they, they could not live in the Orthodox way. The Jewish life wasn't, not the same way. They were more, more out of the religion.

So, he returned to Poland in 1912. And your mother was then about 14?

Yes.

And where did they come back to?

Czeladz.

So, she, by that time, had probably left school?

She attended school in Canada, at the time, till they came back.

Did she go to a Jewish school?

No, English school. English school. She wrote, my mother could write Polish, she could write German, she was quite educated, my mother, yes, she was quite educated. She could speak English better than I could. As it happens, students used to come down to the shop for a bit of conversation, to make conversation in English.

Well, having lived in Canada for seven years, she would be able to speak English.

Good English.

So, the family, your mother's family came back, and your mother then grew up, from 14 onwards, in Czeladz.

She got married in 1919.

She got married in 1919. So, where did she meet your father?

In Czeladz. She used to make, a new thing, or they, it was a shidduch, as you say, an introduction, an introduction, not a shidduch, there was not a shidduch.

What do you mean by a "shidduch"?

A shidduch, is, you see, when you get together, there's money involved amongst, in it as well.

You mean the marriage is arranged?

It is arranged, that's right. They used to meet, they used to meet each other.

But this was not the case of your mother?

That was not the case of my mother, no. They were introduced, as two friends. As two friends, on occasions, in Czeladz. Of course, it wasn't a big town.

Where would they spend their adolescence? I mean, nowadays, people go to coffee bars, or to pubs, or to discos. How would they spend their youth?

Well, up to, when they started, they used to court, they used to meet in families and in homes.

Were there any clubs that they ...

I would not know, I don't think so. They had no clubs there, anyway.

They would go out for walks?

For walks, and spend the evening in some family's home.

What was the weather like in winter time?

Very very cold. Very very cold. Summer used to be very hot, nice and warm, and the winters very very cold.

So, they met through family introduction. And so it wasn't a shidduch, in the sense that it was a money thing, but they liked each other.

That's right, they liked each other. I mean, they were quite good looking boys on my father's side, and my mother was quite nice. I've got some lovely photos.

So they got married, and having got married, your mother came to live with your father?

Yes, they got married, and they lived in the, my grandfather, my father's father, gave them one flat.

And what was your mother, did she do any work before she got married?

Yes, she used to go round, what you call, they used to give things on tally, also do a bit of business, but the girls never used to, in those days, do a lot of work. They never went out to any work, besides, there was no work. The only work there might have been, is that they went to service, like, as maids.

So, your mother, before she got married, helped her father?

Her father, and my grandfather.

So she got married and she left her father's house, and went to live with her husband in your grandfather's house, in his father's house.

Yes.

In a two-roomed flat?

Yes. A self-contained flat.

And what would be her function as a newly married wife?

On the record, is this?

Yes.

Can you stop it, now.

You were saying.

Most of the population in the town, they involved themselves with smuggling, as it was on the border of, between Germany and Russia.

So the town in which you lived, how far away was it?

It was about, from my grandfather's house, it was about 100 or 200 yards, something like that.

To the Russian,

To the German border.

To the German border.

Into Germany.

So, your inn, your grandfather's inn, used to be the meeting place for people who had, who came, smugglers.

Smugglers. And there used to be there, all the guards, the border guards, used to come there after duty.

What, any particular goods that used to be smuggled? Was anything favourite?

Oh, they used to take across flour ... from Russia, from Poland,

From Poland into Germany?

It wasn't Poland, it was Russia, into Germany, flour. Pork, pork in all sorts of other things, what they were short in Germany, and it was plentiful on the Russian side, because the Russian side, the Polish side, was an agricultural country.

So, coming back to your mother, then. She moved into this small flat, nearly on the German border, and your father was trying to run a little business then, presumably, to support himself and his wife. What did she do? Did she involve herself?

While I was born, I don't know if she was, I don't think she was involved in anything.

She was just a housewife?

A housewife.

Was it considered the place of women, at that time, just to involve themselves in looking after the house?

Yes, that was, there was no other occupation for young women, or girls.

She was happy being a housewife, as far as you know?

That's right. That's why she could do.

Did she, was she a good manager?

A good housewife, a good babusta, she was very very good. Very very good.

When your, so your father was the person in the family who earned the money?

Yes. My mother used to run the home.

Who looked after the money within the household? Was she ...

It was she. She looked after it. My father, whatever he earned, he used to hand over the money. She used to look after the money, and the (INAUDIBLE), and the house. Naturally, if he needed the money for business, he used to take it from her. She used to be the cashier.

And where did she keep the money, I mean, bank accounts were not ...

No. At home. At home.

She used to keep the money in cash at home?

I don't think there was a bank in the town! Today, you've got, if a bank opens here, another one opens across the road!

So, she was, he used to earn the money and give it to her.

To look after.

To look after. And when he wanted some for business, she would give it to him?

That's right. There was no such thing, yours and mine, it was ours.

Was she the, was one of them more dominant than the other?

I would say, my mother, she was the more intelligent for writing or anything like that. My mother used to do anything like that, business side. My father, he used to be good in business, although he was not much of a writer.

And they were happy together?

Oh, very happy together.

And she used to visit her family frequently, did she?

There used to be a tradition in those old countries. Used to come Saturdays, when only day off, days to make tours round, visit everybody. Everybody used to, families used to go round everybody's.

Walking? Not riding?

Walking, to house, house to house calls.

But not riding?

No. No. No. There was no cars, no, horse and carts, only if they had to go by there weren't ... in the town, everything was walking distance. If you had to go to the next town, it was only three kilometres, used to take about 20 minutes and you were there.

So, that's roughly the situation of your family, before you were, before you came along.

That's right.

So you were then born in 1920, when did you say?

I was born 1921. 31st December, at the end of the year.

In this town, on the borders of Germany, in Russia?

Yes. At my time, when I was born, it was under the Polish.

Ah! It came back to Poland?

It was Poland.

When was that?

Poland come back there 1918, I was born 1921. That was the time, just when Silesia become Poland as well, part of Silesia become Poland.

So you were born into Poland?

Yes.

Into this flat, which had two rooms, there was a kitchen?

A kitchen, a large kitchen.

What would be the size of the kitchen?

I would say, 17 x 17.

And you would eat in there?

Yes, eating, and that was the place, the living room and everything.

And what would be in that room, the furniture?

There wouldn't be a lot. A table with the chairs.

A wooden table?

A wooden table, about six chairs. A stove. And a few cupboards, a few kitchen cupboards around, not fitted like today.

Water?

No. No water. We had to go out for water, into our water tap into the street.

Into the street?

Into the street. To a pump.

And how would you dispose of dirty water?

Dirty water? Used to be a bucket, in the kitchen somewhere, in the corner, like, what you call, cordoned off, and there used to be a couple of buckets with clean water, enamel buckets, or I dunno, they used to be like zinc, zinc covered buckets, galvanised buckets. They used to be drinking water in those buckets.

And one bucket for dirty water?

In dirty water, on the side.

And when that was full up?

When that was full up, it used to be taken out and emptied.

Where to?

On the street, or, they used to be on the toilets, the pits.

So there was no drainage?

There was no internal drainage.

None at all, in the flats?

No. There were very very few, here and there, maybe in this town, something like arranged a bath in their house.

How was the water heated?

A kettle on the stove. What you call, they used to have those, not galvanised, steel, steel stoves, with legs on it.

What fuel was used?

Coal. Coal fuel, or I remember. They used to have a stove in, a coal fire, with several rings, those rings used to have rings, smaller, larger, covers on, like a hotplate, with about three or four rings.

And the rings could be removed to reveal the flame?

No, they used to, up from the front they used to load it, or from the top. They could put in the fuel from the top.

Where was the coal kept, before it was used?

They had a coal scuttle, in the kitchen. The coal scuttle, and then they used to have in the yard, there used to be like a shed.

What, everybody had a shed?

Their own shed, filled with the coal, coal storage. Everyone had in the house also, a cellar. A part of the cellar, the cellar in the house, for the winter, to store, like, potatoes, cabbage, things like that, because it was too cold to transport it there. Everybody used to store it up for the winter.

So, you , you or somebody else had to go up and down the stairs to get coal all the time.

Coal, yes, not all the time, as I said, we had a scuttle, and that used to last for the day, maybe once or twice go down.

So, the cooking was done by your mother in this kitchen, and that's where you ate?
Was there any comfortable armchairs?

No. No. No special armchairs, nothing like that. Kitchen table and chairs. There was no room for any others.

So, then there was a door from that room, was there, into another room?

The bedroom. The bedroom, we all slept in.

What was the size of the bedroom?

About the same.

And there was your mother and father, and you and ...

My brother and I.

Four of you. What were the sleeping arrangements? Your mother and father had a bed? You all used to sleep in the same bed?

I think we had three beds in the room there.

One for each of you boys?

No, not, the boys used to sleep together. And a bed for mother and father.

And how was that room heated?

There was no heating in that room at the time, in my time. No, they used to leave the door open from the kitchen, and they used to have that stove going, in the severe cold, they used to have that going all night.

How was it lit?

Paraffin lamp. I beg your pardon, as it happens, in my time, there was electric light. That was the first street what had electric light in.

And that was when?

That was under Poland, from the time I was born.

They had electric light?

They had electric lighting. That was the only street that did have, because we had our mill, a flour mill, in the, on our river there, there was a river going opposite the road, was a river, and on the centre they made an island, there was a mill, and turbines used to drive, from the turbines they made the first electric power supply,

Power supply to houses?

To houses.

But not for cooking or any other purpose?

No. Electric light. I don't think they, there was no such thing as electric oven, or...

What about street lighting?

There was no street lighting.

So, we've got these two rooms, and how was the bedroom furnished, then? You've got the beds?

The beds, and a stand up wardrobe used to be, we used to keep the clothes in there.

What was on the floor?

Oh, there used to be a wooden floor. Plain wooden floor. Nothing covered. The only thing they used to do, they used to paint the floor with paint, it used to be painted, the floor.

So, your grandfather was the landlord, which was an unusual situation. Who would be responsible, generally, for looking after the inside of the flat?

Every tenant. For the inside of the flat.

And the outside?

That used to be the landlord.

The roof?

That was the landlord.

What would be the sort of rent, I know, perhaps you didn't pay any rent.

No, they did pay, they had to pay rent. What the rent was, I wouldn't know. I know it was cheaper than after we moved into Silesia, that was the town across the border, where my father used to, most of the time he did most of his business there. There, used to be expensive, Silesia. That was under the Germans, but the facilities used to be better there as well.

So, in the living room, or the kitchen, the living room. I'm just trying to picture this room. You've got a stove, and you've got a cupboard to keep some food. Cooking utensils were scattered around. And a corner where the coal is kept, and another corner where the clean water, and the dirty water, was hidden away.

Used to be on a ...

And anything on the walls? Any paintings, or pictures?

Probably a family picture there, one or two, but not much. What kind, I can't remember.

Were you living, we haven't come to your childhood yet, but were you living at this address?

At that address I lived till about five years of age.

And I don't suppose you remember very much from before your father, I mean, some people can remember from the moment they are born!

I do not really not. We played in the streets.

And so your father would come, I'm just trying to picture a day, in this house, before you moved, that is to say, before you were five. So you were living in this, let's take a typical day. Say, let's say a day in the spring when it's not too cold. You'd all wake up in the morning.

Yes, and in my time, we used to go and wash ourself, and when I was three, go to bed as well. She, she bathed us indoors, in a bowl.

And you had breakfast?

Yes, always breakfast. A cooked meal lunch time.

And then you would go to school, perhaps?

I used to hide, I used to, at the time there, I used to go to a nursery, when I was between four and five. I used to spend half a day there.

And your mother would then stay in the flat and do the housework?

Yes. Go shopping, cooking. There was no fridges in those days, every day they used to be there, fresh.

You said there was a yard, was there a garden where children could play?

Yes, we had, my grandfather had a very big garden at the back there, but we never spent, I never spent much time there. Not in the garden, because the garden, they used to grow vegetables, fruit, things like that. It was not a playing ground for us. We had a yard as well, we used to play in the yard, the children from all round.

The house, this block of flats was well looked after by your grandfather?

Oh yes.

He looked after his own property?

Yes.

So, Mezuzas.

Oh, that was naturally.

On every door?

It's still up to now, Mezuzas, wherever I live.

So, this house looked on to, was on a street?

Yeh.

What sort of street was it?

It was not a main street, it was a, what would I say, a secondary street.

Were there other stores and shops in that ...

There was about, yes, about two shops in that street, two grocery shops. Two grocery shops.

Was the street paved?

Cobblestones. Cobblestones.

And it used to be used by traffic?

By traffic, horse and carts. I never seen cars there. In later years, we used to see, on the main road, come by, a car.

On the main road, yes.

So, the windows of the bedroom, was it? Looked onto the street? Or the kitchen?

We had one room overlooking the road, and one room overlooking the garden, the yard.

And which was which?

The bedroom used to overlook the, no, the kitchen used to overlook the, what you call, the yard.

And the bedroom overlooked the ...

The street, into the main road.

What floor were you on?

On the second.

Were there curtains on the window?

Yes. I think so. I think so. I wouldn't be 100% sure.

If you looked out of that window, would you see similar houses across the road?

Yes, not as big as that was. There wasn't many. This street had quite a few buildings, like three storeys. The others used to have like one storey buildings. As I looked out, there was a river, on the opposite road, there was a river going through. We had no houses opposite us. Because I remember going across ...

Do you remember the name of the river?

Yes. Brynica.

So, that river ran along the side of the road.

On the side of the road.

And beyond the river was what?

Beyond the river, it was again, there was another street there, nearer to the main road going through, from Silesia, on the border, going to Bendzin.

So, as you looked out of this bedroom window, there was, first of all, the road. How wide was the road?

Oh, about, I would say, two cars width. Two car width.

And then there's the river. Was that wide?

Yeh. We also could see a bridge, the bridge, going through from Silesia into the town.

How wide was the river?

The river, I would say, it was about 100 yards wide, about 60 yards wide. A big river.

Was there traffic on the river? Boats?

No. No boats. Used to be only like small boats, like to fish. Rowing boats. Little fishing boats, they used to fish, little boats, pleasure boats. Not boats as you would say, like you would hire here on a lake.

Dinghies and rowing boats?

That's right.

So, beyond the river then, there would be more houses?

More houses, yes. And then it had, to our right, used to be the mill. The river used to be parted into two, but they made the island for the mill, when they built the turbines. And on the other side, they gradually again, joined together. There was quite a nice

space there, because the people who used to own the mill, used to live there. They had their home there, and they used to have their ...

And this was producing flour, the mill?

Yes, the farmers used to bring the corn for, to be ground.

And would your mother, where would she get her flour from?

From shops.

So the mill would grind it for the farmers, and the farmers would then sell it to the shops?

To the shops, or how they used to, because some farmers, there used to be quite biggish farmers as well there.

So, let's go back to your house. There's three floors in all, so you've got a flat above you.

Yes, yes.

Was it noisy there, or was it well insulated against sound?

I don't know, we could hear upstairs. We could hear if somebody would jump, you would have the echo down.

What sort of roof ...

At certain times ...

End of FIO42 Side B

FIO43 Side A

I was asking about the roof?

I believe at the time, they had what you call felt, felt with bitumen, covered. They used to be a pitched roof, with felt.

So it was quite a sturdy building.

Yeh, it was brick building.

Just as a matter of interest to me, would your father have had the freehold, or a lease?

Freehold. They were freehold.

And does that involve some payment?

You paid, where you go to the Council, rates. There was rates, taxes, certain taxes.

Was there a lawyer in the town who ...

Oh yes, there were lawyers.

Let's leave the bedroom, go back into the kitchen, and let's look out of the window, what do you see?

We used to see, opposite, like the yard, the garden at the back, across the fields, across the fields. Up to Silesia.

Up to the border?

Yeh, and we could see above the border, and we could see the beginning of the houses of the next town, on a clear day.

How many toilets would there be?

I think there was about three.

For this block of flats?

I think two families were there. And they were like wooden platform, made, a pit, a hole, and in the centre, they had concreted, made a big tank there, in the yard, where they would cover it, with a cover on, they used to be emptied occasionally. Special people used to come,

What, from the Council, or private?

Private, I believe. They used to, I don't think there was any payment for anything, because they used to use it for the fields.

For fertiliser, yes.

Fertiliser, yes.

So, were you the eldest?

Youngest, youngest. My brother was about 18 months older.

So he was born in 1920. What was his name?

Isaac.

Is he still alive?

No. He died in the War. He was one of the first one caught by the Germans for forced labour, in 1941.

So, in 1941, he would have been 21, around about 21.

Yes.

Still living in this town?

No, we lived in Silesia, Siemianowice.

We'll come back to that later. I mean, just to digress for a moment, tell me about your brother. He, at 21, was, which would be 1942, or 1941, he was taken by the Germans, what happened to him?

He was one of the first ones to be taken into Germany, forced labour camp. And he was, he was already as a carpenter, he worked in the camp, in carpentry.

What camp was that?

Used to be Pazemiechy.

This is the name of the camp?

A Polish town.

Could you spell that? We'll come back to your brother later on, could you just, as we've mentioned it, just spell this name for me, the forced labour camp that he was taken to in 1941 or 1942.

He has been taken to a different one, he spent several months there, I cannot remember exactly the name, what camp it was. Then, most of the time, he spent in, it's P A Z Y M I E C H Y. It's, it was a village there.

Where?

Pazymiechy, in Pazymiechy.

In which part of the country was this?

Poland. Near Poznan, near Poznan. The place was to belong to a very, like a big farm, a very very big farm, he used to ... he was a landowner, and a German General, as it happens, made his home there, and the group of those forced labour, they used to be taken out from the Camp, and work in his, in his household.

Let's go back to your family, when you were born. So there was your brother, who was 18 months older than you, and you, just the two of you, and your mother and father. How did you get on at home? Was the household very strict?

Yes, Yes. No. It was a happy family, we were not bad boys. Not, we didn't do anything to upset the parents, and to get any trouble, laws were strict as well, the (INAUDIBLE), besides, we went to school.

You said that you stayed in this town until you were five, in Poland, and then you moved. Where to?

To Chernanyvitza.

How far away was that?

Three kilometres out of town. We walked within half an hour.

And this is in Silesia, also in Poland?

This is in Silesia, the neighbouring town.

Why did you move?

My father opened up a shop there, opened a shop. Grocery shop. My mother run it, with my aunt, from my father's brother's wife, they ran the grocery shop, where my father and his brother were involved in the potato merchants, and fruit and vegetables.

So this was a partnership really, of two ...

Yes, they started up a partnership.

Of your father and his brother?

His brother.

And the two wives?

The two wives.

They helped in the shop?

Yes.

But they didn't live with you?

No. They had accommodation, where the shop was, they had the shop parlour with the living accommodation, two rooms, and we found accommodation in private rent.

So there was a shop which the four of you ran, but your ...

For about five years, like that. They were together for five years, and then they separated.

And your aunt and uncle lived behind the shop, or in the shop parlour?

Yes.

And you and your brother and mother and father, found other accommodation in this town.

In this town.

What sort of accommodation did you have then?

As it happens, only one big room, in a house. In our house. It was very very hard to get accommodation.

It was not a self-contained flat?

As it happens, somebody sub-let us a room, they had a flat there, a two-roomed flat. That was the usual flats, two-roomed flats.

And one of the rooms they rented to you?

The old lady, she give us the big room, and she kept the other one.

Could you describe this room to me?

Oh, that room was on the top floor.

How many floors?

About four storeys, biggish house, with a lot of families, about four tenants on each floor.

So, a lot of people,

Yeh. That house had toilets in the house, in the hall. In the hall. Not in the rooms, in the hall, in the passage, they had two toilets to each floor.

So this was an advance?

Yeh. We had already also, in the passage, in the hall, a water tap as well.

So, that was a slight improvement.

That was already a German built town. It's been for Germany for the last, nearly hundred years, German occupation.

So, you are living in this room, it must have been a large room, then?

Yes, that room must have been about, I would say, it was about 18 foot square.

And in this room, you slept, and ate?

Oh, slept there, and cooked.

So, there was the same set up, there was a boiler?

There was a stove. It was not a proper one, we had a better one in Poland, that was a portable stove, quite a large one, enough to do cooking, for putting about two or three pots and pans on it.

Also coal?

Yes, also by coal, heated.

And there was no water at all?

Not in the rooms, but in the hall, yes, the passageway.

So there was one section where your mother did the cooking?

There was no, we did not have it separated, no. There was a part, a part in the room, for the kitchen, kitchen part, and a part, like, for the bedroom side of it.

And a part for eating? You ate in the kitchen part?

Yes.

You had the same furniture? You took the furniture with you?

That's right, the same furniture we had, we took it all with us. And that was going on for another five years like it. After the five years, when they parted, my father's brother, my uncle, when they parted, he offered us the old shop.

Your father did?

Yes. My mother ran it again. And my father also carried on the same thing, by himself, in the fruit and vegetable also, by himself.

On a wheelbarrow? How did he buy ...

On a horse and cart.

He would go from house to house?

He would go, next town, to Katowice as I mentioned, on the railway line, where goods are, and they used to, there used to be merchants, wholesalers, and they used to get it from them, take it on the horse and cart. The next morning, he would go to start out, eight o'clock in the morning, go from street to street, and call round with potatoes, apples, vegetables, whatever it is.

Greengrocery?

Yes. And then people would come out and buy their goods.

So he would go, what, daily, to Katowice, to buy

Yes. Afternoon, he used to go.

By horse and cart?

By horse and cart.

How far away was that?

About seven kilometres.

In the meantime, so , after five years, you were then, you were about, how old were you when your father opened his own shop?

About 10.

What sort of shop did your mother run?

A grocers, groceries. Flour, any ...

She used to be in the shop, as well as looking after the family?

Yeh, and looking after the family. We had like a little scullery there.

And is that where you lived?

No, the scullery used to serve as a kitchen, as a kitchen, and we still lived, we had, after we moved out the kitchen from the house, we had just the living accommodation upstairs, where we did have before. And we lived like that for another two or three years, we found, in the same street, another shop, what had better living accommodation, two rooms, two larger rooms, with a shop.

And how long were you in this, this was your third move.

This was the third move in the same town.

And how long were you there?

Till seventeen and a half, till the War broke out, 1939.

From seventeen and a half ... About five years before.

1934. I see. So, let's just talk about those few years, until the War broke out. This was a house that your father rented or bought?

Rented.

He paid a monthly rent?

Rent.

Yes. Do you remember how much he paid?

Oh, I think about 80 zlotys at the time. That was equal here, to about three English, £three and a half (three and a half pounds) English.

A week?

A week, yes. The rent was very very expensive in this town. Because a family there could live, in Poland, for about, I'm talking about food. A family now, in food and clothes, for about 25, 26 zlotys a week, at the time. Live, like, in a household, what you call, under budget, household budget.

So, you were living in this third shop and living accommodation you went to. Your father was going to the market every morning to buy his greengrocery in Katowice?

Yes, potatoes,

And he used to go round the houses selling it?

Selling it.

And your mother was looking after the shop, after the groceries ...

And also, he also run, what you call it. He used to go out, my father, into the country, like big farmers, land holder and they used to load up into wagons, used to load these (INAUDIBLE), they used to buy a field of potatoes, you see, for about 10-15 wagons, of what, 370, about 150 hundredweight, about 3 hundredweights used to be packed in the wagon, and they used to transport it to the town, and used to ...

Store it?

Not store it, he used to sell it to, private people. These private people, oh, they used to buy about 20cwt, 15cwt, according to the family, how big they were, and they used to store it in their cellar, for the winter. That's what his extra income was.

Sort of middle man between the farmer and the consumer?

That's right, he used to buy, and transport it himself, have it transported into the town, and on the ramp, from the ramp, he used to distribute it to the customers, what made all this, during the last few months, they used to take all this for the winter.

So your father was quite a busy, it was a busy family. Your mother had much to do in the shop and the family.

I only think it was, after the season finished, they had what are called a winter season, and my father couldn't do anything. Nothing. Because you could not transport, move about, any fruit or vegetables in the winter.

Why not?

They get frostbitten, and they would go off. They had to be kept in a certain temperature.

Which is why people used to store potatoes?

That's right.

What did he do in the winter?

Help my mother.

In the shop?

In the shop. And also, they used to, for Christmas, was another extra woman used to go and get fish, carps.

Where would she buy these from?

Also in special, (INAUDIBLE) ponds, they used to breed carps. And they used to bring them in for Christmas time, and New Year. There used to be like a main food in Poland and Germany. The food.

The freshwater fish?

The freshwater fish, they used to buy for those holidays.

You're talking about Jewish people, or the general public?

No, the Christians. This was a Christian tradition. Fish, and geese, ducks, turkeys, like here, everyone used to buy. Make proper, they used to look after themselves, for those holidays. Like seasonable business.

Were there many Jewish people in this town?

In this town, as it happened, it was only 70 Jewish families.

Even fewer.

Fewer. In a larger population, over 40,000.

Did you come across any anti-Semitism?

Anti-Semitism in Silesia was less. The Silesians were not anti-Semitic at all. They classed themselves also like a minority, to Poland. There was less anti-Semitism.

You're not ...

When I went to school, there was two Jewish boys, my brother and I, in the whole school.

And you didn't experience personally ...

I have, I have, experienced. We went easily by, every time, every year, we used to go from one class, as you progress from one class to the next, go up in the classes, you used to get a new kind of boys from different classes, and when, on the start of it, they started, they did start. There have been certain people, they used to call us names, Jewish names, and as it happens, we fought back. I have never, or my brother and I, we never let them call us names, we would fight. And as it happens, we developed a certain good fight. And the boys become, after each year, they think they can take you apart, but they respect you more, and they used to, they used to accept you in the clique amongst the (INAUDIBLE).

So your household, as far as the money is concerned, were you quite comfortably off? I mean, was there any poverty in your home?

We always had a meal on the table. There was not poverty. I wouldn't call it poverty, and I would call, there was no richness. We made just a living. Sometimes the

winter season used to drag down all the resources from what they made in the summer. They managed to keep a bit more, saving up, because, horses, sometimes we used to sell the horses, we used to sell them for the winter, because there was no, no use for him.

How many horses did your father have?

They would be too expensive to keep.

How many horses?

We had a pair. Two pair of horses. At times, once, my father had four. And the other two, they only were used for a person, we had the stables in, they had what you call a timber yard. And the timber yard needed transport, for the timber to be transported to the customers. So my father was like a contractor to them, he used to supply the horses, and a man with it, for transporting the timber. That was the last few years, my father did this. We had a stable, and it was a Jewish person that had that timber yard.

So your father, your family was not rich?

But not what you'd call on the poverty line. We always managed to make a living somehow.

Did you see much of your grandfathers, because they were living now ... Just go back to your grandfather then, he had this inn in Czeladz where you lived, but before you were born, he had given up the inn?

Yes. As for age, age purposes.

So, what was on the ground floor?

The shop. The premises was the inn, my uncle, my younger uncle of my father, he got married, and he lived in it.

So your grandfather gave him those premises?

Yes. It was the premises that he used to live.

And where did your grandfather move to?

The same town.

In Czeladz?

In Czeladz, a different road. A different road, I can't remember the name of it.

And he went to live in a?

Private accommodation, actually, I think, a flat.

He and his wife? Was his wife alive?

Yeh. In, and at the time they still had another single brother with a daughter.

And did he have a business once he closed the inn down?

No. He was retired. He was retired.

So what did he live on?

He just lived on the sale of the house, the sale of the house.

Even though he still had an unmarried ...

Yes.

Son, living with him.

Yeh. But I mean, he was old enough to go out to make his own living.

So he must've got a reasonable amount from the sale of this property?

From the sale of this property, he kept it as, then he kept back some money for the daughter, for her marriage, they call it a "nudden".

You mean a dowry, on her marriage?

A dowry, I couldn't think of it.

What would he have done with the money that he got from the sale of the shop?
From this flat?

I couldn't tell you if he put it in a bank, for a little interest. I could not tell you. I know he had, he, he wasn't short, he wasn't short, he lived, quite what you call, he wasn't short of money. I know, because the daughter married quite a few years later, after my grandfather died. And they had money to, for the dowry.

Right. So, you were now living in Silesia, in this town, which was a few kilometres away from where you were born.

Yes.

And your mother is looking after the shop, and your father has got these other business interests, he's a greengrocer,

Greengrocer, potato man.

And he would buy potatoes from the farmers to re-sell, and he would rent out the horses occasionally,

Occasionally, yes. Occasionally to, what you call, for transport of the timber into builders.

And so, you were not short of money,

I would say not, but far from rich.

Happy?

Happy, a family happy life - balbatishe.

A family orientated, so that you were all together.

A close family.

And you saw, you saw your relatives, and uncles and aunts frequently?

We used to always visit my family around, go round say, the next town, spend a day, my mother would spend a day with her mother, and after a meal, she would probably make a meal there in my grandmother's place, we would come and have a meal, and go visiting my cousins and uncles and aunts. The family was a great family. My father's family in this town was great. I mean, my father had, my grandfather had five brothers there, and one sisters.

So there were a lot of people,

Children, and grandchildren.

Did you go out of the town in your young years, holidays or travelling?

Yes. Not holidays as such. But after, when we used to live in Silesia, my mother would take us, I think she was took ill once, she took ill once, she would take us, with her to a holiday place, what you call a health place, for arthritis, an arthritis place.

And she took you and your brother?

She took us, that was the holiday, otherwise we never went for holidays. No holidays. Twice I remember that.

Just, in the evenings, on a winter evening, for example, when you were in Silesia?

Yes, there we had a Jewish Club.

Although there weren't many Jews?

Not many Jews, but there were old family Jews, several old family German Jews, we called them German Jews, from the town, in the town, they were there for years. And they built, one after another, charge or didn't charge, made a Synagogue, in the house where he had, he had a big house, a big store-room, like curtaining, and all sorts of curtaining materials, linens. There were two brothers, they were very very rich people, to us then, they were very very rich, and they kept up, ran part of the house as a Synagogue, of course, quite a big home. And also in that (INAUDIBLE), they had a little room there where the women used to pray, parted off. And we used to meet there, and socialise.

At what sort of age? How old were you about this time?

Oh, I was about 12 then.

End of FIO43 Side A

FIO43 Side B

So, perhaps we can just talk about your schooldays. Tell me about what sort of school you went to?

Yeh, I started school, that was compulsory, every one, seven years of age, into an elementary school. And I went about 8 years.

This was a non-Jewish school?

This was a non-Jewish school, that was elementary, for all, for everyone, for every citizen. And till I finished the school, and when I finished the school, my father put me into a trade.

So when you were at school, what was the language you spoke?

Mostly Polish. We did have about, twice a week, an hour of German, as a second language, in - around - that district.

Did you speak Yiddish at home?

At home, only Yiddish, mostly Yiddish, amongst my family. Until we went out from the house, and then it was Polish spoken.

How many children in those classes?

About between 50 and 60.

As many as that?

Yeh, a class of 50 or 60.

And what would be the number, average, of Jewish children?

In my class there was only one Jewish boy, and that was me! And while the higher class, there was my brother, the only one. In the whole school, there was about five Jewish pupils.

How were you treated, as a Jew?

As I said, some teachers we did have, they were anti-Semitic. It would not be so bad, but for the teachers themselves. I had one, there were two. The one, I still remember the name of him, one, my mother had to go, and have a, what you call it, argument, with him, and she went, and she complained to the Headmaster, went up to the Headmaster, when I come home, it made me cry, because it, because it was a certain part in the history, from the Polish history years ago, where he'd mentioned about the Jews taking liberties with Poles. They used to put the, it's hard for me to explain. Yes, a certain part of the history, where it come to the Jews were mentioned in it, and

so he took advantage, and exploited it as propaganda, which has not helped me, has made me feel very down, and when I went home, I was, the rest of the day, upset, and cried when I come home. After that, we went through several days, I had fights with the boys, they started, and I wasn't the one to take it from them. And most of the time, each year, when I cross from one class to another one, those anti-Semitic things used to come, one or two of the boys starting, what had learned a bit of anti-Semitic probably from home, and used to cause fights amongst me and those boys. Well, after a couple of weeks, that was finished, because they could see that I was not going to let myself be intimidated.

What was the, was it a good school? I mean, we're talking about the elementary school?

I wouldn't say it was very good, although that was the schooling there mostly. Some pupils they were brilliant, like, and they'd passed the exams easy, with higher distinctions. In some, went after let's say, five classes, they went to gymnasiums, who could afford. That's only who could afford at the time. Otherwise, they had to finish up in the elementary school.

So your mother was it, who went to the school, or your father who went to the school to complain?

My mother.

And she wasn't frightened?

No. My mother was quite outspoken woman, she was quite outspoken, well spoken in Polish and German, and English, as I mentioned to you, and she, when she didn't have satisfactory answers from him, he kept on saying "I only just mentioned the parts what's mentioned in the book", and when he started, he said, "I don't mean you Henry." Like, I would be an exception, but I was no exception to the other boys.

But apart from these occasions, because you were the only Jewish child in your class, you mixed well?

Oh yes, very well. We played football, games, all certain games, like baseball, but we used to call it different, football, netball, palestra, and ...

What happened about food at school?

They only used to supply, at teabreak, a glass of milk and a roll. I cannot remember if the parents had to pay for that. Everyone was getting a roll and milk. Well we, we only used to go to school for half a day, by one o'clock from eight, till one. Maybe once a week till two. After that, in the afternoon, I used to spend an hour private in Jewish tuition.

So tell me about the Jewish tuition?

In the afternoon, we had a private Rabbi, coming into our house, to teach my brother and I, into our home, as they could never survive (sic) a Cheder, there was not enough people to be able to employ a teacher, to give him a decent salary.

So your father used to pay a man?

Paid a man for, for each day, an hour, for learning.

How many days a week did you have?

Six days. Yes, six days, except Shabbas.

Just the two of you?

Yes.

And he went to other parents, like, to other pupils in the town. He had probably like, maybe ten pupils, to go round.

Was he very, was he a modern looking person?

No, he was an Orthodox man. Orthodox with modern ideas, as well. As it happens, a Rabbi who was a violinist. A violinist. He used to play the violin, and my brother, he took lessons in a mandolin, and he used to play for our Club, our Polish Club, where it had a teacher what used to run a Club, and he took him into the Club, and they used to play it on the radio occasionally, like, give a concert. And so they used to get together, the Rabbi and my brother, and there was another boy who used to also play a violin, and they used to make a concert, like at social evenings.

The Rabbi, was he attached to any Synagogue?

He was not from our town, he come from a neighbouring town, Bendzin.

What I mean, is, was he doing this as his main job, going from house to house?

That was his main job, that was his living.

As a teacher?

As a teacher.

Was this a recognised ...

Yes, in Silesia, in towns with small populations, where they could, they couldn't afford any Chedorim, so they used to supply private tuition.

And what was this man's name, can you remember?

No, I could not, I could not remember.

A young man?

No, about middle age, 40's. In the 40's. As you know, people in that time, in their 40s, used to look old - a beard- to us, to us they used to look old.

So, he would earn his living by going from house to house, teaching Hebrew, and Yiddish.

Yiddishkeit, to boys, and to girls. And girls.

And he was a violinist too? A professional?

No, not professional, it was his hobby. He was trained, probably he had also lessons, musical lessons, to play the way he played he had to have some lessons.

How did he travel?

On buses. He used to come on a bus to the town.

You don't remember what he was paid?

I wouldn't remember.

Your father would pay him?

Yes. I wouldn't remember that.

So, your father was sufficiently attached to, attached sufficient importance to learning, that he paid someone.

Yes, especially after the, everybody up to the Bar Mitzvah time. I took lessons in Hebrew till about 15.

He coached you for your Bar Mitzvah?

Yes.

Do you remember your Bar Mitzvah ceremony?

Yes. Very much.

Tell me about it?

Well, on that Saturday, we invited from the next town, our family, like the brothers of my father, all my uncles, and some of my mother's part, and my father's part, they were not very religious, like, as they lost their father in younger years. They were mostly brought up by themselves, by my grandmother. And so when it used to come to our Bar Mitzvah, we used to invite them. And well, you made indoors, a dinner.

So your family, your parents family, and their friends, presumably?

Yes.

Came to your house?

To our house. We had a slight kiddush, in the shul. There used to always be a, each different Saturday, somebody else would give the Kiddush.

So, this house, which was owned by these well to do German Jews, they allowed you to use ...

As a synagogue.

Part of that building?

Yes. It's been there since I remember, since we moved in. It's been there for years, before we moved to that town.

Do you remember their name?

Yeh, one was Cohen, and the other, Halborn.

What, they were merchants, were they?

They were shopkeepers.

In the town?

In the town, they were shopkeepers.

What was the town?

Shaymeanavitza.

Okay, so you, you, on the occasion of your Bar Mitzvah, your family and your parents' families, came to the Synagogue,

To the Synagogue to listen to the, to the, what you call the Haftorah, in the part of the ...

You read your portion of the Torah?

Portion of the Torah.

Do you remember doing it?

Not, not very much, as I have not practiced really, properly, since the War broke out. The Synagogue does not allow, because when I got here, to this country, I was working Saturdays and every day of the week, and the only time, I never work, I never work the Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, never.

So you read your portion, and the service finished and then you had a kiddush?

A kiddush.

And what did you have?

For the kiddush?

Oh, it was about, they had the Matias Herring, nice Matias herring, and vodka.

What is that?

Matias? A Dutch herring. One of the best Dutch herrings, with halla, pieces of halla, and Eiercake, I remember Eiercake, Eierkuche, they used to call it, a special like, have you ever seen them?

I don't think so, no.

They're very dry, and light. And when you bit it, it was easy to bite, and it used to be like a sweet dough made, and we used to have that for a bite, with a bit of laicach.

A bit of ...?

Laicach.

What's Laicach?

Like, it's like a madeira cake.

It's a sweet cake?

A sweet cake.

How do you spell Laicach?

L A I C A C H.

So it was something salty?

No, sweet.

No, I mean the herring.

The herring, the hall...,

They had a drop of brandy. Naturally I, first I had a drop of brandy, and vodka, or spirit, and to bite with it, they had Dutch herring, and also calf foot jelly.

Kalag, that's right, calf foot jelly. Peas, some kind of fried peas.

So that's very similar to a Kiddish in England.

In England, they have a bit more.

So, after that Kiddish you went home?

We went home, and my mother had prepared a meal.

What sort of meal would she make?

Usually we used to have like, chopped liver, chopped liver soup with the knodel, or lockshen, or other things, or chicken, or goose, because chicken was not very much eaten by a lot of people, geese more, mostly geese. They used to have a chicken soup, but they used to eat geese.

What, roasted?

No. boiled, boiled geese, or roast. It used to be, sometimes in the summer, they used to roast ducks. They roasted ducks, those things were not expensive in Poland. Food had come, good food was not expensive. Only to get, it was expensive to get the money!

And how many people would sit down on this occasion of your Bar Mitzvah, this family gathering?

About 30 people.

And we'll talk about the food in a minute, but after the meal, then...

They had what you call, they sang zmirot, what you call, if there's more than ten people, they sing it all together, what you call, after meal prayer, the zimmer that is with songs.

The Grace?

The Grace, after meals, sung with songs.

And everyone knew the songs?

Yeh, everybody know, yeh, joined in. And after that, a bit of a break, and then about four o'clock they had showashidas.

What's that?

Showashidas, like, in between tea time, they had beer, a barrel of beer, they would have bobas, albas, peas, or like butter beans, they're not brown, brown beans, they are boiled. I don't know what they are called, those brown beans, they're still, if you go to Israel, occasionally, around Dizengorf. Have you been in Israel?

Yes.

They sometimes still sell them there. Haisobobas, they used to call them.

I know what you, mean, and you're bringing back memories of my childhood now, but the person who's listening to this may not know, so we'll say they were like butter beans. And something savoury.

That's right. And the peas, they used to be salted, salted peas, peppered, salt and peppered to make one drink, so the beer went down well!

It was a pleasant family occasion?

Yes.

Okay. So that was one religious occasion in the house. What would happen on Friday, Friday evening? Your father would come home.

They would all come home a bit early, and went to the baths, have a bath.

In the Public Baths?

To the Public Baths. Went and had a bath, come home from the bath. Took with us a clean underwear, like, to change, when we come home, we change.

How far from your house was the bath?

About a quarter of an hour walk. Quarter of an hour, and then we went to the shul, the father and the boys.

For the Friday evening.

For the Friday evening Service.

How many people would be at the shul?

Was, as many as during the day, probably about 30, 40, 40 men.

Was it accepted ...

It was only 70 families, and its more than you can sometimes see today in a shul here, in Ilford.

Yes, that's what I'm getting at. Was it the accepted, it was understood that the Jewish men would go to shul on a Friday?

That's right, yes. Most of them, most of them would.

Today, it's understood that the majority do not go.

They will go, some of them will go, like Shabazin, Saturday morning.

But this was the general rule?

The general thing.

You would not see a Jewish man riding on a bus, or anything like that, on the Sabbath, or ...

How far away from your house was the shul?

About ten minutes walk. A good ten minutes walk, quarter of an hour walk.

So, your father, you and your brother, what about your mother?

My mother did not go, no. I'm afraid my mother kept the shop open, my mother. In Silesia, she would not do this where we were born in Czeladz. No. You see, in Silesia, most of the shops they were open.

On a Friday night?

Yes, Friday evening, and Saturdays. It's more accepted there than anywhere else in Poland, because it was Silesia, it was already a German culture there, the German culture.

And there were few Jews in the town, there weren't that many, were there?

No, not in this town, no. Where we lived in, like the latest years, until the War broke out.

But, although your mother didn't close the shop ...

We kept, the men,

You went to shul? Your father?

Yeh, he would not go out to work.

And obviously fasted on the Yom Kippur?

Yes.

And any other fasts you observed?

Yes.

Which ones?

There was two. Two.

Anyway, Yom Kippur was not the only fast that they kept?

No, no. There was other fasts in between, during the year.

Your mother ...

Is it Howino, you fast isn't it?

Yes.

As well. Only you fast from morning till night on the ...

Your mother observed the dietary laws, though, did she?

Yes, oh yes. That was very strict. Strict kosher. I mean, she kept separate milchik from fleischik, and we would not eat between a breakfast, say, for after meat, five hours, milchik.

So that was fairly strict?

Yes.

And when Pesach came?

Oh, that was observed as well. All Yomtovim was observed. My father observed the Shavuos,, used to go to Shul, he used to go to Esrig Benchen, and Shana Klapen. You know Shana Klapen?

No.

They take bunches of, from the tree, and they hit it against the, they say prayer on the benches, till the leaves fall off. That's a Shana Klapen, that's also Shavuos, that is. Also used to visit, for Yom Kippur, we used to have a chicken, or a cockerel, and we had kapura-shlung. You know what is Kapura.? It is to take a chicken by the leg, and used to, a live one, and before you took it to the Shurug, used to go ...

You waved it round?

I've forgotten, I tell you, they say a few words.

You waved the chicken round,

Round, above the head, and the children,

By the leg?

Yeh, my mother used to do it above the children as well.

It was a live chicken?

Yeh, cockerel.

And you used to say a prayer?

A prayer, yes.

What was the purpose of that?

I don't know. That is for you to, to offer to God, that we are offering a God, a comb, what they call a comb, a corpse, like, for offering.

And once, then the chicken would be taken to be killed?

Then the chicken, we took it, we, the boys, we used to take it to the schochet. We had our ...

A schochet is?

Schochet cuts the chickens, the animals, for the slaughter. He was a Mohel, he was a Mohel, he was our one in the town. As it happens, I am looking here for the daughters here, in London, of that man.

Really?

Yeh. And the boys would take it to the schochet for slaughtering. As I say, the schochet was a, schochet, he was a Mohel, he was, counted the Rabbi in the town.

A Schochet is somebody who slaughters animals?

Animals, in the kosher way, yes, traditional.

And a Mohel is a man who performs circumcision?

Circumcision, that's right.

So he was a man, Jack of all trades, with his knives?

That's right. We couldn't afford separate ones, that town, so they had to pick somebody, we had to pick somebody who could do all those things. I tell you something, I'll tell you a story. That man, and his whole family survived. They

hidden out, the father and mother, they hid them out amongst Christians, all through the War. And I, I was with one, one was supposed to be here in London living, I mean, I can't find her because she married, you see, she's got a different name. It, I wouldn't recognise her if I see her. I went to the theatre the other day, the Jewish Theatre, mostly Polish people come in, and a woman kept staring at me. I meant to go over to her, because she probably thinks she knows me. And there's people who, I mean, it comes the time now, when you can't recognise people.

So tell me about this shochet. How he survived?

I don't know, they survived in somewhere, I don't know, I'd like to find out. As it happens, I did, I did see him after the War in Munich, because we were very friendly. As it happens, the shochet, sometimes, he used to, the Chazan, they used to take us for Jewish tuition if we didn't have a Rabbi, we used to go to him.

For tuition?

For tuition.

So you were friendly with this man. How did ...

My father was very very friendly, because...

How did he survive? How did he escape?

I don't know. It's a miracle that a man with his wife to survive, hidden. I mean, whoever undertook this, he took a risk.

And it was ...

But a risk is life, a risk with his life.

Did this happen very often?

Not very many, I don't know how many. That's the only family I know, the whole family survived.

You don't know who it was?

And the daughters, the two daughters survived and two boys, the two sons, the whole family survived.

They were hidden throughout the War?

No, only the mother and the father. The two brothers, and the two girls, they were in concentration camps.

But they survived.

They survived the Camp.

So you were saying that there were about 70 families.

Yes, in the town.

Did you meet as a Jewish community, apart from the Synagogue?

Yes, socially, we used to meet occasionally, we used to make, like, Chanukah, evenings, and everyone knew each other, and certain families they used to keep coming to each other's homes, spend the evening between somebody else, different families like.

What were, the families who your parents were friendly with, who came to visit your family, in the evening, shall we say, a typical evening, a Wednesday evening. How would they spend the evening? Play cards? Sing?

They would, no, in the house, we would not play cards. We spoke of all sorts of topics, politics, and politics, and family happenings.

Have a meal together, perhaps?

Have tea, but they would come after the supper. They would have tea with biscuits, or some cake with it. That used to happen very often, they used to come to us. As it happens, Ohesh, we had a shop, with a shop parlour, and there was like a bus station, open house, anybody from the other towns in Poland, used to come and do business there, in this part of the town, they used to always stop. My father was very well known, I mean, they'd been there for years, the whole family, a big family, and they all knew him, and they used to come in, and they used to always be welcome, and they would have a lemon tea, have a sit down, have a chat, and go carry on their businesses.

You're talking about mainly Jewish people?

Mainly Jewish people. We had occasionally a Christian. My father was, with one Silesian, a German Silesian, very very friendly. He used to work for a brother of his in Silesia in German, Glawitz.

Your father used to work?

He used to work as well, when he was single, when the War broke out.

What sort of work?

He used to be on the road, like a ...

End of FIO43 Side B

FIO44 Side A

So, Henry, tell me about the food, it's quite interesting. Your mother was a good cook, you said.

Oh very, very, very good. Very good at balabusta, for the, good organiser.

What was your favourite food then? At that time?

For Shabas it would be a cholent.

Which she used to cook?

She used to prepare it. We used to take it to our bakers, and kept it in the bakers for overnight. Because, we hadn't had the ovens to do those things. We managed to, my mother used to manage to make her own challahs. Baked her own challahs and cake, the traditional cakes, what they used to eat in Jewish homes. It used to be eaten by other people as well.

Tell me about the Cholent?

The Cholent is made up from potatoes, scraped potatoes, and also whole potatoes, meat, like brisket put in, pieces of brisket in it. Butter beans, and a kishka, they occasionally used to put it as well, that's the neck, the neck, stuffed neck. Put in that, and that used to be ...

Put into what?

Put into a pot, a big pot, enough to last for two meals, for four of us.

What, a metal pot?

A metal, metal, cast iron.

And what would happen to this pot?

This pot was taken to the bakery, and ...

By whom?

By the children.

You would take it?

Yeh, I would take it, or my brother.

How far away was the baker's?

Oh, it's about five minutes walk, very close, they used to be, bakeries.

And what then?

And then Saturday, when we came back from Shul,

The baker would take it?

Yes, would take it, and make a charge for it.

And put it into his ...

Into his oven. To his ovens, they always used to be warm. And it used to be matured, got matured there, and it was hot, and nice and brown, it used to come out nice and brown, and flavoury, and very very nice.

And it would be collected?

Collected by me or my brother.

After ...

Before, on the way back from Shul.

After Shabas?

No. Shabas. That was a Shabas meal, because you're not allowed to cook, or prepare on Shabas, any meals, cook meals.

Which meal are you talking about then?

Lunch.

Sorry, I thought you were talking about ... On the way home from Shul on Saturday,

Saturday, we would stop, we'd stop and bring the Cholent home. That is not every week, that is was to be occasionally, that used to be our favourite meal.

And your mother baked bread herself?

Bread, not very often, only in the winter when there was, when she wasn't so busy. You see, in winter time, there was more seasonable business, and there was not much business carried on at the time. She would do, occasionally her own doughnuts, in the winter, or do a bit of bread, home made bread, it's only because we sometimes fancied it, the home made bread. It wasn't that you couldn't get it, because you could get it because Radals, there used to be plenty of bakeries, and they were very very good bakeries.

What sort of bread, I can remember ...

Rye bread.

A very dark bread.

Rasavka, Rasavka. We used to call it Razavanan bread, that used to be black bread. That's like a wholemeal, or very wholemeal.

Let's take a typical day so far as your meals are concerned. You would get up in the morning, and you would have breakfast. What would your mother make you for breakfast?

We would have scrambled egg with bread and butter.

The eggs would come from where?

From the shops.

Your mother would buy eggs. So they didn't have any chickens?

No, no.

So, scrambled eggs.

Scrambled eggs, or scrambled eggs with onion, fried, fried onion and scrambled egg on top of it.

What would you have to drink?

Coffee, mostly, the most drink was coffee.

With milk?

With milk. And lunchtime, if we had a cooked meal.

On bread, with the bread for breakfast, you would have?

Bread and butter.

Cheese, jam, or anything?

Occasionally. No, if we had like scrambled egg, we would eat just scrambled egg with the bread and butter, about three or four slices, it all depends how hungry we were, as youngsters, we did eat.

What seasoning would she put on the egg?

Only salt, salt. A bit of salt.

So that's breakfast. What about, you wouldn't have any cereal?

No. Not when, no, while we were well, while we were well, we would not eat cereals in our homes. There used to be cracker oats, occasionally, but the only time was when a person wasn't well, so they would make a rice pudding, like, or semolina pudding. If you're not well, you couldn't take the, the heavy meals. Or chicken soup lunchtime, or for breakfast.

So, you came out of school at one o'clock, and you came home for lunch, didn't you?

For lunch, we always have lunchtime, we have cooked meal, because my father used to come home, he used to have his break.

What would you have for lunch, typically?

Potato with the gravy.

Boiled potatoes?

Boiled potatoes with the gravy, and have a soup beforehand as well. Always have a soup, like a barley soup, or there's, some other kind of bortsch, there was half a dozen different bortsch, used to be ...

Beetroot?

Betroot bortsch, or cherry bortsch.

Cherry bortsch?

Cherry bortsch. And we used to call Klein Bortsch, that was, used to be a special flour, a sour, made sour first, a flour, mixed with flour.

Flowers from the garden?

Not flowers, no, ground flour from wheat. And this used to be made, they used to season it with something, they used to put an ingredient, yeast put in there, and it used to make it sour, sourly, we used to call it sour bortsch. And it would be boiled again, with a marrowbone with it, and that would be our ... the soup. It all depends, if it was a dryish meal, dinner, then we eat the soup with the, next to it, like, with the potatoes with the gravy, and meat.

What sort of meat?

Red meat, mostly red meat, like not brisket, sometimes brisket, cheaper steaks, steak, or braised beef, beef for braising,

Eingendehft?

That's right, Eingendehft, as you call it! Its ...

And for sweet?

For a sweet, it used to be compote, apple compote, prune compote with prunes, all different compotes, whatever there was in season.

Your mother would cook that?

Yes. Because mostly used to be cooked things and eaten, what was seasonable. But not like here, you didn't see it all year round, fruit, there was no import on fruit.

And you had a drink at the end of the meal?

A lemon tea, lemon tea.

How would your mother make lemon tea?

Boiled water, boiled water. We would always have our little, what you call, teapot, on the side, it used to be brewed tea, cold, after she brewed up a pot of tea, and that would stand beside, always, all day long. And anybody want a lemon tea, she would boil up the water, put a bit of the essence, we used to call it essence tea, made into an essence, put a bit of the tea, and a slice of lemon in it.

So, that was your lunch, and what about an evening meal? Or what was the next meal, did you have tea?

Coffee, we had coffee occasionally.

What, about ...

About four o'clock.

Anything with it, a biscuit or anything?

Or a piece of cake, home made cake.

And then did you have another meal in the evening?

Not a cooked meal. There would be sandwiches, like, canapes, made up canapes, from cream cheese, with onion, or, bortsch.

Cold meat?

Yeh, cold meat, mostly worsht salami, would be sliced.

What time would that be?

That would be about 7 o'clock.

Was there any alcohol in the house?

There was alcohol, for father would have, before a meal, he would have a, one glass, of spirit. He always drink spirit, 96, 96 per cent!

So your main meal then, was lunch?

Lunch, lunchtime.

And would you say this was fairly typical?

Of every family, every family.

I mean, you're describing a family that lived quite well?

Yes, yes. Like, I would say, ordinary families, there had been, not around there, not very poor families. Or as it happens, the women were so good in their cooking and their management, they could make a meal very cheaply, a nice meal, very cheaply from anything they could pick up. The only thing is, they would not have much meat on the table.

Supposing you became ill, what, how would your mother look after you? Would there be a doctor at hand? Or a hospital?

A doctor would be called in, if you were very ill.

A Jewish doctor?

A private doctor, a Jewish or non-Jewish. As it happens, there, we did have a Jewish doctor. We did have one Jewish doctor.

He lived in the town?

In the town. As it happens, he moved, just, 1938, he got a Certificate to move into Israel. He moved into Israel, into Haifa.

So, was his surgery very far from your house?

About ten minutes walk.

So, if somebody was ill, let's say you had a fever or, and you were taken to bed ...

Then we would be put to bed, and looked after by my mother, she would make us, she would give us Disprins, sweat it out, try to sweat it out. We put something, let's say if you had a cold, she put something like Vick around your chest, or some on the shirt to make you breathe easy, and to get, to sweat it out. As it happens, I was once very very ill, I had pneumonia, I caught pneumonia, I was about nine years of age, and then we had a doctor, and that was expensive, very expensive illness for my parents.

Because I was like, touch and go, there was not, nothing special like antibiotic. They used to try to sweat you out in bed. I was six weeks ill.

And you were ...

In bed for six weeks, at home, in home. A very sad occasion because kept in the hospital, I can't remember when.

There was a hospital?

There was a hospital in the town. The thing is, it was very expensive, it was private, mostly it was private. I mean, the doctor, every visit used to come, we had to pay him privately. And as it happens, it was very very costly, it nearly broke my parents.

Did the, did your mother use any traditional remedies? Or did she just call the doctor, or did she just remember things that she'd been taught?

Yes, taught by her parents, like milk, boiled milk with honey for night. Some herbs, I can't remember, I can't remember. Sometimes, they used to go to the chemist and he would advise, he would advise what to take, to get. I mean, after my illness, after the pneumonia, to recuperate, I used to get, from dogs fat, dogs fat, it used to be sold in the chemist.

Dog's?

How do you spell that?

Fatty stuff, yes, fat. Like, melted down the fat of the dog, melt it down, extraordinary, people used to sell it to the chemist, and the chemist used to sell it to the public.

To do what with?

That used to be, let's say, lung. That used to be like a lung remedy, if your lungs were down, poor, not to catch tuberculosis, to avoid tuberculosis, or heal tuberculosis. It was known as the fattest fat going.

What would they do with the fat?

Now, my mother used to put it, let's say she give me dinner, mashed potatoes, she would put in a spoonful of that, and mash it in, instead of butter, or anything else, she would take that fat and put it, she would make the scrambled egg in that fat.

So it was thought to have a curing effect?

That's not kosher, as it happens, that's not kosher. But for health reasons, my mother do that. They do it, I mean, my mother would do anything for the child, and that has been, one of the cure, after my illness. And schooling in the one town, all in the one school.

From the age of five, you were living in Silesia, in this town, which I can't pronounce.

Siemianowitze.

And you were living in, just tell me about the sort of house you were living in?

The house was rented. We had the ground, on the ground floor, a shop. What used to be the grocery shop, and later years we added, first a grocery shop, and then it was converted into a fruit and vegetable.

Your father was still travelling around?

He was carrying, always with the same ...

With his horses, and storing potatoes?

Storing potatoes, yeh. Being a potato, mostly a potato merchant.

Your mother ran the grocery business, and then it became a greengrocer?

A greengrocer, yes.

So there was a shop, and a shop parlour, and upstairs?

No upstairs. There was, in one level, and there was a bedroom. A bedroom with a little, like a hole in the back there, for storage, which my mother used to keep for her domestic stuff.

And that was your home?

That was my home. No luxuries. No luxuries.

The bedroom at the back, and then the shop parlour where you lived?

That's right.

And then the shop?

That's right. The shop parlour was the kitchen, a big kitchen. We had a bed in there as well, in the corner, so the boys, us, we used to sleep in the bed, and the parents slept in the bedroom.

So, the parents slept in the bedroom, you slept in the ...

In the kitchen, yeh.

What was above?

Oh, there was two more storeys, storeys there. They used to have more tenants living there. There could be about eight tenants. Another eight tenants, and the landlord, he had a flat, own flat, like, also on the ground floor. A big flat, the cellar rooms.

And your father paid rent?

Yes.

And you stayed in this house from the time you moved?

That was the last five years, that was house, what I'm just describing, for the last five years, until the War broke out.

And this was a shop, in a street.

On the main street, the main street of the town. Only we used to be on the, on the end of the town, going towards, the Eastern side, I would say, going to Poland. I mean, I could cross through the fields, within twenty minutes, into the town where I was born.

Across the border?

No, that was already no borders there, that was Poland as well. From Silesia into Poland, that was from 1920, that was under Polish, Silesia, was under ...

So there were no restrictions?

No, not crossing there, at that time.

But the house that you were living in, the shop, was in, was in the main street, one of the main streets,

Yeh, of the town.

So, what were the other buildings, either side?

They were mostly four, five storey buildings.

The one immediately next door, was it a shop?

No, oh, next door, on the right of our shop. There was other buildings like, two storey, three storey buildings, to the rest of the street. Opposite, we had two, opposite we had two timber yards, owned by two Jewish men, years ago they used to be partners, and they separated and then divided the place into two separate stores. They run two separate stores.

What would these shops sell, around you?

We had a, also, a grocery shop, fruit and vegetable, a bakery, then there used to be just a few houses, just living accommodation.

What about clothes shops, were there any?

More central, in the centre of the town.

That's where you ...

That's the Western part of the town, the part, there was one road with two names on the road. One used to be called the Wanda, the other part used to be Bitomska. That Bitomska, used to named after Bitom Boyten, used to be in Germany. From there, I should say, about ten kilometres away from us, was the new German border.

So, if your mother wanted to buy you ...

No, she would not buy in the same town. She would go to Poland, where we were born, not where we were born, used to be Bendzin, was a real Jewish community there, a big Jewish community. A population of about 45,000, and they mostly, I would say, about 43,000 were Jewish people, in the town, and they were all merchants. They used to manufacture suits, off the peg, you could go there. Most of the Silesian people, the working class, would go there, to Bendzin, to the Jewish town, to get their clothing. Clothing, linen shops, curtaining shops, they could do a bit of baiting as well there. There was no baiting in the town where I was living.

No fixed price.

Fixed price, German way of doing it.

So, do you remember, was there a market?

There was a market as well, I believe, twice a week.

And I suppose,

There was a square, a square, and there used to be a big market with stalls. Fruit, live chicken, livestock, all sorts of livestock, except like large animals was not sold, like cows and horses, that was not sold there. No, not cattle. Only, just chickens, geese, ducks, fish, live fish.

What was the atmosphere of the market?

Oh, it was busy. Always market, the market was always a busy market. Used to be always cheaper than a shop, they could always compete with a shop.

And your mother and father used to buy, and you used to buy?

That's right. We used to go around, my mother used to go out and buy things up, for the weekend.

What happened if you hadn't paid your rent?

Oh, that was strict. You could get evicted. If we didn't pay one, we got two weeks it was time, so it was up to the landlord, he knew who he has got, who he is dealing with. He knew the person will pay. If he wouldn't pay, I don't think he would take us to court, not, for now, we got two, if you could see, or we could see we couldn't pay, what the case was, there was always money to be put away for rent. As it happens, it was very strict, and they would evict you.

Without notice?

Without notice. No. They would give you notice. Within a week - out.

And did that happen very often?

It happened to people, yes. It happened to people.

Is there, was there a Court, you mentioned a Court.

There used to be a Magistrates Court in the town, a small.

What, for criminals?

Yeh, for small offences, if the police was to summons somebody, they might have to, the bigger Court was the next town.

So, on the criminal side, were there police patrolling the streets?

Yes, we had those, we had a Police Station. As it happens, there were two Police Stations, but the town also was parted, Shiminevitza and Arola, they used to call it, a part where ...

Can you spell that?

Arola? L A U R A H U T A Laura-Huta.

And what does that mean?

Furnaces, used to be like foundries.

Foundries.

Foundry, yes. Laura used to be the name that build that thing, Laura, the name of that man who would build that foundry, and they used to call the name of the man in the foundry, Laura. It's never been changed from German.

So there was a Police Station. And if somebody did something, stole something, or ...

Oh, they used to be pulled in, turned round the thing, and they would put it, make a court case out of it.

What about civil cases? Supposing somebody owed your father some money?

Yeh, they would take a solicitor, there were solicitors in town. They would take a solicitor, and the solicitor would take you to court.

And there was a Court in the town?

As I said, bigger court cases, did involve, what you call solicitors, would go into the next town, Katowice, that used to be the big, next town.

So, what ...

I left school 1936, '37, something like that. The elementary school, then it comes to the end, when the last class finished, I was about fifteen.

And then, what did your father say?

My father, it was his intention to teach us a trade. None of his family had a trade, from my father's side. None of them had any trade. My father did have a bit of a trade, he, a smith, a blacksmith, a blacksmith, that's right. He had a bit of training of that. He never done that, he never involved himself with this. But us, he said, he could see what's happening in Germany, 1933, Hitler, he's got big ambitions, he was going to take over, our part, he was claiming our Silesia back. He was claiming Pommel they call it, a corridor to Dansk, to Danzig, the corridor, he was claiming a corridor, he wanted a corridor, so he don't have to pay any, what you call duty, on the crossing to Danzig, in Ost Prussia. Ost Prussia was really parted away from Germany, through Poland, used to cut it through. And we seen the anti-Semitism, and we seen the ...

We'll come to the anti-Semitism ...

Growing in Germany very very strong, and it was growing in Poland. It has been pogroms, bonshin, there used to be outbreaks of pogroms, the Poles, it was quite, and even, even in the Parliament, you've seen, we had outbreaks of, voiced theirselves with anti-Semitic things. Like, for instance, they used to try to want to boycott the Jews, the shops, and one Minister got up, he said, "Boycotting is legal, violence not." So, we didn't like that either, because we heard what's going on in Germany. They started boycotting since Hitler come to power, the Jewish shops. My father see the danger of it, so he took my brother first, when he left school, he put him into carpentry, he served apprenticeship as cabinet making, and when he passed ...

End of FIO44 Side A

FIO44 Side B

I was speaking about Germany wasn't I?

So, we're talking about ...

After leaving school.

And your father decided to make you have a trade.

Teach us a trade so that we can be self-supporting if we, to go to Israel, as it happens. He was, and when we were close, closer, when my brother finished his apprenticeship, I had another year to go to finish my apprenticeship, but we were already booked to go to Israel. It wasn't legal at the time, because we couldn't go legally so easily out of Poland, so we joined the Betar Movement, it used to be what they call it today, I still, Betar, it was the Youth Movement from the Revisionist Section, they used to call the Revisionists.

What does that mean?

Revisionists? Zaborinski's Organisation. That was the Likud. What they call now the Likud, with Menachin Begin. So we joined to go, and I wasn't quite finished when we had orders to get together, to go to Warsaw.

What year was this?

1939, about eight weeks before the War broke out. And we left, my brother and I, we left with our rucksack, with the most essential things, for the journey, prepared.

Can I just stop you there. Take you back, this is, let's get this chronologically if we can. You left school at 15, and this was in about 1937?

'36, I left about '36.

And your father sent you to be apprenticed to become ...

An electrician.

Where did you go to do that?

I served my apprenticeship in Katowice.

In a?

In a private electrical installer, contractor.

And you were there for?

I was there for about two years, already serving my apprentice.

Up to ...

2 years, two and a half years, something like that. Till 1939.

So, during that time, you learnt your trade.

I learnt my trade.

Did you take any exams?

No, I couldn't take, while we are learning the trade, we are also attempting, once a week, evening, what you call once a week, in the afternoon, schooling, (INAUDIBLE) about the trades.

And then you worked in this electrical installer.

Yes.

And they would send you to shops and houses to work?

Well, I used to work with what you call, a qualified electrician, and, yeh, in private houses, buildings.

And were you paid?

Very very little. When I first started, I received no money. After the first year, the governor give us a little bit of an incentive, let's say, like 50 pence a week, maybe not even that.

While you were learning?

While we were learning, after the first year.

Was it a big firm?

No, he had about twelve electricians, twelve electricians. About five qualified, and five learners.

Did everybody, did most people in the town have electrical supply in their houses?

In Silesia, yes. yes. In Silesia, especially in Katowice, we had a nice then, with modern equipment, they already had toasters then, they had electric irons.

How far away from Katowice were you?

About 7 kilometres.

Katowice was a main, a large town?

Yes, that was the county town, like, you would say, here it was Chelmsford, of Essex, the main town of Essex is Chelmsford here, isn't it. And there it was Katowicze.

And it had a large population?

It was a county like here, Silesia, Shlosk, like here, Essex.

What was the main industry in the town?

In the town, there was the coal mines. The coal mines, that was the most people would be employed in the coal mines, and in the foundries.

The iron foundries?

The iron foundries.

Was there a large Jewish population in Katowice?

In Katowice, probably had about 10,000 Jewish population, 10,000. This was a town, with over 100,000 people.

And that's where you served your apprenticeship?

Yes.

So, you were then growing up, you were 16, 17. Did you still go to this Jewish Club?

Oh yes, we used to join this Club. As it happens, I had to, the last year or so, I joined the Betar, because to go with them, I had to be a member of the Betar Movement.

How did it come about, that you, this question of going to Israel arose?

Through visualising the outbreaks of anti-Semitism, in the threat of Germany, Hitler's, Hitler's Germany. We had seen them, people being evicted from Austria, we'd seen people from Germany, like Polish, they hadn't had no German citizens, they were the first ones to be evicted under Hitler.

So, you, did you experience any anti-Semitism yourself, or is it just that you read about it happening elsewhere?

We read about it, we heard it on the radio, and there were already, in our town, German organisations, like Hitler Movements, they were quite freely there. And there was also an anti-Semitic Movement, a Polish anti-Semitic Movement as well. A Fascist movement.

And how did this affect your father?

My father, he has not affect him at the time, at all. We hadn't been started in our town.

There weren't many Jews in your town?

No. No. No. Katowice, in Katowice, the Jewish people have had much of anti-Semitic experiences, they had experiences, or not to be alarmed about it.

So, the fact that your father was concerned about Hitler, flows from what he read about him, and what he saw on the cinema, newspapers?

Newspapers, and people coming over.

Coming over from?

From Germany.

And so, did your father speak to you about this?

Oh yes, we often discussed the thing. He was very concerned because of us, the young, he didn't want our children, like his children, to grow up and suffer this anti-Semitism, or what else might come forward.

He thought it would get worse?

He thought it was going to get worse, he visualise it is going to get worse. And so did others, so did everybody else.

So you then decided, or he decided for you, that you and your brother should go to Israel?

Yes. And we were quite, willing, to go, it was quite an adventure for us to go.

And was it because of this that you joined this Betar Movement?

Yes.

Now, tell me about the Betar Movement?

The Betar Movement was, what they used to call it, a Revisionist Movement, established through Zaborotinsky. First, Zaborotinsky was the head man of that movement.

What was the philosophy?

The philosophy was to have a State on your own. And he, and we would not get, he knew that we would not get it without shedding blood, so we should be prepared to take up arms.

And did you agree with those sentiments?

We could see, yeh, we could see there's no other way to obtain it. Because there was another, the Zionist Movement, which always took a passive line, in establishing a Jewish State, although it was not happening. The Jewish were also attacked by the Arabs, before the War. At the time, especially when anybody illegally used to come. They used to wait for those transport trucks, to have a shot at them.

So, when you were 16, or 17, and 18, were you, it sounds as though you were politically conscious.

Of getting out, yeh, of the events.

And did you go along with this idea of Zabolinsky's, that it was necessary to take an active ...

Part, yes. We have to be organised. We have to be organised, and there was no other, there were other Organisations, mostly they were Left-wingers, Left-Wingers, like Gordonia, I don't know if you've ever heard of it. There was Gordonia, Hashomer, Hatzair, Hamizrachi.

This is all in?

In Poland. Oh, there was about a dozen, as many Organisations as you've got now, in Israel, there were in Poland. And they all had a different way of going.

But the Revisionist one was perhaps the most extreme?

The most extreme, yeh.

And did you decide to join them on your own, or was it your father who ...

No. To join them first, was, there was only one Organisation what could take you to Israel illegally. Because going legally, there was a quota. The English give a quota, a Certificate Quota, you had to go to Haphshara, and you've heard of Haphshara?

No.

You had to go to in, like a Kibbutz, in Poland, learn Hebrew, learn agriculture, you had to spend a year or two years, I'm not quite sure. After you spent those two years, you were entitled to a Certificate, and they used to choose, after the Haphshara, they were entitled, those people, to get a Certificate, through, even that, they had to take their turn. Pass their exam in Hebrew, and the agriculture, and then they would put them forward for their Certificate.

So in order to get there quickly, you had to join an illegal ...

I had to join the illegal Organisation, otherwise I wouldn't have no preference of going there, either. Because they wanted to have their men a bit trained. And we had been training a little bit, what you call, military.

How were you trained?

Without any arms, or anything like that. We used to train, like discipline. Discipline and what you call, like, must (inaud), that is trainings, of normal army trainings. Marching, sport, certain sport what they do.

This was in the Betar Movement.

The Betar Movement.

How many were in the Betar Movement from your town?

There was about 20, 20 boys.

All young Jewish boys?

Yeh.

Any girls?

And girls as well, and girls. Let's say the family were more inclined to be more in the side of the Revisionists, the children would join automatically, and the youth movement of the Organisation.

So, it was your father, was it, who was more radical perhaps, than many of his ...

Yes, yes, he was.

He was interested in political matters?

He never involved himself in political things. He had this, what you call, he supported that Movement. Because that Movement's the only Movement, I think, people know, it's not a pleasant thing to take up arms, but they have to take up arms if it's necessary. It wasn't told, I wasn't told I would be going to fight the British or anything.

So you were working during the day as an electrician, and in the evenings, you were, sometimes you were involved with this Betar Movement,

We learned a bit of Hebrew as well, there, Hebrew, Modern Hebrew, at the same time.

What sort of social life did you lead, apart from that? Did you have girlfriends?

Yes. I mean, we used to join the Youth Movement, we used to go together, it was like any other youngsters, you, what you call, you flirt with the girls. Nothing serious. Never involved myself seriously, no thoughts about marriage, or anything like that, not in those years. Especially, I was seventeen and a half, 18, people never talked, in Poland, of getting married, until they'd served their Army, what you call, prescription, they was called up, and they were called up, the Poles, they called up about 21, 21 of the age, and most of the people never dreamed of getting married before they were called up, because it take two years till you'd served your duties. We used to go, we used to socialise with boys and girls, used to go on outings together. Meet other Clubs from different towns.

Mainly Jewish people, or non-Jewish?

Jewish people, they used to keep together.

Cos there was no, not much assimilation between ...

No, never had much of that. Never had much of that.

But, nevertheless, you didn't experience much direct anti-Semitism yourself?

Yes. I mean, I'd be called names, but we ignored it.

Did you have any experience with the Hitler Youth?

They have not attacked us there, in the town. They were existing, the Youth Movement, but they have never attacked us. We did go out, occasionally, and had, what you call, meetings, public meetings, and they were confronted by anti, anti-Hitlerites, like, there used to be in the town, old Movements what used to revolt against Germany, for Poland. Polish patriots, Silesians being Polish patriots.

Was your father discriminated against? I mean, were any laws passed which restricted him from doing anything?

No. No, there was no such a thing. As long as he could run the business, there was no stopping. He had to be registered and everything, there was no restrictions for him. No different restrictions than any Polish man, then.

How did the non-Jewish people treat him?

He, my father had a lot of good friends, non-Christians, in the street, in the custom, he used to be loved by, loved by the population. As it happens, as I say, those towns were not very big to get anybody to know.

So your memory, just to sum this up, just tell me if this is right. Up to the outbreak, up to 1939, you were increasingly worried about Hitler, and the outbreak of anti-Semitism,

In what's, in what's going in the future to be.

What's going to happen in the future? But mainly, from what you heard, it happened to other people outside?

In Germany, and also in Poland, there used to be certain people. There used to be certain pogroms, and anti-Semitic, they used to only wait for something, to have our, to have a, what you call a pogrom.

But you don't have any personal experiences?

No. No.

Nevertheless, you decide, or your father decides for you, that you must go to, you must go to Palestine.

Palestine, it was Palestine at the time.

So, then, just tell me, how this, how this affected your life, from then, up to the outbreak of War?

As I say, I carried on my, I carried on my apprenticeship, and waited for our turn, our transport to go.

Your illegal transport?

Illegal transport to go.

And when did that happen?

It happened 1939, August time. Then the War was ...

Just before the War broke out.

The War broke out in September, isn't it. So it must have been the beginning, just before August, when I went on the transport. Because I went on ...

Just tell me first of all, how did you hear that your name had come up?

They sent us a letter from Warsaw.

The Betar?

The Betar. Jhabotinsky's Organisation.

And what did the letter say?

It said that, on so and so date, would you come to Warsaw to, there was a Jewish University building, where it was holiday times, and it was free, and they let us use it

for the gathering together. And there was boys coming from all over Poland there. There was a group of 1100 boys, no girls in it, no girls amongst them.

So, you got a letter asking you to go?

To assemble, for Warsaw, to come to this thing.

And what did your mother say when you got this letter?

She made, she give us also our list of preparations, what to take for food, in case we are stranded on our boat for a month or so, so I used to prepare, all, special dried biscuits, dried biscuits, salami, food we can store for a long time without fridges, or keeping it on ice.

This is you and your brother?

And my brother. And a blanket each.

What notice were you given?

A week, to prepare.

And what did your mother and father think about it?

They were very sad. In one way they were happy we were going, in the second thing, they were very miserable and unhappy to, to leave us, to leave the home. We had a very very lovable home. I mean, it was very attached to each other. A happy home life.

What did they think about themselves, though?

They were hoping, us going there, we get legalised, and be able to send for them.

So, at the end of the ...

Also, they would have made the same way, maybe differently.

After the, when the time came for you to go, you said goodbye to all your family?

The family came round to say goodbye.

Were they pleased for you?

Oh yes, they wished us luck, give us small little presents on the way, some give us pens, you know, writing pen, or all sorts of little, small presents, what we could take, in other words.

Had any other members of your family done this journey before you?

Yes, we had a cousin. He done this journey a year ago. As it happens, that's why we hung on a bit, for him to write to us to tell us how to really prepare ourself for the journey. It was a cousin of my father.

So you then said goodbye to your family, your mother and father.

And we went to Warsaw.

By train?

By train, yes. From Katowice into Warsaw. And we went into the building, into the University, used to call Jewish House of Academics.

Oh yes, it was a Jewish University?

Yes, the Jewish House of Academics, they named it.

And then you were met by?

By, he was there, Menachem Begin,he was there, Menachem Begin was there. He was the, he was going with us. He was the last really, transport getting out from there. He was, he thought that might be the last transport. He visualised, he'd seen it.

How old was he at that time?

He was about 27 years of age. He was a young man, a solicitor. He was a solicitor from his profession.

Was he, he was in charge of the ...

He was the Head of the Betar Movement. Jhabotinsky was the Head of Brit-Chayal, Brit-Chayal they used to call it, the grown ups, the Revisionist organisation, and our Movement was the Bettar, the Youth Movement was the Betar, and that was going up to 20 odd, and ...

And Ben,

And Begin.

Begin was the Head of.?

Was the Head, and a few more what were involved in the Organisation, Heads, were with him, were there with him. We had one doctor.

What sort of man was he, I mean, you obviously spoke to him?

He was a very charming man, very nice and good behaved man. You could have a discussion with him, you could ask him questions and he would, in a civilised

manner, answer you. He was no great, grace with him, he would sit down and talk and listen to all the complaints or anything.

So how long were you staying in this ...

A week, we had a week.

And then what happened?

And then one evening, we went to the Warsaw Station, on the transport, to, going through Rumania. We had Visas made for the, called Transit Visas, not ordinary visas, they used to only give us Transit Visas. In the post, then, they put down, on that visa, once we leave the country, we've got no right to come back any more, they disowned us, in other words.

So you got on the train?

We got on the train, we made our way, we went up to Schnuttings. Schnuttings was the station there, and we stopped there.

How far away from Warsaw?

That was, that took us overnight, overnight, the whole journey. We got there, it was nearly lunch time.

All of you boys?

The boys. We got to the, that was near the border, not far off the border.

With Begin?

With Begin. And we stayed there. And the border, the border guards would not let us through. They stopped the whole train, and after, they made us get out from the wagons, the railway master told us to get out, they can't take us no more, no further, until we get the permission to go. And as it happens, where we stopped there, we had to, we camped out in the fields. We camped out, we made, we had blankets, everybody had a blanket.

In August?

Yes, it was a very hot summer at the time. Very nice, the weather was good, and we camped out. We'd been out there for about three nights, on the fields, camped, with a blanket underneath, and a blanket on top. As it happens, it was already harvest. They had, what you call, corn on the cob, big shoots, so we gathered the things, as a mattress, and put the blankets on top, or underneath, on top of the things, and a blanket over the top. My brother and I we were together, we lied under the blankets until, for three nights. Till all of a sudden, we felt a storm coming up. It was starting a storm, so we said, "We've got to get out from here", cos otherwise we do not know how long we can be still cooped up there. And they took us to the nearest town.

Who took you? The train?

Begin. Begin. And we walked that night, it was at night, of a thunderstorm, it was not rain yet, oh, it was, you could see thunder and lightning, and it's going, and you knew we were going to have a downpour. So we all marched ...

How many?

1100 men. We went into Schnuttings. We, I don't know how they organised, I don't know how they got organised, and we went into a cinema hall, and we lied, we camped in the cinema, the whole lot, together. We started going out, we met the people from the town, the Jewish people, they organised straw for us.

What was the name of this town?

Schnutting. And we ...

Was it near the border?

Near the border, and we camped out there, and we spent nearly six weeks there. Six weeks, in that town, and we just couldn't do it. We had a visit from Jhabotinski's son there. He come from Israel, he made a trip there, he come there, he spoke to us, and also, the transport was organised for the ships, I don't know if this is familiar to you, Stafsky, the name Stafsky, he was, he was the one who was getting the illegal boats.

St,

Yes, S T A F S K Y.

He was in charge of the boat?

He was in charge of the boat.

Yes. Going from which port?

From Constanz, Constanz in Rumania. We were supposed to go to Constanz.

You couldn't get to Constanz?

The Rumanians wouldn't let us in. I don't know myself, the reason why. The only person that I have never found out. The person who would know is Menachem Begin, or, he might know, he might still also not know.

End of FIO44 Side B

FIO45 Side A

So, you were in this cinema for six weeks.

Six weeks.

And the Rumanians wouldn't allow you 1100 young men, to get to the Port of Constanz, where this chap had organised some boats to take you to Israel.

Yes. He had a boat already stood by.

And Begin couldn't do anything about it?

No. So he told us, he had a speech to us, he said, "We'll have to all go back home and they shall organise it through a different country", hoping that the Hungarians would let us through. So he give us back the passports, no, he hold onto the passports, for organising our different transit, and most of us went back, there was only a few were behind, some were already by themselves,

Tried to get through?

Yeh. And they said, "I've got nothing to go home for", and they stopped there and they made their smuggling themselves, on their own, they had some money, they had some money, sufficient money like, on them, and they made, to get across the border Rumania, and they made their way up to Constanz, to be able to get. As it happens, if we would have stopped there another two weeks, we could have all got through. Yeh. Because they opened the border, because the War broke out, so the Rumanians opened the border for refugees to cross. Anybody wanted to cross the border, they were allowed.

You went back home?

We went back home.

And you, your mother and father...

When I went back home, I had operation on my tonsils.

Your mother and father must have been surprised to see you?

Yes. Surprised. We spoke to them sometimes, on the phone, and we wrote letters, what's happening there. They are pleased to see us and not pleased. They were pleased to see us, they hadn't seen us for six weeks, away from home, we'd never been away for that long from our home, we never went on holidays much.

So, you got home, this was in September?

It was about September.

The War...

September, broke up the first, isn't it? Yeh, on the 1st of September, the War broke out. England proclaimed War on the 3rd. On the 3rd. We went home, I had an operation on my tonsils, and on the Friday, I had the operation and gone home, I was not in the hospital or anything like that, and the War broke out on Friday morning, they started shooting over from Germany, we heard it, right across. The Germans rode around already, what lived there, the Nazis and the Hitler Youth Movement, they drove around on trucks, already. Poland was still Poland, and the Polish Army was still there, although they already show their faces out in the open, and there used to be skirmishes with the Polish Revolutionaries, were from the old Revolutionaries, and the Police used to arrest them, and they used to commit what you call "violent actions" against them as well, they took the law into their own hands, the Police, and the civilians, against the Germans. Or, we decided we're not stopping in this town, as threekilometres where we were born, there was more Jews, a larger Jewish population, and it was Poland, it was not already Germany, we never had Germans there, like nationals. So my father, we load up on the wagons, the railway wagons, all the goods.

This was just after the War was started?

Yeh. Most important was like, bedding, kitchen utensils, the rest, we left everything behind, the furniture, there was no room for them on the thing,

On the railway truck?

On the railway, not the railway truck like at the platform, but like horse drawn platform, a road wagon, we used to call it a road wagon.

What is that?

That's a flat, flat platform, like we would say a, a ...

This was a cart?

A cart, a horse drawn cart, with a large platform.

And so your father loaded up what he could on this cart.

What he could, to get into the next town to us. We had to go, close up the shop and go. While he was doing it, while we was doing it, my father had personal message from the Police, delivered, a notice to deliver the horse and cart and him personally accompany it, accompany the horse and wagon. If he doesn't do that within something, they give him three hours, be like a, he'd be sentence, he can be sentenced to be shot, or something like that, to a Tribunal, a War Tribunal, you see, a War Tribunal for not fulfilling the orders.

This was the Germans?

No, Polish orders, because they wanted the truck, the wagon, for their documents, the police used, he went with the police, police transport, what had all the documents they took, they stored.

They needed to requisition transport?

Requisition transport, yeh.

Your father didn't obey this?

He did. He was afraid they, he might be sentenced to a harsh sentence. So, he still had three hours, and he took the whole lot and us, and he left us with families there.

Still in your house?

No. He went back with the wagon to the Police Station, we hadn't seen each other for about three months. We haven't seen our father for about three months.

Now, let's get this straight, you were in your house, loading up your wagon, and the Police sent a message that they wanted the wagon with your father.

For father.

You then unloaded the wagon, and you stayed in your house?

No. We took the wagon, with the goods, as it was loaded, to the next town three kilometres away, unloaded.

What was the name of that town?

Czeladz.

So you went into Czeladz, you unloaded your goods, your father went back ...

Back to the Police.

With his truck?

With his truck. We haven't seen each other then, for three months.

You didn't see your father for three months after that?

After that. We, about, coming Sunday ...

In Czeladz?

In Czeladz.

Where did you stay in Czeladz?

My grandmother. My grandmother's family, my grandmother was in London at the time. Yeh, my grandmother died in London.

So you stayed with your family, your grandmother's, in Czeladz, for how long?

Till Sunday morning, early morning. We stayed in, all the Polish people, especially those what used to be in the 1920 Revolution, they were very frightened, scared from the Germans, because they were traitors to them, and they never, they didn't, when they got caught, they didn't undergo any, they would be roughly treated, concentration camps, God knows what there would have been. I don't know what's happened to a lot of them, I know they were very very frightened, they run for their lives, like all the Jews, they used to, and we used to start escaping. On Sunday morning, we started escaping with those people, crossing our town, we seen them coming from Silesia.

By foot?

By foot. We went up to Bendzin, the next town.

You and your brother, and your mother?

My mother, and there was another family, an uncle of mine, with his wife, they got there to Czeladz as well, also from Silesia, he had a tailoring place in Silesia, and he come around there as well, and we all went to Bendzin, and we stayed a half a day, and that's where we experienced the first bombing. The first bomb, they dropped a bomb in our factory there.

Just stop there for a moment. You said you didn't see your father for three months after he took the horse and cart back. What happened to him in that three months? Did he tell you?

Yes. Yes. He told us. He was going on with the transport with them, till about, about 150 kilometres.

He rode ...

The horse and cart, under the instruction of the Police, the Police were with him as well, policemen they were running away as well. 150 kilometres was a convoy with them, a whole convoy.

Loaded up?

With their goods, yeh. When he seen they, after 150 kilometres that the Polish Army, they getting bitten, he was worried about us. So one night, he undone one horse, from the transport, when they were resting, while they were resting and sleeping, and my father undone one horse, and rode all the way back home.

To?

To Czeladz back.

Where you were staying.

Yeh. Well, we were not there any more. We run, evacuated, on foot, the whole family, my mother, my brother, and about three close families with their husbands with their wives.

To where?

We were going more to the East. We didn't know where we were going.

So your father went to Czeladz to try and find you, having escaped from ...

Yeh, well, when he got there, we were not there any more.

What did he do?

He, he was staying with an aunt of mine, my mother's sister.

For how long was he there?

He was there for about nearly three months. My mother gone back, from the Russians. We walked for about three weeks. We, the escape lasted three weeks.

You went on a walk?

Yeh.

Eastwards?

Eastwards.

From which town?

From Bendzin, Czeladz, Bendzin.

For three weeks you walked ...

To the River Bug, if it's any ...
The river? How do you spell that?

B U G.

That took you three weeks.

Yes.

You're still in Poland?

That was still under, with the Polish Forces, we went together.

You and your brother, and your mother, and some other families as well?

Yes. One family couldn't go, one of the husbands got a pain in his knee, and he couldn't walk any more, so there was no chance of him going any further. He had to stop behind, he stopped behind, he went back. And that is the thing, that was probably not very far away from Poland, we probably made about 50 kilometres when that happened to him, and they went back to Czeladz.

You and your mother, you walked during the daytime?

Daytime, some nights, some in the nights.

And you slept?

Rough, on, on, on grass, in huts, in what you call barns.

How many of you were in this ...

Group? The group was about, about 11 or 12, together.

But there were many people walking in the same direction?

Oh yes. Only one direction, main roads. You could only walk main roads, because otherwise you'd never find your way anywhere.

Why do you say that? Main roads?

Pardon?

Oh, main roads, I thought you said minor. You were walking along main roads, always East. Where were you hoping to get to?

Through towards the Russian Border.

You wanted to get to Russia?

To the Russian border, away from the Germans.

You eventually got to this river?

Yeh, the River, as we crossed the river, we got through the river already, on a raft, a boat, a raft, boat.

A ferry?

A ferry, there used to be a boat with about 15 people at a time. And they had a, yes, we pay them something. And they used to have a rope across so they could go across, because otherwise they would go against the tide. They going, the tide would have take you their way.

So you crossed the river, and you were still going towards Russia?

That was towards Russia. As we crossed the river, there was a priest, a Russian priest, come to us from the village there, come up to us, and he said, "I have been listening to the radio, and don't go any further, don't exhaust yourself any more, as the Russians, up to that part of the River Bug, they made a pact, Russia and Germany, that they take that part of Poland, and the Germans take up to that part of the river." "So", he said, "you don't have to worry about, we're going to have the Russians here, up to that river. So don't go." We didn't, we stopped there, a family took us, let us stay there in a room, we all packed in a room, tight, he let us stay there, and a Christian person give us a room, a bigger room, and we stayed there for about two weeks in that village. As it happens, it was Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur when we stayed there. It came Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and we had a, what you call a Minyan in our room, and we celebrated like the fasting thing. We didn't have to fast because we were already fasting enough.

You were short of food?

Oh, all the way, all the three weeks, there was rough, rough going. Days when we didn't have anything to eat, and days we just lived on anything picked up from the fields, like beet, what you call what they feed cows and things, these big red things, sugar beet, sugar beet, sometimes potatoes, we have made a fire somewhere and cooked. I got hold of a chicken running about somewhere, I killed it, without a Shochet!

And you were worried about your father?

Yes. We worried about him. As I say, we didn't know for about three weeks, till we got to the, when we got to that time, after resting two weeks, we say, we can't get no news here. We wouldn't get any news because it's a village, we wouldn't get any news what's happening to our people in Poland, left behind. So we made our way to a big town, Kovel, to a railway station, and we took a train ...

What's the name of this town?

Kovel.

How do you spell that?

K O V E L.

This is on the ...

That was already on the, we with the Russians, already the Russians occupied there.

The river?

Yeh. The Russians, that was something. There is a lot of things to say about that. They, the Germans crossed it as well, they're not supposed to come there. Or, they crossed into a little town, and we were in the village, and we heard what was going on, and they crossed it, into a little town there, and they told the public to make a welcome tower, to build a tower, a tower, a big welcome for the Russians, to welcome them. Some people, especially the Jewish people, were very pleased they were not having the Germans there. So they build a tower to welcome the Russians, meanwhile, the Germans pulled back, across back to the river, over the other side of the river, and they left, the town was without any, any country. Like ...

It didn't belong to anyone?

It don't belong to anyone, but there were no law, nothing. And this post, the Poles, some of the Poles, they didn't want to stop with the Russians, they didn't like the Russians either. So, they didn't like the Russians either. So when the Poles come, they seen this welcome the Russians, they used to ask who built those things, and they used to take out those people, what, there were certain anti-Semitic people, and they used to point the finger at those people, and they used to take those people, and shoot them. Some of those people were involved in building the tower.

Why did the Russians, why did the Germans want the tower built for the Russians?

To welcome, because they said they not going to be occupying this.

So it was a goodwill ...

It was a goodwill gesture to build the tower for them, because they were, at the moment, they made friends. I mean, the Germans, and the Russians, they made friends, they occupied one part.

This was a very very extraordinary coincidence.

That's right, that happened not only in this town, it happened in other towns like it as well.

Just at the very time that you were crossing the river, a Priest came to tell you that the river had become ...

A border town, a boundary between those two countries.

So you didn't need to go further?

Further, because it has not been.

So you stayed in this village. What was the name? Can you remember the name?

No, I can't. I know the next town, about 15 kilometres away, it was called Lubomil.

Lubomil. Okay, so you stayed there in Lubomil, and eventually the Russians came?

Yes, the, about two or three days time, they come in.

And what happened then? I mean, you were pleased to see them?

Yeh. And then there was another shooting going on. Those who pointed the finger, who built the tower, and other public pointed out fingers, who pointed the fingers, you see, and there was another shooting going on, a massacre there, in the town.

Were many people killed?

Yes, quite a few, about a couple of hundred.

Because, let me get this straight. Originally, the Poles who didn't want the Russians to come, attacked ...

The soldiers, yeh.

And killed the people who put up the tower?

That's right. The temper, the officers, their temper, for doing this, they really beat, they called themselves not really beaten properly, and they already welcomed the other, the other nation.

So they thought the people who put the tower up were traitors?

Yes. They probably had what you call communist views, they have communist mostly, socialist, socialist. Because communist wasn't legal in Poland before the War.

But when the Russians came, then the ones who had attacked the people who put up the tower, were themselves attacked?

Attacked afterwards. It was going on ...

So how did you, you were still ...

Put ...

You were still a young man, a boy?

I was 18.

How did the Russians strike you?

They were very friendly. The first lot come in, they were very friendly to all. And they were not organised, they would not organise things. If the population didn't organise themselves, the town population or anything, they would not help a lot, they were very very disorganised.

But it was the Army that came?

Yeh, the Russian Army. They were friendly to the people, you seen a lot of Jewish men in the Russian forces, and they, in the Shul, on Yom Kippur, they come and visit us in the village there, and they come in there, and see us praying, the Jewish men, and we used to ask them some questions about the Jewish people, what kind of a life they lead there, have they got a religious life? Do they let them, are they letting them practice the Jewish religion? So, some of them, they used to say they were already Communist there, the first lots there, the first years, I mean, that was only about 20 years since Communism existed. And they say, "Yes, you can practice religion. If God gives you anything, well and good." For prayer, you could pray all day long if God give you something to live on. And he said you can practice, they make jokes out of it.

On the other side of the river were the Germans?

The Germans. They, they what you call, they advance, the advancing forces, the advancing force of the German, they are very very rough. They committed terrible atrocities on the way.

Up to the ...

Yeh, up to the, yeh, on occupied, when they started occupying from the beginning.

Things that you heard of, that other people say ... Up to this moment, you have no personal experience of the Germans?

Of the Germans, that's right, I was, what you call, evacuee.

And your mother?

And those that were left behind they experience all the rough treatment of the Germans, they are advancing forces, not very, they, on bridges, they used to drown people, Jews, they used to throw them over the rivers and drown them. They also used to, Bendzin, when they entered Bendzin, a lot of the Jewish, religious people, they run into, in Bendzin, they run into a Synagogue, and the Germans, they surrounded the Synagogue, and anybody, they set alight to the Synagogue, they set alight the Synagogue, and there was a lot of people there, and anybody coming out from the Synagogue, they used to shoot them. Shot dead. I don't know if you've read any of the Memoirs, certain books, there are certain books will tell you, because on this Sternberg thing, there was a man, what told about the story, about the Bendzin story, because that was terrible, setting that place alight with people in it, and anybody tried to get out from the fire, used to run into a bullet.

Where was your father?

In Czeladz. No, no, at the time, he was still on his way there, with, I mean, it took him probably, it was over a week away from us, over a week when he's decided he's not going to go with them any further, with the Police.

But he was, by this time, he was living there, under German occupation?

Under German Occupation, already he was. He made his way, he's told me how he managed to cross from the Poland into Germany, when they went forward. He made himself, he sit down like a child, without, like a backward child would be, he played in the sand, he said, he was playing in the sand, didn't take no notice what the Germans do, if anybody spoke to him, he give a different answer altogether. He made himself simple. Simple. Once they gone through, he picked up the horse and rode back, further back, until he found his way back into Czeladz.

Yes. Did he eventually cross the river to rejoin you? You were now in the Russian part.

Well, we were in the Russian part, we were three months. We left on the very very bad conditions. There was about 16 or 18 people in a room, oh, what you call evacuees.

Talk about your father for the moment.

He was in Poland. As I say, we were in that room, and all of a sudden, there's a transport come with the Germans took them through, and throw them over the border. They picked up a lot of men, a transport, and they brought them up to near the Russian border, and told them to run. They took them into fields and woods, and they said, "Go straight, and you go across the Russian border."

Why did they do that?

They didn't want the Jews there, they took them out of Silesia.

So he was one of those who the Germans expelled?

He didn't, he, not him, he was on the Polish side. They expelled people who still stopped in Silesia, what they called it, they claimed as Germany after, they made straightaway Germany, the Reich, they called it.

So your father, did he cross the river and join you again?

Yes he did.

How did he get across?

By smuggling. We found out from some of those people that were in the town, they managed to go there to the families, to see families, and they see my father. And they

told, they see my father, and he lives with my aunt, he lives with my aunt, so my mother says, "Now we have to get father over." She took out, what you call, like a shawl, a shawl, like a big blanket, like a shawl, over her head, because in the occupied Germany they only walked around with yellow stars, marked as Jews. So my mother, she never put, she heard about it, and she put a shawl over her head, and she was, going over like a peasant. She looked like a peasant. She smuggled herself over the German/Russian border, by the River, towards the, she went to a different river, the river Sanuck, and she smuggled herself over,

Into the Russian occupied part?

Into the German occupied part, she went to the German occupied part. And she made her way to, she took about a week, where it would normally take about a day. She had to avoid posts on trains, on stations, avoid what you call, be found out being Jewish or anything like that. She never wore a star. She had no documents, no papers whatsoever.

No, so she was a brave woman.

She was very brave. My mother, she was one of the, one in a million, to what she could do, and what she done, she had the guts, what you call the courage to do, not many done it.

So, she went, and she found your father?

Yes, she went to the town, Czeladz, she was staying with my aunt. The couple what couldn't walk any more, she was, as it happens, a newly married person as well. She stayed with her.

And she was reunited with your father?

With my father. She went there, and she took a rest a month, she was so tired out, worn out, after the week's travelling, she took a break of a month, and she, my father, they took most essential things we didn't have. She brought an overcoat for me, a overcoat for my brother, because when we left there it was hot, we already started getting cold, very cold, freezing cold. And an eiderdown, she managed to get an eiderdown, my father ...

From Czeladz?

From Czeladz, she made a parcel, made a parcel, and she smuggled, and she gone back with my father, smuggled them back again across the border.

So, she went back into the Russian part with your father?

With my father.

Again they travelled ...

Also on trains, however they could make their way, took mostly about a week, the journey.

And they smuggled across the ...

End of FIO45 Side A

FIO45 Side B

21st October, 1988

We're carrying on now, with Henry's account ...

Polish occupied, by Russians ...

In about November ...

Late November or December, I cannot recall exactly the month.

What happened then?

After my father come, we tried, my brother and I, to go, to register for to go Russia, as the Russians wanted all the evacuees away from the front line, from those towns, because there was too many there. So we decided ...

Tell me about this being sent away. You were told that ...

We seen, the Russians, they used to take them out from certain rooms, from places, and force them onto trains.

Take who?

The evacuees, what were the, all strangers, not the inhabitants from the town.

So you were worried?

We did not want to go so far away into Russia, where we didn't know what conditions we would be living in.

Where would they have taken you in Russia?

To deep, deep inside, it used to be Ural, Dombas.

What for?

For work, to work in certain places, where we did not know. We know if they went voluntary, people without trades, they used to send them to Dombas, used to be a place in Russia, where used to be coal mines, mining area.

And they forced, they ...

They took them by force.

The whole family?

Yes, they used to take.

And you, so your father was worried that he and his wife, your mother, and you and your brother would be taken by force, to work in a coal mine?

Yes, a coal mine.

So what did your father decide to do?

To go back home.

By home, you mean?

To Poland, where we were born, Silesia, near Silesia, where we come from. As the conditions, we could at least not freeze to death there. Thinking the War will not last forever, as so many million Jews living there, we'd be one of them, to rough it through the German Occupation.

So you weren't that frightened of, of ...

No, no. We were never told it was going to be, we knew it's bad under them, we'd got no rights and everything else, but we never knew that they going to finish up with solutions like extermination and, as it did, afterwards, it happened.

So you had a family discussion about this?

Yes. And there was other people, in the same room, but they were without families, they were men on their own, some Army, Polish army, and some were ones already thrown over the border by the Germans, and they decided to go back to Poland.

How many of you decided to go back?

There was about 18 in the room. There were different groups. We went, our family, four of us, in, one of the men of the family was intermarried into my father's family, he stuck with us, and he went with us, and we made our way back to ...

How did you go back?

We went back to our ... not far, somewhere from Belzec.
How do you spell that?

B E L Z E C.

That's on the border?

That's not far from the border. I can't remember that.

So, did you go during the daytime?

No. No. We arranged, we hired, been introduced to smugglers, a couple, a woman, they were going forwards and backwards, they were supposed to know their way there. They were local. As it happens, that little place were divided, it was one town once upon a time, on both sides of the river, was parted, so they knew the proper, the way through.

And they smuggled you across the river?

Yes, across the river, one night. One night, as we crossed the border, the river was frozen at the time, with snow, what you call, snow covered snow, quite deep, about four, five, six foot in places, and the places, we couldn't, the ground then the snow. Well, we crossed the road, and my mother fell quite deep, and she didn't have the strength to push through the snow, so my father says, "You boys, you go. And I stop behind and make more easier for my wife to follow us." So we did that, because we had, concealed a little bit of money, Polish money on us, and we went ahead. Not far, it wasn't far ahead, because we didn't want to lose them.

You became reunited?

No, we went straight, we crossed the border, it was quite rough, because we had all the clothes on. Whatever we had, we put on ourself, not to be suspicious if we come across anybody, that we are travelling. Making out that we are just local people going. As it happens, when we crossed the border, there was a patrol, a German border patrol, coming towards us, with dogs. And there was a fork in the road, and as they come in from the opposite side, we turned left, on the left, the dogs were trying to come towards us, and they called them back, the German guards, they didn't think there was anything wrong.

So you made your way into ...

Into a little village there, and they took us in, the smugglers, to somebody they knew, so we went into there, we did not trust smugglers, as rumours used to went out, they used to work in hand sometimes with the Germans, and they could strip us and take everything what they could find, and turn us, hand us over back to the border.

Hand over?

No, back to the border. The Germans would throw us back over the border.

So you were trying to be concealed from the Germans, but you were worried that they would throw you back into Russia?

Yeh. So we went into the house.

Had you known, that might have been the best thing for you!

Yes. That's, we never knew what's the best for us! So we walked into the place, and my father said, "Let's get out of here." And we walked out, because we make our way

to the town. As we walked out, luckily, a horse and cart passed by, the man had a sick wife on him, he had just come away from a doctor's place, and he allowed us to enter the cart, and he drove us into his own home, and we told him the situation we were in, we were making our way back home. So he said, "All right, I've got some brothers, I will take you. I've got brothers in some of the family, they got horses and carts, they probably go to the town, and they will take you." Well, we thought it was a marvellous thing, it was like the man was sent from Heaven. When we got to the house, he asked us for so and so much money, they ask us, to take us to the next city, where the railway line, yes, it took us a week from the town, to get back to Czeladz. We had a very very difficult journey. It took, on the stations there were patrols, always, German patrols, and sometimes they used to catch anybody, they used to catch us, and make us clear the ice from the platforms, and we didn't know, and trains used to come in and go away. And my parents hung on, my mother hung on, till they let us go, after the work was a bit done, they used to let us go, and you had to hang around, and wait to another train, and we used to get on. They didn't know we were Jewish, we never carried any papers, no sign of yellow star.

There must have been a lot of refugees?

Yes, on travelling, for there and back, the railway lines.

So it took you about a week to get back to Czeladz?

To Czeladz.

And when you got back to Czeladz, what then?

When we got to Czeladz, we managed to get a flat, a two roomed flat. And we settled down in, and tried to make our best like, to live from day to day. There was no work, no business to carry on, so whatever we could do something, just to survive.

What did your father do about money then?

He, the little bit that he had, we used to sell clothes.

Your own clothes?

Yes. Yes, we used to sell clothes, what we had taken from, linen, beddings, and convert it back into, to be able to buy some food. That was going on for a long while. Occasionally he managed to buy and sell something on the black market, because there was no way we could carry on any other way, for a living.

So how long did this go on for?

That was going on till, till they took us to camp.

And what date was that?

It was from, like through December, January, February. But it was going 1942. Because 1941 my brother got caught, taken to Germany, they had to have a family, that had several boys, had to ...

So you got to Czeladz, in March 1940.

Yeh, we had to work for the Germans.

I just want to cover this period, from then till your brother was arrested in March or April, 1941. So we're talking about 15 months, and you are living, the four of you are living, during that time, under German Occupation. What was life, you said it was hard.

Not only hard, we had to work for nothing, two days a week.

Doing what?

For the Germans, clearing rubbish, rubble, also clearing a place, like where they, the Synagogue, where they demolish our Synagogue, clearing the rubble on building sites, work for the Germans. The Germans used to convert different houses for their own accommodation.

You worked as an electrician?

At the time, in the beginning, the first year, I worked, any work they give me. That was unpaid work. All those works till then was unpaid. Then all of a sudden they started giving work, like tradesmen. I got electrical job privately. My brother was doing, also privately, cabinet making. Oh, twice a week, we had to go and work for nothing for them on any demolition.

Did you wear a yellow badge?

Yes, we used to walk out with yellow badges.

And you had papers showing that you were Jewish?

Yes, we had to, what you call, fingerprint, document. A document with a fingerprint to identify that was us.

How were you treated by the Germans, apart from having to work?

Oh, we had to be careful, watch ourself in the street, if we seen a soldier, a police, we used to call them the German Police, or they were mostly occupied forces from the Army, or they wore Police hats, like, like in Germany, as policemen, and they used to catch, if they found anybody on the streets, sometimes they fancied causing a bit of inconvenience, they used to make us clean, clean and polish their shoes, their boots, kicking around.

Did this ever happen to you?

Yes, it happened several times.

Just tell me, just take one occasion and tell me about it.

I was walking around, walking in the road, with a friend of mine, I can't remember where I was walking, and got caught, and they took us up the Police Station, and then made us clean up the place there, and the shoes, scrubbing the floors, and in between, we used to get, smacked with a whip, a kick.

What would they say? I mean, how would they treat you?

They used to call us names (INAUDIBLE) Juden, Juden Hunden, that's the dogs, you Dog Jew, it meant, you Dirty Jew, get on with it, used to humiliate.

Were you allowed to do any other work?

I managed to get a job and, with an electrical firm, in installation work, and that firm used to get some work from the German Magistrate that is from the Town Hall. Used to do the work for Town Hall, for the Council.

Were you subject to any curfew? Were you allowed out?

No. There was a curfew from seven o'clock, we not allowed on the streets.

Did that apply to everybody?

This applied to everybody. I, I personally, with several other tradesmen, would have to go out at night at work, so we had a permit, to the Police, with a white arm band, white arm band, to show that I am a permit holder, and they would check occasionally. After a while, I got to know to the Police, because many times, I'd been sent to do electrical work, on the Police Station, from the firm.

So you were now treated differently from the non-Jewish population?

Yes.

How did the, I mean, you said, some time ago, that your father had non-Jewish friends, how did they react?

They would not go round with you, sometimes, they would come indoors, and talk to us, or we would go into their doors, that was still on the free, we were not confined into, around us, we were not confined into a ghetto. They put us, 1941, into a ghetto.

No, don't come to that yet. We're still up to the period when your brother was arrested, did anything else happen?

Yes, there was one day, some Polish, from the town, for jealousy, stabbed a policeman, one of the policeman, for a girlfriend, so overnight, they made, surrounded

the town with troops, a lot of troops, all the town, and they took everyone out, in the middle of the night, and early in the morning.

You as well?

Yes, the whole families, all the men. Only the men, they took out all the men, from about age 12, 13, and they rounded us up into football pitches, schools, they cleared out all the town, onto the fields, except the women, and over there, we had to lay down, face downwards.

Not only Jews, but Christians?

Everybody, without anything. And meanwhile, they also searched the houses round, on the Polish people, the Polish houses, they have found a lot of what you call flags, the Polish flags still from before the War. They had them hidden in the attics. They found those flags, they were marked down, they marked them, and they received very harsh beatings. Beatings. Very harsh beatings. And mostly went through, checked through, during the day, they picked out, as I say, several to go into the school, from the field, into the school, and we crossed through a corridor, as you know, schools, they've got long corridors where they, these classes are separated for the different classes. They used to pick the end one for interrogation. By the time we went from one end to the other one, we didn't know how we got there. They were clubbing us, they were soldiers, straight in a line, both sides, and they used to clubbing us with clubs, we didn't know how we got into the room. When we got into the room, they used to check all the papers, the fingerprints papers, and after that, all the Jews, they used to take, one used to sit on his neck, and a couple would sit on your legs, over the bench.

Did this happen to you?

As well, to me as well. And they beat us with clubs, with also, they had whips. They used to tell us that they were, those whips, were from ox, from oxtails, dried up, very very hard whips they were.

What, were they interrogating you? What were they looking for?

They were looking, supposed to be looking for the man who stabbed, who stabbed, because he's been known as the boyfriend of the girl. Meanwhile, we all went through a very very rough time. They used then, they got my brother, after he went through that beating, he was fainting till we got home. We had to hold him up to get home, my brother. And also, one of those brothers, what I showed you a photo of here, was the same thing, he also fainted. As it happens, those boys, they used to live in the one house.

The beatings were not restricted to Jewish people?

They had certain people, also from the Christians, had a rough beating. If they found anything patriotic, Polish patriotic things, stuff, suspected, they would undergo strong beatings, especially those where they found flags in.

So your living conditions were not very good. Can we go up to then, and this went on throughout 1940. In 1941, the beginning of 1941, your brother was arrested. Tell me about that.

They, the Jewish people, they formed a Committee, a Jewish Committee, they called it Judenrat, and that Committee had an order from the German SS for so many men they want to force labour, for Germany.

Who was in charge of the Judenrat?

The Judenrat, there was, people from the town, businessmen, known, very well known, like citizens from the town.

Jewish?

Jewish citizens, yes.

This was a Committee.

A Committee from oldest Jews.

Which, which acted as the agency through with the Germans?

The Germans would issue orders, and make them to carry out. And they also had to form Jewish police, policemen, make it so that ...

Do you remember the names of anybody, of any of the men in this Judenrat?

Yes. There used to be Pinkus, Rechnics, Gelbart.

How do you spell Rechnics?

R E C H N I C S.

These were businessmen?

Businessmen, from known, also in the town, from generations, and also more known to the, to the public, and more intelligent people.

So they had ...

They were educated, what I mean by intelligent, like, educated.

So the Germans ordered them to do what?

To deliver, about 200 boys from our town.

For what purposes?

For forced labour into Germany. To send to forced labour. So my brother got a letter.

From the Judenrat?

From the Judenrat, to come into the certain point, where the Judenrat was, where the Committee had offices, and from there they assembled them, and there would come a group from the Jewish Police, and take us to the square, to take the boys to the square, and from the square, they would take them on lorries into Sosnowica, used to be a big town, nearby.

How do you spell that?

S O S N O W I C A. There used to be, they had the Police Presidium there, the SS Headquarters, the Black Union from Headquarters, and they also had a big building there, like, made a prison out of it. We used to call it "Duchgangslager." That's "Truth", like temporary prison, detention centre.

So when your brother got this letter, what happened in the family?

My father was, my parents were very very upset. We all were upset, although there was nothing, a lot, we could do. So, as it happens, at the time, we knew there are forced labour camps, because certain people were already in forced labour camps from different towns, and they, at the time, they could write letters back. They were still communicating with us home. And it was also allowed, occasionally, to send a parcel, a food parcel, to them, as well. Or any clothes or anything. They wore civilian clothes, with a star cut out on the trousers, and a star cut out on the jacket, on the back.

So he, he wouldn't know, he thought he was going just to work in Germany?

In Germany, that's what he has done, that's what he has done.

So, after your brother went, life carried on much as before, until they put you into a ghetto, which was ...

Which was not, we were not rounded, it wasn't a closed ghetto.

Tell me about the ghetto.

People come from all over the town, where they used to normally live, and they putting us, one or two turnings, in the end of the town.

Who organised all this?

The Judenrat, in the Polish authorities, they had to clear, from the other people, from the Christians, the houses, to give up, and they would move in into the houses, the places where the Jews used to live.

Did your family move?

We moved, yes, from one town, from one building, to another one, where they give us only one room.

What reason did they give for making Jews move?

No, that was, that was done all over Poland, they do it, they set up ghettos, so we should not mix with the Christian people.

Did they say why you shouldn't mix?

That, no. They, their reason is that they should have an eye on them, they have them all in one place. If whenever they need them, for whatever reason they had, in one place.

So, you were actually arrested by the German soldiers, in March, 1942.

'42.

So can we talk about the period, then, from the time you went into the ghetto, which was about March '42, to, for the next 12 months, how did you ...

For the last year,

Yes, you lived in one room?

In one room, we lived all. About 15' x 15', 15 foot by 15 foot..

End of FIO45 Side B

FIO46 Side A

You were telling me about this room that you were living in, that was 15 foot ...

By 15 foot.

Square.

Square.

You and your mother and father were living there, and sleeping there.

Cooking there, everything. It was one room.

Food was rationed?

Food was rationed. It was already on the ration cards. There could be very very little, not really enough to live on. Meat, there was 1 piece of non-Kosher meat a week. From the family rations, there was, not sufficient for, that wasn't sufficient.

How many families were living in this building?

That building where we lived, there was four rooms, like two downstairs, two upstairs. The one opposite our room, there was a family, was about six of them, living in one room. Then above us was a room that was only two, father and daughter, and another family of four.

So there were quite a lot of people living in these four rooms?

Yes.

What were the toilet facilities?

The toilet facilities was also in a yard.

As it was, as you described in your first house?

Yeh. Yes, yes, years back, like years back. We had water in the hall, water we had in the hall.

And your mother did the cooking?

My mother did the cooking, and washing, whatever she had to do, everything, everything in the room.

And you got to know the people in the building?

Oh yes, quite well. Quite well, yes.

And what was your life ...

After 7 o'clock, nobody could get out. They used to come, each other, used to come to each other, and we used to spend talking.

You still used to ...

Discussing politics, whatever it was, if anybody could get any news out from abroad.

What about religious practices?

People used to pray indoors, by themselves, indoors, never, it was not allowed to be more than about, there was not allowed to make a minyan, like ten people together, or if they seen, four or five strangers talking together, they would be pulled in.

So you couldn't make minyan of ten people?

No, it was not allowed, not allowed.

Did you do it in your homes?

As it happens, we have done it, good, with this harsh restriction, with not legally, we would be prosecuted and God knows what we would have done. I mean, after my father died, I prayed for 30 days, I made a minyan in my own home, my own room, they used to come in, and I have what they call it in Yiddish, the Shloshim.

What's that?

Thirty days after what you call ...

Death?

We used to say Shivah, Shivah the seven days, and Shloshem is 30 days. Because thirty days, really, you're not supposed to shave, or ...

Let's take an ordinary day, during this period, when you're living in the ghetto. You get up at, what, say, 8 o'clock?

I would get up in the morning,

What would your mother cook for breakfast, typically?

Oh that year we had a bit of bread and butter, if we could, or margarine, or whatever it was handy.

And what to drink?

Coffee. Coffee was the usual to drink, or, we used to call it Ersatz Coffee, that's not a proper coffee. Any beans used to be burned, ground, and made up a drink. Certain teas from leaves, certain leaves, they used to, like, mint leaves, and all sorts of things, and you would make what, years ago before, in the Stone Age time, they, they made up teas to drink, and that's what we had to drink.

And so after breakfast, you would go out to work?

To work, yes.

And where did you work?

I work, when I found, when I found a job with a Contractor, and I worked in the Town Hall. And he used to send us to private, to German occupied people, that do administration, that administered the town, and I used to do electrical work in their homes.

And what did your father do?

My father hasn't done any work. No, he had to do the two days forced labour.

Did he do any buying and selling?

That's the Black Market, tried, occasionally, through knowing people, he might have some certain articles to buy and sell, like, they used to bring some fish from across the border, he got hold of somebody like that and he used to re-sell it, oh, that's occasionally, that was on the really, had to watch himself not to get caught.

So, the money that was coming in, was brought mainly by you?

By me. That's right, nobody else, my father never used to. And as I say, if we were short, he used to sell some clothes, or linen.

You didn't have any, did your father have any savings, any bank accounts?

No, no. There was no banking accounts, there was nothing like that. Anyway, as far as I know, my father never had any money in banks.

So, you must have been, the wages that you received, were they enough to ...

Not enough, not enough. I used to do some private work occasionally, as an electrician, they used to know me. There was, especially, there used to be a German, a Rumanian, what took over a Jewish bakery, and the Jewish man introduced me to him as electrician, if he need any electrical work, to get in touch with me. So I used to go to him to do some work, although I never accepted any money from him. The only thing I wanted is bread, food, so he would give me a, let's say, one loaf of bread or two loaves of bread, that's how much work I done, he'd give me about two loaves of bread, or three loaves of bread, and he, he would give it to me, it was on ration, on ration, bread, and that was helping us, I managed to exchange for other food, the other

bread, mother used to exchange for other food from other people, what they could get hold of.

And your mother would stay in the room during the day?

Yeh, in the house.

Cooking and ...

Cooking, yes, the only time she used to go, we used to have several Jewish shops, what they had allocated on the Russians, to sell food.

So how old were you then?

About 20.

So, what was your social life, or did you have a social life? Girlfriends?

We had, in the street, and if it was in the summer, we used to meet in the streets.

During the day?

During the day and the yards, in the back yards.

What, there were no, were there meeting places for young people?

No, there was not, no meeting places, it was not allowed to any gatherings, no gatherings.

Was the ghetto patrolled by the German forces?

Yes, they occasionally would walk through, walk through, or mostly, we had a Jewish patrols.

So, about the Jewish Judenrat, they were in charge of the administration?

The administration of the ghetto.

Did you have any personal dealings with them yourself?

No, only to try, to see if they could do anything for my brother, to see if they could get my brother away, out, or ...

What was their attitude to the Germans?

Who?

The Judenrat?

The Judenrat? They used to take all their orders from them, they had to fulfil the orders.

How did you feel about them? Did you think they were ...

I never felt they were traitors, but whoever that thing, somebody had to do it. The only things we had, like a thing, the favourite, they made favouritism into the families. Especially when it come to gathering any, getting any men to work, or any different jobs, they used to favourite and exempt, kept them back.

You mean they didn't exercise their power fairly.

Fairly, not, to order. That was causing jealousy. Bitterness amongst them. Or, as it happens, that is, we accepted that it is human nature, the way things would go on, all their lives.

You accepted there had to be somebody,

Somebody to, because they chose, they had to, somebody had to deal with it.

Were any of their children sent on forced labour?

Not till the last moment. And that was the last moments when I went to the camp. So they seen, they seen openly, they mean business to destroy everybody. So, to the youngsters, in the beginning, they send them to those forced labour camps, they told, at least, it's not a concentration camp.

So, in the ghetto, the opportunity of meeting other Jews was restricted.

Restricted in making ...

Was there any, did you discuss Zionism, for example, in any group?

No, no, we couldn't, it was no, no way of, no use for it, there was no use for it, you could nothing be achieved through it. We certainly discuss politics, trying to find out what's going on in the world, through radios, which were forbidden, even to the Christians, to listen from abroad. And first, it was said that if anybody were listening to a foreign station, from France, or England, or abroad, they would not only confiscate it, they would put it, take him off to concentration camp, so you never heard much of it, although people still did have the hidden radios, and listen to abroad.

Did you have any post, any mail, from abroad?

Not, we received one letter from Russia, from that uncle who went to Russia, that he is in Russia, and that he is working, and ask, see if they can let him know what's happening. The only thing is, we could not give him any back.

There was no, was there any resistance at this time, to the Germans?

Not from Jewish resistance, from around my way. Although there were resistance, Polish resistance. There were Polish Resistance which were working underground. I mean, there was, occasionally, they put a bomb under a Public Bath, on the day when the Germans went to the Baths, so the Police went to use it.

I mean, what did you think about your faith, your future? Did you have any idea what was going ...

We lived, we lived with the hope that he is going to lose the War. And the only hope really come, it's going to come to the quicker end, when Stalingrad, when they lost the battle on Stalingrad, and that's when we've seen the tide is turning, and that was the only hope. The only hope we had then, that it's going to come to a quick ending.

So, we're now coming up to the time when you were sent away yourself, which was 1940....1943.

1943, March.

So, what happened?

Yes, they sent us all letters, that on that day, they were taking all the young men, and I'd got to report to the Judenrat, to the Centre of the Judenrat, for examination, for examination for to see if I'm fit. Or, at the time, they didn't look fit or not fit any more. They used to get them all in. The only selection for fitness there was, in proper fitness, was in the camp.

So what did your mother and father say?

Well, my father was already died.

Oh, he'd died?

He died.

How long before that?

About three months. Six months, six months before that. And my brother died three months before I was sent away.

You told me that you'd, let's briefly talk about your brother, he came home once?

Yeh, they sent him from one camp to a different camp. And he was in Sosnovitz, in that Durchgang Lager, and we found out he be there, so my mother went and plead with the SS, would they, as my father is very very ill, in this same town, to let him see my father, as my father would be his wish, his last wish, as he is already on his deathbed. So they sent a guard with him, into, for a visit. While he was in hospital in Sosnovitz, he tried to see if he could give him a blood transfusion, and as it

happens, they would not accept him any more for a blood transfusion, this was too late, they said.

What was the matter with your father?

He had like, what you call, diarrhoea, internal, internal problems, dysentery, and whatever they done, they just could not stop it for the last, for eight months, they just could not stop it. They done their all most. As it happens, they hadn't had, they never had any proper medications.

This was a Jewish hospital?

A Jewish hospital.

So your father was very ill, and was pining for ...

To see his son, as he was in the town.

So he came to see him?

For an hour.

Yes.

And you spoke to your brother?

I spoke to my brother as well.

What did he tell you about his ...

He was, at the time, still lucky, he worked as a cabinet maker, he had a job, they, the General took him into his own building.

Where was this?

In Pazymiechy, Occupied Poland, that was, that town, there was a Camp.

How do you spell that?

P A Z Y M I E C H Y.

And so, he was lucky, you say he was working?

As a Cabinet Maker in the camps. Most of those camps, they used to sort out tradesmen, for the different parts, and they allocate them to those jobs.

So, your brother then went back to the Camp, and your father didn't recover, he died?

He died, yes.

And you said that your brother died?

Three months later. He took ill, in camp, working on a what you call, in the beginning, springtime, to clean, they took him, after work, they drove him about 10, 15 kilometres from the Camp, into that man's, that German General's private home, to clear a fish pond. They have fish pond, they breed, like a fish farm, and they, so in the spring they used to clear the river from the greens, and everything else, and after driving in, they were hot and sweaty, and they had to get undressed, and go to clear the thing, and he took ill. While he took ill, he was still working out, they were working out from Camp a whole week, they only used to come home on a Sunday, they used to get into the Camp. The rest of it, they had like a special accommodation made for those workers in their home, for the General, where he was working in the carpentry.

So he caught, what, pneumonia?

Pneumonia. So when he was, he was all the week there, from Sunday that time, till next Sunday, and when he got into the Camp, he reported to the doctor, and the doctor examined him, that was in front of the Jewish Elders in the Camp, the Kommandant, the Jewish Kommandant of the Camp, in front of him, and they said, "We have to send him, we can't help him a lot here, we have to send him home, from here home, for cure." So they never kept him in. The Kommandant, as it happens, he says, "I'm pleased, I'm pleased I can send you home." As he already knew, they tried, he tried to get him home otherwise. He could not just send him home. He once suggested to him he should do something to get ill. As it happens, I tell you, he asked him to put soap in his eyes, to make his eyes burn, to catch something like, make him look as though he has got a disease in his eyes, so he wouldn't have to, they can't cure it in the Camp, and they would have occasion to send him home. He could not, he tried, he could not stand the pain.

So, was he sent home then?

When he was, tuberculosis, yeh, they loaded him up on a lorry, what went to the town, Sosnovitz, and on the way to Sosnovitz, they passed through Bendzin, so my brother says to drop me off here. So they just dropped him off somewhere near our street, in the street, and he ...

Came home?

No. As it happens, he collapse in the street, and people revived him, in Bendzin, and said, "Have you got any family here?" And he says, "Yes, I've got a aunt living so and so in Bendzin." So, they took him round there and they got in touch with us, and we took him home. And straightaway, we called our, it wasn't a doctor, it used to be a medic, what used to give injections like, before you went for operations, I don't know what it is, anaesthetics, anaesthetics, and he was quite pretty good with medical things. They call him, he was as good as a doctor, they used to say.

Why didn't you call a doctor?

There was no doctors to get, it was not for Jews, it was not easy to get a doctor. Maybe there was one there, but they just couldn't get one. And they called him, and when he examined him, he said, "I'm afraid one lung of his is gone." And he develop already, tuberculosis in the other one.

And so he died?

He was, he was taken out, we took him home, they tried, we had a doctor, the same doctor used to come along, used to prescribe him certain medicines, or, it was no use, he was, he give him a sentence, he said, "He won't last long." He lasted three months. He died indoors, at home. As it happens, when they sent him home, they said, "When you get well, you've got to, every month, you've got to report into Sosnovitz, where the SS is, to the doctor, to see if you fit back to work. But it was no hope. He died. After three months, they, we had some doctors, and for me to report, and I went with the largest group already to be sent to Germany.

So there was only your mother left there?

My mother left alone, and three months later, after I was sent to Camp, I found out, they made Judenrat, Judenrheine, that was called, they cleared the whole town out of Jews, and they took everybody out, to Auschwitz, and they sent them to Auschwitz.

We'll come back to your mother in a minute. So, you then reported to Judenrat. What happened to you then?

They get us all together, again, and they took us to the square. In the square they brought some lorries. We're all surrounded by the Army, the German Army, this is the Police of the Occupying forces.

Did you have any luggage with you?

Yes, we had a, my mother give us a loaf of bread, and some clothes to change. I had a suit, a good suit with me. A parcel made up, and shirts, I had a few socks, a bit of underwear, and made up a parcel, not too big. They give us a certain amount of how much we can take, and with this parcel they took us to Sosnovitz, again, to the Detention Centre, and they kept us there overnight. And the next night, they took us on trains, and they sent us into Germany, near Breslau, not far from Breslau, and that was the, they tell us we're going to a through camp. There was a Camp there.

A temporary camp?

A temporary camp, there, temporary accommodation there, and we stayed there a couple of days, transfer like. The camp was used ...

How many people there, how many Jews, how many young Jews?

Oh that was a train load, a whole train load.

How many men?

Oh, it could have been about a couple of thousand, two thousand. No women.

So then what happened?

Then when we got into the Camp, we got into the Camp, late night.

Which camp was that?

Markshtate.

How do you spell that?

M A R K S H T A T E (sic).

This is in Germany?

That was in Germany, near Breslau.

What sort of Camp was this?

That was a Forced Labour Camp. All those camps round there were for Krupps, Krupps Tankwerks. Ammunition factory. They made what you call ... As it happens, in the Camp, when I first got in, we build the first mast what brought down the three, what you call the voltage, down, the three phase voltage, to the first concrete mixers, when I got there.

So it was a new Camp?

They were building a new camp. Within months, the Camp was a big Camp already, and within a year, they were already producing the tanks.

Not in the Camp?

In the Camp, not in our Camp. On the building sites near our Camp.

In the factory?

The factory, they build a big factory there.

So you went to a camp, to help build a factory?

A factory.

And what was the Camp like that you were in?

Jewish only. It was a Forced Labour Camp, Jews only.

How did you sleep?

We had bunks.

In what?

In the Camp, we had two, one-storey bunks. There was about 80, no, 26, about 52 in a room.

Yes, what, in corrugated ...

No, it was barracks, wooden barracks. A long barrack what had about, say, six blocks.

And was the camp surrounded with wire?

All wired up, all round. This Camp did not have yet, any electric wiring outside. It was out somewhere in the fields.

And were there German soldiers?

There was, outside, German guards, going all round the Camp, and they had watch towers.

Did anyone try to escape as far as you know?

There have been escapes, yes, there have been escapes. Oh, they did a lot of them didn't, it was very very seldom anybody succeeded. The only success was if it was organised from outside.

There was nothing organised, then?

Very seldom. You see, we had more cases in concentration camp of that.

So, you lived in this camp, and helped build this factory for Krupps?

Krupps. We used to, when we got into the Camp, they sorted us out, they ask us who's, "Any electricians here?" So we used to, whoever was electrician used to lift up their hands, and that I'm an electrician. I, as it happens, told my cousin, who was standing next to me, about near my age, a year older, pick up the hand, and you might be working with me, and I help you, and you don't have to go out and work on the, what you call, the shovel, or concrete mixing, or whatever it is, carrying the cement from unloading, or anything like that.

It would be better work?

It would be better work, it would be easier, at least. Anyway, he did. He did, as an electrician, he come in with me, and there used to come a firm next day, and he say, "Have you got any electricians?" and he took about four of us, four, six, six of us, out,

to his Firm. A German Firm, used to call itself Velstein in Ros. They took us out, and we've been employed in that firm, working for Krupps.

What was the food like in the Camp?

The food? There was only one, what you call, the Germans used to call, Onetopf, only one course. A one course meal, not three or four courses, one course.

What were they giving you?

Yes, they ...

End of FIO46 Side A

FIO46 Side B

You were telling me about this - about breakfast.

No, they give us, the Russian bread in the morning, like 300gram of bread.

To take with you?

To take to eat for breakfast, they didn't care if you eat it then or if you eat it at work, they just give us 300 gram of bread, with a little bit of margarine, a couple of ounces of margarine, enough to put on the bread, and they would give us occasionally, like, horse salami, like a blood, black wurst, we used to call it, blutwurst, they used to call it, blood wurst.

And you had this for your lunch as well?

Whenever we fancied it, we rationed it ourselves, in bits and pieces, so we don't starve, some people used to eat it straight away, and fast until they got home, and they got a one course meal for the evening.

What would that be?

That would be potatoes, in the potato soup, beet, sugar beet, like flour, and some small pieces of meat, some kind of meat, cut in bits and pieces, floating about, and sometimes they would make a spinach soup, spinach greens, boil it up with a bit of something in it, like a bit of potatoes, or a little bit of some horse beef or whatever it is, bits and pieces. You could not live on it, really. People what have lived on those rations, there was mostly six months, six, seven months.

Yes, it wasn't enough to keep you?

Not enough to keep alive. Especially those what could not help themselves any more. And their work was very very hard. And they didn't last more than six months, or seven months, some of them. Mostly they, the Germans, the workers, and also the other forced labour, the free forced labour, what were working with us, they would help. They would give us bits of bread.

So, how long were you in this Camp?

For one year.

So, during this year, this would bring us up to 1944.

Yeh.

So, during this year, what were the medical conditions? Were there doctors there? You said people died after six months.

Yes, we did have what you call, we used to call it the Riviera, room, Riviera Room. Like a hospital barrack, and ...

Doctors?

There was two doctors there, working under terrible conditions. They had no medications there to give, they could there, they probably had aspirins, they had a few aspirins, and the operations there, they had to do it in the room, what they was, in the same room where they examined people who came back from work, if they didn't feel well, they examined them, and if they were very ill, with a very high fever, they kept them in the, in one of the rooms there, to have them sweat it out there, under observation. Or, if I had once developed what you call underarm, from the change of food, people used to get boils, used to come out in boils. I had once develop here, and they lanced, they lanced it with a knife. They heat it up, they sterilise the knife over a a flame, over just a flame, burning paraffin flame, they had just a, like methylated spirits or something in it, and they lanced it.

Without any anaesthetic?

No, no anaesthetic, no, just lanced it and they had, they put nothing on it either, they had like a black ointment, what it was, I don't know what it was. They put it under my arm, and I went out in those conditions, back to work.

So, this was, this Camp was set up for people actually to do work?

For work.

Mainly Jews?

Yes. Only Jews in this Camp. That was forced labour camp, and they were only Jews, and administered by Capos, like Jewish Capos, inside, and we had a Jewish Elders.

How did the Jewish Capos ...

Oh, they were very very strict, very very rough.

Although they were Jews themselves?

Yes. They were very very rough, and they had what you call executioners as well.

What do you mean by that?

If anybody got caught doing black market in camp, we would have, they had to report, and they performed a beating under the eyes of the Germans. The Germans would give the Kommandant, the German Kommandant, or would have the under Kommandant under him, he had to, he watched it, them, to do the beating.

Was there any more severe penalty?

They used to get what you call with whips, horse whips.

Corporal punishment.

There used to be, let's say, five whips, ten whips, twenty five whips, 100 whips for trying to escape, for trying to escape they get 100, 200 whips, in front of everybody. Or there were other minor things, they were only performed in the barrack, but under observation.

But a man who got 100 whips must have ...

He was sentenced for, let's say if he tried to escape.

And that's very severe punishment?

That was, yeh, that was severe, or not severe enough when what we seen later on. Because later on there was no whipping, just, they never brought in alive, they always brought them in shot.

That was not in this Camp?

That was not in that Camp, that.

So, let us, let us go up then, were there any other incidents you remember, in this Camp?

Yeh, we had, what you call, sometimes, at midnight, the Capos come in for a inspection, to see if it's clean, and if there was found a straw, anything under the bed, in the room, they would, they would strip the beds, they knock them down, those, what you call, the bunks, strip them down, and they give us a half an hour, or an hour, to put it right, and make it, and clean up the place. And they come back after to make sure it has been done. And you can imagine the work we had, in the half dark in the rooms. There was probably one light, one light in the centre, and we had to put up the bunk, put them up, and make the straw and everything, and make the blankets, all into like a matchbox.

Why were they so unkind to their fellow?

I don't know. They was, if they had some orders from the Germans to keep, to make sure it should be clean. And they had just that bit of a, made themself a little bit of a night out.

What sort of religious activities were there in the Camp?

There were no religious activities. There were no proper prayer things, or books. Certain, some people had little books, and they prayed, if they had time.

Were people coming and going in the Camp?

They were coming, newcomers kept on coming in, to replace what we lost, like, dying off.

Were many people dying in the camp?

There was all the time, all the time, there was, every week about 10, 20 people.

Is that because of the hard work?

The hard work and not sufficient food.

Was it heated, the place, in the winter time?

We had, inside, we had what you call an oven, an oven what used to be kept always burning. We used to kept, what you call, we had to keep, like, guard, at nights. There used to be two always on guard, by the oven, keep the oven going, and also make sure, anybody when they go to the toilets had to report, and the guards had to go, one had to go with him up to the toilet and bring him back.

These are German guards?

No. No. Our prisoners, for the room guards, from the room. They used to take turns overnight, let's say, everyone had an hour, and one used to wake up the other one in turns, like, overnight.

So this carried on until 1943.

'43, yeh, '43.

And how did that come to an end? What happened then?

All of a sudden, one day, in 1943, they go, they say they're liquidating this Camp.

What month?

It was a winter time, in the winter.

The winter of 1943?

'43. They tell us we are going to go. As it happens, that other Camp was built nearby, next, about five, four or five kilometres away from this.

Another forced labour camp?

Another forced labour camp, not forced labour, a concentration camp, were built. As it happens, we were building the barracks.

For the concentration camp?

For the concentration camp, and there was another firm of prisoners, what built electric fences as well there.

Did you know what you were doing?

Yes, we knew that we were building a concentration camp. Who for, we did not know, at the time. Because that was, we also build, as electricians, we also installing lighting, in other camp, in forced labour camp for non-Jews.

So, you, they made an announcement that they are closing the camp.

Yeh.

And what then?

They, the Jewish, the Capos, they sort out certain groups to a different camp, altogether, still forced labour camps, to send these privileged lot, privileged lot, and a group with it, into another forced labour camp, different forced labour camps.

What happened to you?

I, I was sent into concentration camp. The next, next, by.

The next?

The next, the camp next to our camp.

The camp you had helped to build?

Yeh, installed the electric, the electrical installation of that.

What was the name of this Camp?

F U N F T E I C H E N. That means, five, five, I don't know, not rivers, ponds, five ponds.

They took you out of this forced labour camp, and moved you a few kilometres.

Kilometres away, into that concentration camp.

Why did they say they were doing that? Did they give you a reason?

They were liquidating, gradually, the forced labour camp.

Did they say what you were going to?

No, no explanation to us. They, they, we had no say in what, what, you had nobody to ask! We were afraid to open up our mouths to anybody!

But you knew it was ...

We knew, we knew. They, what we were building. And, as it happens, our firm, I don't suppose they wanted us to be moved to any different camps, the electricians. So they moved us into the concentration camp, and we still worked for the same firm.

Did you, you were moved by what, lorry?

No, we walked there, we walked up there, yeh. Five kilometres.

With your belongings?

With our belongings, they told us not to bother to take too much, because we shall not use that clothes any more.

So, how many of you moved then?

There was our camp, maybe about 3,000, 3 or 4,000.

People moved, were they young Jews about your age?

All the working, all ages up to, they were ...

To the concentration camp.

To the concentration camp.

Now, just describe this concentration camp.

That concentration camp was surrounded by three fences. One ordinary wire fence outside, and one inside, and in the centre, about, there was a gap of about six foot, it was another fence, electrified fence, that was the most, always electrified, anybody who tried to make their way through would get killed, by high voltage.

You only had to touch it?

Touch it, and it burn your, burn you.

How high were these fences?

About 10 foot.

So, inside the fence was the Camp.

Yeh.

How large was it?

It was also with watch towers all round it, with searchlights.

How big was the Camp?

The Camp held 6,000 prisoners.

Yes. And they were living in ...

We were living also again in barracks, wooden constructed barracks.

The same sort of thing ...

What we had in the forced labour camp. The only thing is, it was, the rooms, where every block was divided in three. The centre part was the dining area, and the side parts were the sleeping area, into three, three storey bunks, yes.

Three storey bunks?

Bunks yes.

So, they were single storey buildings,

No, single storey building,

They were a long narrow building?

Yeh, they holded, we were about, 90, 90 in a room, in each side, 90, 90, 180, and in the middle was the dining room, about the same size as the sleeping area.

Yes. I see. You went into this Camp, again, only men?

Only men. No, as it happens, the forced labour camp, we did have women there as well.

Did you?

Yeh, we did have women. They were employed in the kitchen, and they performed services for the Germans, they cleaned up the places, they were sent out to clean.

What, Jewish forced labour?

Jewish forced labour women.

How many were in that Camp?

There could be about 50.

How were they treated?

They were treated a bit better.

They stayed in the Camp?

They were not so roughly treated, and they stayed there, and they had their living quarters, and they were working in the kitchen, working in the kitchen. They had a better, more, as much food as they probably wanted. As it happens, they did have, help certain of the, certain of their fellow prisoners.

Okay, so we're in this concentration camp.

Mostly men only. Not mostly, men only, or it was a mixed circle, not Jewish only. We've been with German prisoners, Polish prisoners, French prisoners.

What was the percentage, you said there were 6,000. Of those 6,000, how many were Jewish?

The higher percentage were Jewish.

And what did you do in the Camp then? You walked into the Camp, and you were given a bunk ...

A bunk ...

And the following day, what happened?

The following day, they called us up, on the first six months, three months, they were very very rough with us. Very very strict.

In what way?

They made us get up five o'clock in the morning, they used to beat us, wherever they see us, the Capos, the Capos, and the German guards, and the inside, they used to have, Stubenfuhrers, that were in charge, in charge over the Capos, and us. Or, mostly the Capos. They told the Capos what to do with us in the block elders. The block olrerly is the one, the oldest in the block. He stayed in the block all day, and he organised for cleanliness, and one should get food and everything else. He was the organiser for the block.

What work were you doing at this time?

I was still doing myself, my own, go out, we used to go out to work, the same as electrician.

So, your life was much the same as it was in the forced labour camp, except the conditions in the concentration camp ...

The first three months were very very bad, very harsh.

What happened to people there who wanted to escape, for example?

Oh, anybody escape, and they brought them in, they were brought in and shot. And they would put them up in the centre, where they used to take people out every morning. They used to have roll call, we had to do the roll call, they would put them in the centre of the roll call, on a wooden throne, they used to call it, we used to call it the wooden throne. A beam, sat in up there, naked. And we had to ...

Completely naked?

Completely naked, shot. And we had to march through the call, the roll call, and march through by those people, to have a good look at them. And they had a, they give us a warning, "That's what's going to happen to you if you try to escape."

So you actually saw the ...

See those, yeh.

Were any people you know treated like that?

Not personally, I can't remember anybody I knew. I knew they were prisoners from our Camp, or not by name, I could not mention anybody I personally knew. I knew a, personally, a Capo once escape, he, they never caught them. He was what you call, he used to be the Clerk for the Works, on the roll call, he used to take all the roll call, the number of prisoners marching about, and when we marched in, he used to take all the, count the number of the prisoners going back in, from each Commander, from each group. He escape, or he's been known to us. They knew him, the fellow prisoners knew him from, as an active Communist before the War.

And he was a Capo?

He was a Capo. And he was, they mentioned, he was a, he must have been well organised, because certain people come into the camp, caught, and they say he is free, they've seen him, and they took him into what you call the underground.

So, but apart from escaping, or trying to escape, were people shot for any other reason?

Only by outside, trying sometimes, they made out they wanted to escape, in the fields, they tried to help themselves, dig out something, some food, when he passed by.

And people would be shot for that?

Shot, for trying to get this food, or anything like that.

So, during this period, this six month period ...

There was very, there was very rough treatment, or, we got into, it come to a stage where we went to work, and we did, we like strike, we could not work, we were tired from the treatment, from the rough treatment.

Were you ever personally beaten?

Yes, yeh.

Do you remember ...

On, yes, coming out from the, on the roll call, I wasn't quick enough to get into the line. They used to give us a few hidings, with batons, wooden batons, like what they play baseball.

Hit you on the head?

Hit you on the body, anywhere, anywhere. Anywhere they caught you.

So, you say ...

I tried to keep away from it, as much as I could, it happened occasionally that I did get one or two. And when I got to work, when I've seen, when they've seen you blue, black and blue, beaten up, the German masters would ask you, "What's happening here? Why aren't you work properly?" I said, "I haven't got the strength. I've been up nearly half the night, cleaning tables" or something like that, they make you clean tables, or floors, they were clean, you couldn't clean them any more.

So what did you, you said there was a strike?

Like half striking. The people couldn't work, they were tired, tired from the night previously. So the firm suffered, what you call, loss of labour.

Loss of production.

Loss of production, and the masters notified their firms, what took us out from the SS, from the Camp to work for them. And they made out, had a, what you call ...

Deputation?

A deputation into Berlin, they went to Berlin, to the SS Headquarters, and to complain about this. So the complaint come back into the Camp. And we had a roll call. And they told us, "Your complaints will not help a lot. We've got different methods than beating." So the next, next start is what you call, take us on the fields, and make us sport, exercising things.

What do you, mean?

Exercise, what you call.

Yes, do exercises?

Exercises, and make us bend down, like this, and kick us for half an hour. And you can't do that, it's very hard, you fall over, so they used to kick you about, and make you getting up. I mean, very young boys.

They would make you keep in a kneeled position?

Kneeled positions.

With your hands stretched out?

Jumping, frog jumping, frog jumping, crawling.

And then they would still beat you?

And they still would walk, occasionally give you a beat to make sure you are doing it, or not so severe, not to make you see that you've been beaten, they would not, so you don't show, when you got out to work, you don't show. So that has been going on for a couple of months, till again, the masters made a complaint against Headquarters, to the Headquarters, what you call, the Workforce Headquarters, because they were organising the Reich, because they wanted a, they needed a workforce, because there was no men, no German men, and there was many more to work in Germany, they all were on the Russian fronts, on the fronts, fighting the War, so they needed a, especially the tradesmen. So, they come back again, and things eased up, and begin to become like a normal concentration camp life, without beating, we just go out to work and come back. The only thing is if they, if they caught you doing something you shouldn't done, or a complaint from outside, from the master, or you couldn't work any more, as I say, a lot of people in the hard works, they used to work, they fall and took very ill and died. When they died in the Camp, they used to send them, the next Camp used to be Grossrosen, where they used to have a crematorium. We never had a crematorium in our Camp. Oh, about, I think, ten or 20 kilometres away, we were affiliated to the other Camp, where they had a crematorium.

Just say that again?

The whole of '43, '44, end of '44, till the December, we were in Funf Teichen Concentration Camp.

Doing work, being sent out.

Being sent out to work, still the same, I still work for the same firm, as electrician.

Can I just ask you ...

And the only thing I can tell you, why I survived, working, as electrician, they could not have a guard nearby me. We were working in pairs, in twos. We had our own, like, storeroom, where we met for teatime, or lunchtime, and we had our stores with

the goods, which we work in twos, where we collected and went out for work. And being in twos, we only had like a guard, take us in the whole group, what consisted of eight electricians, and a foreman.

So you were not being watched all the time?

Not being watched by the guards all the time. I mean, in the, governor, not the governor, the master, the German master what was employed from the firm, a civilian, he used to give us the work, and show us the map, the drawings what he wants done. We used to get on with it. He used to come and inspect every day, how we are getting on.

Now, he was a German civilian?

Civilian.

Who was in charge of ...

Of the electricians.

From the ...

From the firm, from a private firm, a private firm, working for the, in the Camp.

And some of the people in the private firm, were forced labour people, like yourself?

No. No, not those masters. Not those foremans, those masters, they were German. German Masters.

The German masters were foremen in a private firm?

Yes, who were in charge over us.

How did they treat you, these Germans?

Certain, certain of those masters, they were pretty fair, they were pretty fair. They were not sadistic, you could find one in different firms sadistic, oh, the one I worked, he was not, he was pretty fair. He, he would look away, if he seen anybody giving us, if anybody had bits of bread from outside, he would look away, he would not say anything. He would personally help bring, from outside, bread. From outside, from the town, would like, bring up also lavi (INAUDIBLE), and put it on the table. He would say, "Share it out amongst yourselves." And that ...

FIO46 End of Side B

FIO47 Side A

Works, and everything, and if he got anything he could help us, let's say any bread, they were rationed then, also, they themselves, didn't have a lot of bread for the families, or they, if he managed to do anything, he used to bring it in, and say, "Share amongst you, out." Whatever he had. It wasn't a lot to share out, a loaf of bread between, between what you call, ten electricians, there wasn't much left.

Did you get to know any of the Germans in the Camp?

Yes. I spoke to them. Even the Guards. As it happens, we electricians, they used to come to us for lunch time, in the winter, it was warm in the room, and they used to come and sit themselves in. And we used to have talking sometimes to them, and we even used to discuss sometimes, politics. We had, what you call, a cheek, like a liberty, we took the chances, and we used to talk politics. And they used to be, if they were two Germans together, Hitler was on top of the world, he was the God. Or if they were separately, they run him down to the ground.

Really? Why?

The same thing, because they were afraid to talk, anything against him. And they, there were amongst them, sadists, especially those, the Stubenfuhrers, the ones in charge, over the guards, they used to be really trained sadists.

In what way? Give me an example.

When we went in, say, not quick enough, or untidy, they used to come up, also with those clubs, hit you, kick you, up your backside, or in the back, wherever they kicked you, they were not fussy, they used to give us a rough treatment, some of them.

What medical attention did you get in this Camp? During this period?

They also had what you call a special, Riviera, what we called it, cordoned off, a separate little part, for sick people. Ordinary sickness, you recovered there. They had some doctors also amongst them, or those prisoner doctors, not outsiders, they were all prisoners, and they have the orders, the Camp, what you call Krankenhaus Orderlies, and what used to organise with their own, like, nurses, and they used to, if they managed to bring you back to health, they used to bring you back to health, like, with hardly anything.

So, on the one hand, the, the Germans gathered you there in order to work outside, on the other hand ...

As long, as long we could work.

On the other hand, they didn't give you enough food and shelter, and look after you, so that you could work properly?

That's right. That's right. The only thing, as long as you lasted. There was a lot of them didn't last the hard work, especially, the columns used to go up, out with, a column of 50 workers together, and they work together, or 20 or 30 columns, 30 men together, and they had a guard, if they were a bigger column they had two guards with them, and they kept an eye on them all the time. They couldn't get no help, outside help, a bit of extra food, or anything.

So you were a bit more fortunate?

A bit more fortunate, working in this, in this small group.

Do you think this helped you to survive?

I'm certain, I'm sure that helped me survive. And the strength I had, till December 1945, really, till it come to January 1945, when we started going on the march, I had a bit of more strength to get through, because from January 1st, or something, when it happened, we walked out, till the day of the Liberation, the 30th of April, there was no way we could help ourselves. I was on the surplus strength, worked on the surplus strength.

You've got your father to thank, really, because he made you become an electrician.

An electrician, yeh. Having a trade, saved me.

So, you stayed in this Camp the whole of 1944,

Till '45.

What was the next thing that happened to you then?

We one day went on the works ...

In 1945?

'45, 1945, December, the last month of, December '44, we went on the works, and all of a sudden, we come to the oven was warm still, no, they didn't wake us up, five o'clock in the morning, there was no waker up, and we woke up because it was already day time, we were, when we woke up, we wondering what's happening here. All of a sudden, they sent us, it was already day time, to get our food. We got out, we got our food, we come back in the Camp, we had something to eat, and they take us, about 10 o'clock, we walked out into the Works, we had a roll call, and went out to work. When we got to works, there was no masters there, the masters, the German masters wasn't there, they come and left the lot, because our master he wasn't, because we felt the oven warm, he made a fire, he was, he never done it, our prisoners made a fire in the store room, and then when we got there, the fire was on, was really going out, and no masters to work with.

This is in your working place?

The working place, in the Camp, on the Works, the Krupps Works, where we marched every day. It was about two kilometres away.

There were no workers?

No workers, and then we had, what we organised, we used to do, we organised ourselves. We had a surplus of bread, what you call, concealed in a, under the floor, in the store room, where we kept it, and that is gone. He himself, the master cleared it out, he cleared out the thing, he'd gone home. Then when we went out, we come across, we used to know Czechoslovakian workman, so we says, "What's happening here? There's nobody here. Where's the masters?" He says, "They all went home, they run home." So, we said, "Why was that?" They had seen a patrol, a Russian patrol, come from outside.

Did you know at that time ...

The Russians pushing forward, they already, they already were on the German, old German, we knew they were already crossed the old German/Polish border.

And they were advancing?

They left Poland, like Polish, old Poland, into the German, they already crossed the German territory, and we are still there working. And they saw the German patrols, and so they all left. And so all of a sudden, they made our, it was on my mind to escape, and a few more. On our mind, because we knew the Works well, and we had hiding places there, where we worked underground, doing the cables, sometimes drawing the cables, the underground was so deep there, it was hard to find anybody there. And we knew the places there, because I had organised with the boys, we had four boys together, we organised ourselves, and we made a little workshop, one of the secret places in the works, and we made some electric fires, and we sold them black market to the Germans, in the forced labour people, the civilians, what used to work outside the, side by side, we used to sell it to them, or exchange it for all sorts of things. And we had, I made electric ovens there. We had the Czechoslovakians bringing us the fire bricks with connectors, with heating elements, to make fires, and we used to have a little workshop there! And it's surprising how you do, in those conditions. We had nothing to lose.

So you thought of escape, you thought of hiding there, but you didn't?

As it happens, I had a, my clothes what I took from home, a good suit, but I never cut out those stars or anything. I hid them on a roof, not on a roof, in an attic. The first attic.

Where?

In the camp, in the camp. Outside, not in the camp where we were prisoners, on the outside, the working camps, where we used to go out to work. I used to took it out, and I had it hidden, because that was always on our mind, to, to escape, somehow.

So, why did you not escape?

Because we would be seen, we'd got no chance. We had no chances. Very very hard. I mean, the railway lines, they were guarding them, there were guards.

Did you not think of hiding in the, staying in the cellar until the Russians came?

That's the last moment, when we heard this, I had that in mind, and the others as well, or we'd got a fear, because the Germans walked around with dogs, they shouldn't go out and sniff us out. But they did not bother. You see, we had made a mistake, soon we left out the camp, the Works, the Works, back into the Camp. When they seen nobody's here, they made a roll call, and they never even counted how many prisoners back into the Camp. Just gathered us together, making looking like it's going to be a roll call, and they marched us back into the Camp. And when you got back into the Camp, they give us rationing, they supposed to give everybody a half a loaf, that's a half a kilo of bread, with a bit of butter, and salami. Most of the prisoners got that rationing. When it come to me, and several others, about half a dozen, we didn't get it. We marched in, they told us, "Get a blanket, and we're marching." And they made another roll call, and we start marching out from the camp.

What time was this?

That's when we knew the Russians are, are really close, and we couldn't escape then.

Why?

Because the sick people, they left them on the Riviera, there, they left them standing there.

What time of the day was this?

That was about ...

That you started marching?

Lunch time, about lunch time. We started marching out from the Camp.

How many of you?

The whole 6,000, except those ill people on the Riviera, I don't know how many there was left behind. And they left somebody behind, one Capo.

Did anybody escape from there at that time?

At the time, I don't know, I don't think so. Or there could have been a few here and there, or we don't know. I know one thing, I met here, on the last gadding, on the last '45 exercise gadding, I met a boy what was in the same Camp I was, and he was at the time, on the Riviera, as a sick man, as a sick man, he said, "Two days after we left the

Camp, they got occupied by the Russians." Two days later, we would have survived in the basement there, for two days.

So, you walked, where to?

To Grossrosen. Under very very bad conditions.

You said, about ...

December, January.

About 70 kilometres, you said?

About 75 kilometres, out, to Grossrosen.

In the Winter?

That was in the winter.

How long did it take you to walk?

Three days, three nights.

And where did you sleep at night?

We slept in the open, some in the barns, if they managed to get some barns.

All these thousands of people?

All these thousands of people. As it happens, I was a bit lucky at the time. I told you, I didn't get my rationing, so when I marched out the first night, to be away, to manage a little bit of space, to sleep, there was near a railway line, a stack of those rails, on the side line, stacked up, a railway line of about four foot high. So one fellow, a friend of mine, an electrician, we walked into that hole, and we slept in that hole. All of a sudden, I get a hit on the top of the head. What is it? A loaf of bread! Like from Heaven! Mannah from Heaven! Come in. What's happened. The prisoners used to pinch one from another, so they were chased by the prisoners, so they thrown it away. So we got, we managed to get hold of it. Being dark, they didn't know who or what happened.

So you survived this three day march.

Three day march, up to Grossrosen. In Grossrosen they put us into barracks again.

Grossrosen is another ...

Concentration Camp. It was a very very severe Concentration Camp. A very, a punishable one.

So how long were you there, in Grossrosen?

A week.

And did you do any work there?

No, no work. We haven't even changed or undressed for sleeping or anything. We slept on a very damp, dirty floor in the barracks, in the barracks, under cover.

What did you do during the day?

Walk around, walk around round the Camp, see what's going on there. Because there's other inmates from different camps pass by there, talking to each other, found some friends, mates from home. We seen some mates, I seen several mates from home, what I come across. And after the week, they assembled us again, and put us on trains, and they transported us to Buchenwald from there.

So, this was now in 1945?

1945, and we, on the train, on the open trucks.

This was in the winter time?

Winter time, open trucks. Some trucks were concealed, I was in a open one.

How many to a truck?

Oh, there was, cramped. We hardly had any much room to sit down there. We just had enough room to sit down. One each other's crutch.

How long was this journey?

The train was a five day journey. Five days they took us. I don't know how it happened. You could have probably made it, that journey, within a half a day or something, in normal circumstances. They took us five days, with a little rationing, they give us again in Grossrosen, but we ate it before we embarked the train.

And during the train journey?

We just didn't have nothing. Not to eat, not to drink. What we do, when it was snowing, we just get the snow, and lick the snow.

Did the train stop many times?

No, it stopped and go slowly.

If you wanted to go to the lavatory, what happened?

They had, they put some what you call, like buckets, in the corners, in the corner buckets, and they used to just throw them out, overboard. Empty it.

So if it rained or snowed, you got ...

Just licked it for, to wet the mouth.

The trucks were open?

Open trucks.

To the sky?

Yeh. And the cold, very freezing cold. We used to be tucked into each other, we used to tuck into each other, kept ourself warm, kept our bodies warm.

Was anybody ill, or died?

Oh, there was, lots of them very very ill. There's a lot of them died, and they got cleared out when you got to the, what you call, the destination.

Buchenwald?

To Buchenwald. On the three day march, there was people, they were getting shot on the road. Anybody who couldn't keep up with the march, at the back, they used to get to the back ...

On the march?

On the march to Grossrosen. On the first march we lost 600 men from the 6,000, between 500 and 600 men, they used to get shot on the way, on the way. They, people tried to get in, because whoever was the last, and couldn't keep up, they shot them, they used to tell him to put the blanket over the head, and they just pulled the trigger. And after, so I was saying, the first march, we lost between 500 and 600 men. Then on the other march, from Ducha ...

We're still on the train to Buchenwald.

To Buchenwald.

So, the five days, you had nothing to eat?

Nothing to eat, not to drink. We were supposed to survive on that ration what they give us, but that ration was eaten up even before we embarked that train.

Did the train stop to let you out for exercise, and to walk around?

No. No. No. Nothing like that.

So, eventually, after five days, you arrived at Buchenwald.

Buchenwald. We got into Buchenwald. They were on the outside of the camp, like, outside, not in the barracks or anything.

Who was outside?

That was like, outside the fence, outside the fence, getting into the camp.

You were outside, the train was outside?

The train, they opened up the train, and there was inside, surrounding, or outside the camp. There was already like a camp, and outside the camp, was the open surrounding where they had the guards had barracks there.

So you got out the train.

And we supposed to go through what you call an Entlausung.

What was that?

Delousing. Delousing room.

So, you got out the train, and what happened to you?

We're standing, waiting to get into the camp. And we still didn't get no food. And they said they're going to get us food, soon we get deloused, and we change clothes. So we were standing outside the Camp, by the, all of a sudden, within about three or four hours they let us in. So they made us undress, and leave the clothes out. And we went into a very big room, in a hall, and that hall, was several hundred people, probably a thousand people.

A hall?

A hall, like a room. A room, and in that room we were walking around, undressed. In the centre it was quite a bit, it was warm enough. The bad air, from the public, being a thousand cramped there, it was very smelly, so they made us open up the windows.

You were all standing there naked?

Yeh, waiting to go into the delousing room. And in the delousing room, they used to shave you.

Right, you're standing in this room.

Yeh, and they opened the windows. The people next to the window standing, they were freezing cold, so that they pushed their way into the middle, or tried to close it,

and there was quite fighting going around, amongst the prisoners themselves. I was in the, that's the first time I fainted. I personally fainted.

In this room?

In this room. And the friends of mine, the, we kept four electricians, we kept together, all the time. On all the marches, and all the bad times, till we got in the Camp. And I fainted away. Anyway, the boy revived me. He says, "Henry, don't give up now. We already in the camp, any minute now, we might get something to eat. We go through the delousing room." We were there nearly all night. Nearly all night there, waiting. What's happened, the rumour went round that they bombed the water, the water mains got bombed, and we can't get no water, we haven't got no water in the camp, to get into having the showers, in the delousing room. We thought personally that it is different, my guess now, that that be the finish. We have in the mind they're going to gas us now. Or, as it happened, they did bomb the place, and we were waiting for the water supply. Early in the morning, all of a sudden, the whole room went in, went into a place, and there were prisoners ...

You went ...

That was what you call a quarantine.

And they made you walk into another room?

Into another room, where there were shower rooms, baths of paraffin, filled with paraffin, and we, in barbers, which they have, like clippers there, to shave us, whatever hair we had, underarm, under, pubic hair, everywhere, the heads.

You had hot showers?

Yes, they hot showers, cold shower. First, before we went into the hot shower and cold shower, we had to get into a tub, big tubs, and there were about half a dozen of us going in there, and they dipped us under with the heads, under it, and out.

Some sort of anti ...

Yeh, against lice, delousing you. After we had this, they give us soap, and they made us go under the shower to wash, to wash us off from the paraffin. And we had to wash ourself and have a shower.

They shaved your heads?

Yeh, they shaved, they shaved, first, when they shaved, they shaved us two ways. Like, with a little bit there, and the centre was shaved. Two inch striped shaves.

A band of completely shaven scalp?

Scalp, so it identified us, so we were always like that shaved, in concentration camp, to be identified we are prisoners, if we escape or anything, they could identify us.

So they gave you some clothes to wear?

They give us different, clean, clean clothes, like the striped clothes, prisoners clothes, again. A shirt, and a pair of pants, and a jacket and trousers of those cotton stripes, and a overcoat. The overcoat was also only one, one cloth, not lined or anything like that, just, and a cap, with a wooden pair of shoes.

And then you were taken to?

Taken into your quarantine. The quarantine, was a camp, also, with three bunks.

Had you recovered a bit by now?

Yeh, and they give us a portion of food. As soon as we had the bath and the clothes, they gave us a portion of food. They give us a piece of bread, and a bowl of soup, and that's gone down like a pill. Swallowed, we didn't chew it, we didn't bother to chew it much, just swallow it, like a pill. So hungry we were.

I mean, after five days, you imagine, a lot of people died on the way. When those people died, they cleared them out, they took them into the crematoriums.

So they revived you a bit?

Oh yes, that revived me. And then we went start in the quarantine, when we were in the quarantine nearly a week. They fed us, we had a bowl of soup every day, with a slice of bread. A slice. The slice was about as thick as that.

That was the camp ...

The camp, before going into the normal camp.

How long were you there for? A week?

For a week. And then all of a sudden, they put us into the, with the other inmates, in a part of the camp. Into bunks. The bunks, they were like, five storey, lying flat, about five in a bunk. Like chickens.

Just explain this, the bunks started off on the floor, and went to the ceiling? Five people, one on top of each other?

Not, five in the width, in a bunk. No straw, anything.

So, could you just explain that again. There were five shelves, going from the floor to the ceiling, and on each shelf ...

There were five into a bunk, like.

So there would be 25 people in this ...

No, one height. One height, those bunks, they were not separated, they were one whole length through the room, both sides.

That is where you slept. What did you have to cover you over?

We had a blankets. One blanket, probably was about the five, we probably had about three blankets.

Between you.

Between us, cover us up.

So,

And every morning, we used to wake up and we used to find two or three dead amongst us.

And what happened to the dead?

They used to be taken out in the morning, and taken to the crematorium. And carted off in carts.

But the ones who were still alive ...

They used to fill them in again, into fives.

But they used to, ... So in the morning, in this camp, those of you who still managed to survive, you got up, what time?

They used to wake us up there about 6 o'clock.

End of FIO47 Side A

FIO47 Side B

You were saying, they woke you up about 6 o'clock in the morning.

Yes. 6 o'clock in the morning, we had to go out and have a wash, wash barracks, whatever else, clean up a little bit, and then we went back into the barracks, and they might make a roll call of the prisoners, how many are still alive, how many, the block Orderly would give an account of how many still alive, when the, after breakfast. Before breakfast, the roll call would be before breakfast.

So, they'd find out who was still alive.

How many alive, how many dead.

Where did the roll call take place?

That roll call used to take place in the barracks.

In the open?

Inside. Inside.

And then they would take ...

The oldest would give the account of the surviving, overnight, how many is alive, how many dead. And after they clear out from the dead, and then somebody, they would come around the prisoners, or the orderlies would come to fetch, from the kitchen, some food, and we would get a bowl of soup each. We get a bowl of soup, and a slice of bread, that was in Dachau.

And after breakfast, what happened?

After breakfast, we just also walked around the camp, we didn't work. We did not work for several weeks, about three weeks I was in Dachau, we never worked, we just walked about. Three weeks.

Did you meet people who ...

I meet, I met a uncle of mine there, who had been parted, a little while with him, and some other people from the town, from home.

Did you see any people there, who had been there for a long while?

Yes, there were, yes. I, as it happens, seen a man, a carpenter, come into the barrack, a prisoner, a carpenter, to do some repair works there, a German, a German prisoner, he had a special, oh, like a blue sign, blue sign, the German.

A label on his shirt?

A label, as he's German. They used to be identified. The Jewish had a yellow one, the German had a blue one, the Poles had a red one.

So, we're now in Buchenwald, and you were there for how long?

For about three weeks.

Not doing any work?

Not doing any work, no. All of a sudden, they ask, anybody wants to go out to work. So I volunteered, out for work, because going out for work, you managed something, with a bit of extra, maybe, food, get a bit extra. To make sure we are fit to work, we have to stand again under examination doctor, German doctors examination, to see if we are fit for work. So we had to undress and march through in front of him, and they decided, "Oh, he's still got a bit of flesh on him, he'll still be okay." And they used to put them on one side for work. And those were, not very fit much for work, they put on another side, back into the Camp, they wouldn't take him out. So they made a, a group of about five or six hundred men, I was amongst them, and we went to another Camp, by train, near Stuttgart, Bissingen, they used to call the Camp. The Camp what used to, and where we used to go out to work, and on those works, they used to extract from stone, oil. Oil. Yes, the way the presses was going, they used to get oil, like a burning material in between, stones, certain stones again, a burning material again. And they used to have pipes, inside, that fit in, and they used to draw, oil used to come out from it. And the oil used to be refined for the purposes, for tractors, or all sorts of things. I don't know how they used to process this. I know we used to go out there, and we had to stack stones on top of the fire material, then light fire material again.

In layers?

Yeh. It used to be a very deep pit inside, and the stones used to be outside, like, at the sides, where we used to dig, and take them up to lie them on top of it. Well, as it happens, we were there again about two or three weeks.

That's in Bissingen?

Bissingen, Bissingen,

Which was a camp?

Not a camp.

Similar to the one ...

The previous concentration camp, not such a big one. It was about a couple of thousand people there. And as it happens, when we were in that Camp, the Allied Forces, the Air Force would not allow us to work any more. What they done, they

used to come around with the planes, and raid it, and going round it. They never bombed. They never bombed. They used to come round and the Germans, the air raid used to go on, the Germans used to run to the shelters, us they left in the fields, they didn't bother about us. We used to be very pleased, seeing the Air Force, we can't work any more. We used to throw down our caps and jackets up there. At the time, there used to be already March, and we had quite a sunny period at the time.

This is in 1945?

1945. About March. We used to be very happy they come to visit us, overhead, and we couldn't work, we used to lean against the shovels and very little work was done, and there wasn't much strength to do any work either.

So, do you have any knowledge of the experience of the selections of the ones heard about, where ...

No, I can say to you, not selections to gas chambers or anything like that, not, not mine. There are people which have been in Auschwitz, and there are some here. There are some here in Gants Hill, I can recommend, I can show you some people, and they've also got the tattoos, but I haven't got no tattoos.

No. No. You were well, I'm not saying you were fortunate, but more fortunate than ...

More fortunate than the others.

Because of your, really, because of your trade?

Of the trade, of the trade, being transported into forced labour camp first, and staying in the forced labour camp, from forced labour camp into what you call the concentration camps, but I still worked in the same works, for Krupps.

Did this continue until the Liberation?

What?

This, you were living in forced labour camps and working as an electrician?

Yeh, well, there I was not, in Bissingen, Buchenwald, and Dachau, I not work any more as a tradesman.

You didn't?

No, no. I used to work, what you call, with the columns. In Bissingen, I mean, in Dachau, in Buchenwald I didn't work, and Grossrosen we never worked, we marched on those marches, those, I was on the transport all the time, and Bissingen was my last time where I picked up a shovel, or a pick axe and worked, in a column.

And where were you when you were Liberated?

I was in, I was liberated on a train.

Going from where to where?

My last train, going from Bissingen, we couldn't work any more, and all of a sudden we heard a lot of guns, shooting, rumbling. We used to, people, special old soldiers, they used to tell, "Oh, those guns, they could be about, say 15 kilometres away, or 20 kilometres away, distance", we heard them going on, and one day, they come, they said, they assembled us, and we went back to a railway line, and they took us into Dachau, near Munchen. And Dachau, I was there about four to five weeks, living on very very little rationing. No work in it. The little rationing, to preserve it, I used to pick up the food, and I go straight back on the bunk, and lie down, lie, not to use any energy. We used ourselves, our sense for that. The less we move about, the more energy we would preserve.

You knew, you knew that you were going to be, you knew the War was coming to an end?

We knew the War was coming to an end.

And did you think that you would be Liberated?

I was still, we still hoped, hoped, or we never had any hope for our, or they let us alive. And as it happens, when it come to Dachau, after four weeks, they put us, assembled us, put us again on trucks, into railway, goods trains, on that train in Dachau, and we were going for a week, forward and backwards on a little distance, and we knew when we went on the truck, when they put us, they are taking us for, to do us in.

To exterminate?

To exterminate, how they exterminate us, how, I don't know. We knew they can only take us somewhere in the mountains of Tyrol, somewhere, to do us in.

How many of you were there at this time?

On the train, it could have been, I would say, a couple of thousand. On the railway line, a couple of thousand, two, three thousands. Loaded up. They give us also again, a portion of food rationing, and they give us, everyday, something to eat on the train, a slice of bread with something. No soups, no warm, nothing warm any more. Or, we we were just in, one day before the Liberation, there was a Red Cross convoy passed by, and they asked the Kommandant, can they give us the food, because they, they said they can't get to any prisoners of wars, to any Camps. Would they allow us to unload the Red Cross parcels, and the Kommandant allowed him to give us. And that's the only Red Cross parcel I received since I've been in camps, in any of the camps. In Buchenwald, and Dachau, the old prisoners, the German prisoners, no Jewish prisoners ever received a Red Cross parcel. They used to supply Red Cross parcels into the Concentration Camps, occasionally. We Jewish prisoners never got

any. And that, they allowed us, and I had a Red Cross parcel, probably two kilo, a two kilo square Red Cross parcel, and they used to, every parcel had the same thing in it. Two packets of cigarettes, a tin of powdered milk, in powdered form, milk, a piece of chocolate, a packet of biscuits, a packet of roast beef, a tin of roast beef, that was something like from Heaven, a miracle from Heaven. We took the milk, we went outside, they allowed us to embark, to stop the train, when they stopped the train, they let us embark, they let us have some water, and we had cans, tins, like to drink tea or coffee, we had carried on us, like a can, and we boiled, made fires, and we made up milk from the powdered milk, and the first time we had a bit of hot water drink, hot water, hot milk, from the powdered milk, and had a bit of what you call corned beef, with biscuits.

Saved you?

That saved us. That was a day before.

So you were on the train?

Near, Near Kochel.

We'll stop here for now, and next time I see you, we'll talk about the actual Liberation.

Yes.

On the, we come to the end, not on the end, on the train of the last week before we've just been liberated.

Okay, so we're starting again, on the 4th November. So, Henry, you are now on the train, what time of the year is this?

Oh, it was April, between, from the last week between the 23rd, to the 30th.

Of 1945?

Of 1945.

And you're on a train going from where?

From between Starmbeegersee, that's near Munich.

Can you spell that?

S T A R M B E E G.

And you're going from there ...

Towards Kochel, that's going on the way.

Can you spell that?

K O H E L.

And in what country was this?

That was Bavaria.

In Bavaria.

In Bavaria, between Munich, and going towards Garmisch Partenkirchen, that's, somewhere around there, near the Italian border. How many of you on the train?

Oh, there was about 12 wagons, 12 wagons, and on each wagon was about 100 people there.

So, over a thousand people.

Oh, over a thousand people.

And you were guarded by Germans?

By Germans, yes. They, they used to be the German Wache, the SS. Or, as it happens, the last few nights, the last couple of nights when they seen they, they're already defeated, we heard what you call, the guns, close by. The most bad one ...

The Russian guns?

No, the American.

The American, yeh.

When the really bad ones, what treated us badly, they, overnight, they escaped from the train, they were left about ...

The Germans?

Yeh. The Guards.

The Guards?

Well, the Kommandant and about 30 of those soldiers, the SS.

They just disappeared one night?

One night, they just disappeared, there was less guards on. That was, nearly the last night, about two nights before. So there was left still about 30 guards.

So, then, what happened then, you were on the train.

Yeh, and the Kommandant, when he heard they were closing in, he told us everybody who could, to get some white from a shirt, or whatever, any white rags, and put out as flags, white flags out.

The German Kommandant?

Kommandant.

Told you to wear white?

Not to wear white, to make white flags, like on sticks.

To show the Americans that you were ...

Yes, surrendering, surrendering.

So, he ...

They shouldn't shoot, attack us.

So in a way, he was looking after you at that point?

At that point, yes, he tried. Not only after us, but after himself as well. So that they shouldn't attack us with the ...

So, what happened?

As they come very close, and we seen them.

What did you see?

We see the Americans in jeeps, coming, passing by.

Passing by the railway line?

The railway line, they surrounded the, they surrounded the railway lines, and all the boys, most boys, what had still a bit of strength in them, they used to make forward to the first wagon, where they kept provisions, they kept provisions for to feed, feed us and themselves, and they opened up and throw out everything from those wagons, there was a lot of boys, they went closer together.

When you say "boys" you're talking about?

Prisoners.

Your friends, and ...

Friends, and what you call, we used to call them Heflingers.

What does that mean?

Heflingers, in German, prisoners, like, concentration camp prisoners.

So, you were, the train was stationary on a railway line, and you saw the American jeeps come up ...

Yeh, surrounding us. They give up, they come out.

Who's "they"?

The SS men, and the guards.

You saw all this?

Yes, we saw it, and we went forward. Some of the boys they, whatever they could, they used to throw at them.

Throw at who?

At the Germans.

So, what actually happened? The SS men came, they jumped down onto the track?

No, no, we jumped, we came off the wagons.

You were now standing on the railway lines?

Lines, because we didn't move much, but some of them, we used to cook, that powdered milk, made into milk, boiled, near the wagons, they, they didn't bother us any more then, the Germans.

So, you saw these Americans come, and surround the train, and you jumped down, if you weren't already down.

Yes. We seen them, some of the prisoners, throwing out food from the front, from the front of those wagons, where they had the provisions, so everybody make their way, try to get something to eat. Something to eat, so we got hold of a bit of bread.

You were very hungry at the time?

Yeh, there was about four of us, we kept together, four friends of us, electricians, we kept all the time together, and another two of his friends from the same town, and we kept together, and as we come up, we made our way back. The Americans told us which direction to go, they told us, "Go back that direction."

Just before you come to that, I'm interested about the surrender. What happened with the German soldiers?

The boys started hitting them around, you know, whatever they had, a belt, or ...

What, assaulting the Germans?

Assaulted, yeh.

How many were there, how many Germans?

About 30 of them.

And they had surrendered?

They surrendered,

What, they put their hands up?

Yeh, and they throw their ...

Weapons ...

The weapons towards the Americans. And the Americans after surrendered them, and they took them as prisoners. They told us to make our way back to town.

Just before you get there ...

As it happens, we haven't had much strength. We thought we had. We were so happy to see the Americans when we jumped from the train, we just fell on our faces.

Because you weren't strong enough?

No, no, there was no more energy.

How did the Americans treat you?

Oh, the Americans, the first lot, they were magnificent, they were very very good.

In what way?

They brought the food, whatever they could give us from their provisions, they used to give us, or it wasn't there at the time, because they told us, they had their duties to go forward, to, to.

I'm talking about at that time. At the very moment the Americans came, they were kind to you?

Yeh, they were kind, they just told us, just go back to the town, and we will be taken care of.

How did they treat the Germans?

The Germans? I tell you the truth, I didn't occupy myself a lot with it, I tried to get away from the train as quick as possible. And they used to call them names, all sorts of names. They just surrounded them, and they kept them in a bunch.

But you say that some of the prisoners wanted to revenge themselves on the Germans, and started hitting them?

Yeh, well, they didn't have much strength to do that, you see. If the American would not allow, they thought it a bit, keep order.

So the Americans marched the Germans away?

And they told us to walk back, away from the German lines, into occupied lines.

So you went back to ...

We tried to.

So, you walked back to this town, what was it called?

Kohel.

And you were there for a short time, a long time?

In the, about only two weeks. For two weeks, and then the Americans come and they say, would we come with them, they were going to take us to Switzerland, to a, what you call, camp, so we go to, we be able to go to Switzerland.

So you thought you were going to Switzerland?

To Switzerland, we were very happy, we left the place, and we went with them. As it happens, they took us into a displaced person camp, Feldafink.

In?

In Bavaria, not far from Starnbergersee. So we ...

What sort of place was that?

They made us undress there and clean up again, to get rid of the, those lice, lice or whatever insects we had. They done good, they bathe us. They bathe us, and they give us pyjamas, they give us SS airman pyjamas.

German pyjamas?

German pyjamas, with a shirt or something, and that was, that was all we had.

Yeh, so, obviously they gave you food.

Oh yes, we used to get food supplies, and sufficient soups.

How were you.? Because you said that you were ...

The Medical Centre was there, too.

You said you were very weak when you jumped off the train.

Yes. Well, we managed to walk back to the nearest town, town with the ...

How quickly did you recover physically, would you say?

Oh, it took, it took about six months. Six months till I felt really good, like. They used to have the old German soldiers there, what used to, used to be with the SS men, what you call us, camp, I would say about probably 5,000 or 10,000 displaced persons there. Of all different nationalities.

Coming from different camps?

From different places, they surrounded, the Americans brought them over, they used to round them up and bring them into this displaced persons camp.

I suppose some of the people were in even worse condition than you, physically?

Some went straight on what you call, onto the hospital beds.

Was there both sexes, women as well as men?

There was women there, and men. Although they kept them into separate barracks.

So you were there for six months.

Six months, yes.

Just to get back your strength?

Yes, till it come, there was one day, a Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashana, there was a, one of a family, come over to the Camp, he said to me, "Come on Henry, come with us, come with me."

This would be, just to interrupt you, this would be about September of 1945?

Yes. He said, "Don't stay here, come with me, we live in better conditions than in a camp. We live private." He's got already, opened up a workshop, a tailoring shop, with a ...

This is a friend of yours?

No, that was a relation, a relation. He was married to my uncle's sister, to my uncle's, to my uncle like, his sister was married to an uncle of mine. To an uncle of mine.

He was a refugee as well?

Yes. What you call displaced person, survivor. Only they survive on the roads, they come of different, on the roads, and they stopped in the villages, and there was about 12 men in the village, survivors, and they camped, they made their homes there. The Germans took them in.

This was after the War?

After the War, the Germans took them in, and like, made, to lodge, as lodgers.

So, after the displaced persons camp, you moved to a private house?

To a private house.

For ...

I was a lodger in a private house.

Were you working at the time?

No, no. They used to give us what you call ration cards, the double amount as a German used to get.

And any money?

No money. No money, no.

Just ration cards to get food.

Yes.

But you had to buy food?

Yes, we used to buy on the ration card.

Where did you get the money from?

Some I had, what you call, from what you called, from the cigarettes, from the Red Cross. We used to get Red Cross parcels, from the Red Cross, we used to take out certain stuff, things what we, like, chocolate, I wasn't much for it.

No, and exchange it for something else?

Exchange it, sell it.

So you stayed in this friend's house. Where was this?

Ergolsbach.

Could you spell that?

E R G O L S B A C H.

So, did you have any experience of mixing with Germans during this ...

End of FIO47 Side B

FIO48 Side A

So, we were talking about how the Germans reacted to your experiences.

They, they, they used to say, a lot of them say they never knew what was going on much between what they were doing the SS and about the camps. Or that was all a lot of lies, because they were seeing people working, with the civilians, in camps, and also I used to go out working, a lot of prisoners used to go out with this thing, on the roads, and they used to see the treatment, the way they treated on the roads, the way they used to behave themselves, the SS men against, towards us.

When you say their behaviour, you said, a long time ago ...

Swearing and ...

You said they actually used to shoot people on the roads?

Oh, this is on the march, on the march, when anybody couldn't walk fast enough, they wasn't close, they used to get weak, they used to, and they couldn't keep up, they used to make you put a blanket over the head, and they used to pull the trigger. Used to put it on the side, like into the ditches, they never used to bother to take away the bodies, or anything like that.

So, the people that you were staying with, at, for this six month period, you stayed with a German family.

Yes.

What did they say, talking particularly about that family?

That family, I mean, the wife she looked after us, she, the place where I stayed, they used to leave the shoes outside, don't hang on your clothes into the wardrobe, just put it on the thing, they used to brush it off, polish the shoes. I used to find that every morning.

You used to pay a rent?

They never took no money.

They didn't.

They did not take no money from me.

So they were quite kind?

Yeh, that family was very, that was quite, they had a shop, they had a business, and they were quite comfortable off. I wouldn't say they were millionaires, they were

comfortable people, business people, middle class. The children were nice. As it happens, one of the daughters, fell in love with one of our survivors, and she fell pregnant afterwards, and they wanted to marry her, but I believe he married her. He married her.

So these people said they were not aware of the camps, did they?

They, they heard about it, although there was nothing they could do about it. As far as I know, the Germans, they were really restricted to talk to each other. When they were, they were afraid, father to son, to talk about the reality of the whole, of the whole situation. If there were four, they were afraid the sons might tell on them, or if it was vice versa, the father might something do.

So, how did you feel towards the Germans then?

Oh, I feel very bitter, because.

At the time?

At the time. I was living, I was treated as human being, I didn't care to carry grudge on them. I had a very very bitter feeling towards the Germans, I didn't want to stop in Germany. I would do anything to get out of it, and I did.

But I mean, on an individual level, you were staying with a family, of a country that had ill treated you, and did terrible things to the Jews, so on the one hand, you were very hateful towards them, on the other hand, the individuals there in the house, were personally kind to you.

I never, I never. Kind, and so there was a lot of the population in the village. But what there is, the majority were like, I don't know, but internal, or too old, they never showed any hatred towards us.

So, okay, let's just carry on with the trips. You then, after six months, you went to where?

After six, no, the first six months I spent in the Camp, after then I went to my friend, I stayed another six months, like in the village. I used to go back to collect my rations from the Camp as well, to the DP Camp. I also registered in the town where I stayed, because I didn't want to be not registered, and they give me rations, so I had double rations! I made sure I had enough rations. I didn't do it for business purpose, only for ...

To survive.

To survive, and to ...

To exchange?

To exchange for, to, I needed clothes, to make myself a provision of clothes, to get, for dressing up and everything else, and have a few pounds on me.

So you then went to Paris, I think? Eventually?

Yes. After, after six months, my uncle sent a Polish officer, they had connections there with a friend in Paris, relations there.

You had relations in Paris?

In Paris. Before the War, my mother's cousins, and my uncle, from London, after the War, come over to Paris, and he told my uncle he received a letter to the Red Cross, from me, he said, "How can I be able to bring him over?" So I said, "Look, I've got a friend of mine here also from Bendzin",

Where was this?

In Paris, "And he's a Polish officer, and he's mixed up with the Polish Army". So we see what we can do. So he found somebody, he sent somebody round, he paid him 50 dollars, 50 dollars.

Your uncle paid somebody in Paris?

In Paris, 50 dollars, to bring me over to Paris.

I see, yes, and ...

So, he sent that man, that Officer had sent us, well, another Officer, with a documents ...

To say that you could go, you could leave ...

Fabricated, fabricated, with the papers, with the leave papers as a Polish soldier, and put my name on, to give me what you call leave, vacation.

Leave of absence.

Leave of absence. So he brought a uniform, a Polish uniform, to Frankfurt. I put the Polish uniform on, and I went with him to Paris, by civilian, I took a few civilian clothes.

So you posed as a Polish ...

Polish soldier.

Polish soldier who had been on leave, and was going back to Paris?

Back to Paris. And when I got ...

You crossed the border without any difficulty?

No. No. I was, slept in the, what you call, what you call, the Umraum. Not the Umraum, like a hostel, Army hostel, and ...

But you didn't speak ...

In Mannheim. In Mannheim they had, not a Polish hostel, but a hostel for any, any soldiers who passed by. So we went there, we spent the night, and we asked them to wake us up, when the train goes to Paris. So we were woken up by the soldiers, they give us a lift to the station, in the jeep, and we travelled all night.

Were you worried that you would be found out?

No. Nothing worried me. No, those things didn't worry me, no.

Well, what could happen to you?

Well!

So, you got to Paris, which was a bit different from Germany.

Yeh, that was, I mean, I had what you call a relation there, like, from my thing, and I stayed with, with my mother's cousins in Paris, for about nearly six weeks. My uncle tried to get, get me over, he wrote every day, for to guarantee, to guarantee that I won't be falling on, a burden on the State. The only thing is, I had a problem, I had to be, to come to England, under 18 years of age. And they, when I went to the Consulate,

And you were now?

24. 24. That comes again to knowing people. The cousin that I stayed with, they used to come in from Bergen Belsen, the Chief, the Jewish Chief, they used to call Administrator from the Camp, made him like Administrator from the Camp, the oldest, and he used to come to Paris often, in connection with, with the Holocaust survivors, so every time he used to come there, they used to notify him that he is in Paris, because they knew each other as childhood, they were childhood friends. So he told them, he said, "Look, there's no problem. I am going back to Belsen within two days, and I'll send you documents, new documents, for him." And he send me what you call, what they used to give, identity cards, supplied in Bergen Belsen to the Holocaust survivors, and he sent me to Paris with a seventeen and a half years of age ...

Passport?

Not passport, identity card, with an identity card, I went to, I went after to the French Police, what they call it ...

The Gendarmes?

Yeh, the Prefect ...

Prefecture?

Like Prefect something, to their office, and they, the Jewish, the Committee, they brought me out, a new travel document, a document that I, the tickets, with conditions not to remain in France. I should remain in France. So with those papers, and the identity card from Bergen Belsen, proving that the document, had "Please do help. Whatever you can, as he is a survivor from then." And that document, if you showed anybody, they used to help, only in administrative circumstances, they used to help out.

So you got out, your uncle was very good to you, this uncle in England? He managed to get you out of Germany.

It took me about six weeks from Paris, to acknowledge me that I am the right age, and allowed me to come over here, to work.

This uncle was what, your mother's ...

My mother's brother.

So, okay, you get to London, and this is, 1946?

Yeh.

1946, yeh.

And you go and stay with your uncle?

My uncle.

And what was his name?

Hertzberg.

What's his first name?

Shmuel. Samuel.

And where was he living?

In the time, when I come over here, he live in Golders Green.

I see, and you went to live with him.

I stayed in his house.

With his family?

For his house, I stayed for four years.

Had he got a wife and children?

A wife and two sons.

So ...

One son was in a boarding school.

What business was he in?

He was in engineering and plastic. In a factory.

And he gave you a job?

Yes, he tried to teach me to, the engineering, that's how I come to work in engineering, in that four years, I was. As it happens, my life wasn't so good. Not no good, I worked on promises. I come out, after four years work with him, with nothing. Because after things gone sour, to get me out from the promises and everything else, he said things what he shouldn't, and like I said, if he said, "Look Henry, I don't owe you anything", for argument, "I don't owe you anything." I said, "If you don't owe me anything, there's no use me staying with you any more. Promises I don't need any more." I didn't have to stay with him, I had my own, my own profession as electrician.

So, you stayed with him for four years. Just to bring us up to date, you met your wife.

For four years after I had that argument with him, I left him, and I went to live in lodgings in Stamford Hill, with a family. I was living lodgings, paying lodging money. And I found myself a job, engineering, in Aldgate.

And you, when did you get married?

Being, 1950.

And what's your wife's name?

Lily. Lily Marks it was as her maiden name.

And she came, lived in?

She was born in this country, she lived in Solebay Street, Mile End.

So, and you'd been married to her ever since. And you've got one ...

One daughter.

How old is she now?

She is now 34.

And after some time, you went into a business with your brother-in-law?

That's right. After being four years in engineering, come an idea to me, that launderettes that would be not a bad thing, something new, what would be easy, not easy for me, it's the right thing.

Could be, because you were an engineer and an electrician?

Engineer and an electrician, and only also by accident, also, I was doing my washing on a Saturday, took my wife's washing to a launderette, and the whole launderette fused. One machine fused the whole shop, and they were all at a standstill. And me, sitting there, waiting there for the washing. And being Saturday, they couldn't get no engineers, no engineers, so I offered, I said, "Look, I'm a electrician. If you want me to check out where the fuse is, I do it." So the staff told the Governor, the Governor, as it happens I know him, Garfield Bless, and she told him, "There's an electrician here, on the premises, and he's offered to repair, to put it right." So he said, "Let him do it." So anyway I checked up. I switched all the fuses off, and I found the machine what fused it, fused the whole plant, I switched it off, and they got themselves an engineer during the week after to repair the machine, and I got it going. They gave me a free wash!

And that gave you the idea?

That give me the idea, yes, it could be bad.

So, you went into this business, this launderette business with your ...

With my brother-in-law. My brother-in-law, he had a bit of collateral, already he had his own house. He won some money on the football, I don't know if you knew that?

I didn't know that.

And that started it off.

So, you married in 1950, to a Jewish woman?

Yes.

Would you consider marrying a non-Jewish person?

No. Not really.

Why not?

First of all, none of, nobody in my family ever married out. Nobody ever married out. The second thing, I didn't, you see, I was born a Jew, and I will die a Jew. After, especially what I went through as a Jew.

That's what I'm getting at. Did that make you feel more Jewish?

Er ... not more Jewish, it made me feel Jewish. I never, I never been strict Orthodox or anything like that. I was Jewish, and as I say, I was born a Jew, and I die a Jew, and I believe in God, I believe, I believe in God, and I have seen things what I think there something is. There, something is in Heaven.

Even despite all the things, all the bad things ...

All the bad things, I think, I mean, there's no explanation. I mean, there's all sorts of explanations. You ask a Orthodox Jew, he'll have an explanation, any Orthodox Jew, why so many people died, and you ask somebody else, a non-believer, he say, if there be a God in Heaven, he should not allow that, what has happened. Then when you come to yourself, you're thinking, you read the Talmud, I mean, going back to history, in Lot's time, when Lot was survived also like through a Holocaust, God created, created by God, he tried to burn down Sodom and Gomorrah, and also when Noah, there was another episode when he tried to drown everybody, God.

So your Jewish links were still very strong.

Yeh. And also, I have seen, when I have seen my own family, when my brother died, the way they were, they said, he couldn't said it from himself, there must have been something there. I mean, he, he was dying of tuberculosis, as I said, a person with tuberculosis isn't sane to the last moment. I mean, when he was dying, he predicted that he was going to last all night, the night before, he said, "I'm going to die tomorrow, about 8 o'clock." And it did happen like that. And when he die, the minute he die, that was die, he asked me to call in, should have a Minyan, ten people in the house. I went out in the street, and called in the people.

Before he died?

Before he died. And I had more than the Minyan, they come in, and once, if, when he was dying, the last word was said, "I'm dead now, take me, put me down on the ground."

Really?

"Put me down on the ground." So all the Jewish, the religious people come into the house. And when they see this, they were stunned, from those words, because they say, A dead man should straight go to the ground. As soon as he dies, the ground wants him.

And he was a young man then?

He was only 22. 22. And he asked, when there was 10 people, he asked them all to say Kaddish with him. Yeh, and he said with us, he said with us, to the last moment. As soon as he finish, he was dead. Now, that's, that, that, I can never forget that. It lies in my mind. And my father, when he died, he also said things. Also, my brother said that. To my mother, he said, "You have Nachus from Hendel. You still have Nachus from Hendel." You know what is Nachus?

Yes.

And he shows you, he predicted, like he was still alive, like.

He would have joy from you?

Yes.

So you married, what's your wife's first name?

Lily.

You married Lily in 1950. She was Jewish, comes from a Jewish family. Orthodox family?

No. Not Orthodox. I mean, the mother was from Polish people, and so was the father, although he was born here, but the mother was born in Poland. They had a Jewish home, they had also kosher in the house, in the home.

I mean, earlier on, you said that, when you were living in Poland, you were thinking of trying, of planning to get to Israel.

Yes.

Have you ever had any thoughts of going to Israel?

I would. I would myself, settle down there. I would myself, but my wife she's not, not too keen. Especially now she's, she got a Israel son in law, she become to hate Israelies! I said, "You can't, you can't go by that. That's the way of life. I mean, there's, there's so many nations there, they're all different, different outlook to life, differently brought up."

And have you spoken to your daughter about your experiences in the Camps?

Yes. Yes.

She knows. I mean, some people like to keep it to themselves, and not to talk about it.

No. No, I used to tell her, and I used to always, I warned her not to marry out. I said, "If you marry out, if you marry out", I says, "I don't think I would like that. I think I would disown you."

Do you think that had an effect on her?

Yes. I think, yes. She would not go out with any non-Jewish boys. She never did. She went to Israel. She had a, you know here, there's not very much organised the Clubs, and things like that, and she took a job in Israel, and she was there for over a year, working in Israel. That's how she met him.

It didn't matter to you, that you married somebody that was not in the Camps?

No.

I mean, you didn't feel that you had a life that you could never share with your wife, because she'd never experienced the things

No. Oh no. No. No. No, what's been has been, no, I never took it that way. No.

You put it behind you?

My wife doesn't like to listen to it, sometimes she's forced to with the television. And sometimes she hears me talking. I mean, when I meet boys, when I go to Israel, I meet men what went through the same as me. I mean, the last, the last time I was in Israel, a man come to my flat, with a son-in-law, and we started talking. The son-in-law was looking round the flat, he talked to me, and he stayed at a camp, and as it happens, he went through exactly, all the Camps, all the camps I went through, and he was liberated on the train.

Really?

On the same train, and taken also to Feldafink.

And you didn't know him till you went to Israel?

No. No. I mean, and I met another one from the same town. No, this one was not from the same town, I mean, this one, he's been in camp before me, he was in camp with my brother. He, my brother went about 20 odd months, two years, before me.

So, has this had any lasting effects, physical effects, the experience in the camps?

I had for years, nightmares. Yeh, for years, I been waking up sometimes at night.

What were your dreams about?

Dreams used to get raided by the Gestapo at night, in the Camp, or they used to happen sometimes, like I told you, they used to break, pull the beds to pieces, and made us after clean up and putting up, and beatings. I mean, in concentration camp, we had, we had, when a Jewish, he was not a Capo, he was a Clerk to the Capos, when you went out. Before you went out, he took all the, how many prisoners going out, how many work in this firm, how many worked in that firm, which Commanders, and who was in charge of, he kept, like a book keeper, he was a book keeper for the

Camp. For the thing, who used to go out. And he was, and he asked me, is there anybody gone out and not caught. He was the only one never got caught.

He escaped?

He escaped. And he took a lot of, like from the black market, they done a lot of black market, him on the outside on the Works, because he was a free man, like, being with this special pen, and everything else, with his special book, they used to let him roam around, and go round, and they used to, they used to do black market, selling stuff out from the Camp, into the civilians there. Outside of the works, and he, he had probably a lot of money. They say he had a lot of money kept hidden, on the works, not on the Camp, but on the works, and he used to belong to the Elders, of the Concentration Camp, they used to be very, they used to be friends, like, they used, the Lagerelster. Lagerelster. The oldest of the Lager. He used to be one of them. There was two.

What is a Lager?

A Lager is, like, a like a one to him, under him, and they used to be German prisoners.

What is a Lager?

Lager is camp. They kept orders. They used to be what you call, he broke into banks, a, for used to break safes, a safe breaker, he used to be 20 years already.

In prison?

In prison. And when they make concentration camp, they put him in concentration camp, because so many years, they used to kept them in prison, and if they got a long sentence, they used to put them in concentration camps.

So, what else, when you had nightmares, you had these dreams ...

I used to wake up "Help, help. Police." And things like that. I like to tell you, I mean, I used to wake up. I mean, this was four years after, and it used to happen another few years, not very often, not so often.

So what's your present feeling about the Germans? Towards ...

Towards them? Not a very good one. I know the whole nation can't be responsible. No nation can be responsible for all. The leaders are, should be responsible. If they not responsible, nobody else can be. I mean, the things, because they, they fabricated this machinery to destruction, and they helped.

So you think, Israel, what do you think about Israel, do you think that's important for the Jews?

Very important. Very very important. I mean, if it's not going to be for Israel, we come to, between us, there's only now, what is it now, 14 million Jews? Or 13 million

Jews, something like that, why is there so little? Because they go out of religion, they mix, and gradually, gradually, it is getting less and less and less, the population.

I mean, do you think your children, your daughter, she married an Israeli, and yet came to England to live?

Yeh. Because my wife persuade her, and he was in favour of coming here.

So, what about...

And me, before the War, I would only be too glad to get to Israel, as I told you, I was on my way there, and I was prepared, my father prepared us to suffer to get there.

Do you, have you been back to Poland?

No. No.

Do you have any feeling of going back?

As it happens, next year, there is an organised tour, and they asked me if I want to go.

End of FIO48 Side A

FIO48 Side A

Would you like to go back to Poland?

Not to live.

No, just to see ...

Just to see what's happened to that, because I have some friends, they have been there, and I would like to go to the cemetery where my brother and my father ...

Have you kept in touch?

With anybody round there?

With anybody there?

No. No.

So, there may be some of your non-Jewish friends ...

Non-Jewish who I used to go to school with, and maybe who used to live in the places where I used to live. Or, other thing, I haven't got not a lot of feeling there to go back, after all this, anti-Semitism what was going on.

Do you think it could happen again, this Holocaust, do you think it could happen again?

Any, holocaust, I don't know. As it happens, it's already happening, anti-Semitism, you hear it, it never die does it, completely. I mean, you get others, I don't know what makes that feeling. I've got no idea what makes that feeling. I mean, I think that's what it's like, if it's not one thing, it's another thing. I mean, if it's, if it's not Jews, it's somebody else.

So, there'll always be somebody ...

Who hates somebody. Like years ago, one lot of boys from a different street used to fight one from the other street.

Is your daughter interested in your background? Would she like to go to Poland, do you think?

No. No. No. No.

She doesn't really ...

No, she doesn't interest herself in those things, no.

I mean, is she, has she ...

She knows my feelings and everything, she knows.

Does she share ...

She shares them, yes, she shares what I went through. My wife, she doesn't like talking about it. She's it's enough, it's no good keep on talking about it, but it isn't good. It doesn't give you any good feeling inside. I can never, never forget.

It's important to talk about it.

That's right.

To find out why it happened, and could it happen again? And should we do anything to stop it happening again?

If we could, how, what can one do? I mean, Israel, what Israel done, they haven't harmed anybody. There was what, four wars there? Every war that, Israel never started it, and they can't allow, not even once, to lose it. Once they lose it, it again, we're back where we were before we started. And whatever is the other nations, they're not very helpful. For their own purpose, for their own thing, they would help the Arabs. I think. Think to yourself, everybody, everyone, likes to better himself. You can't blame a person for bettering himself. No person. There's no more that patriotic feeling, like it was before the War. The patriotic feeling caused, the anti-Semitic feeling caused the patriotic feeling to go to Israel.

And with this recent Election, the Government is moving into a more extreme position, isn't it?

To the Right. Yes.

And this will also cause more tensions and problems?

No. I mean, you know a lot of these also these Zionist methods, from years ago, there was two groups. There used to be a Right Group and a Left Group. There always has been. The Right, if it wouldn't be the Right Group, I don't think Israel would be Israel. They're the ones that started, they took up the arms, to fight. And if they wouldn't have done that, it wouldn't have given the problem at the time to the British, soon after the War, when they were determined to give up colonies, we wouldn't have no Israel. It had to be. We had to have our, a smooth talker, and a Rachman. I mean, the Zionists used to make it smooth, nicely talk.

Well, the argument is that if there hadn't been the, you know, the Ben Gurions, the rough people ...

Not the Ben Gurions, the Begins.

Then all this smooth talking wouldn't have achieved the State?

It wouldn't have achieved nothing. It would not achieve.

There is a time for smooth talking ...

Yes.

And there is a time for action. What is the time now, is difficult to say. Obviously the many people in Israel now think it is the time to be tough and to extend the settlements, and not to have peace settlements.

No, this is, myself, when I look at the map myself, when you look at the map, what they took the West Bank, when they took it, it was in the Six Day War when they took the West Bank, when Jordan fought as well. Was it, that's right, '67, when was it, '67 that's right, the War, when they went, they took the West Bank, occupied the West Bank. I mean, it at least gives a nice part away from the towns.

A safety zone?

A safety zone, yeh. Cos when you look it, Natania, you've been to Israel haven't you?

Yes.

Natania is only a few kilometres away from the West Bank.

Yes, yes, it's within gunshot.

Well, within what, 15 kilometres or something like that? Away. This is where they took it, now, they should be allowed to keep that part. I don't know how the politicians, why they, how they fought the war, that they didn't push out the Arabs with them, to Jordan. That was a big mistake there.

There was a tremendous international pressure on Israel, to stop fighting before it got to that position, and they had to, they had to give into that pressure, otherwise the arms, the help would have been withdrawn by America.

I mean, they, they, those, they should be allowed to keep this, and I don't think they're going to give it up.

No.

Because it's a very bad situation, they can't defend themselves, every time, now, as it happens, the Arabs will never stop. They won't stop. Whichever way it be, they never stop attacking. If they win that's a different story. In the long run, it's no good for Israel to keep it. What can they do? They can't give up the territories, they wanted to give up, when, I mean, Menachem Begin, he give Egypt the whole Sinai, I mean, that's quite a bit, a chunk of land there, that was.

Well, the argument is whether,

If they come, and they talk straightaway, they might come to it, but there is nobody to talk to.

No, well, that's the problem, the argument of giving up land for peace. You're giving up land which you can't get back, and you're getting peace which can be taken away from you at any time in the future.

If you don't get back, and you still won't have no peace, that's, so what's better, you might as well keep it and not to have, right?

Okay. Well, thank you, Henry, very much.

End of FIO48 side B

End of interview

FIO42 Side A

Description of birthplace.

Each parent's background, economic circumstances, religious background of family.
Language spoken, evidence of anti-semitism.

Living accommodation. Father's family details. Strength of Jewishness.

End of FIO42 Side A

FIO42 Side B

Details of mother's family. Marriage of parents and their married life. Parents'
business ventures. Family visits.

Political situation in Poland.

Details of living accommodation, toilets, cooking facilities, furniture, rent, etc..

Description of street life in surrounding area.

End of FIO42 Side B

FIO43 Side A

Further details of living accommodation. Brother's details and experiences. Father's
further business experiences.

Living conditions, standard of life, etc.. Moving home. Holidays.

End of FIO43 Side A

FIO43 Side B

Schooldays, anti-semitism in school. Home Jewish tuition. Barmitzvah ceremony;
Jewish food. Synagogue attendance. Religious observance. Animal slaughter.
Family life. Details of some survivors from the town.

End of FIO43 Side B

FIO44 Side A

Jewish food. Medical attention and conditions.

Living conditions above the shop. Surrounding buildings.

Commercial life of the town, police and legal system.

Growing anti-semitism.

End of FIO44 Side A

FIO44 Side B

Adolescence. Training as an electrician. Planning to go to Israel. Rise of Hitler and anti-semitism. Joining Battar Movement. Abortive attempt to leave for Israel (with Begin).

End of FIO44 Side B

FIO45 Side A

Attempting to get to Israel. Outbreak of war. Flight from Germany to Czeladz to Russian border. Meeting Russians. Being reunited with father.

End of FIO45 Side A

FIO45 Side B

Facing threat of being taken deep into Russia. Deciding to return to German Occupation. Returning to Czeladz in March 1940.

Life under the Germans. Yellow badges. Formation of Judenrat. Forced labour to Germany. Formation of the Jewish Ghetto.

End of FIO45 Side B

FIO46 Side A

Living conditions in Ghetto. A typical day. Financial circumstances.

Death of father. Treatment in Jewish Hospital.

Visit of brother from Labour Camp. Death of brother from T.B.

Reporting to Judenrat for Forced Labour Duty. Sent to Labour Camp in Germany to work for Krupps.

End of FIO46 Side A

FIO46 Side B

Life in Labour Camp in 1943. Living conditions: food, work, treatment. Treatment by Capos. Transfer to Concentration Camp of 6,000 prisoners. Beatings by guards. Executions of escapees. Working for outside electrical contractor.

End of FIO46 Side B

FIO47 Side A

Getting extra rations. Ill-treatment. Lack of medical treatment.

Events of December 1944. Approach of the Russians. The march of 6,000 men from the camp lasting three days and three nights to Grossrosen.

End of FIO47 Side A

FIO47 Side B

Arrival at Grossrosen Concentration Camp and then to Buchenwald by open truck (5 days), without food or drink. Conditions in the camp. Transfer to Bisingen and Dachau.

Approach of American forces. Disappearance of guards. Liberation and recovery of strength.

End of FIO47 Side B

FIO48 Side A

Living with Germans. Thoughts about Germans. Life in the Displaced Persons Camp.

Getting to Paris, posing as Polish soldier and eventually arriving in England in 1946.

Working in London. Marrying in 1950. Details of wife. Going into launderette business.

Believing in God and being Jewish. Religious experience of deceased brother.

Feelings about Israel. Nightmares about the camp. Views about inter-marriage.

End of FIO48 Side A

FIO48 Side B

Thoughts of returning to Poland. Feelings about the Holocaust. Attitude of daughter. Views on Israel's dilemma.

End of FIO48 Side B

End of Summary