

So tell me when you were born.

I was born in 1924. I was born in the small coastal town on the Baltic Sea. In those days it was called Memel, M-E-M-E-L. Rather old town with a German culture. Was on the northernmost point of the last German Empire. After World War II it became known as-- I mean after World War I became known as Klaipeda. And when I was born, it was no longer German territory but Lithuanian territory which Hitler took back in 1939.

And tell me your recollections of the start of the war.

Start of the war I guess we could put a point in time as 1940, 1941 after we had had a short Russian occupation in Kovno-- by short may have lasted a year-- the collapse of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of Nonaggression and the entry of the German troops, I'm not even sure of the month or year but I might say maybe June 1941.

What did you personally hear or see when they came in? What do you remember?

The night preceding the advance of the German troops on their motorcycles and probably armored cars, but the night before there was a lot of artillery noise that seemed to be coming from the airport in Kovno, just a very ominous sound. And I think most people, Jews and Gentiles alike, Jews and Lithuanians alike, were aware that the German army was going to march in that week.

And what about before the Germans came, the pogroms that took place, did you see any of those?

No, I didn't see any pogroms. But I don't even recall hearing about them before the German occupation. I think all that happened after the German occupation.

Tell me about it. Tell me what you know about it.

Mostly rumors. Well, I do remember that the house we were living in then we only had a small room that we were renting at the time in a part of Kovno that was called Zalias Kalnas, meaning The Green Mountain. And it was an apartment house. There were two young students living in the basement, and even though I didn't know them well, I had just a very casual passing-in-the-corridor acquaintance with them. And they told me the day before the occupation that they had planned on escaping with the Russians who were in retreat.

And so there was actually a very, very panic-stricken Jewish population trying to decide whether it was better to run or to stay. And during this mad rush to get out were the Russians. I think at that point already the Lithuanian partisans went into action and just fell upon some innocent victims who were trying to escape. But I think the real partisan mass murders came after the Russians had finally retreated and life resumed some normalcy for those who had stayed behind, but not for long.

What do you mean by "not for long"?

Well, at that point, rumors-- Before there even was talk of a ghetto, we heard about people in the city who had been abducted from their homes by willing Lithuanian so-called partisans who also ransacked the homes, would round up mostly men and either taunt and torture them or shoot them. I didn't see any of this with my own eyes because I have no idea whether the suburb that we lived in was more protected than the rest of the city, but no, I have no knowledge of seeing with my own eyes the brutal acts of the Lithuanian partisans.

But you heard about it at the time.

Yes.

And so how did you hear about it and what action did you take?

No action. In our case, we were a family of three. I'm an only child, and my mother was suffering the consequences of a recent stroke and was quite incapacitated. I can't say that she was totally incapacitated, but she had to be cared for. So even if we had wanted to escape, it would not have been feasible. That would not have been practical. So we stayed in this little room and consulted with all the other neighbors and everybody was panic-stricken but not really knowing what to do.

And tell me about the formation of the ghetto.

Well, as soon as the German I guess military administration was formed, all the racial laws against the Jews were put into effect, the racial laws, the Nuremberg laws that had already been implemented in Germany and other occupied countries. And I can be more specific and mention that none of the Jewish academicians or professionals were allowed to go about their work. The doctors were not allowed to practice medicine unless they were seeing Jewish patients. Lawyers were dismissed from their firms and professors were dismissed from their academic positions.

And a curfew was instituted I think at 6 o'clock all the Jews had to be in their homes. The yellow star, the wearing of the yellow star was made mandatory. That was a piece of yellow cloth shaped like a star. And this started to be worn on the outer clothing, on the left-hand side of the chest, as well as on the back. It had to be firmly sewn on versus being pinned on, which could always indicate the intention to escape or blend with the general population.

Also, Jews were made to walk in the street or in the gutter. They were not allowed to walk on the sidewalk. And all the men had to--

Let's just back up to what happened to the men taking off their hats?

Well, I don't think I can add anything to that. Those were the first blows to our civil liberties.

And tell me about the formation of the ghetto. And do you remember moving in?

Yes, I do. The decree went out that all Jews in the city of Kovno were ordered to relocate to a ghetto, which was the poorest part of the city with mostly dilapidated huts, even though there were some more substantial farmhouses to be found also, as well as some newly constructed apartments, referred to as blocks, which had been constructed for the industrial workers, Lithuanian workers.

The date, there was set as the-- Well, the date was the 15th of August. The reason I remember that is because it fell on my birthday and I forgot whether it was 1940 or 1941. I think it was 1941. We had about two months to relocate. The way this relocation was handled was that first one had to secure a place to stay in the ghetto. And the inhabitants, I mean the Jews of Kovno, some of whom had been quite well-to-do, had owned either their homes, apartments, or houses, so they were in a position to trade their well-established, comfortable homes for a peasant's home in the newly formed ghetto. Naturally, it was not an equitable trade, but at least they had a place to stay.

The three of us were at a disadvantage because we had nothing to trade, so we depended on the kindness of strangers to give us a space. And after a long search, my father was able to find a pharmacist, an elderly pharmacist friend of my mother's, who had owned the pharmacy in my mother's village where she had grown up. So Mr. Masahovich and his wife told my father that they had a small attic space that they could spare, that everything else had already been spoken for, and that the three of us could have this attic space. So that's what we did.

We had very few belongings. I think we may have owned a bedroom suite. And we had a sewing machine for some reasons, which I till this day don't understand or remember how or why we kept the sewing machine from our original household, but it came in very handy later. So there was a bed that was moved, a sewing machine, and maybe a chair or two and the clothes that we had been able to save from our original home. Then my dad hired a, well, found a peasant with a horse and wagon and he paid him for the transportation of our worldly goods to the ghetto.

And what was the attic like? How big was it?

Very small. I'm very bad at dimensions, but it was a long, narrow space that held my parents' bed on the one long wall and my cot and the sewing machine opposite my cot. And there was a window next to my cot that I could look out, and I saw many brutal and memorable, unforgettable scenes from that window.

And just a very primitive door that led from one attic space to our small attic space. Because on the other side of the wall another family was living. And that family consisted of four people, mother, father, adult daughter who was a medical student, and her young brother who was maybe 12 years old at the time. These people became our very good and trusted friends, and I would like to mention that the older son, Ted Pace, is going to be interviewed tomorrow and I hope to have the chance to meet up with him after 50 years.

You said you witnessed some brutal things outside the window. Was one of them the Intelligentsia?

That was the first one that I saw from my window.

Tell me about it.

A call had to go out for I think 500 young men with a good academic background and language skills, possibly fluent in German and Russian, to report for work on a certain day, at a certain time. It was early on. I don't remember the date. It may have been August or maybe early September. And because the work conditions seemed so wonderful by ghetto standards, because already food was scarce and men had been taken away for forced labor-- I'm not even sure what it was-- it sounded like a wonderful opportunity to be situated in a safe office environment, perhaps even get a meal or two during the day, and then return at night.

Because I wasn't working at the time yet-- excuse me-- I had the luxury of staying in our attic and looking out of the window. And here I saw them coming to-- There's open space. It was near what we call the big blocks, at least that's how I remember it, and I looked at their faces and I and I recognized a few of them. One had been my former math tutor because my math skills were always very weak. And I recognized a few other a young men. I think I saw some Germans surrounding them-- it's a little hazy in my mind-- and some pushing and rough handling, and then they were led off. So I didn't actually see shootings going on, but just very rough treatment.

And then how did you figure out what happened?

I didn't have a clue except that--