

If I've never been in the ghetto I and I haven't even heard of the ghetto can you just sort of describe to me in general what a ghetto is like or what that ghetto was like? Were there schools? Was there a culture?

In the beginning there were some makeshift schools for the children. In the beginning there were books. In the beginning there was a hospital that had been established on ghetto grounds. But as time went on, children were taken away. There were no more schools necessary. The hospital was burned to the ground with patients and doctors burned alive. The books were burned. And it was just a very, very gray existence of hardship.

It was so cold. There was no-- In the winters where temperatures dropped to 30 and 40 degrees below zero and people have no firewood to heat the premises. I remember that when we went to bed we covered ourselves with every feather quilt, every coat that we still owned before we had to turn in our fur coats to the Germans.

But the existence was, it was almost on a subhuman level. Microscopic rations. I don't know what the official rations were. I think some working people had some food supplements. There was a curfew at night, maybe 6 o'clock unless some workers returned from their night shift and then they were exempt from the curfew.

It was just a bare existence with a lot of hunger pangs, cold, and exhaustion. Plus hopelessness. Actually, I never felt hopeless. Of course, I had the luxury of not feeling hopeless because I was only in my mid teens.

Yes, young people still were able to see, had the energy or interest in seeing their school friends on the only day they didn't have to work. I think Sunday there was a day to regroup, wash up and so it really was a very harsh existence.

Not only that, and then the either Ukrainian guards or Lithuanian partisans, whoever was assigned to guard duty, would barge in and the German soldiers or SS would barge in for no reason at all and just terrorize the people they found in the home.

Mostly hunger prevailed. People froze to death too. All of sudden, they disappeared. They weren't seen, they weren't heard from. They may have died from hunger and nobody knew because we certainly didn't have telephones. We were not allowed to bring in the newspaper. We were not allowed to have cameras or radios. All electrical appliances had to be turned in early on. I don't remember whether we had electricity or not. I know some homes did but I forgot whether we had to use candles or not.

Certainly there was no sanitation. There was an outhouse in our case, in our first place, in our attic space that was our first residence. There was an outhouse that the men took turns cleaning. And the water was brought in from the well. In the winter the well froze and one had to chop real hard to get to the water.

All of us had access to the shared kitchen where occasionally I would take a bath in a tin tub. And the way to ensure privacy was to put up a sheet and tell everybody not to walk through the kitchen. So that was a very minor inconvenience compared to the other dangers.

What about the administration the ghetto police?

Our ghetto administration was composed of very honorable men we were very fortunate in that respect. Our ghetto elder was a highly respected surgeon whose wife we knew from way back. And he delegated authority and made decisions with the rest of his council to the best of his ability. Not easy decisions.

Police? I just know that we had ghetto police. I may have known some of them personally, and often they had to perform very hard assignments like rounding up, like making up lists or rounding up people for relocation from lists that were provided to them, and that must have been very difficult. I know nothing really good or bad about the ghetto police.

But you weren't afraid.

No. Oh, I also know they had a very decent-- The chief of police was one of the most decent men in the ghetto. I forget his name.

The day of the Kinder Aktion, which was much later in 1944, tell me what you saw.

I happened to be home on that day. I didn't report to work because I was suffering from what I thought was a bad cold. I was running a fever, and because I had a Jewish supervisor I thought I would stay home and just get better and make up all the work that I missed the next day. I knew that no reprisals would be taken against me. Well, I was not prepared for that day. When was it? I think it was in March, in March of 1944. And it may have been the last week in March also.

My mother had died several years before. She died a natural death, but she died as a result of starvation and the consequences of the pneumonia. She just didn't have the resistance to fight it. But by God's grace she died a natural death. She was not taken away from us.

Did you have a ceremony?

We had a ceremony at the cemetery. It was a very sad funeral procession. An emaciated horse was pulling some sort of a makeshift wagon. My mother's body was wrapped in a shroud in the orthodox manner of burying the dead and a righteous man had kept vigil.