

Max Krautler

00:00:51

>> Interviewer: Yeah. Hm. Okay. We're going to go ahead and start now, okay?

>> Krautler: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: And just for the record, what is your full name?

>> Krautler: Pardon me?

>> Interviewer: What is your full name?

>> Krautler: Oh, Max. You want the other name too? It's Samuel, but it's not so important, no? It's enough, Max Krautler?

>> Interviewer: That'll be fine.

>> Krautler: It's enough?

>> Interviewer: Sure. And when were you born?

>> Krautler: September 4, '17.

>> Interviewer: Okay. And where were you born?

>> Krautler: Kraków, Poland. In Poland.

>> Interviewer: Okay. And did you live in Kraków when you were still a child?

>> Krautler: Yeah. Till the war.

>> Interviewer: Till the war?

>> Krautler: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: And what did your father do?

>> Krautler: He got a store. What do you call this? How do you call this here? What do you call this? All kind iron and things.

>> Interviewer: Sort of like pots and pans kind of thing?

>> Krautler: Huh?

>> Interviewer: Like pots and pans, or --

>> Krautler: Not exactly.

>> Interviewer: -- an ironworks?

>> Krautler: Irons and things and keys and all kinds of --

>> Interviewer: Oh, yeah. Okay. And your mother, what did she do?

>> Krautler: She was home.

>> Interviewer: She was a homemaker?

>> Krautler: She was in the house.

>> Interviewer: And did you have any brothers and sisters?

>> Krautler: I got one brother and two sisters.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Interviewer: And tell us a little bit about growing up in Kraków. What was growing up in Kraków like for you?

>> Krautler: Oh, yeah. You went to school, and you do a little sport. It was doing -- later I work a little bit.

>> Interviewer: Where did you work?

>> Krautler: I work in the shoe -- about distributing shoes for the whole Poland, what that is. Distributing shoes. Del-Ka. Maybe you had the brand shoes, Del-Ka.

>> Interviewer: Okay. And when you were growing up, did you experience any anti-Semitism in Kraków?

>> Krautler: Oh, yeah, a little. Yeah.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell us about that?

>> Krautler: It happens. Accident happens, or they close when you went to the -- close by the university or (INDISTINCT) the university, so happens, accident. There was beating up sometimes, and all kind happens.

>> Interviewer: Did anything like that ever happen to you?

>> Krautler: No, no, no.

>> Interviewer: When did you first hear about Hitler?

>> Krautler: Oh, in Poland, when I live in Poland. You hear in the papers. I get the papers, so you hear.

>> Interviewer: Was that before the war?

>> Krautler: Oh, yeah, sure, before the war, you know, already. The war started in '39. You hear already '38, '37, '36 maybe. I don't know when exactly. Yeah, you hear in the papers.

>> Interviewer: And what did you hear about Hitler in Kraków?

>> Krautler: Oh, yeah, his program, what kind he have. You know, I heard all kind things.

>> Interviewer: And in particular, did you hear about what his programs were towards the Jews in Germany?

>> Krautler: Yeah, you know, you hear this. You hear what kind program he got.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm. What kind of reaction -- do you remember having any kind of reaction reading this?

>> Krautler: Yeah, well, what you can say? What you can do? You couldn't do nothing.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Do you remember when the war broke out? Yes? Can you tell us?

>> Krautler: In '39, in September. September 1st, '39, yeah. Maybe September 2nd or September -- you see already planes over Kraków, German planes. You hear.

>> Interviewer: And was there any bombing in Kraków?

>> Krautler: No, not exactly. Not -- no. Not exactly. I didn't see bombing.

>> Interviewer: And do you remember when the Germans moved into Kraków?

>> Krautler: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell us about that? You know, what your memories are of them coming in, how you felt at the time?

>> Krautler: No, that was September 1st, but the war, that was shortly -- not long before they were in Kraków too.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Krautler: And what you can do? The Germans was already -- the tanks and everything was on the street. You couldn't do nothing.

>> Interviewer: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And what happened whenever they moved into the city? What happened to the people living in Kraków? Did things change?

>> Krautler: Yeah, they changed. Everything changed. Everything changed. You couldn't go all the places. There was restriction and everything. Food and everything was shortage.

>> Interviewer: And, and what did -- how did the Germans coming to Kraków impact on you? How did it change your life?

>> Krautler: You have to be -- you have to watch, be careful, not come -- they start to picking up on the street to work, people, starting to picking up to all kind. This was the start.

>> Interviewer: Sure.

>> Krautler: The start to picking up to all kind of work, and they let them out in the night. This was only the start. Later it was worse.

>> Interviewer: Did you know anybody that got picked up? Did you get picked up?

>> Krautler: Yeah, I got a few times picked up too.

>> Interviewer: And what did they make you do?

>> Krautler: All kind work where they need it somewhere and people that was --

>> Interviewer: What kind of work? Just an example.

>> Krautler: Wood and carrying and all kind things and all kind of.

>> Interviewer: Were you and your family ever -- were you moved into a ghetto at any point?

>> Krautler: Yeah, later everybody got to move in a ghetto --

>> Interviewer: Can you tell us about that?

>> Krautler: -- in Kraków. You know, the ghetto, and they moved -- the small. You got the -- one room maybe you got for the whole family, and that's all. And was -- they close the ghetto. You couldn't go out when you want. You need the pass and things and all kinds restriction.

>> Interviewer: Who patrolled the ghetto?

>> Krautler: Oh, the Germans, yeah. The German, they got helpers from the Jewish Police station. They force them to help.

>> Interviewer: And how did they pick the Jewish Police to help?

>> Krautler: How they pick, I don't know exactly. I don't know exactly how they picked them.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Can you describe sort of -- how can we say this -- what everyday life was like for you and your family living in the ghetto? What was a typical day like?

>> Krautler: Bad.

>> Interviewer: Can you sort of elaborate and just, you know, for purposes of telling the story, what would be an everyday life in the ghetto be like?

>> Krautler: You have to watch every second. You have to watch every -- you know, we could get trouble with them, with the Germans

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Krautler: It was -- everybody was afraid.

>> Interviewer: Now, when did you leave the ghetto?

>> Krautler: When -- oh, the ghetto in maybe '42 and took me to a concentration camp, to, I think it was Gross-Rosen concentration camp.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Krautler: Yeah. The concentration camp, it was so long we was over there, and I don't remember exactly how many months I was, and later they took us to a kind work camp.

>> Interviewer: Okay. When you -- excuse me. When you left -- were deported from the ghetto to the camp, to Gross-Rosen, were you married at this time?

>> Krautler: No. Before I went to Gross-Rosen, was close in Kraków where I live was a concentration camp also. I was over there in the concentration camp, maybe two years before I went to Gross-Rosen.

>> Interviewer: So when did you go to this camp near Kraków?

>> Krautler: When they closed the ghetto.

>> Interviewer: Okay, and that was in --

>> Krautler: This was in Kraków, close Kraków, near Kraków.

>> Interviewer: And what day, more or less?

>> Krautler: Pardon me?

>> Interviewer: And when was this?

>> Krautler: when they closed the ghetto -- maybe in what was '40, '41, something like that.

>> Interviewer: Okay. When you were deported from the ghetto to this camp --

>> Krautler: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: -- was there anybody with you, any relatives or friends?

>> Krautler: No. Only by myself.

>> Interviewer: What happened to your family?

>> Krautler: My family, they took my father, they took away somewhere, and I don't know whether he is not -- he's dead or something. And my brother took my mother to the other town because over there it's supposed to be better.

>> Interviewer: And what town was that? Do you remember?

>> Krautler: Bochnia. Bochnia. And he took my mother over there. No. He went by himself. I sent my mother later, sent over there to, to my brother. It was not far from Kraków. Bochnia was the town, and she was over there. I didn't get, I didn't get -- my brother got the papers, permission to stay. I didn't receive, so I was using my brother's papers because he went away. I was using my brother's papers to stay, and I stay over there, and I got the permission. And my mother, they discover -- there was also start -- over in the town where they went, there was -- they hide somewhere because there was -- tried to clean up over there, the

town, and they was hiding somewhere in a bunker, my brother and my mother, and they discovered -- the Germans discovered the bunker, and they shot them both.

>> Interviewer: Okay. And --

>> Krautler: I find out later from friends.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Mm-hmm. Okay. Whenever you got to the concentration camp, whenever you got to the concentration camp, can you describe for us what it looked like to you and how you felt about it?

>> Krautler: It was every minute you was afraid. They can shot you or something. I was always afraid. And food was not enough. You was hungry always. You got -- you got lice on you because you couldn't wash. You couldn't change or nothing, so, you know, lice was eating you up.

>> Interviewer: What was the -- what kind of camp was it that you were in near Kraków in the first year or two?

>> Krautler: A concentration camp. We went to work also. Outside the camp was all kind -- they took us to all kind work.

>> Interviewer: What kind of work did you do?

>> Krautler: There was all kind, and on the street. I carry wood and all kind.

>> Interviewer: And why were you moved to Gross-Rosen? Do you remember? Or did they just do it?

>> Krautler: Why they move us? They -- I don't know. I think they closed -- later they closed the camp or something. Not right away, but systematically they later closed the camp, and I was on the transport to go out from the camp.

>> Interviewer: What was sort of like the typical routine, if you can call it that, in the camp near Kraków? I mean, like,

just sort of tell us, you know, how you got up and what you did throughout the day.

>> Krautler: Got up early in the morning. You have to go out. There was *Appellplatz* -- what do you call this -- and there was counting people and all kind things. And later some people went out from the camp to work. Some was working in the camp.

>> Interviewer: And what did you eat? when did you eat?

>> Krautler: In the morning you got a piece bread, and this supposed to be for the whole day. If you eat right away, you can get nothing later. So maybe -- what was -- a half pound or a pound for the whole day, and that's all. You got a little coffee or a little hot -- a little coffee or something. Lunchtime you get some kind soup, water soup.

>> Interviewer: And in the evenings?

>> Krautler: Also little bit soup.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Krautler: When you got to Gross-Rosen, when you got to Gross-Rosen, what was that like? Was that the same as the camp near Kraków, or was it different?

>> Krautler: No, it was worse. When we went in was the music playing. When we went into the camp, music was playing, and they was beating people according to the music. They was beating them.

>> Interviewer: And these were Germans?

>> Krautler: Yeah, yeah, soldiers, yeah, and they was beating us, and music was playing.

>> Interviewer: Who was playing the music?

>> Krautler: Germans over there.

>> Interviewer: What was camp life like at Gross-Rosen?

>> Krautler: From Gross-Rosen, they sent us somewhere later to another camp.

>> Interviewer: What was life like for you while you were at Gross-Rosen?

>> Krautler: Scary and everything.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Was it also a labor camp?

>> Krautler: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

>> Interviewer: What sort of work did they have you doing?

>> Krautler: Carrying all kind bricks and all kind things.

>> Interviewer: Were you working for a company nearby, or was this all done within the camp?

>> Krautler: In the camp. No, it was -- maybe it was a company from outside, you know, some kind.

>> Interviewer: And then from Gross-Rosen -- how long did you stay in Gross-Rosen?

>> Krautler: Not too long. Later they send us to other working camp, Crawinkel. Flossenbürg also was a concentration camp. It's also the same work, you know, bricks carrying and all kind things.

>> Interviewer: How were you transported from camp to camp? How did you get there?

>> Krautler: Depends. Sometimes on foot. Sometimes they got a train, you know. A train, what they have, the cattle trains like that.

>> Interviewer: Can you describe to us what that was like?

>> Krautler: Oh, they packed in, you know, in a wagon like cattles, and that's all. No windows, nothing, tight. You couldn't move. You couldn't do nothing.

>> Interviewer: Did anybody ever -- did you ever see anybody die on one of these trips?

>> Krautler: Yeah, many, many, many died. They got sick. Some died. Yeah, sure. You don't get -- many died. I see many people.

>> Interviewer: How long were the marches?

>> Krautler: The marches? Depends on where you went. You went in different (INDISTINCT) sometimes the marches was few days. Sometimes was longer.

>> Interviewer: When you were in these camps, did you ever have a colleague or a friend to help you get by?

>> Krautler: Yeah, I got a friend, yeah.

>> Interviewer: Did you have a friend in Gross-Rosen, for example?

>> Krautler: Yeah. I got a friend, yeah.

>> Interviewer: What happened to him?

>> Krautler: I don't know particular what happened to him. I got a friend -- oh, one friend, yeah. I know. I got one friend which I didn't feel so good, and he was helping me. I could hardly walk because we were skeleton bones. He was helping me, and on the end, he got sick, and I was helping him to walk. And I couldn't walk so fast because he was sick. I go slowly, and the Germans told me to let him, and I have to go without him. I left him, and they shot him.

>> Interviewer: When was this?

>> Krautler: On that march to Gross-Rosen. Because I couldn't walk so fast because he was sick, and they told me to let him, and I have to go. Otherwise, they shot me too.

>> Interviewer: After Gross-Rosen, where did you go next?

>> Krautler: Flossenbürg.

>> Interviewer: Flossenbürg.

>> Krautler: Other camp.

>> Interviewer: Was Flossenbürg another labor camp?

>> Krautler: Also heavy work, carrying all kind wood and bricks and all kind.

>> Interviewer: What do you remember in particular about the time you were in Flossenbürg?

>> Krautler: Also was rough. Also there was beating, you know, for every small thing. We got beaten and things.

>> Interviewer: Were all the guards at Flossenbürg German?

>> Krautler: Yeah, yeah.

>> Interviewer: And after Flossenbürg, where did you go next?

>> Krautler: After Flossenbürg, I went to Buchenwald.

>> Interviewer: Buchenwald. What was that like?

>> Krautler: Buchenwald was -- this was on the end. I was in other camps also.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Krautler: Buchenwald was the last one, and there was another camp. Ohrdruf, all kind, smaller camps, and on the end we went to Buchenwald.

>> Interviewer: When you were in all these camps, did you ever see any German civilians outside of the camp?

>> Krautler: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: Did you have contact with them?

>> Krautler: I was in a camp in Silesia once, not too long, and we was transporting coal to the German people, the people. So

yeah, this was before, and sometimes we got little bit to eat from the people we were delivering coal and all kind for the private -- once in a while. It was not too long.

>> Interviewer: Were they ordered to give you food, or did they do that on their own?

>> Krautler: No, they did this on their own, some, some.

>> Interviewer: So you got the impression that -- did you get the impression that the German civilians knew about these camps?

>> Krautler: Yeah, sure they know. Majority know.

>> Interviewer: The majority knew about these camps?

>> Krautler: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Buchenwald, tell us -- tell us about Buchenwald, how you felt when you got there.

>> Krautler: The same. The reception was with music, and they beat us and all kind, and there was all kind, all kind nationality over there in Buchenwald from all kind. And on the end, later we went on a march. It was not too long. We went on a Death March from Buchenwald.

>> Interviewer: Did they tell you where you were going?

>> Krautler: No, never. You never know where you go. We went on a Death March. This was the last camp. This was already probably end, close to the war, to the war, to '45 sometime. We went on a Death March. We walked day and night without a rest. On the end, after a few days from Buchenwald, this was -- we went Bavaria to a farm, a farm over there. We supposed to rest over there, but the night -- because the German was already close -- American, I mean, was close, and they were shooting back and forth. We hear this. And we supposed to rest, and -- no, the superiors supposed to rest in the farm house over there. This happened next morning while we heard the shooting. And we supposed to rest in the farm

house. We laid down over there in the farm house.

Everybody was looking for some kind food. Everybody was hungry, starving from that. There was straw and everything in the farm house, so I went under the hole looking something to eat, find something. And one friend went also over there, and when we're under the hole, we hear the persons. They say, we have to go. They got the orders that the Americans already close. We have to go. I was already half dead anyway. So I said to my friend, I'm not coming out from the hole. What will happen will happen. We couldn't walk. I could hardly walk. And I stay under the hole over there, my friend also, and they got the dogs, German dogs, you know, with them, looking for people who was missing. They was counting. They went out already from the farm house. They was counting. It was missing people. The dog was looking around. One dog come over there up to the hole to me, and I was protecting myself like that with the arm because I was afraid he will bite me, and I hit him. I don't want to. Some kind of way I hit him, and then this was my luck. Otherwise he bark when he see somebody. He bark, and the Germans come and take us and shoot us right away. And this was luck. He got scared because I hit him in the nose or somewhere, and he didn't bark, so they went away. They thought there's nobody over there. And I, with my friend, we was under the ground over there, and we stay. We was afraid to move, to go out.

After maybe a few hours later, they went away, and we stay. This was the luck that he got scared and he didn't bark. Otherwise there was shooting. They went away, and after a few hours, we got up. We was looking. They got, for the farmhouse, the holes for the pigeons, the little holes, and I hear -- from the look around from the hole, I hear -- there was working over there, two Polish workers was working by the farm house over there, and one said to the other one, The American here. I couldn't believe. I just hide here. The American already here. I couldn't believe this. And still, we was still few hours in the farm

house. We was afraid. After a few hours, we went out to the farm. They gave us something to eat, and I see already German -- the American tanks on the road over there, so I went out. I stopped the American tank. They gave us packages to eat. And one American soldier took us to the farm house, to the farmer. He took us to the farmer and told us -- to bring us to the nearest town, to the hospital. So we slept that night at the farm, and in the morning, the farmer took us to the nearest hospital over there. And in the night, we hear shooting back and forth, the American and German. They was still fighting over there. In the morning was quiet. The farmer took us to the hospital in the nearest town. What luck. I was lucky.

>> Interviewer: What happened after that? What happened in the next few months?

>> Krautler: We stay in the hospital. I stay a few weeks, a few months over there in the hospital. And after we settled in the little town. We settled over there for the time being, in the little town over there where the hospital was, and they give us a little room over there somewhere. Some lady give us a room in her apartment. And over there, I meet my wife. My wife was -- we got a room in her house.

>> Interviewer: So your wife was a German living there?

>> Krautler: Yeah, yeah.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell us a little bit about --

>> Krautler: She was not the wife at that time, but later I married her.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell us a little bit about the people in that town. When you got to the town with the hospital, did they help you at all?

>> Krautler: Yeah, a little bit. I went to the store or to the brewery. They give me a beer or a little meat or whatever

because they know us. We was only a few people over there in a small -- everybody knows somebody, so they give us a little bit always. Was only a few people, me and my friend.

>> Interviewer: When you were in this town, did you have a chance to talk to the Germans living there about, you know, what had happened with the camps? Did they know about the camps? Did they talk to you at all about them?

>> Krautler: Nobody say they know. Everybody say they don't know. Nobody knows nothing, they say.

>> Interviewer: How did you meet your wife?

>> Krautler: This was what I got the apartment over there. She was the daughter of the people who give me a room in the apartment.

>> Interviewer: So after the war, you didn't go to a DP camp?

>> Krautler: No, no, I stay over there in the town, and later, I moved to a little bigger -- a little city, I moved.

>> Interviewer: What was the name of the town that you originally were in?

>> Krautler: A small town, Falkenstein. This is -- not far from the city was -- Regensburg was the city.

>> Interviewer: And then after Falkenstein, you moved to --

>> Krautler: Regensburg, a little city.

>> Interviewer: How long did you stay in Regensburg?

>> Krautler: I stayed a few years in Regensburg. I settled in Regensburg. I got in Regensburg, opened a little store, textiles, a little store I opened in Regensburg. And I stay a few years.

>> Interviewer: And then where did you move? When did you come to the United States?

>> Krautler: In '56.

>> Interviewer: Why did you decide to come to the United States?

>> Krautler: I wanted to come. I wanted to come to the United States. This was in '56. We went to New York.

>> Interviewer: How did you get -- I mean, what did you have to go through to get to the United States.

>> Krautler: Registered and waiting. You got wait. First -- through organization, I register to come here, and I was waiting till I got the papers, everything, and then we come to New York.

>> Interviewer: What organization did you register with?

>> Krautler: This was a Jewish organization, a Jewish organization.

>> Interviewer: What was the name of it? Do you remember?

>> Krautler: This was -- Joint, I think, what they call, I think.

>> Interviewer: What did you do when you got here to the United States?

>> Krautler: I got to the United States in '56. For the start, we stay in New York, and later, I got a little job. I look for a job here. And I work in a little hotel. In a club first, in a club. Later I was working in a hotel, Hotel Pierre.

>> Interviewer: If you don't mind, I'd like to just go back and ask, what was it like living in Germany after the war, being Jewish? What was it like for you?

>> Krautler: In Germany, well, it was quiet. It was quiet. Nobody bother us.

>> Interviewer: Did you have any -- were there any anti-Semitic activities after the war that you experienced?

>> Krautler: I didn't, I didn't see. I didn't see.

>> Interviewer: Was your wife Jewish?

>> Krautler: No, she was German.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Did you ever discuss with her about, you know, the Holocaust and --

>> Krautler: No. She know. They hear. They know a little bit.

>> Interviewer: But you never really discussed it?

>> Krautler: No, no.

>> Interviewer: What was life like for you in the United States? Did you speak English when you first got here?

>> Krautler: No. I got to learn. I didn't speak English. Slowly I learned a little bit.

>> Interviewer: And then you got the job eventually, like you said, in the Hotel Pierre?

>> Krautler: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: With all your experiences of living through the Holocaust and seeing it all, is there anything you'd like to say about it? Is there anything you want people --and the world -- to know about that?

>> Krautler: People know because they're watching TV and all kind news, so they know. They know.

>> Interviewer: What would you like people, though, to understand as a result of the Holocaust?

>> Krautler: Nobody can understand even. When you don't went through, you couldn't understand this.

>> Interviewer: All right.

>> Krautler: People don't -- can't understand that this could happen, things, and some people even don't believe that it happened.

>> Interviewer: Is there anything, though, that we can learn from this experience, that we as human beings can learn from this?

>> Krautler: No. It just depends how they teach in the school, how they get education and things in schools.

>> Interviewer: Is there anything in general, though, that we can learn about how we behave to each other?

>> Krautler: I don't think I can learn something. You have to practically went through the things that you learn.

>> Interviewer: How do you feel about being in America? How do you feel about being an American?

>> Krautler: I'm glad I'm here and I'm American. You do what you want. It's quiet. Nobody bother you. It's a total difference.

>> Interviewer: Besides you, besides you, do you know if anybody from your family survived?

>> Krautler: Nobody.

>> Interviewer: Nobody?

>> Krautler: Only I was lucky myself.

>> Interviewer: Did you have any aunts or uncles or anything, cousins that survived?

>> Krautler: I don't know of nobody.

>> Interviewer: Yeah. Did you ever go back to Kraków?

>> Krautler: Yeah, I went for a few days.

>> Interviewer: When was that?

>> Krautler: Shortly after the war. I went to Kraków for a few days, and I went back.

>> Interviewer: What was that like for you?

>> Krautler: Strange. You don't see nobody you know.

>> Interviewer: Why did you decide not to settle back in Kraków?

>> Krautler: No, I wouldn't settle over there. I don't know -- everything change. Everything is new. I didn't like it. I like come back to the United States. No, that time, I was in Germany. To Germany, I went back.

>> Interviewer: Is there anything -- is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

>> Krautler: I got a brother, two sisters, and they're all dead. Nobody. I was lucky.

>> Interviewer: Is there anything in general that I haven't asked you that you'd like to talk about, anything you'd like us to know that I haven't asked?

>> Krautler: I don't know anything.

>> Interviewer: Okay. I think that's it then. Okay. Thanks a lot.

>> Krautler: That's all?

>> Interviewer: That's it.

>> Krautler: Okay.

>> Interviewer: Thank you very much.

>> Krautler: Thank you.

>> Interviewer: Thank you.

00:42:09