00:05 SIMON KONOVER: My name is Simon Konover. I live in West Hartford, I am a developer.

INTERVIEWER: What did you want to be when you grew up?

00:16 KONOVER: My ambition was, when I come to the United States, I would like to open up a garage, fix up cars, then sell them.

INTERVIEWER: Do you speak any foreign languages?

00:31 KONOVER: Well I spoke five or six languages when I first came here. Not well, but I spoke it.

INTERVIEWER: What languages?

00:42 KONOVER: First of all it was Yiddish. Second language was Hebrew, I went to school to learn Hebrew. Third was Polish of course I was born in Poland. Then when I wound up in Russia, I learned Russian. Then when I wound up in Cuba, I learned a little Spanish. Let's see, so it would be, Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, Spanish, and Russian.

INTERVIEWER: And English.

KONOVER: (laughing) And a little bit of English yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like growing up in Poland before World War II?

1:24 KONOVER: We lived like in a little ghetto, all the Jews lived in one place and the gentile lived in another place. Not that they created the ghetto, but we would almost have like a little ghetto because we felt most secure living together.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think, when you were back in Poland, was there anti-Semitism even before the war?

1:51 KONOVER: Oh a lot of Anti-Semitism. We were, I was born in Poland, my family was born in Poland, but we were outsiders. We were not involved. Matter-of-fact when there was some problems, my father and mother would say don't get involved, stay out of it. Don't forget as Jews we couldn't get a job with the government, before my, before I was born, you couldn't even live in a big city. We would get beaten up if we went out of our neighborhood and at the same time, Polish kids would come in our neighborhood, we would beat them up. It was...I never felt like I belonged there because we had a lot of restrictions and of course it was a little better since I was born. Before I was born they used to have pogroms and killings. We were not considered citizens, though we were born there, like outsiders, not involved.

INTERVIEWER: What happened when the Nazis invaded your town?

3:15 KONOVER: That was September 1, 1939. We were about sixty kilometers away from the German border. And I heard, you know I don't remember, I don't think I read papers at that time, but I heard that there is problems between Germany and Poland and one morning in September I woke up and there were tanks and motorcycles and dogs and blow horns, announcing don't go out of the house, if you go out of the house you will get shot. It was a surprise to me; it was like the whole world changed overnight.

INTERVIEWER: And then you went to a labor camp?

4:08 KONOVER: They announced that anybody over sixteen years old and Jewish, should report to the marketplace, which I did. I was over sixteen, just sixteen, a little older, and they sent me, I wouldn't call it a labor camp, I think it was like a farm, with some other young Jewish kids and we were made to pick tomatoes, potatoes, hay for the winter for them, for their army and for the horses that they had, the Germans. So we were taken there and basically I saw that I will not live too long because the food was terrible, they didn't give us enough food, and it got cold and we had no heat. So I decided to run away, with eight of us. Of course they put a fence all around the place with barbed wire on top. We dug underneath and we went underneath and they had security so they started shooting at us and I don't know if they were killed, but at least five of the kids, there were eight of us that ended up going, did not make it but three of us did make it. I ran back home to my house.

INTERVIEWER: Was your family at the house, or where was your family during this?

6:07 KONOVER: They were at the house. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was your first interaction with the Nazis?

6:12 KONOVER: They came looking for me the next day because they knew that we ran away and my father and mother hid me in the basement under a wood plank and I heard the Gestapo, German soldiers, walking right over me, but they didn't find me. If they did I would have been shot right there on the spot. After they left I came up and my father and mother, they were as white as paper. They thought I would be shot if they ever found me.

INTERVIEWER: So what did you decide to do after that?

6:50 KONOVER: Well I didn't decide, I was a little over sixteen years old. My father and mother decided that they will find me eventually; they will know I'm at home because I had to get out and eat, so they packed me up a warm cover, sewed in a zloty which is one dollar approximately and said Simon you better leave because they will find you. And there are people that take you across the border to the Russian section. My brother was two years younger so he and I packed up. They wanted him to run away too because they knew that he would be next. He was two years younger. But we came to a crossroads and he started crying and he went back. And I never saw him again. I never saw my family again since that night when I left.

INTERVIEWER: What inspired you to tell your own story about your experience in the Holocaust and when did you decide to tell it?

8:24 KONOVER: I really got excited when they decided to build the Holocaust museum in Washington. What inspired me is I heard over and over again that the Holocaust never happened. I would say to the people, if it never happened, what happened to my family? Where is my father, mother, sisters, brothers?