

## **Transcript:**

Mark Blank (with interpreter)

A29

35m

Interviewer: We're going to talk a little bit about pre-war life, a little bit about your family, how you grew up. You're a ghetto survivor, correct, and we're going to talk a little bit about life in the ghetto, a little bit about liberation, and a little bit about what happened after. We can stop at any time you need to. I want you to take your time and feel as comfortable as you'd like it.

Mark Blank: I could explain I'm a little bit nervous but I guess it's normal.

Interviewer: It's very normal, very normal. Everybody is nervous. Tell me a little bit about your life. Tell me when you were born.

Mark Blank: I was born in February 3, 1930 in a family, doctors.

Interviewer: A family of doctors?

Mark Blank: Of doctors. My mom and my father were doctors in the city by the name [unintelligible 0:01:46.3], Ukraine.

Interviewer: Did you grow up orthodox?

Mark Blank: I was the only child.

Interviewer: Orthodox?

Mark Blank: No. They were not religious.

Interviewer: Not religious.

Mark Blank: My grandparents were religious. My parents were not. My father's family, parents of my father, my grandparents on my father's side.

Interviewer: Tell me about your childhood when [unintelligible 0:02:34.4]

Mark Blank: I went school. I start school when I was seven years old. I very well remember my parents, grandparents on my father's side. I loved them very much. I remember all the Jewish holidays, Passover. My grandfather had a very nice sense of humor. During the holiday, we were hiding slices of matza and the children were looking for--

Interviewer: [unintelligible 0:03:30.0].

Mark Blank: My grandfather was hiding the [unintelligible 0:03:37.9]. He was hiding in the back pocket of his and he was looking for it because he was doing it every year. Everything was repeating, every Passover. There was a family tradition. When the war started, we evacuated and we were not able to catch the train and my father, and we got horses and buggy and the whole family, the grandparents and the parents and him, they moved east.

Interviewer: When did you have the feeling different as a child? When were your earliest memories of anti-Semitism?

Mark Blank: Before the war, he didn't even know he was different. He didn't know he was a Jew. The question never was raised, and he never felt on himself. When the war started, he realized that the Jews were the first one who were exterminated, and the Jews were the first one who have to move to safety. His mother was very sick. She had TB, tuberculosis. They were able to move 80 km. She started bleeding--

Interviewer: 80 km from home?

Interpreter: They were able to go for about 50 miles and she started bleeding.

Mark Blank: And she was put in a hospital.

Interviewer: This was after the war?

Mark Blank: This was already...the war already begun, and this is why we were not able to move away, ran out of time.

Interviewer: Did she survive?

Mark Blank: She died a little bit later.

Interviewer: Of TB?

Mark Blank: Yes. And they moved. They did not want to stay in a strange place so they moved, went back home. He doesn't remember how they got back because they lost their horse and buggy. We stopped about 30 km. It's 18 miles. They stopped in a small town by the name [unintelligible 0:08:24.2]. We stopped in some home, people, who the parents knew. I remember one example which shocked me. In front of their neighbor's house, a policeman grabbed his grandfather by the beard and was moving, dragging him, pulling him by the beard, and the grandfather was screaming very loud, and the father and himself, they came out of the house and tried to save him, and he started to leave the grandfather alone and started hitting the father. When the Germans were occupying the city, Russian population came out with, this is a Russian tradition, with bread and salt so they would walk out of their house and welcoming the Germans. They were even bringing some shoe polish for the German soldiers as a welcome.

Interviewer: This was what they were doing?

[INTERRUPTION 0:10:32.7 to 0:10:37.5]

Mark Blank: This is when we moved back to [unintelligible 0:10:47.7].

Interviewer: When you saw your neighbors welcoming the Germans, tell me a little bit about that.

Mark Blank: I was very surprised. The soldiers were marching, and the people were just going just to see, and he was one of them, just to see.

[INTERRUPTION 0:11:37.0]

Mark Blank: He was very shocked why the Russians were welcoming and from my point of view, from a Russian, a small child who is 11 years old, he couldn't comprehend why. For majority of the people, there was tragedy and he couldn't comprehend why would during the war when people would die and getting killed, somebody was welcoming--

Interviewer: They're murderers.

Interpreter: Exactly.

Interviewer: Tell me how you got to the ghetto?

Mark Blank: Different people and he understand in the future what was very obvious. When we came back home, in our house, was a cafeteria, and we moved in with the neighbors...to a neighbor's free house. Everything what we had in house disappeared. But people who were stealing were bringing some stuff back, a coat like a fur coat and some furniture. He was able to save or recover before they were organized to ghetto. They had some more...taken Jews from different places. He doesn't remember but he said that there were a lot of Jews arrived from different areas, but he doesn't know how they got there. He doesn't remember.

Mark Blank: A month or two months after the war started, the ghetto was organized. He said in the middle of the street, they build like a gate with...he doesn't remember but he just remembered the gate.

Interviewer: And this is the ghetto in Ukraine?

Interpreter: Yes. He is very, very close to the same place the previous gentleman was.

Interviewer: That's why I was wondering when he seemed close. Did they know each other?

Mark Blank: No. He didn't know him. He was from different--

Interviewer: Different ghetto.

Interpreter: Very close neighbors as far as the counties but different areas.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about time in the ghetto. Tell me what you remember.

Mark Blank: I remember the first thing. It was still summer, September or August. He is explaining a flood, what happened at the beginning of the war, and they moved to the attic. His mother was still alive when they did that. For three, four days, the flood was...people were on the roof of their houses with boats. And shortly after that, his mother died.

Interviewer: Tell me about what you remember most about the ghetto.

Mark Blank: We were moved in different parts of the city. Very often, the people were picked up. The local policemen were picking up the people. He doesn't remember if this is Ukrainian or Romanian soldiers. They were picked up to some work. Some people were coming back and some people were not, but he remembers people talking. I remember we had a hospital only for the Jews and Ukrainian. In the ghetto was Ukrainian

also. They were living in the same area because it was part of the city. The Jews have no rights to get out from the gate.

Interviewer: Tell me about liberation.

Mark Blank: Star of David. All the Jews were wearing black coats and they were wearing Star of David, yellow star. As a child, he didn't have to wear one in the back, but adults were wearing the coats with the stars on the back also. My father was an infection disease doctor. I don't know the diseases. I know them in Russian.

Interviewer: Was your father able to assist a lot of the residents in the ghetto?

Mark Blank: This is what he is trying to tell us. My father was able to wear a strip, a white strip on his arm. On the white label, it was doctor.

Interviewer: How did he get medication?

Mark Blank: He doesn't remember.

Interviewer: Tell me about what you remember about liberation.

Mark Blank: He would like to think more about. He wants to remember the things that he remembers during that time. This label has allowed his father to get out of ghetto.

Interviewer: Get out for...to serve--

Mark Blank: The Jews were not allowed to get out, but his father...he was able to save lives. He was able to treat patients.

Interviewer: Jews and non-Jews?

Mark Blank: No. He treated everybody who needed help.

Interviewer: So they kept his family in the ghetto but they let him come out and treat non-Jews.

Mark Blank: Yes.

Interviewer: Did they give him anything extra like food?

Mark Blank: He doesn't remember. He said somehow we survived but he doesn't know how they were able to get it.

Interviewer: What do you remember about getting out of the ghetto?

Mark Blank: When the Russian army occupied the city, they were able to get out of the ghetto.

Interviewer: Do you remember that day?

Mark Blank: Yes. March 19, 1944.

Interpreter: Same day.

Interviewer: Same day as the other one.

Interpreter: The same day as the other one.

Interviewer: That's why I wondered if they knew each other. Everything what they were saying is the same.

Interpreter: I don't remember what the name of the city was the gentleman.

Interviewer: I don't remember the city.

Mark Blank: It's about 20 miles apart.

Interpreter: They were about 20 miles apart.

Interviewer: When you think about your time in the ghetto, what do you remember the most?

Mark Blank: Very often, they will get pages of names...the name of the city's picture and they had a concentration camp, and this is what the people from the ghetto were called. They were called by the names and they will ship out to the concentration camps. They were called by the names and he doesn't know if this was local police, Jewish police or the German.

Interviewer: Was his family spared from the camp because of his father's service?

Mark Blank: Just a moment. In the city was a local control, a man who was a teacher, history teacher. His name was Ivanov, and he was trying to help the Jews.

Interviewer: Was he Jewish?

Mark Blank: No, Ivanov was not a Jew, but he was trying to help the Jews...Romanian. He was afraid of punishment so he moved with the Romanian but during the time of the occupation, he was helping the Jews. He saved a lot of lives, and his family was spared also.

Interviewer: Because of the teacher.



Interpreter: Because of the teacher.

Mark Blank: After his father was...the doctor provided some services to the gentleman's family...he gave him a souvenir, a present, booklets.

Interviewer: Could you let him know that we are running of time.

Mark Blank: He also remembers a woman who was...the lady was also helping the Jews to survive the hard times. He also remembers what the man...the lady's husband had a motorcycle.

Interviewer: Ask him if there's anything else he'd like to add about his experience as a whole.

Mark Blank: He still remembered the taste of, it sounds like potato pancakes, from the childhood because evidently he was very hungry and it smelled very good and very delicious and tasted very good.

Interviewer: Latkes.

Interpreter: Such a sweet man.

Mark Blank: He also remembered a visit from a strange man, and he was asking to his father who the man was. He was spy came to visit his father, but he was asking his father to help...to get away from--

Interviewer: Ask him if he is ready [unintelligible 0:31:54.5].

Interpreter: OK. He wants to finish his story.

Mark Blank: His father was not able to help the gentleman. They were just trying to...I don't know how to say the word but somebody was trying to see if he had the contact with the Russian military.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Interpreter: He was to tell one more story.

Interviewer: OK.

Mark Blank: After they were freed from the ghetto, he was able to sign the...the government was holding against the Jews, the time they spent in the ghetto. They only think they had a little bit of easier time than the rest of the Jews because the part where they live, it was part of Romania.

Interviewer: Why did you come to Tennessee?

Mark Blank: His son moved to Tennessee in 1990, and he moved in 1995.

Interviewer: To be near his family.

Interpreter: Near his family.

Interviewer: OK. Tell him thank you very much. It was an honor.