

Good afternoon. My name is Devorah Lichstein. And I'm a member of the oral history project at Kean College. Assisting me at this interview is Dr. Bernard Weinstein. I'd like to introduce Alice Lefkovic, a Holocaust survivor.

When my children were small and later, when they were seven or eight years old, I struggled with a question. What can I tell them and how? And how much? And when?

How not to frighten a child? How can I present that being a Jew today for their generation is OK, and few decades earlier the incomprehensible happened just because we were Jews? How can I tell them that I had a good childhood, which was followed by terror in my teenage years?

But our children know because they hear some unbelievable stories when guests come, relatives and friends. They sense that we are different. Then all the other people on our street, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, they know that we went through the Holocaust.

I grew up in a small town in Western Slovakia. The Jewish community was small, about 30 families observing tradition, well-integrated into local economy. Social relations were good, but not intimate. Still, every family had some good Gentile friends.

Since there were few Jews in our town, we were only two Jewish girls in the class. My two best friends were Gentile girls. And one of them was a Protestant pastor's daughter.

I visited at their home, and they at our's. The friendships were seen with approval by our parents. The weekends, especially Saturday, Shabbat, we socialized with Jewish kids and our parents with Jewish families.

We and our parents spoke the Slovak language, attending the state school. And we were patriots. In 1938, after the annexation of Austria to Germany, people, and more so the Jews, started to worry.

Hitler's aggression and threat to Czechoslovakia became a real in our parents' minds. Vienna was only 100 kilometers away. And refugees arrived.

Their stories of terror and of persecution were unbelievable. And sometimes they were questioned. Still, their frights from Vienna was apparently evidence enough for those who wanted to believe.

In 1938, after the infamous Munich Agreement, Hitler marched into Sudeten. And in October '38, six months later, in March '39, he occupied the Western part of Czechoslovakia, incorporating into the Third Reich under the name of Protectorate. The Eastern part of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, declared independence with Hitler's approval and became his puppet state.

I was 13 years old, and here these were my teenage years. Beginning in 1939, 1940, new laws were introduced stripping the Jewish population of their civil rights, encroaching on economic activity, children thrown out of school. In rapid succession, confiscation of property, loss of jobs, and personal assaults became our daily ordeal. In September '41--

Can you describe some of the assaults or some of the things that were done to you a little bit more fully?

People took advantage. And if somebody had some personal disagreements, they could intimidate. They could denounce. They could make an arrest of people who really did nothing. It was just personal.

The personal assaults were that people were calling you names, that friends-- before, like I was telling, I could visit non-Jewish homes. And they came to us. Now, I was a dirty Jew.

To the very people that you were the very friendliest with?

To the very people, yeah. Well, let's say not my best friends, but many others, yes. I was a dirty Jew. And we were

respected until that time. It was a public policy. And people agreed with it.

Yeah.

In September 1941, the Nuremberg Laws were introduced, segregating the Jews into complete isolation, which were followed by physical punishment. We eagerly followed the news. Every month and sometimes every day, new decrees were issued.

The Jews accepted these as one would accept a blow. They bent over and continued. There was little anger. There was mostly fear and disbelief, desperation. But apparently, there was always hope that this has to come to an end.

The change in the community was more painful. Because with every decree, our isolation increased. We realized that we are blemished only when our Gentile neighbors in the community conveyed this message to us.

Not the anti-Jewish laws and decrees, but peoples' changed attitude brought us to the realization of danger. Sifting through memories, my most traumatic experience was the day on a cloudied, rainy, late afternoon in November 1940 just before the Christmas season. Our store was crowded with customers.

The town [INAUDIBLE] stopped before this show window with a pail of white paint and started to write with large letters across the show window, Jewish business, tu Ā½id in Slovak, JĀ¼de in German. My parents and everybody stared at the show window in disbelief. And God knows what they thought or felt.

Our customers started to depart one by one. And a few were left inside, their panic increased. And they hurried faster and faster to get out. And we stood there in the suddenly empty store, alone. It was a very frightening message of what was to come.

What were some of your own feelings during this time? You were in the store at the time this happened. What did you yourself experience?

Just fear. Fear. It was like on a boat. Everybody's running away. We are all alone on the boat.

And your parents? How did they respond?

I think the same. Really when I'm thinking so many years back, I feel that this is my most traumatic experience. Because it looked like this aloneness.

And probably it was so much traumatic because later we were in real danger. Now, we were not in danger. It was just like a preface of what is coming.

It was a message of danger, that you people are different. And later, we learned that we are not human. That's why we can be destroyed.

Up to that time, did you feel that sense of isolation yet?

No, no. You see, like I'm mentioning, the laws were laws. This was on paper. And you accept. It's not you don't feel it. You just learn it. It's cognitive. It's not felt.

But when people respond and they convey the message, then it's felt. It's not learned, like the law you study and learn and know that this is prohibited beginning today. So this was a tremendous impact, the peoples' changed attitude.

After this, was there hostility? Was there more open hostility to you?

After that, also, we avoided people, not only people avoided us because you avoid problems. On one hand, you were isolated. On another hand, we isolated ourselves.

How did your avoidance manifest itself?

That we did not try to meet people, when you passed in the street, you just did not look for the hello, yes? You looked away. Because you knew that, anyway, those people will not see you. So you did not want to be insulted.

So you also avoided to look at them. My husband is telling me that best friend of his crossed the street not to meet him. This was his traumatic experience, yes, somebody who was so friendly.

How old were you when this happened?

Well, I am born in '26. So in 1940, I was 14.

Was there any attempt by the Jewish community to do something about what was happening?

The Jewish community did nothing. We are already stripped of civil rights. The Jewish community did not have any power and any-- there was not attempt, but there was not possibility to do anything.

These were laws against the Jews, which everybody had to accept. There was not fight. Even when things are happening and we could not respond, we could only try to deal the best we could. In our case, we were running and hiding and escaping.

Were there any Jewish leaders or rabbis that you looked towards for comfort or--

It was a small community, no. No, everybody was very capable and very independent. And somehow families helped, yes, when there was need, but they were in the same situation.

Did you witness any acts of courage or defiance of the laws on the part of the indigenous population there, the Slovaks?

Yes, I did. They were hiding Jews. They had to take great courage. And I witnessed many very good acts.

My mother stayed in hiding. She came to somebody unannounced on Christmas Eve. I don't know why everything happened on Christmas Eve to us.

And it was in the town in a village where she grew up. She was 20 years away from this place, but the woman was friendly with my grandfather. So mother knew about her.

She used to be a friend in school. So 20 years later, she appears on her doorstep on a December night. This lady took her into her house and kept her in a room, not in a cellar, for five months.

Her son was in the army. Her daughter-in-law had two young children. The two young children, this was very dangerous for the family. The young children can speak.

The young children were taught to call my mother aunt without a name. But the neighbors could have asked, why is an aunt here whom nobody ever sees? This was tremendous courage.

Very little money the woman was getting from my mother. She kept her. That was in 1944.

Well, now, it's the beginning of 1942. Rumors were going that young men and women from 16 upwards will be deported for work to Poland. In March 1942, the rumors became a reality and the storm was here.

The last week in March, young and the very young boys and girls were ordered and taken out of homes for deportation. So was Ruth's aunt. At the same time, Jews labeled as political prisoners were also taking for deportation.

My father was imprisoned one year earlier, ostensibly as a part of the Jewish persecution. So he was marked as political. He was taken and deported in the first transport to leave Slovakia to Poland, early, unexpectedly, and having no time to realize what was happening.

I was not at home. As the rumors about deportation got started, I went to another town to stay with my aunt. She had no grown children, and her home was seen as safe.

But when the deportation in her town became reality few days later, I was shipped to another place. At night, in a taxi covered with blankets, I was sent to my uncle with some preliminary plans to cross the border into Hungary. The plans were preliminary and many questions were in our hearts and in our minds.

My uncle stayed, at that time, with his in-laws, who were the landowners. Their fields extended near the Hungarian border. The next night, two other teenage girls arrived at their home to hide them and to help them cross the border.

My uncle's brother-in-law, the son of the house, Gabi Arei, knew the right people who could guide us at night to cross the border into Hungary. But the plan did not work out without trouble. The next day, apparently we were seen and denounced.

On the second Seder night, the police came to search the house. And we were put to hide in the barn. When the police left, we came out at night and, led by Gabi, we were running through fields, jumping over fences, but at night, for about two hours.

We were hidden in their farm laborer's house, which was two hours away. Here we stayed for three days, three girls together awaiting as preparation for the border crossing were made. It had to be a dark moonless night. And other safety measures had to be met. And a reliable guide had to be found.

Three days later, we crossed the border with our guide and planned to take a train to Budapest. I don't know why. In the border village, as we crossed the border in Hungary, we mounted the train.

And upon arrival in a nearby town, we looked for a transfer train to Budapest. Soiled from mud, sleepless and exhausted after the crossing, we were caught at the railroad station by the police who were, by this time, aware about illegal border crossings.

Apparently, our arrest was seen by somebody, by a man at the railroad station. Few hours later, we were released by the police. And our quote "unknown benefactor" unquote was there to take us to somebody's house.

At this time, was it four of you, your parents, your brother, and yourself?

No, three girls. When I came to my uncle, who stayed with his in-laws, my father went with the first transport. He was so-called political because he was imprisoned as part of the persecution a year before.

So because he was marked as political, he went in the first transport. I was, from this on, bumped from place to place, yes? I ended up-- they wanting wanted to get rid of me.

For my salvation, I ended up with my uncle who stayed with his parents-in-law. Why did he stay with his parents-in-law? He lost his job because he was working for a company which was in the Western part of Czechoslovakia, which was separated.

So he was jobless. He had to go to work on a road or some kind of labor squad. To avoid this, he went to his father-in-law because his father-in-law was a landowner still that he is working in the fields. That was as if he is employed there.

So my aunt shipped to me to my father-in-law and because the location was on Hungarian border. So it was a perfect location to cross. Somehow, it was felt, if you cross the border, we were safe.

We did not know where we are going. I didn't not know the language. We are three girls.

Two other girls came because they hoped to cross. It was very distant family, so there were some relationship. So they used this family to help.

Where were your mother and your brother at the time?

My mother was still at home. They still did not take the families. And my brother was on the go, like I. It was better not to be at home.

OK, so this gentleman got there when the police released us. He made the arrangement in Hungary not knowing us, a man who saw the girls were caught at the railroad station. He was there and took us to somebody's house.

Here, in great haste, two men negotiated how to help us in further trip to Budapest. I spoke no Hungarian. And during these encounters, I could only guess what is happening around me and to me.

My new friends, the two sisters, could speak Hungarian, but apparently were scared to death and seemingly did not know or understand what's happening. When I learned the geographical location of the town we were in, I remembered that my uncle's relative lives nearby. This was his wife's relative really, his wife's sister.

The two sisters, since they spoke Hungarian, were put on a train to Budapest. I was accompanied by my unknown friend to this newly acquired relative and was delivered at her home. When I rang the bell and Edith's husband opened the door-- he never saw me-- and looked at me in my mother's shoes and clothing, the color drained from his face. And clutching his stomach, he rushed to the bathroom leaving me at the door.

As Edith entered and I introduced myself, she responded positively with some humor asking dear God to assist her with this new breed of refugees. Another cousin of hers arrived the day before crossing the border. So now, again, we were two.

Saturday was chosen for the trip to Budapest. She accompanied us because on Saturday more people travel. And in a crowded train, it is easier to mingle and disappear in the crowd. Our shoes and outfits from crossing the border were packed. And we were dressed up like young ladies with high heels taking a trip to the capital.

These four, five days, leaving home, travel at night, hiding and fleeing, crossing the state border, finding myself illegal in another country, not speaking the language, being shipped like a hot potato while being helped by strangers and family completed a maturation process of about 10 years. All of this happened within five days.

In Budapest, while really not comprehending my situation, I first learned to handle circumstances and situations as they occurred day by day. I was now 10 years older. I soon became independent and responsible for myself.

My uncle and my aunt arrived four weeks later, after a terrible ordeal being caught at the border. A few weeks later, my mother and my brother also came. The rule was to establish false identity, to have minimal contact with each other, to live separately. If one is caught, others should not be included.

As I better learned to play the role of my changed identity, I worked full-time in the quiet rented room in Budapest. Sometimes I receive subsidy, as my family occasionally received some of our funds through friends and clandestine channels. And I made friends with other young people in the streets of Budapest who lived there illegally in similar circumstances.

From time to time, people were caught by the police and were returned to the Slovak border or were incarcerated. The first six months when the deportation was between March and September from Slovakia. So if we were caught, we were put back on some border.

After the six months, the deportation was stopped. So we were incarcerated in Budapest. And some of my friends really were.

We lived all the time in fear. My mother did not do well in this so suddenly changed situation. She could not master the energy and the will needed. She became depressed and very dependent on whoever was available, mostly on my brother who was 19 years old.

The two years in Hungary passed. In March 1944, the German army marched into Hungary. And the SS made the deportation of Jews from Hungary their high priority.

Concentration of the Jews throughout the provincial towns and villages started immediately. And three months later, by June '44, about 500,000 Jews were deported. Meanwhile, Budapest was excluded for deportation.

Immediately, when the Germans-- we had papers as Hungarian Jews. Immediately, when the Germans entered, we had papers as Hungarian non-Jews. Because we had some experience by now.

Our family and our illegal friends decided to move on since it became dangerous to remain in Hungary while search for Jews, legal and illegal, intensified. We knew that we have to act before the deportation will reach Budapest. End of May 1944, we crossed in the dark of night the Hungarian state border back to Slovakia. Ruth's father crossed with me together.

By this time, Slovakia was almost Judenrein, which means the Germans called it that they want to make all Europe Judenrein, clean of Jews. As a result of deportation, Slovakia was almost Judenreined as a result of deportation in 1942. Some Jews who considered to be economically indispensable were given special exemption from deportation in '42.

So still, they went there. We learned through friends that, in three provincial towns, the authorities were somewhat benevolent toward Jews. And these were the towns to stay.

I lived in a rented room and spent a relatively calm summer in 1944. My dark hair and complexion were considered Jewish characteristic. So to improve on my illegal existence, I colored my hair platinum blond before crossing the border back to Slovakia.

Did you maintain the same identity you had when you were in Hungary? You got new papers?

No, we were Slovaks, Slovaks Gentile immediately. You see, somehow we had a clandestine connections, yes? Like, I met people in the street of Budapest. When we returned to Slovakia again, my brother returned earlier.

So when I came back, he already had papers for me. And he already told me that I can be in this town. We had a very distant relative whom we never knew who lived on the Slovakian side of the border, but people were very helpful. She was one of those who were economically indispensable. And they stayed over the two years.

Was there an underground in Slovakia that was furnishing these papers?

Yes, there was. That would be another story. I have a book, but it's in Hebrew. Gizi Fleischman, did you hear the name?

Yeah, OK. She was one of the prominent and Rabbi Weismendl. There was a group of three people who were very active and very, very helpful. And when I am saying that there were three towns where the authorities were somewhat benevolent, so these were the connections that they made the authorities benevolent, these people in the underground.

So when we came, it was easier to establish ourselves in those towns. There was better probability that we will not be caught with the blond hair. Because later, I realized that there were many ladies as smart as me. And it was not something which the police, if they would have looked, found that 18-year-old girls have colored platinum blonde hair. Yes, it was strange.

So we always said that the papers are good as long as nobody needs them. When we were caught, we were caught. Probably it was good for the landlady when we looked for a room.

OK, now, I am platinum blonde. So this was a calm summer. In September 1944, the army of the Slovak puppet state staged an uprising against the Germans and declared a new independent Czechoslovak Republic in Center Slovakia.

Immediately, the German army marched into Slovakia to fight the uprising and, with overwhelming forces, quelled the uprising within two months. With the German forces came the SS. And deportation of Jews was renewed after two years.

By this time and even before, the legal as well as illegal Jews gained more expertise in survival methods. And they also learned by that time the deportation to Poland means death. We did not know it in '42. We knew it in '44.

So people pursued every available way of rescue. Those in the partisan territory tried to hide in the forests. In other places, people went into hiding with non-Jewish friends.

Others obtained papers to change their identity and moved away from hometowns. Of course, at this time, in fall 1944, we are speaking about a very small group of Slovakian Jews. Carrying my false papers and my blond hair, I was caught in the street by an SS man assisted by a Slovak fascist militia man.

I was brought to a transit concentration camp-- the name is Sered in Slovakia-- and witnessed the gruesome anxiety of Jews hunted down in the streets and pulled out from hiding who were brought here for deportation. So now, again, after a short period of unusual calm, Jews were assembled. And the renewed deportation began.

How did the German soldiers know that you were Jewish?

They asked for papers. And they did not. The Slovak militia man helped him. It was my blond hair.

I did not look real with dark complexion and platinum blond hair. It was unnatural. That's A. B, I had in my pocket book a picture, a childhood picture which I did not want to lose, always this me when I was a dark Jewish child. It was easy.

So most of the time, the identifications were made on intuition rather than on actual proof?

I also was in a wrong place. I should have been sitting at home. I went where I should not have gone. I went downtown at a time where Jews would be caught.

The concentration camp was organized when I was brought in Sered. And the deportation started. The concentration camp was organized and managed by the SS. And their methods of cruelty and intimidation prevailed.

But even at this late date of the war, the Germans continued to lie about work in Poland as a place of deportation. Meanwhile, the Jews in the concentration camp knew that deportation means death. The name of the kommandant, I have to remember.

He's living in Syria now. Maybe you know. I will remember the name. He's still alive.

Of Theresienstadt or of the camp?

No, of Sered. I will remember his names. I'm sorry.

Were your mother and father aware of what had happened to you?

No. You see, this was always that we had been separated. No, they did not know. But they apparently sensed it because there was no contact.

And the knew-- they were in hiding-- that I did not have a hiding place. I was just illegal. They were in hiding by that time when this started.

My remaining family, my grandfather, who stayed with my aunt, my mother's sister with her husband and the child, my mother's brother, the uncle who was with us in Hungary and his wife were caught and brought to be deported. These people were informed and realistic what to expect. Still, there was some hope because the Allied four armies were advancing to the German border, so September, October '44.

But they were not rescued and Germany did not collapse. The assembled Jews had to face a terrible reality of deportation, of separation, of suffering, and of death. When I attempted to help my grandfather in packing his backpack, he said to me that he does not need my assistance because he is old. And he's going to die. But I am young, and I will live. I will never forget the scene in his barrack.

My uncle repeated to me his advice from before. He said that I have to jump out from the train, that I have to run, that I can break my legs, but I have to make every rescue attempt and not to be brought to Auschwitz. And so six people of my immediate family were deported from Sered in October 1944. Five never came back. My aunt is here, my uncle's wife.

Was your brother among those deported?

No, he was in hiding. After every transport in Sered, there was a terrible quiet in the camp. You could hear the quiet.

This was September, December 1944. Before transports were assembled, we had to stand for hours to be reviewed by the SS kommandant for selection to go into the transport or to stay here until the next shipping. Standing for hours in the courtyard for selection, I could hear the uncontrollable clatter of my teeth.

I could hear it. It was uncontrollable. In December 1944, knowledgeable people said that, in the quiet of the night, the advancing Russian artillery can be heard from Hungary.

Were you given any food or clothing during this time?

Not clothing. Clothing I brought with me because I had some money with me when I was caught. I was caught in September. I remember I was caught in a raincoat in the street in between. It was December-- and summer shoes, sandals.

I had some money with me. And there were people who were working outside. And with this money, they brought me I think a pullover and a pair of shoes because I was in sandals.

And so some food was provided?

And this is also interesting-- yes, food was provided in Sered. It was not too bad. It was in Slovakia still.

I remember I had to sleep in a girls barrack. I was 18. But it was known that the SS come to the girls barrack and the girls have to undress. And they come at midnight. And they make fun and so on.

So because I had my aunt in this place, my aunt took me into her barrack. And I was sleeping on four stools in my raincoat with my hands because it was so narrow. And in my raincoat, that was my blanket. I slept well apparently, at that time, better than now.

It sounds strange to say that I was fortunate to find myself on December 19, 1944 in a railroad cattle car destined to Theresienstadt. Auschwitz was being dismantled as of November '44. In transport, we were reroute to Bergen-Belsen in Germany. My train was the first one to go to Theresienstadt from Slovakia.

On the train, the distance of about 400 kilometers, which usually could take eight hours, with detours and waiting for



hours had lasted five days. I do not know how it worked out, but these five days I blocked out almost completely. I realize that I do not remember the hours and the days in the railroad car.

I do not remember the physical discomfort, the dirt, the cold, the thirst, the crowding, the crying of babies, the elimination of human waste inside the car. I know, but I don't remember. What I remember is that the train went north instead of west. So we thought we are going to Auschwitz and not Theresienstadt.

And during the long standing in a coal mine region on the way, as the December morning was dawning, we smelled smoke. This was coal mine region. We knew that we could be in the vicinity of Auschwitz.

Everybody was very tired, very quiet, thinking the last thoughts. I felt that it is not fair to die in Auschwitz at the age of 18 years. Then the train started to move into the daylight.

And we saw through the holes in the railroad car signpost and inscriptions in the Czech language. And we realized that we are not in Poland anymore, but we detoured back into the former Czechoslovak territory. And, thus, we passed Auschwitz somewhere in the distance.

On December 24, Christmas Eve, the train came to a halt at the rail's end in Theresienstadt. My repression had been my great ally. I did not remember the terrifying parts and repeatedly gathered mental strength to go on.

In Theresienstadt, we saw people in civilian clothing coming and going. And we felt reassured by their looks. During administrative processing, we met Czech Jews who were the old-timers in the ghetto.

As strange as it may sound, they welcomed us because Jews from Slovakia reminded them of the old times before 1938 when the country was free and independent. They told us that we are very lucky because mass deportation from Theresienstadt was completed two months ago. And the camp is now empty. Empty, that means 20,000 people less. So it will take a long time again before a new deportation will start.

We were stationed in an old military barrack and stayed a group of 10 girls together. We shared bread and bed with a buddy, so we could have two blankets together and some human warmth. We saved a portion of our bread for bad times. And as a result, the bread we ate was always hard as a rock. I do not remember the taste of it.

A doctor friend who came with our transport told us that 40 out of 400 people from the transport, mostly elderly, died within the first two weeks in Theresienstadt. He also made an estimated calorie count of our daily rations and predicted that, on this calorie amount, we will last for three to six months.

We did not mind his calculation because, in January '45, we quote "knew" unquote that the war will be over before we die. Our work assignment was heavy labor for young women. It was called [NON-ENGLISH]. When transports came-- luggage carrying.

Otherwise-- just make work. It means to wake up people at 12:00 or a 2:00 at night, send them into the snowy night to work on barrack construction or similar. We had to carry lumber and building materials to work under strong humiliation, carrying things from here to there just for the exercise, guarded by the SS.

The best time was when we were waking up for work, and the SS cancelled the assignment. We felt that this is the best experience we can get in Theresienstadt. It meant going back to sleep and be inside the barrack.

Looking back, we turned the negative into positive and, thus, kept our morals. My great wish was to have one time again a real bed and a warm, clean blanket. I did not think about the past or about the future.

I focused my ambition to a limited goal in life, to have, again, a warm and clean blanket, hopefully camel hair. I still use this as my sleeping pill. I always think, I have a blanket.

In March, April 1945 with spring in the air, as we were entering the ghetto upon return from work, the Czech policemen

who guarded on the outside of the ghetto dropped words to us, [NON-ENGLISH], girls, heads up again. The spring is here. The end is very near.

At the same time in March, April '45, rumors spread about Red Cross visitors. All the workforce was mobilized to clean up the barracks, streets, to repair the hospital, schools, to restore and beautify the children's corner on the Plaza. The Red Cross arrived. And in our daily food rations, a triangle of Swiss cheese and a roll was included. This lasted for three days.

End of April, the most exciting thing happened in Theresienstadt. A colony of the most beautiful white busses with a Red Cross on arrived to take out and repatriate a group of 420 Danish Jews. I will never forget those buses departing the next day with Jewish internees leaving the ghetto.

Had all the Germans gone by then?

No. They were there. This was Red Cross. It was like a dream. And it didn't seem real that here are the Germans. And the Danish driver takes out a colony of busses.

At the same time, end of April, long trains of railroad cars with human cargo were coming into the ghetto. Other groups coming were starved Jews who marched through Germany during the winter and ended up in Theresienstadt. These were cars and cars, train loads, and the colonies of marching people.

Opening the railroad cars, human bodies dead and those barely alive were tumbling out through the door. We had to open the railroad cars. The work force was in place sorting out the dead from the living.

This time, those alive were taken to a real shower. And some were taken into a field hospital. The last week of the German rule, the SS have been transferring prisoners from the adjacent little fortress into the ghetto.

These were people marked as political prisoners, Jews and non-Jews. The conditions and treatment at the little fortress were more horrible and more cruel than of the ghetto. The people who were brought into the ghetto looked like matchsticks, who could break if they moved.

Their complexion was white like chalk. They looked like unreal people. With these people, also carloads of documents were brought for disposal.

Now, the SS archives containing information of SS activity were burned in ditches made along the ghetto walls. So they brought people. They apparently wanted to close this little fortress. So they brought the people into the ghetto.

There was a difference between the prisoners from the little fortress who looked like matchsticks. And they're dirty, emaciated, hungry, and dressed in rags people from the marching colonies. These had an expression, expression of suffering, of pain, of fear, and death.

The people from the little fortress were washed and dressed and had these white masks like faces with motionless empty eyes. About May 4 and 5th, four days before the liberation, the Prague uprising started. Theresienstadt is only 60 kilometers from Prague.

Rumors spread, again, that the SS left the ghetto. You had always rumors because nothing was told-- so what people anticipated, what people saw, what people constructed themselves. It was always rumors.

Rumors spread that the SS left the ghetto. The next day, some cars and trucks came from Prague and from other cities to pick up Jewish friends, relatives, or mixed marriage partners and children.

This was done in haste and fear and subdued jubilation. The war was not yet over. Two days later, the SS were back in command and in the street.

We woke up at night, the SS yelling and screaming. From our window, we saw about 100 ghetto inmates standing with heads up facing the wall of their barrack. Reflectors illuminated the scene. The SS were commanding and screaming, apparently working on their final heroic action. Thanks, God, the night passed and the men were not shot.

The next day, the SS apparently departed for good. It was in May. The day was gorgeous, bright and warm. And it looked like everybody was in the ghetto square.

That evening, just as dusk was falling, a Soviet Army Jeep entered the ghetto. The Russian officers asked for the [NON-ENGLISH]. And they were carried there on people's arms.

We did not sleep that night, but we also did not celebrate. We did not yet realize fully that we are free. We did not make plans or take steps.

The mood still was downcast, cautious, mistrustful. No excitement or celebration were visible. A day or two later, in this situation of loss and uncertainty, people started to move.

Again, rumors came that medical authorities from Prague are coming into the ghetto and will erect a quarantine since we had typhoid cases here. My friends and I were offered to join a group of young people and take a horse and buggy ride back to Slovakia. So this is the story of my late teens.

I returned to my hometown and found out that my mother and my brother are alive. They were liberated one month earlier and were still staying with Gentile families who were hiding them from deportation. The reunion was subdued as we started to realize that my father and so many others will never return.

Our own house, which was confiscated three years earlier, had to be restituted to us. And this takes time. Well, my life now following this period, my life was good, but sure not easy.

Therefore, I ended up with life philosophy that only difficult life is real life. And this worse was life. Whenever I have it easy, I feel uncomfortable. I do not take good things or a warm room for granted.

I was never sorry for myself and seldom complain about life's difficulties. I always knew that many and many went through worse than I did. My childhood friends and my peers were taken from homes and from parents at 15 or 16 years of age to go to the death chambers of [INAUDIBLE].

Only when I came to the United States I realized that, when women my age spoke about their sweet 16 parties, I in preparation for my 16th birthday was crossing borders at night to escape deportation.

We're going to pause for a few minutes, and then I'd like to ask you a couple of questions. We not might or both want to ask you some questions about--

Yes.

--your experiences and to elaborate. OK.