

They had it planned after the--

that's right.

OK, continue please, Mr Levine

When I came in Gross-Rosen, there was a terrible concentration camp. That was in 1945, January. There was thousands of people, there was no room to stay there, it was so many people. After a couple-- maybe a week-- they took us, we came to Buchenwald And Buchenwald was a very big lager, very big concentration camp, far away from the cities.

There was thousands of people, no work, nothing. They took us to work, a little train, small, a very small train, you know. The train was small and the tracks were small. Used to take us to the city, Weimar. The city was bombed, from the bombs. We came there about 1,000 people, the Germans came and they took 50 people, 100 people. Took to take apart-- to go on the roof, take apart the bricks, take apart this. I never was there in my life, but I was scared but the power, you know. I was on the roof to take apart.

We going home, you know, the evening, he's supposed to take us, the owner, what he -- he used to take us to a restaurant in the back in a room. Give a little soup because we worked for him, a piece bread. Meantime sometimes, you'll find a sour for they preserved, you know, for the winter, some jars-- cucumbers, pickles, you know, tomatoes. Then sometimes you'll take food packets with old potatoes. When we came there it is inspection there. When they find a potato or something they used to [INAUDIBLE] you with a [? leather ?] you know, 20, 30 took off shirt. That was happening in Buchenwald.

The last time I went I was lucky, you know, they picked up maybe 50 people, I don't know where we're going. We went on a cemetery. From the bombs some German soldiers got killed, we dig the graves the whole day. Came a German priest and, you know, he made a ceremony. He said you still alive. You're dead but you're still alive when you say this, you're alive for us. And it was going like this.

Until from Buchenwald they took me to a munitions factory and not me, a couple hundred people. And it was Waldenburg, a city out of the city. No rifles, only ammunition. And in the evening after work, they used to take me back to Buchenwald. Every day, the same people used to go there. Until one day, you know, [? surrender ?] [? the arms ?] [INAUDIBLE] stop to work we don't know what's going on. Out from the factories and we start to walk til we came out of the city in a forest.

And all of a sudden, we you know, we don't know what's going on. The Germans, one German, he was there, he took out-- what's it called in English-- to cut them off from his jacket and, and we don't see any guards, we don't see any soldiers. They left us. It was on a Friday.

D'you remember the date? Do you remember the date?

Yeah, April 13th on a Friday. And we don't know, we don't see these soldiers, we left alone. And all of a sudden big tanks is going. Me and another maybe five, six boys, we went under a bridge, we don't know what to do. We didn't hear speaking German, we heard something, a strange language.

After a couple hours we went out, we took out a shirt and we keep the shirt up. And we come there and see the American soldiers. First of all they took out some cans, it was their food inside, they give us. And they took us later in the city, put us in the houses, in German houses, it was empty some of them.

Can you describe their reaction when they found you?

They the Americans-- we was very happy. We was happy that at least I see we're free already, we didn't expect to be free. If the war could go on another couple months, nobody could go out alive. Hitler said, after the war if he would see a Jew, he would take off his hat, and he would give to him, you know like an expression. Nobody expects to be alive from this war, especially the Jews.

And thanks to the American army, they liberate Auschwitz, they liberate Buchenwald. I don't know if Eisenhower was there and when he saw there thousands of bodies, half alive, were still on the wooden beds, on the beds you know, ten in a bed, you know. And he saw thousands of bodies.

I have a wife who's [? half-dead ?] you know, but they couldn't go out. I think General Eisenhower was there, I don't know exactly. And that's what went, after the war, that's what General Eisenhower was more, you know, for the-- to make a Jewish state or something, I don't know what it was going in those days. And after I came in a city in Germany, a big city, Dresden, it's a big city. And all the trains, everything, the tracks, everything, was from the bombs ruined.

We was there under the-- the English army was there, the American, they concentrate, they start to feed us. Later they said, who wants to stay here? But in a couple days this goes, the Russians are coming over. Do you want to stay under the Russians, or do you want to run away? Some of them-- I was under the Russians in 1940 and 1941, I got enough-- so I didn't stay there. We went away to another city. What the Russians did in those days, our people, when they were alive, they drafted them to the Russian army. The war was not finished, they send them in first, in front. Hundreds of them got killed in the army, in the Russian army. Being freed from the concentration camps, they was drafted by the Russians.

And where did you go?

Being In Germany, before I came to Poland, I was on my own with some guys, you know, I was going from house to house to ask for a piece of bread. I don't want to stay there. I came back to Poland. I came to Kraków.

Did you have money? Did you have--

No money, nothing.

How were you able to travel?

We came down--

How were able to go?

We came, we took horses with a wagon, and we came there. It was a couple hundred miles. We came to Kraków. In Kraków was already a Jewish community, with Jewish refugees, because they came from the concentration camps and other places, from the partisan. I was there, you know, however, some time I met my wife. We were not married in those days and I know her parents from before the war. She told me her name. I said I know your father, I know your parents. And I saw her one time in Auschwitz, but in the woman lager. And after, after the war, I met her again.

I say, I'm going to my town, I'm going to see what is something left of it. One of my friends was going not far from my city, a little town like a village. He said he remembered his parents put a couple hundred [INAUDIBLE] in a bottle and they buried this in the ground. He was there, had a Polish family, came the Polish military, they used to call them the AK, the Polish army. They took him out from the house and they shot him.

After the war then, from Kraków I came in Warsaw. I took a train, but no tickets, they chased me out. I went in another back, in another wagon you know. I came in Warsaw. From Warsaw I took a train the Jewish people was already there, some of them were in the ghetto again. But I It was not too long, I want to go to my city. I came in Bialystok, my state, it's not far from my town. But like it is separation-- Russia occupied Poland but she took a large piece, a big part from Poland to Russia direct. No Poland at all, like Grodno.

Before the war I used to take Bialystok-Grodno-Augustow to my town, a train, but when Grodno occupied from Russia. I need a permit to go to Russia. From Russia, a permit to go to my town. I was not sure if they would arrest me, or they would take me to send again to the Russian army. I didn't go. When I was in

Bialystok, maybe a dozen people was sent. But the Russians sent them to Russia, they came back and they was in a little ghetto. One guy used to stay like a soldier with a rifle outside and they said to me, when it gets a little dark you don't walk on the street, because you'll get killed. The Polish soldiers used to fight with the Russians then, but before they fight, when you a Jew don't walk in the streets they will shoot you. And I was there another day I came back to Warsaw, from Warsaw to Kraków. From there I was concentrate--

So you made like a round trip?

Right, right. And from there, you know, we was like from a Jewish community, the Jewish congregation, they used to feed us in Kraków. So like for breakfast, a cup of coffee or something and dinner. And from there where you like to go. The war finished May 8th, I think. I was liberated April 13th From April 13th [INAUDIBLE] no money in the pocket, from house to house.

From there, from Kraków, they said that like organization, Jewish organization, we came to Czechoslovakia. Was a few days in Czechoslovakia from there we came to Hungary. We was in Budapest. It was June. I was in Budapest. Again the Israeli the Jewish people from Betar. they organized I was there again in a camp, concentration camp. I was there another couple months. It was no good there, the Russian army occupied there. We're walking Saturday, five, six boys on the street in Budapest, two solders, Russian, stopped us. Raise your hands, take out everything-- we don't have nothing. I had a watch maybe for a dollar-- no, it wasn't worth a dollar-- they took everything away from us, and say, go home. Then a couple days later, I left-- we left. I had a choice to go to Germany or to Italy. I said I am not going to Germany. I want to go to Italy. And I came to Italy, again in a concentration camp. There was already 1,000 people from all countries, you know.

Was this a DP camp, this place?

There was a DP. There was, in the same place there was Italian soldiers, but it was empty, and they put us. I never saw in my life such a poor people, after the war, like the Italians. It was only very rich people and very poor. No work. People are going on the street, walking around, hungry, their government doesn't do nothing for them. They say the American UNRRA in those days sent thousands of packages, food, to give for the poor people. Not one family got a package. It was sold on the black market in the stores for the rich people. America never have control, if you have the money you go in the store and buy.

We was feeding in this-- I was in a city, Cremona, there was an American officer he used to give out, every day they opened the kitchen like for the soldiers. In the mornings they give you coffee and bread and about 5, 6 o'clock they give you dinner. And everything is cooked.

Were you married at this time already?

No.

Was your future wife with you?

We was not married. We met again, we met again. We got married in June.

In Italy?

In Italy in '47.

Yeah, I'm sorry, continue with your story.

It's OK, '47 we got married, my daughter was born in '49, March the 20th, she will be 40 years. She's out, she's here. My son was born here in 1954. Five years the difference. And after all, after the war--

Take your time.

There's something you want to tell us about after the war?

After the war there's no place to go. I expect survivors from a war like this, from concentration camps, they will do something, they will tell us, they will show me, they will take show for the people, but it did not happen. I was hungry, five years, I was standing in line to get a little soup and bread After the war it didn't happen. Took me five years until I came here. I came here with my daughter, 10 months old. I have a brother in Perth Amboy. he picked me up. I was in his house a month, two. No job, no work.

I used to go out to help my brother, he used to be in fruit and vegetable. To peddle with him so, to look better then, I do something for my food. That happened from December, in May, I got my first job but I didn't have an apartment. I start to work, I make \$70 a week. I worked 10 weeks, I made \$160. Sometimes, the holidays, I work three days, four days, two days. In 10 weeks I made out \$160. It was Passover, and I said to my wife-- we was married already-- I said I'm not going any more on the job, it's not a job, there's no money, no work.

Then somebody recommended me, I went in Woodbridge in a pocket book factory. And then there was German Jews, two Jews, two brothers, they hired me. They started me with \$0.85. They had extruder plastic machines and I learned. I was staying, watching over time, after work, I didn't went home after eight hours I stayed and watched. It was Jewish man, he used to teach me, he used to show me. He was in the American army. After a year, he got married, he moved to Lakewood in the United-- that was United States-- and I couldn't get his job.

They hired somebody on the job but they didn't know that I know the job. They hired two men in a short time, they didn't do the job, and I told them, I would do the job. And they gave me a try. It was a lot of work to do. They gave me \$1.10 an hour, and I start to work, they gave me \$1.30. In those days my brother rented an apartment for me, it was \$72 for three and a half rooms in Perth Amboy. the factory was already in Woodbridge. When I worked, I worked three weeks I couldn't pay a month's rent.

So my boss, I went to them and I talked to them and he said to work every day a couple of hours overtime. So I start to work 17 hours a day. I went to work-- I start to work 7 o'clock in the morning and I worked till 12 o'clock at night. 17 hours. I used to have a sandwich and a cup of coffee working. I didn't take off because I couldn't shut off the machine, was working automatic. I work maybe 15 years like this. Seven years later I bought a house in Woodbridge, close to the factory. I saved my \$5,000 and I bought a house for \$40,000. My boss gave me the mortgage.

I worked 30 years in the factory. I was very happy that I make a living to my children. My daughter got a good education. Oh my God, yes. I couldn't get education in my country. I was happy we had food on the table. My daughter went to college, I pay for college, she got married, I made a wedding. My son went to college, [INAUDIBLE] he finished college. My daughter have two children, my grandchildren, he's 11 years old and a grand-daughter, seven years-- eight years old today.

Have you been able to talk with your children about what happened?

Yeah, I talk to them.

Did they want to know about it or was it hard for them to listen?

Yeah, they to want to know but, hey, in America they don't, they just want to know but not too much. And now, see the story of my life, 30 years I worked in a factory, did it to get education, never-- they got--

You mentioned that there were two or three survivors from your town. About how many people were there before the war, how many Jewish people?

6,000 or 7,000.

Thousand men they shoot out right away. They were [? over ?] [? age. ?] The left overs there was mothers and children. And when we came into Auschwitz first thing, mother and children goes right away in crematorium. They don't took children with the mother with this.

So you were married and your child was born in Italy.

In Italy, I was married in Italy.

Did your wife work also?

What?

Did your wife work when you came here also, or was she home?

No, my daughter was 10 months old. I didn't work from December until May, I didn't have a job. After when five years my son was born, there was two children. And I start to work in Woodbridge already and I start to work overtime and overtime, seven days a week. I was very happy.

Sure.

You know.

Is there anything else that you want to add or anything else you want you want to say in conclusion?

What I want to say, I never know what was to be young.

I know.

The ghetto, concentration camps, five years, five years after the war, ten years. 30 years in the factory, 17 hours a day for 15 years, later I work 12 hours. I'm sorry.

No, it's good to--

My heart is bleeding, what they did to us. Wherever we came, we had no place to hide. Being in ghetto, you know, every Jew gave away what he had, his clothes to the Polish people. When we went sometimes people say, give me a piece, give me a jacket, I will sell for bread. He said, after the war, don't come anymore. It happened to the doctor, happened to the lawyer. The Jewish doctor had his friend, said when the Germans came, he doesn't want to see him, he didn't talk to him, wasn't a friend anymore. There was no difference. They're intelligent people, and our people was the same thing.

Mr Levine, I want to say thank you--

You're welcome.

--for coming and telling us your story.