

Mr. Laks, please continue.

Thank you. Dr. Weinstein. I forgot to mention why I was going from Plas back to Mauthausen. I was very much in need to let to know my sister in the United States that I was a life until '45. I wasn't thinking I will be-- I will live too, but it helped me that no trace would remain after me. Nobody will know where I disappeared, how long, but it was only a wish. I couldn't communicate.

And I was-- and I was thinking how could we help ourselves? Here we knew any day, and here we don't know if we'll be able to talk by itself was very painful. And after liberation, the disappointment. We always were thinking about a man. Since the beginning of the war we were like dreaming about the defeat of Hitler in Germany, and now this wish came true.

We should have been very chill from this, but we weren't. I wasn't. I remember there was a sense of helplessness, a sense who I am, where do I go. We knew that we don't have anybody in our homes.

Oh, let's see. In the beginning when I didn't know that I had a home, everybody wanted to go back to the home where ever it is and to get there, but there was still home. But in '45, we knew there's nothing left for us anymore. The people, their families, and this and all of a sudden I find myself without-- how to say not knowing what I'm going to do.

No resources.

No, not thinking that with what-- I didn't know how to decide for myself, to take-- to make decisions. Before when I was in camp, I said when I'm going to be free then I can sleep wherever I want. I can sleep outside. I can go in a field and dig out a potato and eat. I love potatoes, anything. I wouldn't be hungry.

But then you saw there are different needs. I didn't have clothing, and then because I was naked. And then I got some jacket, I think, this was and a romper, and that's all and a shirt. And I had to decide simple what to do, and then this is why I went from one place to another.

And I was in Bratislava, and the girl told me that I had sisters. My aim was to unite with them, to go back and see them again, to live with them. So then we went to Prague, and we got from the Polish committee some document to travel back to Prague.

But I want to say the people in Czechoslovakia were so great. They set up kitchens. They fed people. They saw people should where to sleep. They did really right.

I mean thousands and thousands people went through both ways from-- let's see-- from East to not the opposite, from Poland to Greece. There were a lot of people in Poland from other countries, and they cared for people. So I was there a few days, and I got even some-- in Bratislava, we got some money from the Jewish committee. And we got a meal a day and same thing in Prague.

And I set out to go back to Poland and then back to-- and on the station in Prague, we met a lot of people who are coming from Poland. They told us there was the [NON-ENGLISH] on the pogroms that they were killing Jews. And many said this in Poland, but I wanted to be with my sisters.

So I remember passing the Polish border, the Polish soldiers came, and I had-- what I had is a few blankets from Mauthausen they gave us. Then I had the luggage. He took me off the train and took me in, and then started to ask me if I do contraband, gold this.

He took away my blanket, and I started to talk. He threatened me. If you talk, we took you to work brigade. I went through, and then it was I felt like you know what I'm doing here. On the boat they said they had big signs we greeting yesterday's business, and you are now the like-- how would this be in English? You now the subjects of free country, something like this. They had that sign, a greeting sign for those, because thousands-- hundreds of thousands Pollacks

came back and went to the station.

So I went through channels to Harvard. This man that told me to actually look for my sister. And I didn't have where to go to start, and I walk through-- I remember still [? Garibaldi ?] was the street where the Jewish people settled. I asked. They told me there is a kibbutz.

I went in the kibbutz, and I saw religious girls staying and praying. I said my sisters are not there. I asked. Nobody answered me.

Then I went to the Jewish committee, and from the committee I got a loaf of bread, some sugar, and they gave me a free ticket to go farther. And I got to know that my sisters-- someone who was the leader of the kibbutz told me that my sisters left, and we can go to Danzig. They founded there a kibbutz.

And my younger sister was a few days before she left. Now I didn't think twice. I took my love package, and I went to the station. And conditions to go there were terrible. Trains were packed. You couldn't go in, but to go to Danzig, I had to go to Lodz. in Lodz, I had to walk over to a different station. And from there we supposed to get the train to Danzig.

I came was night, late. So when the train came, we're through. There's no way to get inside. So the people were standing on the steps holding on. I settled myself on a bumper between two railroad cars, and I was traveling like this.

And there was a little steel plate where they used to put the lamps. In Poland, they used to have those kerosene lamps. And it was very narrow. And I was sitting there.

But at night, when you travel, you tend to fall asleep. Every time, I close my eyes I woke up because I knew the minute I will fall asleep I wouldn't hold on. And I can fall between the two-- fall down. So this how I traveled all night long.

And in the morning, after people got off, I got to-- I managed to get-- I don't know how you call it, a place where they have the breaks for the little-- from the train. There, they used to have like a little-- it's not-- a person could stand there. And there was a wheel where they used to break.

So I managed to get in there. And I traveled this way to Danzig. And about afternoon, we got-- it wasn't Danzig. Was Brzesc, was a town near Danzig, where they told me this is.

And I got off the station. And I asked to go to the committee because an address for Jewish people was always a Jewish committee. After the war, in the big cities, they set up. And there they used to give food and luggage. This was the only address was for the Jewish people.

So I went to the committee. And happened that two girls from the kibbutz worked there. And there was, oh, everybody knew is a good-- [INAUDIBLE] the three sisters' brothers came.

And this was early for Rosh Hashanah. And I got there for [NON-ENGLISH]. Then I was really happy. But I was a little disappointed that they were in my kibbutz, you know, in life. But I joined, too.

And in Danzig, we started to learn Hebrew and prepare to go to Israel. We worked on the harbor with buildings and this. They tried to gave us places where to work to.

And we stayed there until like November. November, we went back to Czechoslovakia.

Can I ask you why you were disappointed that they were there?

I don't know. I was thinking of a home to be together the first. But then I got used. This was only the first moment.

Yes.

I thought I'll be-- we'll have a home, and the sisters. But they didn't have a home either. They couldn't provide me with one.

And a lot of youngsters joined a kibbutzim. They were all over in Poland after the war. And there was like an organization who directed the people across the borders to Germany. And they organized kibbutzim. Bricha was called, who was preparing people to go to Palestine.

Was it connected with the Agudat Yisrael?

No, no, no, was leftist.

Oh.

Was-- later, would become Hashomer Hatzair, left of left.

Yeah.

[INAUDIBLE]. So then it wasn't yet. But later, it was together with another organization.

Well, it was from HeHalutz. But in Germany, then they separated. They became the other-- some of the people went to the war, a different kibbutz. And we were in Hashomer Hatzair.

But then we had to travel to back to Slovakia. So they gave us a group ticket like, with papers that we are Greek refugees. They taught us even to say [NON-ENGLISH], good morning. [NON-ENGLISH]. And places from where we are. A few words in Greek they taught. I still remember.

And we got-- we were supposed to have gone to Prague. I don't know, for some reason we wind up in Bratislava, back in this. And in Bratislava, we came to the Hotel [? Yellen ?] in Platz [PLACE NAME]. It was a big square there where this hotel was situated, where they-- it was for refugees.

And there we stayed-- I don't-- a day or two. And then we went to [? Karlsbratt. ?] And from there, they took us at night by foot to the German border.

And we went-- what is that? I don't remember the town that we got at. But we had to go by-- the bricha took us over to Germany.

And then from there, we went to [? Minhen, ?] in the [? museum. ?] We stayed a few days. And from there, we went to Wittenberg. After Ulm, a town-- what was the name of it? I have it someplace.

And I think I have it someplace. At this moment, I cannot remind--

Yeah. I-- it's not on your questionnaire.

Yeah. But we went there. In this place in this town, we stayed in the former SS barrack, military barracks. And after this, we were transferred to [? Yodenbach. ?] This was-- it was [INAUDIBLE], a sanatorium for the recuperating SS and the administrate-- the German-- Catholic nuns administrate. I mean, they were the one who cared for this sanatorium.

And there, we learned Hebrew. And we had-- we prepared ourselves to go to Palestine with Jewish history, Hebrew. And we worked a little bit because they wanted us to try to be prepared to physical work for the kibbutz.

And then they-- I was there-- oh, when I was there, I went with my sister Golda. We traveled to the [INAUDIBLE]-- this is the Swiss border-- to see our uncle from Switzerland. We started to write to him.

But we couldn't meet because I could see him from the other side border. He wasn't Swiss, and he didn't have Swiss citizenship. So those who didn't have, they wouldn't let them out.

So we were talking like was hundreds of people far away. I could see him from far away. And he had some suitcase with things, but we couldn't take it. We were very disappointed we couldn't see him.

And there in [? Yodenbach, ?] I found another cousin from France. She lived in France, in Metz. Two administrator from the [? Judenrat, ?] I don't know how-- I talked.

And he knew-- I think his father came from ZmigrÃ³d, too. And I told him I had cousins in Metz. He told me about this cousin. And we got in contact with Esther. She lived in Metz.

But about in March, the end of March, we-- they selected people, like a group of 10 people, to go to Israel. So we traveled back to Austria. And then in-- with [INAUDIBLE] trucks, it looked like American military trucks, this how we passed the border.

And from Austria, we went to Innsbruck. From Innsbruck, this was near the Alps. Then we stayed there.

And in a day or two, I don't remember how long until we were-- they put us again on the same trucks. And we went through the Alps, the border between Austria and Italy to Milano. This was the first town. But this is the famous Brenner Pass.

Yes.

And when you go down from the mountains, and you look down Milano, this-- and some-- I'll never forget the sight. It was in the spring. And they had a lot of citrus wood.

Every turn, it was blossoming. Was so beautiful. I'll remember this always.

And in Milano, we stayed over Saturday there. And they had the house, the bricha. And-- oh, I forgot. In Austria, we got united with a group from our kibbutz who remained in Danzig.

And they had traveled-- they weren't in Germany. But they traveled from Poland. And I had a cousin there, too. And we got united, and we went together. They went with us together to Italy.

And from Milano, we went to Milano. We stayed there. And it was the Jewish committee, too.

We slept on the floor a few days until the-- and after this, they sent us to Tradate. This was a camp from the bricha. It was like estate, with a lot of grounds and a big building.

And we stayed there. And you couldn't leave this camp. It was like a military regime. And we were all waiting to get on boats to Israel.

How long did you stay there?

Well, we-- I stayed longer. But my group left, I think was in July. And they went to-- I forgot which one. [INAUDIBLE] was the-- a big boat. And they went to Israel.

But my sisters-- [? Hava ?] had a boyfriend who got sick just before the group left. And he was transferred to the hospital. So I on mine returned.

There was another boy who was sick. And he got the appendix but in a bed already. It was already in-- how do you say-- in the-- not in the beginning of the stage.

It was an advanced stage.

Advanced stage. And he-- this boy, [? Moishe ?] [? Kleinman, ?] from-- he was from [? Klentz-- ?] from [? Keltza. ?] He was in our group, a very gifted boy. And he had a sense of humor.

And we stayed with him. And the whole group left for Palestine. And he was in hospital. And we thought he is already almost recovered. All of a sudden, he got sick again.

And he got a bad infection. They operated there. I guess this was-- Tradate was a small town.

And they operated, I remember, like Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning. He died almost in our hands. We were standing next to him, and he passed away.

And he said to me-- to us, if I will get to Palestine, [INAUDIBLE]. He was already-- I mean, he knew, because he had high temperature. The doctors gave up. They opened up, and it was all infected. And he was buried in Milano.

And there's a story to it. He had a brother who was with him in [PLACE NAME]. He knew he is alive. And he was looking for him.

And the brother happened to be in Milano at the time when we were. He wasn't in the kibbutz. He lived there separately.

But after we were already in Israel, we got a letter. My sister got a letter from this boy in Italy. And he-- all through-- the rest of our kibbutz came to Italy in 1947. And to them, he got to know that his brother died in Milano.

And he went to the cemetery. We didn't-- we-- I happened to have some money, because the uncle from Switzerland sent me \$50. So I left for the \$50 they should put up a stone, a gravestone for him.

But apparently, they couldn't write the right age and the right name. He told-- he wrote to us later, the brother of this [? Moishe, ?] because he was a younger brother. He later left for Brazil. He had relatives there. He was in touch with my sister for a long time after this.

And so in Milano, then a different group came. There was one leader, [? Yohuda. ?] He was like-- like it was like a military camp.

Every day, we went out in appeal and was singing the [NON-ENGLISH], because they had to have discipline there. And they were afraid people shouldn't go out and talk, because the English were looking. They-- everything was [INAUDIBLE]. I mean, they all-- all the journeys and all the boarding of the boats.

But we were there another two months, approximately. And then we went to La Spezia, and we were-- and they put up tents in a [? vineyard. ?] We were waiting for a boat to come.

So finally, the boat came. And they took us with smaller boat to the bigger one because this wasn't a regular harbor. The boat had to wait far away in water.

And the bricha used to transfer with smaller boat. It was such a storm-- the water was so stormy, and that one boy went up with the ladders made from-- how do you say-- not from wood but from-- no, I forgot the word-- that you tie like a--

Rope, from rope.

Rope. Yeah, a rope ladder. I think that's the one. Excuse me.

And the-- it was so shaking. One broke his leg. They had to take him back. He got caught with the-- from between the small boat and the larger ship. And he had to go.

My sister had her hand in a cast because she went to a [INAUDIBLE] then, to a doctor, because she broke her arm. She went up with one hand. She was very brave.

And the journey to Palestine was terrible. Was a very small boat. And [? "Al ?] [? Bahal ?] [? Iat" ?] was it called.

And they built-- it used-- before, they changed this for a passenger boat. It was-- they transferred coal. They had two decks.

So what they did, they put down from pipes, barriers in like-- from hammocks like. From one, then they tied a cloth to this, and this was our bed, four stories high. But there was a storm. And I was laying in one of those beds.

And above me was a heavy woman. And she-- and those gave in a little bit, the steam pipes. And then this bent out. So I had to go out from that and lay in the-- on the floor, where people passed on the passages.

How long did the trip take?

Oh, how long-- 10 days, because they had a small motor. And the [INAUDIBLE] from cloth they put down to-- with the wind to go-- how you call it? A sailboat.

Sail, sails.

Sails. And one-- some-- I remember, one night there was a big storm. The boat went back actually.

And the conditions were terrible. Was no water. In the beginning, they gave us only a quart of water.

Once, they made tea. And I happened to be-- I don't know, I was very sensitive. And I couldn't take any food. What I did, I gave back everything.

Yeah.

I was sick, really sick, during the whole journey. And finally, we got to-- oh, before we got close to Israel, they threw out all provision. There were a lot of cans-- canned food usually, because they didn't have refugee-- refrigerators.

So everything was in cans. And they threw everything out because they didn't want the English Navy should get it. And the English destroyer, the Navy, they surrendered us before we got to Tel Aviv.

And a lot of people jumped. They said, those who know how to swim should get and jump to the water. A lot of them did.

Firstly, we thought didn't let the English come aboard. And a lot of people tried to swim back. They got-- the English went out with small-- in [? gummy ?] boats, motor boats. And they, in those, and they caught them and brought them back.

A few-- I think two people, they told us when we came back to Israel, managed to get to Netanya, to the Israel, to the-- they managed--

Through the blockade.

--to swim.

Yeah.

I mean, it was quite a-- you have to be a good swimmer to get through. And two-- and then they found two bodies, too. They didn't make it.

And then they transferred us in Haifa to those-- they had special boats made like prisons to transfer the illegal immigrants to Cyprus. And they sent us-- we were not far from Haifa. And they transferred us.

And there, they were-- they put up a resistance, too. And then they transferred us to Cyprus. And we lived there in tent.

But quite a few-- how long should I say-- from-- was end of August, before the Jewish holidays like, until March. And then February 15, I was transferred to [? Atlit. ?] This was like a holding camp for those who they released, because when they transferred the people to Cyprus, they gave out then a 1,500 that certificate a month for those people.

And there was like a next-- first, they took children and pregnant woman. They had priority, small children. And the rest, they divided according to the next. So some transport who came like in the beginning of '47, they were there until the Jewish state was founded.

And from there, I went to a kibbutz in the beginning. It was in [? Nakba. ?] And from there, they transferred us when-- in '47, when the-- in November, when they declared in the United Nation the Jewish-- the resolution about the Jewish state, they started to get hard.

So they transferred us to the first-- which was the first one? Oh, in [PLACE NAME]. And this was a area which is-- wasn't too many Jewish settlings, and then to the border with Syria and [PLACE NAME]. So this was on the border.

And then in-- and then we went to [PLACE NAME]. And then '49, the beginning, we founded the kibbutz in Megiddo. A border kibbutz was there.

But I didn't stay in kibbutz long. My sisters didn't go to the kibbutz either. And so I went to army because when I was in kibbutz, I didn't have to go because was like--

You were doing your public service.

You-- I was-- I did my service. I used to go out and board the [? patrols ?]. But when you left the kibbutz, then you have to go to the army.

I didn't go for as long as the others because they took off time, a half a year for the time that I was there. But I had-- [? a ?] [? stint ?] [? like ?] in the army from '51 to '52. And then I settled in Haifa until '59, I came here.

Did you have work to do? Did you find a job?

Yeah, I worked in construction, not always. When there was bad weather in some place, there was not work. I worked very hard in [INAUDIBLE].

Did you meet your wife in Israel?

No. I married here. Because I worked so hard, I was always tired. And there, you worked eight hours a day. And then Friday was like not to have-- a short day. So you worked-- you started-- you worked seven hours.

What was it? Why was it shorter? We started usually like 6:30. And we had a half an hour breakfast. And we worked through until 2 o'clock.

What brought you to the United States?

What brought me? It's a good question. First of all, I was the-- I couldn't find-- I didn't get married. And then I felt I couldn't work in construction.

I had already arthritis my knees, because in the rainy season, when you-- I had the-- when you work outside, it gets you

very badly. And it was-- and I wanted to get a steady job in some factory, like in [NON-ENGLISH]. This is electric station. My sister worked there. She was steady.

And I tried to get there a job. But I couldn't remain steady. After five months, I was laid off and taken back.

And my sister was here. And I would say more-- if maybe I would've been married, settled down, I wouldn't mind the hard work. So I came here, and I met my wife.

I mean, in '61 I got married. And we had children. But my wife passed away when-- in '69 she got the breast cancer. And I remarried a few years later in '76.

And your present wife is also a survivor.

Yes.

You didn't know her until you came here.

No, I didn't know her. Somebody-- my boys-- oh, I-- when-- my wife happened to be in the same-- my first wife, in the same movement. She has a story, I mean, something to have a-- she lived through the war by herself.

Her father came to the United States in '38. And he left behind her with her brother and her mother. She was two and a half years younger than me. She was born in '25.

And-- but she went through terrible times. She lost her-- she had grandparents. Her father's parents lived there in the same town, [? Klost. ?] It's a known old Jewish town, too.

And she came in the-- I mean, and her mother passed away-- they suffered hunger, and terrible. But then she was taken to the camp. She escaped by herself. And she managed to survive.

But when she was liberated by the Russian of '44, when they were still in camp, a German plane came and with bullets, strafed the camp. And she got wounded. She had-- until her-- all that she could see a big hole in her-- near her behind.

And then she was got sick in typhus after the liberation. And she was brought to a hospital, Ukrainian hospital in Chortkiv. She told me she had to run away, middle of the night, in her nightgown in her-- because they said they wouldn't-- they wanted money from her.

And she joined-- oh, she had her father's cousin there. And she joined them. But later on, she joined a kibbutz from [NON-ENGLISH], too.

I didn't know her. And she went to Italy. She was active, too. She went to Italy.

But her father wanted to bring her to the States. And she was a minor. So they used to send the MP to the camp to look for her.

So when they saw that, they hid her. And she came to Israel, and-- no, I'm sorry. When the kibbutz went to Israel, and they were sent to Cyprus, so her father convinced her, why should she go and suffer in Cyprus? She should come here and stay in the United States. When the kibbutz will come, she'll join them.

She came here in '47. And they lived-- and her father lived in Plainfield. He was a storekeeper, [? Gelfand. ?] His-- [? well, ?] [? the Shops ?] [? of ?] [? Gelfand ?] was his name.

And he had a wife. But he was [? somethings-- ?] he was in-- I think he divorced her. I don't know why.

And she lived with her father until after the Israel, they founded the Israeli state. And they came to Israel. She left, and



she went to Israel, too, and stayed there for a year, and came back. She couldn't.

And what brought you here to New Jersey?

To New Jersey? I lived in Brooklyn. I had a house with my wife. And the wife that I-- she lived in Jersey when they introduced me. So I moved over.

Yeah. You have two children. And--

Yeah, they're very religious.

I was wondering if you have spoken with-- they were born here, I assume.

Yes.

Have you ever spoken with them about--

Yeah, I-- as a matter of fact, they wanted to make a tape. They were very interested what I went through, to hear from me. The reason why, in the beginning, I wasn't religious when I was here, when [? Shamat-- ?] I had-- I felt very-- I had-- how to say-- I had a feeling about belonging to the Jewish nation.

But I wasn't-- I got unused to put on [INAUDIBLE]. And in Israel, I felt you can be Jewish without being-- praying like three times-- twice a day. But when we had the children, when we started to think with my first wife what education to give, I insisted I want a Jewish education.

I said-- I saw that kids who went to elementary school, they get lost. They don't know from Jewishness. And I felt that I'll be closer to them if they going to have a Jewish education, a traditional.

Another thing, when I told my wife, when I remembered in the camps, and I was longing for a home, I didn't remember the four walls. I remembered the Saturday nights, how it was, the holidays, the candlesticks, the food. This always was, for me, the symbol of my home.

And I said, I want to-- my children should be-- feel like they should be more closer to home. I had the feeling I saw immigrant children who weren't religious and didn't know anything from Jewishness. They get lost. They intermarry.

And somehow-- and I am very pleased we made this decision, because I think it helped my children to grow up without their mother, too, the being religious. And the-- and I always tell my son, I envy you, both of them. I envy them very much because they can say they believe 100%. No, they're very devoted. And they're morally, they wouldn't do any wrong thing, not to, let's say, cheat and things-- very high standard.

My older son is married, and both he and his wife are the same kind of people. They wouldn't do anything. My daughter-in-law, she goes to work. She works from-- [? Dun ?] [? & ?] [? Bradstreet. ?] She's a computer--

Analyst?

Not analyst. She set up the program. She has a master's.

Programmer.

A programmer in computers. And she wouldn't take off an hour. She says it's cheating. I admire them very much.

The same, my son. He is now working on his PhD in physics. But he wouldn't-- what belongs-- he wouldn't miss a [INAUDIBLE] with a minyan in the morning, in the evening. No matter what kind of weather, he always has to be-- he has to learn everything.

Yes, no, I'm very proud of them. My younger one is in-- he was in Israel for five years in the yeshiva he learned. Now he is in Baltimore. And he-- in the evening, he takes a computer-- master course in computers in once-- one-- once a week.

Mr. Laks, I thank you very much for your time and for your story. And I know that we will very much appreciate having it and learning from it.

I, too, thank you, Dr. Weinstein. I feel that I had it on mind how to say-- I felt I have to tell my story. And I didn't know how to.

I thought of writing, because I know I belong to a world that disappeared. And there's not going to be very-- in a short time, there's not going to be anybody left to tell this story. And I think I still would make some-- for my children to make some tape.

I'm thinking. I'm playing with the idea. I don't know if I'll be able. And I'm very grateful to you, that-- to you, that this program enabled me to talk about it.

Yeah, thank you.

You're welcome.