

I urged the Polish officers on the border to let me go through. Because I explained the story of my sister's sickness. And they thought that they caught a big fish, because we had diplomatic passports. And I told him that I have done my work in the underground, that I have fought to liberate Poland, that I am not in politics. And whatever government will be in Poland, I'll obey the orders. And they have no right to detain me here in any way.

And somehow, in the course of pushing back and stuff like that, I managed to see a couple officers in different uniforms. And I pushed myself through. And luckily, for the first time in my life, I met American soldiers. And he was an officer, by the way.

And I told him with my broken English. I tried to tell him who I am, and what happened here. And they understood me. And they started to ask all kinds of questions. And I said to them, that I came here with my sister, and with my mother, and my brother, and we are going to Italy to save her life.

And they felt a little bit caught in a surprise. Why would the Poles not let us through. And they went over and they gave orders to the Polish officers, that they have to release us immediately. And they didn't do it gladly. They didn't willingly. But they somehow had to do it.

They let us through. And immediately, they started giving us some food. I remember that they called in the Italians. And the Italian soldiers where they saw that my sister who was blind, they felt obliged to be gentlemen. And they brought oranges, and they brought all kinds of things. And they say that the to Murano will go at four o'clock. And this was about afternoon.

So we were brought to the train. And there weren't too many people traveling. I can tell you that. And we went up in Murano that same evening, because it took about three hours, I guess, three and a half hours to go from the border to Murano. So this episode finished for me.

And my brother decided to return back home, because he didn't have a passport. And he promised his girlfriend who we met, that he's going to come back. So I guess that I was a little disappointed. But he went back to Poland, and we said goodbye to him. And we went up in Murano in a strange city in Italy for the first time in my life.

For the first time also in many, many years, I saw a different country, a more free country than Poland was. My feelings were torn, you know. I didn't know here I am in also an occupied country like Poland, but somehow, the people are so nice, so helpful.

And I located my sister. I stayed with them over the New Year. And the doctors gave us hope. And back in January, I returned back to Poland. I had a responsibility towards my job. I had a responsibility towards the people I worked with. And I hoped that that would be a good location for my sister.

By the way, I would like to mention that the Polish government gave me the equivalent of 500 dollars to locate my sister in Italy. I thought that the gesture of the government was great. And I told them, I promised that I give back the money to them, and everything will be all right. But not too many good things are being told about Poland. But somehow, I have to say, that after the war I was treated very good by them.

I went back to my work. I was assigned to go at that time, to Hungary and to Germany, and to France. Because there were situations and rumors that a lot of SS, big shots like this, were hiding under different names. And we have to find out things about them. Why they decided to send me is maybe to give me a chance maybe to stop and see my family at the same time.

I remember I went to Budapest at the time. It was for the first time in my life that I was in Budapest, and to look for criminals. I spent a week. I met some people I knew that were still trying to find out about their relatives. We had accomplished our mission in Budapest, and then we went to Germany, and from Germany to France.

The whole trip was not a tremendous success, because there were rumors and very different points, how do you say to--

we search for clues, different clues. But we tried to help each other. I mean, all the governments like France, Germany, whatever, was looking for these criminals, tried to help each other. But it was not a great success as far as I'm concerned.

And from there, I went to Italy. As a matter of fact, I remember going to Italy through to the French Riviera, and meeting for the first time in my life with my Uncle [? Nind ?] who survived the war in France. Leon was an experience for me. I'm talking about 1946.

I went back back to Italy to see how my sister is doing. And I found out that she is not improving too much. I spoke to the doctor. He gave me hope. So I went back to Poland. In Poland at that particular time, I was invited by the Polish government to change my position from Silesia to Warsaw, to go to Warsaw, and get a position of higher level yet.

I accepted it. But I told them, frankly, that it would be a good idea that they should rather send me to a school that I can receive my education. I was longing for an education, for more than I had then. And somehow, life stayed in such a way that I could not do it.

And later on, when I was all ready to go to Warsaw and take my position in the foreign ministry, which they gave me, I got a telegram from my mother that my sister is sinking, that the situation is getting worse. I should come as soon as possible. Naturally, I went as fast as I could to go to Italy. That time took much longer than the normal times.

But I arrived there. And it was already summer time 1946. And my sister was getting worse and worse. At that time, I had decided being that I've been to other countries before, I decided that to continue my career in Poland would be not proper for me, that I'm still too young to give everything up in life to work with the government whom I was not really in love too much. Because communism was far fetched from my feeling.

I was not I was not happy with a lot of things which happened later, arresting people, and sending them to prisons.

And you yourself were still only in your 20s, weren't you?

I was in my 20s, yeah. At that time, I was already 24 years old. And I was thinking while I was in Italy, I was thinking what to do. And I couldn't make the decision, because a career like I could make in Poland, or had at that time, was very difficult to achieve.

It's not easy to become a big shot, you know, just because you deserve it. The circumstances, the war, everything that I've done to fight for survival of my people, it took a tremendous toll on me, you know. And I wasn't sure what to do with myself.

I remember I stood there, and it was a little improvement in my sister's health. And I couldn't take off so much. So I ran back to Poland. And in September, beginning of September, I got another telegram that it's getting worse. So I took again, the train. I was going again to Italy. I was experience already how to go to Italy.

And that time, things were better already, was traveling. Trains were going through all the way. And I arrived in Italy just before the holidays, the Jewish holidays. And the situation was-- I did not believe that she is going to die. I didn't. No matter how bad it was from the medical point of view, I believed that perhaps, that God will help, that there's some hope that the whole thing would change.

And I went to pray Saturday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And there was just at that particular time, they opened up a sanatorium, Joint Distribution Committee opened up a sanatorium in Murano Italy for survivors who contracted TB. And my sister was supposed to be the first patient to be transferred.

And they had already-- they renewed the little shul they had there. So we went there to pray. And I went there and I prayed, and I cried, and I thought that maybe God will help, that things will be different, and that my sister will survive. And on the way back home, a nurse was running towards me. And she says in Italian, she says, Paulo-- they called me Paulo.

[SPEAKING ITALIAN]

You understand? I took it very hard. I couldn't believe that there's all this struggle of my life I couldn't save a person who survive the Holocaust. And this was Saturday. We buried her Sunday morning in Murano. In the cemetery were very great people, of poets and writers who died on consumption, because Murano was famous for the lungs to be healed. It was the alps, beautiful air.

And I remember that being that we didn't have too many people, that I had to sit with a person, one Jewish fellow lived there. He sat with her until 11 o'clock at night. And I had to come at 11 o'clock at night until the morning. I had to sit there the body of my sister. I was not afraid. I've seen this.

The death of my sister changed the character of my life completely. Although I could have been a big man in Poland and maybe a chief, the status higher than I thought. But I decided at that time that I'm going back to Poland, and I'm going to resign from all my functions.

I had done that after I said Shema. And I quieted down a little bit. I went back, and I told the authorities that I cannot function anymore, that I took the tragedy of the Jewish people too much to heart, that I wouldn't be any more good. They offered me a position as counsel general in Italy. And I refused to take it.

I wanted to break everything with the past. I felt that to live in the country where I was born, and I went through so much would be unbearable for a long time. The time of my reign was just to forget, just to forget what really happened. And after all, I had my mother in Italy. What am I going to do with her? And I discussed this with my brothers. And they all decided the best thing would be that we should all leave Poland.

How did your mother take your sister's death?

My mother took it very hard. We all did. She knew that we went through the war. She knew that a lot of people got killed. And that we were lucky that we survive. But to lose somebody after the war, and not be permitted to get medical treatment in any countries, and countries who could help her.

So a matter of fact, at a time when my sister came to Italy, they discovered these medicines here in the United States, and they saved a lot of people. And if they would only permit my sister to go to the United States, she would have been alive today. She could have. However, I decided at that time to leave Poland, and I went back to Italy. They didn't accept my resignation. They gave me a way out that any time I want my position and come back, it will be ready for me.

I cannot say anything about that government after the war in Poland, because I would be a traitor to say something. I think that they had dealt with me in an honorable way. When I came back to Italy, I decided to do something for the survivors, for the Jewish people who lived there. I got the position with the Joint Distribution Committee, and also with the UNRRA. This was the refugee organization.

As a social worker at the beginning, I had made contacts with a lot of Italian officers on the border, being that I was traveling from Italy to Austria trying to make some connections for myself. I had no idea what it was going to be with me, where I'm going to go. I wanted to go to Israel, but it was closed for me.

So first, I wanted to establish a situation, what to do with my mother, being that my sister was lucky enough to leave Poland in 1939, when the Germans were there already for a few months, her husband had decided to try to get out of Poland. And he had money. So he bought something out there, and he went to Italy, from Italy to Algiers, from Tangier to Portugal, and then to the United States.

So she was here in the United States since 1941. And literally, we were in touch with my sister by writing letters. And I was lucky to meet a lot of Italian high ranking officers on the border, and in the area there. And they liked me. I conquered the Italian language. And I was very helpful in creating a situation that being that I was working for the refugee status, and supplies of food, and to all kinds of camps that they formed.

At that time the Jewish people who lived in Germany in DP camps and in Austria, wanted to go to Israel. They wanted to cross the border to Italy, because they said that it was an illegal [? allie ?] to Israel. Certain boats were going from south of Italy to Israel. So they were going through the mountains, through the Alps. And a lot of them got hurt. Some got heart attacks going to the Alps, through the snow.

So I had an idea with the Americans and Italians to get some people through to Italy with convoys, military convoys. And believe me, that worked. I was in touch at that time with the Bricha, which was the illegal organization for transporting Jews from Europe to Israel. And I spoke to an American captain that was in charge of the convoy.

And he said, there is no problem. We go back and forth from Austria to Italy. Let them prepare the people. And we put them on the food trucks. So be arranged like that, being that England was very against letting the Jews through to Italy in order to go to Israel. We arranged it in such a way that we put let's say, like eight or 10 people in a truck. And around them, we put food cans, stuff like this, all around.

And they were sitting there, and they just had to go through the border. Once they went through the border, we had already our transportation arranged to bring them to camps near Murano, from Murano to Milano, and so far. And I was instrumental in organizing that in Italy for a while.

And it was going good. So I was so busy with doing these things that I forgot about Poland. I forgot about my lost career. And I decided at that time, I was very ambitious to go to school. So I entered the University of Padua. And for examination, it was like six hours, seven hours, by car to go back and forth.

And I went there. And I explained to the professors, I say, I don't know Italian very to the extent to be able to study, but I'll try. So they gave me an examination. I deeply believe today that they just let me go through. They gave me a test [LAUGHS] because they felt sorry for me. And they felt also happy that I wanted to do things.

They were wonderful people, the Italian people. So I was traveling twice a week for college for instructions, and taking home, working for the UNRRA and for the Joint Distribution Committee, study. And I was lucky at that particular time to do all these things. I slept very little, four hours a night was enough for me.

And at the same time, my mother got a visa to go to the United States. And I took her to Genova, which was the deport. And she went with the first immigration boat in 1947 to go to the United States. And I remained in Italy by myself with my work. I had plenty of work, and I was not afraid to be there.

My feeling was to go to Israel. I wanted to go to Israel very badly. Because I believed that Israel leaded me. You know, I was Zionist. I felt that this eventually, will be our country, where Jews will be able to live. And I approached-- I went to the consulate in Rome, and spoke to the Jewish leaders.

At that time, the war broke out, and I said, I must go to Israel. So they said, no, you're not going to Israel. First of all, you are not experienced in Middle East affairs. You're not experienced in fighting in Palestine. We need you here. I was important to them in Italy to be able to continue this mass immigration, or whatever.

And I left beautiful memories in Italy, and bad memories. But it was a country gave me the first touch of freedom. In 1949, I went to the United States. I had a visa and I wanted to see my mother and my sister, and my nephew who was born in 42. I didn't see though. I was separated from my sister about 10 years.

And this idea to go to Israel, I really wanted. So when I came to this country in November 21, 1949, and I remember Marine Jumper was the boat. And the Marine Jumper boat was a boat who looked like it sinking every minute. But exactly, I made it.

And in this country, I met my wife. And we got married. We both had ideas to go to Israel with different feelings. But it took a year or two to consolidate all these things. So we decided to get married. We were married in 1952, April 6.

I love this country very much. The United States has been good to me. I have certain feelings about this country that at that time when we needed them, they weren't there to help us. And it comes back to [? episode ?] that we tried to our organization, and the [? government ?] organization to notify England to bomb the concentration camps, and relieve the suffering of the Jewish people.

And we got back and then said that for humanitarian purposes, they cannot bomb the camps. I was very disappointed years later. Then when I found out that Roosevelt was not very willing to help the Jewish people. That they did do that because of politics, or because of the congress. I am not in a position to be a judge of that. But I still believe that they could have done a little bit more in order to help us people at the time.

I love this country. Because it is a unique country in the world, especially in the last 30 years, or 40 years, where freedom is giving the people the opportunity to become what you want is a priority, to help the extent to many countries the burden they have with it. And the freedom of expression, of expressing yourself. You can say anything you want. You can contradict the government, as long you are not sabotaging them.

You are a person. You are a human being. Look what's happening in the world around us. Unless you have any questions to ask me what to say, I would like to say that having three children here in this country, whom we educated.

They know about all of your experiences.

And they know all about our experiences. I remember years ago, when I became the president of the [? Lakhour ?] Jewish Center, and I started expressing myself about the Holocaust, and about my life. And they were in the audience. They were sitting there. And I saw the tears in their eyes.

We did not talk to them when they were very young. But we started when they started going to school. We started telling them what we went through. And the I only can say one thing, that I hope and pray that they will be good human beings, and that they will treat their families the way we treated them. And that they will take advantage of this beautiful life here in this United States of America.

Paul, thank you very much.

Thank you very much.