

Bokor, you mentioned during the break that you would like to talk about your brother.

Yes. I knew that my brother, even he was young, he was called up for forced labor. But I didn't know where. And because the Germans was losing the war, they was in defense. They were crossing through Budapest.

Also, the Hungarian military, the German military, it was [INAUDIBLE] [? chaos ?] that time. Military all over everything, through the Danube. And in between, lots of forced labors, Jewish kids.

And somehow, I had feeling-- I had some kind of feeling to find my brother. So I always went out when it started to be dark, and they don't see me, that I am in Nazi uniform. I went out and I was asking if-- I remember his number of the company where he was. And I wanted to find him so I always asked these people that was crossing Budapest if they knew about his number of company.

Many of them didn't know. But one night, a guy in the dark. I asked him, do you know this company? He says, yes, I am from this. Do you know Ladislaw Bokor? Bokor Laszly-- his name was in Hungarian. He says, yes, he stepped just out by the synagogue in certain street. [PLACE NAME], they called it. And he went over there. He must be there.

I thanked him and I disappeared in the darkness. I didn't want to that he sees me, who I am. So I was walking there and I came to the synagogue. I pulled up my coat that I took off my armband, and I left with my friends my arms. And I went in the synagogue. And I asked about my brother.

In the darkness of the synagogue, they had some candle lights. I remember it like today. I screamed, if Bokor Laszly is here. I remember his voice when he called, brother, I am here. So right away we come together. He had lots of friends from the forced labor company. And I told him next day I will take him out from there. Because I didn't like it, the way that it-- like herrings pushed together. Thousands and thousands of kids. And I knew that the Nazis wouldn't let them to stay there, [? like ?] just that.

And next day I came, at night, and I took him to one of these Swiss houses. I thought at the time that it is a better place. And they stayed over there a long time. I used to bring over food for them. And they went out for certain work. They was working, all kinds of works. And in the end, we came on the-- I know that is the Russian more-- closing more and more.

One night, I decided that I'd throw away my arms and everything. And I stayed with my brother. I didn't want to let him to go. I wanted to be beside him because he was a tall, skinny boy, not as strong, physically, like I am. I wanted to stay behind them. I knew that my mother is not alive no more. I didn't know about my sister.

How did you know that your mother wasn't alive anymore?

The American Air Force, early in 1944 in-- I don't remember, it was about June. I don't know. It was in summertime. It was a huge bombardment in Budapest. And the American Air Force, between the bombardment they was throwing down leaflets and telling the Hungarian Nazis-- I remember the leaflet.

It was like a washing bowl where you wash your hands. It had two hands in it. Even if you were washing your hands, you wouldn't be protected because you are killing the Jewish people in Auschwitz. I didn't know what Auschwitz means. I didn't know. I believed a little bit, but mostly not. I couldn't believe a thing like that happening.

But somehow, it was in June till November or December, when I found my brother, you know, everything was changing. And somehow I-- I don't know. I had had the feeling. But I had the feeling I had to stand by my brother. I know that my mother is not in the city we used to live, nor my sisters and nobody.

About the deportation, I knew. Because certain deportation happened already from Budapest also. They took our people. So I knew that something is going wrong. So I wanted to stay with my brother. We was working, packing up German trucks. And this way they took us to Austria.

We got to Austria. From there, they took us over to Germans. And they took us to Mauthausen-- concentration camp Mauthausen. We weren't too many. We came over there at night. I remember, I didn't know that day what concentration camps mean. We came-- it was a tent, big tents, huge tents. And I didn't go in. But we stayed outside. It was at night-- moonlight. It was already-- I don't know what month. Maybe in April.

And I saw people in those uniforms that they--

Striped uniforms.

--uniforms. I didn't see things like that-- yet. And I said to my brother, do you know what I do? I ask somebody what is it over here. How do you tell whether it's a good place or a bad place? I was pretty naive on that. I went over there. And it [INAUDIBLE] was like cracking. That guy, I said-- I went back to my brother. You know, but they are all dead people over here.

And in the morning when I saw what's going on-- no food, no water. Around 11:00, they brought kind of-- I don't know what kind of food, what they called it, in big cans. And [? fight. ?] All of a sudden, a German Nazi came over there and he picked up a guy by his legs and pushed him in the food. And he hold him till he died.

When I saw this, what's going on, I said to my brother, you know what. I wish we never came over here, and we was hiding somewhere. He never wanted to run away. I always-- it was on my mind to run away. But he always wanted to be with his friends. That's why I came to this point.

But luckily, in afternoon I call everybody who can walk-- can walk. We'll get a piece of bread, a piece of roast, and go out. I told my brother, you know what, whatever we have to get, and go out from here, I don't like it.

Early in afternoon. It was a small hill. Everybody had to run down. This way they decided if he can walk or not. My brother's leg, it was frozen partly. His shoes was in very bad condition. But I told him, with my friend of mine-- he died in Israel about two years ago. We was holding him, two of us, from side, and he was running three of us downhill.

So we came to the gate. They gave us the food. And we was walking. But also, we heard already the shelling. And we knew already a little bit of what's going on-- the bombardment. And I had the feeling the war ends very soon. I always was telling my brother, just keep up. We have to live over this.

We was going through this town or city, Wels. And over there I met Slovak war prisoners-- soldiers. And I asked them, what's going on? And he told me, listen. You don't go where they take you. You must hide yourself somewhere. Don't go. [INAUDIBLE] the Americans are very close.

So with [INAUDIBLE] and my brother, all three of us know Slovak, was from the same town. So we decided to run away. On one of the corners, we sneaked out and was running on the street, and came to a house. And we opened the cellar door. It was open. And we sneaked in.

We was hiding over there a few days. I don't remember how long. And probably the old woman who lived there, he heard us. And he heard kind of movement. But soldiers, they didn't have too many. So one of the days, the door opened. And the old-- I don't know what he was-- a policeman. I didn't know the uniform. He came. He says, you get out from there. Hands up.

We went out. And one of my friends, he knew a little bit German, better than I did. And he asked him, where are you taking us? He says it's over here, not too far up, a concentration camp, a new camp. I have to take you there. He says, don't worry. It will be very soon over.

We came to the place. It was in the forest. The barracks wasn't finished. Everything was just muddy. I said, again, from one part, I felt in the other one. From one camp, I came to the other one. Even worse, maybe. But, like I said, the shelling was always closer and closer.

It was a late night. In the morning, it was raining, muddy around. Looked out. We didn't see the Germans. And I didn't know what's going on. I was very-- really naive. I said to the guys and my brother, I said, it's no Germans around. All of a sudden now, one of the-- in striped uniform came in. The Germans disappeared. Everybody can go wherever he wants.

But some of the guys that came, he says don't go out because the Nazis still hiding in the forest. Stay here. And about in very short time after that, the first American tank came in, and soldiers. It was right after that they started to give out food. Too much food, which was bad. A lot of people with that empty stomach, they was felling like flies, dying. And [INAUDIBLE] lice, we had plenty.

And the next day, my brother got sick. Even I brought food, even I brought water, killing still for food, which wasn't important because was enough. But it was psychological. If I don't have it with me, next day maybe I don't going to have it. I brought even milk for him. I remember I wanted to make some noodles for him. He didn't want to eat.

And one of my friends who was making transport to hospitals, he said, Ernie, how about you will go with him to the hospital? Maybe it will be better for him. It was late afternoon, and put him on the American military truck-- more sick people. And through that bumpy road, he was in pretty bad condition. My brother already had the typhoid. We didn't know what's going on.

I took him to a so-called hospital. It was a school. And they took him in the bed. No doctors, nothing. It was at night we came to this school. He didn't want to eat, even we had plenty of food already. Early in the morning, he says, Ernie, give me something. I have to have a toilet. You know, he had to go. I said, I have nothing, Laszly. I will bring something.

He says all right, all right. Stay over here with me. He says, look at me. He says, Ernie, I cannot see you. I said, Laszly, Laszly, that cannot be. I am over you. He says, but I can't see you. But you know what, leave me alone. I want to sleep.

And I was sitting by his bed. And all of a sudden he wakes up. He says, Ernie. [INAUDIBLE] he's holding my hand, [INAUDIBLE] going around [INAUDIBLE]. [? Like ?] this, he died. On his birthday morning.

This was the day after liberation.

Five days after liberation. And after long, I always had in my mind, I never knew where they buried him. I had the feeling, I have to find him. I was telling all this, this story to my wife. She's pretty good in German. And she wrote a letter to the town where it happened. And we got the answer that they have his grave together with a mass grave. But he's in a separate grave because I gave his name. So he's in separate grave.

And I had always a feeling I find it. So one day we decided-- about ten years ago or eight years ago, I don't remember what year was it-- '80 or '81. We went to Czechoslovakia. I wanted to go to my father's grave too. [INAUDIBLE] I came to my father's grave and I-- we already wrote to the city that they put a marker by his grave. Because we want to put kind of a memory or a plaque on the grave.

And from there I collected-- because we didn't have no cement, no tools with us. So in the town that we was living, they gave us cement. And in the other town, they gave us a small spackle. And with this, I went to his grave, made a small monument which is seen still today. My sister will visit it for a few weeks.

How did you make contact with your sister?

Oh, no, my sister-- I knew about my sister. My sister came home earlier than I came. She was home. She was liberated in Czechoslovakia-- in TerezÅn, which is Czechoslovakia. So she was about a week or two weeks earlier at home.

Was she in the camp in Theresienstadt?

Yes, she was in Auschwitz. And I don't know which camps she was in. She said, comparing to others, she was in ammunition factory. She was working. From Auschwitz they took them to ammunition factory. She had pretty good,

comparing. I can imagine what means. Maybe they had a slice of bread more than the other people had. That was the goodness.

That's it. It is the story what came out from me after so many years. And I had to relieve myself about these terrible things what happened to us, that tell to the generation not to give up. Today is much better, much stronger than we were that time. To fight back. Don't give up. Because if they want to kill you, they anyway will kill you. But if you're going to fight back, you have chance.

What was your impression? I know it was probably a very brief one. But what was your impression of Wallenberg?

Wallenberg must be a angel. For me, Wallenberg means everything. If somebody would tell me today-- I'm not a youngster. I am 67 year old. If somebody would tell me that they know he's alive and they need a rescue mission, I think-- I don't think. I would refuse not to go. I would be ready.

Even the strength I have today, after I had my best. Also, I was sick. So anyway, I am strong enough today. And I don't know if I wouldn't be ready to go and do whatever has to be done. I wish of bottom of my heart that he is alive, and he [INAUDIBLE] out, I want to kiss his hand.

Where did you go after the war?

After the war, we came home. I was still-- 1948, I had a small business. I married my wife. And we went to Israel.

How did you meet?

In 1945, everybody-- every survivor in Czechoslovakia had the right to have two weeks in Tatra, that are Carpathian Mountains, part of Carpathian Mountains. We had two weeks. And I came over there. And she was also there. But she was, I have to say, a very pretty girl.

She's still it?

A lot of boys around her. So I was just a side person. And after that, my cousin met Helena in 1945 or-- '46. He went to Israel and married my wife's sister. So I am my brother-in-law of my cousin. And when he came to Israel, he wrote me a letter. He says in the letter, probably you know my sister-in-law. You was with her in the Tatra, in the Carpathian Mountains. And he gave the name.

Right away, after that, I picked up my stuff. She was, like I say, pretty girl. I liked her. She didn't like me, probably, those days. I went over to the city and we came together. We got married in 1948. One of the happiest person in-- and I wish everybody have a marriage life what like we had. We came to Israel. In 1949, my daughter was born. In 1950-- she lives in Edison. And the other one in Westfield.

I love them. You know, we are more tight because of this happening. We feel differently than other people. We tried to raise them. And like a plant, always take care, always water it. To give them the-- even if we didn't have what to eat, but they never ever said they are hungry. Because in Israel in 1949, when my older daughter was born, it was very scarce food. We didn't have food like today they have. It was the beginning.

But my children never had problem. We gave them the best. Even today.

Have you been able to speak with them about your experiences?

They know about it. They know about it. They hide everything, like the second generation. They know. We told them. They know. And I don't want to bother them. It's what they have from it. Just I teach them always, don't. But I said always, don't give up. God forbid, anything happens, don't give up. Fight back. Only way to survive.

If, you know, these people what was deported, they had their psychology. Eichmann was a shrewd person. He knew

what to do. They took away the male, his strength, to forced labor. Who stayed home? The children, the old women and old people. It was easy to deal with them. Especially like in ghettos. They killed one or two person. The other heard and was scared already. They went quietly.

But maybe if the strength of the male part would stayed at home, they would fight back. They would have not as easy than they have the deportation in 1944 from Hungary. I don't know the other deportations, from Slovakia or from Poland.

But like I'm saying, I put everything on one cart. Anyway, they destroy me. But I will fight back. And that's the way, If they destroy me, they will hard time.

Did you always believe that you would survive?

No. No. It was many times when I said maybe-- first of all, the bombardments. I wasn't saved from the bombs. The same way like the German, the bomb can hit me too. That was one. The other part, I was afraid always of my friends. I never was afraid of the Nazis. I was afraid of my friends.

Somebody recognize me and would say, oh, I was very afraid when I said when we went to this factory, and we took from the trucks our people. I was afraid that somebody will recognize me, and god forbid, something. But I was lucky.

Those days, you had to have guts, but more-- luck. Guts to do it, and luck to survive it. I [INAUDIBLE] one of them.

Thank you for sharing with us and inspiring us.

You're very welcome. It was hard but somehow I did it.

But you came through.

Yes.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[STRINGED MUSIC]