

Mr. Hersh, you left us in May, 1945, in the concentration in Wels at the time of liberation by one American soldier. And you may continue the story from there.

And the decision was whether to stay there and wait for people to come to help us, and feed us, and so forth, or to leave. David and I decided that we were going to leave. We started walking out of the camp. And the first thing that we came across was a newly-planted potato field. We started digging the pieces of potato that were actually in the ground.

There was a farmer's wife or someone that came screaming at us, that those are potatoes that people are going to have to-- people will starve if this thing doesn't grow. So we told her, we're starving now. Tried to eat those potatoes, and my teeth just couldn't bite into it. They were raw. So we took some stones. And we smashed them and somehow or another was able to eat something.

We started moving down the road. And by this time, we hit American soldiers with DDT equipment. And you just had to remove your clothes, and they sprayed you. This was going on throughout the countryside.

As we went along, I got very weak. And he carried me. They carried me to a place where there was some shelter. And I got worse all the time.

Later on, I found out I had typhus. I got totally blind. I couldn't see anything. And even what he remembers now, that all I kept screaming is, I'm blind. I can't see.

Later on-- what happened from that point on, I just don't remember. I know-- whether he found-- he got me into a hospital, he doesn't remember that either. Whether he-- I did get help, or I just stayed there until I got better.

But later on, I do remember finding myself going into a city. I was in a city somewhere. And I saw American soldiers. I saw my first Black man at that point.

And I found myself with a document, which, again, I must have been somewhere where I got a document that I was a concentration camp victim, and I wanted to be traveling at home. And I got a pass to get on a train and to go back to my hometown.

How I got all those things, I don't know. Either someone took care of it for me, either-- I can't believe that I did it myself. But maybe I did. I don't know. This train took us back towards this Velyki Luchky. That's where I--

Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovakia. Well, it's no longer Czechoslovakia now. I didn't know whether my brother or I arrived-- survived-- or Albert, the one that lived in Budapest survived. It turned out to be that Albert was working under Wallenberg in Budapest.

They were saving people, shielding people. They were supplying food, passing out the documents that were false and whatnot. This is how most of his time is-- he's got a story of his own in that.

When the war was over, which was earlier than when I was liberated, he went back home. And of course, there was no one there. There were two or three Jewish men there that had come back to this town.

Someone had told him that they saw that my brother Abraham, [? Boomy, ?] was alive and that he went to Romania. He was sick, and he went to Romania. He decided to go to Romania and to go to see if he can find him. Some people said they saw him. But he ran into a dead end. He just couldn't find him.

So he was returning on the way back to see if anybody else showed up, if anybody else survived in the family. The last leg of that trip, there was a change in trains. On that last leg, we would have happened to have been on the same train. We got off. And at that point, we managed-- we find out that we were there.

And he had told me that [? Boomy ?] was possibly seen alive. He went to find him. He couldn't. Sometimes later, we got a telegram from the United States, from our relatives, to say that [? Boomy's ?] alive, and he is in Romania.

How did they know to send you a telegram?

He sent them a letter.

Oh, Abraham-- [? Boomy ?] did that.

Sent them a letter.

And the telegram came to your hometown.

To us. We were in touch with our relatives in the United States. This time, the area we were--

Who were the relatives in the United States?

Who are they? Too many to mention.

Yeah. But who were the ones who were in charge of getting you over here?

Well, we've-- again, it would not even be fair to single one out of the other. We've been mentioning Matilda here from before, that she's the one that got me to do this thing. She was one of them.

That's Matilda [PERSONAL NAME] who lives in Elizabeth.

Yes. But there were so many. They were all involved in it. Anyhow, there was a time-- and the Soviet Union was now occupying this area. And it seemed to me that they were going to close the borders and they would not let many more people out of there.

My brother Albert went to Czechoslovakia, where it was free, to find a place where we can go to. And he didn't come back right away. During that time, there was only two days left to get a pass to be able to leave. I went, and I got the pass, which took me two days just to get it, on the last day.

I went directly from the office where I got that pass and got on the train and went to Czechoslovakia, not knowing where I would find him. But people on the road knew one another. If you asked, did you see so-and-so, they would say-- we're talking about people who were concentration camp victims. They knew where so-and-so is. So you could always find where he was.

Turns out to be he was on the way back to get me. And we missed one another. And then he had a rough time getting out. But we finally did make it.

From there, we went to Prague, and we applied for entry papers to the United States. And they finally came through. During that time, after we heard from Monty-- from [? Boomy-- ?] we had two weeks together with him. He came to Czechoslovakia before we came to the United States. And we spent those two weeks together with him.

I understand that a number of people-- survivors-- after the war had to wait quite a long time in order to get papers to come or permission to come to the United States.

I think we were one of the first to [BOTH TALKING] the line.

You were able to come because you had relatives here, is that it?

Relatives here and one of the first ones to apply too. So anyway, from there on in, we went to Paris and waited until we could get on a flight. Then we came. We actually flew to the United States.

In '46.

Yes. TWA.

Many of the people I speak to came by boat.

TWA-- we came in style.

And that was provided for by the relatives.

Yes.

Very quickly, what happened to you when you came to the United States?

When I came to the United States, it wasn't easy either. But I wound up going into the Army. I--

Why did you go into the Army?

I went into the Army because whatever I was working at, the job that I was doing didn't pay me enough money to be able to live on.

You still had trouble.

Still had trouble with it. And I figured going into the Army, at least that part would be taken care of. And I needed a couple of more years of someone else just to feed me and so forth. It turns out to be it was for 16 months that I was in there. And I spent my time in Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

And did you learn some kind of an occupation at that time?

At that point on, I went to school and went into interior design.

And that's what you did when you came out? Interior design?

I started-- for many years until I developed it. And eventually, I met my wife Marilyn. And we got married. And we have three kids.

How old are the children?

The children are now 35, 33, and 31.

Are any married?

One is married, the oldest.

And do you have any grandchildren?

The second one is about to.

Good.

And I have one grandchild.

All right. So after a period of adjustment to a new country-- you were really an immigrant when you came here.

Well, I certainly was.

So you adjusted, and you found an occupation.

Occupation that I loved.

And you met your wife, and you raised a family.

Things started going right for me.

Fine, fine. All right, let me see. I'd like to ask you some general questions. When did you begin to talk about the events that you experienced?

At the beginning, I tried to-- people would ask me questions all the time. And I would answer the best as I could. But some of the stories were so-- they were unbelievable stories. And I may be wrong about this, but my feeling was that I wasn't really believed.

This is in the '40s.

Yes.

What about the '50s?

I just cut it out. I stopped talking about it. And even when-- with my wife, I did relate, going into some of the details and some of the things that I have gone through. With my children, I tried to, again, just touch on it, but never really explained exactly what went on. By the time I started-- I did my paper on it, they were all after me. And they were very much interested to know what was going on.

I know what you're saying. The audience was more prepared to listen.

I think so.

Then you spoke.

Yes.

You waited until the audience would listen.

Well, that was one thing. And I think maybe because they were not really prepared to listen, I-- and also, I was afraid of getting myself emotionally involved with it.

What happened that they were more ready to listen? And what happened that you were able to overcome your concern of becoming too emotionally involved as you related it, [BOTH TALKING]

You know what, my children, for example.

Whoever you're talking to--

So with my children--

Because in the beginning, it sounds as though--

Well, my children have grown to a point where they understood what it was all about and then were more interested to find out about it. So that was it. Individual tales, and details, and whatnot, they've heard those before. Really, once I started-- I wrote this paper on it-- I, myself, am able to more freely talk about it.

Do you talk to people other than your children about the events?

No. People that have read the letter and they ask me questions about it, again, I would answer them. But right now--

Who should do the talking?

Who should do the talking? You're saying in general?

Yeah.

We should all do a lot of talking. Some of us are not able to. And some of us are still in that shell. But I think a lot more should be said than that has been said.

And you're doing it now.

Trying.

The events that you experienced, did it teach you anything? Did you come to any conclusions about humanity in general?

You're talking about people that I went through this experience with?

Either those people, or people over here, or the people who brought about these events, the people who--

Well, if one of the people that brought about--

The people who built these camps and put the action into motion.

Well, what is there to say, that-- it took people without feelings, without a heart, without a care to do what they did. And what do you think of people like that? What is there to say? They didn't think we were human. They brought us down to the lowest level a human being can get to.

What made this happen?

I don't know what made it. What makes-- I think just being a Jew is what makes it happen. Something we-- is it through our religion? Is it through-- I suppose religion has an awful lot to do with it.

Is it the victim who makes it happen? Or is it the villain who makes it happen?

Well, the villain thinks that the victim causes all their problems.

The villain thinks so.

Yeah.

But what do you think?

I obviously don't believe with that. I don't agree with that.

So what brings it about? That's a tough one.

It's a tough one. But--

You've thought about it.

I've thought about it. But it happens all the time. And it was-- I mean, bigotry, hate, and everything that goes on constantly-- it has never stopped. Start going back in our history books, even in our Bible stories and whatnot. Killing was always around. Hate was always around.

Prejudice and bigotry.

It was always there.

Have you given any thought as to must it be? Is there any way to overcome it?

Well, it was overcome-- the overcoming, I don't think that'll ever happen. Certainly, not in my lifetime it won't happen.

So you're pessimistic.

I think so. Definitely. I think it takes for people to do things that is extreme, what happened during the Holocaust-- I can't believe that those people themselves are human. They treated us that we weren't.

But I can't believe they're human, because I think you can get more-- say the word for it. I can't even think of it. You can get more out of an animal sometimes in friendship than you can from people like that.

I thank you very much. I think we'll close it on this note.

Very good. Thank you.

Thank you.