

[INAUDIBLE]. And within a few weeks I operated them all. Young I was. It was very easy to learn.

You were 16 at the time. 16, 17.

So. And there we were till 1944, till the Germans had to leave. In fact, we were on the train, the last train, that left the town. And some of my boys hid. And if they could hide out for 48 hours, the Russians came in and they occupied that part. We were the last train to leave. They got us out.

How long were you in this last camp?

Over a year.

Over year. Can you describe the year.

In the camp. There were three shifts. I was lucky. I worked in the day shift. The food was terrible. They gave us 800 calories per day, just enough to keep you alive.

One episode which cannot be forgotten in that camp. Our commander had a dog, and one of the boys-- one of us-- took care of the dog, a German shepherd. That German shepherd had a booth, almost a small room, and he kept him there. it was his dog.

But that dog got better food than we did. A pail full of good-- they say a soup that the spoon can stand in. He used to bring the dog that kind of food. That fella, he's alive too.

Itzhak [? Zilverberg. ?] He lives in Florida now. And there's only a handful of us that are alive. And we are still in touch sometimes.

And I made up with him that he used to take the dog for a walk. And that time we had some things in the factory that we had to go and throw out the garbage. So the garbage disposal was on the other side of the camp, and we had to go by the dog's house. So throwing out the garbage on our way back, we used to have always, in the camps, like in anywhere else, you find your way to survive. We had some-- what do you say-- the army that when you carry with you?

Dog tags?

No, no.

Identification?

No. When you eat from.

Oh, a canteen.

Canteen. We had ours. We found a couple. And while we throw out the garbage, if you walked the dog, you jumped in, scooped up a couple containers of food, put it into the garbage bag, took it back into the factor-- you never worked alone. You always walked with three, four fellas.

So one looked out for the other one to make sure That the SS don't show up. And it helped. It helped supplement my food.

Another episode, the disposal was also near the kitchen. One time, a truck of potatoes arrived, and they dumped it on the ground. That's a very good occasion to grab some potatoes. And we did it.

Also with a few fellas, I ask, what do you do with the potatoes-- raw potatoes? In the factory, we had a blacksmith. the

blacksmith worked with iron, with heat. And we also had, in the yard, roofers what work with tar, also heat. So you always tried to make out something that you work with something.

So you split. You brought in a pail of potatoes here. Bacon, let's split. You know? You never-- you could not be selfish. You had to share it.

I was caught one time.

And what happened?

By the-- not just by anybody, by the commandant. I didn't know. I was in the backyard straightening out some 2x4s, all kind of steel things. Because I worked in that kommando too, which we always work with the troops and then. So he sent us out to do some work.

I did not realize that-- we knew where he lives, but I did not know that he looked at the window. And he looked, and he saw me doing something. Many times when something like this came, we got ourselves two, three pairs of potatoes and we buried them so later on we could survive.

Somehow one time I did not pay attention. And next thing I know I hear, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. What you doing?

What are you doing, yeah.

And he was in the house. Before I knew, he is next to me about three feet from me. And not only that I have a pair of potatoes, I had them even in my pockets. But there were so afraid to touch us that he stood three feet away from me and asked me what I did. Yes, I said I'm here. My master sent me out to do some work.

Why was he afraid to touch you?

Because we were unclean. You know, working clothes. We washed, we cleaned, but for him to touch me it would be taboo. But the SS man, the one that took care of us. Anyway, it took about five minutes before the guy, the SS man, came.

But in the mean time, I had enough time-- he says, what do you have in my pockets? And we always had garbage, papers, and snot rags. In the mean time, I pushed it out from my one pocket and then the other pocket. By the time the SS man came, he didn't find nothing on me.

He didn't find it. But he looked around and he found the whole pail with potatoes. what's that? Beats me. I don't know.

You sure? You see, I'm working here. This is the first time I see it. Because I could deny it because there are other people working.

He took down my number. And of course at night they called me when we come home, back home from work. 12 hours was a shift, not eight. We came home, 2,000 people.

And he calls me out. What was I doing there? I said working. He did not punish me. He just gave me a warning that time, the commandant.

I forgot. I have to go retrace back.

Why didn't the SS man do anything you?

No the SS took down my number and they called me out when a pail-- when we came, they counted us out that anybody didn't escape.

There was a count every day.

Yes. Twice.

A few times.

In the morning and at night, appell, when they count you. That was in the evening. Everybody was starved to death.

Anyway, going back, tracing back, after he took my number down he went back and the SS man went away. I went back in the back yard and took the whole pail of potatoes and hid it. I still need my potatoes. I want to eat.

That SS guy came an hour later after me, started looking for the potatoes. He couldn't find them. And they don't give up. So they went after those poor guys, the roofers working the other side of the yard. And he gave them a hard time, but they didn't know anything.

Anyway, I hide it. And I took-- the following day, life goes on-- a container full of potatoes. I want to go to the guys, the roofers. Just get away from me. You almost got us into trouble. We stay away from us.

I went inside the factory. And that time there were a blacksmith. There were rations, civilian rations, also taken to camps. But they lived out the camp and worked in the blacksmith work. Whatever they [INAUDIBLE].

And I asked the guy, would he let me put in my canteen and cook up some potatoes. He says, why not? Go ahead. But it has to take 15, 20 minutes.

I was a little negligent. Before I look around, I look in the back of me, and guess who is in the front and back of me, front of me, there is the SS man. He did not recognize me. He took, of course, the potatoes away.

He did not recognize you. The same man that confronted you that day before.

No. Because if he would have recognized me, he would have killed me right on the spot. And of course--

Why do you think he didn't recognize you?

I don't know. Maybe only he spoke to me for a couple minutes. All he did is took down the number, because the commandant was there. And I am called out again.

When I'm called out again, the commandant did recognize me. Now, what's this? So I told him, listen, you found the potatoes yesterday. I took them and I cooked them. Why? Because I was hungry.

What? On the top of his lung-- is there anybody up there that's hungry? Over 2,000 people, starving to death, not a whisper. He says, look at your comrades. Nobody's hungry but you.

I said yes, sir. I was hungry. Then he gave me a punishment. He told the block leader to give me half an hour punishment. But there was a little comedy in it. Somehow one of the block leaders recognized the cooking utensil, the canteen, that belonged to a French Jewish fellow. His name was Finkelstein. I'll never forget it.

And he was called almost daily. He was a thief. He was known in camp as a thief. And where did I get that cooking utensil? I found it in the garbage. And you go through the garbage to find something, and it was perfect to cook something in. And one of the elite block leaders says to the commandant, do you know something? That cooking utensil belongs to Finkelstein.

He got a smile [INAUDIBLE]. Calls up Finkelstein-- Finkelstein, come here. Is this your cooking utensil? He says, yes. Could you tell me how it got to him?

And that's where it was my luck. He said, he stole it from me. And that was my luck, because I was prepared of getting at least 25 on my bare. That helped me. That's why he only gave me a half an hour punishment. Stay on your tip-toes in the morning for half an hour straight and your hand on your toes, sitting position, staying like this.

You were able to do that?

Yes. But my block leader was not a bad guy. So--

How much did you weigh? Do you have any idea?

When I was liberated, I weighed 65. But I still kept my weight somewhere. I weighed 125, 130 pounds when we left Pruskw. And I kept up my strength. Because I found out, any way you can, you have to survive. Survival of the fittest is the word in English.

I became a thief. I don't care what you call it. I wanted to survive. And the only way to survive is to eat. And I survived.

And from that camp-- and that's how I survived in that camp. And from there--

During the year that you're in the camp, were there any discussions? Did you have close friends in the camp? Were there any kind of--

No. You never make any close friendship with any of them, because there was no time. And the time that you had, that little time that you had, you felt sorry for yourself. You didn't even have time to feel sorry for yourself to begin with when you lost your parents, because you were hungry. All you were thinking about, the food that you don't have.

There is another episode that happened in that camp. We were mixed. Mixed means all the races. Russians, Polacks, Frenchmen, Dutch--

Jews and non-Jews.

And of course Jews. I'm talking non-Jews and Jews. What happened is one fella escaped. They caught him. Within a couple of days, they brought them back. And this was the first time I ever saw an execution.

They brought them back. They made a gallows. And they brought the boat shifts, day and night, put us in a circle, and they read his trial, where it came from and for what reason they hanging him. And everybody had to watch their verdict and for what reason.

But he was considered a non-Jew. I don't remember-- he was a Russian or Polack. I don't remember. The following day, new orders came from Auschwitz. Every non-Jew, everybody that is not a Jew, has to be sent back to Auschwitz or wherever, out of the camp.

Out of the camp that you were in.

Where we were in. Only Jews remained. And there were many, especially some Russians. Which when they are born, they are being circumcised. The moment you were circumcised, you were considered a Jew, and they were left in the camp. And that is another episode. And--

Do you remember what month that was?

This was in '43 going on '44. No, this is going in the middle of '44 already. We knew it, because when we left that camp, we knew that the war is getting bad for the Germans, because they had to evacuate us, as I said before.

OK. The month when you were evacuated from the camp, you don't remember. You say it was mid--

It was going '44. It was winter. Winter '44. I know that exclusive. I know very well.

November 1944.

Yes. We do. And they were transporting us in trains of about 20 in a train, in a car, instead of 100 the way we came to Auschwitz, where we came 100-150 in a cattle. Here, they give us passenger cars but unheated. And they transported us for a week or maybe longer. And they send us to Mauthausen Austria. By the time we arrived in that camp, half of us were frozen-- froze to death, unheated things-- unheated cars.

How many people-- do you have any idea-- were in this transport to Mauthausen? That camp held at least 2,000 people.

But from your camp, where you were coming from?

[BOTH TALKING].

But you went directly to Mauthausen, correct?

Yes. I'm just wondering how many people went with you directly to Mauthausen in the transport.

That camp-- the whole camp was evacuated.

Right.

The whole--

But only-- you had mentioned before that the non-Jews already had been taken out of the camp.

Yeah. But so they brought some more people in. There were French Jews French-- they brought in Hungarian Jews. Hungarian Jews were the-- I wouldn't say the worst. The worst, they want to survive-- for survival purposes. By the time they came--

You mentioned Auschwitz a second ago. You were not in Auschwitz.

Birkenau was part of Auschwitz.

OK.

You see. We did not go into the other part because they sent us away.

Right.

Now, the Hungarian Jews were-- in Poland they choked us systematically, I mean slowly. They did not pull that noose up tight. Whereby in Hungary and in France, they put the nose on your neck and they tightened it very fast. Like, for instance, the Germans did not go bad very strong with their Hungarians up till 1944, where I was already almost four years. I was already a veteran of the camps.

So when we got mixed up with the Hungarian Jews, in our opinion they became the animals compared to us. And I'll explain. We were used to the hunger. We took that 4 ounces of bread, and the soup, and the 800 calories-- we had to live with it. Where they couldn't-- they didn't get accustomed to that hunger.

So they were twice, three times as starved as us. And sometimes they just wanted to see how much animals we are. They used to call out seconds. Seconds-- you had to line up in a line.

The Hungarians became animals. They jumped around the pot or whatever it was dished out with. What happened is

this-- they just went wild. With that [INAUDIBLE] with those things. They had the rubber things. They just went straight over everybody.

And that's when many times I got hit for no apparent reason. Because I never volunteered or never ran for seconds. Because I knew nothing good can come out of it. So you have to do the best we can with whatever you have.

If you get hit and you hurt yourself, you go on roll call to the doctor. You'll never return. Never return. So you had to stay healthy-- alive. So that's another episode.

On the transfer to Mauthausen, you say about half of the people who were with you in the camp froze to death.

They froze not to death. They froze. When we arrived in Mauthausen, they put us under hot water, give us showers to clean up. I remembered something when I was a child, and I put a pinch-- we actually didn't have showers. They gave us fountains, big fountains, and water came out from them. And there were about 20 people to each fountain-- the water came out.

And I put-- the first thing your feet were frozen-- a pinch of water my big toe, and it hurts me till the day of today. And you never hot water on frozen things. But I was a baby, but I grew up with my own understanding. And I closed the hot water and I poured cold water on my feet. And that saved my life.

The other people were all-- people-- were young kids. They didn't know. They were cold and they went and they poured hot water on them. That's when the problems started. They got the gangreen and all that thing. That's why I said half of them died. Because they sent them out from camp, that's the last you heard of them.

How long were you in Mauthausen?

Another transition period. And from there, they send us--

How long? You said another trip. A few weeks?

A few weeks. Again, because we were considered workers.

Right. And you said you had some feeling that the war was coming to an end.

Sure, because we knew it. We knew it.

How did you know?

Sometimes somebody smuggled in a piece of paper. But how and where were not interested. Because yes, we knew it. Because the next camp, where I'm going to come to, was near D $\frac{1}{4}$ sseldorf. They put us on another train and they took us to another factory. And that day we arrived in January of '45.

And in that factory, another factory for the German factory. They in that factory where specialists are already. There were Frenchmen, Jews and non-Jews, and there were German political prisoners. And the only one we could-- the long language we could communicate is German, because everybody else was from-- my department was six, seven people from six different countries. German was the only language that we all understood.

And there we spent almost to the week when D $\frac{1}{4}$ sseldorf was bombed. D $\frac{1}{4}$ sseldorf. Oh, I forgot. And from there to Theresienstadt. Maybe it will come back to me. I just--

You mentioned Theresienstadt just now.

Theresienstadt was the last one where I was liberated. Terezin. Terezin, that's where it was. It was a suburb of Terezin. And they were bombing. In fact, every time there came through the sirens, they, the Germans, went into the bunkers.

And with us they left in the factory.

And we made the bunkers. We dig the holes for them. But we were left in the factory, and they went to hiding. So we knew that the end was closer and closer.

And there we spent-- it was the last four-five months where we spent. And even there--

So that's from January 1945 through February, March, April, May.

So at the end of April--

End of April.

-- in that camp.

How many people were in the camp with you?

Several hundred. Close to 1,000. And there, again, food was the biggest problem. Somehow people got a hold of salt. And what they did, they mixed it with water, and they drank it. What happened? They swelled.

I didn't. I took a pinch to put in my food. I didn't do it. It saved my life again.

Going back to Mauthausen. In Mauthausen, they somehow tried to kill us down there while we were waiting. They gave us the portion of bread with a square ounce of artificial, some kind of grease to put on the bread, very, very salty. When you finished, you were so starved, you're so thirsty, and coffee, or what's supposed to be dirt water, they gave you 3 ounces.

So what you had to do was go for water. The first time I, went I had a couple sips, and I didn't feel good. So I'm not going to drink that water again. From my group, about a third of the people that drank that water-- that water was poisoned. I don't know with what.

You got the diarrhea. And the moment you got diarrhea-- the people were still alive. When they came to the appell, and when they counted, they counted them as dead. And now we heard-- I didn't see it personally-- they had big drums-- there were no doctors-- they drowned them and throw them away.

And I survived again by my wits. I did not-- that water didn't taste good to me. I'd rather I was thirsty and alive. Another episode.

And in that camp, we were the [? salt. ?] They did not send you away. When they put you on-- when you reported sick, they send you outside to dig trenches for the Germans. It was 10 times as hard workers as in the factory. In the factory at least you stay in a place, and you do whatever you can.

Then it came that early night, where we saw the town burning. And so they took us around--

The town of Terezin? Which town?

Terezin No, Terezin was in the foreground. We were in the suburbs somewhere in a factory. And they told us to congregate. We're going to go.

No trucks, no more nothing. Just a dead march. And we walked out. But one thing they did, they took away our shoes. And they gave us Holland shoes-- you know, those wooden.

Wooden shoes.

And again, I put them on for about 10 seconds, and I didn't feel comfortable in them. And I, again, am a farm boy. Because we did have [INAUDIBLE], and I knew how to walk barefoot. And we always have rags with us. I went and I wrapped around my feet with rags. And I found a stick, and I walked barefoot.

What happened? We walked for about a week. We walked actually in from there into Czechoslovakia, to Theresienstadt. But we go into Theresienstadt directly. We went into a holding camp, I don't know, about five kilometers from Theresienstadt.

And on that march, half the people-- [INAUDIBLE] [? shoot ?]. This was the worst thing where they did. People did not realize. The heavyset people, they fell like flies. I was skinny. I was always little. I never grew up big. So they left me alone.

And we arrived in that holding camp about half. They did give us something to eat. There I saw bunkers eight floors high. And within 24 hours--

Again, in Theresienstadt itself or just outside.

No, no, no. It's outside. Outside Theresienstadt. That was in Czechoslovakia already. All of a sudden, it's the first time, and I didn't hear the word Juden, Jew, in a couple of years. All of a sudden, Alle Juden raus!-- "All Jews out!"

My life, you know-- you lived through. You know it's only days before the liberation. What's happening? And I walked out, put us in a column, and marched us. And we marched the five kilometers to Theresienstadt.

We come to Theresienstadt, we see a synagogue. We see Jews. We see people there. And that camp, that camp was actually a ghetto. What the Germans did is they took the German Jews, the old, the crippled, and they wanted the world to see the goodness what he did, that he left a ghetto with crippled people alive.

Honestly, I saw the where I was. You know something? I resented it. I still resent it very much. And here's the reason. I saw my family, my young sisters and brothers, and six million, three million, young children, fathers, youngsters, healthy, good, could be left alive. And here cripples-- not that I am not for letting people live. But if I have a choice to let somebody live, people that can have a life or people that were in wheelchairs or dead or blind to leave something like 30,000 people like this, leaving those people alive, to show the world that he left cripples. I don't understand why he Hitler did this, or whoever was in charge why he did this.

And there we were only a couple weeks, and the liberation came. Russians liberated us. The Russians came in. There was another hedge there too.

Can you describe when the Russians came?

Yes. There was a hedge. The Germans left.

Just all of a sudden--

And they came back. I understand-- I never saw it--

Did you have any idea how many people were in Theresienstadt at the time?

There were any people?

Yeah, how many people. Do you have any--

30,000 or more.

On the day of liberation.



Yes. And there were maybe the same amount of us coming into the camp from all over.

What were you doing for those three days-- those three weeks.

They cleaned us. They gave us civilian clothes. That's the first time we put in a civilian-- I thought-- we knew that the end was close. Close-- the end is very close. But we did not know that Theresienstadt had prepared-- there was-- first of all, they had a crematorium there. And they had 30,000 loaves of poisoned bread to be distributed to the inmates.

Somehow that leader, that German whoever it was in command of that camp, looked out for himself more than for us, that he thought, from himself-- which I'm sure he did-- that he did not distribute that bread. That bread was found. That's how we are alive again.

And they left, they came back, and then finally the Russians came. When the Russians came, they gave us a free hand to go into town. Plunder, do what you want. Go into town.

We went. We went into a town. There was German occupied, a factory.

Did you believe that the war was really-- I mean, what were your feelings? I mean, this is after going from one camp to another camp.

We were not humans. Now, when we got out, the first thing you wanted to do--

You said at the time before you were about 60 pounds when you were--

That's what I-- yeah, 65 pounds I weighed. And all you thought, and my only-- I made a promise to myself. Whenever I get liberated, I'm going to cook myself a bread soup. Because many camps, what we did when we had the chance, we took a pot of water, and that 4 ounces of bread, we put it in it, and we let it boil with a drop of water. This way it filled you up.

So by the liberation, the Russians let us out. They cleaned us up. Go, look for food, whatever you want to.

Going to town we saw a car. The Germans saw us-- there were Germans, a horse and buggy. It's [? not ?] a car-- a horse and buggy I meant. Everybody looked for food. I didn't have a chance.

I found AN attache case full of cigarettes. And there was a big box, three, four feet by TWO feet along CLOSED. We opened it up-- you wouldn't believe it.

Alcohol?

No, money. He must have been a banker. I grabbed a handful and stuck it in that attache case. Fellas, Germany's kaput. Who needs the money? Who has a match.

We burned it. We burned millions of German marks. Who needs it? Now, this following--

Let me just get this correct. This was money that was next to the--

No, this is the money that--

I understand. You found in a box.

In a box on the wagon--

The box was on the street.

On the wagon.

It's on the wagon. Nobody was in the wagon.

No, they ran to the woods. They went for their lives-- they ran for their lives. They were Germans or whoever they were. And they had some food, but I never had a chance to grab any. I guess somebody gave me [INAUDIBLE].

We got into the town. There was a factory-- cheeses and all kinds of things.

Let me just ask you another question. The cigarettes--

I'll come back. I took them back to camp

Yeah. Did you smoke?

I started smoking. I never smoked in my life. That's one of my bad habits that I developed.

You never smoked in your life prior to that?

Not prior to then, no. In fact, in one of the camps, when you made your quota, they gave you a couple cigarettes. I used to sell them for a piece of bread. So here you have a case full of cigarettes. So I became a big shot-- started smoking. In the beginning there was no taste. Then you develop something.

And the money-- anyway, I changed it later. \$160 for it when I came to Germany.

For the cigarettes?

No, for the handful of German money-- marks.

Oh, you said you burned it. In other words, you saved some of it, and you--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I grabbed a handful and put it in my attache case.

In the attache case. OK.

And we're going back to into that town. In the town there was a factory where cheeses. Tubes. We never knew that cheese can be in a tube. German was advanced and all kind of thing. But things, no food.

And we came back to Camp. Oh, of course, we did something. Another day--

When you say we-- you were.

We never went alone. We always went in groups. Because you don't go alone. You're always afraid. But when a group-- what happens to a group.

So you were still afraid. I mean, the Russian came--

Sure.

--told you the war is finished, go into town.

Right, we went. On another excursion like this, we found-- they must have been soldiers or something-- a loaf of bread I found in one of the rucksacks. And next to it was like a brick-- honey.

Oh, I wouldn't dare eating it there. I brought it back to camp and I ate it up. I ate up the loaf of bread and I ate up the honey with it. Immediately I got diarrhea. I didn't know, but later on I found out why.

But I was lucky. We did have some things to stop the diarrhea. But the diarrhea and that-- again, it was not clean, another typhoid broke out in Theresienstadt. And quite a few people died, except there was better medical care then.

Who gave them medical care then?

Whoever was in charge there already. I don't remember who was the administration there.

But the Russians were--

In command.

--in command of the camp.

The camp, right. But they let people, whoever they were, in charge. I understand later on why I'd rather everybody came in and tried to take you wherever you want to. And if I wouldn't have had my typhoid in Rzeszow, I wouldn't have survived. I was immune to that. That's how I survived again.

And then, from there we had that choice to go to Italy, like straight to Israel or whatever, or to Germany. I took the ride to Germany, because I wanted to see. Again, until I came--

For how long were you in Theresienstadt after the liberation.

A few weeks.

A few weeks.

A few weeks. And we came into Germany. In Germany--

Did you have any contact with any other organizations at the time other than the Russians? Did you have contact with the Red Cross? Did your contact with--

They came into the camp. They fed us. They gave us. And they, again, here already is Germany back-- West Germany, Landsberg. And there again, into our camp, not free, they registered and everything. But they let us go.

We can go to Munich, where I registered. I knew I had some family in America. And I also knew I had a brother in Belgium. And I also knew I left my family in Poland.

And you registered in HIAS. You left all your numbers, your names. And I started traveling. We had free passes in Germany. ID cards-- you didn't have to pay for any transportation. Or which town you came in, you give us free food. And I met already some friends, some boys.

I wound up going to the English zone to Bergen-Belsen after the war. And I spent there six months. Again, no future. Fine, you belong to a Zionist organization here and there. But still, my mind was on, where am I? What am I going to do? Where's my family?

What were you doing for the six months at Bergen-Belsen?

Just looking around-- loafing, talking. We met Ben-Gurion came to visit us there and spoke in a beautiful Yiddish. Of

course Hebrew we didn't speak. And he said if he could he would take us all with him. And that's when I registered. I was one of the Zionist organizations.

But my mind was not made up. I wanted to go back home. And I registered as a legal alien. I want to go back. I am Polish.

And they put me in the transport and gave me papers. I went back to Poland.

By yourself?

By myself. This is already by myself. And I don't know. We didn't have money, but somehow I arrived in my own town. There was maybe a handful of Jewish people living in that part which used to be a ghetto.

There was no thing of getting food and being around. In fact, not only food-- I went to my neighbors, because I knew that our house was taken apart. I have pictures, and I bring them with me. And I went to my neighbors, and there they are hanging. They plundered our house when we left.

I said, these are our pictures. My mother was [INAUDIBLE]. And the neighbor says, your mother gave it to us we should pray for her. I said, I want to take them. And I did. They didn't say nothing.

I had another story. Another neighbor says to me, why don't I change my religion and become a Christian? Because in our town there was a judge-- I forgot his name-- he changed his religion.

[Whether there was a God? ?] The Germans came, he hid. But after the war he became a big shot again. I suffered the whole war, now am I going to after I lived through? Why did I come. I came to see if it's anybody-- I found a couple pictures-- anything. I didn't find much.

In fact, some neighbors, which I know my nephew went, my five, six-year-old nephew, I had to pay him for holding him. You know he was here-- I paid him, my neighbors. Of course our house was taken apart, and neighbors owed money. And I knew about it as a little child. They said, this is all-- your nephew, we gave him more than what you owe us.

And I was lucky, because as I was in my town, I saw two funerals on Jewish boys who were left alive, came back, and they went into the villages. And that same thing-- the families left whatever they possessed. But instead of giving them back, they killed them.

There was no police to go and give you back your stuff. They buried them. Our cemetery in our town was all destroyed. One tombstone. There was nobody to erect it or do anything. And that's how it is.

And do you know what happened to your family?

I don't know for sure, but I know my oldest brothers were in the Russian side. I told you they were soldiers. And when they registered to come back to our side, the Russians took them and sent them to Siberia. They were young, and they survived.

They survived the war and they were in America. One of my brothers just died last year. One is still alive, and he lives in Union near me.

And you had another brother in Belgium?

I had one brother before the war. He did not-- I did get an answer from the HIAS. When I came back, going back from Poland, I had to go to a kibbutz, which was organizing Katowice, and spend there a few months. And with them, they transported us, a Zionist organization, to Austria and to Germany again.

But then I said, I'm not going get to Israel. I want to see a little more of Germany, see about what happened. And being in Katowice, when I was in a kibbutz, people started coming back from Russia. And I have already received an address and people that knew where my brothers were, that my brothers were alive. I knew that.

But when they were coming, I did not know. Ironically, the day I crossed the border going from Poland back into Germany, Austria and Germany, that same day they arrived in Poland. Because within a few weeks, not too many Jews left in Poland. They kept on going the same way as we do.

So by the time I came to Munich to go into the Jewish community there, I had an answer from Belgium that he was taken to one of the transports. I found people-- in fact he was a Trencher. He's in Israel now. He says that he saw my brothers in Gleiwitz, both my brothers.

So I knew that sooner or later that-- and I used to go to those trains where they come from Russia every day, looking and looking. But I couldn't wait any more than six months. Because they did something in Russia that held them back those six months. They wanted to become Russian citizens.

But finally, one day, Russian let the Polish citizens go, because they did not want to become Russian citizen. They sent them the last out. Anyway, they joined me in Germany within six, seven months later back.

And by then I was a native. I knew Germany a little bit. And I moved into a city. I knew that there was a friend of ours from my hometown, he had pull in that town. He was a macher. And he gave me-- I had to have a room. And if I had the room, I could live in a city out of camp.

And the city was called Regensburg. And in that city, once I had where to live, I got a Kennekarte-- I got not a passport, Ausweiss.

ID papers?

ID, a German ID. And eventually I got the room. It only cost pennies. And I lived there for a good six months. And all of a sudden I hear my brothers were coming to our camp. And I went there and got them.

Again, everywhere you went, they never let you lose, always in a camp and again. I had to get them out of the camp.

Out of the DP camp.

A false ID. Yeah, with false papers I got from friends. I got into the camp at night when I got them out the same way. Once I had the papers I brought them. Once we had in the city, eventually they got the papers too [? straight. ?]

And in Germany-- I came to the United States in '49. And in Germany, we don't-- I started-- I tried to acquire a trade. I thought maybe I'll be able to go back to mechanical work. I worked the Messerschmitt works in Regensburg. They had a factory.

Mechanically I wasn't too good inclined, but I learned a little bit reading and writing, a little arithmetic, like algebra, the first stage. Which helped me a little bit too. And then you were just--

You were in Germany for how long before you came to the United States?

Three years.

Three full years. What was life like in Germany?

We considered ourselves above a little bit. Because, you see, it's a right way and a wrong way. Maybe in a way we were right that they owed us something. And then, as you live, the same way when we arrived in the United States, we thought we were the only ones that went through the horror. We were entitled to something.

But you have to make your own nest and live. But nobody gave us guidelines. So in Germany, the only way you lived, there was a little black market street. You bought a carton of cigarettes and you sold it individually, cigarette by cigarette. You get your spending money.

You weren't going to work. I worked in a German factory for a little while. Not for working, for learning the trade. I thought actually that I could-- I want to acquire something. And we say [INAUDIBLE]-- that it wasn't to be.

Did any Jewish agencies help you come over to the United States?

My brothers. Finally, we decided in Germany we wanted to go to Israel. And we were packed. In fact, we sent away our clothes already. I never-- my brothers wanted. I had family here. I had two uncles and an aunt in Pittsburgh. And they sent me a--

Visa.

--a visa. What they used to call it? Visa then? Yeah. They paid him for my transportation, but as displaced person. And the very last few weeks before they supposed to depart, the war broke out, and Israel started to get very bad. So they got cold feet. And they registered with HIAS, so with UNRAA, whatever. And they waited, and they came to America six months later after me.

Here I came of course to my aunt, to Pittsburgh, started to find out American way of, life which was very hard to begin with. As I said before, I thought that the world owes not a living-- owes us something. And I still think so too. Not because-- maybe because too, there are six million Jews in America, never knew of anything bad, and we were under 100,000 people left alive and went through the hell. I think we were entitled to something-- to some consideration.

Especially, I had a very bad experience too in Pittsburgh, which will stick in my life forever. The week I arrived, my uncle died. And I saw him alive. But they had him in a funeral home. He died in Miami, they brought him to Pittsburgh.

I did not understand, but the [INAUDIBLE], the goyim, they came to see in the funeral parlor. I couldn't understand then that you go to see. Anyway, the following day he was buried. And they were sitting shiva in my aunt's house. And my aunt is from my mother's side. My aunt and my aunt's family's name is Penner. In Pittsburgh there are lots of Penner.

And oh, nephew came from your Europe, survivor. Nice. Somehow our conversation came out, and the Penners in Pittsburgh were quite well-off. After all, they were here from before the First World War. Everybody said, oh, except my poor uncle, my aunt's husband-- he was a salesman. You couldn't put him in business.

My family. And I hear the conversation. They did not know-- I did take a few English lessons in Germany. I did pick out a few words, that much I did understand. If a refugee would come, I'll give them \$50 and kick him out.

This was said by--

My aunt's house.

Somebody in conversations.

When they were sitting shiva. Yeah, in the conversation. I was sitting on the porch, whatever. Such a thing stick with you, especially when you survive and you come to a free country, when you have all that mishpucha around you, and you hear talk like this. Not even a word of sorry what happened to our whole community of Jews. People are lucky. It was never touched here, the United States. I still say-- I won't say better, but we were entitled to some consideration.

Next, I got a job right away. I was lucky, unlucky. For \$25 working six days 12 hours with some luck. I didn't complain, in a butcher shop.

And eventually I just got laid off or fired from the job. Not because I wasn't good, because the GIs came in. And my boss took in a GI, he paid him the minimum, and the rest the government paid the subsidy. Where by me, after six months he had to give me a raise automatically. That was the law. So for a lousy \$5 he fired me.

And I still have a hard time. I've had to go start looking for a job. Till the day of today, that's the hardest thing for me. And that's why I went into business.

By then I had no [? breira. ?] I had to. Knowing my family-- I asked my aunt, where is the Penner. I know he has a pickle factory somewhere in downtown Pittsburgh. She gave me the address, and I arrived there. It was like, I don't know, deli pickle whatever.

The man employed over 100 people. I stayed and waited, came once, came twice. Finally, he took me in. And I ask him, I'm looking for a job. I don't care what.

Employ me. Give me something. I see outside he have a black man doing the sweeping. I can do the same thing. I'm not asking more. I'm asking \$25-- that's the minimum. I did not get a job.

That's why I have that sour taste in my mouth. I should forget, but those things, maybe I do forget, but they come back to you. You survive, you have the family-- distant family-- not even family, a Jew.