

Good afternoon. I'm Professor Bernard Weinstein of Kean College. I'm the director of Kean College Holocaust Testimonies program. We are affiliated with the Kean College Holocaust Resource Center, and the Holocaust Archive of the Sterling Library of Yale University. With me, is Professor Carole Shaffer-Koros who will be sharing the interview, and we are very pleased to welcome Mr. Hugo Princz who was born in Slovakia and is a survivor of the Holocaust who now lives in Highland Park, New Jersey. Mr. Princz, we would like to welcome you to our interview.

I would like to ask you a little bit about the place you came from, the country, and the town in which you were born, and in which you grew up.

It was a small town, a community, population, I would say, about 1,000. I went to school. All we had there is public schools. Besides a public school, it's customary, every Jewish family had Hebrew school every day after public school, which we had private. There was no school, but my father used to hire a private teacher. There was about 10 Jewish families, and everybody was orthodox, I would say. We observed. we lived quite a normal life. Country, Czechoslovakia, was democratic, it was very prosperous, especially in late '30s after the depression, I would say. '32 and '36 I remember as a child.

Besides my parents, who were hard-working people, but made a nice living. Everybody in our family, we come from a family of eight children. Everybody participated in the business. Everybody helped this, and we had no schooling. We all helped out in the business.

What business was your family in?

My dad had two general stores. One was managed by my older brother. It was in a town about two miles away. One general store was in the town where we lived, which was managed by my father and my brothers, and the whole family participated in that. Beside that, we had farmland, about 50 acres of land. We had a forest that had about 100 acre of forest pine trees, which was a very good income. We were selling that for lumber every couple of years, and so that thing would be [? timber. ?]

And besides, my father was involved in many other enterprises. He would go out and he would undertake anything. There was a lot of orchards. He had a very good business head on his shoulder, and anything he touched, he was very successful. He could go out and make an estimate of an orchard of 1,000 trees and come out very close and he could estimate how many apples and pears, how much food would be there and so on.

So you lived a comfortable life?

Very comfortable life.

Was there a fairly thriving Jewish community where you lived?

Well, everybody was hard-working. I would say yes. They were all involved in business, and in farming, and it was very close relations. Everybody was very observant, especially on the weekends. All businesses were closed and never had our businesses open, and get together, and it was social. We had a good social life besides that.

Were there any particular memories of your childhood, or your early years, that you remember or cherish?

Well, the closeness of our family. There was so much love, I could never picture me losing my parents. I remember we had an unfortunate accident, my oldest brother Ernest. We had this farm equipment, and his hand got caught in one of this equipment, ripped off his hand. The hospital was about 60 miles away, and by the time they took him to the hospital, he died. He bled to death, and this was a terrible tragedy. I can never forget. Took me years. I was very young that time, and I just couldn't forget it. It was so terrible a thing.

We had many friends, Jews and non-Jewish. We used to gather at all kinds of parties and so on.

Was there any feeling of anti-Semitism before the war?

Some. Very little. Some. Not until 1938, when our country tore away from Czechoslovakia and became autonomous. I guess it must have been my impression is the problem is Hitler to get rid of the Jews, and this is how Hitler and his government helped them establish the government of Slovakia.

What were the first signs that you, yourself saw of things beginning to change?

Oh, it was terrible. As soon as we became autonomous, the country, they weren't in power. A week or two weeks, already orders, new laws, came out against Jews. Started out with, first of all, if I remember correctly, no kosher meat was allowed. No slaughtering was allowed. And we had to wear Jewish stars. Every week or so, new strict orders would come out. Seemed like this was a high priority of the government, anti-Jewish discrimination and oppression of the Jews. This was on top of the priority.

Every time we pick up a paper, a delegation from the Slovakian government would be going to Germany. Us reading that, I would know. We predicted what they are up to. Businesses were taken away gradually. They took one store away from my brother, and then they took our other store away. We had people working. Nobody was allowed to work for us. On the farm equipment, and the threshing machines, we had men working on a farm. He wasn't allowed to do it. We took over the labor. We did the farming. We did the harvesting the crop, everything. We did as good a job as anybody in the community, but that did not mean nothing.

The impression was, after this whole thing started, Jews are only good for business, speculators. This was injected. This was constant propaganda. Every time you turn on the radio, we could hear propaganda against the Jews. Little by little, we lost friends in the community. Very few people would talk to us anymore. They were afraid to associate, even the ones who were really good friends of ours.

Did the change in attitude come as a shock to you and to your family?

Oh, terrible. It was a terrible shock, terrible shock. I just couldn't believe it, how human beings can turn against you for no reason at all, just because I'm Jewish. We worked as hard as anybody in the community. For my father, to work 20 hours a day was nothing. Nights. As a kid, I was maybe 10, 12 years old, I would participate, help out in the business. I would get up the farm equipment, would start work very early in the morning. For me to get up 3, 4 o'clock in the morning, 2 o'clock in the morning.

And the latest year they start threatening us. They're going to burn the those equipment down. So I used to sleep right at that thing, guard those equipment.

Was your was your father's business taken over?

Yes, all the business was taken over. This was taken over a couple of months after our other store was taken over.

By Slovaks?

By the people in the community who joined that group, they call it Hlinkova garda. Hlinkova did the original movement that tried to establish Slovakia, a government of Slovakia. They didn't want to be connected with Czechoslovakia. They kept insisting that the Czechs have taken over all the good jobs, police, and high offices, and this priority. And he wasn't alive at that time, but he was the one. We always know that he was anti-Semitic. In the midst of all this movement, he always used to, even while in Czechoslovakia was still existing, he always used to use anti-Semitic slogans and all those things. But he was quiet until the government was established in 1938.

So outsiders did not come in to impose these changes? That were carried out by people who were already there.

Carried out by the people in the community. All the dirty work was done in the community.

Was there any form of occupation by German troops or by German soldiers?

No, not to my knowledge. I've never seen one German soldier, Wehrmacht or SS, in any part of Slovakia. The only time I heard about them being in Slovakia, only when they were attacking Poland. They had to go through part of Slovakia. This is the only time. But all during that time, I had never seen a SS or a German soldier present.

When did you become personally aware that you were really in danger?

Right in the beginning. My father was a very brilliant person. He studied a lot, and he read the book, Mein Kampf, and he predicted that. It's going to happen. He was telling people, the Jewish people, be aware. Right away, as soon as everything started, my father was an American citizen. He was here in this country. In 1900, at the turn of the century, he became an American citizen. Returned to Czechoslovakia, and he always had intentions coming back to the United States.

My grandfather was ailing. He was in the 80s. He died when he was 95 years old, and he died in 1939, and this was one of the main reasons that he couldn't come to this country. How can you leave a person like this. You can't take him along with you. When all this trouble started, my father made an application to the American embassy in Prague for a passport. This was in 1938. Correspondence. As a young kid, I would sit outside for days and wait for the mailman for some good news. We might get some good reply.

And there was correspondence, all kinds of questions back and forth, but nothing concrete, no promises that you're going to get your passport within six months, or a year, or 10 months, nothing. 1939, a couple of weeks, I think, before Czechoslovakia was occupied, American government just left Czechoslovakia without even a notice to us. Look, Mr. Princz, get the heck out of here. Germany is going to occupy Czechoslovakia. Nothing whatsoever. They just left.

Three months or four months later we get a letter from the American Embassy in Budapest, which is Hungary. Even while the embassy was still there, I remember an incident. A forest ranger was shot. It was in that area. Not far where I lived. The police came, and from each family, they took one member to jail. Rumors were that every 10th person would be shot. They blamed it, naturally, first of all, they blamed it on Jewish people, that Jews killed him.

From our family's part of it, we told them we were American citizens. The police came, they took me and they took my brother. We were the only one of my family. That's how anti-Semitic, how bigoted, the police were in our town. My father dispatched a telegram to the American embassy, never, never heard anything. That's why an American ambassador is in a country, to help American citizens. What was he there for? Because one word, immunity, they would have released us, but never did he do anything, and this was very disgusting.

Right from the beginning, I couldn't figure out what was going on. To me, it seemed like secret orders came from Washington. Please do not help out. The Americans, as long as they're Jew, don't give a damn and help them out. This is my impression. I'm still convinced that this is what it was during the Roosevelt administration. I know for a fact, quotas does not affect American citizen, quotas that each country has. I don't know how many people were allowed from Czechoslovakia. They did not fill the quotas.

They did not even have according to quotas they should allow. There was a quota, for example, 1,000 people or 500 people, and anybody applied, they should allow 500 people to immigrate. I'm not thinking as an American citizen. I should be the first one. I should be allowed, but the quotas were never filled.

So there was a sense, really, of betrayal.

Oh, betrayal, definitely betrayal. Definitely betrayal. The Roosevelt administration, they weren't that naive they didn't know what was going on. I'm sure American ambassador informed them, that's what, told them what was going on in Slovakia and part of Czechoslovakia, but nothing, nothing whatsoever. I don't know how could they be so reluctant to give us a piece of paper even, if we didn't have a chance to leave the country, to have the paper, because my father, somehow, he lost his citizenship paper.

In the First World War, he was drafted, and that time, there was no training, basic training. They drafted you, and within a couple of days, you were lined up to go in the front. And my father was lined up to go, and he showed them this American citizenship, he surrendered the paper, he never got it back. They took him out of the lineup. I don't how. I remember, out of, maybe, 1,000 people, he was the only one who was called out and sent home, because he was an American citizen. That's where he misplaced it. He asked for the paper. He never got his citizenship paper back.

Were there any other people in your father's position who had been in the United States and had American citizenship.

I had an uncle, but he lived in Hungary. I don't know whether he tried to do anything. The relationship between Slovakia and Hungary was unbearable. There was very constant border incidents.

Animosity.

Animosity, terrible animosity, constant skirmishes. My father, after the American embassy took over in Budapest, several months later, they ask him to come to Hungary. So my father wrote back, it's hard. He says, I don't care. You must appear. If he would send him a piece of paper to protect him, he would come to Hungary. No, this is your business. You try to find your way here. And my older brother, with the three of us, were on a passport. My older brother, Arthur, I, and my father, we were going to go with the 3 of us, and we were going to bring the rest of the family up.

I was under 21. I didn't have to appear at the embassy. My father actually risked his life. If he would have been caught, he would have been jailed. Who knows what they would have done, especially as a Jew from Slovakia. He hired a special guide, and they took him, I think it was hundreds of miles all the way to the capital city of Hungary, Budapest. He appeared there, and then went to ceremony where he had to swear or something for a new passport. I don't know what the procedure was.

That time, while he was there, my father asked the American embassy, can I have my passport soon? They said, well, we'll let you know. I don't know how many months, about three or four months. Everything was dragging out. Three, four months later, we received a notice. State Department approved your passport, but you cannot receive your passport until you have ship tickets. Can you imagine? This is another thing. First of all, at that time already, this was in 1941, 2/3 of Europe was occupied. How can a person, a Jewish person especially, get a transit visa?

So it goes to show you, this was all reluctance of helping their own American citizen. This country used to send the Marines, years ago, used to send the Marines for one American citizen. Here, we are talking about nothing. They wouldn't lift a finger. They wouldn't give us a measly piece of paper just to protect our life. Maybe, by chance, with an American passport, I could escape to Hungary, or escape to any other country. As long as they see you with that, worst thing could have happened, they would have interned us in Hungary. That's what they did with American citizens, but nothing.

Take a person like Wallenberg, gave out thousands of papers, false papers, to save lives. Here our own embassy, my own embassy, American embassy, wouldn't help my family, and I lost every one in my family.

So none of you had papers at that point when you said that the police came?

No, we had some correspondence.

The police came and took your brother.

When the police came, we showed it to them. They took it and ripped it up. The paper was showing that we were Americans, but in the paper, they didn't even make any attempt to read the paper. It was black and white that we are American citizens, especially in that letter where the American passport was approved. The American embassy does not give a passport just to anybody.

What happened after you and your brother were taken away?

In 1942? Well, the whole family.

You said, in revenge for the death of a forest ranger, that they came and--

Oh, yeah. I'm sorry. I never finished the story.

Yes.

We were in jail for about, I would say, almost a month. I live under that fear, any day they're going to take us out and line us up. They found out some drunken derelict admitted that he shot, to our luck.

Did they then release all of the hostages?

They released everybody, yes.

Could you talk a little bit about any incidents you can remember of persecution, daily persecution, that might have been encountered by you, or by members of your family, or close friends.

There was constant. My older brother, who was taking care of business, he was a very brilliant man, and he knew every policeman in the town. Because in my town, there was no police headquarter. Police headquarters was in the other town where we had the business. But when this establishment of Slovakian government, police became very, very anti-Semitic. I heard, as I was a young kid, several times they took him and they beat him.

I had a sister in Hungary. The name of the town was Holloko and we made arrangement that we might meet her on the border. So we went to the border. I was there, and this brother of mine came, and he went inside. This is the border patrol. Never met them, never seen them. Next thing I hear, they're beating him up. He came out beaten up just because he wanted to meet his sister. She just had a baby, her first baby. We're going to meet her and talk to her. I mean this is so disturbing.

We had, I don't know how many times, every time that fascist group, they call it Hlinkova garda, would have a meeting, on the way back from the meeting, either our window would be busted, or my next door neighbor, or any one of the Jewish families. We report it to the police, there's nothing done. They knew exactly who did it, and nothing was done.

Were these organized outbursts, or were they drunk, or what?

No, I don't think they were drunk. They just came from a meeting.

They knew precisely what they wanted to do.

The whole meeting was taking place, probably, what are we going to do with the Jews, probably planning. It was anti-Semitic. Our own priest-- Our town was, I would say, 95% Catholic. The priest in town, the sermons every Sunday were taken up half the time talking against Jews. It is unbelievable. This is the kind of people. A priest says something, well, this is holy. Because we had a couple people to discreetly told us the sermon that the priest had this Sunday.

But the whole town would be empty. Everybody's in church. That's how religious those people were. This is religious bigots, I call them. How can you be religious and be anti-human. Take people and kick them out of their home. This is people that go to church, run to church, rain or shine, rain or shine. You couldn't see a person if you came Sunday morning. Everybody was in church. That's how holy those people were.

When it came to ship the Jews, there's one policeman came, one policeman, and about 40, this fascist group, from my town, my friends who went to school, my brother's friends, and they go out of the house. They gave us, I don't know, I think a half hour, or an hour, to pack 40 pounds per person. They got out of that house. God forbid if you wanted to escape. There was like a human chain.

Did they come during the day or at night?

Came during broad daylight. The policeman came on a bike. He already had everything prearranged, but at least 40 of those fascists waited for him.

Did they have aktions, or did they just come to, let's say, someone's home and take that person?

No, they came to our family and says everybody has to leave, everybody has to leave.

Did they tell you where you were going?

No, no, no, nothing. They took us to the next town. We walked. There, I saw incidents. I had my uncle which lived also in another town. There's one of the policemen, I understand, I came back after the war, I found out that he got killed. Because if I would have ever met him, I don't know, his life would have been worth \$0.10. I don't care. There is another policeman, as a matter of fact, the one who came with 30, 40 fascists. He was still on the police force.

I went to the chief police. There was no fear, especially after liberation. I said, if that man is here, I'm going to blow up that whole headquarters. I said, if that man is not transferred, get the hell out. I don't want to see his face around. Seven days, I understand, they transferred him. And I approached him. I grabbed him by his neck, and said, how dare you. You're still holding a job in this administration.

How old were you at the time that they came?

Liberation?

No, when they came to take everyone from the town.

I was about 18.

Were you in the middle of the family? You had younger and older brothers and sisters?

I had a younger brother. It's always this younger brother. I've had so many nightmares about him. It is a horrible thing. When I came from this first camp, Lublin to Auschwitz, I was there several days, and I pass by a barrack. It supposed to be a hospital. A pig stall are cleaner than this. People were rotting. They weren't taken, they were just throwing you in there. I see a face, and I recognize him right away, just skin and bone, my young brother. He was about 14 or 15.

I broke down so many times. I had so many horrible nightmares. He was a kid that age, and I can't help him. I used to give him, for about two or three days, I was giving him a liquid. He couldn't eat. His mouth was dry, so I would give him the miserable portion that I got though. Coffee, in the morning, or tea without sugar. So every morning, as soon as I get it, I would run over and give it to him, and I was thirsty, but this is a horrible experience which I can never forget. I still have nightmares about it, at times.

This was this was in Lublin or Auschwitz?

This was in Auschwitz. We all went to Lublin. They all took us to Lublin first.

Yeah.

We get back to the-- when they took us, they rounded us up. They loaded us up, next day, on a train, and they send us. It's all being done, repeated again, by the Slovakian fascist under the leadership of Mr. President Tiso, who was the highest bishop of Slovakia, appointed by Pope Pius XII, and he did all those things. This was under his leadership. I'm sure Rome knew about it, what was going on. I'm sure they had-- this was only several hundred miles, Italy from Slovakia, and I'm sure he could have stopped them. The Pope, or any cardinal in Rome, would have said, how dare you, as a Catholic bishop, do things like this.

I mean, Catholic religion does not teach to do things like this, I'm sure. Even Jesus Christ they are believing, and then they preach brotherhood. How can a person like this be in charge of this, see something like this. So they took us. We traveled about 24 hours, or 48 hours-- I don't remember exactly-- to the Polish border. There, SS took over, handed us over. The fascists went back. The SS took over.

That was the first time you saw the SS?

And this is the first time I saw the SS.

What was your first impression there?

Terrible. It was a whole [? other ?] [? person. ?] I could see, because the fascists were bad, and they used to beat us up, but no comparison what they did. Just as soon as they took over, you could see the horrible beatings and all this, and all kinds of restrictions. On the train, you couldn't even stand by the door and peak out. This is how terrible, and then we traveled--

At this time, your family was still together.

We were still together. We traveled several days until we arrived at town Lublin. Orders came. Everybody from age 18 to 35-- I don't remember-- 18 to 35 or 40, step out, and we stepped out. My parents insisted, the little belongings that we had, insisted we should take most of the stuff. And I had such a hard feeling after that, because my understanding was they went to Treblinka, which was one of the-- the man is being tried, now, in Israel, this Ivan the Terrible.

Yes.

Which was not too far. As a matter of fact, we had a group of workers go in to that town, and we got letters from my parents, and we found out that all the belongings that they had, they left with them. Our belongings, as soon as we got to the camp, Lublin, they took everything away. So you can imagine what a hard feeling we had. They insisted we should take most of the stuff. They would have had, at least, some extra food for several days. And, I don't know, for such a long time, I felt so bad that we took most of their belongings, the food and stuff, but they could have enjoyed it. And that was the last we seen our parents.

Where did you go from there? In Lublin, my two brothers were there, but we were all separated. I never seen them until I saw my brother, my younger brother, into this horrible condition. My older brother also followed. I heard from some of my friends he had a very good job. He was in Auschwitz. I was in Birkenau at the time. He luckily got a job. They call it Canada where they, that group of people, they had about 100 people in that group. They used to take care of all the packages.

When transport used to come, they take care, sort out food, and all this thing. And this was one of the best jobs in the camp, because you had enough food. The SS didn't watch you. There was a lot of food there. One day, it's like I mentioned one time, those kapos, if they were short a man, they would grab from other groups. When he was in that group, he wasn't allowed to do. He grabbed him. This was a group that went to Buna Werke, worked for IG Farben. He worked there one day and he hurt his foot, this is my oldest brother, and he hurt his foot, and next he stayed behind. He couldn't go to work. That was the last day. They came, and they had a selection. They took them to the crematorium.

What was happening to you in the meantime?

Meantime, I was working back and forth. I was also fortunate. A civilian, German civilian, got an idea to select about 100 young men to teach them bricklaying. I always volunteered, and I was lucky. Not all every volunteer got in it, but several hundred us. Everybody wanted to get in. I was lucky. I was selected. I was in that thing for about seven or eight months, and I would say this was like a life saver. All we did, it's very unusual, among what was going on in Auschwitz and in Birkenau, to select 100 people. If you ask any survivor today, if you were either in that-- those were the two best jobs, the Canada that I was talking before, and this maurerschule, the bricklayer school.

All we did, all day long, was sit in a class, and hardest job was, every morning, we would have one hour calisthenics. They wanted to breed healthy bricklayer's. One hour calisthenics, this was the hardest thing. Otherwise, also the civilian would go to the kitchen and he would order extra food for us. And this, I would say, saved my life at that time. I went back after this. I went back to work for a couple of months. Again, they selected to Buna. All of a sudden, after all the schooling, they dissolved it. I don't understand that whole thing.

We went a couple of times out on buildings. We were alongside civilian, they were bricklaying, and I was helping out. This was only on several occasions, and then the whole thing was dissolved, the whole thing, the whole school.

What were you building?

Well, Auschwitz was a tall, two, three story building, and they always used to do a lot of building, a lot of fixing up. Some buildings were collapsing, and they would have to do repairs, or new buildings they were putting up. After this, I went to work to Buna. They transferred me to Buna. I worked there for a couple of months, IG Farben, which wasn't bad. First of all, the living conditions were better. The food was a little better. I worked on road construction and building construction. As long as I wasn't beaten up or so on, I could work, didn't bother me. I was always used to hard work.

Did they give you food?

They gave us food, a little better than Auschwitz, but nothing exceptional. You would see, every once in a while, a potato or so on. In Auschwitz or Birkenau, I never seen, in the soup that they gave us, never a potato or anything. Our whole portion was, you would get a, I would say, a quart soup in the evening, hot soup. The only good thing was it was hot, especially in the winter, it warmed you up. And they would give you, maybe, a pound of bread if you were lucky. The way they were cutting it up, sometimes you got half a pound. And a slice of bologna, thin slice of bologna, or a slice of cheese. This was supposed to last you for 24 hours.

The next morning, all you would get is coffee or tea. Never any sugar, just bitter coffee or bitter tea. But I was fortunate. I had a friend in a kitchen or in other positions where they would get some extra food. That's the only way. Otherwise, you just couldn't exist.

Wasn't it dangerous for the people in the kitchen to do that?

They were. It was dangerous. I got, once, 25 lashes. I went to the kitchen. I was so hungry. Sometimes they would throw out the potato peels after they peel the potatoes. So I was picking up potato peels from the ground, and one of the prisoners, he was, I think he was from Poland, Polish, not Jewish, and some of them had positions because they were there before us. Some of them were terrible. They did a lot of dirty work for the Germans.

Were they kapos?

Kapos, you know. But they were-- So they caught me for nothing, for picking up potato peels from the dirty ground. Took me, I got 25 lashes. I have a sore, I don't know for how many days. I don't know how I survived that.

What were you working on for Farben, what kinds of jobs?

IG Farben?

Yes.

I worked construction. They were still building barracks, because this was right in the beginning, in end of '42, beginning '43, because they were planning on bringing in more workers. So they were putting up new buildings. They were prefabricated barracks. And then, I was working on-- They used to have clean up to the camp. They had a wagon, human beings, no horses are pulling it. We used to push it around, but it wasn't one of the worst jobs, honestly. SS

would come around, and they started beating us. You're walking too slow. You're pushing that wagon to slow, and then beat the heck out of you, but otherwise it wasn't that bad. It was no comparison.

Birkenau was the worst. In 1942, you seen, in my area, tons, and tons, and tons. I used to see this fellow from one day, next day I would see another one. Within a month or two, I didn't see nobody. There was nobody. There wasn't one person. You could take 10 communities like mine, there wasn't one person that came back alive in my area. Like we say, like Middlesex County, they call it okres Trebisov. So a county, this was called in Slovakian, but not, as far as I can remember, I didn't see one person alive in, I don't know how many, communities.

Yeah. What experience did you have during the war, experiences that you would consider to be the worst, or the hardest to bare, the hardest to talk about?

You mean while in camp?

While in camps, yes.

Well, that incident with my brother was one of my horrible things. My worst experience. The first day, when we arrived from Lublin, Lublin was a new camp, new buildings. Birkenau, when I arrived from Lublin, was a disaster. It was terrible. No roads, muddier than a rainy day. You would walk in a thing. Then, my first job was, as soon as I arrive, within an hour's time, we were collecting bodies from every building in the camp and stacking them in one of the buildings, maybe, five city blocks long tents. I don't know. I don't remember exactly. Approximately.

These bodies have been gassed, or--

No, they died from beating up. If you stood in line for food, for a miserable quart soup, and that half pound or a pound of bread with a slice of bologna, and God forbid you turned around and you went back second line. That was the end of you. They would grab you, hit you in the back, behind your ear, and you were dead. This was happening, I don't know how many. Some people have better appetites than other, and what was a little soup? They finished it in no time, and they wanted some more, but this was the end of you.

This was done, most of the time, they would be those Polish prisoners, prisoners like us, but they had position. Later on, there was some Jewish prisoners who got those type of positions too, and they were also just as bad. So this was one of my horrible experiences. At one time, I was also working on building the crematories, and I knew what they were doing. Luckily, I learned that I had a friend of mine who had a good position with the kapo. He gave me a job.

While on a job, people were just-- they were just like in daze. They would just walk away, and they had SS, I don't know how many lines they would have guarding. As soon as they would pass by, they would shoot them, and this was getting so bad. They were walking. So they established a human guard from us. They would pick out about 50 people, and they make a circle. Every 50 yards, a man would stand. I would stand. I got one of those jobs, which was very easy. I was standing all day long, watching. If anybody would come to try to get through that line, we would stop them.

Also, at that time, luckily I had developed bad case of typhoid, diarrhea. I mean, this is what I was told by a friend of mine, a doctor. I didn't know what typhoid was, but I was lucky. If I would have been on any kind of job assignment, I couldn't have done it. I was so emaciated looking. I must have lost 20 pounds. So this friend of mine, who was friendly with this kapo, he had a chance of fire. You couldn't start a fire. To start a fire, and take a bread, or toast it, my goodness. They would come and kill you for that, the SS.

So this friend of mine, had a chance of doing it. Because he was friendly with the kapo, he could have a fire, and he toasted bread. Toasted, burned bread is supposed to be good for diarrhea, and somehow this saved my life. This was a horrible experience. And plus, I was watching the building of the crematory, and I knew what the consequences will be, what they had in mind, because, secretly, even though we didn't have newspapers, but some news popped out from here and there.

Some SS would say something, not to [? their ?] one I haven't come across one good one. I tell you, honestly. I was in

how many camps, eight or nine camps. I haven't come across one decent guard, SS, or even Wehrmacht. And I was watching the way the building they were building. First of all, there was a big gigantic building [? cellar, ?] and I've seen them putting up showers, just like on a shower head, during the whole thing. This was supposed to be the place. Nobody knew about it, what they were planning.

This was supposed to be the first time where they would put the people in, when the transport would arrive. They would tell them to take their clothes off in one room, and the other room they had the shower. They looked there, people didn't know what was going on. They figured this is going to be shower. This is a big gigantic building. In the center was an opening, and this is where they would drop the cyanide. As soon they fill up that room, they jammed them in. I don't know. It depends how many people they had, but sometimes they would jam them in by the thousands, maybe 1,000 people.

And how many times they used to find, I understand, they used to find people still alive. It didn't make any difference. They would still put them. Friend of mine used to work. They used to call it the Sonderkommando. This was after he was finished. From that building, they had tracks built, and then an elevator would go up on a second floor, and over there on the second floor were-- I don't remember exactly-- but they were the length of the building. I would say two city blocks long.

There were ovens lined up all the way down, and they would just, on those tracks, this was going on day and night. Tracks up and down, and they would just throw them right in the ovens. I don't know how long it would take to disintegrate them. I knew this is what they were building, and this is what's going to happen, and our premonition was right, and this is what they were doing. And me working there on a side like this. Who knows, my sister, or my brother would wind up, who escaped to Hungary, it could be one of them.

My sister did wind up in one of them. She escaped from Slovakia twice. She was thrown back. As soon as the Hungarians would catch you, you didn't have proper papers, you were from Slovakia, they would throw you right back across the border. So first time when she was thrown back across the border, I had this friend of ours, they was a distant cousin. He knew the border police. Well, one of them was still a friend of his, and he notified us, and we send money and they were able to send her back again. Several months later, I understand that she was caught again. But I had an older brother who was hiding out. He went to Hungary about the same time. He was hiding out until 1945. I would say until about a month before the Russians came into capital city of Budapest.

Where was he hiding?

Well, he had papers. He had papers. There was a Jewish organization, some other paper. Some people were making them, selling them.

Forged.

He would get forged paper from somebody that is from Hungary. But he was so shrewd. He knew every town. Several people came, transports came, from Hungary in the later years. And they were telling me, your brother was so shrewd. He knew every city. He helped me out how many times, because police was constantly check up, and he would know every street and he would somehow escape. About a month before the Russians came, the time when Wallenberg was hiding out thousands of people.

That time, Hungary was occupied. The fortunate thing for the Hungarian Jews was, in spite of it, their leader, Horthy, he was anti-Semitic. He was able to refuse the Jews until 1944. Can you imagine?

Yes.

Where our president, who was the highest bishop of Slovakia, didn't give a damn about it. Here's a man who wasn't a clergy, he was just a plain man. He refused the Germans. The deportation did not start until 1944 when Germany occupied Hungary.

Yes.

And my brother, one month before that whole deportation started, he was hiding out. As a matter of fact, this friend of mine, who is in Canada, I had a friend, also very close. I never knew that he had a brother who knew my brother. They were hiding out in Budapest. So after the liberation, I happened to meet this fellow, and he says he knew my brother well. He says he went to the American embassy. He went to the Swiss embassy. They never would give him a piece of paper. Can you imagine?

They wouldn't help him out. If he would have had any kind of paper proving that he was an American citizen, or the Swiss embassy later on who represented the American interest, never. He was hiding out in one of those buildings that Wallenberg established, but they came in broad daylight and they dragged hundreds of people. They were shooting them right on the river, Danube. They were dropping them right in the river. This is one month before. My high hopes were that he's the only one alive.

Another thing I would like to emphasize, this is true fact. I read about this. This is not fiction. The Red Cross, while this horrible thing was going on, the Red Cross was asked by Jewish organizations, please send about 100 volunteers so they don't do those horrible things. If they see Red Cross, people with armbands, those Hungarian fascists wouldn't do those things. The Red Cross refused to do. They would have done it, my brother could have been alive. They wouldn't have done things like this in broad daylight, shooting people left and right.

I mean this is the most disturbing thing.

When you see people who have the capacity and the resources to help, and don't help.

How much effort would it have been for the Red Cross to take 50 or 100 people and let them walk around in the capital city.

As neutral observers.

That means nobody gave a damn, including Tiso, the highest bishop, President Roosevelt and his administration. My thing is that they knew about it, and they didn't give a damn. It looks like they gave Hitler the green light. Go ahead, do whatever you want. We don't give a damn. You didn't see what I hear about. Even the press had any kind of release, it was on a fourth, fifth page, maybe two or three inches. Things like this should have been on a headline. The American people would have done something. They would have forced the government to do something.

We're being signaled to take a break now. We will resume in a few moments with the continuation of Mr. Princz's testimony. You had a question that you wanted to ask.