

We are continuing our discussion with Mr. Hugo Princz, a Holocaust survivor who now lives in Highland Park.

Mr. Princz, you mentioned that when you were on construction details that one of the things you were building was a crematorium and that people suspected what the purpose of this building was. Was there any effort on the part of the workers to sabotage the projects they were building?

Oh, yeah. We were talking about it. We had meetings, but however the decision came, the final decision was better enough to leave it because that would have been the end of us and the end of-- they would have destroyed the-- one person who would do something wrong, they would take 100 or 500 people or 1,000 people. It was nothing for them to take and clean out half the camp because they could always get another transport to get more people in there.

We were only figures. We were never called by name. We were only numbers. In two and a half years, I was never called Hugo or Princz. Always 36,707, which was my number. This wasn't under any kind of control.

36,707. This is how I answered. I didn't answer, so-- and so it would have been-- I don't know it would have been the right thing to do, sacrifice, but I wouldn't have been alive today to tell them the story, to be an eyewitness to those horrible experiences which the world must know, must hear about it. And we were thinking about it very, very often, but I know-- first of all, escape. There's so many people try to escape.

From 1942 until I left Auschwitz at Birkenau, there wasn't one person. This is a kind of tight control they had over those camps. Many, many people made attempts, and nobody survived one. So we had all kinds of things in mind, but we just gave up the idea, you know, because--

What kept you going from day to day?

I don't know. Really, if I think back, I can't understand. You see, I used to go at night. We had the latrines there, the bathrooms. You had to walk to the bathroom maybe a quarter mile sometimes. It depends where the barracks were. OK, there's only one big camp.

On the way, if you had to go to the bathroom, I would walk down and I would see left and right people going to those electrical wires and killing themselves. And sometimes I envy those people, that they had the courage to do it. So I think to myself, what kind of sense does it make to live this kind of thing in life that we had no hopes whatsoever? Like I said before, Hitler wouldn't be that stupid to let us live through and tell the world what transpired here.

So this was going on every night. You could hear. Even though you got killed by the electric-- you know those?-- The SS on top would still shoot you, maybe give you one, two, or three bullets. I'll never forget. We're talking about foreign nationals helping Hitler.

My first camp was Lublin. The SS was in charge of the whole camp, but the only guards who were guarding the camp were Lithuanian, and they were the most horrible beasts that I have ever experienced. They used to have bread in their hands. The guard would walk down from his tower. He says, come on, I'll give you a piece of bread, and soon as the guy came three, five feet near him, he would shoot him.

I've seen so many instances. We're not talking about German. This is Lithuanian. I have a town right next to me, South River, where I heard this gentleman John Loftus, who used to be a prosecutor in the Justice Department. And he stumbled on so many evidences that was all covered up, confidential. Can you imagine bringing those killers, traitors? Some of them are responsible for thousands of lives.

Bring people like this to our wonderful country and give them haven? And put those kind of files under confidential? I mean, this is the most disgusting. How can a democracy allow this thing? How can you allow something like this covered up?

This man stumbled up, and he-- from disgust with Mr. John Loftus, he quit from disgust. I heard that he went one night-

- he was afraid to go at daytime. He had a record of many of those collaborators, those beast Lithuanians and Ukrainians. He had names, and he compared them to that. He went with a flashlight and he looked some.

Some of them are dead, and he compared their names to those files, Justice Department confidential files. He speaks out. He's speaking constantly. He goes around speaking about this. He wrote several books.

I understand they were threatening his life, and all those things, but it is a sad story that something like this would-- I don't know who brought them in. They say the CIA was involved in that, secretly. If they're going to get information from-- the excuse was they were getting information on the communists. What information is worth it? What information is worth to cover up for murderers?

We have here a revolutionary like that Williams and the other fellow, Lamonica, we spent millions of dollars. This is a person for a trial. Here with months and months we try people like this because it's a democracy. Here we take him in with not even a trial? We just put it in a confidential file and forget about it?

It must have been terribly frustrating to know this and to live with it every day, but let me ask you a different kind of question for a moment.

Yes.

What do you think enabled you to survive? I know this is a question that every person ponders who--

Those horrible things?

Yes.

Well, first of all, I was used to hard work, hard labor.

Mhm.

As I said in the beginning, I come from a fairly well-to-do, but we were never ashamed to work, hard work, whether to go cut lumber, whether to go on a farm and harvest, whether to go out and spend 20 hours a day. It was nothing. In winter in the 10 below, 20 below zero weather, I would go out in the snow and go to the forest and cut down wood. So I was used to hard work.

Secondly, I always was lucky. I had a friend here. I did the same thing. While I was in camp, always had somebody in certain positions that was they did it illegal. This guy would get extra bread or extra soup. They would help me out because it was impossible to survive on the portion that they gave.

I was working in Warsaw when I was in camp there. I was working as a Postenturmerreiniger. I was cleaning the booths where the guards stood, and I had lots of food where they used to eat breakfast and lunch there, although I never had a friendly conversation.

This is another thing. I was in so many camps here. I was seen, and they used to change around. So in the 10 months that I was there, I went through several hundred different people. Never would one man come across and have a friendly conv-- never once.

So you can have the food, what was left. This was-- it's like throwing it to-- I was going to throw out in a garbage anyhow. And I had a lot of food, and they didn't care because I would take it in the camp and I would give it to my friends and help out. And next time when they would have a position, they would help me out. And any time there was a transport going any place, I was always volunteering.

Mhm.

I always wanted to get from-- and I was fortunate every time I volunteered. Even going to work to IG Farben was no picnic. It was hell, but it was 100% better than in Birkenau-Auschwitz.

Mhm.

You know, one place to another.

Yes. Did you think that it would ever end?

Uh, no. I don't know. I didn't have especially-- we didn't-- you mean the end of the war, or are you talking the--

The end of the ordeal or the end of the war.

Well, we had some hopes. But like I said before, I never had any hope that they're going to let us out, that they're not going to destroy us. As I told you, up until the last minute, our life wasn't worth \$0.10. In the last day-- I don't know. Did I say that on the camera?

No, you didn't say it on the camera, but--

No, this was behind the scenes.

Yes.

I just want to give you an instance. This is 24 hours, 15 hours before liberation by the American troops. We were in a camp. First of all, we were in the camp Waldlager. We were building-- there was an underground airplane factory, and we were pouring concrete to protect that underground factory from air attacks. This was I don't know how many hundreds of feet high.

This was day and night, 24 hours those machines were going. People were dying left and right because you had to work eight to 10 hours loading cement in those machines, and this was going on continuously. I also--

You were in Germany at this time?

I was in Germany. This was in Waldlager. This was not far from Minga. This was also a big company that was-- I have the name somewhere-- that was working on it. Anyhow, I landed on that job only one time. If I would have worked on that job two or three days, I would have been done. I mean, I don't know if I could have survived it.

Mhm.

I landed a very easy job. I was working in a-- my friend was in charge of the carpenter shop, and he took me in, and this is what saved my life in that time. While the American troops-- this was around 1945 in April. One day, orders came-- everybody march out. They loaded us. They took us out of the camp, loaded us up in cattle cars, and every night we could hear-- and rumors were that they'd taken us to the Austrian Alps near the border near the Alps, and they're going to shoot us. Everybody will be killed there, which definitely was the plan.

Mhm.

This was discovered after liberation, that this was the plan. Orders came from Berlin, and every night people knew what was going to happen, so people tried to escape. Several-- I don't know how many-- of my friends got killed, because they tried. I'm going to die anyhow, so might as well try. I could hear all night long screaming because they were beating him up or because they trying-- this was only a few days, maybe four or five days before liberation.

We arrived at the station named Poing. A few days later. We rode back and forth. Sometimes we would stop. I guess it looked like they cannot aim. Where they wanted to take us, they couldn't get through, so we stopped at a station named

Poing. And we are there for several hours. Suddenly, the station master comes out and says you are free.

Everybody got out of the car. We were running. We didn't know where we were. One man, east. One man, west. Suddenly, after a short period of time, I see German police on horseback from every side coming and beating us up.

Where the hell are you going? Because they thought we were escaping. Beat the hell out of us. I got hit on the back with a big stick. I felt it for years and years, and I think I still have scars from that.

And we got back on the train, and the next morning this happened. Can you imagine? Happened but maybe 15 or 20 hours before liberation. This is the kind of-- we're talking about animals. People, human beings, knowing that American troops, and I'm sure every one of them knew-- they were born that stupid-- about the American troops must be around the corner. And this is what they did to us.

So my life wasn't worth \$0.10 up until the last minute. The next morning, we woke up, and American troops-- and this was the town of [PLACE NAME] This is where we were liberated.

What was your first day of liberation like?

Oh! There was an officer. I don't know if he was-- somebody told me he was Jewish. I don't know whether he was Jewish or not, but we showed him. He's a lot of corpses in those trains after that beating because we had to take-- we really got beaten up, and we had to take him. So he got very disturbed.

He says, you go ahead. You have a good time. Do whatever you want, but 24 hours. That's all, but I don't want to hear any killing. So we want to-- we went wild first. We got a good meal. Everybody stood in line with the American soldiers, you know, were giving food.

We got filled our stomach, but they warned us please don't overdo it because a lot of people ate too much and they died from--

Their stomachs burst.

--from overeating. And we had a 24 hours we went wild, eating a ton. And we asked around who were the SS. We went to several places. One place we went to, we opened up the garage. We found out that the son is a SS. I don't know whether he was.

He had a brand new car, several of them. SS troops, they sent-- I don't know whether he got them or they sent them back from something. Brand new car. We took those cars out, and by the time the end of the day, I don't think that car was worth much.

First of all, we rode around, but we destroyed property. We were like animals coming out.

Were the SS by this time under arrest, or--

They were all under arrest, yes, and a lot of them escaped, but they caught quite a few of them. Matter of fact, I was doing some interpreting for the American troops.

Yeah.

But we took over the mayor's headquarters. This is his home, and he told us please do whatever you want . He gave us a kitchen. He lived in the house, too, but we took-- there was about 10 of us. He had a big mansion, and we took over his house, and we were having a good time cooking.

There was no meat around. I'll never forget. Every time I see potato latkes-- that's the only thing I could eat, just potatoes, so we were frying potato latkes for I don't know how many days.

Several days later, those troops marched out, and a different regiment came too. Don't you think that beast went to complain to the, I don't know, one of the high officers? And other troops came in. That we did this, we did this.

I don't know what could we have taken. You know, maybe a watch or something. What did they mean?

Mhm.

Well, we took him aside and we beat the hell out of him.

This was the mayor?

I mean, how dare-- I mean, we really were fair. We didn't destroy his place. Somebody might have-- if we didn't have a watch, maybe I took a watch or something. What was his name?

So he got his share, so this is the kind of-- I was just like an animal. Even when I came to the American embassy when I got home, and I saw the ambassador in Prague, and he was very polite. I told him the story. I said to him, you're lucky you're not the ambassador that was in Budapest because I don't think I would have-- his life would have been worth \$0.10, and this is how mad I was, how pissed off I was at him.

Did you try at all to get back to Silvas in Slovakia?

Yeah. Where I stayed in the displaced camp, there was-- it was called Feldafing. It used to be SS barracks.

Mhm.

This is where they gave us food and everything, but I stayed there only-- the first opportunity that I had, I transferred. There was American trucks. They said whoever wants to go East, we'll take him.

Mhm.

This was several hundred miles. I couldn't stay. I'll mention it a little later, you know, how it-- when I made a claim. No. Anyhow, I got back to Czechoslovakia, and arrived at home to my sad-- I had the sad news. I found out that my brother is dead. This was the only hope that I had, the one in Hungary.

When I made my application-- you know, in 1950s during Adenauer, he established a law. All the survivors are entitled-- they call it Wiedergutmachung, for reparations.

Reparations?

Mind you, I, who was an American citizen who went through the most-- survived maybe one in 1,000 or 1 in 500. After I made an application, and there was a United institutional office in New York. When I made an application, I told him I was an American citizen. The case worker takes me to the head of the office and said, my goodness, Mr. Princz, you're the first American that-- you'll be the first one to collect their compensation before anybody else.

Don't you think three months later I receive a letter? Germany rejected my case because I did not reside in Germany. Who the hell wanted to reside in a damn miserable country like this? I did not reside in Germany in 1947, and, secondly, because I was an American. Those were two reasons.

Can you imagine those two reasons? I cannot collect. I have friends that collected \$250, \$300, \$400. Depends on their health, which I have a lot of problem with my health. I can't sit down to a meal without-- I tell them I can't eat this, and every day I don't know how my stomach will act.

Mhm.

This has been going on for years.

As a result of what you'd been through.

I said how else? I'm lucky I'm alive living through all this misery that I can eat even. What I've been going through-- every morning, I get up and I don't know how my stomach will act up. Even with all those sicknesses, I never collected up to date a nickel. Would you believe that?

This is the most disgusting thing, and you think I approached at that time [? in the fifth-- ?] I approached Congressman Patton, if he would see the most disgusting letter, like a real politician is that getting down, calling up the White House or the State Department. How in the hell are you-- what you did during Roosevelt administration what this man went through, you didn't save him? You're going to let him deprive?

Get after the German government and tell them how the hell you have the audacity to refuse a man like me. I mean, I don't say that everybody else-- the rest of them are not entitled, but I should be deprived of that? I spent thousands of dollars, different lawyers, but nobody.

Three years ago, I went to Senator Bradley. I never seen him. I wanted to see Senator Bradley in person. I'm sure if I would have seen him in person-- he's a very conscientious person, and I'm sure he would have done something. He went to one of his associates. I don't know.

Her name was Paula Cohen Schwartz. She did a job, wrote a letter to the State Department. State Department wrote a report on Claims Commission. This is all-- and everybody is just like passing a buck, then it went down to the German embassy-- I mean the American embassy in Germany.

Mhm.

Six months later, again. No excuse whatsoever. I get a big long, thing letter. "I'm sorry. You're not entitled." Not even an excuse this time.

You would think this administration or administration before it would have any kind of heart and see what this man went through. There is millions of dollars cannot compensate the loss of my family, and my health, and the aggravation of my physical and mental thing that I go to today. Nothing can compensate, and to deprive me of--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--Germany wants to pay.

Yeah.

Wanted to pay, but because of technicality because I was an American.

Do you know of other situations of people who had similar frustrations getting any kind of money or any kind of--

As far as I know-- I don't have that many friends that remain alive, but every one of them collected. Some of them collected between \$175 and \$200,000.

Mhm.

As I told you, of course from 1946 to 19-- this is 40 years I never collected. Several months ago, finally through a friend of mine I got a lawyer in Washington, and I hope this time. Do you know this gentleman, Mr. Purvis?

Yes. Yes.

In Washington?

I've heard him, yes.

You heard of him?

Yes.

This is one of the most educated persons. He called up the White House and spoke to somebody, and they rebuffed him. Just happened just a few weeks ago.

He called me up that day, and he says I'm burning up. I'm pissed off, and I'm so mad. I said, just for that I'm going to work a hundred times harder in your case. Can you imagine that? Even now.

Yeah.

They just ignored him completely. Nothing. At least they would say, well, we'll try to do something.

Mhm.

You want to tell me the State Department would send a letter to the German government and tell them how dare you do something like this? You don't think there would be a response? But no. To go to Bitburg for Mr. Reagan, this is fine. This is fine to go and honor the SS, the murderers, the killers. That is fine, but in cases like this.

Same thing. The American embassy in Hungary. I want to bring the subject up I don't know if you've heard of Cardinal Mindszenty--

Yes.

--who wasn't an American citizen, but he was a high cardinal. The same embassy that refused a miserable piece of paper that might have saved my life, or my brother's life, or my parents, or maybe my whole family. The same embassy was hiding this man out for I don't know how many years.

Mhm. Yes. I understand that. [SIGHS] I wonder if you can talk about your feelings now about your Jewishness. Has your identification with Judaism strengthened, or have you had any--

It has to end. I tell you, for the longest period of time not only me-- there are old friends of mine. There are several of them that we used to be close. We had like a click, maybe. We were in the same camps, going from one camp to another, and this is how we helped one another.

None of us believed in God. We all lost faith in God. Everyone used to say, and including myself, there is no such thing as God. How can a God-- if there is a God in heaven-- allow such a thing to happen?

Well, this is a tragedy. I studied history. We had schools who were very strict, and every subject, especially history was one of the very important. I studied history way far back.

I have never heard experiences like this since the war is in existence, taking six million people, and just the methods, the way they were killed. And so what was the question? I'm sorry.

The question was about your being Jewish.

Yeah, so this is--

And what that means to you now.

No wonder that people lost faith in God, and I did not. I used to be mad at God. How can--

Yes.

--there be a God? You know? Even the most religious, very few of them would pray even.

Elie Wiesel speaks about that, too.

I used to be very religious. There wasn't a day that I wouldn't pray in the morning or night. We were Orthodox, but in a camp everybody became atheist. But after the war, it took me a while. It me seven years, and the feeling of-- I'm very pro-Zionist, pro-Israel. I would do anything.

You feel that strengthens you now and gives you courage and--

Yes. Yes.

--endurance?

And I tell you the state of Israel is in existence today because of the Holocaust and because we had a president like Harry Truman, who was one of the-- I have my doubts. My doubts, and I repeat it again. If President Roosevelt would have been president, I doubt whether the state of Israel would have been established.

I have my doubts, and I speak on this again, and this is my feeling.

Yes. What would you say to future generations who their only access to this piece of history is through what they learn in school or what they learn from oral testimony of survivors? What would you want to say to these people today--

I would warn them.

--about your experiences?

Please be aware of bigots like Farrakhan, who stands up-- a man like this who praises Hitler, speaks against Jewish people who went through or lost six million people, and he's against Israel. Please. And another one is Lyndon LaRouche, and several other ones, publishers in Canada, and so on, where they try to deny that there was no-- the Holocaust existed, this is propaganda, and please be aware. Speak out when people like this get on a soapbox and start speaking. Speak out against them because this is how Hitler started.

If you're not going to speak out, then things can happen. Quoting Elie Wiesel. I don't think he speaks. He had a speech. He spoke hundreds of times. There's not a speech where he doesn't mention, please we must remember the six million.

If we forget and if you're not going to remember what happened, what the 20th century civilization allowed to do, were silent, were watching, including our country, our wonderful country and other countries, Europe, England. It's the same problem.

Did not open up the door. They could have saved thousands of lives. Did not give damn. Did not lift a finger. Did not lift a finger to save those people.

If you're not going to be aware, things can happen again very easily. It is an important thing to remember those people.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Well, I think you've given us a great deal this afternoon of your own experience and of your own feelings. And I know

that we have learned something from you that is very special and very unique. I want to thank you.

Can I mention just one thing?

Please.

All the experiences and how emotional I get, I would like to emphasize people that watch my story and watch my video should not misconstrue, should not misinterpret me that I'm anti-American or I'm anti-religion. I'm a loving human being. I'm telling anything that transpired here is true, and I figure it's my duty to tell the world.

Where it hurts, I know a lot of people will not like to hear something like this, but a truth must be told. It's very important.

And I think you've told it, and we thank you very, very much for contributing--

Thank you.

--to our own archives and to the archives of Yale University. And I think your testimony will be invaluable.

Thank you for letting me come.

Thank you, Mr. Princz.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]