

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:26,230

2

00:00:26,230 --> 00:00:27,500

Good afternoon.

3

00:00:27,500 --> 00:00:29,860

I'm Bernard

Weinstein, Chairperson

4

00:00:29,860 --> 00:00:34,840

of the Holocaust Resource

Center Oral History program.

5

00:00:34,840 --> 00:00:38,190

Assisting me is Marcia Weisberg.

6

00:00:38,190 --> 00:00:40,230

We welcome George Popper.

7

00:00:40,230 --> 00:00:42,010

Thank you.

8

00:00:42,010 --> 00:00:44,010

I was born in Czechoslovakia.

9

00:00:44,010 --> 00:00:47,730

At that time, Czechoslovakia

was a democratic country.

10

00:00:47,730 --> 00:00:51,570

It was formed in 1918.

11

00:00:51,570 --> 00:00:54,570

And of course, it

lasted until 1939

12

00:00:54,570 --> 00:00:57,180

when it was occupied

by the Germans.

13

00:00:57,180 --> 00:01:00,840

The life for the Jews  
was pleasant there.

14

00:01:00,840 --> 00:01:05,280

There was some  
anti-Semitism, but the Jews

15

00:01:05,280 --> 00:01:06,390

lived very well there.

16

00:01:06,390 --> 00:01:13,080

And they led happy lives until  
the Munich Agreement in 1938.

17

00:01:13,080 --> 00:01:16,380

By that time, we all realized  
that there is no future

18

00:01:16,380 --> 00:01:18,420

and that we have to get out.

19

00:01:18,420 --> 00:01:22,110

At that point, we all  
applied for a visa

20

00:01:22,110 --> 00:01:24,210

at the American embassy.

21

00:01:24,210 --> 00:01:26,730

And the quota was  
long, but we hoped

22

00:01:26,730 --> 00:01:31,410

that eventually we would get our  
visa and be able to emigrate.

23

00:01:31,410 --> 00:01:34,770

In the meantime, I  
graduated from high school

24

00:01:34,770 --> 00:01:38,800

and I sent my diploma to my  
uncle, who lived in New York.

25  
00:01:38,800 --> 00:01:41,850  
And he got me admitted  
to New York University.

26  
00:01:41,850 --> 00:01:45,450  
And because of that, I was  
able to receive a student

27  
00:01:45,450 --> 00:01:47,620  
visa for a year.

28  
00:01:47,620 --> 00:01:49,990  
And this is the way I got out.

29  
00:01:49,990 --> 00:01:53,460  
I left Czechoslovakia  
end of September,

30  
00:01:53,460 --> 00:01:56,520  
and I arrived here in October.

31  
00:01:56,520 --> 00:02:00,750  
And I was able to have my  
visa renewed every year

32  
00:02:00,750 --> 00:02:02,460  
while I attended college.

33  
00:02:02,460 --> 00:02:06,000  
And eventually, I received  
an immigration visa

34  
00:02:06,000 --> 00:02:07,410  
and became a citizen.

35  
00:02:07,410 --> 00:02:10,770  
Can you tell us a little bit,  
George, about your family life

36

00:02:10,770 --> 00:02:11,950  
before the war?

37  
00:02:11,950 --> 00:02:15,000  
Well, we lived in  
a small town called

38  
00:02:15,000 --> 00:02:17,430  
Ricans, which was near Prague.

39  
00:02:17,430 --> 00:02:20,220  
And we spoke Czech.

40  
00:02:20,220 --> 00:02:25,890  
And also we learned German,  
which was a second language.

41  
00:02:25,890 --> 00:02:31,860  
And in the same town, the town  
was a capital of a district,

42  
00:02:31,860 --> 00:02:35,550  
and the local high  
school was there.

43  
00:02:35,550 --> 00:02:38,850  
And I attended the high  
school and so did my sisters

44  
00:02:38,850 --> 00:02:40,530  
for a time.

45  
00:02:40,530 --> 00:02:44,550  
I would say that  
during my childhood,

46  
00:02:44,550 --> 00:02:48,190  
there were about 200 Jewish  
families living in that time.

47  
00:02:48,190 --> 00:02:52,500  
And we had a synagogue  
with a rabbi later on.

48  
00:02:52,500 --> 00:02:55,980  
When the rabbi retired, we  
were not able to get a rabbi,

49  
00:02:55,980 --> 00:02:59,260  
so we had a cantor who  
would conduct the services.

50  
00:02:59,260 --> 00:03:03,300  
And we had a rabbi from another  
town who came twice a week

51  
00:03:03,300 --> 00:03:07,350  
and gave the Jewish  
children religious classes.

52  
00:03:07,350 --> 00:03:12,650  
And out of the Jewish  
families living there,

53  
00:03:12,650 --> 00:03:17,830  
there were very,  
very few survivors.

54  
00:03:17,830 --> 00:03:20,830  
A few families  
emigrated, one of them

55  
00:03:20,830 --> 00:03:24,880  
to Canada, which was a  
family of my best friend.

56  
00:03:24,880 --> 00:03:27,730  
And most of the  
others were killed.

57  
00:03:27,730 --> 00:03:33,970  
And I think of the ones who  
went to a concentration camp,

58  
00:03:33,970 --> 00:03:36,840  
I think there were only about

two or three persons who

59

00:03:36,840 --> 00:03:37,340  
survived.

60

00:03:37,340 --> 00:03:40,120

61

00:03:40,120 --> 00:03:44,140  
Somehow, I think  
that the people lived

62

00:03:44,140 --> 00:03:47,800  
under a false  
feeling of security,

63

00:03:47,800 --> 00:03:50,620  
because Czechoslovakia  
had a strong army,

64

00:03:50,620 --> 00:03:53,410  
and also had an  
alliance with France,

65

00:03:53,410 --> 00:03:57,100  
and France in turn, of course,  
had an alliance with England.

66

00:03:57,100 --> 00:04:00,610  
And I recall very  
vividly that in March

67

00:04:00,610 --> 00:04:05,470  
1938 after the Anschluss when  
Germany occupied Austria,

68

00:04:05,470 --> 00:04:09,770  
my mother said, we should pack  
everything and go to America.

69

00:04:09,770 --> 00:04:12,680  
And my father said, there's  
nothing to worry about.

70  
00:04:12,680 --> 00:04:16,510  
We have our Allies and  
nothing will ever happen.

71  
00:04:16,510 --> 00:04:18,760  
And that was very unfortunate.

72  
00:04:18,760 --> 00:04:23,790  
How long had your family  
lived in Czechoslovakia?

73  
00:04:23,790 --> 00:04:30,390  
As far as we can tell,  
because a friend of mine

74  
00:04:30,390 --> 00:04:34,170  
who lives in Czechoslovakia  
prepared a family

75  
00:04:34,170 --> 00:04:39,180  
tree going back to 1790--

76  
00:04:39,180 --> 00:04:42,930  
he couldn't find records prior  
to that because prior to that,

77  
00:04:42,930 --> 00:04:46,650  
the Jews didn't have the family  
names which they have now.

78  
00:04:46,650 --> 00:04:50,160  
So as far as I know, the  
family had lived there probably

79  
00:04:50,160 --> 00:04:53,070  
for many generations.

80  
00:04:53,070 --> 00:04:55,230  
What language did  
you speak in school?

81

00:04:55,230 --> 00:04:56,460  
Czech.

82  
00:04:56,460 --> 00:05:01,410  
We spoke Czech, and we had to  
also study German and French.

83  
00:05:01,410 --> 00:05:02,640  
But we spoke Czech.

84  
00:05:02,640 --> 00:05:03,930  
That was our language.

85  
00:05:03,930 --> 00:05:07,920  
And my parents were  
completely bilingual.

86  
00:05:07,920 --> 00:05:10,860  
They also spoke  
German and sometimes

87  
00:05:10,860 --> 00:05:15,990  
used German if they didn't  
want the help to understand.

88  
00:05:15,990 --> 00:05:18,450  
How far were you from Prague?

89  
00:05:18,450 --> 00:05:21,090  
I would say maybe  
around 25 miles.

90  
00:05:21,090 --> 00:05:25,530  
We used to visit Prague very  
frequently, because we also

91  
00:05:25,530 --> 00:05:26,520  
had family there.

92  
00:05:26,520 --> 00:05:30,900  
And my father went there  
on business and so on.



93

00:05:30,900 --> 00:05:35,270

Was there any overt  
anti-Semitism where you were?

94

00:05:35,270 --> 00:05:36,450

Not really.

95

00:05:36,450 --> 00:05:39,120

Occasionally some  
other child might

96

00:05:39,120 --> 00:05:41,850

have called you a Jew, or  
dirty Jew, or something,

97

00:05:41,850 --> 00:05:43,170

but very seldom.

98

00:05:43,170 --> 00:05:47,700

But the government discouraged  
any form of anti-Semitism.

99

00:05:47,700 --> 00:05:52,650

And the Jews, I would  
say, basically everything

100

00:05:52,650 --> 00:05:53,670

was open to them.

101

00:05:53,670 --> 00:05:55,590

The Jews were  
officers in the army,

102

00:05:55,590 --> 00:05:58,200

unlike in some of the other  
countries where they could not

103

00:05:58,200 --> 00:05:58,740

become.

104

00:05:58,740 --> 00:06:03,580

And they were active in

various industries and so on.

105

00:06:03,580 --> 00:06:08,730

So overall, they  
lived very well.

106

00:06:08,730 --> 00:06:14,520

When did you yourself begin to  
feel that you were in danger?

107

00:06:14,520 --> 00:06:16,380

In 1938.

108

00:06:16,380 --> 00:06:22,470

I would say that when the  
agitation of the Sudeten

109

00:06:22,470 --> 00:06:27,340

Germans started, and then  
it was supported by England

110

00:06:27,340 --> 00:06:28,830

at the time.

111

00:06:28,830 --> 00:06:33,030

Chamberlain was prime minister,  
and he actually sent a mediator

112

00:06:33,030 --> 00:06:35,220

to Czechoslovakia.

113

00:06:35,220 --> 00:06:38,917

And he found all the fault  
with the Czech government.

114

00:06:38,917 --> 00:06:40,500

And then, of course,  
that was followed

115

00:06:40,500 --> 00:06:41,760

by the Munich Agreement.

116

00:06:41,760 --> 00:06:44,670

Now, once the Munich  
Agreement was signed

117

00:06:44,670 --> 00:06:48,360

and Czechoslovakia  
lost all the parts

118

00:06:48,360 --> 00:06:50,310

where they had their  
fortifications,

119

00:06:50,310 --> 00:06:52,890

I think all the Jews realized  
that the situation was

120

00:06:52,890 --> 00:06:54,060

hopeless.

121

00:06:54,060 --> 00:06:59,430

And I would say the reason  
why not many more got out

122

00:06:59,430 --> 00:07:03,060

is that there was simply no  
place where they could go to.

123

00:07:03,060 --> 00:07:04,890

Now, what happened  
to my parents was

124

00:07:04,890 --> 00:07:09,480

that they were hoping to get  
the visa to the United States.

125

00:07:09,480 --> 00:07:12,450

And they waited.

126

00:07:12,450 --> 00:07:16,020

And then, of course,  
the war started.

127

00:07:16,020 --> 00:07:20,190

The United States entered  
the war after Pearl Harbor.

128  
00:07:20,190 --> 00:07:25,530  
And all the communications  
were broken.

129  
00:07:25,530 --> 00:07:28,210  
By that time, you  
couldn't go anywhere.

130  
00:07:28,210 --> 00:07:31,170  
And I know from  
my sister's diary,

131  
00:07:31,170 --> 00:07:35,550  
and also from some  
relatives who survived,

132  
00:07:35,550 --> 00:07:38,730  
that they were  
deported to Terezin,

133  
00:07:38,730 --> 00:07:44,760  
which is also in Germany,  
Theresienstadt, in 1942.

134  
00:07:44,760 --> 00:07:50,460  
And then they were deported  
from there to Auschwitz in 1943.

135  
00:07:50,460 --> 00:07:54,060  
Now, apparently, they  
were in a transport

136  
00:07:54,060 --> 00:07:56,610  
that the Germans decided  
to treat differently

137  
00:07:56,610 --> 00:08:01,320  
for propaganda purposes,  
and they kept the families

138

00:08:01,320 --> 00:08:04,950  
in the same camp  
very near Auschwitz.

139  
00:08:04,950 --> 00:08:09,360  
And they were marked in the  
records for what they call

140  
00:08:09,360 --> 00:08:13,200  
[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] special  
treatment in six months.

141  
00:08:13,200 --> 00:08:15,810  
And then the six  
months went up, they

142  
00:08:15,810 --> 00:08:18,030  
told them that they were  
going to transfer them

143  
00:08:18,030 --> 00:08:20,100  
to a work camp.

144  
00:08:20,100 --> 00:08:23,460  
And the SS commander  
of that particular camp

145  
00:08:23,460 --> 00:08:26,130  
says, you can have my  
word as an SS officer

146  
00:08:26,130 --> 00:08:27,360  
that you won't be gassed.

147  
00:08:27,360 --> 00:08:31,170  
But they took them right to  
Auschwitz to the gas chamber,

148  
00:08:31,170 --> 00:08:33,840  
and they were all killed.

149  
00:08:33,840 --> 00:08:39,570  
I think it was on March 7, 1944.

150  
00:08:39,570 --> 00:08:41,460  
You said they were  
all your sisters--

151  
00:08:41,460 --> 00:08:45,690  
My sisters, and my parents,  
and many other relatives.

152  
00:08:45,690 --> 00:08:49,410  
It was a group of Jews  
from Czechoslovakia.

153  
00:08:49,410 --> 00:08:52,860  
How old were your sisters?

154  
00:08:52,860 --> 00:08:59,520  
Let's see, my oldest sister  
was about 20 years old

155  
00:08:59,520 --> 00:09:02,220  
at that time--

156  
00:09:02,220 --> 00:09:03,300  
going on 21.

157  
00:09:03,300 --> 00:09:07,670  
My younger sister was about 18.

158  
00:09:07,670 --> 00:09:13,640  
And I heard then from my cousin  
that the next transport, which

159  
00:09:13,640 --> 00:09:15,920  
left Terezin about  
two months later,

160  
00:09:15,920 --> 00:09:19,370  
was also marked for  
killing after six months.

161  
00:09:19,370 --> 00:09:20,960

But by that time,  
the Germans were

162  
00:09:20,960 --> 00:09:25,370  
doing so badly that they  
decided that they would utilize

163  
00:09:25,370 --> 00:09:28,640  
any people who were in  
fairly good physical shape

164  
00:09:28,640 --> 00:09:29,700  
for hard labor.

165  
00:09:29,700 --> 00:09:32,300  
So that's how my  
cousin survived.

166  
00:09:32,300 --> 00:09:37,260

167  
00:09:37,260 --> 00:09:41,520  
Now, when they were sent  
to Theresienstadt and then

168  
00:09:41,520 --> 00:09:43,860  
to Auschwitz, you were  
already in the United States?

169  
00:09:43,860 --> 00:09:45,030  
I was here.

170  
00:09:45,030 --> 00:09:48,840  
I found these things out  
only after the war when

171  
00:09:48,840 --> 00:09:53,130  
I heard from a cousin  
of mine who survived

172  
00:09:53,130 --> 00:09:55,260  
and then when I received  
my sister's diary

173  
00:09:55,260 --> 00:09:59,820  
where she described how  
they didn't know what

174  
00:09:59,820 --> 00:10:01,410  
was going to happen,  
they just knew

175  
00:10:01,410 --> 00:10:03,090  
it was something unpleasant.

176  
00:10:03,090 --> 00:10:08,400  
And she would always write,  
today, they gave out notices,

177  
00:10:08,400 --> 00:10:13,490  
and luckily we were spared,  
and so on, and so forth.

178  
00:10:13,490 --> 00:10:20,580  
I'd like to just come  
back a little bit to 1938.

179  
00:10:20,580 --> 00:10:21,080  
Yes.

180  
00:10:21,080 --> 00:10:27,080  
That period-- had you  
heard in Czechoslovakia

181  
00:10:27,080 --> 00:10:31,310  
of what was going on in  
Germany during Kristallnacht

182  
00:10:31,310 --> 00:10:32,720  
and during these periods?

183  
00:10:32,720 --> 00:10:33,440  
Definitely.

184  
00:10:33,440 --> 00:10:34,880



Did that have an impact?

185

00:10:34,880 --> 00:10:36,380

That had an impact.

186

00:10:36,380 --> 00:10:43,220

And of course, we heard at all times what was going on as far

187

00:10:43,220 --> 00:10:46,970

as the persecution of the Jews, because that was always

188

00:10:46,970 --> 00:10:48,800

written up in our newspapers.

189

00:10:48,800 --> 00:10:52,340

And we knew, for example, that the doctors and the lawyers

190

00:10:52,340 --> 00:10:55,730

were not allowed to practice after 1936.

191

00:10:55,730 --> 00:11:00,500

And the Jewish teachers were not allowed to teach and so on.

192

00:11:00,500 --> 00:11:02,220

So we were informed about that.

193

00:11:02,220 --> 00:11:09,440

But I think the whole idea was that until 1938, people just

194

00:11:09,440 --> 00:11:11,000

thought, well, this would be confined

195

00:11:11,000 --> 00:11:15,980

to Germany, because the Western countries would come

196

00:11:15,980 --> 00:11:17,840  
to the aid of Czechoslovakia.

197

00:11:17,840 --> 00:11:19,970  
And of course, instead  
of coming to the aid,

198

00:11:19,970 --> 00:11:21,650  
they actually forced  
Czechoslovakia

199

00:11:21,650 --> 00:11:23,930  
to give up the territory.

200

00:11:23,930 --> 00:11:27,730  
So that's what happened.

201

00:11:27,730 --> 00:11:30,520  
Was Masaryk the head?

202

00:11:30,520 --> 00:11:32,420  
Who was the head  
of the goverment?

203

00:11:32,420 --> 00:11:34,210  
Well, Masaryk was  
the first president.

204

00:11:34,210 --> 00:11:40,570  
And he resigned when he  
was in his 80s in 1935.

205

00:11:40,570 --> 00:11:42,240  
And he died shortly thereafter.

206

00:11:42,240 --> 00:11:44,770  
And then the president  
was banished.

207

00:11:44,770 --> 00:11:45,490  
Banished.

208

00:11:45,490 --> 00:11:50,470

The foreign minister was  
Masaryk's son who, again.

209

00:11:50,470 --> 00:11:52,280

Took the office after the war.

210

00:11:52,280 --> 00:11:54,940

But then he was most  
likely killed then

211

00:11:54,940 --> 00:11:57,460

during the communist  
coup d'etat.

212

00:11:57,460 --> 00:11:58,930

He fell out of a window.

213

00:11:58,930 --> 00:11:59,472

I beg pardon?

214

00:11:59,472 --> 00:12:00,555

He fell out of the window.

215

00:12:00,555 --> 00:12:01,180

Yeah, he fell.

216

00:12:01,180 --> 00:12:04,360

But it's not known whether  
he jumped or was pushed.

217

00:12:04,360 --> 00:12:08,020

218

00:12:08,020 --> 00:12:14,020

And you left in September of--

219

00:12:14,020 --> 00:12:17,320

'39, shortly after  
the war had started.

220

00:12:17,320 --> 00:12:20,620

I left after I had  
gotten my student visa.

221

00:12:20,620 --> 00:12:24,700

And then I had to go to  
the Prague Gestapo office

222

00:12:24,700 --> 00:12:29,470

to get an exit permit,  
which they granted.

223

00:12:29,470 --> 00:12:31,160

They wanted to get  
rid of the Jews,

224

00:12:31,160 --> 00:12:35,260

so I didn't have any problem  
getting this official paper.

225

00:12:35,260 --> 00:12:39,820

And of course, they took  
away the Czech passport,

226

00:12:39,820 --> 00:12:41,860

and they gave me  
a German passport.

227

00:12:41,860 --> 00:12:46,270

And every Jew whose  
first name wasn't Jewish

228

00:12:46,270 --> 00:12:48,520

had the middle name Israel.

229

00:12:48,520 --> 00:12:52,450

And the women had the middle  
name Sara put in the passport,

230

00:12:52,450 --> 00:12:56,050

so that everybody would  
know they're Jews.

231

00:12:56,050 --> 00:12:59,620

What was done to your  
father's business?

232

00:12:59,620 --> 00:13:07,600

Well, actually, my father  
sold the store itself

233

00:13:07,600 --> 00:13:08,900

before the war--

234

00:13:08,900 --> 00:13:12,670

just, I think, after Hitler  
came, to another fellow

235

00:13:12,670 --> 00:13:14,170

who was our neighbor.

236

00:13:14,170 --> 00:13:19,720

And then the rest of the  
property was actually lost.

237

00:13:19,720 --> 00:13:23,070

238

00:13:23,070 --> 00:13:29,160

My parents had some jewelry  
and we had a friendly family

239

00:13:29,160 --> 00:13:32,670

in Holland, and  
actually, the man came

240

00:13:32,670 --> 00:13:33,940

and he took it with him.

241

00:13:33,940 --> 00:13:37,920

But later on, he was also  
Jewish, so he was deported,

242

00:13:37,920 --> 00:13:40,830

and everything was lost.

243

00:13:40,830 --> 00:13:45,440

So as far as the property  
was concerned, it was gone.

244

00:13:45,440 --> 00:13:49,650

Now, later on after the  
house was taken over

245

00:13:49,650 --> 00:13:55,350

by the government after  
the communist takeover,

246

00:13:55,350 --> 00:13:59,850

eventually I got sort  
of a small compensation

247

00:13:59,850 --> 00:14:02,160

through the American  
government, because they

248

00:14:02,160 --> 00:14:05,445

made some arrangement to  
return some Czech gold

249

00:14:05,445 --> 00:14:07,050

to the Czech government  
if they would

250

00:14:07,050 --> 00:14:11,220

compensate American  
citizens whose

251

00:14:11,220 --> 00:14:13,060

property was expropriated.

252

00:14:13,060 --> 00:14:14,530

So I got a small amount.

253

00:14:14,530 --> 00:14:18,150

254

00:14:18,150 --> 00:14:21,740

So when you left  
for the States, that

255  
00:14:21,740 --> 00:14:23,120  
was the last time you saw--

256  
00:14:23,120 --> 00:14:24,450  
That was the last time.

257  
00:14:24,450 --> 00:14:29,930  
And then we corresponded  
until December 1941.

258  
00:14:29,930 --> 00:14:34,200  
What were your feelings at  
leave-taking when you left?

259  
00:14:34,200 --> 00:14:37,050  
Well, I was glad to be leaving.

260  
00:14:37,050 --> 00:14:42,480  
And at that time, I hoped  
that my parents and my sisters

261  
00:14:42,480 --> 00:14:47,610  
would follow me in  
a reasonable future.

262  
00:14:47,610 --> 00:14:52,800  
And of course, at  
that time, we just

263  
00:14:52,800 --> 00:14:55,650  
thought that we had to leave  
because the life would be very

264  
00:14:55,650 --> 00:14:58,260  
unpleasant for the Jews, and  
you couldn't make a living

265  
00:14:58,260 --> 00:14:59,430  
as a Jew, and so on.

266

00:14:59,430 --> 00:15:01,440

Nobody, of course,  
had the slightest idea

267

00:15:01,440 --> 00:15:06,060

of the Holocaust-- of the  
systematic extermination.

268

00:15:06,060 --> 00:15:08,820

That was just in nobody's  
mind at that time.

269

00:15:08,820 --> 00:15:12,210

Nobody thought that anything  
like that would happen.

270

00:15:12,210 --> 00:15:16,560

When you came here  
in 1939, do you

271

00:15:16,560 --> 00:15:21,660

have any recollection of  
how Americans regarded what

272

00:15:21,660 --> 00:15:24,520

was happening in your country?

273

00:15:24,520 --> 00:15:31,020

Well, I think that in general,  
the Americans were friendly

274

00:15:31,020 --> 00:15:35,220

to Czechoslovakia, partly  
because a lot of the people

275

00:15:35,220 --> 00:15:36,420

knew about Masaryk.

276

00:15:36,420 --> 00:15:38,280

His wife was American.

277

00:15:38,280 --> 00:15:41,670



And they liked the  
country because it

278  
00:15:41,670 --> 00:15:43,060  
was a democratic country.

279  
00:15:43,060 --> 00:15:47,610  
So they were  
friendly towards it.

280  
00:15:47,610 --> 00:15:51,570  
And people were generally  
very friendly when I came.

281  
00:15:51,570 --> 00:15:55,770  
Later on, I got a scholarship  
for Colby College,

282  
00:15:55,770 --> 00:15:59,160  
which was actually arranged  
through a Quaker group for me.

283  
00:15:59,160 --> 00:16:04,530  
So I found it very  
friendly reception here.

284  
00:16:04,530 --> 00:16:10,470  
Now, I know that as far  
as admitting people,

285  
00:16:10,470 --> 00:16:15,030  
that many people were not that  
enthusiastic about admitting

286  
00:16:15,030 --> 00:16:17,220  
immigrants, including  
some Jews that I

287  
00:16:17,220 --> 00:16:21,930  
spoke to who were afraid that  
the refugees would take jobs

288  
00:16:21,930 --> 00:16:23,520

from them.

289

00:16:23,520 --> 00:16:27,930

I remember several in  
particular who were very worried

290

00:16:27,930 --> 00:16:30,610

about that aspect of it.

291

00:16:30,610 --> 00:16:35,070

But I think that also, I  
must say that people were not

292

00:16:35,070 --> 00:16:41,100

aware until maybe 1944 or so  
what was really going on there.

293

00:16:41,100 --> 00:16:41,880

People here?

294

00:16:41,880 --> 00:16:46,650

People here-- about the  
systematic killing and so on.

295

00:16:46,650 --> 00:16:49,500

296

00:16:49,500 --> 00:16:53,430

Was there anything in the  
newspapers that you recall?

297

00:16:53,430 --> 00:16:56,070

I assume you spoke  
English when you got here.

298

00:16:56,070 --> 00:16:59,110

I spoke some, and I  
started to read the paper.

299

00:16:59,110 --> 00:17:02,100

So let's say by the time I  
was here for a few weeks,

300

00:17:02,100 --> 00:17:06,869

I was able to read the paper  
and understand it quite well.

301

00:17:06,869 --> 00:17:10,180

Did you see any news  
about what was happening?

302

00:17:10,180 --> 00:17:11,829

What was coverage--

303

00:17:11,829 --> 00:17:19,339

No, I somehow remember that  
this news came out much later

304

00:17:19,339 --> 00:17:25,069

because, actually, the  
extermination started probably

305

00:17:25,069 --> 00:17:29,300

around 1942 or so, I think--

306

00:17:29,300 --> 00:17:33,440

after that famous  
Wannsee Conference.

307

00:17:33,440 --> 00:17:37,580

And they didn't start  
building camps--

308

00:17:37,580 --> 00:17:39,620

actually, they had  
concentration camps

309

00:17:39,620 --> 00:17:42,740

in Germany, which they  
opened up in 1933.

310

00:17:42,740 --> 00:17:46,010

But people were killed  
there, but it was not

311

00:17:46,010 --> 00:17:48,830  
the factory type of killing.

312  
00:17:48,830 --> 00:17:52,100  
But the concentration  
camps that they opened up

313  
00:17:52,100 --> 00:17:57,380  
in Poland I think didn't start  
till around 1942, I think.

314  
00:17:57,380 --> 00:18:03,650  
And of course, knowledge  
here took probably

315  
00:18:03,650 --> 00:18:06,970  
some longer time still.

316  
00:18:06,970 --> 00:18:08,810  
You met your wife  
in this country.

317  
00:18:08,810 --> 00:18:09,310  
Yes.

318  
00:18:09,310 --> 00:18:11,770  
Can you tell us something  
about her background?

319  
00:18:11,770 --> 00:18:15,880  
Well, my wife was  
born in a small town.

320  
00:18:15,880 --> 00:18:19,150  
The name is Hynau,  
which was near Breslau,

321  
00:18:19,150 --> 00:18:21,520  
which was in Silesia.

322  
00:18:21,520 --> 00:18:24,280  
And now it has become Polish.

323

00:18:24,280 --> 00:18:28,930

And she went to school there.

324

00:18:28,930 --> 00:18:33,580

And then when it started  
to get a little bit more

325

00:18:33,580 --> 00:18:37,930

difficult for the Jews, she  
was sent to a private school.

326

00:18:37,930 --> 00:18:43,510

And somehow, my  
parents-in-law, their life

327

00:18:43,510 --> 00:18:46,900

was not that affected, because  
they lived in a small town,

328

00:18:46,900 --> 00:18:48,550

they were well liked, and so on.

329

00:18:48,550 --> 00:18:52,330

So I suppose that  
they didn't start

330

00:18:52,330 --> 00:18:57,130

thinking about immigration  
until around 1937 or so.

331

00:18:57,130 --> 00:19:01,960

And then, of course, it  
was accelerated in 1938.

332

00:19:01,960 --> 00:19:04,990

And they were able to get out.

333

00:19:04,990 --> 00:19:10,600

My wife has one brother, and  
he went to Israel, Palestine

334

00:19:10,600 --> 00:19:12,220

as it was then known  
in their youth--

335  
00:19:12,220 --> 00:19:13,390  
Aliyah.

336  
00:19:13,390 --> 00:19:16,630  
So he left a few  
months before they did.

337  
00:19:16,630 --> 00:19:20,740  
And actually, my  
wife's family, I

338  
00:19:20,740 --> 00:19:26,110  
would say that her uncles and  
aunts, the majority of them

339  
00:19:26,110 --> 00:19:27,100  
survived.

340  
00:19:27,100 --> 00:19:30,580  
And there were, I think,  
two or so who were killed,

341  
00:19:30,580 --> 00:19:33,970  
but most of them were  
able to emigrate.

342  
00:19:33,970 --> 00:19:38,940  
And actually, one of her  
cousins was actually hidden

343  
00:19:38,940 --> 00:19:41,590  
in a convent and  
survived that way.

344  
00:19:41,590 --> 00:19:46,700  
And when you got here  
in the United States,

345  
00:19:46,700 --> 00:19:48,500  
did you start

school immediately?

346

00:19:48,500 --> 00:19:50,250

Where did you live?

347

00:19:50,250 --> 00:19:55,490

When I got here first, I  
already had the acceptance

348

00:19:55,490 --> 00:19:57,230

from New York University.

349

00:19:57,230 --> 00:20:02,900

And my plan was to start in  
February of 1940, which I did.

350

00:20:02,900 --> 00:20:08,270

So in the meantime,  
I went to high school

351

00:20:08,270 --> 00:20:11,720

in the evening for English  
classes to learn better.

352

00:20:11,720 --> 00:20:15,890

And I took some other courses  
at City College in English.

353

00:20:15,890 --> 00:20:17,040

So you lived in New York?

354

00:20:17,040 --> 00:20:17,540

Yes.

355

00:20:17,540 --> 00:20:18,140

Manhattan.

356

00:20:18,140 --> 00:20:22,520

And I started then at New  
York University in February.

357

00:20:22,520 --> 00:20:24,000

And I went there for one time.

358

00:20:24,000 --> 00:20:26,780

But of course, I couldn't  
afford the high tuition,

359

00:20:26,780 --> 00:20:30,230

which at the time was  
about \$250 a term.

360

00:20:30,230 --> 00:20:33,140

And I started to look around  
for some scholarships.

361

00:20:33,140 --> 00:20:37,910

And somebody told me to get  
in touch with the Quaker

362

00:20:37,910 --> 00:20:39,950

office, which I did.

363

00:20:39,950 --> 00:20:44,090

And they interviewed me, and  
then they eventually offered me

364

00:20:44,090 --> 00:20:45,170

two scholarships.

365

00:20:45,170 --> 00:20:48,410

And I took the one for  
Colby College in Maine.

366

00:20:48,410 --> 00:20:51,590

And besides that, they  
also gave me \$100 a year

367

00:20:51,590 --> 00:20:54,590

from some other fund  
towards expenses.

368

00:20:54,590 --> 00:20:57,470

And I worked.



369

00:20:57,470 --> 00:21:01,770

I lived in a fraternity  
house and became a member.

370

00:21:01,770 --> 00:21:05,630

And I did various jobs,  
like I washed the dishes,

371

00:21:05,630 --> 00:21:08,780

I waited on tables, and one  
year I took care of the furnace,

372

00:21:08,780 --> 00:21:11,140

and so on.

373

00:21:11,140 --> 00:21:17,680

Were there other European  
refugees there at the school

374

00:21:17,680 --> 00:21:19,570

in similar situations?

375

00:21:19,570 --> 00:21:21,460

I was the only one at that time.

376

00:21:21,460 --> 00:21:24,760

There was another one who  
had graduated when I came.

377

00:21:24,760 --> 00:21:27,370

But there were some  
faculty members.

378

00:21:27,370 --> 00:21:32,410

I remember there was a  
professor who was a mathematics

379

00:21:32,410 --> 00:21:33,890

professor from Romania.

380

00:21:33,890 --> 00:21:35,860

His name was Schoenberg.

381  
00:21:35,860 --> 00:21:39,700  
And actually, when I was  
there the first year,

382  
00:21:39,700 --> 00:21:43,330  
he invited me for Thanksgiving  
together with some faculty

383  
00:21:43,330 --> 00:21:44,380  
members.

384  
00:21:44,380 --> 00:21:49,810  
He was the only other refugee.

385  
00:21:49,810 --> 00:21:53,470  
His wife was, I think,  
the granddaughter

386  
00:21:53,470 --> 00:21:59,200  
of Paul Ehrlich, who was  
the discoverer of Salvarsan,

387  
00:21:59,200 --> 00:22:02,680  
which was the medicine  
against syphilis.

388  
00:22:02,680 --> 00:22:04,210  
And he was there.

389  
00:22:04,210 --> 00:22:06,370  
He was Paul Ehrlich's grandson?

390  
00:22:06,370 --> 00:22:12,070  
And now the wife was, I think,  
either daughter granddaughter.

391  
00:22:12,070 --> 00:22:15,580  
She was from Germany, he  
was from Romania originally.

392  
00:22:15,580 --> 00:22:17,770

So he was actually  
a faculty member.

393  
00:22:17,770 --> 00:22:20,920

394  
00:22:20,920 --> 00:22:26,080  
And did you have correspondence  
with your family at that time?

395  
00:22:26,080 --> 00:22:28,870  
Yes, we had regular  
correspondence, as I mentioned,

396  
00:22:28,870 --> 00:22:35,990  
until November or December 1941,  
when the United States entered

397  
00:22:35,990 --> 00:22:36,490  
the war.

398  
00:22:36,490 --> 00:22:39,250  
So then everything was cut off.

399  
00:22:39,250 --> 00:22:44,002  
When you were growing up  
in your family's house,

400  
00:22:44,002 --> 00:22:47,310  
did you have a lot  
of Yiddishkeit,

401  
00:22:47,310 --> 00:22:48,638  
or were you religious?

402  
00:22:48,638 --> 00:22:49,930  
Or how would you characterize--

403  
00:22:49,930 --> 00:22:52,510  
Well, we were religious.

404  
00:22:52,510 --> 00:22:55,710

My father, as a matter  
of fact, was always

405  
00:22:55,710 --> 00:22:58,650  
an official in the  
temple, in the synagogue.

406  
00:22:58,650 --> 00:23:00,450  
And we used to go--

407  
00:23:00,450 --> 00:23:03,350

408  
00:23:03,350 --> 00:23:06,170  
we used to go every time  
somebody had a yahrzeit.

409  
00:23:06,170 --> 00:23:09,950  
And we used to  
fast on Yom Kippur

410  
00:23:09,950 --> 00:23:12,560  
after I became bar  
mitzvah and so on.

411  
00:23:12,560 --> 00:23:16,370  
But we didn't keep  
a kosher house.

412  
00:23:16,370 --> 00:23:19,550  
And in that part  
of Czechoslovakia,

413  
00:23:19,550 --> 00:23:22,340  
Yiddish was not used  
as a spoken language.

414  
00:23:22,340 --> 00:23:25,940  
It was used-- just  
used certain terms,

415  
00:23:25,940 --> 00:23:29,210  
like [YIDDISH] and

shiksa and so on.

416

00:23:29,210 --> 00:23:30,170

Important words.

417

00:23:30,170 --> 00:23:33,120

And there were some words  
that actually were used there

418

00:23:33,120 --> 00:23:34,070

but are not used here.

419

00:23:34,070 --> 00:23:36,800

Like there was a word  
which was called [YIDDISH],,

420

00:23:36,800 --> 00:23:38,930

which meant somebody  
that's stupid.

421

00:23:38,930 --> 00:23:42,380

And actually, that word comes  
from the Hebrew word [HEBREW],,

422

00:23:42,380 --> 00:23:44,030

which means a donkey.

423

00:23:44,030 --> 00:23:48,350

But people spoke Czech.

424

00:23:48,350 --> 00:23:51,410

And let's say if they  
wanted people to understand,

425

00:23:51,410 --> 00:23:52,850

they spoke German.

426

00:23:52,850 --> 00:23:55,850

But Yiddish was not  
used in that part.

427

00:23:55,850 --> 00:23:59,720

Yiddish was used more in  
the Eastern part, which

428  
00:23:59,720 --> 00:24:06,260  
is now part of the Soviet Union,  
which was originally Hungarian.

429  
00:24:06,260 --> 00:24:09,230  
Then after the war, it became  
part of Czechoslovakia.

430  
00:24:09,230 --> 00:24:14,520  
And there they spoke  
Yiddish to a certain extent.

431  
00:24:14,520 --> 00:24:17,060  
Going back to the  
letters you received,

432  
00:24:17,060 --> 00:24:21,300  
what was the mood and the tone  
of those letters in November

433  
00:24:21,300 --> 00:24:23,700  
of '41 and December '41?

434  
00:24:23,700 --> 00:24:27,780  
More or less, the mood  
was that they were hopeful

435  
00:24:27,780 --> 00:24:30,270  
that the visa  
would come through,

436  
00:24:30,270 --> 00:24:34,080  
that we would be reunited.

437  
00:24:34,080 --> 00:24:36,570  
Were those letters censored?

438  
00:24:36,570 --> 00:24:40,530  
I couldn't tell if they  
were really censored or not.

439

00:24:40,530 --> 00:24:45,630

I know that my mother sent  
a few cards from the camp,

440

00:24:45,630 --> 00:24:47,970

and those were, of  
course, heavily censored.

441

00:24:47,970 --> 00:24:50,970

And all they were allowed to  
say there that we are well.

442

00:24:50,970 --> 00:24:55,800

Now, those cards were sent  
to some other relatives

443

00:24:55,800 --> 00:24:57,510

in Czechoslovakia.

444

00:24:57,510 --> 00:25:00,900

My mother had a cousin who  
was married to a non-Jew,

445

00:25:00,900 --> 00:25:02,850

and she survived that way.

446

00:25:02,850 --> 00:25:06,090

So she used to  
communicate to her.

447

00:25:06,090 --> 00:25:10,170

But basically, they  
could write a postcard,

448

00:25:10,170 --> 00:25:13,680

and I think they were  
limited to a number of words.

449

00:25:13,680 --> 00:25:15,660

And they could just  
say that, we are well,

450

00:25:15,660 --> 00:25:19,910  
and we received your package,  
or something like that.

451

00:25:19,910 --> 00:25:21,800  
Who did you live  
with in New York?

452

00:25:21,800 --> 00:25:25,940  
I lived with my uncle and aunt.

453

00:25:25,940 --> 00:25:29,720  
My aunt, who is still alive,  
she lives in Israel now,

454

00:25:29,720 --> 00:25:32,240  
she is the sister of my mother.

455

00:25:32,240 --> 00:25:38,240  
And she married a fellow in  
Germany, also in Breslau.

456

00:25:38,240 --> 00:25:43,280  
And they immigrated  
to the United States

457

00:25:43,280 --> 00:25:46,520  
at the beginning of 1939.

458

00:25:46,520 --> 00:25:50,630  
And there is an  
interesting story,

459

00:25:50,630 --> 00:25:56,600  
because he was a very  
successful salesman in Germany.

460

00:25:56,600 --> 00:25:59,360  
And as a matter of fact, he  
retired for the first time

461

00:25:59,360 --> 00:26:01,290



when he was in his 30s.

462

00:26:01,290 --> 00:26:07,010

And when the situation  
got around 1936,

463

00:26:07,010 --> 00:26:11,930

he took all his money out, and  
he went to Prague with my aunt.

464

00:26:11,930 --> 00:26:15,350

And he went to consult  
some big banker.

465

00:26:15,350 --> 00:26:18,980

And this fellow said to him  
that he shouldn't be an alarmist

466

00:26:18,980 --> 00:26:20,300

and things will work out.

467

00:26:20,300 --> 00:26:22,940

He took his money  
back to Germany.

468

00:26:22,940 --> 00:26:27,500

But luckily, he then applied  
for the visa in time,

469

00:26:27,500 --> 00:26:32,150

so he was able to  
emigrate in 1939.

470

00:26:32,150 --> 00:26:35,690

And he got some money out,  
but not as much as he did.

471

00:26:35,690 --> 00:26:36,830

So I lived with them.

472

00:26:36,830 --> 00:26:41,330

And then I went up to  
Maine to Colby College,

473  
00:26:41,330 --> 00:26:44,570  
and I lived there while  
I went to college.

474  
00:26:44,570 --> 00:26:48,840

475  
00:26:48,840 --> 00:26:59,633  
Did the letters signify anything  
that things were getting worse,

476  
00:26:59,633 --> 00:27:02,050  
or that they were coming to a  
head, or anything like that?

477  
00:27:02,050 --> 00:27:03,342  
Did you read between the lines?

478  
00:27:03,342 --> 00:27:08,210  
Well, it was  
evident, for example,

479  
00:27:08,210 --> 00:27:15,760  
that just towards the end before  
the correspondence stopped,

480  
00:27:15,760 --> 00:27:18,740  
they had to move to  
another apartment.

481  
00:27:18,740 --> 00:27:22,720  
Because when my parents took  
the apartment in Prague,

482  
00:27:22,720 --> 00:27:24,220  
it was in a very nice section.

483  
00:27:24,220 --> 00:27:26,780  
And it was a nice apartment.

484  
00:27:26,780 --> 00:27:30,790

But then apparently they  
wanted to concentrate the Jews

485  
00:27:30,790 --> 00:27:33,460  
in one part of the  
town, so they had

486  
00:27:33,460 --> 00:27:36,010  
to move to another apartment.

487  
00:27:36,010 --> 00:27:40,660  
And then later on,  
I read in the diary

488  
00:27:40,660 --> 00:27:45,340  
that several Jewish  
families had to share

489  
00:27:45,340 --> 00:27:47,680  
a very small apartment.

490  
00:27:47,680 --> 00:27:50,710  
And then they had to move  
again suddenly-- they

491  
00:27:50,710 --> 00:27:55,000  
said somebody appeared from some  
German organization and said,

492  
00:27:55,000 --> 00:27:57,310  
you have to move by  
tomorrow morning.

493  
00:27:57,310 --> 00:27:59,082  
They had to move to  
another apartment

494  
00:27:59,082 --> 00:28:00,040  
and that's how it went.

495  
00:28:00,040 --> 00:28:04,720  
In other words, they were  
always harassed, even prior

496  
00:28:04,720 --> 00:28:06,910  
to the deportation.

497  
00:28:06,910 --> 00:28:10,030  
Is the diary of your sister  
being the main record

498  
00:28:10,030 --> 00:28:12,190  
that you have of that period?

499  
00:28:12,190 --> 00:28:17,710  
Well, I have, actually,  
the diary of my sister,

500  
00:28:17,710 --> 00:28:25,690  
and then I have some information  
through a few relatives

501  
00:28:25,690 --> 00:28:26,510  
who survived.

502  
00:28:26,510 --> 00:28:30,850  
One of them was a cousin of  
mine who lives now in Chile.

503  
00:28:30,850 --> 00:28:36,490  
And another one was an aunt who  
was the only one whose son was

504  
00:28:36,490 --> 00:28:37,900  
killed, and she survived.

505  
00:28:37,900 --> 00:28:43,960  
And eventually, she committed  
suicide about 20 years later,

506  
00:28:43,960 --> 00:28:48,910  
I guess partly due to the  
experiences that she had.

507  
00:28:48,910 --> 00:28:53,290

So that's how I know  
what happened afterwards.

508  
00:28:53,290 --> 00:28:56,950

509  
00:28:56,950 --> 00:28:59,800  
Tell us a little  
about the diary.

510  
00:28:59,800 --> 00:29:02,860  
Well, my sister  
started the diary

511  
00:29:02,860 --> 00:29:11,080  
when she was 19  
years old, in 1941.

512  
00:29:11,080 --> 00:29:15,700  
And at the beginning,  
she said, we

513  
00:29:15,700 --> 00:29:21,110  
lived in very difficult times,  
and we hope that we'll survive.

514  
00:29:21,110 --> 00:29:25,600  
And she described social life--  
about her friends and so on.

515  
00:29:25,600 --> 00:29:28,180  
But then it started--

516  
00:29:28,180 --> 00:29:32,740  
you could feel the fear that  
they had of the unknown.

517  
00:29:32,740 --> 00:29:36,130  
They know that people  
are being deported.

518  
00:29:36,130 --> 00:29:38,530  
They didn't know what was

going to happen to them.

519

00:29:38,530 --> 00:29:41,230

Of course, I don't think anybody  
had the idea that they would

520

00:29:41,230 --> 00:29:43,810

be systematically  
killed, but they knew

521

00:29:43,810 --> 00:29:45,280

that they would be deported.

522

00:29:45,280 --> 00:29:50,470

And what they used to do  
is that the Germans used

523

00:29:50,470 --> 00:29:53,590

to pass out notices  
to the families that

524

00:29:53,590 --> 00:29:57,910

had to be deported, and  
you could always see,

525

00:29:57,910 --> 00:30:02,410

now, the notices were passed  
out, and we were spared,

526

00:30:02,410 --> 00:30:06,760

and now we'll have,  
again, about six weeks

527

00:30:06,760 --> 00:30:09,490

before the next  
notices will come out.

528

00:30:09,490 --> 00:30:13,600

And then she would say,  
today, my aunt got a notice.

529

00:30:13,600 --> 00:30:18,850

And then she wrote about my

younger sister's boyfriend

530

00:30:18,850 --> 00:30:22,240

got the notice, and they  
said goodbye, and so on.

531

00:30:22,240 --> 00:30:27,970

And then she wrote a very  
moving part about a family

532

00:30:27,970 --> 00:30:29,200

that they knew in Prague.

533

00:30:29,200 --> 00:30:30,970

And the man died.

534

00:30:30,970 --> 00:30:32,710

And she mentioned  
about the funeral--

535

00:30:32,710 --> 00:30:34,900

they had to walk there,  
because they were not

536

00:30:34,900 --> 00:30:37,060

allowed to use trolley cars.

537

00:30:37,060 --> 00:30:41,740

And she said it was the funeral  
of the dead and of the living,

538

00:30:41,740 --> 00:30:45,430

because the same afternoon  
the wife of the man who

539

00:30:45,430 --> 00:30:50,110

was buried in the morning and  
the daughter were deported.

540

00:30:50,110 --> 00:30:54,730

And then towards  
the end, every entry

541

00:30:54,730 --> 00:30:58,730

has something showing  
the fear of the unknown

542

00:30:58,730 --> 00:31:00,200

of the deportation.

543

00:31:00,200 --> 00:31:03,790

Like she would say, today,  
Mrs. So-and-so went to leave,

544

00:31:03,790 --> 00:31:05,260

and today, so-and-so left.

545

00:31:05,260 --> 00:31:06,340

And we are still lucky.

546

00:31:06,340 --> 00:31:09,400

And then she says,  
oh now, they said

547

00:31:09,400 --> 00:31:11,800

there won't be any  
transports for four weeks.

548

00:31:11,800 --> 00:31:14,530

And then three days later,  
they got their notice.

549

00:31:14,530 --> 00:31:16,270

They said, we got  
our notice, and I

550

00:31:16,270 --> 00:31:18,130

don't know if I'll  
ever see Prague again,

551

00:31:18,130 --> 00:31:19,458

and so on, and so forth.

552

00:31:19,458 --> 00:31:20,500

And that's where it ends.



553  
00:31:20,500 --> 00:31:22,560  
That's where the diary ends.

554  
00:31:22,560 --> 00:31:25,800  
How long was the  
diary sustained for?

555  
00:31:25,800 --> 00:31:30,110  
I would say a  
little over a year,

556  
00:31:30,110 --> 00:31:37,120  
because it started sometime  
in 1941 and ended in 1942.

557  
00:31:37,120 --> 00:31:39,130  
She wrote part of  
it in the camp.

558  
00:31:39,130 --> 00:31:40,210  
No, no, no.

559  
00:31:40,210 --> 00:31:41,020  
This was all prior.

560  
00:31:41,020 --> 00:31:43,700  
This was all done in Prague.

561  
00:31:43,700 --> 00:31:46,180  
She gave it to the governess,  
and she sent it to me

562  
00:31:46,180 --> 00:31:47,807  
after the war.

563  
00:31:47,807 --> 00:31:48,640  
The governess there?

564  
00:31:48,640 --> 00:31:49,540  
Yeah.

565

00:31:49,540 --> 00:31:51,935

How did she know  
where to find you?

566

00:31:51,935 --> 00:31:55,540

567

00:31:55,540 --> 00:32:01,280

Well, she knew my aunt's  
address in New York,

568

00:32:01,280 --> 00:32:02,830

so she wrote to that address.

569

00:32:02,830 --> 00:32:06,120

570

00:32:06,120 --> 00:32:07,910

And then she sent it to me.

571

00:32:07,910 --> 00:32:12,430

She died about seven  
years later or so.

572

00:32:12,430 --> 00:32:15,550

How did you learn  
what happened to them?

573

00:32:15,550 --> 00:32:20,590

Actually, the first  
information I received,

574

00:32:20,590 --> 00:32:24,580

let's say when the  
war ended in Europe,

575

00:32:24,580 --> 00:32:27,340

then suddenly these  
pictures started

576

00:32:27,340 --> 00:32:30,970

to appear when they liberated

the death camps and all that.

577

00:32:30,970 --> 00:32:34,720

And naturally, everybody hoped  
that his family survived.

578

00:32:34,720 --> 00:32:39,130

And then I received a long  
letter from my cousin,

579

00:32:39,130 --> 00:32:44,650

and he described in the letter  
what happened and gave me

580

00:32:44,650 --> 00:32:46,060

the date when they were killed.

581

00:32:46,060 --> 00:32:48,450

And so that's how I knew.

582

00:32:48,450 --> 00:32:50,320

How did he know?

583

00:32:50,320 --> 00:32:53,510

Because he was there.

584

00:32:53,510 --> 00:32:54,290

He was there.

585

00:32:54,290 --> 00:33:00,000

You see then, as I mentioned  
before, he left Terezin

586

00:33:00,000 --> 00:33:01,520

about two months later.

587

00:33:01,520 --> 00:33:04,310

And his transport,  
which was also

588

00:33:04,310 --> 00:33:07,100

put in this so-called

family camp,

589

00:33:07,100 --> 00:33:09,080

and when it came  
to the date when

590

00:33:09,080 --> 00:33:13,100

they were supposed  
to be gassed, they

591

00:33:13,100 --> 00:33:16,310

selected the younger  
people for hard labor,

592

00:33:16,310 --> 00:33:18,230

and they shipped them  
to another camp, which

593

00:33:18,230 --> 00:33:20,030

was called [? Schoenheide. ?]

594

00:33:20,030 --> 00:33:21,740

And there, they were doing work.

595

00:33:21,740 --> 00:33:26,480

And some people, of  
course, died there

596

00:33:26,480 --> 00:33:28,040

because of the bad treatment.

597

00:33:28,040 --> 00:33:30,320

But he eventually survived.

598

00:33:30,320 --> 00:33:35,510

And his wife also was in  
the concentration camp

599

00:33:35,510 --> 00:33:36,260

and survived.

600

00:33:36,260 --> 00:33:40,190

She lost her first husband,  
but they married, and then

601  
00:33:40,190 --> 00:33:44,480  
they came here after the  
war, and they went to Chile.

602  
00:33:44,480 --> 00:33:47,150  
And they lived there.

603  
00:33:47,150 --> 00:33:52,610  
But I learned from him  
then what happened.

604  
00:33:52,610 --> 00:33:54,350  
And then later on,  
of course, I heard

605  
00:33:54,350 --> 00:33:56,600  
from my aunt who survived.

606  
00:33:56,600 --> 00:34:00,330  
And she told me the same thing.

607  
00:34:00,330 --> 00:34:01,630  
You have children?

608  
00:34:01,630 --> 00:34:02,250  
Yes.

609  
00:34:02,250 --> 00:34:03,480  
I have two sons.

610  
00:34:03,480 --> 00:34:06,810  
And my younger son  
is married, and we

611  
00:34:06,810 --> 00:34:09,949  
have three grandchildren.

612  
00:34:09,949 --> 00:34:13,530  
Over the years, did you

talk about what happened?

613

00:34:13,530 --> 00:34:16,292

Yes, I talked about it.

614

00:34:16,292 --> 00:34:18,380

They're aware of what happened.

615

00:34:18,380 --> 00:34:22,420

616

00:34:22,420 --> 00:34:30,949

I know you've commemorated  
several times what happened.

617

00:34:30,949 --> 00:34:35,219

I heard you read from  
the diary yourself--

618

00:34:35,219 --> 00:34:35,719

Yes.

619

00:34:35,719 --> 00:34:39,699

I know that you feel  
very emotionally

620

00:34:39,699 --> 00:34:41,409

about all of this, of course.

621

00:34:41,409 --> 00:34:45,909

But are there any  
thoughts of yours

622

00:34:45,909 --> 00:34:48,429

that you've had over the  
years about these things

623

00:34:48,429 --> 00:34:53,340

this whole period that  
you want to share with us?

624

00:34:53,340 --> 00:35:00,100

Well, I think that  
even now, it will

625  
00:35:00,100 --> 00:35:02,740  
be 45 years since my  
parents got killed,

626  
00:35:02,740 --> 00:35:06,790  
but I still find it hard to  
believe that anything like that

627  
00:35:06,790 --> 00:35:08,260  
could happen.

628  
00:35:08,260 --> 00:35:10,570  
And I think that's  
probably the same feeling

629  
00:35:10,570 --> 00:35:12,490  
that most people have.

630  
00:35:12,490 --> 00:35:16,170

631  
00:35:16,170 --> 00:35:19,620  
You say you did hear  
some rumors about what

632  
00:35:19,620 --> 00:35:24,060  
was going on in Germany when  
you were living in Prague?

633  
00:35:24,060 --> 00:35:27,870  
Well, we knew that there  
was persecution of the Jews,

634  
00:35:27,870 --> 00:35:30,660  
and that was well  
known and was reported.

635  
00:35:30,660 --> 00:35:41,020  
And I think the feeling  
was that the Jews would

636  
00:35:41,020 --> 00:35:42,730  
have to leave  
Germany eventually,

637  
00:35:42,730 --> 00:35:45,500  
because they couldn't  
make a living,

638  
00:35:45,500 --> 00:35:48,760  
and it was difficult for them,  
and they were being harassed.

639  
00:35:48,760 --> 00:35:53,110  
But I don't think that anybody  
in his wildest imagination

640  
00:35:53,110 --> 00:35:57,070  
thought that there would be  
this wholesale destruction

641  
00:35:57,070 --> 00:35:58,450  
of the Jews.

642  
00:35:58,450 --> 00:36:01,540  
And unfortunately, the  
Jews in Czechoslovakia

643  
00:36:01,540 --> 00:36:07,600  
felt that they were safe because  
they believed in the alliances.

644  
00:36:07,600 --> 00:36:13,120  
And they believed, first  
of all, Czechoslovakia,

645  
00:36:13,120 --> 00:36:14,620  
if it would have  
come to the war,

646  
00:36:14,620 --> 00:36:18,785  
they probably eventually  
would have been defeated,



647  
00:36:18,785 --> 00:36:20,410  
but they would have  
slowed down Hitler.

648  
00:36:20,410 --> 00:36:23,440  
And as we found out later  
on from the history books,

649  
00:36:23,440 --> 00:36:27,400  
the German generals were  
ready to overthrow Hitler

650  
00:36:27,400 --> 00:36:30,640  
that time, because they  
felt that the army wasn't

651  
00:36:30,640 --> 00:36:31,660  
ready for war.

652  
00:36:31,660 --> 00:36:37,300  
And actually, they sent envoys  
to England to Chamberlain,

653  
00:36:37,300 --> 00:36:39,920  
and they asked him  
not to give in,

654  
00:36:39,920 --> 00:36:41,170  
but he wouldn't even see them.

655  
00:36:41,170 --> 00:36:44,780

656  
00:36:44,780 --> 00:36:47,250  
Have you been back  
to Czechoslovakia?

657  
00:36:47,250 --> 00:36:48,390  
Yes, I was there.

658  
00:36:48,390 --> 00:36:53,740

And actually, I've met  
with some Gentile people

659  
00:36:53,740 --> 00:36:55,860  
who went to school with me.

660  
00:36:55,860 --> 00:36:58,370  
And also, we had a very--

661  
00:36:58,370 --> 00:36:59,460  
Were you in Ricany?

662  
00:36:59,460 --> 00:37:01,140  
Yes, and in Prague.

663  
00:37:01,140 --> 00:37:05,010  
And we had a very interesting  
and emotional experience.

664  
00:37:05,010 --> 00:37:07,800  
When we were in Prague,  
there's an old synagogue

665  
00:37:07,800 --> 00:37:11,260  
there called, in  
German, the [GERMAN]..

666  
00:37:11,260 --> 00:37:14,340  
And we went to go,  
in and there was

667  
00:37:14,340 --> 00:37:16,950  
a lady from the Jewish  
community and she said,

668  
00:37:16,950 --> 00:37:18,810  
you can't go in, because  
there's a wedding

669  
00:37:18,810 --> 00:37:22,510  
and it's being filmed  
by the German TV.

670

00:37:22,510 --> 00:37:24,190

So I said, I was born here.

671

00:37:24,190 --> 00:37:26,100

And so she let us go in.

672

00:37:26,100 --> 00:37:30,330

And it was an unusual occasion,  
because there are hardly

673

00:37:30,330 --> 00:37:31,740

any young Jews left.

674

00:37:31,740 --> 00:37:35,400

But this fellow, I think  
he was half Jewish,

675

00:37:35,400 --> 00:37:37,680

and the wife  
converted to Judaism,

676

00:37:37,680 --> 00:37:40,200

and they were being married  
in this very old synagogue.

677

00:37:40,200 --> 00:37:44,430

So it was a very  
emotional experience.

678

00:37:44,430 --> 00:37:48,090

And unfortunately,  
Hitler succeeded

679

00:37:48,090 --> 00:37:51,540

in making Europe,  
as he called it,

680

00:37:51,540 --> 00:37:53,490

judenrein, because  
there are hardly

681

00:37:53,490 --> 00:37:57,540

any Jews left in any of these  
countries-- in Czechoslovakia,

682  
00:37:57,540 --> 00:38:00,300  
Poland, or any of them.

683  
00:38:00,300 --> 00:38:02,730  
Those that were lucky enough  
to emigrate, emigrated

684  
00:38:02,730 --> 00:38:03,930  
where mostly?

685  
00:38:03,930 --> 00:38:05,280  
To America?

686  
00:38:05,280 --> 00:38:08,890  
I think that the country  
that most people preferred

687  
00:38:08,890 --> 00:38:11,050  
to emigrate was America.

688  
00:38:11,050 --> 00:38:19,410  
And as far as the people that I  
know, most of them emigrated--

689  
00:38:19,410 --> 00:38:22,620  
first of all, from my  
hometown, very few emigrated.

690  
00:38:22,620 --> 00:38:26,170  
But from Prague and so on,  
they emigrated to America.

691  
00:38:26,170 --> 00:38:30,150  
And very few were able  
to go to Canada, some

692  
00:38:30,150 --> 00:38:35,100  
to South America,  
some to Australia.

693

00:38:35,100 --> 00:38:40,165

I also have my mother's cousin  
who emigrated to Sweden.

694

00:38:40,165 --> 00:38:42,810

695

00:38:42,810 --> 00:38:44,400

You mentioned Denmark before.

696

00:38:44,400 --> 00:38:48,540

Yes, my wife's  
actually two cousins,

697

00:38:48,540 --> 00:38:53,280

they married two Danish  
lawyers, non-Jews.

698

00:38:53,280 --> 00:38:57,870

And when Hitler  
occupied Denmark,

699

00:38:57,870 --> 00:39:00,630

they went with them  
to Sweden by boat.

700

00:39:00,630 --> 00:39:02,880

And that's how they were saved.

701

00:39:02,880 --> 00:39:05,190

As you probably know, most  
of the Jews in Denmark

702

00:39:05,190 --> 00:39:09,000

were saved due to the help  
of the local population that

703

00:39:09,000 --> 00:39:11,340

got them to Sweden.

704

00:39:11,340 --> 00:39:15,060

How did the local

population in Prague

705

00:39:15,060 --> 00:39:19,560

react when you and all of  
your family and friends

706

00:39:19,560 --> 00:39:20,490

were being taken?

707

00:39:20,490 --> 00:39:22,830

Well, I wasn't there, of course.

708

00:39:22,830 --> 00:39:28,170

But from what I hear from  
the people who survived,

709

00:39:28,170 --> 00:39:31,650

they weren't that  
much concerned.

710

00:39:31,650 --> 00:39:33,720

And there were not  
that many people who

711

00:39:33,720 --> 00:39:37,110

were safe, or hidden, or so on.

712

00:39:37,110 --> 00:39:37,950

I know some.

713

00:39:37,950 --> 00:39:41,673

We used to have neighbors  
when we lived in New York,

714

00:39:41,673 --> 00:39:42,840

and they were from Slovakia.

715

00:39:42,840 --> 00:39:45,960

And they were actually  
hidden by some local people

716

00:39:45,960 --> 00:39:46,770

and they survived.

717

00:39:46,770 --> 00:39:51,510

But there was not that  
much help, I think.

718

00:39:51,510 --> 00:39:55,390

719

00:39:55,390 --> 00:39:58,600

Of course, again, you  
can understand it,

720

00:39:58,600 --> 00:40:01,960

because anybody who  
was caught helping Jews

721

00:40:01,960 --> 00:40:04,120

was immediately shot.

722

00:40:04,120 --> 00:40:07,570

So it would've taken  
somebody very brave to help.

723

00:40:07,570 --> 00:40:10,620

724

00:40:10,620 --> 00:40:14,150

And I think that,  
also, everything

725

00:40:14,150 --> 00:40:17,690

was done in this very  
systematic way, because they

726

00:40:17,690 --> 00:40:20,050

were good records of  
the Jewish population.

727

00:40:20,050 --> 00:40:23,360

So it probably would have  
been very hard for somebody

728

00:40:23,360 --> 00:40:30,440  
to hide or pass as a non-Jew,  
because they right away started

729

00:40:30,440 --> 00:40:32,480  
to move the Jews  
from the small towns

730

00:40:32,480 --> 00:40:35,480  
to Prague and to  
certain designated areas

731

00:40:35,480 --> 00:40:39,200  
so they could keep the count.

732

00:40:39,200 --> 00:40:44,540  
So I don't really  
know anybody who

733

00:40:44,540 --> 00:40:51,170  
survived in the western  
part of Czechoslovakia

734

00:40:51,170 --> 00:40:53,570  
unless they went to  
a camp and survived--

735

00:40:53,570 --> 00:40:56,494  
but who survived in hiding,  
I don't know anybody.

736

00:40:56,494 --> 00:40:59,690

737

00:40:59,690 --> 00:41:05,160  
Were the Slovakian nationalists  
very active in that area?

738

00:41:05,160 --> 00:41:08,910  
Not in that area, because  
they were active in Slovakia

739



00:41:08,910 --> 00:41:10,000  
in the eastern area.

740  
00:41:10,000 --> 00:41:12,660  
And by the way, they  
were very anti-Semitic.

741  
00:41:12,660 --> 00:41:19,480  
And when Hitler  
occupied Czechoslovakia,

742  
00:41:19,480 --> 00:41:27,380  
he took over the  
two western parts,

743  
00:41:27,380 --> 00:41:29,080  
which is Bohemia and Moravian.

744  
00:41:29,080 --> 00:41:32,770  
And he said that Slovakia  
would be independent.

745  
00:41:32,770 --> 00:41:35,020  
And there was a  
government that was

746  
00:41:35,020 --> 00:41:39,010  
formed under a  
Catholic priest who

747  
00:41:39,010 --> 00:41:41,800  
became the president  
and prime minister.

748  
00:41:41,800 --> 00:41:46,960  
And they actually had some  
kind of an organization,

749  
00:41:46,960 --> 00:41:48,940  
similar to the SS, in Slovakia.

750  
00:41:48,940 --> 00:41:52,210

751  
00:41:52,210 --> 00:41:55,150  
And this man was Father Tiso.

752  
00:41:55,150 --> 00:41:58,570  
And he was actually  
shot after the war.

753  
00:41:58,570 --> 00:42:03,340  
I think that stems back  
to some dissatisfaction,

754  
00:42:03,340 --> 00:42:07,140  
because Slovakia  
felt that there was

755  
00:42:07,140 --> 00:42:09,430  
the more backward  
part of the country,

756  
00:42:09,430 --> 00:42:10,680  
and they weren't treated well.

757  
00:42:10,680 --> 00:42:13,590  
And I still remember  
as a boy there

758  
00:42:13,590 --> 00:42:16,230  
were some that felt that  
they might be better

759  
00:42:16,230 --> 00:42:17,590  
under Hungary and so on.

760  
00:42:17,590 --> 00:42:20,730  
So they always  
made some agitation

761  
00:42:20,730 --> 00:42:23,590  
against the western  
part of the country.

762

00:42:23,590 --> 00:42:24,510  
Which was democratic?

763  
00:42:24,510 --> 00:42:29,940  
Yeah, but they actually had  
a pro-Nazi type of government

764  
00:42:29,940 --> 00:42:32,370  
at that time.

765  
00:42:32,370 --> 00:42:36,750  
Among the Jewish  
community, was there

766  
00:42:36,750 --> 00:42:42,210  
a great interest in Zionism,  
or Bundism, or any other--

767  
00:42:42,210 --> 00:42:43,740  
There was some.

768  
00:42:43,740 --> 00:42:48,660  
I would say that probably  
the majority at that time

769  
00:42:48,660 --> 00:42:52,710  
felt that they were  
Jews of Czech religion.

770  
00:42:52,710 --> 00:42:55,710  
I think that's how  
many of them felt.

771  
00:42:55,710 --> 00:42:59,070  
And there even was  
a newspaper, which

772  
00:42:59,070 --> 00:43:06,450  
was called the newspaper  
of Czechs-Jews,

773  
00:43:06,450 --> 00:43:08,220  
like with the hyphen.

774  
00:43:08,220 --> 00:43:09,540  
But there was interest.

775  
00:43:09,540 --> 00:43:14,820  
For example, I have a cousin  
who lived in another small town,

776  
00:43:14,820 --> 00:43:19,230  
and he was a great Zionist.

777  
00:43:19,230 --> 00:43:23,820  
And he actually emigrated  
around 1934, '35.

778  
00:43:23,820 --> 00:43:25,920  
And everybody, of course,  
said he was crazy.

779  
00:43:25,920 --> 00:43:29,610  
But he was the only one of  
his family who survived.

780  
00:43:29,610 --> 00:43:32,640  
His sister and his  
parents were later killed.

781  
00:43:32,640 --> 00:43:35,280  
So there was interest.

782  
00:43:35,280 --> 00:43:40,320  
And I think in Prague, there  
was also a Jewish sports club,

783  
00:43:40,320 --> 00:43:42,510  
which was called Macabee.

784  
00:43:42,510 --> 00:43:47,670  
And actually, my  
cousin, the one who

785  
00:43:47,670 --> 00:43:51,480

survived who is now in  
Chile, he went to Palestine

786  
00:43:51,480 --> 00:43:53,520  
because he was Zionist,  
but he came back

787  
00:43:53,520 --> 00:43:57,360  
because his father died and his  
mother wanted him to be back.

788  
00:43:57,360 --> 00:43:59,460  
So he actually went  
back at that time.

789  
00:43:59,460 --> 00:44:02,910  
And eventually, he survived.

790  
00:44:02,910 --> 00:44:03,880  
He survived?

791  
00:44:03,880 --> 00:44:04,710  
Yeah.

792  
00:44:04,710 --> 00:44:08,340  
He survived the  
concentration camp.

793  
00:44:08,340 --> 00:44:13,290  
But I would say that the  
Jews felt very emancipated

794  
00:44:13,290 --> 00:44:18,420  
and sort of as part  
of the population.

795  
00:44:18,420 --> 00:44:23,050  
Do you ever speculate  
about whether your life

796  
00:44:23,050 --> 00:44:24,730  
would have taken a  
different turn if it

797  
00:44:24,730 --> 00:44:26,110  
hadn't been for these things?

798  
00:44:26,110 --> 00:44:27,610  
Would you have come  
to the United States,

799  
00:44:27,610 --> 00:44:29,300  
would you have stayed  
in Czechoslovakia?

800  
00:44:29,300 --> 00:44:29,842  
I don't know.

801  
00:44:29,842 --> 00:44:32,740  
I might have come here,  
because there was always

802  
00:44:32,740 --> 00:44:35,890  
a lot of interest in  
the United States.

803  
00:44:35,890 --> 00:44:39,710  
And I had, actually, two  
uncles who came here.

804  
00:44:39,710 --> 00:44:44,920  
One of them came here  
early before the first war,

805  
00:44:44,920 --> 00:44:46,960  
and the other one came in 1920.

806  
00:44:46,960 --> 00:44:51,430  
So I'm sure that I would have  
at least come here for a visit,

807  
00:44:51,430 --> 00:44:53,590  
and I would have  
liked it and stayed.

808

00:44:53,590 --> 00:45:00,220  
But we were always interested  
in learning languages.

809  
00:45:00,220 --> 00:45:04,223  
And the plan would have  
been, if the situation

810  
00:45:04,223 --> 00:45:05,890  
would have been normal,  
I would probably

811  
00:45:05,890 --> 00:45:08,860  
have gone to France  
for a few months

812  
00:45:08,860 --> 00:45:10,660  
during a vacation  
to learn French,

813  
00:45:10,660 --> 00:45:14,500  
and the following year to  
England to learn English.

814  
00:45:14,500 --> 00:45:16,180  
But who knows?

815  
00:45:16,180 --> 00:45:17,170  
It's hard to speculate.

816  
00:45:17,170 --> 00:45:20,680  
But maybe I would  
have ended here also,

817  
00:45:20,680 --> 00:45:24,772  
but under different  
circumstances.

818  
00:45:24,772 --> 00:45:26,480  
Is there anything else  
you'd like to add?

819  
00:45:26,480 --> 00:45:30,630

820  
00:45:30,630 --> 00:45:34,010  
No, nothing too much.

821  
00:45:34,010 --> 00:45:38,280

822  
00:45:38,280 --> 00:45:43,200  
In general, I think just  
the people who were aware

823  
00:45:43,200 --> 00:45:46,800  
were being Jews  
and probably could

824  
00:45:46,800 --> 00:45:49,110  
bear the persecution  
better than,

825  
00:45:49,110 --> 00:45:51,960  
let's say, people who  
were so assimilated

826  
00:45:51,960 --> 00:45:54,060  
that they thought of  
themselves as Germans,

827  
00:45:54,060 --> 00:45:57,126  
or Czech, or everything else.

828  
00:45:57,126 --> 00:45:59,840  
Yeah.

829  
00:45:59,840 --> 00:46:01,070  
George, thank you very much.

830  
00:46:01,070 --> 00:46:02,910  
Thank you very, very much.

831  
00:46:02,910 --> 00:46:04,460  
Welcome.



832

00:46:04,460 --> 00:46:10,000