

We continue with Mr. Werdiger's testimony.

Mr. Werdiger, how is it that you came to the United States instead of Canada or Israel?

Well, simply, as I mentioned to you before, we came to the point where we wanted to leave Europe for good. And there was no one in the family to ask for some papers or whatever. And we heard-- and we worked in the offices close to HIAS, where one can register to Canada, Australia, Israel and the United States. And we did register to all the four countries.

And luckily for us we got the visa to the United States pretty quick. And we came to the United States. And we are not sorry about it.

Yeah. Where did you live? Where did you settle?

Now, we came boat. We arrived here on February 2nd, '49. And they took us to HIAS on Lafayette Street, where we lived for six weeks. And it was like not a camp exactly, but I was separated from my wife. Men were separately and women separately. And, of course, we were thank God for this. And in the morning we had breakfast in the dining hall. Then we had lunch and dinner. Till after a week or two, we met some people we know. And they got us jobs and we started working.

And then we met a fellow whose name was Archie Cohen. He was one of the executives in HIAS. And he took some interest in us. And he took us home a few times. And then found a furnished room for us in [? UNRAA's ?] section of Brooklyn, where we moved and we lived with a nice couple for two years. In between, we lived a few months in Borough Park, 9th Avenue, I think 46th Street.

And finally, we moved to [INAUDIBLE] Hills. I guess it was 1951, where we lived for the next 20 years or 24 years, moving around from place to place, always to better ourselves.

And we bought a little house in [INAUDIBLE] Hills. And then because of my type of job, where I was mainly employed here in Jersey, we moved 15 years ago to Union. As a matter of fact, I built myself my own house in Union. And here we are.

Yeah. And both of your children were born here in this country?

Yes. One is born in 1952 and one is born in 1955. They went to school in Queens. One, the older one, graduated Albany State School. Went later to a medical school, Cornell Medical School. And now he's a physician in his office in New Haven, Connecticut.

The other one went to Rutgers and to Syracuse. And he graduated architecture school in London, England. Then he came back. And he took the master's of business administration in Columbia. And now he's a vice president of a big development company in Manhattan.

Both doing very well. The older one is married, has two children. And we see each other pretty often.

Have you been able to talk with them about your experiences and your wife too?

I'll tell you, mainly what they know, and I think they know almost all the stories, is from what they heard, but not in a continuous talk or whatever, which not only that they avoided, but it's our fault. We avoided ourselves. We didn't want to share with them those experiences, which we don't know if it's good or bad. But I'm pretty sure that they both know.

Because whenever friends come into our house, and most of our friends are from the same background, also survivors, so as usual, always comes to the same thing. And we would remind ourselves of those things-- that time what happened, that time what happened. And automatically, they had to listen and hear it, what's going on.

And they read quite a few books about it also. And then it's not that hard for them to realize they never had grandparents.

Yeah.

Not even uncles or cousins.

Did they ever remark on that and that aspect?

Yes, they did.

Yeah.

No, they mainly told us, that, we keep telling them about staying close with the family, and so forth. They say, what family? They don't know what one experiences having a grandmothers, or an uncle, or a cousin. They don't know it. And they have no feeling for it.

Yeah. And your grandchildren, how old are they?

One is three. One is five.

Do you have any message that you take away from your experiences that you would like to share with us?

No, I'll tell you, I think that we were, unfortunately, living in this period of time when those kinds of things happened. And we hope that those won't happen again anywhere at anytime. But at the same, we would like the young generation to know, to beware of any little things which they may detect that may lead to this type of behavior and the consequences which they heard and they saw came out of it.

Have you gone back to Krakow or to Poland?

Yes. After thinking for years and years, which, of course, we all mainly have bad memories of, but still we felt that once at least before we are gone let's go and see how these things look there. And especially, at least to visit the graves, which we did.

Yeah.

Is there anything about that experience that you would like to mention?

It's uh-- I don't know how much accomplishment we made, but we felt a relief that we were there. We actually didn't see any monuments, which we knew all-- like we went to Belarus, which is on the Russian border. There's one little monument there commemorating the 600,000 Jews. We know that there are-- our parents were between them.

Now in Plaszow, there's a little monument. And about-- which I remember about the place where my brother and his wife was killed. Otherwise, we visited the graves in Krakow and Auschwitz. And that's the whole thing which we could go and look at. Otherwise, we have no interest whatsoever.

It's true, we went to our birthplace in Krakow. My wife is from Czarnow. We went from Czarnow. She saw her house. But she didn't go inside and I didn't go inside. We just looked from far away.

And then I was walking in Krakow on the streets which I know and I remember very well. The streets are there. The buildings are falling apart. There are no people there.

No people at all or no Jews?

No, there are people, but you walk around like complete strangers. Everything is strange to you. Everything is neglected. The synagogue, there's no one active synagogue. They're falling apart. The ones they have, they make storages out of it. And it's-- there's one little synagogue with a cemetery, where it's supported by the American Jews, so still the few old Jews, the sick ones, come there every Saturday. So do the tourists. And they're begging for money and things like this.

You mentioned something before we started the interview about visiting Mauthausen or seeing--

Yes, since I was liberated, although I wasn't in-- I didn't go to Mauthausen which is, I think, four or five hours ride by car from Vienna. And I hope to be there this year if everything goes right. And maybe we will go also to Theresienstadt, where my wife was liberated, which is not too far away. It's near Prague.

I'd like to thank you for sharing your thoughts and your memories with us.

Thank you. OK.