

Mr. Bergen, at the break you were telling us the story about a heroic act that came early in the war. And I wonder if you'd like to tell that publicly.

Yeah. We were going to go to the Russian side because they were helping. So we stopped at this town, Przemysl. It's right on the--

This was in '39?

In '39, yes. The end of '39. Right on the river San. S-A-N is the river. And we stayed there in a house. Next day we're supposed to be able to go in legally, because a lot of people swam through the river. But we waited. There was maybe 200 people in this one house, right on the bridge.

All of a sudden came some Ukrainians with some Germans and took 20 people to work into a cluster. It was right on the river, a cluster. And we had to take from a truck potatoes, with all the mud, just taking out of the-- just dug out. Very, very heavy. And bringing them into the basement. It was at night, late at night. And we had to run very fast. And they were beating us and beating us.

Finally we finished the work. And they took us into one room and then made speeches, different speech. Then one came in and said, we're going to shoot you all. Then again he start another speech. He says, well, we won't shoot you if one of you will volunteer to be shot.

It didn't take one second. We didn't know each other. I only knew my brother. And from different towns we came. One second came, and one man volunteered. They took him out. And it was different fences. It was like a cloister. In Poland, the cloisters were very secretive, hidden away. So they took him out. A few minutes later, we heard the shot.

And the soldier came in, saluted this officer. All the done. Fine. And then they decided again. No, we're going to shoot you anyway. So they took us out, maybe to the fences. It was late at night. We didn't hear a thing. We saw in front of us there was a machine gun with some people. And we saw a bundle. It was this man. I never know if the man was shot or not. I can't say that he was shot. But we heard a shot. And then we came. He put us all 19 people against the fence. And they were going to shoot us. And we saw this bundle in front of us, a black-- covered with something, with a coat, and that's it.

And nothing happened. Me and my brother, we kissed. We hugged. And we said goodbye. And then all of a sudden they say, no, if you can run away, if you can run-- there must have been three tall fences-- if you can run, you can run. Run away.

So we ran. Then I thought about it. All they wanted-- because we had some knapsacks, some little junk, whatever we had, whatever you could take from home to go away to a different country. So I guess this was the gimmick for them. I don't know if they shot this man, but to show this, the man didn't take one second. A stranger volunteered to be shot.

When you were in Plaszów, did you encounter any acts of heroism? Did you experience anything like that?

No. No, they used to bring other Polish people, so-called patriots. But they chained them. They were chained. For them, they always had a reason why. For us, there was no reason. Just because you're Jewish, that's it. But for them, it seemed that they committed some kind of against the government or something.

They were political prisoners.

But they were chained. They built them in chain. Us, they didn't chain. In fact, in this other [POLISH], there was another place. It was the female organ called. It was the same thing. And they put them against this.

And they shot them, only with one shot, and they kicked them into the graves, into this hole, with the chains all together, maybe 10, 15, 20 at a time. I saw it a few times. This was Polish people. But they shoot because they were committing sabotage or something. But no, I didn't see, really, in Plaszów, heroism to

speak of.

They were beaten. People were beaten. There were Jewish police in there, too. In fact, I have a friend. I don't know if he's still alive. He lived in Hillside. His eye was taken out with a-- for the horses what you have, you beat the horses with.

A riding crop.

Yeah. Yeah. And a Jewish man, I forgot his name. He was an [POLISH]. And he beat him right in eye and took his eye out. I think-- used to live there was heroism.

Did you believe at this point in your life that you would survive?

No, of course not. I guess I had hope, only because I was curious to know what's going to happen. This maybe partially kept me alive, I'm sure, just the curiosity. And I think a lot of people would feel it. If you asked them, you would find out that a lot of people felt the same way. Curiosity made you stay.

It's like every day was a test of your endurance.

Yeah.

And whether you would get through that day.

While you were in the camps, did you have any way of knowing what was going on in the world outside, how the war was progressing? Did you get any information from the outside?

Very vaguely in Poland. Maybe later, in the rest. Not really directly, but maybe we heard that the Americans bombed in here or the Americans bombed in here. But we didn't hear much. Because there were anti-Nazis, even in the SS, but they were afraid to talk to us. I know there was.

I remember in Tarnów there, when we worked for the cavalry, one man told me he was a communist. But he was a Nazi. He joined the Nazi party. So he was against Hitler, but they were afraid.

Were you in Plaszów when it was liquidated?

No. No, no, because I was taken to Mauthausen from Plaszów. First, maybe three months, we worked in Zakopane. We were building this dam. In fact, the head of this camp, his name was [? Troyevski. ?] He killed hundreds of people, but we believed he was a decent man. He had to do it. He didn't do it because he wanted to do it. He had to do it. It's funny.

Did you really believe that? Or was that a rationalization at the time for--

I don't know. We probably thought he was a decent man. And he did it. And he had to do it. But we knew there were others where they did above their duty. Those, they scared us.

As you think back, how would you describe your state of mind at this time?

In general?

In general, I mean.

I wasn't scared. I figured we take day-by-day. What's going to happen, happen. We weren't scared of death. I don't think none of us were scared of death. We knew we're going to die. In our mind, we knew it. We wanted to live, but we knew that we're going to die. So we took it as it came. And that's it.

It was in the ghetto, especially, because after this, there was a lot of fornication going on because we knew every day people died. There was no selection, just whoever he felt. There was this guy, the head of the

Gestapo. His name was Rommelmann. He just used to come in and just shoot, without any reason. He entertained himself. So he didn't care.

If a woman was free, we went to bed with her. And nobody refused because they know in 10 minutes they could be dead. And we didn't really-- most of us did not worry about dying. We came at the point where dying didn't mean a thing.

Also, a lot of people don't realize this. We didn't go out and make problems because if one Nazi was killed, they could destroy the whole town. And I guess Jewish people have this sense of responsibility.

For each other.

For each other.

Looking out.

This had a lot to do with it, because many times they destroyed complete villages because one German would die, was killed or something, one sabotage. I know in Plaszów, I know I was once very scared because this one boy escaped. His name was Bergen, by the way, too. So he escaped. Somehow he had help from outside.

And so when we came home-- because there was two labor camps, two camps-- the ones we were sleeping and the ones we were working. They were separated. Once you went to work you couldn't go into this. So at night, with guards, we had to go into the camp where there was sleeping camp.

So one day we heard they're going to shoot 10 people because this one man escaped, which they did. And I was sure that I'm going to be the next, because I figured with the name Bergen, I'm going to be next. So I was really scared then.

And was somebody shot?

10 people, of course. This was no problem, because shooting was the easiest thing. Plaszów was built on a cemetery. You know this? Did you know this?

No, I didn't.

Yeah, we were playing with the heads, with the--

Skulls.

The skulls, of course. We were kicking skulls. The whole camp was on a cemetery.

What were the circumstances under which you left Plaszów? To go to Zakopane?

Yeah, then I had to come back.

They needed workers?

That's why I don't have a number. In Zakopane, they were giving out KL, Konzentrationslager. So I was then in Zakopane. It was too small and they didn't need to. I never had a number. But when we came back from Zakopane-- I don't remember, maybe 50 people-- they were building a dam. And the head of the dam was an engineer. His name was [? Bodde. ?] The dam was never built. And we saw him in the movies in Rome. This [? Bodde ?] was in the movies. He was an actor, too.

And people went to the police to talk about him. But they found out that he was a spy. In fact, this [? Troyevski, ?] who was our cop, our head-- he was the head of our branch. The [? Bodde ?] was only an engineer. He want every day what we built fell down, so maybe he was a spy. So he said to [? Troyevski, ?]

of course if I didn't see what's going on, you would say the Jews did this. And I was there. I heard it. This way, he told us he was, in fact, a decent man. He tried to protect us, because if it would have been sabotaged from our side, we'd all be shot.

They tried to move the river from the regular to the controlled, to make it controlled, to move the river from- the dam. Isn't the dam something like that?

Yeah, to hold back the water.

To move the flow and flow evenly. When we stayed in Zakopane, probably six weeks we couldn't take a bath because they occupied the villa. There was no water. And they didn't have enough guards to take us to town, to take-- Sunday afternoon, this is the only free time we had. Our entertainment was killing lice. We took them like this, like this. We were specialists in killing lice.

Also, the cook in this place, he was a miserable guy. He sent us bread in. Over there, we got our portion of bread. Sometimes when we were in Melk we didn't get our portion of bread because Melk wasn't too far from Vienna. But anyway, we go back then. But this-- hot bread, he used to pile it one in the other. And he kept it before it got stale. And most of it was green. Mold, and we ate it.

Moldy.

And this way he gave it to us. Only if it was moldy. He was the cook. I can only tell you the thing which I remember in my mind.

You were also in Mauthausen?

Then, from there, we went to-- from Plaszów, when they liquidated Plaszów. I wasn't at the liquidation because they always have to leave somebody to clean up and whatever. They have their special people. The head of the Jewish police was [? Hillevich. ?] And he thought he's going to survive. He was with this Goeth, like this. I think that they killed him, too. I don't know if they caught him or not. I think they did. I guess he had to be mean. This was his job. But the Jews there took revenge on him after.

Anyway, then going back, then we went to Mauthausen. At the time was Lem Bloom was there in Mauthausen, too, when we came. Lem Bloom was in a jail. He didn't go out. But we found out. People told us there's a Lem Bloom was there.

So anyway, we went into the showers. And some people came out to the chimney. Some of us came out. And we stayed about 10 or 12 days to learn how to work. We worked in a quarry barefoot. We had to run over the rocks barefoot.

And the one was an Austrian sergeant. He was the worst. He was the biggest sadist I ever saw in my life. I don't know his name. Don't remember his name. He pushed people on the wires, on the electrical wires. He had for the horses, with the iron ball, hitting over the head. A lot of people died there after they were freed from the gas chambers. I mean, we went to the regular showers. The other one went to the--

The gas showers.

So we were only there for 10 days, but horrible days. Working in this quarry was the worst thing. I'd like to go back to see this quarry once if I could.

Was it even worse than the first labor camp you were in?

Even worse. But it was only 10 days in there. Not many survived this place. And then, from there, they sent us to Melk. Melk is 80 kilometers of Vienna. Two weeks before we came, we heard that the camp was bombed and 250 prisoners died in this camp by the Americans. But I guess they didn't know.

And over there it was a horrible place. I remember once I had to drink urine, because it was very cold. It

was in the winter on the Danube. And people used to take a cup and pee in there. So whoever was nearby, you have to drink it, he said, because this was their system.

It was so cold, I risked my life. I joined one-- you call it in German a [GERMAN]. A bed. Not a bed. Made out of wood. What do you call it? A little two-by-four. I joined with another. We had two blankets so we could be a little warm. There was no bed, so we had to go out. And this was very cold, because this is near the mountains. Melk is near the mountains, near the Danube River. Bitter cold.

We had to go to appell every morning about 4 o'clock, counting us, 4, 5 o'clock. Bitter cold. No shoes. I had two those wooden things. One was with a nail out and I had to throw it away. This was in November. We went to work. We had to stay about three hours on this appell to count us, back and forth if somebody was missing. Once we stayed maybe for four hours because one was missing. And then they found him. There was a kind of a pool. They found him in the pool, committed suicide. I think Beckelhammer was his name. Was from my town, this guy.

So I went to this-- in the mountain, we had to lay pipes. When we went out it was raining. When we came up on the mountain it was snowing. It was cold. And I stayed all day long without shoes. When I came back, they had to drag me back. You couldn't go to the hospital unless you had a 104 fever. There was a kind of a hospital.

So next day, I just couldn't move. So they took me to the hospital. The hospital there was enough for maybe eight people. There was 45 people. But there was no heat. But we didn't need any heat. So I didn't get no medicine. They put me in cold water, in ice water. And I don't know how I got well. I can't understand how I got well after this. In fact, there was a friend of mine who-- he died there. He was there. He had an operation, too. We met in this place, in Melk.

And then, in Melk we were going-- to remember again. This was finished. Then we went out to build a village. So we had to walk maybe a kilometer and a half. And they built a special station for us. It was, I would say maybe 1,000 people went to work there. And we wait on the station for the trains to take us. Because to walk to the station wasn't too far, but to work, which is where we built this village, we couldn't walk there.

At one point, people committed suicide. They throw themselves under the train. So at one point we had to stay away from the train, not face the train when the train was coming to take us to the village. The village was called Melkendorf, what we built, this village. From zero, the foundations and everything.

Then even this wasn't enough, so we had to hug one another away from the train so people shouldn't jump. Even with this, I remember one young medic from Krakow. He jumped right under the locomotive. The head of the camp, it so happened he was a music lover. Oh, he loved music, opera, this head of the camp. In fact, I had a cousin there, kind of, and he was a virtuoso violinist. And he put them in the kitchen to work in the kitchen. In the kitchen, you always have a little bit extra. A couple of times he gave me a piece of bread and this medic.

So anyway, this man, this young medic threw himself in there. You couldn't even find a piece of him. They had to make sure that he's dead. So he called the medical head to make sure that he's dead, to check if he's dead. He wouldn't even find a piece of him. And he made a joke. You think he's dead? Right in front of me. But this medic was also a decent man. He was an Austrian. He was an officer. An SS, but he was a very decent man. He didn't smile when he made this joke. So this was Melk.

And then, from Melk, we stayed there from 1944 till, I guess, 1940-- it was horrible. This was a horrible place. Cold. We had diarrhea. No food. Many times we didn't get bread for weeks, because we got the bread from Vienna and Vienna was bombed so we couldn't get any bread. So they gave us maybe sometimes a potato.

And from there, this was the rest, when we went to Ebensee. This was in '45 already. It must have been the beginning of April in '45. They put us on a boat on the Danube for four days. No food. It was like a merchant with iron. And we just sat there for four days.

And then, after four days, we got off in Linz. This is also in Austria. And in Linz they gave us some pieces of bread, and running fast, and with rocks. No, we had to walk. We had to walk from one village to another.

In one town, we stayed there was a beer brewery. It was bitter cold, on the outside, on the rocks like this. No nothing. Just uniforms from there. This is where we stayed. And across the street were nuns. Some threw bread across the fences there. We stayed there for one night because they didn't let us walk during the night.

Then another night, I remember this one town was Wels. And there were chickens used to be there. There were chicken coops. And they put us into the chicken coops. We sat there all night. People died like flies with those marches. And somehow there was potatoes with [? socks. ?] With raw potatoes. So we grabbed potatoes. And they used to beat us if we grabbed a raw potato. Ever tasted raw potato? The most horrible thing.

And then we came to Ebensee after four days of marching, a lot of people dying. And this was the last place. And also, always hard work. There were Russian prisoners, too, and they already told us that it's to the end. It's going to the end.

In fact, the rumor was-- I don't know if it's true or not, but the rumor was-- this must have been in the beginning of May. They told us that we should, for protection-- there was 20,000 people in the camp-- we should go into the mountains, otherwise the Americans are going to bomb the camp. So the Russian officers, which they must have had some contact already, they said no. It's all right. If you rather die from the Americans, then go into the mountain. The rumor is-- I didn't see it, so I can't say what it-- the mountain was dynamited. They want to destroy 20,000 people. This was already at the end.

But in Ebensee, I saw people cutting flesh out of people and eating it. I, myself-- the SS owned us. And they were selling us to private companies for whatever private industry, whatever they needed. So now and then those industries were giving us like a surprise, a few cigarettes. But who didn't smoke, which I never smoked, you could sell the cigarettes. And I sold the cigarettes. In Ebensee, I remember, I sold the cigarettes for a little machine oil.

We only ate once a day a soup made out of potato shells. And you didn't know what to do because there's a line. Let's say that 50 gallons. No, 50 liter, and they had one measure with a liter. They didn't mix it, so you didn't know if you-- you were so hungry, you wanted to get first. You wanted to be in line first. But yet, on the other hand, you wanted to have something thick. You didn't know what to do. So it was a problem. If you had from the top, you had only water. In the bottom, you had a few shells.

Every eight days I went to the bathroom. I was in Barrack 23. It was a famous barrack. We must have been 200 people in this barrack, just on the floor, laying around. And every day they threw out the window three, four, five people, dead. Dying from hunger. This was the worst of any camp, the food. There was no food at all.

They didn't bother to bury them or anything? They just threw them?

I think there was a place they were burning them. There were right outside. They were burning them. In the front of us was a pool. Not to use. It was all-- in fact, when the Americans came, they liberated us. They cleaned up the pool somehow with some disinfectant and they made us bathe in there.

But it was something happen in there. It was a beautiful day in May, May the 8th, in the mountains, beautiful mountains in the Alps. Ebensee was in the Alps, and beneath there's a beautiful lake. You know Ebensee means a lake. So we were standing there. We didn't know. We were in shock. We didn't know what to do.

Next to me was a young Russian boy, very good-looking boy, and well-fed. And all of a sudden, other Russian, all the guys came over and they say to him, well, would you like to swim? I said, why you want him to swim? He can't swim. He's too weak. They didn't even look at me. Come on, you want to swim or to

hang? I said, what? I didn't know what to say to them. They told me to shut up. And he said, to hang.

He had the cigarettes. He got cigarettes, too. You think he would give it to me? No, he wouldn't give it to me. He gave it to somebody else. So then I found out he was spying on other prisoners during-- this why he was so well-fed. He was spying to the Nazis. And they hung him. Within one minute he was hung. They did a lot of people, but this one just happened next to me.

Also in Ebensee, we worked on coal. We were shoveling coal. So I don't know what kind of matter this is. If there's a chemist, he would know. Some gray matter in the coal, we ate this. I ate this. Nothing happened. I don't know why. Somehow, when you in a condition like this, you don't die. It's very hard to die from natural causes.

What were your feelings like on the day of liberation?

Oh, this is what I say to this guy. You see, you're lucky. Now you go home. You have a family in Russia. I don't care. To me, it doesn't make any difference. I have nobody. I had nobody, nowhere to go. Nothing. Really. I missed the camp in a way, because at least whatever they gave me, I had. I couldn't walk. I couldn't walk.

The Americans, I guess they couldn't-- their business was the campaign, to finish up the campaign. They didn't take care. They cleaned up the barracks. The same barracks, they cleaned up, linen and all, whatever, sheets. And they put us in there like we're all sick. Many people died because they opened up the warehouses and ate. I couldn't walk. Maybe this was my luck. So I didn't eat.

There was a doctor. And he gave you kind of a general-- so I went to this doctor. And he examined me. And he said I have no acid in my stomach. I didn't know. No acids. Because if I drink water, it turned out like eggs, like rotten eggs. And the only thing I remember, I found a can. It was almost boiling inside. A can of food, it must have been an American can laying there in the sun. I ate this. Nothing happened. This was OK. It was boiling inside, a can of food.

But this doctor told me he didn't have any medicine. In fact, this cousin, this one-- I don't know. He disappeared. The musician. He put me on a train to a town that's called Schwandenstadt, a small little village, very nice, quaint little town.

I had no money. I walked into this drugstore. I had the prescription. He said, no, I have nothing for you. And then he called me back. It was an Austrian. And he called me back, and he gave me something. And I took it.

And I went back to-- then I went down from the camp. The Germans, the Austrians, left. This was resort. They left the homes. We all left this camp, and we went down and occupied those empty homes. It was all furnished homes. So in this one place I went there. It was 30 boys. We didn't know each other. Just whoever wanted to go in went in.

So one guy opens up the door. He was Polish. He said, so many Jews did survive? This decided me not to go back no more to Poland. But now I would like to go back anyway.

I was going to ask you if you ever had thought of going back to Tarnów.

Yes, I was in Italy two years ago and I wanted to go, but it was too late. I couldn't make it anymore. But I would like to go back, at least to see if I could find where my father was buried. He died in the war, but he died.

So then we went, and I joined with another man. This was already the war was finished. A man I didn't know. Everybody was going and begging for food, went to the German homes, to the Austrian homes, begging for food. So we went with the-- and took a little knapsack and we went back for food. And we slept. Diarrhea, constantly diarrhea. They put us up in the ceilings. They were afraid, of course because the Russian prisoners, those who were healthy, they killed a lot of Austrians. But we were weak. We didn't.

So most of the time they gave us oatmeal. The Germans eat a lot of oatmeal. And this saved my life. You know oatmeal is called in German Haferflocken. So they gave me this oatmeal, and that's all I could eat. After I took the medicine, that's all I could eat.

It's a binder.

And then, one day, the man I was going with, like partners to collecting food, he was Polish. I didn't know him. We just-- instead of going alone, we joined with somebody. Coming back, we were at one station. We're coming back to the camp. We were at one station, and I see a big group of people waiting there. Among them was my cousin from Arizona. I said, [? Cy, ?] what you doing in here? He said, I'm going to Palestine. I said, just like this, you're going to Palestine? He said, yeah. So I said, I'll go with you.

So I split up with this guy where we had food in this knapsack. He went back to the camp. And I went, and we went over a train. Imagine a train with coal. And we went on this train. And we went to Salzburg. This train took us to Salzburg, and there was already a camp organized by the Palestinian troops.

And we stayed there a few days, recuperated a little bit. They gave us food already. They treat us good. And with trucks, they took it over the Brenner Pass to Italy. But just like this. It showed you the mentality we had. We didn't care. You go? I go, too. We had nothing anyway in there.

So then the Italians were very nice. The first town was [? Trento. ?] And the first time-- maybe I could say in my life-- I had the orange. But this was in June, around June. And [? they're all ?] [? dry. ?] [LAUGHS]

So we stayed there a few days there. Then we went to the next town, which called Bolzano. It's all North Italy. They had ration breads, rationed food. The Italians, not only they gave us the tickets to ride, but some of them gave us money too. We stayed in this town a few days.

And then, yeah, I took off a pair of shoes from a dead German. And I remember a green shirt. It wasn't [POLISH], but like [POLISH] type shirt, I remember. We went to Verona. We didn't stay in one place. Each day they took us a different place. So we stayed in Verona a couple of days.

So I sold my shirt, and I went to the [INAUDIBLE]. First time in so many years I had money in my hand. So I went into a store. It was a rotisserie, an Italian rotisserie. And I asked him to sell me a roasted pigeon. They didn't want the money. [LAUGHS] They gave me the pigeon, and they didn't take the money.

And we stayed maybe a couple of days in Verona. Then we went to Padua, then to Bologna. Then we went, finally, from Bologna to Rome. In Rome, they didn't know what to do with us. They deliver us in Cinecitta. Cinecitta was a camp. You know Cinecitta? It's outside Rome, where the movie industry is. But there was a camp at the time.

And then they decided now to take us down to all the way south in Italy. And this was the place where I mentioned before. That was in [ITALIAN]. But before this, we stopped in the town Bari. Bari is a big port. So we stopped there for maybe two, three hours, and they let us go into town. It was in the evening already. So we went in town. We looked like-- we're still starving. I weighed maybe 75 pounds at the time.

You looked emaciated.

Yeah, we all like this. They used to call it Muselmann.

Yes.

You know this, too?

Yes.

OK. So anyway, we saw a red cross. And we walked in. We walked in. They look us deserters from the



cemetery. One said, hey, your Landsmann are here! Somebody, there must have been some Jewish officers. And I think there was a reporter, too, a woman reporter. And the first time, they took us up there, interrogate us. They asked, and then they brought us. The first time we saw beer in cans. We saw sardines in cans, and white bread. We ate like pigs!

And then we went down to all the way south in Italy, this place, [ITALIAN] To go to the next train would take eight kilometer to walk, this place called [Place name] I stayed there till December. And I was happy there. There we were fed. It was pretty good. It was on the beach. They gave us private homes, I mean, little rooms to stay there.

And in one room, some other people in this room. So I was in this one room. And all of a sudden, some guys came over. And they had a picture taken from Ebensee. They said, I think this is this Muselmann, that I am the guy. And it was me. And there was this picture. It was a group of people when the Americans came in and photographed us. We were naked. We were ready to go to the mountains there. They kepted us there, the Germans.

And I lost the picture. This was really a document. Maybe somebody has it someplace. Who knows? In fact, I had to make a cross over my head to recognize me later.

That you were the same person?

Yeah.

And how long were you in Italy?

Five and a half years. In Italy, I stayed. We lived with black market. No, first of all, in there I was till December. In December, we decided-- seven boys, one girl, no money, no nothing. We decided to go back to Germany to look if somebody survived. It looked like in Germans we had some rags. We can sell some rag, make some money. But mainly, we really went to look for somebody.

And we just sat on the train. No money. [LAUGHS] In the southern part, nobody asks us for money. They're very naive, those Italians. Somebody showed them from the Bible, something from the Hebrew writings. They asked for a ticket, a train ticket. So they showed them from the Bible. [LAUGHS] And they let him go. [LAUGHS] It was funny.

And I went from there. With the seven boys and this one girl we went. And there it was raining, but it was warm. We must have gone 24 hours on this train. And on the river Po there was no bridge. We were scared. Oh, it was [? raw. ?] The river was wild. When we came to the Brenner Pass, it was bitter cold. We were there summer.

But somebody had some money. We took a guide, and we went. He brought us up on the river. It was 11 o'clock at night we came there. He brought us up on this Brenner Pass. He took us a little way. You said about dying. This was you made one little move-- it was snow and ice. It was the Alps, high. We didn't even know that we could die. We didn't even realize that we could die. I remember, later, I said, gee, it was so narrow, if I made one little slip, that's it. And we went.

And then, at a certain point, he left us. And we had to go up and down, snow up to here. And then, finally, in the morning-- all night we walked-- early in the morning, with rucksacks, knapsacks, we came to Innsbruck. We were lucky because they were the French. If they would have get us, they would have arrested us. But nothing happened.

So we went. This was when we were in Austria. In Innsbruck we took a train, and we were going to go to Germany. It was this where we thought maybe somebody is there. So we came to the border. We didn't realize there were borders already there. It was December already.

So we came to this border in the daytime. You just walk. So two guys come over, two Germans. And they ask us where we going, what we're doing here. We're going to Germany. They said, no, this is a border. You

can't go. You need a passport.

So one of the boys took out the knife and wanted to kill him. So they whistled. Somebody came out with a gun. So they arrested us in Germany, after the war. [LAUGHS] We were in jail for eight days, as they fed us. And then there was a trial. It was American judge and American prosecutor. And they made a joke out of this whole trial. They let us go.

And I was eight kilometer from my brother, and I didn't know that he was alive at that time. And he had money. He was working with American-- he was helping the American troops or helping. He was like a police or an orderly, whatever he was. And I didn't know that he was alive.

So we were there. And then we sold those rags, whatever we had. Who had some rags, he sold this. And we all went back to Italy. I came back to the same place, and all my friends are gone. Because I had a few friends from my town, we were--

Was your brother with you?

No, I didn't know about my brother yet. So I came back. One friend was there, and he was buying oil in South Italy and bringing to Rome. Black market. This way we made-- how could we? We didn't have any money. How would we survive? like the UNRRA gave us a little bit, but this wasn't enough to live.

So we went. I asked my friend, can I go with you? OK. Because all the rest of the friends were there. He was just going back and forth. So when I came, they had a room in Rome, three guys and this guy, which was the fourth. They had a room on the street Via Quintino Sella, right in the center, Via Venti Settembre. I don't know if you know Rome. And we rented this room. Five guys in two beds. [LAUGHS] And we stayed there.

We went, we got a soggiorno. Soggiorno means a permit to stay. So they gave you tickets for bread. But [LAUGHS] we were cheating because a lot of people went away so we bought their soggiorno. There were no pictures on this. And we got bread-- not for free, but cheap. And we were selling the bread. This is the only way. We has to use all kind of gimmicks to sell.

Then we couldn't afford suits, so we bought uniforms, soldiers' uniform. There was an Alexander Club, the English club. They were a little stiff, but we went in there. They let us in because we had Polish passports. And the Polish were with the-- we went to the Polish embassy. We got passports. So they let us in. We look like-- every soldier wants a picture-- look like an English soldier. [LAUGHS]

Then we went to the-- Americans we couldn't go in. American clubs, we couldn't go in. They wouldn't let us in. But we went to the Palestinian Club. We enjoyed Rome. And this is where I met my wife and got married. She come from one of the finest families in Rome. Her brother was married-- of course, he died now-- to a rabbi's sister, the Chief Rabbi of Venice. When John XXIII, you know--

The pope.

The pope. When he was vicar of Venice, he was the rabbi. They were friends like this. This why he was so good to the Jews, because he was influenced. His name was Rabbi Leoni. I don't know if you heard of him. He wrote many books. This was my ex brother-in-law's wife's brother. When I got married, my wife must have been crazy-- in love or crazy, because I had nothing. She couldn't get references about me. A lot of the Jews from concentration camp, they stole. They had to survive.

They had no identity.

They had no identity. They had to survive. Suckers like me, I just did the best I could to survive. But some of them were smart. They were in black market. I did some black market, only I was going to the Polish soldiers, buying whiskey from them and selling it to the stores so I made a couple of dollars.

One day on the bus, it was a crowded bus. All nuns around me and priests, in Rome. And I had 10,000 lire

at the time in my pocket. All of a sudden it's gone. And I look. I didn't-- who could? A priest? And I couldn't speak Italian. And a woman, she was dressed as a postman, a woman stole it from me. [LAUGHS] She didn't have the [? balls. ?] I was without money again.

Why did you decide to come to America?

Yeah, this is a good question. I had a good life and a nice home, nice relatives, lovely people. Pride. I wanted to show them why do I have to be helped by them? She should help me, I'm going to show what I can do in America. But I didn't do so well. I mean, I didn't do bad, but I can't complain.

Just pride, because I lived a good life in Italy. I didn't have to work hard. We had a store. Wasn't that the store was making millions, but we made a living. I always could lean against this brother-in-law. He was a very rich man. He was nice. And a lot of people he helped, a lot of refugees. Everyone in the clothing store.

This must have been the happiest time of your life up to that point.

Yes, this was really the happiest time. In fact, even here-- I tried to commit suicide after my wife left. So did my brother in Italy. He shot himself twice in Cinecitta. And my wife left me. Because that's all I had, was my family. We had a nice little business, not rich. We had a nice home.

Your children were born by this time?

When I tried suicide, my son was just finishing law school. And I was very sick. I was sick for a long time. I used to weigh 205 pounds. I lost-- I'm friendly with my ex-wife. We're not enemies. But she decided to go to school. She already was an educated woman from Italy. She had a teacher's degree. She never taught because Mussolini wouldn't let them teach. But then here, she got two master's degrees. Now she's a social worker. Now she would like to go back, but now it's too late.

Where does she live now?

Hmm?

Where is she now?

She lives in Jersey City. I see her now and then, when we go to my son. In the beginning, my wife didn't want anyone to meet her. She's Sicilian. She's jealous. But [LAUGHS] a very fine woman. Very fine woman.

I tried three times somehow. I don't know. Maybe I didn't want it die-- I don't know. I was in the hospital. I went down to 160 pounds, and not for a diet. It's my depression, the way it was. But I pulled myself up by my boots and my kid finished school, my daughter. My daughter got married with two rabbis. Within a year, she divorced. It was a nice family, the boy, but she didn't like what he was trying to do to her. I don't know. Very bright girl, my daughter.

And now I'm 70 years old. And I'm still a messenger. And I still do some work in the house, too.

And you're still surviving.

I'm still surviving. Believe me, I don't have any money, but I still help my son. I make in eight year what he makes in one year, but still, I try to help him.

Did your children ever ask you about your experiences during the war?

Not really. I tell them. But I try to keep them away from it. I really try to. I don't know if they want to hear it. I know my daughter, she's good. She was in Italy now, working for the Medicis. You heard of the Medicis. They're all a big deal in there. She only worked there nine months because she couldn't take it over there.

And she had made a video tape. But I was proud of her. The one who made it-- it's all non-Jewish people in

there. She was the only Jew. On the videotape she said, not too bad, eh, for the little Jewess? I was so proud of this.

Yet my son is kind of-- he's scared. He didn't circumcise his children. I don't really care, but I know why he did it. He was scared. We all are paranoid.

It carries over for you.

My wife still wakes me up at night. Many times. Nightmares. You can't. You can't forget it. It's just impossible.

Well, thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us.

I'm sorry that I couldn't-- I only could tell you exactly the fact what I remember.

You told us a great deal, and you told us much more than the facts.

If I could write it, I could make it in sequence. But I can't.

Thank you very much, Morris.

[MUSIC PLAYING]