

Did you ask your father about his year in hiding?

Yes, several times. But the--

Or two years, actually.

Two years? No. No, no, no. It was from September of '43 to October of '44-- [INAUDIBLE] is essentially the same year for me in the mountains.

Two things-- my father, because of his leg, was not a mobile individual. Therefore, it isn't that he missed going out. Because being cooped up-- I think he changed altogether three locations. He went with some friends in the beginning, then just for security and before suspicions were aroused, he moved.

I don't think he had, first of all, things to read like books or things like this. And I don't think my father read that much as compared with my mother, who was an avid reader. So he told me we're primarily of-- thinking about the rest of us, counting the minutes, and the hours, and the anxiety that he felt. He spoke about that.

And always before my mother and brothers were caught, he looked forward to seeing, occasionally, when they would come. My mother ventured, I think, once or twice to come down. Very often, I think it was, really, Sam who played the intermediary. Or my father would then use still somebody else to deliver money or news.

So I think that the pictures I have now of my father and the conversation I had with him was that he simply spent these 13 months with a mixture of despair, stoicism, hope. He didn't express much more than that. And I know-- I could imagine how it must have been for him, cooped up in those places.

Now, in 1946, you went to the Polytechnic Institute of Athens?

At the end of '45, I took the entrance examinations and I was accepted. But almost simultaneously, I was informed-- because I do not know that until after it happened, that my father, all this time after the liberation, even before Sam returned, was working behind the scenes-- and he did not tell me, that's what I mean by behind the scenes-- through his contacts with the B'nai B'rith to see what he could do to assure my education.

And so finally, things had progressed far enough, I guess, from the other end, from the United States, that he had to tell me. And my first reaction was, I have to confess, a little bit negative. Because not so much the idea of going to the United States to study, but that suddenly, my future had been already prepared for me.

When I was a child, to be an engineer, that's fine. And I grew to like it. But later on, I'm now an adult. I have to decide for myself. But that only lasted [LAUGHS] for a few hours or a few days.

So I attended classes at Polytechnic only for, essentially, the first semester. Because then everything-- I had to get ready to come the United States. Among other things to get ready is getting the visas and passports. But even more than that was transportation.

Remember, it was still a year after the war. And we had to wait for the next available ship with the opening that was traveling to the United States. And the first opening was in October of '46. That's when I--

Now, let me express some surprise to you.

Right.

Here, your father has two children. He lost his wife and his youngest son. And he, it sounds like, almost immediately began to plan so that you would have a different sort of future that wouldn't be in Europe. So he loses you in a certain way, at least in terms of every-- how do you unders-- I mean--

You're kind. Because I thought you would carry it one more step and say, how did I dare then leave him?

Well, I might have gone there. So it's good that you-- [LAUGHS]

Well, there is no question. My father-- he used to tell me, I remember, even when I was already in high school-- if I would ask him for some money to do something like, I don't know, go to a movie or something, or go buy something, he would say to me, look, I don't have the money to give you for that purpose. But if you were to ask me that you want to go buy a book, even if I don't have the money, I will tell you what I will do. I will not smoke for a week to save from smoking. So anything that has to do with education, I'll do.

So it's not surprising to me. And I know in some respects, because I learned this thing subsequently, my father would say things that were not true-- fibs, lies. But they were lies for good purposes. Even before he worked this thing through the B'nai B'rith for the scholarship for me to come to the United States, I know he wrote a letter to Churchill saying-- which was a bit of an exaggeration-- that he, at the risk of his life, had hidden a British soldier who had to go into hiding because the British contingent had come to help the Greeks when we were fighting the Italians.

And then, of course, in '41, it was partly true. There was a man who was in the British army that happened to be-- his parents were Monastir. And he came to the synagogue for Pesach. And so we invited him. And he joined us for a [INAUDIBLE].

That's what happened. That's true. But he was not really hiding. [LAUGHS] So he-- in other words, my father would do anything, even embellish the truth or stretch it, to assure that I had the proper education.

And he really thought you couldn't get it in--

Oh, no. No, it wasn't that. No, no. No, that-- on the other hand, getting into United States-- because for a long time, in certain ways, my father was naive. When I was growing up, I was going to be a textile engineer. Well, why? I mean, what did he know about textiles other than some son of some business associate had gone and studied textile engineering in Liege, in Belgium, which apparently had a well-known textile engineering school.

So I was being prepared fully for engineering, but also for textile engineering. Of course, all of that got changed when I decided to be an electrical engineer. And [INAUDIBLE] textiles. But he understood this much, that opportunities in Europe, educational opportunities-- let alone in the United States, which was a mirage. It was not very far away physically, but so distant notionally. So he would do anything.

So let me then ask you the more difficult question. How did you dare leave?

Well, how I dare leave-- first of all, I was, after awhile, inebriated by the thought that I was going to the United States. Second, Sam had returned. So I knew my father was not alone. Third, I was joined by a cousin whose father was my father's cousin.

I, with a young man-- Jeff Levy- [Levice ?] was his name. We came together on the same ship. He went to Iowa, I went to Illinois. We were related from both sides, the maternal and paternal side. So he was an only child. And therefore, I-- putting all these things together, there were no limits to what parents would do to further.

After all, I was going to study. It didn't necessarily mean that I was going to go there forever. I could have easily, in normal times, be sent to study in Manchester, which has another textile engineering school.

Right.

So there were no thoughts. Now, if Sam had not returned, I can-- as they say in Greek, I could put my hand on flames and swear that my father would have done the same thing, and would have pushed me, and encouraged me, and really shoved me. Because he felt the value of education. And I did it.

You had no family here.

No, I had--

[INAUDIBLE]

--an uncle in New York, whom I saw when I landed.

Right.

But that's it. I then went to school in Illinois. And--

Did you have English by then?

No. But you see, in engineering, you don't need very much, especially in the beginning, which is mathematics. In fact, I knew more mathematics than they taught in the first two or three years in college. Because in high school, especially the one that I went, which was so intensive in mathematics and engineering-- no, I had no English. But I learned it.

[LAUGHS]

And you liked this country when you came? Or didn't you?

Of course. Well--

[INAUDIBLE]

In the-- well, first of all, again, in the first four years, I was busy learning and getting an education, trying to get a degree. Then the decision to go to graduate school was really, of course, mine, primarily. But I began to get encouragement from professors that they had in undergraduate school.

And I was encouraged enough to stay although I had no means independently. I was given a research assistantship, which would pay the tuition, and \$103 a month. And that's all I had to live on. Because my father, from time to time, would send me, in a letter, a \$5 bill or a \$10 bill.

So it was primarily the encouragement I got from teachers that made me stay. And in fact, I stayed another two years in Illinois.

And where did you go to graduate school?

In Illinois also.

In Illinois. You stayed in Illinois. And the first time you saw your father after you'd come to the United States and your brother--

Yes. Finally, I left Illinois. I began to work at Bell Telephone Laboratories. And within a few months after starting work at Bell Labs, I was drafted.

Oh.

Because the draft was still on. And of course, I would have had the choice of not going to the army, being an alien. Of course, I could never then stay in this country. We haven't talked about the fact that-- that was in '50. At one point, I was to be expelled by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Because I had essentially overstayed my student visa.

It's another long story. But my professors intervened. And the long and the short is that Senator Douglas introduced a

private bill in Congress. And I got to stay in the United States on a law named for me, for the relief of Isaac Nehama, signed by President Eisenhower.

No kidding.

Not too many people have laws made for them individually.

No.

But coming back after the Bell Labs, I was drafted. Of course, within six months after Europe, drafted in the army, you don't wait five years for obvious reasons. The country asked you to go and maybe die for the country. They don't make you wait for citizenship. So I was naturalized in Colorado Springs where I was stationed.

So that was in '50-- between '53 and '55. Does that mean that you-- well, you didn't lose Greek citizenship. Because you never were a Greek citizen.

I was never a Greek citizen.

That's right.

I lost Yugoslavia, since I didn't know Yugoslavian. [LAUGHS] Right.

So after that, you went back and visited? No?

No. No, during my years in the army-- actually, a few months after arriving in Colorado Springs-- I got a call from the Red Cross. My father had had an accident. Really, he fell. He slipped. The cane slipped, and he fell. But because the left leg was always weaker, he fell with the weight of the body on the leg and broke it.

So I was given compassionate emergency leave, which in order to use it, I hitchhiked. And it took me three weeks to get there. And hitchhiking means I would go from air base to air base and ask if there is a plane going in that general direction.

So I got from Colorado Springs, eventually, to Stewart Air Force Base in Massachusetts, and then in the Azores, Libya, Athens. And fortunately, then I presented myself to the military attache at the American embassy in Athens. And that's when he stamped my orders. And the 30 days counted from the day of my arrival.

Oh, how nice.

Well, eventually, it was over. And on the return, it took two months to find-- but again, I got stopped in Washington for the first time. For three weeks, there were no planes going in the general direction of Colorado Springs.

So when you look back on all of this, how do you place your life in the context of those years?

Which years? The partisan years, the--

The war and the partisan and--

Well, the context is there are two aspects about it. One, that it's definitely-- it was an extremely significant period in my life, and I think to a large extent, of considerable extent, also forming. It was a kind of, maybe-- I don't want to use the word crucible here.

But-- right. The second part, when I reflect, at times-- it lasted for-- fortunately, for me, and I think for my family and friends-- a very short time. Namely, especially when I first came to the United States, I was surprised. Because many of my fellow students were American veterans who had flown missions over Germany in that very dangerous time.

In fact, I arrived in the United States November of '46, the day before midterm elections. And when I asked the question, are you voting tomorrow? First of all, they didn't know there were elections.

Now, in European tradition, university students are always at the forefront of political activity. So here are people-- not only students, but veterans of a war. So for a bit, I got sort of disoriented, that there was no-- that my experience is really-- I was beaten into wonderful shape.

And very quickly, I think, after it, I began to think seriously about that [INAUDIBLE], how ludicrous the thought is. Because I would have preferred a banal, normal childhood with my mother, and brothers, and family than being formed into a fine shape. No, thank you very much. I would not wish it on anybody else.

Is there anything you'd like to say that I've missed, or you would--

No. I'd like to thank you, almost in the same reasons that Sam says the same thing to his own interviewer. Because the other reason, other than Sharon's very wise statement persuaded me to do that, is that it leaves something for either my descendants, number one, as well as, perhaps, people in the future who might be interested about this particular period.

And this I'm saying now, following a year and a half of work as a volunteer for the Holocaust Museum in doing this thing for the Bitola Jews. I have lived with, essentially, almost 2,000 faces of people who are all dead and whose names then I had to type into a database and who become alive, and then reading books, and talking about that.

So I want to thank you for doing that. Because it leaves something which might be of some small value or use to some interested historian or person in the future.

Well, I want to thank you. You tell a very vivid story. And your articulateness is really appreciated. So I thank you very much for being willing to do this. I know that it's not easy.

Yeah.

Thank you.

Right.

Fade!