

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with David Halivni
June 13, 2014
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PREFACE

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DAVID HALIVNI

June 13, 2014

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **David Weiss Halivni**, which is taped on June 13th, 2014. The interviewer is **Michael Abramowitz**, and we are at the museum in **Washington, D.C.** So, professor, I would like to start with some basic questions: where were you born, and – and where were you raised?

Answer: Well, I was born in a little village, which changed hands a number of times. It was called **Poliana Kobyletska**. **Poliana, p-o-l-y-n, koba, k-o-b – koba, b-e-l-e-c-k-y**, that's how I spell it. At that time, when I was born, it was **Czechoslovakia**. Then for a while after the war, it was **Russia**. Now it's **Ukraine**. But my father got there because – which is interesting – all of a sudden – that's what people told me, a wonder rabbi appeared.

Q: A wonder rabbi?

A: Yes. Supposedly he performed miracles. He knew a person, the ba – sickness, which is always the platform for wonder people, you know, to heal, to – and my f – and he needed somebody to set up his – his sel – activities, and my father was chosen, and therefore he moved to – he – he settled in **Poliana**, in **Ponya(ph)**, and he moved there. And of course, I was there, I was born there. I tell it because all of a sudden, two or three years later, he ceased performing miracles, and the whole

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thing evaporated, and there was no – there was no reason for my grandfather – for my father any more to stay there, and we moved away from there, we moved to a bigger city called **Houst**(ph) or **Hist**(ph), **Houst**(ph). May I also tell you, I think it's interesting, you – you'll decide what you want do with this story. After this he became paralyzed, and nobody even know where – what happened then. The whole thing, the whole – there were only 50 families, Jewish families in – in that village, and if he left, th –

Q: Was his whole body paralyzed?

A: Whole bo-body, th – we need – and people didn't – didn't hear from him, I didn't know what happened. And then, a few month before deportation, in '44, I got a message he appeared, reappeared. Must have been in an institution the meantime, I don't know. He reappeared, and asked to be – he wants to see me. I was come pa – I was **[indecipherable]** outside my narrow – he must have heard, he wants to come.

Q: So you were about 15 or 16.

A: Fifteen or 16.

Q: And you had not seen your father for many years.

A: No, I – my father, we – we do – I'll come to it.

Q: Okay.

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A: I – I just want that – you don't have to mention, but it's interesting. I – he came to see me, he want to come and see me, in a wheelchair, of course. As soon as he opened the door, he burst out into tears loudly, and he couldn't speak. Tried to break into – hold a conversation, to engage in something, and didn't come out. So much so that said goodbye, and we left. Few month later, there were – we were – the deportation to **Auschwitz**. I'm always asking myself, what was the – the – the cause for that – what shall I say? Thunder, kind of flood of tears that came out? Could it be that I reminded him of the years when he had power, and that caused that? Or, he still had some power, and he knew about the deportation. He knew I had [**indecipherable**] time. In any case, a few month later – later, of course he was deported, and he was – so, let me go back. My father left, went back to **Houst(ph)**, and we lived in **Houst(ph)** two or three years, and then my mother and father broke up, and the age four or five – I was born in '27 – the age of four or five, we – Mother left Father, and we went to **Sighet**, where my grandfather lived. It was in **Sighet** that I was brought up, and I lived there with grandfather. Finally they were divorced. Til **Mengele** separated grandfather from me, you know, the –

Q: Tell me a little bit about your grandfather, because he really became the father in your life.

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A: Right, he is the – the – I do say, I say it in the book. There are two people who had the influence. One was the grandfather, who was a gr – great Talmud scholar, but old-fashioned, if I may use the word **[indecipherable]** the old-fashioned, but the – who – who – who taught himself **[indecipherable]** at night, he used to give a – a lesson **[indecipherable]** Talmud. And – and he brought me up, that's the male figure that I know. He was very poor, he could hardly support me and my mom, my mother and another sister. But he was then a great influence, that he taught me how to learn on a simple, elementary level. And he was a shochet, he was a **Belzer** shochet, with uniform, with a **kapoto(ph)**, you know what's a **kapoto(ph)** and **[indecipherable]** so from secular knowledge, or secular activity, he had no idea, there was no – it's no – he didn't – you can't even see he rejected it because he had no dealings, or that. So I was brought up, and of course, along these lines. And then people asked – even today asked me how – where it comes from. I can't answer the question. Since I remember, even when I was five or six years, and lived under the influence of grandfather, I wanted to study secular knowledge. I wanted to have secular knowledge.

Q: Did you go to – did you go to a secular school at all?

A: Not at all.

Q: Not at all.

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A: That's what they – people asking me, where did that come. Maybe you will see what you could do with that. When I was a chi – five, six years even, and I used to pray, daven, and I said the prayer **[indecipherable]** God give us in our heart, understanding, to understand you and so on. I remember I used to look at the window, signifying outside knowledge as well, not only religious knowledge. Where I got that – that urge, I don't know. That really, after the war, after the liberation, that was the reason I didn't go to **Israel**. I wanted – was afraid I wouldn't be able to study there, I didn't know, secular knowledge, so I went to the **United States** where the – so – so I had the – but then I was – so grandfather had the enormous influence, other than some ideas. I was never a shochet, never believed in the **[indecipherable]**, even though grandfather used to tell miracles, and the **[indecipherable]**. And then, of course, that lasted til – til '44, and then '44, the other person that had the influence on me, was Professor **Saul Lieberman**, who was the great – the great Talmud scholars. And then eventually I adopted the more scientific, or the more critical approach – could tell you I – to the study of Talmud, which I now write, teach, preach.

Q: So you mentioned that you were considered a child prodigy in the – in the town where you grew up. Can you remember at all how you – when you first realized that might have a calling in this area?

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A: Yes, I remember exactly. When I felt that the first time – when others felt that, how old was I? Was I seven? Around there, give or take. I used to go every Friday with grandfather to take a bath. We had no pi – we didn't had hot water in the house, we had to warm it up [**indecipherable**]. So once a week, Friday, as you could imagine, we went, and there was **ambatya**(ph), a bath. We had to pay for it, and grand – but the – I was allowed for the two of us, he and me to use the same – the same bath. One day – one week – one Friday – be th-there was a seat there, I remember, and there were two – what's the English word for **ambatya**(ph)? What is it called, the one that – it escapes me. The one that you have inside.

Q: A bath.

A: A bath, but what is it called, **skatabietel**(ph) in Yiddish.

Q: Not a sauna, or a steambath?

A: No, no, no, no, the container.

Q: Oh, oh, a – a tub?

A: A tu – that's a tub, there's a name, the tub, the ba-bathtub.

Q: Bathtub, okay.

A: Yeah, the bathtub is good enough. I remember the bathtub in there was two, kind of place to sit, and I – we got up on the bathtub, and I tell grandfather, I remember, I could tell you the name of all generation, the name of the generations, since the

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time of **Adam**, the first person, til King **David**. [indecipherable] And I gave him the list, I still remember it. And that –

Q: T-Tell me – right, that's it.

A: And so much so that afterwards, people in the street used to tell the story, and they used to ask me, and [indecipherable] which is the –

Q: So they would come up to you and ask you questions, try to test you.

A: Yeah [indecipherable] wha-what – what's the te – what's the 21st

[indecipherable]. I have an interesting story I will tell though. I was – later on I learned Talmud, at the age of nine, 10, I knew 200 pages [indecipherable] by heart. And I came to a city, it's called **Vishiva**, my late wife came from there. And a man by the name of **Lefkowich**(ph), **Bartka**(ph) **Lefkowich**(ph) I think it was.

Yakabowich(ph). **Yakabowich**(ph) told me, I'll give you – tell me the 25th **rovo**(ph), the name of the sage who's mentioned [indecipherable], and I'll give you 25 **lei**. For a poor – for me, that was considerable money. So I told him. And I was stretching out my hand to get money. He turns to me, he says, how do I know that you are right? I remember it to this day, over here, I – I have – that was taken back, that he – he has such a [indecipherable] question. He – I – but I wanted the money, and he was willing to give, so I told him, if I'll tell you the 10, the 15, the 20th and the 25th, would you give me the money? No, don't want.

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Q: Can you – I don't want to forget your mother. Can you tell me a little bit about your mother, and – cause she also raised you, obviously, and you –

A: Lately – lately, I was thinking about that. Interesting. She was bitter.

Q: Bitter.

A: Bitter, yeah, because of the divorce, and she was an elegant woman, and – but life wasn't elegant, life didn't treat her too well.

Q: And what was her name?

A: **Fayga**(ph).

Q: **Fayga**(ph).

A: Our ten – two weeks ago, less than two weeks, it was 70 years that she and grandfather and my sister and Aunt **Ani**(ph) arrived at **Auschwitz**. And really I was thinking, trying even to remember, I remembered that she would kiss me and passionately – I don't remember. She was suffering. She had the daughter who was paralyzed.

Q: Your sister?

A: Pardon?

Q: Your sister?

A: My sister.

Q: Yes.

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A: **Laysha**(ph) was her name. She died afterwards a natural death, but that, of course, made life much more miserable. She was relatively intelligent, she had a Hungarian **[indecipherable]**. She had ambition, she was a – which were never realized. So, she was religious. So finally she was claimed by the crematoria, when she came. That was **[indecipherable]**. And then I was together with the aunt, she had a sister. The problem was that when we came to grandfather, we were four people; grandfather and the three children. I had a sister, and I'm one – the sick sister, and myself, and she and the mother, we were four people. Grandfather, with difficulty, could support us, which made – cal – created tension. We had really no full job. So we ca – we – we – we came to gr-gr-grand-mother, she had to **[indecipherable]** in the – the – the kitchen, they have, of course, and the – the household, and so on. But she was always – always a sense of bitterness. But the problem was when we came the grandfather, in addition to the poverty, he had two still unmarried daughters. And in those time, marriageable – to marriage, to get dowry, was not an easy – one easy thing. And the – and that, of course, added tension to the house, which I **[indecipherable]** occasionally used to shout at me, then the other – I was convinced that they were against me. And then finally one got married, and faced a tragedy; husband died within two or three years. But the other daughter came with me, though shu – she must have been about in the late 20s, you

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could imagine those days, probably [**indecipherable**] to explain, you'll understand.

I thought she's against me, and there is nothing I could do. But I knew that if you make a **Mi Shebeirach**, you know what a **Mi Shebeirach** is? When you read the Torah, if you want ask for health, or for anything, you read – you make – ask for a special blessing while the Torah, the scroll is on the table, that has special – so as a child, eight or nine, I thought that will work negatively too. If I'll make a anti **Mi Shebeirach** against it, she will – something.

Q: It's like a curse or something.

A: Something left. I didn't realize that when we arrived at **Auschwitz** 70 years ago, and they opened up the cars, and they shouted [**speaks German**] I apparently was near the door, and I jumped out from among the first one on the – I heard the shouting after me in Yiddish [**speaks Yiddish**]. The Torah that you so much worked on – worked on it – on there, should offend you – protect you. And I contribute – and it did protect.

Q: That's wonderful. So she – she – you – you realized that she – she loved you.

A: She realized that time that she loved me. In the Torah that you so much worked on – n-not so that I'd worked, that – that there's – there's so much willing to renounce, conveniences [**indecipherable**] convenience in order to achieve it,

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protect. She was – she didn't go to the crematoria, she went to a labor camp, and she died there.

Q: Can you – I – I wonder if it's possible if you could just take a – a couple minutes to tell us a little bit about what life was like in the town where you grew up. Just – it's a very – it's interesting, because you're a connection to a – to a – hundreds of years of history that have been lost to many of us. But – and it was – and that was destroyed, you know, in the Holocaust.

A: The – the city? The city –

Q: What was life like there, when you grew up?

A: The city was almost 10,000 Jews, mainly Hassidim. There were non-religious Jews too, but I didn't know them, I found out after the war. Some of the youth were communists, like in other places. Religious. But I wa – I think I'm making a – a truthful statement; when I came to **Sighet** when I was 40 years old, so that could be '31 – '32. There may have been seven – several hundred young people with payos.

When I left **Sighet** in '44, there were less than 50. So this secularization

[**indecipherable**] or the communization had enormous impact. The Jews were generally poor, all Hassidim of certain Rebbes, engaged in quarrel, in

[**indecipherable**] as there is always between the Rebbes. And little – none – no connection with the non-Jews. I – we – the language we spoke, and didn't even

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know it, was Yiddish. I mean, I know Yiddish, how to go buy – buy in the – in the shop. But I didn't know [indecipherable] the Yiddish, I didn't even know that there is some Germans in Yiddish, I eventually found out that the German's in Yiddish. After the war I felt a kind of [indecipherable] a kind of poetic urge to write down, jot down, but I know no language, only Yiddish. So I jotted down in Yiddish, and I was embarrassed to show. But not long ago, I took it out, and they're translating it to French. So I don't know Yiddish, but not literally, I guess. And although in my time there was already compuls – education was compulsory. But since I was born in the **Czechoslovakian** side, and I lived in **Sighet, Romania**, Mother denied me. Every year before scrips – school, the – an official came and asked, well is – are there children of school age, Mother could deny.

Q: I see. This is a Romanian official, or Hungarian official?

A: A Romanian official.

Q: Romanian official, okay.

A: But after the da – ma – the Hungarian came in, she couldn't deny. She was afraid to deny me because that would be [indecipherable]. So she burst out, she acknowledged, she confessed that she have. And then became [indecipherable] I was already almost [indecipherable]. So with [indecipherable] with connections,

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they let me do private – there were the four question – the four classes. So I think I did officially made the four classes.

Q: How did – how did the Jews largely support themselves ak – you know, in – in **Sighet**?

A: Likely to?

Q: How did – how did – how did the family, the Jewish families support themselves?

A: Depend. There were a few stor – a few rich Jews. I don't know, one of them was the richest, name was **Mandolovich**(ph), he had a textile store. Not educated, but rich. But most of them were poor. Par – really poverty where e – bread was a looked after item, seek – seek after item.

Q: What did you typically have for dinner, for instance?

A: Well, when things worked, we did have chicken – we did have meat, no, chicken was a – we used to buy – go to the – to the place where butcher, where they sold meat, and buy a cheap meat, and we used to eat soup. That was the – practically every day. Shabbas, we needed more, because they had a tradition Shabbas **ma-mahali**(ph), Shabbas foods, Shabbas – and it was a problem that we had to **[indecipherable]** it up. But we ate enough, I nevertheless was not hungry, didn't go around town. But I couldn't afford eat the kind of food I wanted.

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Q: I wanted to ask you what – about one other resident of the town. I think it's fair to say you were probably the second most famous person to come from **Sighet**, but I understand you were also friends with **Elie Wiesel**.

A: Yeah, we went to chayder together, very clo – he himself wrote somewhere that the closest people have is his wife and **Halivni**.

Q: Can you tell a – can you remember a little bit about what he was like when he was a boy?

A: Sure, I could tell you about it. He was a kind of sickly child, didn't always come to chayder. And he look – sit near the window and looked up at the window **[indecipherable]**. But he was bright, you could see he was bright. I sat near the Rebbe. He was a kind of **[indecipherable]** he sat at the window. He did go to school, so he knew Romanian. And from the Romanian, so close to French, that's why after the war, he picked up French as his language.

Q: We – he was not on the same transport with you to **Auschwitz**, was he?

A: Th – not the sa – but the same time.

Q: Same time.

A: He – he – I wa – his father was a policeman, he was no – in the ghetto, wasn't always negative. And that's why he was left to the last transport. I had nobody, I

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was the first [**indecipherable**]. We – I went Monday and he went thurs – Thursday, I think, or next Sunday.

Q: Mm-hm. Let me ask you, in the town where you were raised, was their much knowledge of the events in the outside world? What was happening in –

A: Very – very little.

Q: – what was happening in **Germany** with the Nazis –

A: Very – very little. We did know there were a few pe – one or two person who came back **Brest-Litovsk**. The Hungarians, in '43, or '44, before the general deportation, deported some people who were – were not citizens of – and they brought them on the Polish side, **Brest-Litovsk**, where the Germans shot them and that. One ot – including my father, came back. I don't know, he smuggled the way back. And they told of this. But that only – they wasn't supposed to speak about it, so only a few days ago la – only single out individual, you know, and that. But the idea was, I still remember it, tha-that that wouldn't happen in – in **Hungary**, **Horthy** was the – the – worl – one – wa – law and order, and he will protect, and so –

Q: So there was no discussion that you remember about trying to leave, or to –

A: No, not in my circle.

Q: – or sense of foreboding.

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A: Obviously there were some clever people who had inside, who had – who had the opportunity. I had no opportu – we had no opportunity to go anywhere. We didn't have the money to pay for the – for the transportation.

Q: So in March of 1944, the Germans occupied

A: In [indecipherable]

Q: – and do you remember anything about when that happened?

A: We – yes, we all do – in the morning, we had no radio, but the neighbor had a radio, and came in [indecipherable] and told us that the German occupied it. But I didn't know the significance. But th-the soon the Germans occupied, then beginning the ghetto, and [indecipherable] in between and they were moving, and the results, and –

Q: So the Germans occupied **Sighet**, and – and they created the ghetto. Can you tell us anything about when you were – how you were forced to leave your house, or just any, any of the details.

A: Yeah, I didn't a ba – to me it meant my house had a small apartment that we lived, and I was – I was not so inconvenient, I remember [indecipherable]. We were moved to the **shlangengasta**(ph), the place, with another family, in a one – two room. I was still continuing to study, I was diligent, I studied, I remember. And – and it wasn't so – and even the ghetto I was – where we went to **oyber-**

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yaddish(ph), another section of town. I wasn't so inconvenient. I did – I didn't go out to the street [**indecipherable**]. There was something to eat. [**indecipherable**] inconvenient.

Q: Was it the German **SS**, or was it the Hungarian police that –

A: The Hungarian police.

Q: So the Germans were not –

A: You did hardly see a soul.

Q: Hardly see them, mm.

A: Yeah. And I was like – people thought the ghetto – we were only af – two or three weeks in the ghetto, four weeks. Four weeks. So I was not so – I didn't have such a luxurious life, wasn't so inconvenient. And as long as they let me do wa – do what I did before, I – it was only when the – they took us away, led – took a – an – and turned us in the synagogue, **Mozeikatorah**(ph), and from there, they took us. Again, the Hungarians took, and they put out to the train. There wasn't Germans there. The Germans le – my contact with the Germans was th – in **Auschwitz**.

Q: I see. So you didn't really come into contact with the Germans until **Auschwitz**.

A: No, I didn't. I hardly even saw them, although they were around.

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Q: Sure. Did – let me ask you a couple other questions about the ghetto. Wa – it sounds as if it was – it was not like in **Warsaw**, say, where they set up a – a fence, or anything, it was just –

A: No, not in **Warsaw**. At least my – I don't know what people, even include maybe [**indecipherable**] father, who was an ins – who's an insider to the admin – leading, I will tell you. I had no connection. I was – I had two rooms, then I had one room, I mean, and –

Q: Did you live with another family?

A: Yes, I live with a – with a relative, another family. So I –

Q: And you could come and go, it sounds like.

A: As long. Not well. I couldn't come and go, I couldn't go leave the ghetto. But I could go out to the street.

Q: Ah, I see.

A: But it was so crowded. We live – I'd shared th-the same room, with the – I don't remember now – no, I don't think anybody slept with me in the bed. I still had a bed of my own. Maybe on the floor, but –

Q: Do you remember much about the day in which the Hungarian police liquidated the – the ghetto?

A: Very much, yes.

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Q: T-Tell me a little bit about that day.

A: Well, they came into the shul.

Q: They told you to come to – to th – they told you to come –

A: Then they kept us for a day in the shul.

Q: I see.

A: Couldn't move from there, and shouting.

Q: Did they give you any food to eat, or water to drink?

A: I don't remember. There was something there, or we brought from we had – no, we didn't need it. We had enough food even on the train, the people. What did they do with the food they left behind? I remember – what I think is that when we – told us to leave the ghetto, and we were – we were ord – form in a line, in – in the outside, before they took out to the shul. And that time, then I remembered – I realized that this is serious business.

Q: Did they tell you what they were going to do with you?

A: No, no.

Q: They didn't –

A: They didn't tell them. We didn't know even on the train where we are going.

The only time we got – we knew we wer – we heard the story about working, we thought maybe the Germans will take us for work, and grandfather used to say to us

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that, you will – I will help – you will work for me. I mean, I – the only time we – we – we got suspicious was on **Kashu**(ph). There's this big city **Kashu**. And I didn't know, but the people – when we moved in our direction, with the train, the **Kashu** people [indecipherable] moving towards **Poland**, not towards **Germany**, and then we became scared.

Q: All right, but at that time, do you have any sense of a –

A: My father went to work, but – but – but the – the trains were horrible. I mean, you could imagine, was – they were crowded, there were no facilities for the doing – and – and there was some kind of disciplines. But this – we had thought this until we go to work. Once you wor-wor – go to work, it difficult. Every – every work what – but when we moved to **Poland**, to that direction, people were – who knew, realized that they take to **Poland**, then became panic.

Q: So there were people on the train that knew about the gas chambers?

A: No, no gas chambers, they knew they lead to **Poland** and that – they – they – they thought that we would have gone to **Germany**, we probably would work. If we went to **Poland**, there is no order. There is no –

Q: They thought they might – that you would – you would be killed.

A: Tha – and to – to **Poland** that wa – was a bad omen. A-All the – all the [indecipherable] almost kill them, because some people know – heard from people

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who returned. We knew the Russians, that they were there. But I personally was not too much involved with these predictions.

Q: Were you on the same – in the same car with your family, with your grandfather and mother?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: So you – you were there with them?

A: I'm telling you, til – til I jumped off the car, and – and then – I mentioned that on the book, that I jumped off the car, and we **[indecipherable]** we were the ramp.

You don't know what **[indecipherable]**. And passed by Mother, Mother reached me then, and she saw grandfather from a distance. So Mother says, don't leave the **maltan(ph) zeyan(ph)**, the old grandfather, alone. So I ran towards – I went towards him and I held onto his hand, and I was almost – soon after, I was standing before **Mengele**. So –

Q: How did you – how did you know that it was **Mengele**?

A: I didn't know **Mengele**, but it was an **SS**, the discipline you couldn't miss. And he had – he grabbed grandfather by the collar. And then there was the **[indecipherable]** the one who – who on the way met me, he says **[speaks Yiddish]**. Let us hold on and go together. And as soon as he said, he was – and we were down before **Mengele**, that was **[indecipherable]**. So grandfather he sent on the death

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side. The [indecipherable] was a young man in the 30s, he probably would have send him on this side. But he told him something, I couldn't hear. I assume he may have seen all his important [indecipherable], including the president going in that side all together. So he pushed him in that side, and that's the – and then he turns to me and says, **und du**? And he had the – had the – a piece of, what is it? A piece of – made out of wood, a kind of – he hit me with that. You know, what's –

Q: A stick?

A: Well, let's say – not a regular stick.

Q: A whip?

A: A whip –

Q: Yes.

A: – let's say, a whip out of wood. And he hit me, and – and I went to the other side, and that – that was the end.

Q: Did you see pictures of **Mengele** after the war and you realized that was the person that you had – in there.

A: Ah, I was too – too – too –

Q: Too dark?

A: – afraid, and – during the – I couldn't make a detective. But once you see it – I didn't look in his face. So – and then we – I was in **Auschwitz** only a few days. I

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was told afterwards, I had – couldn't even verify that, that when a transport came – and we're talking primarily Hungarian trans – when a transport came, the tho – to **Auschwitz** I'm talking, the authorities contact places in **Germany**, asking them whether they need – whether they need workers.

Q: I see.

A: That I understood. But I didn't know – I don't know whether it's true, I heard it afterwards, that if – it happened a few times. No – there na – there was no place that were looking for workers. And since transports with Hungarian Jews came one after another, they killed those transport. They don't know what to do with them. I don't whether that is true. So, not all transports went before **Mengele**.

Q: Did you have a si – did you have a chance before you left, you know, before your grandfather went to the right, and you to the left, did you have a chance on the train, or anytime t-to talk with your grandfather? Did he give you any words of advice?

A: No, no, I couldn't te – the only thing, he thought, as I told you, that we'd be working, and he's too old, he was 80.

Q: So he wanted you to work for him.

A: He want us.

Q: Us, yes.

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A: I and my sister to work for him. Otherwise we were sitting dumbfounded, we didn't – didn't talk in there. There's a [**indecipherable**] stench when people had no place where to go. There's –

Q: I know you were only in **Auschwitz** for a few days, but do you remember anything about the camp?

A: Not much. I wasn't – I wasn't spread out. Certainly I didn't know the surroundings. I do know that we went out, there were some – we were discussing, wondering, pondering whether – whether we could eat treyf as – as if there is something to eat.

Q: What did you decide, it was okay?

A: I decided it's okay, although there was one person who did said he will not eat, but didn't survive, I don't know what – that's any connection.

Q: Did – so you were – and there was no other selection while you were there at **Auschwitz**, you just – they just took you to this work camp –

A: Oh yeah. Oh, were this – and then a few days, probably less than a week, a few days, we were told to go to the train, and we were taken.

Q: And so you never had a number. Did they shave your head?

A: No number. I was ne – never – had no episode in **Auschwitz**.

Q: So they took you to **Gross-Rosen**.

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A: [indecipherable]

Q: And – to the sub-camp there, **Wolfsberg**.

A: Yeah, to the sub – **Wolfsberg**.

Q: And that was really where you spent most of your time in the camp.

A: Yeah, in the camp, that there we spent from ? which is what? What – what's the secular month?

Q: Of ma – June?

A: May.

Q: May.

A: Yeah, May, til February, practically, on the way travel. There is a different – I – before I – the few years, not the two or three years before deportation, I used to learn with the rabbi in the local [indecipherable]. Not the chief rabbi, but the te – all intents and purposes, he was the chief, but he was the Dayan, which is

[indecipherable] I learned – that's where I got ordained, with him

[indecipherable] that we covered a great part of the [indecipherable]

Q: You were 15 when you were ordained, right?

A: Yeah, well, sic –16 –

Q: Sixteen.

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A: – and a half. [indecipherable] Then, at the very end, when things became so bad, we decided that we are going to learn the – the [indecipherable] chapter 25, that deals with women who husbands were lost. The idea was, you probably heard the Germans, and then so on, we should know after that, wha-what to find out in case women will have problems, we should know the laws, and shall know –

Q: So he wa – he had a foreboding of – of bad things to come –

A: What?

Q: He was – that was an omen in his mind of bad things to come.

A: Yeah, was a forebo – no, but he did not have foreboding. And the things – it was a – usually, after the war, and so on, there's always problems of – of **agunot**(ph) [coughs]

Q: Do you need some water?

A: I don't know what all beca – th-that – maybe the air conditioner is thirsty.

Q: Oh. Would you like some orange juice?

A: Will that help?

Q: May – it might.

A: Th-The throat?

Q: I think it will help with the throat.

A: I don't have a cup.

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Q: Okay, do you – do you –

A: I'll – I'll drink from that cup.

Q: Okay [**break**] the tape again. Just take a moment.

A: Good juice.

Q: So where were we? Can you – can you –

A: So – s-so we were – he told us to prepare to – when I was in **Wolfsberg** and ca – I saw – took upon myself, on mostly two transports from **Sighet**, to keep a – also a memory to who – who died, so that I could afterwards be a witness for the [**indecipherable**]. But after the war it turned out that women fared worse, because with children, **Mengele** send them straight, he did not check whether they're – whether they're th-the – able to work or not. So I st – to this day know who was the first victim, but he never – and he didn't – he didn't, of course, survive, and neither did his wife, survive.

Q: What did you – what did you do in the camp?

A: Well, depends. That I – I think that there was very, very crucial and lam – to the survival, how do you tell. I was interested purely in – in survival. So much so, I think I mentioned in the book, in the memoirs, but that's worth me mentioning again. There was, in my neighborhood in **Sighet**, there was another family, by the name of **Dupe**(ph). Their son – they had a son on my age, a little old – a little o-

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older, a year, who went to the gymnasium, was over there, who went to school, which I hadn't. Who did exercise at school, at [indecipherable] who was robust, and so on. I was pale. What did they expect, I sat all day long and was in the – in the synagogue [indecipherable] closed doors, what – closed windows. I remember when I – we came to **Wolfsberg**, he was sitting there, and we went to work. He uses the muscles, so to speak, at the beginning. We were shoveling, and – and he looks at me, and he couldn't resist, and said, what will happen?

Q: You said what will happen?

A: No, he ask me, he was robust –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and he was able to work. And he sometimes even got in some extra piece, for the extra – or bread, for the work. My policy was not to work, not to strain myself [indecipherable]. He said –

Q: You do the minimal, to make sure you survive.

A: Oh yeah, just when the **SS** looked, I looked – I – this – my shovel moved. He said [indecipherable]. How would you survive like this? Well, sometimes later – we were already neighbors there, which is the other [indecipherable], his father was with him. Can never forget that. One day the father tells me – we were sitting – standing near each other. Look at **Ossie**(ph) – **Oscar** was his name. He was already

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what we call the **Muselmann**. You don't know that expression. A **Muselmann** – I don't know where the exactly what the etymology is, was someone who you know he'll die within 24 hours. Malnutrition. Then the father told me – he was our neighbor [**indecipherable**] those were his words. You will survive. Was the second time he told me. You will survive. See what happened to **Ossie**(ph). You will come home, tell my cousin – he named him – what happened here. And exactly next morning, **Ossie**(ph) was already dead.

Q: Cause he had exerted himself so much, that he was so weak?

A: I think the exertion, without the nu – without compensa – without nu-nutrition, and other things, health things. He didn't make it.

Q: What was the nature of the work, what was going on in the camp? What was the –

A: Oh, the different camps had different the work, more different. I was working with the shovel. We dug. The – the – the bi – the – the work was usually, at least in my case – the Germans built tunnels for int – to – to – they dig tunnels to build factor – ammunition factories against – against bombing.

Q: I see, to do the work – so they – so they would not be destroyed.

A: So we did – we would – well, I describe in detail, if you want the details –

Q: Yes.

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A: – it's simple [indecipherable]. We went in then, the particular place and made a hole, dig a big hole. And then hole was dynamited, and then we came again. We mean the Jews, the workers, came with the **cheela**(ph), with a wagon, and took out – and took out th-the – the debris, whatever it is, so there was room. And – and then we went further, and so. We weren't allowed to use the dynamite. In my case [indecipherable] was Italian s-soldiers, war prisoners, who did the bombing. I have a whole story you read, about the battle, and so –

Q: I want to come back – I want to come to that, I think it's an interesting story.

A: Yes.

Q: But – but I – I wanted to ask you, in general, did you continue to study Talmud, or –

A: No, I-I couldn't, I didn't have – there were not [indecipherable]

Q: But I remember that you had me – you remem –

A: I – after – I mentioned that –

Q: Yes.

A: – after I was settled down, so to speak –

Q: Yes.

A: – I had those – th-the – that made the holes, and I had a – so to speak, a fixed job. On the way, I could begin thinking. Til then, my job was to look at the SS, in

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order that he doesn't catch me not working. You know, when we came to camp, we had to make sure we had to have a place to sleep, and everything is there. So I had no – no time to –

Q: Did you have any kind of – did you co – were you able to continue any kind of religious practice in the camp?

A: Religious?

Q: Yes, did you – did you mark the Shabbat [indecipherable] did you mark any high holidays?

A: Well – well – well, we know it's Shabbat religious, and the – the problem was Pesach [indecipherable] Yom Kippur. You know about the davening, you know, the **bletl**.

Q: Yes.

A: I know with the davening that they allowed us **Kol Nidre**.

Q: They allowed you **Kol Nidre**?

A: Yes, but otherwise, we were working. So there was about – like almost none.

Q: Te-Te-Tell me the story about the **bletl**. I know it's in your book, but I think I'd like to – I'd like to record the story.

A: Well, to record the story, it's – it's – there was a – start from the very beginning. The – technically, we had off every second Sunday, but we did not – but they did

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not really realized it. The al – the **SS** always found an excuse. Supposedly we are volunteering. But the – nevertheless, it happened a few sunda – a few hours where we could sit and – and do nothing, the **SS** didn't bother us. So there was the ca – the – th-the – the ca – the people that worked, it's called – it was called **Ackerman**(ph) who do the drilling, and who had th – they had kapo, also the name of **Weiss**. And when we were sitting that do – that Sunday, or that – we sort of – supposedly free Sunday, he was [**indecipherable**] and we talked, I remembered what we learned in si – the [**indecipherable**] of sha – Sh-Shabbat, because the people knew it from the book, from the prayer book and so on. And I was sort of a leader. He saw that, and sort of decided that he'll take me in in his company. **Ackerman**(ph), who was doing the – it was a very difficult company, and therefore, while the others worked 12 hours and na – they worked only 10. And the occasion, sometimes they even got cigarettes from the company, from – so when I got cigarettes, I sold it for bread. So, the idea was why – why would they take me to a company which worked so ha – was more difficult than the others? Because those drillers, you know, that made the hole, had to be sharpened. And they didn't want that to be bring to a fire, to a **schmidder**(ph) – to a smith. They wa – they didn't want to do it in the ca – in the – in the – in the tunnel itself, fire, so it was outside. So somebody had to bring those dri-driller to the schmi – where they sharpened, and bring it back, two or three

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times, or more times during a – a night, let's say. So, if I – and usually chose the youngest – I was the youngest – to do that work. That mean that was much easier, and I also – the person also got the benefits, because the company did not notice. So, he took me in – into that – in his company, and I had those privilege. So, during my – at night, when we worked at night, I used to do four or five times, going through from a – from the – the place of work, inside the hotel, pending – every day it got larger and larger, to the outside where they were sharpened, and bring it back, and so on. That's why I said before, I walked with **[indecipherable]**. I had to be very careful, because when the other people took out the – the stones, the – the – the pla – the – where the dynamite exploded, they had then a ca – a little **cheela**(ph) they called, a ca – a little **[indecipherable]** car – cars, so – and there was hardly any room for a car or for a human being, had to – there were cases where people **[indecipherable]**. So, on the way, there was, in a crossroad, there was a German, who was not a German, was a toad. That means – toad mean one of **Volksdeutsche**, with that – **deutsche** was really his mother tongue, you could s – you could recognize. If he was a **Volksdeutsche** from **Poland**, he spo – if he spoke German, it was on the Polish accent. So we knew –

Q: He was a Pole.

A: What?

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Q: He was Polish.

A: He was – but he was German.

Q: Ah.

A: But was born in **Poland**.

Q: I see, okay.

A: What? **Volksdeutsche** –

Q: Yes.

A: – it's called. And I used to – because some night, I met him a few times. I had to lift up my **mütze**, my hat at that procedure. One night I walked, and that time I'm beginning to – I even discuss – I remember what I was thinking about. I described that too, some **[indecipherable]** interesting **[indecipherable]** Talmudic question. **[indecipherable]**. And I saw them, they used to eat the in – in between, and in the night too, but I saw he had his – his food is on a ripped and a sh – page of **Shulchan Aruch**, I remember **[indecipherable]** Pesach **[indecipherable]** and the – the laws of Pesach, and I remembered even the – the particular law, whether you could do it through an agency, an agent and I – I – I **[indecipherable]** and I fell to his feet, and I asked him to give me the **bletl**. It was – it was saturated from fat, but he took out the – the **[indecipherable]** whatever. **[indecipherable]** and then he gave it to me, and I brought it to camp. But then, as I said, there was a danger that the Germans

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were – you couldn't carry anything, contraband. So a Jew by the name of fines – **Finkelstein**, I think he was from **Martasalka**(ph), that's a particular community, he carried it on his – on his body. When we came back to camp first, we used to – if there's a free Sunday, we could il – use it. But month later when we went to **Eb-Ebensee**, you know the eb –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And there it was a total different. There was a **vernichtungslager**, extermination camp. And I saw him from a distance, and I asked them, motioned them what's happened, and they knocked on the **[indecipherable]**. And then I was told two or three hours later he collapsed, and he was taken to the camp – to the **mislaifa**(ph), and he was burned together with the **bletl**.

Q: He was – he was in the crematorium?

A: What?

Q: I'm sorry, he was – I – I didn't hear what you said, he –

A: He was – I was told –

Q: Yes?

A: – he collapsed, and then they tooked him to the crema-crematorium.

Q: To the crematorium.

A: And they burned them.

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Q: And – with the **bletl**.

A: With the **bletl**. Which **[indecipherable]** tells you **[indecipherable]**. That **bletl**, the Torah, has value only if there is a Mr. **Finkelstein**. No Mr. **Finkelstein**, no **bletl**.

Q: You know, one thing that was interesting was that – that I – that I was curious about from your memoir, is that a number of the – of the – of the kapos seemed to be interested in you, and –

A: A member?

Q: The – the – the – the – the kapos. The –

A: Kapos, yes.

Q: – yes. The-They were – they seemed interested in you, and –

A: That's – I – I can't explain that. And there is – just a minute – and there is a story, which I don't – I don't mention it, I didn't know, and I think I'm use this opportunity to mention. I – one day already in bo – in – still in **Wolfsberg**, one day a rumor had it tha-that they taking kid – children – kids my age to peel potatoes. You don't know what that meant. First it meant warm. Usually you're in the kitchen, you peel potatoes. Secondly you have what – you have food. It's **[indecipherable]**. You could throw it in the **yidda**(ph), you could throw it in the ovens. So, it was one of the most desired jobs. So I smuggled my – not smuggled, I

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joined them. I went and sat down where they were supposed to meet. The assistant, the vice-director, a short fellow, he had [indecipherable]. You could imagine, if he had – had that position in camp, he was not a – a [indecipherable] he was not – he was known a certain ruth – ruthle –

Q: Ruthlessness.

A: – ruthlessness. He took me out. I – the second time I went, I smuggled them again. Because I ne – I d – I don't – I didn't think yi – I ever met him, I ever knew – I met him, of course, I saw him every day, but not the kind – face to face kind of meeting. And he took me out a second time. So I saw it's useless. Then it turned out that they were – they weren't taken to peel potatoes, they were to be killed. Now, I didn't write in the memoir because I didn't – and I don't know today either, what – why. Why would this man, who was basically cruel and inconsiderate, why would he take out? Why did he even know me? The only explanation I have is that the one who – they only took somebody take care of their needs, household needs, other need, took care of his house, and cooked, and so on, was from **Sighet**. And he thi – even I think even told me that, that he once pointed out, pointed me out to him, told him I was [indecipherable]

Q: I'm sorry, this was a person who helped – who worked for him, and was also from **Sighet**?

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A: Yeah – no – he one of all th-the refugees.

Q: Yes, okay.

A: Who – who too – who th – this kapo had the hou – had the room, a house.

Q: I see.

A: So this fellow from **Sighet** took care of his needs.

Q: I see.

A: He told me, I think, I think, that he once pointed out – told him, point at me, that I'm **[indecipherable]**

Q: I see.

A: I know – probably, you know, that.

Q: So, he saved you.

A: He may have – could it be? I can't believe it to this – could it be that this man, despite his **[indecipherable]** that the learning of Talmud should continue? That's staggering.

Q: Did he tell you why he was taking you out?

A: No.

Q: He just said go.

A: No, he doesn't talk to me. He never said **[indecipherable]**

Q: He just said go away.

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A: That – there was another one that I mentioned, by the name of **Lefkovich**(ph), who told me he was a – a kapo, was once a ghetto **shochet**, they said, that used to ask me to quote him erotic sections from the Talmud.

Q: Erotic?

A: Erotic, I said erotic.

Q: Yes, uh-huh.

A: Erotic, yeah. And he gave a piece of bread, or something. That, I understand.

Q: You were transferred to **Ebensee**.

A: **Ebensee**, yeah.

Q: February 1945, and you s – and you write in the book, but you don't really talk much about it, that it was a long trip. It took maybe –

A: Yeah, a month.

Q: – a month or so.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you – did you walk?

A: Oh no, no, no, we couldn't walk, it's a different coun – we rode on a train.

Q: On a train. But the train went slow?

A: The train went slow, stopped place, and one place **[indecipherable]** that we have to eat.

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Q: Did they give you food?

A: Very little. You could see people before and after, you could notice that their body –

Q: So you didn't lose any – you didn't – you didn't eat on that train.

A: Very little. Something we must have been [indecipherable] I don't remem – four weeks. Cause we came from sla – to **Silesia** but just in a – in a freight car. And whenever there was a need, we were sidetracked.

Q: I see.

A: But that was a extermination camp.

Q: Yes.

A: You could imagine I was in block 24, and people, he continued coming, but the number of people were the same. That's where it happens [indecipherable] I imagine.

Q: Did you – was there a selection that you were involved in at all at **Ebensee**?

A: They did not a selection, people died natural. A lot of that, you saw it on the people.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you have to do any work there?

A: On the train?

Q: No, no, no, when you got to the camp.

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A: Oh, oh, very – oh-oh, oh-oh. The – the work was more difficult, other than – than there, other than in **Wolfsberg**. And then I had the problem – I think I say that the – I said – **Hitler** committed suicide May sixth – is it – am I right?

Q: I think – I think that's right.

A: I think it's around there. I – and May four, I was so desperate, I was [indecipherable] there, in **Ebensee**, I had to work, I couldn't play games, watching when he looks. There was a small company, they were – on the whole ca – the colony had only 20 or two – or four – or 25 people, so the kapo could see exactly what's happening. And we had to work, and dig things and – and I think I mentioned, I was working at the cement – mixing cement, which meant that I couldn't stop for a minute, cause if I stop the whole work, there will be no cement [indecipherable]. Besides, I mean, it's a – it's – the – this kapo was an – an anti-Semite of the highest order and edition. I don't know what – was he an German? He may have been a German, because we usually carried something on the [indecipherable] line, the first letter of nationality. I carried a **J, Jude**. He claimed afterwards that he thought it's **Yugoslavia**. And he – and he find out that I'm a Jew, he want to kill me. And he handed over to a – to a kapo, the day after – the day, or maybe even a day after, who are – I think was also a Yugoslav, who already know that **Hitler** committed suicide.

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Q: Did you and the other – okay, sorry.

A: So he te – he – he turned [indecipherable] give me 25 l-lashes. Which would have been – which would – that would have been fatal. The kapo says [indecipherable] Hitler's – says shout. We're not doing – he didn't do it. And I shout, and that's how I survived.

Q: I see, so you prou – you pre – you pretended.

A: Pretend. Shout.

Q: And you worked with the kapo.

A: No, no, pretend that you're getting –

Q: Yes.

A: – lashes.

Q: I understand.

A: And that's how I survived. [indecipherable] explicitness.

Q: Did the – did you and the other workers in the camp have any sense that the war was coming to an end? What was going on outside? You had no idea.

A: We just hoped that everything was come to an end, but –

Q: Right. So how did – do you remember liberation day?

A: Yeah, do I re – yeah.

Q: Tell me about that day, what happened?

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A: Well, let me before tell you something for I want to tell you, then we conclude.
The fact – I go back to Mr. **Dob, d-o-b**, that I'll survive, that happened second time.
The hundred – the first time happened in **Ungvár**. **Ungvár** is a city – you ever heard of **Ungvár**?

Q: Mm-mm.

A: Uza – **Uzhhorod [indecipherable]** big Jewish – at that time was a big Jewish city. That's a good way of ending that. The – I came there in '42 – '42? Forty-two, '42 – '43 – '42. Came there, and there was a – a Jew, whose name I **[indecipherable]** **Hershel(ph) Friedman(ph)**, tells me ya – he tested me, asked me questions, you know. Says, you will survive the war, I quote. I wouldn't. Here is a **d'var** Torah, which I want you to remember. And he gave me the **d'var** Torah, which I still remember. And that's the way – he didn't survive.

Q: What was the **d'var** Torah about, that he – that he gave you?

A: Oh, I could tell – I – I describe it in the memoirs –

Q: Okay.

A: – in great detail. I mention it, but then I don't mention that maybe this part. I felt obligated – I met his ga – his son in camp, and I want to give the **d'var** Torah, but the son didn't survive. After the war, every Shabbas, I told the child – I used to repeat it when the **[indecipherable]**. And finally here in il – here in **Israel**, I found

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some of his grandchildren, and I told them, here is the **d'var** Torah, you carry the responsibility to remember. If you want I could tell you the **d'var** Torah, but it's in there.

Q: Okay. Well, t-tell me about the – the liberation of – of what – what – what you remember. Was it – was it the British that –

A: Well, I – let m – le-let me tell you that everybody asked, who liberated you?

Q: Yes.

A: They don't ask the other cl – more cr-crucial – crucial question, what did you do after that? The Americans were there, they gave us chocolate, they left next day.

Q: And the guards ran away?

A: The guards had to go away, or someone would kill them, of course. The guards left even before the Americans came. They knew the Americans are in the vicinity. So, we stayed there, and we had diarrhea, I had diarrhea very, very severely. And – and there [**indecipherable**] we had – but we were on our own. We had no money, we had no documents. I have now, I just put that – framed it, the document from the **UNRRA**, asking governments to let us across, to let u – let us through. And then I went home, the few days, nobody there.

Q: Tell me, did an – the na – no one came to the camp to give you food or take care of anyone, they just – you were there on your own?

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A: We – for a while went out of the city to get food. And then there was some – must have been about – there was – some left for – the Americans may have left, I don't know, I'm not familiar. I could tell you I left soon.

Q: And you went to **Sighet** to see if ya –

A: To **Sighet**.

Q: – to see if any of your family had survived.

A: Yeah, and I –

Q: How did you get to **Sighet**?

A: With that document.

Q: I see. But did you – was there a train, or a –

A: With both, with the train, mainly – mainly the train. I remember times when I traveled on the roof, which was dangerous, in case it gets to a tunnel. And then I realized within – less than a few – a few days, 10 days, I went back. Then I – then I had a friend in j – in **Budapest**, and I stayed in **Budapest** almost a half a year. He was the – the man that was a student, learned [indecipherable] learned with grandfather, my gr – and he kept me [indecipherable] for half a year. And there I began plans to come to **America**, learned English. And then –

Q: So, and –

A: – I went to a **DP** camp, in order to go there – from there to **America**.

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Q: And did – I think I remember in your memoir that five of your grandfather's children – grandchildren, survived?

A: Less than five.

Q: Less than five.

A: From 62 – four survived. Two are intermarry, that is, are not his natural children.

Q: I see.

A: I have no connection with them, I don't know whether they're alive. Of the natural ones, were three. Three.

Q: Who were the other two besides yourself that survived?

A: Well, I don't know what – one died **[break]**

Q: – awe stricken, yes.

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: My daughter is fortunate because her grandparents are all here.

A: Yeah, she doesn't have to – is she – what's – is she dealing in school with the Holocaust?

Q: Oh yes. In – she's in – she's in ninth grade now, but in – in seventh and eighth grade they – they deal with the Holocaust, and actually –

A: What school is she going? Here? I don't know.

Q: Here –

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A: The same school as the –

Q: No, no, no, no, she goes now – **[break]** Ready? All right. So a-actually, I did want to ask you about what happened after the – you left the camps. And, first of all, I – I know you talk about this a little bit, but I would like to put it on the table.

Why do you take the name **Halivni**?

A: Well, to – two reasons. One, I – I'm – the semi-objective reason, if you want to call that objective, and **Weiss** being – there was an **SS** commander of **Treblinka**, by the name of **Weiss**. And then I encountered a person – **SS** by the name of **Weiss**. So I decided that's a good reason for – for dropping that name **Weiss**. But – but I couldn't do that because grandfather was very close to me. On the other hand, **Weiss [indecipherable]** father's name was **Weiderman**(ph). So **We-Weiss**, I make him forget **[indecipherable]**. So by using a biblical word, it's not a name in the Bible. Yes, it is a name, sorry, it is a name. But **Halivni [indecipherable] Halivni**. So I used to use it both names, in the book says both name. But now that I went to **Israel**, in **Israel** I don't use both names, only **Halivni**.

Q: You know, you're reminding me something I wanted to ask you about your father, because we talked about him at the beginning of the interview. I wa – I remembered a story that I wonder if you have more details about, because I found it

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so interesting, that when he was being transported to **Auschwitz**, he managed to send you a letter.

A: Yeah, he send out the second time. First he was imported as a known citizen, and he came back the part. And then he was sending a letter. He'd apparently dropped the letter in the train, I don't –

Q: This is on the second time he was going – on his way to **Auschwitz**?

A: Yeah, on to **Auschwitz**, yes, yes, he arrived in **Auschwitz** –

Q: Yes

A: – must have. And – and – and I still received a letter in the ghetto, even before me. The story is that he died on the way, was in **Warsaw** ghetto, they were brought to – to clean out the ghetto, and so – and then the way to au – to **Da-Dachau** – ach – ach – **Dachau**, there he died. Story is he stepped off the wrong way, I don't know what he did.

Q: Do you remember what was in the letter to you?

A: Just a simple – a postcard.

Q: So –

A: Just telling that he is – he didn't tell me where he send it, that he is well, he is well.

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Q: Why did you make the decision to come to **America**?

A: Because that's what I said before, I wanted so much to study, circular knowledge, circular **[indecipherable]** and I was afraid not having any relative, anybody, that I wouldn't be able to do it in **Israel**. I didn't know about the war, but I probably would have gone out to be a soldier. In **America**, the American Jews will be, I know from iga – I got money. I was – I must be – tell you this story. I – when I was nine, 10 – nine, I knew 200 pages of Talmud **[indecipherable]**. I still remember a good part of it, that time, I think. And we got those – thousand **lei**. You know what the **lei** is the – th-the wa – is the – is the currency of – of **Romania**.

Q: Ah. Okay.

A: The money came from a fellow, **Forrenstein(ph)** in **Boston**, who was philanthropic.

Q: **Forrenstein(ph)**.

A: Ye-Yeah, **Forrenstein(ph)**. He gave the money, and I was delighted. I met a few – a few month ago **[indecipherable]**. Somebody – a young man who came over to do – introduced himself –

Q: In **Israel**. To you.

A: In **Israel**. Introduced himself as **Forrenstein(ph)** from **Boston**. So I ask him, what **Forrenstein(ph)**? He says, the one who gave you money. So it – I thi – was

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delighted that the family remembers – or some members of the family remember that he – that he gave me the money.

Q: Was your – was your trip – was your passage to **America**, was it arranged by a Jewish social service agency?

A: I don't know exactly what ha – what happened was, I went back to the **DP** camp, and from there –

Q: Where was the **DP** camp, in –

A: In – the last **DP** camp was **Prien**(ph) on **Prien**zay(ph), not wal – not far from – what city is it called? Come back to me. A German city. Hanno – not **Hanover**, **Bremerhaven**. **Bremerhaven**. There they se – they collected the – the children that [indecipherable] the story. They collected the chi – the children that came to **America**, that were coming to **America**. The – that big advantage was that these children still needed a quota as far as I know, but they had priority. So – so went back. I went back to that – before to that camp. I was in **Windsheim** in a camp, and then I went to – to the [indecipherable] and from there I went to **America**. Who paid for it? I don't know. I – not long ago, in **Israel**, I tried to go to the Joint and fi – I assume was with the Joint. And – and I tr-trying to know who sponsored my trip. We couldn't get an exact who paid for it. There must have been some Jewish money.

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Q: Right. And can you just say a few words about your first few years in **America**, and na – na – I know you talk about it your book in great detail, we don't need to go in that great detail, but just tell – tell us a little bit –

A: I was in the yeshiva.

Q: You were in the yeshiva.

A: That is now the yeshiva, and going still, at the age of 18, I was then – I going to public sc – to the elementary school, I had no school. In order to – able to go to coll – to high school, then to college.

Q: And you lived in a – in a – in a room at the –

A: In a dormitory.

Q: In a dormitory.

A: Yes. It's interesting, I must tell you. I don't know whether you want to include it.

I – when I lived in the dormitory, I used to listen to music, listen to classical music;

I got some records. One of them – one among the music was **Lalo's Symphonie**

Espagnole. That's a fe – well known, **Lalo**. I liked the **Lalo**. The door usually was open, and students also heard al – wanted the door open, so they listen to it too.

Two years ago, three years ago – it was three years ago, in **Jerusalem**, I got a call from somebody, he says, do you remember? And it was 60 years before or more,

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and we played the **Lalo**? [indecipherable] in **Jerusalem** is playing **Lalo**. You want to go?

Q: Where did you meet your wife?

A: Oh, thought I mentioned that. She was the granddaughter of the **Vishivavov**(ph), who was well-known – there's a two volume, three volume book now, about his life. And I went, as a [indecipherable] I went to – to him – to – in '30 fi – '38. And –

Q: In 1938?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes.

A: And then he passed [indecipherable]. And – and – and the story I heard later from my mother-in-law, that they heard there was some other [indecipherable] and they only looked through the – through the cracks of the –

Q: **Zipporah** looked through the cracks too.

A: Cracks to see me there. But she said after I left, her gra – the father-in-law said [speaks foreign language] **Zipporah**. Whether that's true or not. But then we met. She came to **America**, and we met in **Brooklyn College**. She's also graduated **Brooklyn College**.

Q: I see. That was what, 1950 –

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A: I graduate in '50 – '52.

Q: Okay.

A: And then I went further.

Q: Over the years, were you able to learn the fate of other family members? Were you – were you able to learn the fate of your other family members?

A: I – to this day I don't know. I don't know my sister – my sister. I heard from from – from a chaplain who in **America** told me, and I assume – I have some documents with the li – camps they were. They send me in with the – but my sister – the chaplain told me that he was in **Bergen-Belsen** after the war, and then there was a hospital with people there, and he met a woman who was already dilu – diluted – not diluted.

Q: Delusional?

A: What? Not delusional, but she was not well.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: And she told him that she had a brother who was a **[indecipherable]** and so on.

And he thinks that fits me. If that is the case, then she died after the war, though.

Mother died in **Auschwitz**.

Q: With grandfather.

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A: Gra – with grandfather. And Father died, as I mentioned before, on the way to **Dachau**. That's what I heard from people. And the aunt, I have her – her name appears on a list of camps, but it doesn't say when she died. Or does it? I have at home.

Q: I have a couple more, sort of larger questions, which I just will acknowledge. We're going to only be able to skirt the surface, but I would like to – I'd like you to consider them. First of all, I'm wondering just about you being very open today about your experiences during the Holocaust, but did you have trouble talking about that after the war?

A: I didn't talk. I didn't talk after the war. I didn't talk after the war. But neither – neither did I have people ask, I mean, I – I didn't – it was no – talking or not talking would not playing a role in my life. I didn't talk cause I was busy with –

Q: With Talmud.

A: – other things.

Q: Yes.

A: But I do – people claim that my scholarship is that – somebody wrote an article – my scholarship is influenced by **[indecipherable]**. That this – that I'm critical of – in learning, which means you cri – critical in learning means that you interpret differently than –

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Q: Yes.

A: It comes from the connection that you have no trust in human beings, that you basically think human beings are corrupt.

Q: Do you think that's an accurate analysis?

A: What could I know? In other words, you – a person who's more trustworthy, will not look for new interpretation. That's – that's that –

Q: Yeah, that's the theory. Yeah.

A: I assume that the theory goes – a man who [indecipherable] new interpretation, who has 10 volumes almost now, with different interpretations. One who was not only is not the [indecipherable] only, but the particular case [indecipherable] that consideration about. So – though – so that maybe I'm – if that is the case, then it – then that should be more investigated, more study with the inner connection. Of course, whenever somebody comes up with a new idea, not that – that something new happened, but a n – a new idea of the things that already happened.

Q: Yes.

A: There should be a reason why he's dissatisfied with the old. And therefore that may – that may fit.

Q: When did you change your – when did you start talking, and why did you start talking about the Holocaust again?

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A: I don't – I don't think it is – it was a sort of a break. More that in the beginning I just – there was no ca – I was too busy with something else. [indecipherable] going to school, living alone, and so on.

Q: Did your children have a lot of questions for you when they were growing up?

A: No, no, they were – since my wife was also – she was a Holocaust scholar.

Q: Right.

A: She wrote – so it was a – in the house –

Q: Yes.

A: – so to speak all that time, was nothing that – not what happened to some people that they're all of a sudden – practically all of a sudden begin to talk, and then talk aba – and then some of them couldn't stop talking.

Q: Yes.

A: No, there wasn't this here, there was – gradually I had more an opportunity. So I didn't – didn't – the – the – I think, I'm not correct on a -- **Fortunoff**(ph), you know, the – the – had – gave money for the college people to talk, as that – they had then [indecipherable] and they had the – made something, a party, or a – and they asked me to talk, so I ta – they didn't ask me talk about my talking, but to talk about th – the [indecipherable]. So I realized that that time, more than before, how much

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that is a problem, that it needs to be encouraged. The – but personally, I always read, and I still avidly, wherever I could, read about the Holocaust.

Q: I'm wondering if you could explain – this is something you've written about, I know, in great detail, but I'm wondering if you could explain for a more general audience, that is going to be watching this, answer this question. How did the – how did the Holocaust affect your – your faith in God, and your own religious beliefs?

A: Oh, well that – you assume it did affect.

Q: If it didn't, then that's a – that's an answer too.

A: The – then – then that is [indecipherable] answer. I think I told you that when I – I mentioned the book, when I came to the **States**, I met the late **Moshe Myzels**(ph). You remember that?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He was the – he was the editor of [indecipherable] Hebrew magazine. He asked me, are you religious now, you know? I will still repeat. I said yes, religious. Were you religious before the war? [indecipherable]. Said yes. He says, I understand that people religious before, are religious after. They're religious before, religious aft – the people that don't – that remain the same way, they either no [indecipherable] nothing happened? [indecipherable]. No, of course it's modified, but I never broke with the religion. Although my religion is proba – I mean, it's not the same way, I

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would say, as **Sighet**, I mean, even as grandfather. The learning is certainly not, and that's so – but that could have a na – could have happened anyhow, even without the Holocaust, just going to college, learning secular the boo – reading secular books and so on. So it's not to – to the Holocaust particularly. The – I don't ever, ever kind of angry – I not remember being angry at somebody, at something for the Holocaust, even though my – now I have this book on [**indecipherable**] Holocaust, and I mi – if I only finish. I may write more on that topic, I haven't finished that. I was probably influenced a great deal, but that may even be subconscious, you know, the whole –

Q: You know, I was really interested in something that you wrote in your book, that I wil – that I wanted to just ask you about, cause you wrote the book maybe 20 years ago, and you wrote about – you made a statement that the Holocaust should be treated as an event without explanation. That – that you increase the suffering of the victims, and the survivors by asking –

A: Yeah.

Q: – how or why this event could have happened. And I'm wondering if – if that is a statement you still believe?

A: Well, yes and no, as everything is a yes and no answer. That was a – that's in the memoirs. That was a sort of a protest against those – and I am still firmly against it,

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who considered the Holocaust the result of sin. That, I think is unforgivable for the – the survivors, for the sufferer, and u – and unforgivable for the truth, objective truth. If you say that it is sin, that means it was coming to them. I often quote, and I th – the – the – the **mishna**(ph), and [indecipherable] says that, if the court executed somebody, the family of the convict, family of the – should come to the court, to the judges, and say [speaks foreign language]. We have nothing against our hearts on you. In other words, justice, it was coming. We almost have to g-go – come **Hitler** and say we have nothing [indecipherable] it's because of sin. So that I reject, full-hearted. So although not as successful for a substitute, we don't have something that I could substitute. So, the idea is, leave it. Leave it as it is. That's why [indecipherable] without a reason. Because any reason will ultimately – whether, you know, the Rabbi of [indecipherable], who se – by the way, I was close to him, I was close to him. The Rabbi [indecipherable] thought the Zionist is the sin. And some people are bor – rabbis in **Israel** thought the – the anti-Zionists. We must say, I do insist that the Holocaust is a metaphysical. Certainly it's not because they were – some Jews were communists, or some Jews were capitalists. Or the way they say – said that in the New Testament, that when **Jesus** was crucified, the – th-the Jewish leaders had made that blood [indecipherable] on

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them and on their children, 2,000 years ago. But my problem at the moment is to make it metaphysical, in a way that human beings are not the cause.

Q: Yes.

A: That I am working on.

Q: Well, let – let me follow up in this way, you know, **Elie Wiesel** [break] – they just have a technical problem.

A: Oh.

Q: And they're just – and they're just fixing – they're just fixing that, and then they'll keep going. We're just about five minutes away. Are you ready? Oh, okay, I'm sorry. So, what I wanted to ask you is, do you think there's anything – cause **Wiesel** has talked about – you know, one of the reasons he wanted this museum to be formed, was he wanted to, obviously have a permanent memorial to the victims, but also to remind people about what can happen in the future. And so my question to you is, the Holocaust was a unique event in human history, but do you think there is something to learn from that episode that might help us prevent this kind of thing from happening in the future? Maybe not on the same level, but the same kind – genocides have existed –

A: That was the topic that **Yad Vashem** asked me to talk about here a year ago, or two years ago. What's the most effective way of preserving the – the – Holocaust?

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I'm not – and I'm saying this with great caution should be misunderstood, then. I'm not sure that – that we could be sure that there will be no other Holocaust, since, as I said before, I think it's a metaphysical. Has something to do with free will. Man is created in a manner at least that – that he could do – God would not interfere – will punish him, but He will not interfere with this evil-doing. So, to ask, which is the basic question for a religious person, why God did not intervene in our time, when intervened in – intervened in the time of **Haman**. The idea that something moved in the cosmological sphere, that saw – that God did not intervene. He intervened at that time, did not intervene. So, we cannot be – I think sometimes even **Netanyahu** or the others, it was naïve to think that an Israeli, the Israeli power, military, could prevent **Hitler**. Whoever remembers – remembers the power of the German army – now we have this **Normandy**, just what is it, 70 years?

Q: Yes.

A: You – you really think that **Israel** could have prevented the German army? So we are – I don't know, I am still working find out what is sort of – but it is our relationship to God, Jews, as I still believe was the chosen people, but they are chosen because God gave the Torah. And giving the Torah is a sort of intervene – intervention in a u – in a person's life. God intervened – asked – intervenes in our life by telling us what to do, what not to do. And therefore, He may intervene in our

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favor. When we are not following this part, sort of the bargain, the other part is not – it's quite complicated. It's not that simple.

Q: What role do you think the Holocaust should play in Jewish collective conscience?

A: In the Jewish collective –

Q: In the Jewish collective consciousness.

A: Well, that we are a unique people. I know **Rwanda**, I know the other thing, but not at that size, and that **[indecipherable]**. Our relationship to God, and therefore our relationship to the world is o – the way religion claimed all along, although not – religion may claim your details **[indecipherable]** that we have a particular relationship, and we should find out, particularly what – the channel by which it moves. And that may be the only way we'll prevent. Look I am – I'm troubled and – and – and – and puzzled. During the war, I'm tal – when I say war, I mean the second World War –

Q: Yes.

A: – of course. **Sweden, Denmark** was good for the Jews. I give you no examples, you know, save Jews, and **[indecipherable]**. Today, they not so good to **Israel**, which is a **[indecipherable]**. What happened in those 70 years, sort of, 60 sort of? Did they – if th – there is some basic built-in relationship that we have, with the

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worl – with God, and with the world, and so on. And that sort of moves around.

And therefore I – I mentioned that in the – in the article on the prayer in the camp, you know, that –

Q: Yes.

A: The Jews prayer, the ba – God has the – intervene – intervened on behalf of the Jews is almost done th – because of He's giving the Torah **[speaks foreign language]** the two are connected. **[indecipherable]** the – involves responsibility as well as – as co – as singling out, and so on. Now, God will intervene on our behalf, apparently if we have – we – we are in debt, a certain – and maintaining a certain **[indecipherable]** for certain relationship. That is a very delicate balance. When that relationship is disturbed, God may not intervene. I don't know, I don't have the picture, I mean **[indecipherable]** clearly, but that's the direction I'm thinking. I cannot accept sin as the cause.

Q: Let me ask you one final question if I may, which is; do you have any personal way of commemorating the Holocaust, or of remembering your family members who died?

A: That's an interesting question. It's a difficult question. What do – you can ask me what do you do during the Holocaust day. Almost feel – I mean thank – I mean obviously, thank for the survival. There is no – I mean, there must be a reason, there

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is [indecipherable] a reason, but not a known reason at all why I survived and – and **Dupe**(ph), who was stronger and fatter, the – Mother used to come home from – from their home, visiting them, always that argument, why are you so – why are you so pale? Why, why pale? I was sitting [indecipherable] in the closed doors, and he was doing sports, and why I survived? So, does that entail a special obligation, a special tha – usually that – that leads, or should lead to more learning, but that's individual, and – and that's usu – the [indecipherable] having accomplished something. To leave for posterity something in learning, that's what, that others did not say it, did not have it.

Q: Do you have anything else you want to say, that I've missed?

A: Well, I – I thought about the Holocaust, I think that's – I am – just was saying, still reading. Let me ta – leave at that.

Q: Okay.

A: Leave at that, since you asked. No things, no – no stories that I have. My – I came across the following story not long ago. A woman who had children, with cha – a child, came to the ramp, you know – you know, in the – she apparently had presence of mind, and she realized what's – at least that there is a – she handed over the child to her mother, or mother-in-law. I came across this, I don't vouch for its veracity. An **SS** saw that and came over and gave her **moussat**(ph). So, how do you

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leave a child. Don't you see what's going on there? How do you leave the child like this? She took back the child, and of course **Mengele** send her to the other side. The cru – the – the corruption, using the moral stance in order to –

Q: The cruelty.

A: The cruelty of [**indecipherable**]. The other story I just told to my grandchild, who went to **Auschwitz** just a few weeks ago, with some stories. The – they asked the – you know, there was a, how did they get the gas? Not inside, because they couldn't – from outside, there was a little window. So they interviewed, I think in a German ta – **TV**, asking them, how – when did – did they know to open up the – the window, have the gas in there? He said, I put my ear to the window. If I didn't hear **shmizel**(ph) at all, I know I could open the window. And I told this story to chile – my grandchild told me – told the story to his children, they all burst out **shmizel**(ph). Think we could leave it here.

Q: Okay. Professor **Halivni**, thank you very much for your time. It's been a great privilege. This concludes the interview with **David Halivni**, taped on June 13th, 2014.

A: Okay, thank you.

Q: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview