

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Morris Sternberger on July 15, 2014 in Boca Raton, Florida. Thank you very much, Mr. Sternberger, for agreeing to speak with us today, to share your story, your testimonies. And I will ask you a question right at the beginning about your date of birth. But I know that today is your birthday. So I wish you a very, very, very happy birthday.

Thank you.

Our first question starts at the beginning. And I'd like you to tell me, what was your name at birth? Where were you born, and the date of your birth?

I am Morris Sternberger. I was born on July 15, 1928 in a small village in the Carpathian Mountains, Kostrina.

Kostrina?

Yeah, K-O-S-T-R-I-N-A. And at that time, it belonged to Czechoslovakia, when I was born.

Well, that part of the world has had so many border changes. And that affected what happened to people in the places that were in those areas in the Carpathian Mountains and close to Ukraine and so on. Tell me, what different countries ruled over?

Well, when my parents were born, it belonged to Austro-Hungarian, Franz Joseph, the king. And after 19-- was it? 1940, or must be '40 or '41-- no. After the First World War, it belonged to Czechoslovakia.

OK, so it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire first.

Right. And in 1940s, in the '40, whatever, the Hungarians took it over.

I see. During the war?

Yeah.

OK.

And then after the war in '44, the way I understand, it belonged to Russia.

Oh, so the Soviet Union?

Yeah. And now it belongs to Ukraine.

People can get very confused.

Yeah.

So with so many different rulers in a very short period of time, truly less than-- between 100 years, so many different governments and authorities and powers. What languages did people speak?

Well, my parents spoke very good, of course, the Jewish language and Hungarian. Of course, it was also Hungarian at that time. And after this, when the Czechs took over, they were still speaking Hungarian. But we went to Czech school. And we were learning Czech, regular alphabet, and also the Russian alphabet because the Ukraine people had the same alphabet as the Russians.

Cyrillic, that's right.

And it's a very close language, like the Russians.

So were there a lot of Ukrainians in Kostrina?

Yeah, all of it was Ukrainians, except us Jews.

Oh, really?

Yeah.

So it was a Ukrainian village, one could say.

Right. It was very close to the border.

Were there any Polish people?

No. We were, I think, about 25 miles or something to the Polish border, or something like that. Who knows?

Yeah, but still, close enough. Close enough.

No. No Polish people.

No Polish people?

Just Ukraine people and the Jewish people. We were in a small village.

About how many people in that village?

I wouldn't know, but I think there were about a dozen Jewish families were there.

So, not too big?

No. No, it wasn't very small. There was no water-- I mean, there was no electricity. There was no-- the outhouse was about 50 or 40 feet from the house. And we had a very nice house, a big house.

Mm-hmm. What did your father do?

My father was a custom tailor. And we also had a lot of land. All the Jewish people who lived there in this section on the Carpathian, they all owned land also. I don't know how it came to it. But they owned the land.

Did they farm the land?

Well, yeah. We had-- not personally. I have people. And the people are doing the--

People were, then, farming for you.

And we paid them very well, I remember, because they all wanted to come to work for us. Especially when they came in the morning, my mother prepared them a nice meal, a good meal. And I remember around 10, 11 o'clock, my mother gave me a pitcher with milk to go to the field and give them. So--

Give them something to-- as a break or refreshment?

Right.

About how many workers did you have?

Well, they came. The villagers only worked when we needed them.

That's right. So it was at harvest time, or at sowing time?

Yeah, at spring time, harvest time.

What did you grow?

Well, different things. Also, we had quite a few apples. In fact, [INAUDIBLE] in the fall is a freight car was ordered just for our apples, we had so much. And my father's father at there, when they had a lot of apple trees-- and fall was so many apples that a--

You sold them?

A freight car came and ordered--

So it filled up a freight car?

Yeah. A freight car.

Wow.

Jonathan, you remember? Do you know these apples? I had them here once, Jonathan.

Oh, Jonathan? Yes. Those are nice apples.

Yeah, that's what we had.

Wow.

I was surprised when I saw that here, Jonathan, I was really surprised.

Yeah, those are very, very nice apples.

Really good apples, yeah. We kept some of them for ourselves. And we wrapped them up in the paper and put them in the big boxes. We had apples for the season.

Tell me, why would one wrap an apple in a piece of paper?

Newspapers.

Yeah, why would you do that?

I don't know. I don't know. Maybe if one rottens, it should not rot to the other. I'm just--

OK.

I'm just guessing, you know?

OK.

And we also dig a big hole in the ground for Pesach so we'd have carrots, all these vegetables, and beets for the borscht.

Put it in the ground, and then in the spring time when Pesach come, we took them out, and so we had fresh vegetables for Pesach.

That's nice. That's nice. Did you grow potatoes, too?

Yeah, we had potatoes too. We had potatoes. Corn. Yeah, we had potatoes.

About how large was the farm? How large was the land that you--

Well, it was different places. One place was maybe a piece of land maybe 50 feet wide and 100 feet long. I'm just guessing. I don't know. We have quite a few--

Well, would it be like several hectares all put together, or 10, or 20?

I don't know.

You don't know.

I don't even remember anymore, the hectares, what it means.

OK.

But we had enough. And we had cows. We had our own butter, our own cheese.

Wow.

So you were able to feed yourselves.

Right. We had enough. And fish, we were catching them ourselves. My brothers and me used to catch enough fish. And we would clean them-- the small ones-- and put them on a string and dry them, and dry fish to make Gefilte fish and to make-- what do you call it-- the herring.

Really?

Yeah.

So you-- wow!

We were very independent on food.

That becomes very important.

Yeah. We have chicken. We have our own eggs. We had chickens.

Did you sell any of-- besides the apples?

No.

No?

Only the fruit.

Only the fruit. Were there other fruit trees that you grew?

Yeah, plums. Me made Lekvar. You know what's Lekvar? Yes. We had a lot of plums. We made Lekvar. So we had Lekvar. We had everything.

It sounds very nice.

Yeah, it was. We didn't starve. We had a good--

How was that-- hang on just a second. OK.

We made honey, our own honey. We had honeybees.

You had bees?

Yeah. Came in boxes like this. And maybe we had 10 or 20-- I don't know. I don't remember boxes. And sometimes the bees are like two mothers in the same box, so one fights with the other until she chases her out. And we used to run.

Really?

Used to run and watch where they will settle.

Really?

Yeah, my father would come put on his net and put them in a basket. And now he made another box. And we had enough honey for the whole year. We had enough honey.

Who cooked? Who prepared all the food from this time?

My mother.

Your mother?

She was a wonderful cook. And she was very intelligent. When we were kids, we wanted-- she was in the kitchen, and reading like this. And you say, Ma, Ma, Ma! But she was still reading.

That's wonderful. That's wonderful. So she was-- she would be interested in books, as well as--

Oh, yes. She was very intelligent.

Did she go to higher education of any kind?

No. I don't think so.

OK. What was her name?

Julie.

Julia?

Yeah, Julie.

Julie? And what was her maiden name?

Steinberg.

Also? So a Steinberg--

Not Sternberger, but Steinberg.

Ah, not Sternberger, but Steinberg.

Steinberg.

Yeah, Steinberg. So it was rock mountain, in other words.

Yeah, rock mountain. Not so romantic.

And was her family from the village as well, from Kostrina?

No, in a different village, I would say maybe 10 miles away. My grandfather was a baker. He had a bakery.

In that village?

No, where he lived. But the only baked bread, only bread. The peasants would buy bread.

And did he bake black bread and different kinds? Or you don't--

I don't remember. All I know is that it was only bread.

Did you ever visit him there?

Oh, yeah. We used to go there for Pesach, or for-- we were four kids. So two of us would go for a certain holiday, and the other two will go for a different holiday.

Why would you never all go together?

Well, it's too much. They were no youngsters, you know?

I see.

You get four kids in the house--

Yes, of course. Of course, it becomes noisy. So tell me a little bit about your siblings. What were their names?

My older brother was name was Levy.

Levy?

Levy.

Levy.

Yeah, Ludwig.

Ludwig, OK.

Yeah. And the second was Alex-- [HUNGARIAN] in Hungarian, [HUNGARIAN], and Alex Shloime. And then I was the third, Morris. And then I had a sister, Lora.

Lora.

Yeah, she was two years younger than me. But she was a head taller than me.

Really?

We were all tall. My mother was tall. My father tall. And my brothers were tall. I was the only one who was short.

Go figure. It happens.

And I had a lot of trouble during the war with this.

Did you? We'll come to that. We'll come to these things. Tell me a little bit about how it came that your family was in Kostrina? Now, had they been there for generations? Or had they moved from other places?

Well, they came-- I think my father's parents must have come from Poland.

I see.

Because when my uncle, my father's brother-- I remember he was small-- they sent him to Yeshiva to Poland. So I figure they must have come from Poland.

OK, but they didn't talk much about their own childhoods?

No.

OK.

Maybe my sister would know. But I never heard them talking about anything.

Was your family religious?

Yeah. Not-- but Shema Shabbos religious, you know? Strictly religious.

I take--

Because not as-- I'm not as religious as them. I am strictly kosher and I go to the shul, but they were more.

They were more?

Yeah. OK. So I was asking about your parents, whether they were religious. And if you were a village of only about 12 families, was there a synagogue?

Yeah, we had a nice synagogue. We had a mikveh--

Uh-huh?

--a separate building, a mikveh, and the synagogue. In fact, I was just thinking about it, a couple of weeks ago. I said, I wonder who built this synagogue and the mikveh. Because it wasn't a little thing. There was a big shul and a nice mikveh, you know? There, where you went, Friday, to take a hot bath.

Mhm? So it was also like a community center.

Yeah.

People would come-- would gather for services?

Yeah.

Mhm? And--

The cheder was there, too, you know-- like, when we were kids, we went to the cheder and davened early in the morning. And then, 8 o'clock, we went to public school. And we came back from public school, we had a lunch-- whatever. And then we went back to cheder till 6, 7 o'clock at night.

Tell us, what is cheder?

Cheder. A, like, school or some-- you know, a Hebrew school.

Would it be like a religious-- religious training--

Well, it was religious, you know?

OK. Were you learning Hebrew?

No, we were just learning Torah, Chumash, and Gemara-- things like that, you know? But not-- not modern Hebrew. And German.

You were learning German!

My parents, they were social, very loyal to Franz Joseph, you know, before-- because he was very good to the Jews. So, we were learning German.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--their alphabet-- the real German alphabet is different. You know that.

Yes.

I don't remember it anymore. But--

Well, when it's in the old-fashioned script, it's Latin letters but it's written in a very old-fashioned way.

But I don't remember anything at all.

But you were learning that.

Yeah, in cheder, yeah.

Yeah. So the languages of the Austro-Hungarian Empire--

Yeah.

--Hungarian and German.

--and German, yeah. And they used to bring a talmud-- you know, a teacher-- came to the village and stayed with us. And he stayed, for example, by us about two, three weeks and then stayed again with other Jewish people for a couple of weeks, till the season was over. And then he went home.

So he would be like a private tutor?

Well, it's not a private tutor, but just how-- we went to the shul. There was this little, separate room, and we all kids were studying, you know?

In the public school, was it mostly then Ukrainian children?

And us Jewish children, yeah.

Any Czech children?

Only the police officer's children. But they didn't have any-- if I remember something, there was only one, one or two kids, you know.

OK. And would the police officer-- do you think, would they have only moved there after they became part of Czechoslovakia?

Yeah. And then, when the Czechs left, the Hungarians took over. Then the Hungarian police came, you know.

I see.

It wasn't police from our village. It was brought-in police.

OK. That was-- that's an important distinction!

Yeah, yeah.

So they weren't really part of the community.

No, no. No. The same thing, the schoolteachers. They brought-- you know, they stayed-- in fact, one schoolteacher lady stayed in our house. And we had a room-- one or two. In fact, my sister just reminded me about the name. I said, I don't remember, you know?

And they were Czech?

Not exactly. I think they came from Ungvár-- Uzhhorod, you know, if you-- That's sort of-- But they speak there, most of it, I think, Hungarians, now.

Mhm. Yeah. Uzhhorod, you said?

Uzhhorod, yeah.

Uzhhorod, yeah.

You heard of it, right?

I've heard of it, yes. I think I've interviewed somebody from there.

Oh, yeah?

Yeah. Several years ago. That's how I knew that the region was so mixed. So, if it was mostly Ukrainian kids and the kids from the 12 Jewish families, about how many Ukrainian families were there? I mean, was it a village of 500 people or 1,000 people?

It wasn't 1,000. I would say, about between 400 and 500-- something like that.

Did everybody know everybody else?

Yeah, everybody knew everybody else.

Yeah. And did you play with any of the Ukrainians kids?

Yeah, with the kids. We played with them. Used to throw stones at each other. [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS]

And played some soccer, you know.

But who were your closest friends? Were they usually Jewish, or were they mixed?

Jewish.

Did the kids ever tease you? Or did the kids tease each other-- you know--

You mean, the Ukraine kids?

Yeah.

Well, once in a while they would call you "Dirty Jew" or things like that, you know. The only time they got really-- on Christmastime, when they came out from the church, they would holler "you killed Jesus," you know? Otherwise, we had no problem.

Hm! That's such a juxtaposition of that image.

They are Orthodox, you know, not Catholic. You know, they-- the Russian church. They belonged to the Russian church.

OK. They belonged to the Russian Orthodox church. So not many Catholics there?

I tell you, I'll be honest with you-- I didn't even know what a Catholic-- what a Catholic, what a Protestant till I came here. [LAUGHS]

That makes sense, yeah. And what kind of businesses or-- how did the town survive, economically? How did people, in general, make their living?

All farmers. The peasants were all-- the goyim-- the Gentiles were all farmers. And the Jewish people had stores-- stores-- like, my father had a tailor shop. And there was a shoemaker and this, you know. They all had land. Everybody had land. I don't know how it came to it. Always wondered how they got--

Why was it a question in your mind, how-- was it unusual?

Yeah, because, you know--

Why? Why is it unusual?

Well, I don't know. Maybe it was so most of the Jewish people lived in cities, and there was no land.

That's true. That's true.

And we were the only ones, in the villages, who owned land.

Oh, I see. So, did your Jewish neighbors own land, too, or not?

Yeah, all--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

All of them did.

That was our relatives. One great-grandfather came from Russia-- from Poland. His name was Levkovich. And he had a bunch of kids-- you know, I don't know-- a dozen or so. And he lived in a chicken coop, when he moved-- when he came.

[LAUGHS] Oh, my goodness.

Yeah. But he became very wealthy. The land-- not the land-- the forest, nobody could own it-- only the government. But, to cutting down the trees, and bringing them to the station, so he contracted, and he had to bring the lumber from the hills where they were chopping them down and to the station. So this, how he developed the contract, and this, how he became very well-off.

So he had a bunch of sons and daughters. And they all-- one had a restaurant, one had a bar, one had a grocery store, and things like that.

So you were kind of all related!

Yeah. Yeah! Most of the village-- I would say, about 60% were related to each other, you know?

Wow!

Yeah.

One big clan!

Yeah, yeah.

So did you celebrate holidays, all together?

No-- well, each family had his celebration, except Purim. So we had a play, when we were kids, and we celebrated together-- in my uncle's bar.

[LAUGHTER]

And you put on the play there.

Yeah, we put on the play. I played once a girl. It was very funny. And I had the pants rolled up. And all of a sudden, in the middle of the play, the pants rolled down. [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS] Those are the sorts of things that happen when children have plays, you know? [LAUGHS] And people like it even more, because it's unexpected. Were you happy, as a child?

Yeah, I was happy. Yeah, we were happy kids.

Yeah?

Yeah, we were happy.

Were you close--

Yeah.

--OK--

--we were going fishing, in the summertime. In the wintertime, we were skiing. You know? And all we had to do-- just get out from the house and make 10, 20 steps, and you walk up the hill, you know? So you just where the skis come down straight to the house, you know?

It sounds like a very pretty countryside.

Yeah, very beautiful! Very beautiful. Mountains-- very beautiful, very beautiful country, yeah.

Did anybody have a radio?

Only one cousin. First of all, during the war you weren't allowed to have radios, the Jews--

But before the war--

Yeah, before, the war. Well, I was too young, then. I think one cousin-- our cousin neighbor. He had already big boys. They were already college graduate, you know? They went to college. They were teachers already.

Your father-- did he finish any higher education?

No, I don't think so, no.

OK. What was his first name, by the way?

In Hebrew, Avrum, and Adolf.

Adolf? Adolf Sternberger.

Yeah.

And, aside from Yiddish, your parents spoke Hungarian to each other?

Yeah, yeah. Not as much. They spoke more Jewish. But they have cousins who spoke most in Hungarian-- very little Jewish. [LAUGHS]

Some were more assimilated than others.

No, no, because the boys married from-- like, from Ungvár, from different-- and, there, they spoke all Hungarian-- very little Jewish. So the kids were speaking Hungarian.

What kind of newspapers were there in town?

I never saw a newspaper till I came here to New York. [LAUGHS]

Really. Really. So-- so the only-- I guess I'm asking, what was the means of information? How did people get information about the wider world?

Well, like my mother used to go to the big city. And she would come back and-- to get news. And my cousins were already, some of them, college graduate already. And so, you know--

But only-- I think only one radio-- maybe two. I don't know. I know my cousin-- my uncle-- you know, a cousin, the boys had a radio.

Mhm. Anybody have a car?

[LAUGHS] What's a car?

[LAUGHS] Well, that's why I was thinking-- I've talked to people who say, when a car would come we would chase after it.

Right!

[LAUGHS]

A car came to the village. It was passing through. And we-- all kids were running behind it.

[LAUGHTER]

So these other kids were doing the same thing.

Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah. [LAUGHS] Yeah, it was--

That was the fun!

Yeah! It was the big event.

Right-- when a car passed through. And, if the road was dry, very dry, with dust, you know, and--

It covered everybody.

Right. Yeah, we were all running. And they weren't going fast. They especially went slow, so we could run.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah!

That was the big fun.

It's hard to imagine, now. It's hard to imagine, when people have two or three cars, in this country, what an event it was-- you know, 100 years ago-- less than 100 years ago.

My uncle's son he had a butcher store. And he also sold meat to the army. So his son had already a motorcycle.

Whoa! Oh! We got, each one, a ride! That was the biggest thing ever happened.

[LAUGHTER]

That must have been. That must have been. When you went to school, what were the subjects that you found most

interesting?

Jeez, I don't remember anymore. But regular-- maybe history-- things like that.

Were you a good student?

I don't know. [LAUGHS] You would have to ask the teacher!

[LAUGHTER]

Were you interested in school?

Yeah, it was OK. It was all right.

So, one of my questions is, when-- when the world-- you know, the outside world, from your description to me-- the impression I get is that it was very far away.

Yeah.

It was very distant.

Like, it's thousands of miles.

Yeah. If only one family has a radio, and there are no newspapers, and people pretty much are self-sufficient--

Yeah.

--you know, when you're self-sufficient, then you--

I never went to a doctor, only till I came here.

Really!

I mean, after the war.

That's right. So, as growing up, you never had to go.

No, I never at a doctor. They say, when I was a baby, I was very sick. And there was no doctor in the village, so my mother took me to the rabbi.

And he said, well, let's give him a name, another name. So they gave me Moishe Chaim. "Chaim" means "life." So that's how I got well, you see? Better than doctors!

[LAUGHTER]

The right name. Did you ever go to any other town, when you were growing up? Did you ever visit any other place?

Well, I went to Grandfather.

Right. What was the name of where he lived, of--

Stavne.

Stavne.

That was even closer to the border, you know.

OK. Was it also a small village?

Ah, it was a little bit bigger. There was a sawmill there, which my uncle, the neighbor, who owned the land, and his-- he rented the land to the sawmill, and they paid him not with money but with, like, a freight cart of boards--

Of lumber!

Yeah, lumber. That's how he got paid.

Well, that can be pretty valuable.

Yeah, and he would sell it to-- you know.

Yeah. So you would visit your grandfather, but did you go anywhere else?

Down Berezne-- you haven't heard of it, then? No.

No.

It's a bigger town-- it's a nice little town. I went there a few times.

OK. Was there a railroad?

Yeah, the railroad passed through. In fact, our house was right by the railroad-- by the railroad station-- close to the station.

OK. So tell me a little bit about your house. You said it was a rather big place?

Yeah, it was a big house. The people who built this house they were in the United States. And then, when they came back and they built this big house, the way I figured it out, they realized that this is no more their life-- no electricity, no nothing. And they moved to the big city. This is what I-- you know, I came to the conclusion.

Right.

That-- you know? So we had a big house.

So your family bought it from them.

Yeah.

OK. How many stories did it have?

Only one floor, but a lot of big rooms. And one room was like a barroom. So probably they planned to open up a bar or something. I really don't know. I know the name is Markovits. And I think they were a little bit related to us-- I don't know exactly what.

You mean the people who built the house.

House, yeah. But I figured it out. They must've been very unhappy, after they came back from the United States, you live a completely different life, you come to this village where the outhouses, 40, 50 feet-- and no electricity, no nothing. So, they must have just packed up and left.

Describe the rooms to me a little bit. You were a large family. You had four kids?

Yeah. Well, we had big rooms. Maybe one-- one-- one, two-- also, we had a sukkah that was built with the house, together.

What was built?

A sukkah-- sukkah!

What's that?

You know, in the fall, the holiday Sukkos? Oh, you don't-- oh, you're not Jewish? Oh. You know, the fall-- the-- they have a sukkah that they build something from, you know, like, the Israelites lived, when they were in the desert.

OK. And so that's a separate building?

No, it was built--

Connected.

Connected, with all three sides of glass, and the roof would open up. You know, because they have to open it up for the holiday. Can't be a closed-- otherwise, it's just a house. But, like this, you open it up-- so it was a sukkah.

How do you open up a roof?

Well, we went up, and we pushed it up.

So it was a glass roof.

No.

It was-- it was just--

It was metal-- metal and wood. But three sides of this was glass-- glass windows-- big glass windows.

So, if I were to understand it properly-- I mean, to have an image in my mind, would it be like a sunroom today?

I would say something like that, yeah.

OK. OK. And so you had that built next-- connected to the house.

We didn't build it. The people built it.

I see-- the ones you bought it from.

Yeah.

OK. And did you have any pets?

Pets? A dog-- we never bothered with him. He was always outside. The only time he came running in in the wintertime, to warm up by the stove. [LAUGHS]

Yeah.

I guess we never bothered him like here, you know. My daughter has two dogs. Boy! Phew, phew, big thing.

So, when Hitler came to power, you were just a little boy--

Yeah.

--about five years old.

Right.

Do you remember, as you were growing up, your parents ever talking about what goes on in Germany?

Well, I know they were shushing-- you know, talking quietly to themselves. They probably didn't want we should get upset. But we knew that something, Hitler, that he doesn't like Jews-- something like that. Burt not much.

When and-- in Czechoslovakia, was there-- did-- even though your parents had an affinity for Franz Joseph, what were their feelings about Czechoslovakia as the ruler now of the village?

Well, the Czech people were very nice people, you know. Very nice.

They weren't part of your daily life, but there was no ill--

No, no.

In 1938 or '39, you'd be about 10 or 11 years old.

Yeah.

Do you remember September 1, 1939?

No.

That's the day the war started-- World War II started-- with Germany invading Poland. Do you remember how people found out about that?

I really know nothing-- very little about it.

OK.

You know? All I remember-- that the Hungarian anime was also marching with the Germans. Because we are by the Polish border. So a lot of trucks and trucks were going to the Polish border. That's all I remember-- trucks and then horses with soldiers.

Were there any-- did you ever see refugees from Poland coming through?

No. No.

So, when did life change for you and your family?

Well, in 1944, when--

What happened?

Right after Pesach.

So, right after Passover--

The first day after Passover, a drummer came drumming-- was drumming on the street, on the road, and telling that all the Jews have to go to the synagogue, you know. So this is the first time I started to [INAUDIBLE] what happened and what's happening, you know.

Did you, by that point-- you know, I ask about the beginning of the war, and 1944 is one year before it ends. During the war, did more news come in about what was going on?

If it was going on, we kids-- my parents kept-- we all were shushing, quiet, talking to themself. They probably would know what's happening but not exactly-- didn't know that the Jews are being killed, you know.

Because, when you said the Polish border was 25 miles away--

Maybe even less!

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

So, you know, from here to Miami, it would be-- someone in Miami-- things would be happening terribly, and yet you'd be at home and you wouldn't know! I guess I'm trying to find out, how did people find out things? How did news travel, and did it travel?

Well you have to remember, I was a kid. I didn't bother with those things what's going on. But it was always, somebody went to the main town, and they would come back and know things. But they really didn't know much what's happening to the Jewish people in Poland or-- you know?

Or anywhere else, yes, Hungary was not affected until very late.

Right. Yeah.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--that morning-- so we got all-- got together on the shul. And we packed up whatever we could. And we were [INAUDIBLE] next day, they take us to the station, and they took us to Uzhhorod. And they put us in a brick factory. And we stayed there, in this brick factory. And then, I really don't know how long it was we were there-- maybe two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, five-- I really don't remember.

Do you remember what kind of atmosphere it was in this factory?

Well, everybody was sad, you know? It was--

I can't-- I mean, if-- one of-- if people didn't know much of what was going on, it must have been a shock--

Yeah!

--a huge shock, that, all of a sudden, you're taken from your home--

Right, and-- and then, you know, after a month or six weeks, five weeks-- I don't know exactly, you know-- they took us and they put us on freight trains. And that's how we got to Auschwitz. And we got off the train in Auschwitz.

My father saw these big chimneys with smoke. So he said, [NON-ENGLISH]-- children, he said, it's not going to be so bad here. We'll work here. He thought it was factories. We'll work here, and when the war will be over we'll go home.

You know? I'll never forget it-- he said, [NON-ENGLISH], you know, it's not to be so bad here. We'll work, and we'll go--

But 15, 20 minutes later, we found out different, you know?

What happened?

Well they took us on a big yard, you know? And there was a big building, a very big building. And all-- you know, right away they separated the men and women separate, and the children.

And you had to undress outside-- not inside, outside-- just to keep your shoes, they said. Keep your shoes. And that's it. And then, when you walked in in the building, there was a Nazi officer, I remember, with a cane. [INAUDIBLE] he had a little ax. I don't know if you know it-- in Austria and Germany, they have the ax, you know, so, when they go in the mountains, it has a hook, you know?

And he would point-- you go here, you go here-- you know, on this side. And I was very small. All my parents-- my-- both parents were tall. My older brother was already he was 18. He was-- No, 20. And he was tall. And my middle brother was 18. He was tall.

But I was the smallest. My sister's two years younger than me, and she was a head taller than me. So they said, they are going on the right. They make me go on the left. You know?

So the whole family's on the right.

Yeah. Yeah. All, you know-- my two brothers, my father, and-- and-- so I see that there are old, very old, people and kids like me. You know? And one guard was guarding us-- like on an angle, you know? And this. And he was going up and down, watching-- guarding us, you know. And I was, like, on this edge of the--

But, every time he passed through, he stopped-- there was an old man who had beautiful shoes-- real burgundy shoes, you know, real-- real beautiful shoes. And-- kept on looking at them, every time he passed through. So, once he passed through, he tried to take it away from him. So the old man said, [SPEAKING GERMAN]-- "I need them. I need them."

So the soldier said, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. "Where you go, you don't need them."

Oh my goodness.

So it hit me in my head, you know? I kept on saying, in my head, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]-- no good-- it's no good. So it was like a minute or two-- he passed all the time. So, when he passed me, and I saw already my father and brothers were starting to go away-- and, as soon as he passed me, I started to run. And I caught up with them. That's how it was

And you weren't noticed.

Yeah. Because he was walking, you know? And I had no shoes-- just barefoot, so-- yeah. It hit me, I said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Something bothered me, that it's no good. You know. So I ran.

Your intuition. Yeah!

The intuition a person has, and how little we listen to it, and how big difference it can make.

Yeah. It's just unbelievable. When I think of it, now, it's-- I kept on saying, in my head, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Because he said, where you go you don't need them. Oh, this is something not right!

That's right.

Yeah.

That's right.

So, I went with them. And we were in Auschwitz-- I don't know exactly how long-- maybe 10 days, maybe two weeks. But I don't think longer than two weeks. And they took us-- I don't remember the camp. This is a camp I don't remember. I don't know why.

So they took us-- Schlesien-- you know Schlesien?

Mhm.

But there is an Oberschlesien and Unterschlesien. But I don't know remember-- I don't know even if it was Unterschlesien or Oberschlesien. And it was--

When did you find out that the group-- that your intuition was absolutely spot-on and that the group where that old man was part of-- where they were going? When did you realize--

I didn't know. I just knew that--

So, even during those two weeks you were in Auschwitz--

Yeah. I didn't know! Well, they kept us-- you know?

Did you have to work, during those two weeks?

No, not in Auschwitz, no.

Did they feed you?

Yeah, we had-- I don't know how many times-- once a day or twice-- I don't remember. But, I'm telling you, this thing hit me in my head-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]? Is that what you're saying?

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. "It's no good. It's no good." Something is wrong. You know? Every time I go in a shoe store, now, I look for a burgundy color, but I have never seen a color yet like this gentleman had. And I could see his face, and he cried [SPEAKING GERMAN]. You know-- "I need them."

So he said [SPEAKING GERMAN]. "Where you go, you don't need them." If he wouldn't have say this-- you know? But--

Yeah?

So we came to Schlesien. There was there a big mountain, and they were building, like, a city instead of the mountain-- floors, you know?

Oh, really!

Yeah! I don't know what it was, but-- what they were building it for, but it was-- if you walked in in the mountain, you could get lost. Floors, like, three, four floors, and different sections. But my father and two brothers, we didn't work there. We worked outside, down the mountain, and we were building a railroad-- a railroad--

Tracks?

--tracks, yeah, but it was like a a station. Because the cars weren't such big cars as regular cars. They were small cars, you know? Because probably to take up the mountain, there. So we were working there. And then we finished this thing there. Then we worked--

What kind of work did you do?

Well, we were making railroad tracks, you know, and--

You were actually making the tracks.

Yeah! Tracks, you know. And this was the station for going-- for taking the freight up to the mountain, there. You know?

Were you wearing striped prisoners' clothes--

Yes, stripes, yeah.

OK. So, your other, civilian clothes, you got rid of back in Auschwitz--

No, that was right away in Auschwitz, you know, before you walked in in the big room.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

All they said is, just keep your shoes.

So you're in the big mountain, and you're working there for about two weeks, you said?

No, no, most of the time, there.

Oh, OK.

You know? And we were there about two months. And one morning, they starting call out names. You know. But the German are very efficient, so alphabetically, you know, not just jumping from name to name. They were alphabetic. And I am S, so I was on the end.

And my father noticed that, if you were-- they called out the name, and if you were tall, you went back to the line. If you were short, a small kid, you had to-- you stayed, you know. So my father told, when they will call my name-- so my middle brother should step out. My middle brother was tall.

So they called out my name, and my middle brother went out. And they told him go back. So that's how I was saved the second time.

OK. You have to explain this a little bit to me more, because I get a little confused. There was four of you-- your father and three boys.

Yeah. Right.

And so they would be calling four names.

No-- just one name.

They would only call one name?

Yeah, mine, because I was the youngest one. So they wanted another-- maybe where we were working for this company, maybe they were complaining there are too many kids.

Oh! I see.

So, one day, early in the morning when we used to go out, we would line up and they would check us out before we go to work. But, that time, they were calling out names.

Only the young kids' names.

Yeah, the young ones, the smaller ones.

All right. Got it.

So, when my father noticed that if you were tall-- back in the line. If you were short, you had to stay. So that's how my middle brother saved me.

By that point, your father also knew that being left behind is a bad thing.

Yeah.

OK. What happened, after that? How did things go?

Well, after that, we heard artillery. So we were so happy that the Russians are coming, because-- not the Americans, because they were close-- closer to Schlesien, closer to there. But one morning, right away, after we were hearing the artillery and it was really thundering. We heard it. So my father said, they must be about 30 or 40 miles away from us.

And one morning, the next morning, we are starting to march. They took us. We walked a whole day, from-- we walked, we walked. And it was cold. And so many people fell, and just didn't bother even to get them up, you know.

And it came night, they put us in a big barn-- in a big barn. And we were there overnight. And in the morning, they brought a big soup. So, I took my cup, and was running there to-- also. But it was so much pushing there, that the Nazi guy-- again, with that-- they had all those canes with that axe, a little ax on it. And he hit me. I saw stars, but I didn't care. You know, he got such a hit that I saw stars, you know? But I didn't care. I wanted that little soup-- whatever they were giving, you know?

And so everybody else-- everybody is pushing, you know. And, a little later, maybe a few minutes later, I felt something warm on the back. But I didn't bother, because it was too cold. I didn't take off my cap. it was too cold.

So I was hit right here.

You still have the scar?

Sure! So, then we walked again, to freight cars. But--

I want to interrupt right now. I'm getting lost in the sense of time. If I understand correctly, you were taken from your home sometime after Passover.

Right.

So that would be in April.

Right.

Sometime in April.

That's right.

And if you're saying now that it was cold and you kept your cap on--

Well, then we were-- we were working in there for a long time-- for months.

So would that be, like, late fall already? Would that be December, November?

No, it was more like February or March.

So this is almost a whole year!

Yeah, right, yeah.

Almost a whole year that you were there.

Yeah.

OK. And so it's dead of winter.

Yeah. Yeah.

OK.

So they put us in the freight cars-- but not closed freight cars-- open freight cars. And it was so cold.

And you know, the train was going, and my father noticed-- recognized the Tatra Mountains. You ever heard of?

Mhm.

You know, Czechoslovakia.

Yeah. Yeah.

The Tatra Mountains. And we were going, like, under a bridge. And on top, people were looking. So my father says to the rest, we should holler [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]-- "bread, bread!" So he says, maybe in the others where we'll pass through, that--

They'll give them some.

There were maybe some people going, so what God gives, it happen. And I happened to grab one. But I was so excited-- I said, I got one! I got one! --that the whole crowd jumped on me, and nobody had nothing-- just a couple of crumbs.

Oh. Yeah. People were that starved.

[INAUDIBLE] So, I was so excited. [INAUDIBLE] I got one! I got one! So the whole--

So what happened? They fell on you? Everybody fell on you? And-- and just tore it out.

Yeah, and grabbing, grabbing. I'm lucky I had a few crumbs left over. So we came to-- and it was a cold night, very cold. And my father said we shouldn't sleep-- we shouldn't fall asleep, you know? Because you could get frozen.

So we came to Austria. The camp was named Ebensee.

Ebensee!

You heard of it?

Mhm. E-B-E-N--

--N-S-E-- "Ebensee," you know. And we got off the freight train. And we started to walk. And my pain-- my feet were burning like fire. I was screaming, rolling on the snow like [INAUDIBLE]. It was so painful-- unbelievable.

Your feet were cold? And your-- was it from when he hit you?

No, no, from the frozen.

From the frost. Mhm?

From frost. And-- was terrible pain-- unbelievable. You know? They're frozen-- both feet. And every time I walked a little bit, I just-- unbelievable.

So we came to the camp. And it was unbelievable. The pain was terrible. And that was where I froze my toe-- I don't have toes on this one. You want to see it?

Later. Yes, thank you, we would. But that's-- you lost toes on your foot?

Yeah. I ripped them off, because they were hanging! It was very painful, because, you know it was touching the regular foot, you know. It was, like, half hanging. So I couldn't take it, so I ripped them off. It was rotten.

Oh my god. Oh my god.

And this foot wasn't so bad-- only like this. You know? And this one is like this. But it was very blue, all the way till up here, by the ankle. And pus was coming there, like a small stream, all the time, like a small stream. You know?

So then already the Americans came.

So you were liberated in Ebensee?

In Ebensee yeah.

How much time did you spend in Ebensee, do you know? Was it a month or more?

I don't know.

Did you work there? Did they make you--

No, no, it was--

So they were just taking you out of Schlesien on the train, and--

Just to save their own lives, you know. They don't want to go to the front. So this, what happen. All those soldiers. You know, they kept us there, they would run away! You know.

What was liberation like?

I was too sick. My father and two brothers died, in those few days or weeks. I don't know if it was one week or two weeks, you know. First my father, and then my older brother. And I don't know when my middle brother died-- maybe a day-- I was dying, myself! So I didn't--

So, when you got to the camp, did you-- where did they put you? Did you--

In barracks. They put us in barracks.

In barracks.

Yeah.

And were your father and brothers there, too, next to you?

No, my father right away, as soon as we came from on the train, he collapsed. And they took him away. So I don't know what happened to him. I don't know what happened to my two brothers, either.

Oh my gosh.

I don't know. I-- all I know is, every time I went to the bathroom, I came back, another brother was missing. And then again, the same thing with the middle brother. So I don't know that I was too sick, myself. I don't know if it was a week, two weeks, or two days, you know.

But all I know is that my feet were rotting, and it was very painful. So-- and then the Americans came. All I remember is, I was on a stretcher, and an American was bandaging me. That's all I remember. I don't remember anything else.

When do you next remember something? That is, what's your next memory of after the Americans came and you were bandaged? Were you in a hospital?

Yeah, they put me in a hospital where the German soldiers were there, too-- you know, the same hospital. But I only was there a day or two-- or maybe more. But they didn't treat me well, the nurses, you know?

They were German nurses?

German nurses, yeah. They didn't treat me well. I know that, you know.

Did they ignore you? Or did they just not--

Yeah, they ignored you. They just-- you know. But I was only there a few days and-- what was the name, that town? Ebensee, then from Ebensee, Goisern, I think.

Still in Austria.

Yeah. A school. And they made a hospital out of it-- for us, you know. So there, where they took me. And so these feet, this was already-- and I ripped them off [INAUDIBLE].

And you had ripped them off at the hospital, or before?

Before, before.

Before.

Because it was rotten-- was very painful, you know.

Oh my gosh.

Then, one morning, doctor-- a young American, Dr. Thomasson, he says, tomorrow morning, we will cut your foot off here. So, I was crying all day. But what God does? A Red Cross delegation of doctors came-- older doctors, you know, who had experience. And they go, you know--

The room was big-- maybe had a dozen beds, you know? And they started like this-- go around-- didn't say nothing. When they came to me, I was crying. So they ask me, why I cry? So I said that, tomorrow morning, they're going to cut off the foot, here!

So they took me in in the examining room. And they were maybe half hour, talking, all those doctors, discussing. And they said, no-- no operation. No, you know, it is just like [INAUDIBLE].

But it took a long time to heal. I was in the hospital till 1946, maybe September or July-- sometime-- or August, you know? I was so long in the hospital.

So, by this point-- was this a military hospital? Or--

No, they just made it for us-- for all the people who were in concentration camp. And they open up the high school or [INAUDIBLE] school-- I don't know what school it was. And from the classes they made bedrooms, and--

And this is in that town called Goisern?

I think, Goisern. I--

Goisern. G-O-I-S-- something like this, Goisern.

Mhm? Mhm?

And, you know-- so--

And so it took that long for you to recover.

This foot, yeah. It was all blue-- you know, like, almost like black. And pus was coming from here, like a small stream. This, I probably-- at that time, didn't take X-rays, you know? There was no X-rays, we went that place. You know, and--

Did you have feeling in the leg, in the foot?

Yeah, I had a little-- you know? I walked, like-- you know, if I had to go to the bathroom, I walked like this.

Mhm? On your heels.

On the heels, yeah. So, and then I got pleurisy there-- you know, pneumonia. And they put me on the table-- sit there on the table. And the nurse would come. And she would hug round me like this.

And they put in a needle, boy, like, this thick, and-- was so much fluid there, you know? They took out the fluid. And it was so painful that I give her a bite. She was screaming, [LAUGHS] and I was screaming!

Oh! Oh my goodness I mean, it sounds-- if they hadn't liberated you, you would have not survived--

No, that was only a matter of a few days-- a week or so, probably. You know.

And, at this time, were you in any state to be able to ask about what happened to your family?

Well, I know what happened to them. I know they didn't come out alive, so--

So that was with your father and your brothers.

Yeah.

And your mother and your sister, you last saw in Auschwitz.

Right. But--

What happened to them? After, in 1946, when I got well already, this a Jewish organization-- Bad Gastein. Did you hear of Bad Gastein?

No--

Bad Gastein.

Bad Gastein?

Yeah, in Austria.

Uh-huh?

They took over a couple of hotels, there. It was, like, a tourist town.

Sounds like a resort. Yeah.

Yeah. And we were there in that hotel. You know, I was there-- you know, that was, like, in end of '46 of, you know-- And there was guys who were-- all guys, like, in their late 20s or 30s, you know? And they were sitting once around the table and talking about America. So I told them--

Can we stop just for a second?

Oh, this is the gardener.

So you're in this place called "Bad"--

Bad Gastein. Hotel [PLACE NAME]--

Hotel [PLACE NAME].

S-O-E-G-E-N, I think-- [PLACE NAME]-- something like that. And we are sitting by the table on the ground floor. And a bunch of us are talking about America. So I said to them, I have relatives in America, but I don't know-- I know very little about them.

So this one young fellow-- not young-- he was already in his 30s-- and he says, you tell me everything about you and your family. And I will send a letter to some organization-- I don't know. And I told him.

And, a few weeks later, or a month later, I get a telegram.

Mhm?

Your sister is alive, and a letter is following.

Wow.

So, at that time, we were sitting in on the-- downstairs, on the-- at that time, it happened many times. So everybody was happy. And they were jumping, because it happened at least once or twice a day. [INAUDIBLE]. And this is already almost-- I am-- more than a year. You know? So this, how I found out about my sister. She was already in the United States.

Was she!

Yeah. She was taken, after the war, to Sweden, in a children's home. And the same thing happened to her. She found out through same-- they send-- so, this, how I found out.

And it's lucky. The gentleman who saw this note-- this thing-- he lived in Yonkers. But he said, looks very familiar with this. So he went to my uncle's, to Queens. And he showed them. And he said, yeah!

So these uncles that you didn't know much about were sort of like the meeting point of information.

Yeah.

What happened to your mother?

Well, I don't know. She-- took off the train, they separate us right away.

Well, did your sister know what happened to your mother?

No.

So was your sister--

It was the same thing, separated like me-- working and working and not working, you know?

So your mother was in one group, and she was in another.

Right.

Did your sister tell you what her story was and what had happened to her?

Well, no, we really didn't talked about it. You know? I know she was working, so I don't know where she was, in what camp, you know.

Do you know, now?

We don't talk too much about those things, you know?

No?

No. Because you talk about it, you start to cry, you know?

Yeah. Yeah.

Well, she was lucky. She was already tall. She was a head taller than me, so you could see already. And she was only 14, and I was 16, and I was a head shorter than her.

Yeah. Yeah. So you got the letter. How much longer did you stay at this place, this hotel, in this resort town?

Well, I came here in 1947, so I would say about [INAUDIBLE] but I had big problems, to get here, to this country.

Tell me. What happened?

Well, I was sick. I had TB also.

Oh, my.

So, you know, to get to this country, so you had to go take an X-ray. And if you took an X-ray, you know, right away you can't come. So I didn't know what to do.

But, one day, in the morning I got up, and I go out, and I see those two guys which I-- I spoke to them but I didn't know them well. And one guy was like me, the size of me. And I told him my problem. I said, I'll give you everything what I have, except I leave myself \$5. I gave him my watch and everything.

And he went-- and we practiced the handwriting-- you know the signature. And he went and took the X-ray for me. It hit me! As soon as-- right I saw them, I [INAUDIBLE]. So this, how I got here. Otherwise, I could have never come here. And I wanted to see my sister.

And she was already here.

Yeah.

OK. Did your uncle send a sponsorship or something? Did--

No. At that time, President Truman-- I don't know-- something-- 100,000 under 18 could come without visas.

Ah. Orphans, without visas. So I had another problem. I was already 18. So this-- but that wasn't such a big problem. I went and I got papers-- changed that I am 17, you know? So this, how I came to this country.

Did you come by boat?

Yeah. I just told them, I had \$5 left, when I got on the boat. And I never saw an orange in my life.

Really?

Yeah. Well, in the Carpathians, the mountains, there, only apples, plums, and cherry and things like that. So I never saw one.

So I asked this gentleman who was carrying oranges-- you know, [INAUDIBLE]. He had five oranges. I asked him if he wants to sell me. So he said, yeah-- \$1 each. [LAUGHS]

Ooh!

But I was so happy! I thought it was a bargain.

[LAUGHS] But in 1947, \$1 for an orange!

I found out, when I came to this country and I passed through a street and I see 10 oranges for \$1!

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah.

Says, well, this is my first lesson. [LAUGHS] But I finished all three of them.

[LAUGHS]

Oh, they were so good. If he would ask \$5 for one, I give it, too. [LAUGHS]

How did you get from the hotel to where-- where did you leave from, in Europe, in other words? What harbor-- what--

Oh-- from there, because I got the papers, they sent me to Munich. And from Munich, we went-- you know, to the-- what was the name that, you know-- German town--

Hamburg?

Yeah, Hamburg. And there we went. It wasn't a fancy boat. It was like an army boat [INAUDIBLE] moving troops, because double-deckers. We slept on double-deckers, so.

I mean, do you remember what it was like, leaving Europe and coming to the United States?

[LAUGHS] I was just happy to go [INAUDIBLE] see my sister.

Was she there at the pier, when you arrived?

Yes, she did. Lucky, I sent her a picture, which I wear a suit. She recognized the suit, not me. [LAUGHS]

Really?

Well, she thought I was a small guy, and I was 5' 11"! I grew up, after-- after the war, you know, I was, you know, 17. I grew-- stood up.

Yeah.

So I didn't go straight to my relatives. I went to a home in the Bronx. This organization, you know? And I stayed there for a while.

And I think they investigated first my-- where I live-- When I met my aunt-- where I live with my aunt. And then they told me I could go there.

Oh, I see. Did they want to-- why did they-- what did they investigate? To find out if it was a real place?

Yeah, it was a-- I don't know. All I know is I was there for a week or two, and then I could go [INAUDIBLE]. So they must have checked out, you know?

And these uncles that lived in the United States, how were they related to you? Whose--

My mother's brothers and sister.

So they had left Kostrina.

Yeah, Stavne, yeah.

Ah-- Stavne, where your grandfather had the bakery.

It started my oldest uncle. He was drafted, right after the war, to the Czech army. And something went wrong, and he died in the army. So, every time one of my uncles became 18, so they went to the United States, so-- Because he died, so they-- so, like this, all of them got here.

I see. And did you ever get any documents or any kind of certificates about your mother and your father and your brothers?

No, no, no.

Nothing.

No.

OK. Did--

So then I was here for a while. And I had TB, so I got sick. And I was, for a year, in Denver-- National Jewish Hospital in Denver.

And this is what year?

What year was it? Was it '48 or '49? One of those years. I was for a year there. And I came back. But, at that time, was no medicine. All you did it just stayed in bed and rested, you know?

And I came back, and my uncles found a job for me. And I-- Then there was two other guys who were in concentration camp, where I worked. And they wanted to go to business, and I wanted to go business. So we opened up a ladies' belts factory.

Belts?

Yeah, for ladies, belt. You know? And--

Was this in New York?

Yeah. So this, how it started. And--

Did you ever go to-- I'm sorry to interrupt, but, when you were told to leave your home, in Kostrina, how much schooling had you had by that point?

Just regular-- you know? What you have till you go till 15, 14 years old-- 16.

Yeah. Did you ever go back to school?

No. I had to take-- you know? I had to take care of myself. But I went to night school, when I came to this country, to learn how to write English and how to speak-- which I don't speak [? now either. ?] [LAUGHS]

You speak fine. [LAUGHS] And so you went to night school--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--I didn't tell you. This is, like-- when I came, my uncles gave me-- took me to a place [INAUDIBLE] job. It was a ladies' factory. And they put me to a sewing machine. it was a little room and dark. And I sew, and I say, from one hell to another hell. You know, it was terrible! It was terrible! Said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. You know, from one hell to--

So it was a week, and I quit. My aunt calls up my uncle, she's lazy. He doesn't want to work. [LAUGHS]

When you got sick and you were sent to-- how did that happen, that you didn't recuperate in Brooklyn but you recuperated-- you were in this Jewish hospital in Denver?

Well, the Jewish organization, they sent me there.

I see.

Yeah.

So they were-- in some ways, they took some responsibility--

Yeah, they send me there. They paid for the airline tickets-- for everything, you know? And this hospital, it says, "none may pay who enter, and none who could pay can't enter." It's only for people who-- something-- something like this, it said on the door, you know?

For people who can't afford it.

Yeah. "None may pay who enter"-- something like this.

I understand the meaning. Yeah.

It was a nice place, a good place. I was there a year.

So many years--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

At that time, it was no medicine. You know?

But it took so many years to recover from what had happened.

Yeah. Then I-- Too many things happened. When I quit this job, my uncle had a famous restaurant, the Turnpike Restaurant.

Turnpike Restaurant?

On Queens Boulevard. I don't know if you know it. At that time-- it wasn't your time. [LAUGHS] And he said I should come over to the restaurant. And he put in a bag with sandwiches and everything, and he gives it to me, I should hold it. And we go with a train to New York City. And we go to a place, up an elevator. And he takes the bag from me, and he puts it on the boss's desk. Here. Give him a job. Goodbye. [LAUGHS]

He was very-- he had a big company-- you know, about 100 people work, you know?

So your uncle went to a boss? Whose--

Yeah!

His boss?

No, no-- this gentleman-- I found out, this gentleman practically came every night to this restaurant.

Oh!

And I don't think he had a very happy life, so he spent a lot of time--

In the restaurant.

[INAUDIBLE]. So he says, give him a job-- goodbye. [LAUGHS]

And did he?

Yeah. I said-- he said, what do you want to do? I said, I'll do anything, but I don't want to sit at a machine. So he put me in the warehouse. And there I started to learn things, you know? I had to fill-- make, prepare orders for how much materials for this type of belts and how many-- you know, I started to learn things.

And, one day, this who is in charge, he quit. So he put me in charge. And that's how I started to make better money already-- you know, I think \$115 at that time, a week was a lot a lot of money.

And I saved every penny. I wanted to go to business.

Where did you live, at that time? With my aunt-- my uncle's brother's sister.

So it was two brothers and one sister of your mother.

It was more. Uncle Rudy, Irving, and Louis, and [INAUDIBLE]-- four brothers were here. Four brothers were here. And my aunt was-- she was the boss.

[LAUGHS]

She would go to them and say, give me \$20 for things for [INAUDIBLE]. And they would-- they'd never say no [INAUDIBLE] \$50 or \$100, they would all give. [LAUGHS]

OK. Where did she live?

In Brighton Beach, in Brooklyn.

Oh, she lived in Brighton Beach.

Yeah.

So you would travel on the D train or something every day to Manhattan?

At that time, I don't think it was the D train-- was a different name, I think.

It was a different one?

I think there was a different train.

OK. Maybe-- maybe-- I thought it was the D.

Hey, Marvin.

He's far away.

Oh. He comes from Coney Island.

Oh, yeah. Nice area!

That's how met his sister.

Uh-huh? So you met his sister in Coney Island?

Yeah-- Bright Beach.

In Brighton Beach. She was-- my sister already at that time bought a house-- a two-family house, with her-- with my brother-in-law's cousin. They bought a house. And she was a good friend of my brother-in-law's cousin.

And, it came Christmastime, I got a-- because I was in charge of the warehouse, and I was getting orders, I was running orders. So I got a big present-- different bottles of wine, different things. So, the cousin, she said, let's make a party, you know, for New Year.

She says, OK, do you have a date? I said, no. And that's how she says-- that's how I met his sister, and we got married.

What was her name?

Esther.

Esther.

Yeah.

Esther.

We got married, and we had two children-- a boy and a girl. And then I decided I want to go to business again. And I needed \$3,000, and I only had \$2,700. So she gave me-- she gave me-- I came to see her. She gave me a box, like a shirt box.

This is your sister or your aunt?

No, no, my-- my girlfriend.

Oh, Esther! OK.

Yeah. She gave me a box, gift box, like a shirt. Oh, I'm getting a shirt! So I open up, and there was a check for \$250.

Oh! Oh!

So, when she got upset, she would say, I want my \$250, plus--

[LAUGHS] Interest!

--not only this, but what do you call that? You know, double interest--

Oh--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Jesus, all the time I know, I know--

Double interest? Well, what would it be? Would it be double interest? I don't know the phrase. I don't know--

There is a phrase for it.

It's OK.

It might come to me, you know? So [INAUDIBLE].

And you were able to start your business.

Yeah, and very successful. I sold fabrics, with my partner, to chain stores. It was a nice business.

So, textiles, yeah?

Yeah, fabrics. And then, later on-- So one young fellow was giving us orders. Ever heard of Neisner Brothers? No, they went out of business. They had about 200 stores.

Eisner Brothers?

Neisner.

No, I haven't heard of them, no.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--they were here in Florida.

Yeah?

Yeah, also.

And the stores were called--?

Neisner Brothers.

Neisner. Oh, I see. The stores were named after them. OK.

Yeah. And he didn't give us too much orders, just about \$200,000, \$300,00 a year, which is not much. But on Broadway there they gave over \$1 million orders there for those guys. And he was telling them, I want to go to business. I want to go to business. So I said, yeah, yeah, yeah, we'll go with you.

So [LAUGHS] so he decided to quit. And when he quit, he comes up-- says, I'm ready to go to business. They don't need them anymore, I say, well, we changed our mind. But he was smart enough-- walked out from there and came to us.

And when I finish this story, my partner and I at the same time said, you're in business. And it was-- it became the biggest fabric store in this country-- 90 people we were. We had 90 people.

The biggest--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--in Rochester.

In Rochester.

Yeah.

What was the store's name, then?

Fabrics and Findings.

Fabrics and Findings, in Rochester, New York?

Yeah.

Wow.

It was the bigg-- He lived in Rochester.

Wow.

[INAUDIBLE] but this business has all died out, you know?

Yeah. And you were in business for how many years?

Well, for a long time-- maybe 35 years, 40 years.

Did you ever go back to Kostrina?

Nah. Why do I have to go back?

Did you ever go back to Europe, to any of these places?

Well, my wife and I, we went-- we went for a trip to France, you know. We went to Israel a few times, you know. But I never think of-- never think of this.

Did you ever talk about these things with your kids?

No. I really don't talk. Listen, when you start to think about it, you start to cry, you sure they want that? So now, this is the reason I'm making it-- so they could see it whenever they want it.

I'm glad you are. I'm glad you are talking to us today.

[INAUDIBLE].

Is this the first interview you've given?

Yeah. I never give nobody an interview. Oh, my son-in-law, he's taped something but not like this, you know? Just a few things, I don't remember.

Did your grandkids ask you about these things?

No.

Is it sort of like you put it behind you and--

Well, you know, you locked it up, and that's it. You know? You see? Even now, you cry. You know?

Of course. It sounds to me-- when you were in the camps, up until Ebensee, did your father and your brothers-- were you all living in the same barracks?

Yeah, the same barracks [INAUDIBLE] each other, you know.

Did that help-- you know, when you were all together, rather than being separate?

Yeah, they used to say, ah. There goes Sternberger with his three sons. Yeah, and there goes Sternberger with his three sons-- or sometimes a father with a son, but not three sons.

What would you want your children and your grandchildren to know about your parents-- about what kind of people they were?

Well, they-- I think I told them-- they taped something. I don't-- quite a few years ago, so I don't know. They are good kids. They go to Hillel, you know? And they're very good kids.

What are some of the values that you-- it sounds to me that your father, from the little bit you told, was very protective and-- protective of you and protective of the kids--

Yeah, he was.

--you know, even in those terrible circumstances.

Yeah. If he didn't notice what happened to, you know. I wouldn't be here, you know?

Yeah. Is there anything you'd like to add to what we've talked about?

Well, if you want to see my frozen toes--

I think we will. But, at this point, what I'm going to do is I'm going to conclude the interview. This concludes our interview with Mr. Morris Sternberger on July 15, 2014. And thank you.

Thank you.

OK. Do you have--

I wanted to make it aa separate from the interview, in case at the office they say no.

OK.

OK, here-- if you put your foot down a little bit, he'll be able to get that better.

See, first I ripped off those little ones, here. And then the big toe was hurting me very badly--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

OK.

[INAUDIBLE].

Your bones were frozen, as well?

Well, this was all blue and skin. It was hanging. So it's like-- and that was always touching this, you know? So I ripped them off, because it wasn't curable, you now?

I can't imagine the pain.

[LAUGHS]

I can't imagine.

So this one-- the reason they wanted to cut off, because pus was coming here, day and night, right here, from under here.

So did it look like your foot was frozen up to your ankle?

Yeah! Was all blue!

And yet--

Dark blue, you know, real dark.

And yet they said that-- those Red Cross doctors said that they could save the foot.

Yeah, they said, no-- no curing. They saved it.

Yeah. Thank you.

Thank you.

OK.