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OK. Can I speak?

You got it? OK. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. David Wolnerman on May 9, 2016 in Washington, DC. Mr. Wolnerman is the last surviving Auschwitz former prisoner in Iowa who has traveled from Iowa to be with us today and to share his story.

So we're very, very grateful to you that you have done so. And thank you. Welcome to the museum. And thank you for agreeing to share your story with us today.

I'm going to start with the most basic questions about your early life, and we'll take things from there. So can you tell me, what was the date of your birth? Modzhev, Modrzejów.

That's the town you were born In

Right.

OK. Modrzejów.

Modrzejów.

We'll talk about that in a minute, Modrzejów. And tell me when were you born?

May 9, 1927. May 9--

May 9, 1927.

1927.

Right.

OK. And you were born in Modrzejów you say?

Right.

And what country is Modrzejów in?

Poland.

In Poland.

Close to the German border.

Aha, so on the Western side.

Right.

OK. And what was your name at birth? When you were born, what was your name?

David.

The same as today?

It's the same.

Sometimes it's changed for some people?

I didn't change.

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OK. So you were David Wolnerman when you were born?

Right.

In 1927?

1927.

OK. And can you tell me, did you have brothers and sisters?

I have one brother. And once there were four, two brothers and two sisters, me and my brother and two sisters.

And where were you? Were you the youngest, the oldest?

I was the youngest.

You were the youngest? So tell me the names of your brothers and your sisters?

My brother's name was Abraham.

Mm-hmm.

And your sisters?

And my sister's name was Gertrude.

Gertrude. And another sister you say?

Bluma.

Bluma?

Yes.

So Abraham, David, Gertrude, and Bluma?

Abraham, Gertrude, Bluma, and Dave. I was the youngest.

All right. So Abraham was the oldest?

Right.

What year was he born?

You know what, he was born, I think, Second World-- the First World War or something like this. You know what I mean?

OK. So in the 1918, 1919?

Something like this.

OK. And then your sisters were born in the '20s.

Yeah.

OK. And what were the names of your parents?

My father's name was Pinchas, Pinchas, Pinchas.

Pinchas?

And my mother's name was Chana.

Chana, OK. And the town or the place you were born, tell me again?

Modrzejów.

Modrzejów?

Modrzejów.

What kind of a place was Modrzejów?

Very small town, close to the bigger town was Sosnowiec. Or Będzin, Katowice, Kraków, you know what I mean? This was a very small town, two streets.

Two streets?

That's it. One policeman, one doctor, and one car.

One car?

That's it.

You know something, that's a question that I often ask people from small towns, did they have cars? Were their cars in the--

One car.

Were the roads paved?

Well, we had only one main street, that's all.

OK.

We had two streets in the whole town.

Did you know everybody in town?

Almost, yes.

About how many people do you think lived in it?

Well, maybe a thousand Jews and a thousand Christians.

OK.

Well, half and half.

It was about half and half?

Yes.

Was there a synagogue?

Pardon me?

Was there a synagogue?

A few.

There were a few.

A small stable.

OK. And was your family religious?

Yes.

And what, very religious or just sort of?

Religious.

Religious?

Never worked on Saturdays, you know what I mean?

Mm-hmm.

In this town, the Jewish stores were closed. Nothing was open and everything, you know what I mean?

Did you go to synagogue every week?

I used to go-- you see my father died six months before the war.

In 1939?

In 19-- 1939, yes. So he died six months before the Germans took over.

OK. We'll talk about that, but let's go back to when you're still young and a small child. How did your father and mother support the family?

We were very poor, I mean poor. We didn't stay and beg on the street, you know what I mean, but we were poor, you know what I mean? So my father barely make a living.

What was he doing?

He was buying some bags, the bags from floured bags, and sell it.

I see. So he would buy, and he would-- was he a peddler? Could one say--

A peddler, yes.

Did he travel or did he--

Walking, not traveling.

Uh-huh. So he walked around the town?

He walked out the town, too, the bakeries, the stores with some bags.

That sounds like it was a hard living.

Yes, yes, yes.

Did he come from a large family?

I think so. I think so. I didn't know too much because I was young, you know what I mean?

Did you have grandmothers-- grandparents?

One grandma and one grandpa.

From your mother's?

My mother's parents.

OK. So you didn't know much about your grandfather on your father's side?

No, no, no because he didn't live in the same town.

Where had he come from?

I mean, he came from not too far away from Kraków, a small town, too, you know what I mean?

I see. Do you know how your parents met?

No.

OK.

In Europe when you're 10 years old, 12 years old, you don't mix up. It's not like now in America.

No. And then some people told stories and some people didn't tell stories to their children?

Well, no, they didn't-- no, they didn't talk too much stories.

OK. Did your father fight in World War I? Was he in any army in World War I?

I'll be honest with you, I don't know.

OK, all right.

I know the little town where we lived, my mother used to say it was always changing, one time Russian, one time German, one time Polish, the First World War or something like this.

Yeah.

Because my mother speaks fluent German, very little Polish, and Jewish.

OK. So it was Yiddish and--

Yiddish, right.

--Yiddish and German, which are not so far from each other.

And a little bit Russian, too.

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And a little bit-- well, yeah. Was this part, I think, of the Austro-Hungarian Empire?

No.

No.

See, over there it was changing. One time it was Polish, one time it was German, one time it's Russian. Finally at the end, it was Polish, Poland.

Got it. Got it. And tell me about your mother's family. Did she have brothers and sisters?

Yes, she had two brothers and one more sister.

OK, so also--

There were two sisters and two brothers.

Like yours?

Yeah.

OK. And did they live in the same place?

In the same town.

Did you know them much?

Because they live in the same house. You see, grandpa had a house. My grandpa was our mayor over there.

Was he?

Didn't know how to read, didn't know how to write, but he knew how to drink?

[LAUGHING]

Sometimes, that's the most important part of politics. What can we say? Did you--

He was collecting taxes, not too much.

[LAUGHING]

So he was the mayor of--

The little town, Modrzejów, yes.

Modrzejów. And did you know him well, your grandfather?

Well, as long as I lived, yes, I know him.

And you were all in the same house?

Not in the same house. In the same house was the family, my mother, my brother, and my uncle.

Uh-huh.

And he had a house himself with his wife.

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Oh, your grandfather?

Right.

I see. I see.

And was he well-off? Was he well-to-do?

No.

No.

Made a living, not-- but no, no.

OK but aside from knowing how to drink, I bet you he had some other qualities that made him the mayor?

Well, a small town, you had to have a good name, that's it.

OK.

What was his name?

Abraham.

And his last name?

Nyer.

Nyer, Abraham Nyer. And how did he made his living, your mother's father?

What do you mean?

Well, he was a mayor.

Yes.

But is that how he had supported his family, or had he had a professional trade?

No, not from this. He had a cow, milk.

Got it.

He made butter. I remember we were kids, we had to--

You have to do that.

The one, the old-fashioned way.

Yep. He churned the butter.

Yes.

OK.

He used to do that.

Really?

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Yeah.

I bet you it took a long time.

Well, he worked around with his fingers, steal a little bit. You know. Yes.

Your own family, tell me about your home. What did it look like, where you lived with your brothers, and sisters, and parents?

We had two rooms--

Two rooms, OK. And was it a single--

--a kitchen, and our bedroom, and a living together. Living room, kitchen, everything.

All right. And six people--

Six people.

--in two rooms?

Yes.

Was this part of an apartment building?

No, it was grandpa's building. And he give us to live over there.

OK. And were you next to other houses, or did you have--

Yes, oh yeah.

So you lived in the town?

Yes.

Did you have any animals? I mean a cow or anything like that? No? Did anybody keep any chickens or--

No.

Not really.

Maybe-- I didn't-- I don't-- I didn't see it.

OK. OK. How did you heat the place?

Very, very clean. OK.

My mother worked all the time in the house--

Yeah.

--because we didn't have no electric stoves and all this kind of stuff, you know what I mean?

What did you have?

Oven, with wood or coal, cooked and everything.

OK. So in the two rooms, no electricity and coal heating?

And electricity we had maybe six months before the war.

Really?

One light bulb. Oh, this was something.

Was this a big thing?

Oh! This was something because you used to have the kerosene.

Uh-huh. Well, tell us, how do you use kerosene? What do you have to do in order to make light from kerosene

With kerosene, you just start it. It's like gasoline, like oil, you know what I mean, you had to fill it up.

You poured kerosene into something, and then you light it like a candle?

Right.

Were there fires?

Not too much because-- they always had Christmas trees. We didn't have no fire department, nothing, but was no fires because everybody's into their room, you know what I mean? You didn't have no six rooms. So you [INAUDIBLE].

So you would find it. If something starts, you find it very fast.

Right.

OK. Did you have plumbing?

Pardon me?

Did you have plumbing?

No.

OK. So where did you get water? We have to buy water.

You'd have to buy it?

Yes. So it wasn't like you had a well that you could go to?

Well, no. We have to buy it. It was like two pennies a bucket of water.

Really! This is the first time I heard that somebody had to buy water.

Right.

Wow!

I used to go. I couldn't handle a whole one. I used to buy a half for one penny.

OK. And would that be like a half a bucket?

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Right.

And half a bucket would be about how many gallons do you think?

Maybe three gallons and something like this.

And how many buckets did you need for a family of six per day?

First of all, you didn't took no showers because you didn't have no shower. You took a bath you know what I mean? And the men used to go to the city every Friday take a bath.

Oh, so there was like a bath house?

And when you don't need it, you'd-- if you need it or not, you took our bath.

And what did the women do, at home? No showers, no bath houses?

No. No showers.

OK. OK. How many rooms were in this building that you lived in?

The rooms 2, 4, about 6.

OK.

Everybody, three families.

Three families?

Yes.

One lived in the penthouse. So you couldn't straighten out. You have to go like this because it was too close.

OK. And which one did you live in?

The first floor.

The first floor.

That's all we had, two floors.

OK, two floors and a penthouse.

Two and one, one penthouse. The penthouse was-- when you do tall, you had to--

Who lived there?

Well.

OK. Did anybody live there in the-- it's the attic space then.

Like an attic space.

OK. My uncle was living over there.

I see. OK. Can we cut?

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So we were talking about where you lived. Can you describe the house to me? Was it next to other houses?

Yes.

Was it wooden or of stone?

Stone, but old.

Old. So you think it was maybe built in the 19th century?

Maybe before--

Maybe before, OK. OK.

--because when the time I remember. You used to put sand by the windows--

Sand?

--so they covered up for the snow, for the winter and everything.

Oh, I see so that's how you--

The house was not young but older.

Do you remember it being cold inside?

We had a stove, a round one for winter.

Like a cold stove?

Right.

And was it in the corner of the house, or corner of a room, or in the middle of the room?

In the house.

I know. Where was it in the room?

In the middle the house in the living room.

Really, in the middle? And your mother cooked on a coal or a wood--

A stove.

--stove. OK.

She didn't bake. She didn't have for baking. For baking we used to go every Friday or so to a bakery, you know what I mean, and bake in the bakery.

So in other words, not only at a bakery could you buy bread, but you could bake your own bread?

Bread, not too many made it.

OK.

We make challah, you know what I mean, for Friday.

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I see. And would she bake other things?

And a cake sometimes.

OK. Was there a particular food she made that you really liked?

I liked everything, but she cooked for six people a pound and a have of beef. So if you get the bone, you don't get no meat. If you get the carrots, you don't get meat because my father got to get a little piece, my brother and my sister both, too. And we were the youngest, so we didn't have too much.

Were you hungry?

Bread we got plenty, you know what I mean?

Mm-hmm

A little bit sugar on top or something, you know I mean, not butter, once in a while.

So butter you could churn for your grandfather, but you didn't get much of it at home?

No because he sold it, you know I mean? And it was different. Like eggs, you wanted to the store to buy two eggs, one eggs, and something like this, not a dozen.

Was there only one store you would go to?

No, you had a few stores.

Yeah?

Little stores, you know what I mean.

And who would do the shopping, the food shopping?

I go with them my mother or something. Most the time for Friday we shopped, Thursday for Sabbath, you know I mean.

Mm-hmm. So because you were the youngest, did you accompany her everywhere? Did you go with her when she went shopping?

Yeah, sometimes.

OK. And your sisters?

You have the one sister, the older sister was working, you know I mean?

What was she doing?

She worked in a printing. And my brother was the foreman over there. The foreman made $25 a week.

Well, it was in Polish money, was it?

In Polish money, right.

And so would it have been 25 zloty?

25 zloty, right.

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OK. Was that considered a lot of money?

He was a foreman already.

And what about--

Because it was, I think, cheap because you had no money. You didn't buy a dozen eggs or something, you know what I mean?

Which of your siblings were you closest to?

We were together. We were living close.

All of you?

Yes.

OK.

The mother and father was the tops.

Really?

That's it.

Tell me about it.

We didn't sit down at a table tell my father and mother was there.

It sounds like you had a lot of respect.

Nothing but respect.

OK. Tell me a little bit about your parents' personalities. What kind of a person was your father? Let's start with your father.

Very, very Yiddish, you know I mean. He had to have a paper every day.

He reads. He would read the paper every day.

The Jewish paper.

Do you remember the name of the--

The Forverts.

The Forverts.

Right.

OK. Did it have a political leaning, The Forverts?

This I don't--

You don't know.

I was too young to--

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Because there is a Forverts in New York City.

Oh, yeah.

And that's a different-- that had a political leaning.

And look, Michael get paper, Forverts, but in English.

Yeah.

You can get it in Yiddish, you can get it in English, the same thing.

So he would read the paper, which meant that he went to school, and he knew how to read.

Yes. Oh, especially Yiddish.

OK.

And your grandfather, the mayor, didn't.

He didn't, no.

Interesting, interesting. Did he like your father?

My father was very, very-- everything what he said had to be.

OK. So he had a--

Very good man, very good father, and the mother, too. Old-fashioned. Matter of fact, I am a little bit with my two boys the same thing almost.

Really?

Yes.

So you learnt how to--

Because my wife was Polish, too, a survivor, too.

Oh, I see.

She was five years in the concentration camp, too, but in different camps.

Yeah.

They wanted to write a book from her, too, but a difference.

Yeah.

She had a different story. But I didn't let her because she was sick.

Yeah. I can understand that these are not easy.

But they want it badly. This would be a tremendous book because she was difference.

Do you know her story?

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Yes, a little.

So maybe when we finish talking--

Well--

--about yours, you can tell us a little bit about her.

--it's too much to talk about it.

OK.

Well, maybe a little bit private or something I can give you a little bit.

OK. But I know that we're talking now about your family before the war. I want to get a sense of, what did you parents-- how did they inspire this kind of respect? Were they warm people to you?

We were brought up like this, respect.

OK.

My mother used to say, nobody looks in the stomach what do you eat, but you dressed up a little bit is difference.

Ah.

That's it.

That you would be presentable?

Yes.

OK.

You wanted to be representable, especially in a small town. If you neglect, nobody looked on you. It's different in America. You don't look who your mother was, who your grandpa, as long as you're both happy with each other, you know what I mean? Over there is difference.

If they asked me, you don't see your name. I have to say, I'm the son from Pinchas. So you know it. Because in a little town, everybody knows each other, but not a little baby like me, you know what I mean?

Yeah.

I went to camp when I was 13 years old--

Mm-hmm .

--and I went by myself because they told him, if you go, your mother going to be saved. So I said, OK, I'm going.

Wow. Wow. We'll come to that. We'll come to that. We're going to still talk about life prewar. So your mother kept a very clean house?

It's majestic, again, you know what I mean?

Of course, it's not easy.

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No, because we had wooden floors a little bit. You didn't have no carpets.

But you had wooden floors?

Wooden floors.

Wooden floors.

Pieces. Some of them we had to fix it, too.

Yeah.

Did you have cousins?

Yes.

Who did you play with the most when you were little?

The cousins lived in the same house--

Ah!

--because it was the family.

OK. Your mother's brother?

Right.

OK. So was it a happy time having so many kids?

Yes, yes.

OK. Did you go to school?

Yes, was only one school.

In the whole place?

In the whole place.

So was it both--

For both.

--for both Poles and Jews?

Christian, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish.

OK.

So we had one hour a week Hebrew or Jewish, and one hour a week Catholic, and one hour Protestant.

Oh.

If you wanted, you could stay. If not, you don't walk out, you know what I mean.

OK. Did you ever stay for the others?

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Sometime I stayed on the Catholic one.

Did you?

I just wanted to know. Sometime I know sometimes more than some Catholics in this country.

[INTERVIEWER LAUGHS]

Well, when you get an education like that, then-- what stays with you?

I just wanted to know, you know what I mean, not that I'm perfect, everything.

But is there anything you remember from any of those lessons?

Not too much because there was that I was 12 years old, 11, 12 years old.

OK. Did you ever go inside a church?

After the war.

OK.

Before the war--

No.

--the anti-Semitic was a little bit in Poland. It was very, very strong.

I want to talk about that.

So you didn't go to the church then, you know what I mean.

OK. So since you were all in school together--

In school together, yes, girls and boys together, everything, you know what I mean.

--did you ever have any of the Christian kids make fun of you or tease you?

Well, I tell you one thing, I was lucky.

OK.

I had some friends, Gentiles, went to school together and everything.

Mm-hmm.

For the age, I was not bad. I wasn't fighting. But I act like a big fighter. I never fight. I never remember having a fight or something.

OK. So are you saying that the kids that you knew who were Gentiles were friends?

Oh yeah, yes.

Not bad? Everything was OK?

Till-- Hitler took over, it was a different story.

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Yeah, of course, of course. But did your parents or did anybody you knew experience any kind of discrimination?

They didn't like a Jew. They like some of me, you know what I mean. Let's say like my wife, my mother, she had a neighbor, she loved her. That's it. Maybe second Jew, she didn't, you know what I mean.

OK. So you're saying a neighbor lady who was Gentile--

Some of them, right.

But if your grandfather was mayor of the town--

Yeah, but--

It doesn't make a difference?

You collect half a dollar tax.

OK. Well, a tax collector is never popular no matter who they are.

No money--

Yeah.

--a little town like this.

What did the little town-- what was the main economy in this town?

A coal mine.

There was a coal mine.

There was a coal mine over there, and owned by the French government.

Really?

Yes, this I remember. They were talking about this. But Jews didn't work in the coal mine at all.

Why? Some of them was a shame.

OK. So it was dirty work?

See like us, example--

Yeah.

--we didn't stay outside and beg for a piece of bread or something. We were hungry, but I mean, not to stay on the street or something because my mother and father had too much shame, you know what I mean.

They had too much pride to do something like that.

Right.

OK. So it was mostly-- it was mostly the Gentiles who worked in the coal mine?

Yes, maybe a few Jews and maybe in the office, maybe. In the war time, all the Jews worked in the coal mine.

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OK.

I didn't work in the coal mine. I was lucky.

OK.

My sister, the older one, she was a tough girl, a good-looking girl. If you don't let her in from the front, she come through the windows. And she got a job for me. I was an engineer sweeping the street.

This is during the war?

This better than coal mine. You come out, you know what I mean?

We'll talk about those things.

So she got me the job.

OK. So were there people who-- was it a farming area as well? Were there people who had farms?

Farms, yes.

But not so much as the coal mine?

No.

OK. You said that electricity, the first light bulb, was six months before the war started. What about a radio? Did anybody have a radio?

In my town was one radio.

One radio?

Right. Because I remember we used to listen to the soccer game because in Europe, that's all you had. You didn't know about football, baseball, or something like this, nothing like this.

OK. So who owned the radio?

Some-- maybe he was a little bit richer than me.

OK.

So you open the window, and the whole town--

Really?

--listen to the game--

OK.

--the soccer game, football.

Well, tell me, who was the richest person in town?

Not too many, a few over there. If you need a few dollars, he borrowed you. But you have to have something, like a piece of silver or something, gold, for guarantee, you know I mean.

OK. So it was a business. Was there a bank?

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In my town? No, no bank.

No bank.

We had a bank for the water.

That kind of a bank.

[LAUGHTER]

That's a time V.I.P. call yourself [INAUDIBLE] So you used to play big shot. We used to say, oh, we used to own a bank. So after that, he say, yes, the bank for the water.

So you had one policeman in the town. What did you say before, one doctor--

One doctor, one policeman, and one car.

--and one car. Who had the car?

The doctor.

The doctor.

That's it.

Was the doctor a Jewish doctor?

No.

Did everybody go to him?

Yes.

What was he like? Was he--

Very good. Well, for over there, he was a good doctor, you know what I mean. When you had a headache, they used to put the one their back.

Leeches?

Not leeches.

Oh, these little--

Little--

--cups.

--cups, right. Now you know.

OK. But you explain it because many people do not know what that means.

This is when you had a cold or something.

Yeah, like the flu--

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So this takes off-- the darker they come out, you know I mean? This is what they said, you know what I mean, because no medication. My father passed away. He had asthma, no medication. He was 47 years old.

He was young. He was young.

That's it.

Tell me about that. Tell me about your father's illness. When did he start getting sick?

He got sick, he was in the hospital. Every time I come home from school, my mother used to give me a little bag, a little jar with soup. I used to walk four miles in and four miles back--

Where was the hospital?

--at the hospital.

What town was it in?

This was Sosnicowice, a little bigger town the next to Muenchen.

And how long was your father in the hospital for?

He was maybe six months in the hospital--

That's a long time.

--and no medication.

No medication?

He had asthma. Over here, asthma, if you watch yourself, you can live 120 years.

And how did he get this? Was it because he was outside all the time in the--

He smoked cigarettes. In Europe, you used to have different kind of cigarettes, over here, the same thing. You like Lucky, Camels, or something, you know I mean? Over there, you had to have two, three, different kind of price.

And he used to buy the cheaper ones because he had no money. And he smoked. And we didn't know it, you know I mean.

Yeah. So was he in the hospital when he died?

Six months the last time.

And is that where he died in the hospital?

He died in there, yeah.

Was anybody with him when that happened?

No. But we had to bring him from this town to a little town to us. The same date was the burial. The funeral was the same night.

That must have been very hard--

He was laying in the living room on the floor all day till they wash him and everything, you know, the Jewish

thing.

And who did that? Explain to me what the process is when you have to bury somebody because many people won't know. How do you bury your father if you do it the proper way?

They had people who worked for this.

OK.

They don't charge from the city, from this synagogue and everything, you know what I mean.

So it wasn't the family that did this? It was somebody else?

No, no. This was some people who donate this, you know what I mean.

They did it as volunteers.

They used to wash it and everything. And they put you in linen, and no suits, no nothing.

OK.

And the cof-- cof--

Coffin?

How you call?

The coffin.

Had to be made different with no nails.

Really?

Right. The real religious one, no nails, no nothing, cheap.

Was your father's done that way as well?

Yes. I was-- yes. He was buried. But I was there after the war-- well, I'm going without question. I leave it to the question. Later on, I can tell you different things.

What do you remember most about when that happened, when your father passed away? Where were you in the home? Who came and told you? How did you find out?

It's a small town, you know what I mean. They heard it at some place because it was only on the post office, one radio, one telephone, that's all.

OK. So somebody called from the hospital?

Because somebody or somebody was there close or something, you know what I mean?

Mm-hmm.

And they brought him, not with a car--

No, no.

--with a-- they used to have a horse and a buggy. Like over here, you're going for sport to look. Over there,

if you got a few pennies, you don't have to take the bus, you know what I mean, to go to the little town.

Did your father have a-- do you think he knew that he was not going to get better? You don't know.

We didn't have no medication or nothing.

When you visited him in the hospital, did he ever talk to you about anything?

Yes, the foot, it's swollen. Every time before I come, he cover it up because my mother always ask him, how is the--

How are the feet?

--the swelling, you know what I mean? And I think the swelling go to the heart and that's it. Because when he died, the mouth was open. They had to put a handkerchief to close the mouth, you know what I mean.

Oh, I see. What was the hospital like? What did it look like?

A regular hospital, cheap, you know what I mean. It was nice.

Was it a wooden building? Was it a stone building?

No, it was a building.

Did it have-- you see, hospitals in Europe are different than hospitals here, and certainly hospitals before the war.

They didn't have no private rooms yet. As much rooms they have, bed they can put in.

Was it a big place?

For the town, it was nice size, you know what I mean?

All right. Stone building?

Stone building, yes.

Two floors, three floors?

No three floors, no. Maybe two floors because no elevators.

OK.

And did you visit him every day?

You mean?

To his father when, he was in the hospital and you brought soup --Right. or something--

Every day. Every day I come up from school, my mother got, and I used to walk every day.

Did they feed him there, or did it mean--

Well, they feed you. But I mean, my mother.

OK. Did any of the other children go with you?

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Because the two older ones was working, you know what I mean because they were the breadwinner, you know what I mean because we didn't have like over here food stamps and everything like this, nothing, no insurance, nothing.

So when your father wasn't able to work, it went your brother?

A little when he was OK. So he used to go and buy the bags and had to handle by himself, you know what I mean? How much can you do, you know what I mean?

Of course.

Some of them with a horse, with a wagon, so it's a little different, you know what I mean. This is just like a car, you know what I mean.

So it was a tough life. It was a tough life it sounds like for your father.

Yes, he had a tough life. I mean, I never knew how a hot dog could taste in my life ever. I never eat a banana, only for the kids, the richer people a little bit for the baby a banana. Matter of fact, it's true when us [INAUDIBLE] come to this country, they eat a banana with the-- they didn't know how to--

You eat it with the skin?

That's right.

Yeah.

Now I go tell you a little bit story.

Sure.

I went to the doctor a few months ago for the cataracts or something in the morning, so the doctor was a head doctor, nice doctor, nice. And he said to me, you cannot take a shower for two or three days because--

Of the-- mm-hmm.

So I say, doctor, I didn't took a shower for five years. So he got scared to touch me, you know what I mean?

Yeah.

So finally, I told him the story, you know what I mean. Oh, it's different. And it's true. So I didn't took it for five years.

I can't imagine--

I didn't even know what a shower looks like. But some people, our people, they try to show off a little bit more than that because nobody knows, you know what I mean? To me, no, I like to eat steak.

Now, you said that earlier that the men would go every week to a bath house. And what did that place look like? Was it like a sauna, like the old-fashioned saunas that you'd steam?

You had the sauna on the steps.

Uh-huh.

From the leaves, you handle, you wash.

So you would hit yourself with--

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Right.

--a branch or something.

And you had a shower a little bit, a little bit water coming. So as kids, we go walk in. And the end, he let us go in free, you know what I mean.

Yeah.

That's it.

Now--

It's unbelievable, you know what I mean?

Yeah. It's hard for people like me to imagine it because we grew up in a different way.

But lots of people, our people, are. They like to show off a little bit because I could tell you I had a factory, you wouldn't believe it, you know what I mean? I don't like to do this. And I brought up the kids the same way, only the truth.

For lying to me was like you would take a knife and hit me. Lying is stealing. Stealing is lying. If you do both, you can kill. And to me, this is the worst thing.

Where did you get those values?

Pardon me?

Where did you get those values?

What do you mean?

These are very important to you, that you taught your children such a thing.

You know what, I come to this country with-- I don't have no education. I got three and 1/2-- I didn't finish third grade regular school. I am very good with a pencil, very good, better than college.

I don't have no computers. I could have lots of computers. The kids wanted to give me. I got two boys, one of the best in the world. Especially Michael, you cannot find better than this.

That's wonderful.

Especially for the mother. I just lost my wife four months ago.

I'm so sorry.

She was a-- she was really, really a good woman to everybody. We live that time in Gary, Indiana. Gary, Indiana was the first black mayor in America was Gary, Indiana. And my wife made it for him for the ladies to come in for the election and everything.

He got elected. Every day, he used to call. Ma, you need something? Can I help you something? Can I bring you something? Every day, the mayor never forgot

That means something.

--because my wife didn't care. She didn't know color or something like this. She used to bake sponge cake, the real one, professional one. Everybody know it, the whole town because she always made for everybody.

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Even she don't know it. Somebody pass her way, she baked this. This how kind person she was. I was married 67 years.

A lifetime.

I married in 1949.

Wow. Thank you for sharing that. I can't imagine how difficult it must be after so many years and such a life together.

Yes. Old-fashioned mother.

Let's go back to your town before the war in the late '30s.

You don't mind a little bit louder.

OK, I'll speak a little bit louder. I'd like to find out how much people knew in this town of what was going on in Poland politically. Did you know about Pilsudski, about his death in 1935?

You mean about the concentration camps or just the people?

I'm talking just about Poland before the war.

Anti-Semitic.

OK, in what way? Tell me in what way.

Well, Jewish especially because they didn't have no black people--

OK.

--you know what I mean? If they were to have black people, maybe it would be different, you know what I mean, a little bit.

Mm-hmm.

So the only one is the Jews.

I understand. But I'd like to find out how this showed up in your life, and how you see--

In my life, I was too young, you know what I mean?

OK.

So I didn't--

In my parents' lives, did they experience--

I didn't-- I mean, having real close friends, Gentiles, no. Friendly from school, going together, you know what I mean?

OK.

But to say I come to his house, and he come to my house, no. In school, everything fine to some people, you know what I mean.

What about teachers? How did teachers--

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The teachers, we didn't have no Jewish teachers.

Mm-hmm.

Well, if you're good, you're good.

Were you good?

They were nice, you know what I mean. Some of them, you know what I mean. I was lucky. I had a teacher, she used to like me.

Do you remember her name?

No.

OK.

In that small town, you don't have no name. In a small town, you have to tell you my father's name, this how they know. Oh, I am Pinchas' son, you know what I mean? That's it.

Do you remember how many people came to his funeral?

To this what?

Your father, when he died, did many people come to the funeral?

A couple hundred.

Wow!

Almost the whole-- because a small town, and my father was very likable, you know what I mean? He was religious, but not so crazy, you know what I mean? Not a big beard, no payos, nothing, a little bit. He didn't shave, you know what I mean.

But I mean-- and he wore the Jewish hat, but I mean, he was modern. He was modern. Compared to over here, he was modern.

Got it.

Over here like this, he would have been big, you know what I mean, Jewish. I got a grandson a rabbi in Canada.

Ah! So when you went-- he read the newspaper, The Forverts, and you listened to the radio for the soccer games.

Only soccer games.

Only soccer games.

That's all we had over there. You never had no--

Did you ever hear of a person named Hitler when you were growing up?

Person what?

Named Hitler?

Hitler?

Yeah.

We know of Hitler. But we didn't know about Auschwitz, about Birkenau. I lived five miles from Auschwitz. Nobody knew it. Nothing, nothing.

Was there talk-- when your father was dying in 1939, it was the last year of peace. Was there talk in the town that things aren't very stable, there will be a war?

The town was too poor. You didn't have money to go to Israel or someplace or to America. To America, if you had family, maybe. This why it took me almost five years till I could come over here because I didn't have no family. Maybe if you had, but I did not know, you know what I mean?

OK.

And my older brother and older sister, maybe they would know it, so they passed away. My sister died two weeks before in Auschwitz before liberation.

Oh!

Two weeks before. She had diarrhea and everything and that's it.

Your older sister?

Right.

Gerta, was it? What was her name?

Gertrude.

Gertrude.

Gutshe. She educate herself, intelligent, good looking, dressed up nice because my mother always say, food is not important. It's important, but this-- I want my dress for, you know.

Do you have pride--

In a small town--

Yeah.

--they look a little bit different than a big town. Especially like in America, they don't care who you are as long as they love each other, you know what I mean?

Yeah.

Over there, it's different. Sometimes you get married, you don't know to who you marry.

Was your parents' an arranged marriage? Was your mother and father's marriage an arranged marriage?

I think so because that's all they had.

OK.

So let's go now, again, to 1939. You knew that there was someone named Hitler.

Oh, yeah.

How did you find out about him?

Well, they were talking. Hitler was one of the best speakers in the world, the best one speaker in the world. Same thing like Dr. Mengele, one of the best doctors in the world, not just in Germany or something. But you see what he did. Mengele, 21 million people went to him dead because only six Jews, and the rest was Gentiles, not just Gentiles, Protestants, six different sections, different-- all kind of people, different kind.

You're talking about the experiments that he made?

Right.

But I'm talking beforehand. Did you ever hear Hitler's speeches over that radio?

I saw him personally when I was in camp, the first camp. They was making the snow for the soccer game clean, clear. He was up sitting over there. I couldn't go close to him, you know what I mean, but far away.

You saw Hitler?

Yes--

Wow.

--because we cleaned up for the game.

And what camp was this?

This was not too far away, a small camp.

What was it called?

This was in Oberschlesien.

Oberschlesien?

Yes, a small camp. I was maybe in 10, 12 camps.

Oh my goodness!

I was all over.

Oh my goodness.

I was in Dachau, Birkenau, Auschwitz, Theresienstadt and lots of smaller ones.

We'll come to these. And I will want to talk about them. I'd like to find out now, what was that time like before the war starts? And were there people in your town saying, we're going to leave, we're going to go to America, we're going to try to get away? Or was it pretty much nobody had the belief that there's anything that's going to change in 1939?

No. I never believe I will be freed someday.

In 1939, the war hadn't started. Did you ever-- was there talk going on of things happening?

Nobody knew it about so bad, you know what I mean? Maybe the older people thought a little bit more, you know what I mean? But the young ones--

OK. Do you remember where you were when you learned that the war is starting? It was September 1.

Yes. I was home-- not home. We used to go in a different town, you know what I mean? They thought maybe over there it's going to be better, but it just--

What, you had left your own home to go somewhere else?

You left this town to go a different town, maybe it's going to get better or something. We didn't know, you know what I mean.

Do you remember where you went to?

It was in a small town, too. I don't remember even.

And your whole family had left, that is, your mother--

Yes. We want, you know.

OK. What month did your father die?

He died six months before.

So he died in April?

Something like this. This was-- this was after Yom Kippur, Sukkot, something like this, in that time--

OK.

--he died.

So who was left? Your older brother, Abraham, your mother, Hannah--

And Gutshe. They both worked there. And they give us the few dollars to live because we didn't have over there Medicare. You don't have nothing or something like this. Nothing, nothing, nothing. You could be brains like Einstein, but you wouldn't have no money to go to the college, you couldn't go.

Yeah. Yeah.

From my town, I remember one went to college.

One person?

One person because he had a little bit of money. My mother, my father, my brother, and my sister was very, very smart, very intelligent, but no money to go to college.

OK.

You could be Einstein, but if you don't have no money--

You don't have possibilities.

No.

So, did you come back home from that town that you had run to or gone to? When the war started, you were not in your own town. You were someplace else.

What do you mean?

I mean, the war started on September 1, 1939.

Right.

And you said you were in another place.

Later on we come back--

To your own town?

--because he come all over, you know what I mean?

Mm-hmm.

We thought he wouldn't come over here and not over there.

OK. And what did you find when you came back?

And I stayed over there at home till--

Till when?

--he come in and say, if you go to work, you're mother' going to be saved.

Well, before that, I want to get a sense of, when was the first time you saw a German soldier?

The first time I saw what?

A German soldier.

In 1939--

OK. And--

--on their motorcycles and everything.

On the motorcycles, they drove through town? Did they stay?

Some of them stayed over there, too. And they had a dog, too. They had a German shepherd. The German shepherd killed a dozen people right away.

Really!

Yes because Saturday you couldn't go to the synagogues, no churches, nothing. So the Jews went private, they found out. So they brought the dog, they took of the leash, and the dog killed all of them, all of them, all 12, 15 people.

Who had gathered together?

Right.

And this was somebody who would become the administrator, the German administrator?

The dog, with Kommando, with the soldier.

I see. So that means there was a curfew established?

I guess. Yes, yes.

OK. Did you continue going to school?

No.

No school?

The minute they come in, no school.

OK. What else changed the minute they came in?

You see, I left to concentration camp right after the war, not too far out long the war.

After the war starts?

In 1939, I was in camp already, in a small camp.

So let me get a sense of this. The war starts, soldiers drive through on motorcycles, there are German shepherd dogs that are used to attack and kill people. And does your brother continue working in the printing office?

Well, he worked for a while.

OK.

For a while. And he want to camp, too.

So tell me about this, does something-- it's something that's not very clear to me. The Germans come, they establish themselves, at least the army does and so on. What happens to most of the Jews in town?

The ones who could go to work, I mean, older or something, they took them to work. He left home, took him to work.

OK. In the coal mine?

Sometimes to the coal mine. So you stayed home, and you went to the coal mine.

Got it.

My sister worked, but she worked in printing. And the Germans owned that. So she stayed over there, and she worked over there. But she was going home and back all the time, you know what I mean? She was lucky to have the job for a while, until it was Judenrein, take away, and everything was different.

OK.

I was the last one because they come down, they say, we need to so many people, hundred or something. If you go by yourself, your mother going to be saved. I said, OK, I am going.

What happened with Bluma? Where was Bluma?

Bluma was in camp already. I was the only one left at home.

OK. So when you're at home, it's your mother--

Right.

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--your sister is working in the printing place--

Right.

--Abraham is--

In a camp already.

--in a camp already.

And Bluma just got to be in a camp, too.

OK. And so why-- did they volunteer to go, or were they forced to go? How did this happen?

Sometimes they went by themselves. They promise them, you know what I mean, if you go, your parents are going to be safe, and everything, and this and this. So you wanted to try to save the parents because we thought eventually we're going to come home.

Got it. OK. So does this mean this was the last time-- when you left to go to a camp, it was the last time you saw your mother?

That's it.

What about Abraham and Bluma? Did you ever see them again?

I did not. With Abraham, with my brother, I couldn't find out at all. He died in camp.

OK.

Bluma, she made it through the camp. Gutshe, she died two weeks before the Russians took over Auschwitz.

Got it.

Auschwitz was occupied by Russian because Auschwitz was Poland, and the Russians come in. So she had diarrhea and everything. How did I find out? Some friend of hers could make it through. And I saw him, and he told me.

And did you ever find out what happened to your mother?

Pardon me?

Did you ever find out what happened to your mother?

My mother right away, want to take to the oven right away because she wasn't-- they looked, and wouldn't go for work. She couldn't go to work, you know what I mean. She was 47, 48 years old. For them, she was too old for them, you know what I mean? Same thing with me, if I were to say I'm 13 years old, I would go right straight to the oven because--

How old did you say you were?

And I was 13, but I say I was 18. Mengele asks me, how old are you? So I lied to him, and I say 18. Why did I say 18? I don't know. God had to give me some brains to say it, that's all, because I wasn't so smart to think, to tell him, you know what I mean.

So from your life, Abraham disappeared?

Right.

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And you never really found out what happened to him? And your mother disappears?

We found out right away she went to the gas chamber, you know what I mean.

Yeah. So when you left, where were you taken?

At that time, I was in Auschwitz. The very first place you were taken?

No, no, no. I was before in smaller camps.

OK. I'd like to find out-- do you remember what month you were taken to the camps?

In 1939, end of the months, you know what I mean, maybe two months before.

So, it would have been like November, October?

Something like that.

Something like that?

Yes. I went early.

OK. And so, which is the small camp? Do you remember the name of it?

Oberschlesien in Germany, close, you know what I mean.

Oberschlesien--

Breslau, like this.

OK. So it's further north. It's still between Germany and Poland, that area, but it's further north.

Not too far away from Auschwitz. But Auschwitz, nobody knows.

Of course.

I didn't know it. Maybe some older people, maybe they were thinking or something, you know what I mean.

Well, the first camp that you went to, do you remember how long you stayed there?

In Auschwitz?

No, no, no. The very first place in Oberschlesien?

Maybe I stayed six months or something. It was 120 people, the whole camp.

So not many.

No.

Not many.

So later on, he didn't want it. So he put us in a different camp, a little bit bigger, you know what I mean.

What did you do in the first camp?

And finally, he put us to Auschwitz.

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OK. We'll get to Auschwitz.

Yes.

But in the first camp, what were you doing?

Work, labor, make holes for protection for the soldiers or something, you know what I mean.

You were digging trenches?

Right. Some of them said I am a shoemaker or something, you know what I mean. So he could get a little bit different work. I didn't-- first of all, I didn't know how to lie, and I didn't know, you know what I mean?

So--

So I didn't say nothing. To Mengele, I lied. I wouldn't lie. But something God give me to lie because I wasn't so bright, so smart.

In that first camp, how were you treated? In the very first camp in Oberschlesien, how were you treated?

How many people?

No. How were you treated?

A little bit better than Auschwitz and big, you know what I mean. Not too much better, you know what I mean.

Were you fed?

You didn't get three meals a day, you know what I mean. You was getting the same thing almost, maybe a little piece of bread-- a little bigger piece of bread or something, not too much, no.

Did it feel like prison?

Prison?

Did it feel like a prison in that camp?

It was, not like a regular prison, but barracks.

Mm-hmm. Could you leave it if you wanted to?

No.

No, OK. OK. So it was guarded.

Of course.

All right. And you say from this camp, where they were about 120 people, you're then moved to another one.

Not everybody moved. Some of them went right straight to Auschwitz to the crematorium or something because the small camps didn't have no crematoriums--

OK.

--you know what I mean.

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Were there older people in these first camps?

Sometimes older, sometimes younger. They look. Mengele said if they like you, God have to be with you. This is the only thing.

Right. Before we get to Auschwitz, in the small camp in Oberschlesien, were there are people who were dying in the camp?

Of course.

OK.

Some people, a little bit richer people, they die like flies because they wasn't used to it like this. I didn't have too much soup in home. I didn't have too much that I can eat. Like I told you, I never know how a hot dog taste.

Yeah. Yeah.

So these kind of people-- like I was in camp with Italian Jews, French Jews, Holland Jews, they were not used to the cold weather and something, you know what I mean. So they sit in a little bed, and they died--

Yeah.

--not laying down, sitting like this. Well, the Polish ones, we always had winter time. We tried to work a little bit, and God, that's it.

Got it. Got it. So from the first camp, you went to a second one, not Auschwitz.

No.

And where was this place?

In Oberschlesien .

Again, another place in Oberschlesien?

Yes, yes. They had lots in small places. But later on, they make it a little bit together.

And so when you went to the second camp, was the work different?

Same thing. In Auschwitz I used to work by the oven.

But we're not talking about Auschwitz. I'm talking about before Auschwitz.

Labor, labor work, streets, something, give water, give sand, something, stones.

So lifting, carrying stones, and bringing water.

Right. Labor camp, nothing special, you know what I mean. You had to be no-- you didn't have to be intelligent.

But the manual labor is what you were doing?

Right.

And you were 13 years old?

13, 14.

OK.

13 years old, yeah, before leaving.

And from the second camp in Oberschlesien, where were you taken from there?

I was in Breslau. This was already-- German took over. Now it's Poland.

What's it called in Polish?

Breslau.

Uh-huh. OK. Does it have a Polish name, too?

Everybody know Breslau, that's all.

OK. And in the city of Breslau or outside?

A little outside.

And how long did you stay there? Maybe a year or so, and later on again.

And from Breslau, where were you taken?

From Breslau I was taken to Oberammergau, a small town in Germany.

OK. Oberammergau, I believe, is in Bavaria.

Bavaria, yes.

OK.

Everything was in Bavaria. Later on, they took me to Theresienstadt. This was close to Czechoslovakia.

Yeah, it's in Czechoslovakia.

Right. And I was in lots of different camps. I don't even remember the names. I was at least 10, 12 camps different kind.

That's amazing.

Yes.

That's amazing that you went so many.

I had typhus.

Where did you have typhus?

In one camp.

Do you remember which one?

In Warsaw. Warsaw was uptight long, how you say, from Auschwitz.

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It was within-- Auschwitz had like a part of its campus--

Warsaw belonged to our Auschwitz, you know what I mean?

Though it's very far away over Auschwitz.

Over there, we had lice, from lice. You see, typhus, there's two kinds of typhus, high fever and stomach.

OK.

We had high fever from the lice. We had lice. We just throw it, not just one lice.

OK. And was that in all of the camps, that they were lice?

Even SS got sick, too, with lice because it was terrible camp. Not too much water to wash, a little bit. I don't mean a shower or something, just [INAUDIBLE] a little bit. No, no. This was after they bombed the ghetto. We were there to clean up.

So this is after the uprising, the Warsaw uprising--

Right.

--ghetto uprising?

Right.

So that would have been 1940--

'43, 42.

Right, '43 I think it was.

And later on from Auschwitz, they took us-- from Warsaw, they took us back to Auschwitz.

OK. But let's talk about this a little bit.

And from Auschwitz, I went to Dachau, Germany, Munich.

Yeah.

And this was already '44, '45.

OK.

But you say that it was in Warsaw that you got typhus?

Right.

And is this after you were cleaning up the ghetto?

This was after the cleanup the ghettos, the steel, stones, something like this.

All right. Tell me when you were taken to Warsaw, and it was to clean up this ghetto--

We didn't know nothing.

OK.

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We going to Warsaw, we didn't know what kind of work. But it was a labor camp, that's all.

So when you got to Warsaw and they put you to work, tell me, what did you see?

Nothing too much.

This was in the place where the ghetto had been?

Right, everything, yes.

Were there still buildings standing?

Nothing, nothing, nothing.

One building, the jail.

That stood?

Sent. They went over there to the jail once a week to clean up the lice, I remember. Used to put us some stuff, burning and everything, once a week.

But it was to take the lice off of you?

To kill the lice or something, but didn't help too much because it was so many, you know what I mean. You didn't have no one lice or something, you had pick it up, throw it away.

And what were you supposed to do in this bombed-out ghetto? What was supposed to be done by the prisoners?

This was after they bombed the ghetto.

OK. And so afterwards, what were you supposed to do there?

We cleaned up the buildings half way, you know what I mean, separate the stones, separate the steels, something like this.

I see, the rubble. Basically you put the rubble in one pile and the steel in another pile.

Right. Labor, real labor, you know what I mean.

Did you see anything else? Were there furniture? Was there--

We had a few people who was hiding. And it was cold. And the chimney was out. That's how they found out they were hiding over there. So they took him out from the hiding and hang him or something, or they send him away.

Did you ever see anybody who had been--

I saw them taking out, but I don't know what they did with the people, you know what I mean. Maybe they send them to Auschwitz, or maybe they killed him over there.

OK. So whether or not these had been people hiding in the ghetto or they were other people who came into the ghetto we don't know.

Well, this was the people who used to live in the ghetto.

Oh, so it was Jews?

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Jews.

It was Jews.

Jews, Jews, only Jews.

OK I worked with Pollacks. The Polish people, they used to come to work from home, you know what I mean.

In Warsaw?

In Warsaw. But they didn't give you nothing. I asked him to give me a piece of bread, they asked me, you've got blood? I say, what do you mean blood? You got gold? I didn't even know if I find a piece of gold the difference because I don't know nothing about gold or something like this, no.

And I speak Polish because in Warsaw, they had Jews over there from all over the world-- Italian Jews, French Jews, Holland Jews, because they didn't want the Polish Jews-- some of them maybe hide or go another way or something. But they need a hundred people or more. And we went over there.

OK. I didn't understand that part.

They took the Polish just to make the-- because they had to have a thousand, and they had 900.

Ah, I see.

And they were short 100 people, so they took--

They took Polish Jews, even though they didn't want to.

Right.

Got it. Got it.

So it was about a thousand people who were sent from Auschwitz--

Oh yeah, this is nothing.

--to clean up the ghetto.

And Auschwitz had thousands of thousands of people, Birkenau and everything.

OK. And as you were cleaning up the ghetto, about how long did you do this job of cleaning up?

Till the Russians come closer to Warsaw.

Yeah.

So we worked three days back to Auschwitz.

By foot?

And we worked a few years in Auschwitz. Later, the Russians come and close it. We went back to Germany, Munich.

We'll get there.

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Yes.

Let me think more about the ghetto in Warsaw. Did you ever find dead people when you were cleaning up the ghetto?

No.

So all the bodies had been taken away? No skeletons?

No, no, no.

No goods in other words?

No. Some people found maybe a piece of gold where they hide it in the basements or something, you know what I mean. To me, even if I saw it, I wouldn't know what it is--

I see.

--you know what I mean. The one thing, even if I see, I wouldn't know what to do, you know what I mean.

OK So it's just hard for me to picture that when it's bombed out that all that is left is bricks and steel.

Only the ghetto--

OK.

--not the rest, you know what I mean. And lucky to be the [INAUDIBLE], the Auschwitz-- I mean, in Warsaw is the jail, the big jail in the ghetto site. But they didn't bomb to ghetto.

OK. They didn't bomb that jail.

This jail, no.

OK. But you got sick in Warsaw.

Because of the lice.

Because of the lice. And so what happened to you? Did you go to an infirmary?

Well, they took us-- and that's supposed to be like a hospital. First of all, they took away the straws. We had straws, no mattresses. Because in the straws--

There's the lice.

--too much lice. And they had small-- two in a bed, the small ones. If I had to turn, he had to turn. If he turned, I had to turn.

That small.

And he had typhus, I had typhus. No medication, no water, no medication, no bread, nothing, nothing at all.

So it sounds like he was just left to die.

Nothing at all. The only thing we had is God. Matter of fact, he was dead two weeks, I didn't know if he was sleeping or he thought because the Kommando, they throw him out through the window.

When I come out, I couldn't walk. I was like a baby. Like a little step, I couldn't go. I had to just like a baby,

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I had to lay down and go to step. It's unbelievable. It's a miracle, that's it.

Was this an infirmary?

Pardon me?

Was this an infirmary? Was this in Warsaw?

This is in Warsaw.

So, it wasn't in the ghetto, and it wasn't in the police station. Well, where were you? When you got sick--

I was in the camp. They had a barrack only for the sick people, for dying.

Yeah, for dying.

They didn't want-- because the mayor from over there didn't allow them to kill nobody if they don't have to. If they die, they die, you know what I mean. Because they wanted to kill everybody, so he said, no, you can take them out. But don't kill him over here because he knows already that Russia was close, so he didn't want to be the bad man, you know what I mean.

Was this in Germany?

Later on, they found out. They didn't know right away. So nothing happened, but they die on the work. We had to work three days. Less than half died, you know what I mean, no water, nothing. I saw what I never believed it.

What did you see?

They were drinking their own urine for water because--

There was none. Oh yey. Oh yey.

It's unbelievable, you know what I mean.

Oh yey. I want to pause here just for a second.

OK.

OK. You were all alone. Once you left home and you go to the first camp in Oberschlesien, and then the second one, and then after that, did you make any friends along the way?

You see, we can talk about friends. OK, I give you the example.

OK.

Wiesenthal-- what's the name? Not Wiesenthal, the one who--

I know who you mean.

Blitz-- not I was with Blitzer, you know, John [=Wolf] Blitzer from the television?

No.

With his father I was in camp, too.

Mm-hmm. No friends. Hello, hello, or something, but everybody got their own problem. Bread, bread, bread,

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that's it.

By friend I mean something else.

Never talked about being free someday, never, never.

Really?

The brains was like a cow.

Your brain was like a cow?

Nothing, nothing, no brains, nothing, nothing. Didn't talk about the father, and mother, politics. We didn't nothing, nothing. People said, well, we didn't know what day. We never saw a paper and never saw nothing, you know what I mean.

So it was survival mode?

That's it. Nobody thought everybody survived.

When did you first get that sense that I may not survive, from the first camp or from before?

We didn't see nothing, you know what I mean. We didn't see nothing. Same thing, get up, go, wait for the little piece of bread.

Mm-hmm.

You have to hide it so they don't steal it, too, your own people.

It's difficult-- many times I've heard that the way a person survived in a camp was when they had someone close by, that is, either a brother, or a sister, or even a cousin, or somebody where you would watch out for one another. You'd help one another try and survive. Did you ever have someone like that?

I tell you what, when you was in camp, you didn't have-- you don't have nothing to help. Even if you wanted to help him, you didn't have nothing. If you wasn't some older smart one who was a little bit in camp before, jails or something so that you know a little bit how to run, how to hide, how to do, you couldn't help him. You didn't have nothing to help them. You had a little piece of bread. You couldn't give them--

That's right.

--your own.

OK.

So there was nothing.

But it's amazing that you went through so many of them and you survived them.

It's unbelievable. But we didn't think about nothing. He didn't think about the mother, about the father, about the brother, about this, nothing, nada, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. Never talk about ending the war or something. We didn't know what it was, nothing, nothing.

OK. Did you speak German?

Yeah. I had to speak. I speak fluent--

OK.

Bayerisch. I learned it because most of them-- Muenchen close. And Frankfort the different dialect and Muenchen a different dialect.

Yeah. Bavarian is a difficult dialect to understand.

Well, you learn. Now you forget, you know what I mean, after so many years.

Yeah. Were you in Oberammergau before you got to Auschwitz?

Yes.

Were you there before Auschwitz?

Before, Oberammergau was Oberschlesien, very close.

Uh-huh.

A small camp.

OK. And do you remember what that place looked like, that small camp?

Was no good. I mean, they didn't kill you like in the big ones, you know what I mean. You didn't see no furnaces, no gas chambers, nothing, you know what I mean. You just watch yourself that you don't do nothing wrong to the watchers, the SS, they don't hit you, you know what I mean.

And this what I was watching very close not to get hurt because if you get hurt, not too good. Three days later, you're dead. You die because you forget, you don't want to wash yourself, you didn't care. You could see, you know what I mean.

OK.

Three days.

OK. Was the work different in Oberammergau?

The work is everything labor. It was nothing, you know what I mean.

OK. All right.

This was the labor camp, you know what I mean.

These are labor camps.

Right.

See, there's a difference between labor camps and concentration camps.

Right. Because after labor camps were the concentration camp come in because they got bigger, no more the small ones and everything.

OK. So at first you were sent to labor camps in Oberschlesien near Breslau, Oberammergau, and so on. But these aren't concentration camps. These are for work.

This was all-- right, labor camp.

Do you know was it for a particular industry that you were working in Oberammergau?

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No. People on the street outside, you know what I mean, loading the little train, loading the little thing, the small trains with the sand, or stones, or something, you know what I mean. Everything labor camp. Everything labor camp.

OK. Now in the places before Auschwitz, did you meet Jews from different countries?

Even in Auschwitz, yeah. All over I've met different people, homosexuals and everything, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], mafias and everything, gypsies, Jehovah's Witness, everything, Catholic priests, rabbis, everything, everything, everything because you always had a different thing, you know what I mean, a little--

You had a different label.

Not a label, the name of something, but a little picture like this so you can see if he is a mafia, or he is a this, or he is this, you know what I mean.

What did you have on yours?

I think blue and white, something like Jewish or something because I was too--

OK. Did you ever feel afraid of other prisoners?

Afraid for other prisoners?

No, of other prisoners.

You mean the kapos, for the kapos?

Well, for you.

They're called the kapos?

Yeah, tell me about them.

The kapos, you see, you had to be a big man, first of all, strong. And if you took it, you had to be sometimes tough because they had to show it, you know what I mean. So they got a little bit more food and everything.

But after the war, sometimes the kapos got killed. We killed him ourselves because they were no good because he thought the same thing, he will never be free. Now in the meantime, he got a little bit food to eat.

So for that, he agrees to become a kapo. Did you ever feel danger from other normal prisoners, not kapos?

No, because he was the same, you know what I mean.

OK.

He didn't have no business to do something, you know what I mean, if he didn't steal the piece of bread from somebody else. Stealing bread was death, your own death. I was there in a camp, the father stole from his son, the father from his son the piece of bread, and he found out. They killed him.

You know how? You take a pieces from the shovel, they put it over here, one on this side, one on this side. And if you still alive, they do it one more time, our people. This was death because you take away the piece of bread, this, you know what I mean.

Wow.

This is unbelievable.

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Wow. How did things change when you went from a labor camp to a concentration camp?

We didn't know too much before, you know what I mean. And was different. You come into Auschwitz in the music.

Really? OK.

You're going to want to work with the music. And to be in the music, you had a good job. You had a piece of bread more, you had a little soup more, you know what I mean. You was like a big shot, you know what I mean.

If you play music?

Yes. But you had to know how to play.

Yes.

So when you got to Auschwitz, did you already know what Auschwitz was?

No, nothing at all, nothing at all.

Did you know that people were being gassed there?

No. When I was in Auschwitz, you didn't know how to hide a little bit of something, so I went to work. Where did I want to work? To Birkenau. This was a four-kilometer walk and everything. Birkenau was the biggest one, the ovens and everything. And I worked by the ovens. First of all, I had the wooden shoes, like Holland does.

Yeah.

I come over there to Birkenau, was a big pile of dead people. I took a jacket because we had the pajama stripes. It took a jacket, I took a pair of shoes from the dead. But it didn't take long till I come to the camp they took it away. I saw Russians cut pieces, meat from the dead, took it home to cook and eat.

Being in Auschwitz, in Dachau-- Birkenau, our group from number 10 walked out, was maybe a dozen boys, big ones. And one was my brother's friend. He recognized me. I wouldn't recognize him. He recognized me as a baby.

So he told me they castrate me. I didn't know what it is. I didn't understand. He had to tell me the old fashioned way.

Oh my goodness! He had been castrated?

Yes. He made out no shots, no extra thing, everything. And he did the ladies the same thing. But you had to be beautiful, tall, and everything.

Was this medical experimentation?

Right. This was him, with Dr. Mengele experience, right.

Oh my goodness.

Well, this was in the papers, too, and everything, you know what I mean. But lots of time wasn't in the paper if they were, let's say, blonde and blue eyes, but he was Jewish. So there's lots of time you had to take off the pants because most the Jews were circumcised. But they don't see this in papers too much.

Yeah. When you got to Auschwitz, what was the very first image you had of the place? What was the first

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thing that your eyes saw when the train opened?

The first thing I saw, the big stack of dead people. It didn't bother me because you get used to it, you know what I mean. So I went over there, I picked up a jacket from the dead people, I pick up a pair of shoes from the people, and I walked. I thought I can get by. So when I came to Auschwitz from Birkenau, they took it away, you know what I mean. You cannot be different than somebody else.

The train that takes you to Auschwitz stops when you're going there. It lets you out at Birkenau. You're at Birkenau, you see a pile of corpses, you take the jacket, you take the shoes, and you go-- was there a selection taking place when you got off the train?

At that time already I was in Auschwitz and Birkenau.

OK, you had already been there.

I had been there. So it was news for me to have been there because first I was there in Auschwitz when they put the number on.

OK. I want to go from the very beginning. When you first get to Auschwitz before coming to Birkenau, what's the first thing that happens when you get off the train?

When we get off, I told you, we were invited with music.

Right.

So this was something that I never saw it. I say--

Of course.

--it had to be good.

So what happens-- the music is playing, you get off, what happens?

So I was not lucky enough, I didn't know how to hide this. They took me to work to Birkenau.

So in other words, you were in a selection. A selection had happened.

The selection, I was already-- this was to the selection.

OK. Before the selection--

I had gone through Mengele.

OK. So did you know it was Mengele?

Because later on they told me this was Mengele because he was there, and he told you, left or right, you know what I mean.

And who told you this was Mengele, in the camp?

In the camp later on because I told them, the one who was there longer at the camp, so they know a little bit more.

Oh, OK.

I didn't know it--

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You didn't know who he was

--the doctor came till after the selection, Dr. Mengele, you know what I mean.

OK.

After coming-- when after I got free, you know what I mean because we didn't think about it, you know what I mean.

So at the selection, he asks you how old you are.

Right.

And that's when you say, I'm 18.

Right.

And you were really how old?

Because I saw it going left was all the people, some of them a little bit not fast, nothing. So I saw everything goes straight to the oven.

Did you know it was the oven?

Well, we know it was no good. We didn't know exactly the oven. We didn't know. So finally he asked me, and I told him 18.

And you were really--

But why, I didn't think I was so smart to say it. So to me, it had to be God.

And how old were you really?

And I was that time 13 years old.

My goodness! So this is early on. This is in 1940 that you were in Auschwitz is in 1940.

And this was 1940? Yeah, yeah.

OK. So the other camps you had been to, you hadn't stayed there for more than a year.

This they didn't ask too much, you know what I mean--

OK.

--because it was small ones and everything, you know what I mean, you can get by a little bit. But this one?

Did you look older than your years do you think?

I don't know.

OK.

I think I was a little bit taller maybe, you know what I mean.

Now I'm going down.

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So you got into the line of younger people.

No between different kind.

OK.

Was different, all the-- not all the girls, woman, everything together, everything together.

And after you were in this line that got selected, what happened to you then?

To dress went to work--

Right away.

--different places or something, you know what I mean.

And you got sent to Birkenau?

Right.

And that's when you went to Birkenau? And what was your job in Birkenau?

Job at the Birkenau was a tough one.

What was it?

I used to stay by the oven and one side and on the other side to push in.

Oh my!

The worst thing was that next to me on the other side was Konos' father and mother. And he had to do this to the father and mother.

Oh my!

This is the worst thing I saw. Plus when I met my brother's friend, when he told me about castrating, because I thought maybe they could do it everybody like this, something like this.

Yeah.

This was the shake-up a little bit.

Of course.

So your job in Birkenau was to take the corpses and shove them into the crematorium?

This was the worst job I ever did.

So by this point, you must realize that people are being killed, they're being gassed. So your sent to Birkenau as your first job in Auschwitz?

This was the job, the worst one what I can say, you know what I mean, something to do something like this. Special when my next one labor on the other side, who works with me, his father and mother come.

What did he do?

The throw them in. He went through. He had to push everything--

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Did he say this is my father, this is my mother.

No, he had to push them in.

How did you know? Did he tell you?

Because he told me. He talked. The same thing with my brother's friend who they castrate. I didn't know what it is. I didn't know it, you know what I mean.

Yeah.

How long were you doing this? How long were you doing this in Birkenau?

This was only medical stuff, you know what I mean. The did it to the women, too.

No, I'm talking about your job, when you were pushing corpses into the ovens, was it for half a year, was it a year, was it for three years?

No, no, no. This was sometimes it took a few days. It depends what you do, you know what I mean, what they tell you to do.

So they switched you around?

Right.

So this wasn't the job that you did all the time.

This wasn't all the time the job--

OK.

--a few weeks, a few months. But after a while, you don't mind. You don't think about it anymore.

Something will bring you there.

OK. What are some of the other jobs that you had at Auschwitz?

In Auschwitz, same thing, streets, he was making stones.

Streets? Oh, cobblestones for the streets?

This is one time this, something, and loading trucks with cement.

So you would-- like cement bags onto trucks?

Right. This why I got a little bit--

Uh-huh.

--because I thought this was going to be easier. In the meantime, it wasn't so easy. It was easier a little bit then walking and going back.

Yeah.

But I couldn't straighten out.

Yeah.

Well, heavy bags all the time, that would do it.

This kind of job I did lots of time.

OK. So it was loading bags onto trucks?

And loading--

Unloading.

--you have to put on top, somebody is working--

OK.

--because I thought maybe it going to be easier, but.

Did you ever have any choice in any of the jobs that you did?

Not too much.

OK. What was your uniform? Describe to me how you got your uniform?

The uniforms?

Mm-hmm.

You had to take off completely everything. And they give you a uniform. Sometimes they give a big tall men shorts, short men, tall. And you had to wear it. They give you a pajama with the head and everything.

And I made one mistake. I should have saved it.

Ah. Did you have the same uniform the whole time?

It depends. But it's always something. Matter of fact, they used to put a stripe in the middle.

A stripe?

They shaved it.

Really?

You didn't have no hair, but I mean, life for me, they didn't had to. But, I mean, some of them in case you run away--

OK.

--you can see it, too.

And did you get a number?

I got a number.

Do you know what your number is? Can we focus on this?

Elie Wiesel got a number 18, and I got a number 18.

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Uh-huh. But there's more to your numbers. What is it? So it's-- let me see here. I see 1-6-0-3-4-4. Are we able to focus in on?

7, 10, 14, 18.

Well, your number has 1-6-0-3-4-4.

I counted. 1 and 6 is 7.

You're right.

7 and 3 is 10. 10 and 4 is 14. 14 and 4 is 18.

That's how you to 18.

For 47 years, I didn't know the number. I thought this is it. So everybody asks me, what is the number? I used to tell them this is my girlfriend's telephone number because I got tired to tell them everything, you know what I mean. I didn't know it for 47 years--

So you didn't counted up that way before.

--because I didn't have the brains to figure ti out.

I wouldn't have thought it either. I would have just read the numbers as the numbers.

Well, if I were to tell you twice, you would've found it. But at that time, you could've told me 10 times, I wouldn't think because the brains wasn't there.

So Elie Wiesel's--

Elie Wiesel, different number, but 18.

It comes to 18.

Only two numbers. I was in camp with him and his father.

And did you know Elie Wiesel?

Just we know each other, hello, something, you know what I mean.

Yeah.

But I didn't know he was so smart and so intelligent and everything because I was nothing.

Well, I think everybody there felt like they were nothing in those camps. Now, were your barracks segregated? Was it men segregated from women?

Right.

OK.

We used to different camps, different barracks. Sometimes was maybe the wire everything separated from the women or something but you couldn't go close or something.

First of all, it was electric wires. If you go close, you die, you know what I mean. In Auschwitz, Birkenau, it was electric wires.

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Yeah. Were there some people who committed suicide?

Some of them did suicide, yes.

When did you find out about what happened to your mother?

Well, because everybody know this kind of people, like my mother and everything, if they come to the camp, they don't have a chance--

OK.

--because they were looking for younger ones to work and everything.

OK. When you got to Auschwitz, did you realize that you were not so far away from your home?

After. After I found out because I didn't think that this is all so close or something, you know what I mean.

And did your sister help you get some kind of job? Earlier you mentioned to me that your sister was smart and forceful Gertrude. And you said that she helped you get a kind of job. And I'm not very clear about that.

This was before she went to camps and everything.

Oh, OK. I thought it was about--

No.

So you had started working in the printing--

A few weeks or something on the street. And some of the work in the coal mine. But she got me a job. This was for the city--

OK

--to sweep the floors, I mean, the--

To sweep the street or the floors?

The streets.

The streets. Oh, so I see. So this was still back in the hometown.

This was the home not too long, you know what I mean.

Now, had she been sent to Auschwitz?

She was in the Auschwitz because when she come to Auschwitz, this was already Judenrein. This was the end already almost.

OK.

I mean, a few years, but the end.

How many years were you in Auschwitz?

I was in Auschwitz maybe a year and a half to two years.

So till 1942 or '43?

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And later on, I got transferred to Dachau because--

Was that your last camp?

This was the last camp. And General Eisenhower liberated me.

OK. We'll talk about that later after lunch.

I got pictures, too.

OK.

Not with me, but I have some pictures.

But did you ever know that your sister was in Auschwitz when you were-- did you ever meet her in Auschwitz?

I knew she was in Auschwitz. And I thought she will make it sooner than anybody because she was different, stronger, speak perfect German, good looking.

If she come into the door, you don't let her in, she come to the window. She has to, you know what I mean. She was a--

That kind of person.

--this kind of people. I thought if somebody's going to make it, she's going to make it for sure. But she got sick.

I know. My question is, when you were in Auschwitz, did you know that she was in Auschwitz?

No.

OK. Did you--

OK. All right, we are rolling.

Yeah?

Mm-hmm.

OK. Mr. Wolnerman, before the break, we were talking about your various experiences in the labor camps and in also Auschwitz as a concentration camp. There were a couple of things that came up while we were off camera that I wanted to make sure we found out about and explored in more depth. One of them was that you mentioned that when you were in Warsaw, after the ghetto uprising and cleaning up the rubble, that part of your work took place in the Jewish cemetery.

You want to know the street name?

Yes.

Gęsia.

Gęsia?

Gęsia.

OK. Can you tell me what the cemetery looked like when you got there?

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Beat up, lots of thing.

Were there headstones still?

Headstones, some of them missing, lots of them missing.

Lots of them missing.

Lots of them missing.

Were they bombed out or just taken away?

They took it away because they made it more for storage, like stones, steel, flames, and so on.

Does that mean that if you walked into the area you would be able to recognize it was a cemetery?

Yes, yes, you still could have.

OK. Could you still see stones with Hebraic writing on it?

Some of them, yes.

OK. And are you saying it was used as a place where people would store-- where the authorities, the German authorities, were storing things?

Well, I don't know what kind else they did, but this, the storage of the stones, and the steel things, and everything.

So the cemetery plots weren't kept clean. And I guess what I wanted to get a sense of is, what did it look like when you walked into this--

Like a warehouse.

Like a warehouse. OK. And your job in the cemetery?

Just to straighten out as much as I could, you know what I mean.

Mm-hmm.

Was it a large-- was it a large area?

Pretty good, pretty good, yeah because some of them still left stones the way they were.

OK. In Auschwitz-- you also mentioned something off camera about where your barracks were located. You said that your barracks were located near a gallows.

It was a house--

OK.

--right across in the same place where they were hanging people.

Did that happen a lot?

Well, it happened not every day, you know what I mean, because every day they had the fire going all the time, you know what I mean. The smoke was going all the time. But this sometimes they used to hang.

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Were you forced to watch these things?

Yes because they didn't give us the breakfast-- I mean, the black chicory coffee, you know what I mean, till you go over there first to see everything. And he was hanging at least 24 hours.

I see. So that was the procedure?

Yes.

So before you get to eat--

Some of them who tried to run away or something, they get caught or something, this how they do it.

Did anyone you ever know end up being so unlucky?

He wasn't kin with me. He was from Greek, from Greece, good-looking guy. And a Polish lady, Polish girl, fall in love with him. And she tried to get him out, and they caught him.

So the best thing for them to show the rest of us if you would try what can happen to you. So they wanted everybody to see. They didn't serve you the food, the coffee, nothing. You have to get out and stay outside to watch and everything.

Were they both hung?

Pardon me?

Were they both hung, the lady and the man?

No. The lady was not caught. They didn't catch her.

Oh, they didn't catch her?

No.

But they caught him? And was this within Auschwitz?

This was in Warsaw, but--

Ah, this was in Warsaw?

This was in Warsaw after the ghetto. you know what I mean.

After the ghetto. I see.

I was in Auschwitz, I saw people hanging, but I didn't know the people, you know what I mean.

Yeah. But where you were housed in Warsaw was right next to it, huh?

This was next to it. And I was housed next to the hanging in Auschwitz, too.

Really?

Just happened.

What a charming location.

Yeah.

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Tell me a little bit about what your barracks looked like in Auschwitz.

In Auschwitz, very poor, you know what I mean--

How many people would--

--not like the rest of them. It was brick homes, you know what I mean, a little bit different, a little bit because I used to be in the big one, too, for the horses. It was two or four stages--

Levels.

--levels high. Most of the time, I used to live on the top.

Which was the better location? Was it the top of the bottom location?

Well, you didn't have nothing to say.

OK. But was there a place that people--

They tell you--

Where to go.

That's it.

OK.

They didn't ask you where you're wanted, you know what I mean.

Was there a particular location that people would have preferred?

Well, the top one was a little bit more secure, you know what I mean, with the stealing, your own people, the piece of bread, you know what I mean. Lots of time, you used to take the bread between the clothes, you know what I mean. And then they steel it, too, while sleeping, you know what I mean. You didn't feel it.

Did anyone ever steal from you?

I was lucky, no.

OK.

I was very, very careful not to get hurt. This was my only thing. I didn't try to steal, I didn't try to run away, I didn't try no little things. I was straight listening, you know what I mean. And I figured maybe I will get by, not live or something, but I get by, you know what I mean.

What do you think-- why do you think you survived?

Only God want me to, this is the only one, because like I told you, no medication, no food, no water, high fever, nothing.

You're talking when you had typhus?

Right.

So, did you get better being in that place?

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I had to get better. I am here.

Yeah.

The first when I got out, I was like a baby. I couldn't go on steps even. I couldn't walk on the steps. I had to crawl, you know what I mean, for a while.

And they still kept you, that is, as a worker?

Yes.

I tried-- they away a little bit, the kapos, the foremen, because they couldn't make me die in an hour, you know what I mean.

This was in the place in Warsaw where you said the mayor didn't want to have anybody outright killed?

Right. The mayor didn't want nothing to happen to us because if we were dead then the Russian came closer-- we were outside for three days, no food, no water, nothing to make us very tired, not to fight or something like this because they thought maybe we go fight because the Russians are coming closer, we might fight. So the mayor from the city knew it. He say, I will not allow nobody to do nothing to them, to shoot them, kill him, or something.

Was this a Polish mayor?

I don't know if he was Polish or not.

OK.

He could probably German--

Yeah.

--because a Pollack wouldn't take a chance because they could kill him, too, you know what I mean.

Yeah.

And he was looking for the future a little bit.

So actually you were there before the Polish uprising.

He was there before, right.

Yeah.

The uprising was-- when we left, we heard it. The Pollacks made the uprising because the Russians were closer.

That's right.

But the Russians were very mad on the Pollacks because the Russians wanted to come before to go through Poland when they occupied Czechoslovakia. So the Pollacks say, no. So the Russians were very mad on them.

So when they make the uprising, the Russians moved back a little bit. And the rumors were that maybe 100,000 Pollacks got killed.

It was pretty brutal. It was pretty brutal.

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This is what I heard. We didn't see nothing, you know what I mean because we walked already a few ways.

So when you left Warsaw, how did you get back to the actual Auschwitz camp?

With the trains, a hundred people on the--

In a cattle car?

On the cattle cars, right.

OK.

This is the time when I saw people drinking their own urine because no water, nothing, hot. And when you die, you couldn't lay because everybody has to stand, you know what I mean. The more died, a little bit more room you have. They throw them out, you know what I mean.

How long did it take?

It took us maybe three days. The train goes slowly, it stops and everything.

Were the doors open or closed?

The doors, it was-- nobody run away, that's the one thing.

But to throw out a body?

They throw it away, right.

OK. And had it been only young men or men who were in the--

Only men.

Only men, OK. So when you get back to Auschwitz itself, it's already the late summer, early fall of '44 because that's when the Warsaw uprising happened is early August of 1944.

Well, we didn't know nothing about the day, the month, the year, or nothing, you know what I mean. You don't had no control because you never had a paper. You never saw a paper, nothing.

Was there a very active rumor mill? How did you get information?

Not too much information--

OK.

--because we didn't never talk to each other. We only talked between us. Like example, we were 10 kids, and one was the oldest one. He was maybe 10, 15 years older. So he was like the father. If he say, sit, sit, walk, walk. Everything, we listened to him.

So we sit one together, if he talked. And one get up, and he say, what would you do if the SS come to you and give you all the bread he wanted and he shoots you? What do you think? What if you want it?

Everybody say, give me the bread and he shoot me. Not bread and butter, or steak, or something, just bread, enough. Nobody, not even the one say no or something, you know what I mean, nothing. And this is true.

And this is the one-- I met him 47 years later. I didn't know where he was. He left. After we got liberated, a week later, he said, you know what, I'm going.

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I say, where you're going? Maybe I find my mother, my father, my brother, my sister because he was 15 years older, you know what I mean. I was afraid to walk out, you know what I mean. So he left. And I always used to tell my wife when we got married and everything, I wish I knew what happened to him.

Two weeks later, a friend of ours made a luncheon in Florida, and I was invited. And one man comes in, a tall man with a yarmulke and everything, and he say-- he shakes, hello, hello. I think your name is Dave. I say, yeah, my name is Dave.

And he started to talk a little bit and everything. I say, it was nice to meet you. I wanted to go. He said, no, don't walk away because I want to talk to you. I say, yes, OK, we talked. He talked.

Again, I tried to walk away. So he say, let me talk a little bit more. First of all, you got a number 18. I say, Mister, I got a number 16344. You got a mistake, you know what I mean. And this happened. You're going to have a mistake, you know what I mean.

So I say, it was nice to meet you. He say, no stay right here. He started to talk to me and everything. And he explained to me the numbers because I didn't know it. I didn't have the brains to figure, you know what I mean.

I always used to say after the deliberation to everybody who asked me, I say, this is my girlfriend's telephone number so I don't forget because I didn't-- first of all, I didn't know the number. So he told me the number. So just when he told me the number, I tried to understand that this was him. And I didn't see him for 47 years.

What was his name?

Abraham. I don't remember the second name, you know what I mean. And he lived in Canada. And he had a kosher butcher shop because he wear a yarmulke and everything.

And so then you finally recognized that he was--

I asked him, how did you recognize me? The voice. Is it possible that the voice can make you? That's what he told me.

It was your voice? Wow.

Well, I don't know. I didn't recognize him at all.

And he explained to you--

But he explained me the number, and he explained me later on about the lady who we live on the attic when we got sick, and the Catholics nuns saved a life because they took us over because they got lots of food from the American soldiers, the beef and everything.

And we got-- and this was the-- and we were on the attic by farmer. And it was up and down. It was going all night. So we were laying in very bad. And we didn't have no hospital with that small town. So he had nuns big place, Catholic nuns.

You're talking about Feldafing, or you're talking about Dachau?

This was already Dissen am Ammersee.

"Amadazay."

This is already when I got liberated, the same day, the next day.

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OK.

Later on we went to Feldafing to get married to get everything.

So after liberation, you were in a place called "Amazay?"

Dissen am Ammersee. This was--

Dissen?

Dissen.

Dissen.

Dissen am Ammersee. This was maybe 30 miles from Munich.

Uh-huh.

So we stayed over there. They took us in. They cleaned us up.

These are Germans?

In Germany, the nuns.

The nuns, I see. So this was a monastery--

A monastery, right

--a convent, excuse me, a convent.

Right, with the hat, very strong, very, very, very, very strong, the religion.

OK.

And they give us, the first day I remember, was five spoons of oatmeal. And I say, sister, how about a loaf of bread? No, no, nothing. The next day, one more spoon. Third day, another spoon.

Finally they give us one slice of bread. So I say, give me at least a half a loaf of bread, sister. No. But later on, I got better and everything. I used to go over there every day. If I didn't go, they was looking for me--

Really?

--for Dave. First of all, I know a few young ones. They asked me for a few cigarettes, you know what I mean. And they trust me a little bit.

And they were very strong. They told me, they cannot sleep. The hens have to be out. They cannot sleep with the hens underneath.

So they were very strict in their habits.

Very strict, but I mean, very good to me, very good. For five years, I used to go in every day sometimes for breakfast, sometimes for lunch, sometimes for dinner. When they saw me coming, oh, David is coming. The table was full with food, full, because they know me for so long. And I lived over there. Everybody know me. I got married over there.

So Dissen am "Amazay?"

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Dissen am Ammersee.

Do you know what kind of nuns they were, what order they belonged to?

They always had the white hats and everything.

Uh-huh.

Very strict, very strict--

OK.

--because was a couple young ones, they were cheating a little bit, a couple of cigarettes, you know what I mean.

So in other words, they nursed you back to health after you were liberated.

They saved our life.

OK.

And I have now nuns who come in Florida. They come over.

Oh, really?

The Catholics used from Africa, but they speak English. And the head nurse from the hospice brought them over. It was three nuns. And we were so close. After a meal, everybody sat up and prayed for us and everything. Every Friday, they used to call me and wish me happy--

Sabbath?

Saturday, yeah, Shabbat.

Shabbat, uh-huh.

Right.

And this is in Florida?

Yes.

Yes, in Florida.

I still got the pictures.

OK. So that means when your wife and yourself retired to Florida some time ago.

Because I used to live in Des Moines. But it was cold, you're getting older, so I moved to Florida. And I live 20 years in Florida, a condominium. I just sold it not too long ago because Michael got us a condominium. He fixed up extra one bedroom for the nurse and everything because my wife--

She needed some help.

--for a while, I pushed it away. Now I realize. It took a couple of years. We used to walk. She used to walk four or five miles a day.

Wow!

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Lately she walked a little bit. Let's sit down. She put my head on it, start to sleep. I say, Jennie-- in Polish, Yanka, Yanka-- people go through, they go see, I'm ashamed. But she couldn't.

She was tired.

And I was pushing away the--

You were pushing away that she was not well?

--because I saw it going down, you know what I mean. How they call, not the Alzheimer's, before Alzheimer's?

Dementia?

Dementia, yeah.

Dementia, yeah. Not easy, not easy for anybody.

Yes, yes. Yes, I was six months in a home with her feeding her three meals a day. I was there three months all days from 7:00 till 8:00 at night.

Hard.

I feed her breakfast, lunch, and dinner, three months. And finally, Michael said, no, come on.

Yeah. It's hard. It's very hard.

He took a plane, a private plane, he took us over there. He got fixed up the condominium special for the maid for night, a special room with a bed to take it outside from the wall.

Yeah.

No, only one Michael in the world.

You're very proud of your son.

Well, I give him hell, too, sometimes.

Well, that's what children are for.

[LAUGHTER]

He giving me, too.

That's also what parents are for.

[LAUGHTER]

So let's go back a little bit to Europe.

OK.

And in Auschwitz, when you will returned after the Warsaw uprising-- well, during the first days, you already noticed that the Russians are not so far away, and the uprising--

We saw the airplanes, too, already.

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OK. So you all returned to Auschwitz. And that becomes-- even though you don't know the dates, it is the fall of 1944. And I remember reading at some point that sometime in November, there was a kind of a revolt in Auschwitz against--

We left already. I heard it, that they burned down a little bit and everything. But they did it a little bit too early. They got killed. Lots of people got killed.

All right. So when did you leave then? You left in the fall?

Maybe a day or two before.

Uh-huh. OK.

We was walking for three days.

So you were taken out and marched out.

And after three days, we got on the trains and go over there. When the Russians come in closer, we went back to Munich. And over there, we got liberated by General Eisenhower.

OK. But that still leaves half a year. You leave Auschwitz sometime in the fall, October, November, whenever, a few days before whatever this revolt was. Because I remember someone telling me they no longer stamped arms after that revolt. Whoever was then brought to Auschwitz no longer got a number because they stopped it.

Well, maybe this is possible, yes. And lots of camps, they didn't give no numbers either. Like my wife, she didn't have no number.

OK. But you did?

I have.

Yeah. You saw it.

Yeah. You showed it.

My telephone number.

Your telephone number, which adds up to 18.

18, right.

Yeah. And you know it by heart.

How about the book? Did you read the book?

Yes.

You have the book?

Yes, I do. Yes, I do.

The book is tremendous. When we were in Texas, we sold it right away, a few hundred or something books charging $16 a book.

My goodness. My goodness. So you're taken out in the fall, and you're marched for three days, and then you're put on a train, and then you're taken to Dachau, which is where you spend the next several months,

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which would take us through the winter of 1945, when it's cold.

We got liberated in April--

OK.

--27, 28.

So tell me about before liberation in Dachau, how different was it from Auschwitz?

Well, it was a little bit different because, first of all, it was not so big a crematorium like in Auschwitz and then Birkenau because Dachau was the first concentration camp in the world in Germany because this was made for Germans, for the mafia, for the rest of them, homosexuals, and so on.

Also for people who were political prisoners, people who were different.

Have to be not everything political, you know what I mean.

Yeah.

Sometimes you had brown hair, black hair, or something like this, you was going to, you know what I mean.

Yeah.

But was most of them for German. Dachau was the first one.

Yeah. So when you got to the camp, were the conditions different than in Auschwitz?

A little bit different.

In what way?

Because, first of all, you didn't have the ovens so big. You didn't have nothing like this.

Did you have the same job to put--

No, no. I didn't have no job. Any kind of job was for me. Because some of them said, they are shoemakers, or one is a sewing machines, or something, you know what I mean.

Mm-hmm.

I couldn't tell him I'm somebody because I don't know nothing, you know what I mean. I couldn't say I'm an electrician.

Yeah.

Maybe somebody who know a little bit, he could get by, you know what I mean.

Yeah.

But for me, I couldn't do nothing.

But what I meant is, were you put to work feeding corpses into a crematoria in Dachau like you were in Auschwitz?

No, no.

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OK.

In Dachau, I worked different jobs.

What did you do?

I worked a little bit farther from Dachau in Muehldorf.

Muehldorf? So you were outside the camp?

Muehldorf, not too far away.

Muehldorf?

Right.

But we used to go to Dachau to sleep and everything. And we had sometime like bunkers. We lived in the down, you know what I mean.

Oh, you lived in bunkers underground?

In bunkers like this, too.

Uh-huh. And the bunkers were within Dachau, within the camp?

Around Dachau.

Not in the camp itself?

No, no, because in Dachau, the camps, we had big buildings and everything, you know what I mean.

Yeah. So in Muehldorf, what were you doing there?

Same thing, on the railroads, and sometimes working in the streets--

Mm-hmm.

--this kind of work.

OK.

No proficient, no special or something.

Did you have a different kind of uniform on?

Same thing, stripes.

OK. Stripes and the same clothes that you had gotten in Auschwitz?

Some of them. And if not, they give you another one, you know what I mean.

OK. Still the wooden shoes?

Still the wooden shoes, right. Well, they wooden shoes was not bad, especially in wintertime.

Mm-hmm. OK. You get used to walking in them, huh?

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You get used to everything. Same like Russian, was cutting from their people pieces to cook, to eat. But I never thought in my life something like this, and I saw it myself, he was cutting.

Did you ever have something like that?

Pardon me?

Did you ever do anything like that?

No.

No.

This was something think-- of course, this is unbelievable. I don't think they even wrote too much in the papers like this.

Yeah.

But this was. But only the Russian did it.

I see.

In Auschwitz, going back to Auschwitz, in the time that you were there-- because you were there a couple of years, weren't you?

Right, all together.

All together a couple of years. That work that you did at the crematorium, did that happen until the time you left off and on?

Off and on, right.

OK. So it wasn't one time at the beginning and never again?

No, no, no. Well, sometime how you used to work over there, people who used to work over there, the next day, they want by himself. They throw him, too. They don't want them to know too much, in case.

Yeah. Yeah. There was that danger.

Yes.

By the time you're in Dachau, and it's winter, and it's cold, and it's a little bit different, you're in Muehldorf, and so, are people getting the sense of-- in the prison, in the camp, are they getting the sense that the end of the war is near?

No. The only thing happened, when we saw it, the soldiers tried to run away a little bit. So we started to run away, too. But this was three days too early. So they had to catch us. We had to get back to the camp for three more days.

So this is in April, close to liberation.

Right, right.

So German soldiers are running away--

Because-- right. So we'd run away, too, you know what I mean. But we had to go back because they caught us back. And some of them there was a fight.

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They was afraid, so they went back. Like me, I had to go-- I went back by myself because I was by myself, you know what I mean. I didn't know what to do.

OK. Were you afraid that you might be hung just like the people in Auschwitz had been?

Well, I thought maybe-- we thought already different things. Maybe I could be free. I wanted to be free. I don't want to get killed, you know what I mean.

Right.

So later on, three days later, American soldiers took over and everything.

And you were in the camp itself when they came?

This was out of the camp on the trains going up and down, up and down, you know what I mean.

Explain to me it.

--because not too far away was like Garmisch-Partenkirchen, the skiing and everything.

That's right, the Garmisch area.

Yes.

So you were outside the camp when you saw Americans for the first time?

Right, right. Matter of fact, they were the first ones we saw coming into the little town. So they wasn't the-- they had the Jeeps open.

Yeah.

And they had the cans stored up, everything. We didn't ask no question. We were just running over there. We took it out, and we took it and everything. So they stopped the whole thing, and they come over with guns and everything, and they took everything away. So everybody started to cuss in her language, Yiddish, and German, and Italian, French, everything.

So finally was over there one Jewish captain. And he heard Jewish, Hebrew talking, a little bit. So I still got the Chai. I wear it, even.

So he asked me-- he took it out, and he say, you Jewish? Yes. So he read it. I told him, it's a Chai.

What's a Chai?

A Chai, this mean like-- let me show you.

You know you're going to ask him about that?

OK, hold on.

It's like a Jesus, something like this.

But if we can, we can cut for a second.

I see-- well, on the book you can--

--[INAUDIBLE].

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Leave it out for right now.

We're going to have to put it on record.

Yeah. We're going to-- all right.

Sorry. I'm glad we got to that.

OK. We're rolling?

Yes, we are.

OK. So let's talk about this incident again because I didn't fully understand it. I'll repeat what I think I understood, and you tell me if I'm right. You are all former prisoners-- you're prisoners.

Right.

And the first Americans that you see--

Right.

--are riding on a Jeep through town, through the small town you're in. And that's close to the camp of Dachau but not in it.

No, right, right.

It's not in it.

Right.

And you see because they have open trucks--

Because the Jeeps-- It was summer or April.

Yeah, it's April.

And we saw the cans.

You saw cans of food?

Food and everything. So we didn't ask no questions. We just went there, and grabbed it, and everything.

OK.

So they stopped the whole thing.

The soldiers stopped?

Stopped and they had over there a general and everything. And he come over to our group, soldiers, and they took everything away from us because they didn't know who we are.

Right.

So finally, the captain, the Jewish captain, explained it to the general and everything. So they brought everything back and more.

OK. So before we get there, this Jewish captain hears you cursing in Yiddish?

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Right.

Because everybody cursed in different languages because they took it away--

Yeah.

--you know what I mean.

What did he do? After he heard you cursing, but before he spoke to you, what did he do?

He didn't say nothing. He just went. He came back and he say, you are Jewish? I say, yeah. And so he took this out, and I say, read it. I say it's a Chai.

So he say, I am coming from Austria. I never saw no Jews or nobody. You guys are the first ones that I see.

And he went back to the general and he talked to them and told him. So the general come over. And with the soldiers, they brought all this stuff back and more to eat, you know what I mean.

And did people start eating?

And we start to eating. And I found out later maybe 100,000 of our people died from this food because we was not used to it.

Yeah.

We was getting diarrhea from the front and back.

Yeah.

All night we was vomiting and doing something else--

Yeah.

--because we got-- over there, it was curfew time. So we went to a farmer, and he give us the farm upstairs on the attic, you know what I mean. With the Chai, the straw was over there.

So in other words, at that moment when the Jeeps come in, you realize that you're free--

Right.

--because the Germans are no longer in control?

Right.

OK. And so the first thing is is that you find this-- that you have this contact with this soldier. And what you're showing me now, is that your own Chai, or is that from him?

From him, this is from him. This is from him.

This is from him?

Right.

So what did he do? He took it off his neck?

From his neck and give it to me.

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Do you ever-- oh my goodness! And you've carried it around all this time?

Since 1945.

So you've worn in around your own neck for over 70 years?

Right.

Wow. Did you ever learn his name?

Well, I tell you one thing, I didn't think about it. Later on, I worked for the soldiers after a few months liberation. I used to work for the soldiers. I used to go around and give the food, breakfast, lunch, water, extra water, water.

So I got some pictures with their soldiers when they took it, you know what I mean. And they told me the name, but I didn't took that full name. I didn't take-- they told me they are from Indiana or something.

OK.

I didn't have no brain. I didn't think about it.

OK. So at one point, you knew, but it didn't register with you.

No, no.

I didn't stay with you.

No, it didn't register.

But the Chai did?

Right.

The Chai did.

Right.

And for those of us who aren't Jewish, explain to me what is a Chai.

A "Chai" means 18 to life.

Ah, OK. And is it a symbol that men often wear?

Right. And the ladies, too.

And ladies, too.

To life.

To life.

Yes.

OK.

In the book where they wrote it, it's the page, the first page is this, everything.

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Yeah.

The number and telling everything what it is. The Chai is-- liberation, the whole explanation, you got in the book.

Thank you for showing me. Thank you for sharing that.

You still need that?

Pardon? No, no. We can put it away. But thank you so much.

I tell you one thing, I'll be honest with you, I don't show this not too many people because, well, it's too much.

Of course. Of course.

I believe in one thing now.

Mm-hmm.

Believe, but don't forget. Forgive, but don't forget. Because the SS who was, they are not alive anymore. They had to be older than me, at least a year or two older, you know what I mean. So, not too many live longer than that, you know what I mean.

So my philosophy is forgive, but don't forget. Lots of them from my people would hate me for this saying because, how can you forget something like this? How can you forgive something like this? But I am different.

Were you able to forgive?

Pardon me?

Were you able to forgive?

I am thinking, because the people who was, they are not alive anymore. And the younger ones-- you could see today, I bet you had lots of Germans over there so they're visiting and everything. And the Germans now, everything, Germany is very close friends with Israel, very close.

So some I don't blame them if you don't believe it. I don't blame them if they believe it.

You mean about what happened, or if they believe in what?

I mean if they're forgiven.

I see.

I see.

I say forgive, but don't forget.

OK. It's a huge thing. Once a person has been injured to such a degree, once a people has been wiped out to such a degree, it's a huge challenge to be able to do this.

Right, right. Like I told you, I bet you lots of from our people who may be alive now, they would hate me for saying this because I told you, with a religious, my brother's friend, he was one of the top believing in everything.

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Tell me about this incident again because when we spoke about it, it was off camera. So tell me, this was after the war?

This was after the war in Munich.

OK, what happened?

Happened to be I was in Munich, and he was walking, and he lived in Munich or something. I didn't know about him at all. I just met him now. I knew him before the war that he was my older brother's friend.

OK. So I was at that time 10, 12 years old.

OK.

I saw him. He recognized me, I recognized him a little bit.

On the street?

On the street. And he was dressed up with a nice suit, with a tie and everything. And at home, he was dressed up with the black thing, like the real Jewish rabbi or something.

Like somebody who was Hasidic?

Right. he was like a rabbi or something. And so I say to him, what's happened? He said, I don't believe in God. You don't believe in God? He was such a believer. He was like God to us and everything.

He say, where was God when they throw in the kids? They throw my parents in, your parents in, maybe they can say, we was against Hitler, maybe it was a communist, maybe it was that, maybe it was that. How about the young kids? How about the two months, three months, one year, two years? What did they do wrong?

Yeah.

So he asked me, how about you? I said, I believe God more than I ever did.

And did you tell him why?

Because I had typhus with no medication, with no nothing, no medication, no food, no water, high fever, no water at all, and I am alive. So, who was it?

Yeah.

So your answer to him was, you believed in God because you got better from this typhus.

Because this was a miracle.

Yes, mm-hmm. And did you ever meet him again?

No.

So this was just on the street?

Yeah.

OK. All right. So I'm going to go back now a little bit chronologically. That first time that you see these American soldiers, when you get the food-- you get some food, but you didn't get sick from it, did you, from the food that they gave you?

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Well, we eat maybe too much and too fast. It's not normal.

Of course not.

But what happened to you when you ate it?

I was sick like a dog.

Ah.

I didn't think we ever going to make it.

And that evening, did you go back and sleep in the camp?

No.

Where did you go?

I was free. I was over there by the nuns. I stayed over there a week in like a hospital or something until finally they let me go, and IO lived private. But I used to go everyday to them over there.

You had mentioned when the Jeep was still there that there was some farmers that you went to, or did I misunderstand that, that the first night you spent with a farmer up in the attic?

Because it was curfew time.

Ah, OK.

So we had to have something.

And the farmers let you in?

The farmers had to let you in because the soldiers--

Forced them to?

--told us, you cannot stay in the street because you have to go, you know. So they put us on the attic, you know what I mean.

OK. And they knew who you were, these German farmers.

Of course.

And what was their manner like to you?

No, they didn't say nothing. They were nice. They did it because they were afraid or something from the soldiers, and they had to do it.

OK. And the second day is when you end up with the nuns in the convent?

We stayed over there maybe a week in there--

With this farmer?

--till we got a little bit back to normal a little bit.

OK. And then that's when you went to where the nuns convent was?

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Yes, I got very close with them.

OK.

They got very close with me. If I didn't come one day over there, they were looking for me.

When you left the convent, where did you go live?

When I left the country?

No, no, no. The nuns, when you left the nuns, you said you lived nearby.

So the government, the German government, give us an apartment.

Ah, OK.

So we stayed over there by ourselves.

OK. And who did you live with?

With a few boys from where we got liberated.

OK. Also from Dachau?

This was from Dachau, yes.

And the apartment was in what town?

In Dissen am Ammersee

Ah-ha, close to the convent, Dissen am Ammersee.

Close to Munich.

Yeah. How long did you stay there?

I stayed five years in this town.

In that same apartment?

In the same apartment, maybe four years.

OK. And was the apartment part of the Feldafing camp?

Well, they had rooms where they let us use it, you know what I mean. Maybe they got paid from the government, from the German government. I don't know.

But my question to you is, did you ever end up in a DP camp, in a displaced persons camp?

I used to come visit Feldafing.

Ah, OK. But you were never living in the camp?

No, I didn't live too much. My sister lived over there for a while, before I met because I didn't know her.

OK. So tell me when is the first time you met your sister?

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I met my sister maybe after-- maybe a year after liberation.

And how did you get to know-- how did you find each other?

Because everybody's-- we either saw somebody. Did you see my sister? Did you this? Somebody saw her, and talked to her, and they told me. And I got a hold of her, and this how I know it.

And where was she living when you found out about her?

She was living in Feldafing.

Oh, so, she wasn't that far away?

But we did know it.

Yeah, OK.

It was a couple thousand people or more.

And what camps had she gone through?

She was in different from my camp.

OK. Did she tell you much of what she had gone through?

She had not too bad. Some of them, not too bad.

Well, what does that mean, not too bad?

She worked over there. They were treated a little bit nicer. And she worked in a factory who make the clothes-- not clothes, the material, you know what I mean.

Oh, textiles?

Right.

OK. And was she in Germany?

This was in Germany.

OK. And did she know what had happened to your older sister?

No.

Or your brother?

No.

Or your mother? No. OK. Did you think of going back to Poland at that time?

No.

Why not?

Because, first of all, all the big concentration camps was in Poland, Auschwitz, Birkenau, all the big ones anyway. Lots of big ones was in Poland.

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And you didn't want to be anywhere near them.

And I didn't want to go back. I didn't have nothing to lose over there.

Yeah. Were you thinking about where you should go, where you should move to? Once you were free, where did you want to go from there?

Well, when I got free, we were thinking to go to Israel, America, and Australia--

OK.

--them three.

Those three places?

Right.

OK

So Israel was coming late, Australia late, and America come before. So we went to America.

So when you say they came late--

Because you had to wait. With the Jewish Federation, you had to wait in the line. It's not like Mexico, come over.

So tell me, what was the process? Explain to me what the process is.

First of all, you had to be the true what you are--

OK.

--telling the truth what you are. Secondly, they thought maybe you've got relatives. So the relatives can be-- they were afraid if you come to this country, you get sick. So the government have to pay because we didn't have nobody. So they were looking for something who will be for you.

OK. So you had to find sponsors?

Right. And I didn't find nothing because maybe we had some relatives because I was too young to know.

OK. What about during those years when you were waiting, did you go to school?

What do you mean, after?

After the war?

No.

Because you say you finished three grades of schooling before the war.

First of all, in Germany, took maybe a year before they opened up the schools.

OK.

You couldn't go to school. And secondly, you didn't think about it yet.

OK. Well, your life-- these events all happened at very crucial parts of your life. The war started when you

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were 12 years old. You're not even a teenager. And six years later, you were already a young man. It starts out as a kid, and then when it ends, you're 18 or 19 years old.

Well, I remember I was reading a paper after the war, doctors from all over the world come out, if anybody who was more than a year in concentration camp, had to be something wrong with him. You will never be the same like he was. And I think he was right. I am not the same like I was.

How were you before, and what changed?

Well, I give you the example. For 42 years, I never had a vacation. I didn't even know about the vacation, a day or something off. So you tell me I was normal?

And did you eventually have a vacation?

Not too much because my vacation was I wanted my boys to have education.

Mm-hmm.

I was the old-fashioned me.

What kind of a person would-- what kind of a young child were you before the war started? How would you describe yourself?

Well, I can tell you, I know we got respect for the mother and father all the way.

OK.

We never talked about the table something like over here, sex and this or this, nothing, nothing, nothing. Nothing happened.

OK. By the way, did you learn about such things in the camps?

No.

No?

We wasn't ready for this.

And then afterwards, when it's all over, in 1945, how had this all changed you?

Well, it took a little bit, a while. It took us time to get a little bit back to normal.

OK. Can you explain that a bit? What does that mean? Did you have nightmares?

Well, normal, we never be normal. But it's better, you know what I mean.

How did you meet your wife?

Pardon me?

How did you meet your wife?

I met her in the DP camp in Feldafing.

OK. And in what way? Who brought you together?

No, just we were there, something, together. We were young.

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And how long did you know each other before you--

Six months.

Six months? Can you tell me a little bit about what her experiences were?

Hers?

Mm-hmm.

Well, she was in camp. She got one place. The head German from the company, I mean, the real big one, she liked her. She loved my wife.

She used to bring her everyday soup and a sandwich every day. She took her life in the end, you know what I mean. And she wanted her to take out from concentration camp.

In Germany, you've been there, every second one has got a bike. Everything is bikes over there. And she brought a bike for her to take her out and everything. And she said, I don't want to go because I don't want to leave my friends.

Your wife said that?

He want to take her out from the concentration camp, take a chance.

Mm-hmm.

And she didn't go. Secondly, they were walking, too. So the soldier had like a bag to put the bread in for them and everything. So she say to the soldier, to the German, it's too heavy for you. Let me carry for you. So he give it to her.

And they open up, and she eat with the friend the whole thing, the bread with the lunch, everything. And she give it back to him, he say, you finished up everything. You know I could shoot you, but I will not do it. If you've got guts and take a chance to do this, I let you go by.

Wow! Wow!

She would've been dead.

So these are some of her experiences?

She took a chance, and he took a chance, too.

Did you talk much to one another about these things?

Sometimes.

Mm-hmm. Do you think she understood you better because she had been through these same things herself?

Well, she understand.

Yeah? What was your wife's name? What was your wife's name?

Yanka in Polish.

Yanka.

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Jennie in English.

And what was her maiden name?

Nyer.

Nyer. And what town was she from in Poland? She is maybe eight kilometers from where I used to live in a bigger town.

Really? So close. So close. What was the name of her town? Do you remember?

Bingen.

Bingen, she was from Bingen.

Close to Oberschlesien, too.

OK. So in these years after the war when you spent them in Germany, did you start working someplace? Did you do anything to earn some money? Or how were you supported?

I worked.

OK. What did you do?

Work with the soldiers. And they pay me not with money, but they give me half the ration what the soldiers were getting.

OK. And were you able to sell some of this to make some money?

Right.

OK.

On the black market. I used to get a carton of cigarettes. They used to get two cartons, and I used to get the one carton. And a carton of cigarettes was lots of money.

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, the black market was thriving after the war. And is this how you were able to support yourself?

Right.

Did you get any kind of financial support from UNWRA or from--

No, no, no.

Nothing?

At that time, they didn't pay nothing yet.

Huh. Uh-huh.

But I worked, my wife worked.

What year did you get married?

In 1949, six months before I came to this country.

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OK. What's your wedding date?

This was before Yom Kippur, October or something like this. You can ask me some questions.

OK.

A little bit louder

I will try. Sometimes my voice is too soft. So I wanted to get a sense of what kind of training, what kind of work did you do in Germany while you were waiting to get permission to come either here, or to Australia, or wherever?

I talked to coming to America to a tiny place. I have to have something to-- I have to have something to do, you know what I mean. So I had a friend who took over from the big Germans a factory, a printing factory. And the printing factory was 2,500 people working, a little publishing company in Cleveland.

Oh, this is in Cleveland.

Right.

I'm talking still in Germany.

Oh, well, in Germany, was a big company, too--

OK.

--in printing, Hubert Printing Company.

Hubert?

Hubert, right. And this was my friend. He was the Treuhändler. He just took over because a Nazi used to own.

I see.

And he was liberated. And he used to speak English, speak very fluent English already at that time, a very intelligent man. So he took over.

I go to him, and I say, listen, I wanted to be a pressman, but I mean, I want you-- in Europe, when you start to work, they let you take out the bucket first because the toilet, you don't have no toilet, you know what I mean. And I say, I don't want it. I want this.

So he talked to the foreman over there. He say, Dave coming, teach him. Don't tell him to sweep the floor first or something. And I worked over there, and I learned this job.

And the job was what kind of job?

Printing.

Printing?

Yes, a little publishing company, one of the famous company.

Is it's still in business now, do you think?

I worked over there.

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OK

And they paid a little bit.

OK. So you learned how to be a pressman?

A pressman, right.

And when you came to the United States, and you lived in Cleveland at first, and you went and found a job there, was it the same technology?

Well, this one over here was a little bit more modern.

Ah, OK.

They had bigger presses, bigger everything. But I had the experience already.

OK.

And I learned quick.

OK. And so you already had something--

And I had a good job.

How was-- I want to talk about DP life a little bit. In this town where Feldafing was so close by, was it a very large camp?

You mean in Dissen?

In Dissen, yeah.

A small town.

A small town. But what about the Feldafing, was that close to Dissen?

Feldafing?

Yeah.

Maybe 10, 12 miles.

OK. And how long did that camp exist?

The DP camp?

Yeah.

This was quite a few--

No? OK. All right. He's tired of looking at me.

No.

[INTERVIEWER LAUGHING]

All right. Was Feldafing basically a Jewish DP camp, or were there other nationalities there?

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In the DP camp?

Yeah.

Different nationalities too.

OK.

Most of them Jewish.

Most of them Jewish. OK. And you're in Germany for quite a few years after the war. How did it feel right after the war being in a place that had been-- was the place where, in a part of a country that was the aggressor country that had made war on the Jews? How did it feel being amongst Germans?

Well, it goes both ways.

OK.

You have the same thing like being in the business. I took over business, I didn't have no knowledge from business. But I was kind to the customers. I treat them like they would be the top.

OK.

And this how I made it.

OK.

Same thing over there. I had good neighbors, they treat me nice, so I treat them nice, too. And we were friends for five years living over there.

So in other words, you didn't hold it against all Germans.

Not too much, no.

OK. All right. That is also something that not everybody was able to do.

I told you before, some people, my own people would hate this what I say.

Yeah.

Forgive, but don't forget--

That's your motto. That's your motto

--because how can you forget?

Yeah.

How can you forgive? But you have to do it. This is my opinion.

Did you talk much after the war about all of the experiences that you had?

No, not too much.

As your children were growing up?

Well, my children, they were too young to tell it. If I tell them something, they were laughing.

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Really?

They couldn't believe.

When did they start believing?

When they got older a little bit they got to believe.

Did you wait until they started asking questions?

Well, not quite.

No. You shared what you had known before that, huh?

Right.

OK. I mean, that's something also that people are different. And some people never told their children anything because they wanted to spare them the knowledge. And other people felt that it's important.

Well, I think the kids should know because our people in 10 years, not even 10 years, you will have no Holocaust survivor anymore.

Mm-hmm.

So the second generation should remember more than this. If not, it's going to be finished completely.

Tell me again how many children you have.

Pardon me?

How many children do you have?

How many I have?

Yes.

I have two boys. And who is the older and who's the younger? The name of the older.

The other one is Allen.

Allen. And the younger son?

Is Michael.

OK.

10 years younger than the older one.

All right. And they were both born in the United States?

Right.

Have you ever been back to Poland with them?

To Poland with them? No.

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Have you ever been back to Poland?

I was back one time.

OK. How many years after the war was that?

Oh, at least maybe 20 years or more.

OK.

And this was already-- I went only because of the neighbors and my wife--

They wanted to go.

--because they want a chaperone because they was never in Auschwitz and Birkenau. And they wanted to see it. So they took me. And so we stopped already in the town where I lived. It took us five minutes in the town.

Now, your grandfather's name was Nyer, too, wasn't it, who was the mayor of your town? Wasn't his last name Nyer?

Nyer, yes.

And your wife's maiden name was Nyer.

Right.

And she was only eight kilometers away from your town in Bingen. Was there a relationship there? Was this a family relative of some kind?

Maybe.

OK. But you'd never were able to--

No.

--establish it? OK. Well, I've come to pretty much the end of our interview. Are there other things that you would want to add that you think people should know about, things that you've thought about, as well as the story that we have explored today, things you'd like to say?

Well, I don't have nothing bad to say about this country.

About the United States?

Right.

I only have good things to say because what's happened to me and my family, this could never happen no place in the world--

OK.

--to being good friends with the generals, good friend with the governors, good friends with senators. This can only happen in America in a town like I live in Des Moines, in Iowa.

OK. Well, it's also very heartening to know that they find what you have to tell them important, that they need to know and want to know about your experiences. I understand you also go to school sometimes to talk to children?

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I do this.

OK. What are the kinds of questions that they ask you?

Sometimes yes, not quite like you, but yes, very good questions, too.

What do you think--

Their questions a little bit different. How was your food, and how was this, how was-- a little bit more kids stuff.

Well, kids are interested in that way. I mean, they have their own important things that they want to know.

Right.

OK.

I went to churches, and they donate over $200 to this Jewish thing, their money.

They donate to which Jewish-- a charity?

To this.

To this? Our museum?

Right.

Well, thank you very much for that, for the work on behalf of the museum.

I have over 200 letters at home when my wife used to go to schools. I didn't go to schools before. My wife used to go more than me.

When did you start going?

I started going maybe a few years ago.

Uh-huh. Was it difficult at first to talk about these things?

Well, because I'm not a good speaker.

Well, I think you've done wonderfully.

But I am an honest figure is the only thing.

Yeah. Well, Mr Wolnerman, I would like to thank you for speaking with us today, for sharing all of your stories with us today, for answering all my questions, and once more, for making the journey from Iowa to here in Washington, DC.

And with that, I will say this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. David Wolnerman on May 9, 2016. Thank you again.

I hope I have decent job.

You did a wonderful job, a wonderful job. Thank you.

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