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We're rolling now.

OK. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Herman Malvet on June 5, 2018 in San Francisco, California. Thank you Mr. Malvet for agreeing to speak with us today to share your story, to share some of your experiences. I appreciate it.

Thank you for interviewing me.

I'm going to start our interview as we do with all of them at the very beginning with the most basic questions. And from there, our story, your story will unfold, and we'll explore all corners of it that you wish for us to know about. So my very first question is this one. Could you tell me the date of your birth?

January 1, 1935.

New Year's Day.

Yes. And excuse me for a second, can we cut?

Cut?

I lost my mic.

OK. We're rolling. And what was your name at birth?

Herman Majerovic. It was a different spelling. When I became citizen, since people have problems pronouncing my name, friends suggested I simplify it which I did, not necessarily simple, but simplified.

And Majerovic was spelled how?

M-A-J-E-R-O-V-I-C.

And would that have been a more Polish or Czech or Slovak spelling?

Czech. Because Polish, my uncle who kept his name, the ending was W-I-C-Z. And the original name, supposedly, was the German spelling W-I-T-Z.

Ah, that's right. It would be that way.

So it depended who was the ruler of the country.

Yes.

Or where one was born or kept a name.

Well, that brings me to the next question. Where were you born?

In what is now-- Czechoslovakia. What is now Slovakia.

And what place in--

City called Bardejov.

Bardejov?

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Yes.

And would that be more to the Eastern part--

The eastern part of Slovakia.

OK. So this is part of that region of Europe where you could be born and grow and live your whole life in one city, in one place, and yet have lived in five countries.

Yes.

OK. Five citizenships. Yes.

Five citizenships or more or less but, basically.

Yes, it could be, yes.

OK. What was your father's name?

Julius. Juda Majerovic.

Julius Majerovic. And your mother's?

Bertha.

And her maiden name?

Tier.

All right.

French, right.

Were they both also from-- what was the name of your town?

Bardejov? No. My father was-- I don't remember exactly where he was born. I heard often the name Dukla, but I'm not sure that was the place. My mother, I don't know.

Do you know anything about her side of the family?

Yes. Know she had several brothers in the United States. Some of them came here before World War I.

OK.

One was in what was known as the Czech Legion. That was he was a POW World War I where the Russians and a Czech Legion fought their way from Russia, from Europe, all the way to the Pacific.

Oh, my.

And he made it to the Pacific. In the interim, he married a woman in Russia. And she had a child. His brothers did not know that he had family, so they sent for him. And he made it to New York. And later on, his wife and daughter followed.

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What a story.

The daughter that was born what was had to be in Manchuria, now China.

You know, because we talk about World War II so much, the stories and the drama and the tragedy of World War I is often eclipsed.

Yes. But there were so many. George Soros' father was actually also fighting, I believe, with the Hungarians, that is part of the Hungarian army. And was a prisoner in Siberia for many, many years. And that influenced him and then influenced his son.

Yes.

In very profound ways, those experiences. So what was the name of this uncle?

Tier. There were four brothers.

And his first name, do you know?

Adolf.

Adolf.

Adolf Tier. Yes. And then they moved in Buffalo. They were in New York City, but mostly in Buffalo.

Did you ever meet him?

Yes. I did meet him, and I knew his children and his wife.

Was this after the war?

After the war, yes.

OK. So what about your mother's other brothers? What were their names?

One was Irving, whom I never met. I do not remember, I just met-- Leo was one another, and the others, I don't I don't think I met. They were not in Buffalo. They were not because we went to Buffalo shortly after we arrived in the United States. That was in 1949. So we spent Thanksgiving in Buffalo.

I can imagine that must have been memorable.

Yes.

OK. We'll come to that, that's part of the story. Right now, what I'd like to do, and we started it, is try to find out as much about your family background as we can. So I'm repeating just so that I make sure that I understood it. Your mother had four brothers, Adolf, Irving--

Leo.

Leo, and the fourth one you don't know.

I don't remember. Maybe, there was a fifth one.

OK. And her first name was?

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Bertha.

Bertha. Exactly. Did she have sisters? Possibly, but I don't know.

OK. And do you know what place in Europe the family came from? Her family?

One was, after World War I, was Poland, but which part of Poland, I don't know.

OK. OK. So it was Poland even though you were born in Slovakia. She had come from some place in Poland.

Yes.

Do you know whether or not where you were born was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire?

Yes.

OK. So she might have been from the part of Poland that also came under the Austrian Hungarian Empire.

Yes, most likely.

Most likely, but not sure.

And my father, also, because he served in the Austrian army in World War I.

Interesting. OK. And did you ever know your grandparents on your mother's side?

No. I knew someone who was they called Babchak, grandmother, but who it was, I don't remember. It could have been on my mother's side. I don't know my father's, I don't remember.

Do you have any memories of that person who you called Babchak?

Elderly woman, and in that was in Zakopane.

That's a pretty part of Poland.

But that's about it.

OK. And so can I assume that you really got to know your mother's side of the family after the war?

Yes. Because whoever was still there was here in the United States.

She had nieces, and a niece and two nephews. So that may have been from a sister possibly and whom I got to know. They actually they were living with, also, working for my father before the war, and I got to know them. One survived the war, and the other, there were two brothers and a sister. The sister and one brother did not survive. The other brother did survive, and he also had quite an interesting history.

So we're talking about your mother's nieces and nephews, not other siblings of hers?

Right.

But they were children of these--

Possibly a sister. That's what my assumption, although I never-- unfortunately, I did not inquire, and never--

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Well, if you were born in 1935, you were a child when everything broke out.

Yes.

When the world collapsed.

When the war started, yes.

And I'm asking you a lot of questions that presume a knowledge of family that you would gain after age five or as you grow up. But bear with me that I ask anyway. Do you have memories of your mother?

Yes.

OK. And pre-war memories of her?

Brief pre-war memories and beginning of the war memories. Yes.

OK.

Until 1942 when she was deported.

OK. So basically, six years, seven years.

I was seven. Yes.

You were seven. Let's turn to your father's side of the family. His name was Julius?

Yes. Julius.

Julius. And he also was not native to the town that you were born in.

No. I think, as I mentioned, he was born in Dukla or, I'm not sure, really, because that word was often mentioned. Dukla, Rowen, and some other names.

Also in Slovakia?

That was Poland, I think, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but after the war was Poland.

Did he have brothers and sisters?

Two brothers and a sister.

And what were their names, do you know?

I guess, Majerovic, yes.

Yes, but as far as first names.

One was Irving, also. The other one was-- the Jewish name was Mendel.

Mendel.

And the sister's name, I don't know.

OK. Did you ever meet this aunt? The sister, I did not meet because she was in the United States. She married and emigrated to the United States in the early '20s or whatever, well before the War. One brother, the oldest one, I met, he survived the war. He lost all his family. He lived in Belgium.

OK.

The other brother, the youngest one, I did not meet. He lived in France. He was also, well, supposedly he was in a resistance in Lille, and he was shot and killed or shot and died of his wounds, and his family was deported. Him, I did not know. He lived in Lille, and my uncle had a business in Brussels and Antwerp.

I see.

Remind me, the one in Antwerp survived the war.

Yes.

OK. His name was?

Mendel.

Mendel.

Mendel, yes. And the other one was Irving?

Irving, yes. In Lille.

In Lille. He worked for his older brother.

So your father was the middle brother?

Yes.

Did you know your paternal grandparents?

No.

OK. How is it that your father and your mother came to this part of Slovakia?

My father survived World War I, and his parents survived briefly, but what I understand, they died in that Spanish flu in [INAUDIBLE].

1918?

Something like that, yes.

And he went to Vienna to study night, this may have been when he was mobilized even before the war ended. And then, he ended up and traveled a little bit around Austria to try to settle in Germany, in Berlin. Didn't work out, returned to Poland. Had some money or inherited some money and started a business, textile. My other uncles, the oldest one, was also in the Austrian army. On the Italian front, he was captured.

Mendel.

Mendel, and he was highly decorated because he saved some general from-- but he was eventually captured. Sent to

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Sardinia. And after the war, ended up in France and then Belgium. And I guess he brought a youngest brother over. Because we had some relatives in France. I don't know much about them. That's how they ended up in Western Europe. And my father stayed while the group became Poland. And he started a business, a textile business. And eventually, a factory.

It speaks of a very international family.

Sort of, yes.

What was the main language at home that you remember?

I think, my father's first language, I think, was German then Polish, Slovak also, and Yiddish.

OK.

My mother, I think, was Polish and possibly German, but I don't know because I just remember speaking to her Polish or Slovak a little bit which was very similar. But I don't remember having any conversation just as a child.

So when you were growing up, the language you were taught, the main language that you were speaking was--

I think I started with Slovak and was Polish because we lived in Poland in Katowice which was German, Silesia, but a lot of German speaking. It was on the border of Germany before World War II.

So you didn't grow up in Bardejov?

Bardejov? No. I spent some time there, born there, and for whatever reason, there was a spa close by, so maybe that's why they spent the holidays. And then, we spend in Poland, in Katowice.

So actually, your early years are in Katowice?

Yes, Katowice and Krakow because we also had an apartment in Krakow for whatever reason. Because my brother and my sister were supposed to study at the University. So I don't know the reason why my father also had an apartment in Krakow.

Well, that was a question I hadn't come to yet. We talked about your mother's siblings, your father's siblings, and now your siblings. You had a brother and a sister.

Yes.

Older or younger than you?

Older.

Were you the youngest of the family.

Yes. My sister was about 10 years older, my brother is seven or eight. And I was maybe afterthought, accident, whatever you want to call it.

What were their first names?

Helen.

Helen.

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Or Hela. And my brother's name was Henek or Joachim.

Ah, Joachim means Henek.

Or Henek. They called him Henek. I think-- I don't know why they call him Joachim. Maybe that was on his certificate-- birth certificate.

You know, from the little bit that you've told me, I am making a few assumptions. And I am-- I'll field those assumptions to you. Tell me whether I'm right or wrong.

Your family was more assimilated into Gentile culture than most, because Yiddish was not the primary language. Is that true or not really?

Not completely, no. We were not religious at all.

That was my second assumption.

Except my mother observed. She did not want to have ham in our house. So my father would eat it outside, as I would.

But he would? That is, he would?

Oh, yes. And kosher, someone who was very kosher would not eat probably in our house, because things were mixed. So in that respect. Friends, yes. I was never told as a child not to associate with someone and so forth. I don't know about my siblings. But given the atmosphere in Poland, it was mostly they clung to their own.

Now, as regards to language at home, I don't know what language my father spoke to my mother. To my sister it was either Polish or German.

OK. OK. Well, there's also the difference between most of the time from-- this is a wide generalization, but Jews who were from Poland most often-- not always-- spoke Yiddish amongst themselves. Jews who were from Germany, Yiddish was never spoken. It was always German.

So we were in between sort of.

You were in between.

Silesia, Germans. First language of my father was German. And the environment was also conducive to German. And I learned Yiddish actually in Slovakia, after we fled Poland. But at home I don't remember speaking Yiddish. Or maybe I picked up a word, but at the age of four--

Of course.

--you can tell the difference between German and Polish, but not German and Yiddish.

No, no. (LAUGHS) So-- Oh, I got a little bit of a-- a question was in my mind and it flew out, and it has to come back.

I may have interrupted it.

No. No, no, no. You grew up then in-- ah, I know this was. Did your father-- you said he studied in Vienna, is that right?

Supposedly in the war he went to Vienna to study before he was mobilized. And that was already towards the end of the war.

So do you know if he finished a University education?

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No, he did not.

He did not.

He may have started, but he was mobilized, sent to the front, and the war-- wounded after two weeks on the front, and survived the wound. But then by the time he recovered, the war was over.

He did not inherit a business from his parents. He built a business.

No. He built up his business.

And his business was?

Textile factory.

So producing textiles.

Producing textiles, yes.

Do you know what kind of textiles? Whether it was for men's suits or whether it was for household goods?

Men's suits, I believe, mostly. Yeah. And that was in-- the factory was in Bielitz, Bielsko.

Bielsko. Bielitz is the name of the place.

The German-- Bielitz, Bielsko. Bielsko may be the Polish name. Bielitz is the German name. That's not far from Katowice.

Do you remember what the factory looked like?

No. if I was-- I don't remember at all.

Do you remember-- did he name it after his own last name?

No, it was called Wool Products.

V?

Wool Products-- English name.

Wool Products.

Yes.

So in Poland it would have been called Wool Products. Wool Produkcja maybe.

Wool with a V.

With a W.

With a W that will pronounce as a V.

Yes, right.

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OK. Wool Produkcja.

Because I came across some documents that we claimed from Germany and so forth. So that's what I remember. But about the factory, how it looked, where, and what, I don't know.

What about your own early years, those first years, where you lived. Do you have memories of your home? In Katowice vaguely and in KrakÃ³w.

OK. Tell me what's in your mind's eye.

Vaguely, in Katowice, I remember the name, because I found it after the war-- quite a few years after the the ware, the street, building was still there. And I remember just a big apartment. I liked to play soccer, and I know what I played in the apartment. I must have done some damage, broken things. And naturally, I got punished. The punishment I remember. What I broke, I don't.

What was the punishment?

Spanking.

Ay-yay. Ay-yay.

My father rarely spanked me. Apparently I was spanked only once as a kid because I did something. I don't remember. And afterwards, just when he told me not to do it, it was like a military order. It was a large apartment. We had, I had what they call a maid for-- not a Maid. We had maids, cooks, and I had a girl for me as a child.

In KrakÃ³w, I remember, vaguely, also a large apartment. But when you stepped out, to the left were there planty. And the planty was in KrakÃ³w. They demolished the old defensive wall and they planted trees. It was like a ring of trees of parks around KrakÃ³w.

That sounds pretty.

Yes. And I remember that. And somewhere I still have a picture-- a pre-war picture.

Do you remember the street names? In Katowice, it was Moniuszki.

Moniuszki. And in KrakÃ³w it was Sarego.

Sarego. And do you remember the street numbers?

I think it was in KrakÃ³w Sarego 6. And Katowice maybe 12 from Moniuszki [POLISH].

Can we stop for just a second?

Sure.

One of the things that's happening is I'm pickup up--

When I'm rolling to--

[INTERPOSING VOICES].

OK. At this point now, we have switched audio so that channel 1 is the boom microphone. It is on the right side as well as the lavalier on the interviewer. This means that Herman's lavalier is isolated on the left channel audio 2.

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OK. Thank you. So we were talking about your childhood homes, the apartment-- your two apartments.

Yes. In Katowice and KrakÃ³w.

And KrakÃ³w. And the family had maids.

Yes, we had maids, cooks, and--

So there's a number of questions that I usually ask--

I'm picking up the siren.

Yeah. We'll cut.

This is the noon--

Cutting.

OK. So where was I with my questions? Oh, yes. There's a number of questions that I ask, which bear with me if they sound almost self-evident, but there's a reason why I ask them. Did you homes-- do you remember that they had electricity?

Yes.

Did they have indoor plumbing?

Yes.

Did they have-- did you have a telephone?

Yes.

Did you have a car?

Yes, more than one.

More than one. A radio?

Yes.

A cook.

Yes.

OK. To me that says your family was rather well-off.

It was.

OK. OK. So your father was quite successful in his business.

Yes.

Was he prominent in Katowice or in KrakÃ³w? That is, one of the more prominent businessmen in the town.

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In KrakÃ³w less so. Possibly in Katowice. But that I don't know.

Do you know about how many people he employed in the factory?

No. But from their main accountant who survived the war, he told me that he distributed Poland in two sections, and he gave salesmen material to sell, like just salesman. And he had about 300 or 400 salesmen. He told me that my father operated the business as if it was a German general staff, with German discipline and order. Which was also sometimes the children were raised that way-- very strict.

Well, then it was something that sounded familiar to you.

Yes. I inherited some of these traits.

Was that the kind of personality that your father had, of somebody very strict?

He could be strict and very generous. Strict. And jovial, but also strict, yes.

Was he a storyteller?

No.

So when you were telling me about his World War I life, is that something that he shared with you, or you learned from other people?

I learned from him, because he had a wound, and I kept asking him what that was. And he told me how it happened and the consequences of it. So that's how I know something about that experience in World War I.

What about your mother? What kind of a personality did she have?

Apparently, what I know from friends, and my father's friends, and others who knew the family, different personality. More easygoing, more reserved, more of, I would say, more of a Sephardic disposition.

What does that mean to have a Sephardic disposition?

I would call it Mediterranean. Not as-- perhaps I wouldn't say aggressive, but more subtle, more relaxed.

But you don't have these memories yourself?

No. Because I remember just vaguely, you know, from before the war a little bit. During the war when we fled, it's basically fear and so forth. But not much really.

What did he look like, your father? You know, pre-war.

My father was, I would say, solidly built, fair hair, I think green eyes-- green, bluish, or something. He looked more Slavic. My mother, olive complexion, dark hair, dark eyes. And favorite music was Spanish music for whatever reason.

Really?

Yes.

Did your older brother and sister-- were they prominent in your first years, or was it that it was nannies and people who took care of you?

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Before the war, they were not prominent, no. When the war started, then we sort of left the nannies, everything, and it was my brother and sister.

Do you have any earliest memories, even if they're episodic or vague, aside from-- like the one where you're playing soccer in the apartment. Which, if it's big enough, why not? Other memories from being a few years old, something that sticks.

No, I just remember September 1st, when the war started.

You do remember.

We were in Katowice, and my father did not drive. We had a chauffeur and others-- we had, I think, two cars. We had a chauffeur and somebody else always drove the other car. And when the war started, my father knew someone, apparently-- that's what he told me-- he knew an intelligence officer that told him that the Germans already invaded. And we were fleeing from Katowice, abandoning everything.

And I remember crying that I wanted to take my ball with me. And naturally, I was told just to get going, and we fled Katowice towards KrakÃ³w. The whole family abandoned the apartment, and we are fleeing eastwards.

I mean, war was sort of expected. After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, people expected that something will happen. They did not know the timing. So when it happened, unfortunately it happened September 1st.

Well, it happened very fast.

Yes.

One week after they signed it--

Yes.

--Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

So that was-- and we first fled.

You have memories of fleeing?

Yeah. That I have. Because for whatever reason-- I don't remember the cities we were, but apparently, in those cities we were fleeing were also certain segments of the government, and there were frequent bombardments. And I remember often at night being woken up and just run down the stairs to the cellar or whatever, wherever we were. And on certain occasions, when we were on open the road, they said we have to jump out of the car into the ditch-- how to fall, and how to cover-- how to curl up basically, just in case it happens.

So either if a plane is flying low-- if you'll be shot or if they drop a bomb.

Bombs or strafing. You know, the Stukas and so forth.

Well, that's quite a bit for a four-year-old kid.

Yes. And then we are fleeing eastwards, hoping to get to Romania. But when we came to a certain part of Poland, I remember-- I think I remember the name of the village where we were, Kopietkow. And then the Russians came.

In the meantime, one car was abandoned because gasoline was hard to get. I remember sometimes the car being pulled by horses. That was the newer car. I think it was a Buick or something. I don't remember.

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That was going to be my next question. Do you remember the make of the cars?

One was a Chevy, and I think one was a Buick. I don't remember which one it was. But I remember it was a new car, and I was jumping on their seats. Naturally, I was scolded and told to get out of the car. That was not during the war. It was before the war.

That's what seats were for.

I would say I was not very passive. I was curious and lively. Because I remember fighting sometimes with the cook. Because before the war end, the girl whose German name was [GERMAN].

[GERMAN], so it's sort of like, oh, a chambermaid?

No, it was governess. But she was not a professional governess, just someone taking care of a little brat or a kid. Yeah.

And was the chauffeur still around when you were driving away eastwards?

No, he left somewhere along the way. So someone-- who was driving, I don't remember.

Did your father know how to drive?

No, he did not. That hampered him.

He was hampered. So there was some family members or acquaintances who didn't fall, didn't stop somewhere, or stay, or whatever.

Do you remember the number of people who were in the cars or who they were?

They were my family, immediate, which was five.

Five.

There may have been one or two more people that fitted in the car.

OK. So you get to this small village.

Kopietkow. And then the Russians came.

So what was that-- what was your first impression?

Well, I was surprised, and then my father was surprised also. And since there was a small village, he somehow decided to go to LwÃ³w, Lemberg. May have been not far from LwÃ³w.

Which would have been further in the North.

Yeah. It was a city occupied by the Russians, Soviets, whatever. And he found an apartment, and that was difficult, because the city wasn't bombed apparently. I remember an apartment, being there. And in the building, I remember, it was a little bit damaged. It was cold in the apartment.

While there, the car was confiscated by the Soviets. It was taken by-- it was a good car-- by the GPU, the predecessor of the others.

NKVD and KGB.

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NKVD, that's right. And he was given an old car, some old jalopy-- exchanged it. But he knew how the Russians operate, so he wanted to have a piece of paper that he did not steal the car.

The old Jalopy.

Yes. It was an exchange. And what I remember-- I don't Know how much time later-- couldn't have been much later-- it was in the winter-- the apartment some GPU was showing up. Because I remember in uniform in the green caps, coming for my father. That's what he told me--

To arrest him?

To arrest him. Apparently-- that's what he told me-- he stole Russian property. But he showed the papers, and the officer who gave him the papers was fortunately still there. So they did not arrest him or send him to Siberia on the spot. Although when they took him, I was crying and figuring I may not see my dad or that he's being arrested. But apparently that experience was so searing and so fearful that he would be sent to Siberia, that he decided to return to occupied Poland to KrakÃ³w as a Volksdeutsche or Reichsdeutsche. In other words--

An ethnic German.

--an ethnic German. Because the language for him was no problem. I guess my sister may have spoken a little bit, my mother possibly, though my mother did not look typically Aryan. My father, yes. My sister also. I don't remember how I looked. My brother was resembling more my mother, who was more olive skin, dark hair.

Does this mean you had to get false passports for everybody?

It was-- I don't think you needed a passport, you just had to register with German authorities. And there was an assembly point where they would ship you back and so forth.

In Lemberg?

Close to Lemberg, whenever he decided to register as Volksdeutsche. Whether that was Lemberg, or some other, close by to Lemberg, I don't know where the assembly point was.

But your memories then, are they these episodic ones, where you remember this apartment in Lemberg, in LwÃ³w.

Yes, yes.

You remember that it's winter time.

Yes. You remember what the old jalopy looked like.

That, I don't.

OK. You remember the-- so the GPU, which was the secret police.

Yes. In the apartment, yes.

And green hat, was he alone, or were there more people with him?

Well, with the GPU?

Yeah.

At least two others.

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At least two.

Yes.

OK. And you remember them taking your father?

Yes.

And you remember him returning?

That I don't, when he returned. But obviously he returned.

Do you remember leaving Lemberg?

Vaguely, yes, to that assembly point.

OK. And this is kind of interesting, in that whether that assembly point was within the city or further away--

It was outside the city. How far or where exactly, I don't remember.

It was interesting whether it would have been a repatriation point for Volksdeutsche throughout the region.

It could have been.

Throughout that the Soviets are controlling.

Well, throughout a local region, yes. Whatever the Volksdeutsche-- wherever there were enough.

OK. And he was then successful in convincing them that he is a Volksdeutsche?

Well, we were in that area, whatever that was, with buildings inside. And he realized that sooner or later they will discover that he is not what it claims to be. So I remember, in winter, with a sleigh, the immediate family-- mother and so forth-- managed on sleigh to get out from there and take the train to KrakÃ³w. Because he had to escape. Otherwise, he could have been either shot or whatever the concept. But he realized that it won't fly, the claim that we are Volksdeutsche.

But he fled from the Russians. He was more fear-- it's like, from the frying pan into the fire. We took the train. I remember the train was not heated passenger trains. And there were Germans and German officers, because some of them brought us some cover and some warm drinks. I remember I was given a little bit warm drink. I remember German uniforms in the compartment. And then we arrived in KrakÃ³w. The trouble is we arrived in KrakÃ³w at night, or at least after curfew.

So being on a station after curfew and civil, we took a-- I think it was a sleigh, not a [INAUDIBLE], because it was winter snow. And we tried to get away from this station as soon as possible before any police asked for identification. Went to our apartment, came to the apartment, the concierge or the [NON-ENGLISH] was still there. And she almost-- when my father rang the bell she opened-- passed away. My father told her keep quiet, and we managed to get into the building, off the street and so forth. So we were, in a way, safe.

And then and the woman, the concierge, told my father that my cousin or a niece on my mother's side with her little daughter was in the apartment still, but part of the apartment was occupied by two Germans.

Military?

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Apparently they were intelligence.

Oh jeepers. Oh, jeepers.

And they took over the apartment, what they called beschlag [NON-ENGLISH]. They put a sign up. And they were at the front at the entrance. I remember, when you entered the apartment, to the right there was a room. Before the war, I don't remember what it was, but that's what they occupied. Naturally, when we came to the apartment, they being officers of not uniformed or Abwher probably, although that's what my father found out, German intelligence, they must have heard people coming in. Anyway, they did nothing.

We stayed in KrakÃ³w with my father's niece. The apartment was ours--

In your own apartment.

Yeah. But then there were frequent razzias. So my father--

I want to stop you for a second. These two intelligence officers knew your real identities?

They knew that someone came in. They knew the real identity of my cousin, who was in the apartment.

That she was Jewish?

That she was Jewish, yes. When we came in, they must have assumed something. I mean, when five people come in with some luggage, noise, and so forth, and a kid-- maybe I was crying-- they must have heard it.

But it wasn't that-- they were able to, at least from your memory of it, the owner of the apartment has returned home, and they know that this is the owner of the apartment.

No. They did not know. I don't know, but it doesn't seem like. Possibly, they did. They may have inquired. But that I don't know what they knew.

Another question. Your apartment, this was in KrakÃ³w, was it in a central area? Was it in a residential area?

Residential area. It was a second or third building from what I call planty, which was sort over like the ring around KrakÃ³w.

And was it a mixed area ethnically? That is, Jewish, Polish? Or was it mostly a Jewish neighborhood.

I don't know.

OK. Or was it just maybe a well-to-do neighborhood.

It was a well-to-do neighborhood.

Because that's where they would mostly requisition.

It was a well-to-do neighborhood, yes, because it was not far from the castle either. But mixed, I don't know.

I'm also wondering, in that time that you were gone, how many of your neighbors who would have been Jewish would have been taken away. Was there a ghetto already established?

That I don't know.

You don't know.

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That was the beginning of 1940. Winter could have been March, February.

Half a year after the war starts.

Approximately. It was still winter, already 1940, yes-- February, March.

And did the apartment look different to you?

Not really. I did not remember that, vaguely what it looked like before and all that, no.

Did you have your own bedroom in that apartment before?

No, I don't think so. I don't remember, but I don't think I had my own apartment-- or bedroom. No.

So now, when you were there and your cousin is living there with her child?

With her child.

With her child, and it's the five of you. What part of the apartment do you go to? Not the two front rooms.

No, there are other rooms-- a sizable apartment. Where, I don't remember. The layout of the apartment, I don't remember.

Tell us, what is a razzia? What is a razzia?

A razzia was sort of they surround an area and catch all the people. The police surround us and circles a certain area, and they just grab all the people whom they suspect, semi-suspect, than others are let go.

So those things were happening around--

Already KrakÃ³w. So my father decided that it was too dangerous, so he and my brother decided to flee to Slovakia illegally.

And your brother is about 13, 14.

My brother was about 13, 14, yes. I was-- he was-- Yeah, I was 5. He could have been 13, 14. Right.

And his name again was?

Henek.

Henek, Henek, Henek, of course. And Hela is your sister. Yeah, Hela, Henek, Herman. All H.

So--

Hang on a second.

--like a motorcycle.

Let's cut for second.

OK, cutting.

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All right, we're going?

Yes.

OK. So it's just the two of them, your mother, Hela, and you stay behind.

[INAUDIBLE] and stayed behind. Right.

And they want to go to Slovakia because?

To escape the fear of being caught in a razzia.

OK, OK. So was it generally men and older boys who were the ones that were taken away?

Yes, yes.

And the women would be let go?

That I don't know, the woman would be let go, but it was the men, primarily Jewish, but also Poles whom they suspected of-- they had lists all being in their resistance or someone whom they wanted. But the razzias were quite common.

Do you remember your father leaving?

No.

Do you remember him being gone?

Not really.

What do you remember from this time when you were in your KrakÃ³w apartment?

Being restricted, you know? Where we could go, not being outdoors much.

Did you cross paths with the two Nazi intelligence officers?

Not that I remember. I heard them come and go, and maybe they bumped into my brother or someone. But I do not remember them, no.

OK. And about how long were you in this apartment without your father?

A few weeks, I think. Because shortly thereafter, he sent for me. Someone came, picked me up, and then took me also illegally across the border.

Do you remember any of that?

Yes. We were taking side roads, and it was an acquaintance who had his horse-- horses and sleigh. We were going across fields. But that was a time when snow was melting, and in some places this the horses were slipping. So I remember just being scared. And I used to tell my father, don't be afraid.

So your father was with you.

Yeah. At a certain point, he met me.

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He met you, and--

He got me across the border. Although somewhere along the way, there was still a control. And it was a German-- must have been in officer, because he was that big cap-- and he spoke to him, and he let us go through. So that may have been somewhere a point where the fields were impassable. And I ended up in Slovakia. And shortly thereafter, my mother and my sister came across also illegally to Slovakia.

Do you know why it was in such a sequence?

Maybe the person-- the smuggler or whoever it was-- could not take more people. Or whatever the reason was, I don't know.

And do you remember how your brother and sister were behaving at this time? That is, were they taking care of you more? Were they showing fear? Were they--

Fear, I wouldn't say. They were taking care of me, my sister more than my brother. Me and my brother used to have occasional fights.

Even if it's wartime, kids will still have fights.

Well, because I guess he was smoking illegally. My father wouldn't allow it. So, he somewhere nice, occasionally wanted to have a puff. And he wouldn't give me, so I would threaten him with blackmail-- expose him that he was smoking. And that happened not on the beginning of the war, but throughout occasionally. I wanted to have some sweet candy in exchange. I had a sweet tooth-- anything sweet went.

You know, you have to learn. You have to become streetwise very early on.

Oh, yes. I grew up very fast.

Yeah. Do you remember feeling fear from September 1st, '39?

Yes. When there were air raids and that, of course I was afraid. Already, we were told in a car, in case something happens, if there's a noise, stop the car, jump in a ditch, and so forth. And then when we left that German Reichsdeutsche, Volksdeutsche-- assembly point-- I felt some fear. And also, when we arrived during curfew in KrakÃ³w, because I know everybody was afraid. It just transmitted, you know?

And I don't remember-- maybe later or during there, I saw, when we arrived, someone passing by, which was the German Feldpolizei. It was a German uniform with a shield here. I don't remember whether I saw it or that was a dream only-- or a nightmare. And then when we came to the apartment, it was just cold, tired, hungry. So it was a combination. But I did know fear after September 1st. Perhaps more than my share.

Yeah. Yeah. Well, one of the way children experience such events--

I'm fine. I just had to stand up.

That's OK. My feet were falling sleep.

The way children experience such events is completely different. I mean, all can feel fear, but a child is in a certain developmental stage in life. And so the way that that impacts that child is going to be different than the way it will impact somebody who is older, even if that older could be adolescent, or teenager, or so on. It is a very vulnerable stage of course. Yeah, of course.

And for most children it is, was my mother or my father close by. They could be going through most horrible things, but if these secure people are there, it's not as horrible. That's the little that I've been able to glean from other interviews.

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Yeah, that is normal really. Yeah.

So you remember the snow melting and your father taking you through a checkpoint in Slovakia. And then, what's the next scene? What happens to you next?

We were in Slovakia. Somehow we ended up in a small town in a border town for a few days called Medzilaborce.

Medzilaborce. OK.

And then I ended up, for whatever reason, in Bratislava, which is Pressburg. There was a nephew-- my father's nephew-- the brother of who was in the KrakÃ³w apartment. How he got to Bratislava, I don't know? So that's where I ended up.

Separated from the family?

Yes, my mother wasn't. It was my father and my brother.

And you.

And me. Because he would-- that cousin, which was my cousin-- take me places. You know, I remember him vividly. And then, afterwards, we stayed there a short while. I don't know how long. Then we moved to Bardejov, back to my birthplace, where my father had friends from before. And that's where I remember my mother-- seeing my mother again and my sister. Possibly they were in Bratislava, but I don't remember that. And we had an apartment and stayed there.

I wonder how your father paid for all of this, because it was an apartment in Lemberg, it was getting back.

Well, before the war he was very well off. He actually had money in the United States. Because I was told as a child, during the war, in case something happened, doesn't survive, the name of the bank where he had the money.

Do you remember the name of the bank?

Manufacturers Trust Company.

Well, either that was very prescient or extremely lucky, you know, that he knew to transfer money. Because that was a huge probably

Generally, people in those countries knew something may happen. So they wanted to have money outside and jewelry which would fit in the pocket. In case they have to leave everything, they could flee. That was the experience, unfortunately, quite often in that part of Europe. Land you couldn't take, property you couldn't take-- whatever you could carry.

And do you remember such things being, as you ran away, that there was jewelry taken?

No, I don't remember what it was.

But it must have been--

Yeah. Dollars, currency, and jewelry, and so forth.

He had his work cut out for him, didn't he?

Yes.

So you're in Bardejov--

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Right.

--and you have another apartment that you were living in.

Yes. It was a small city. Cost of living was low. Apartments were inexpensive. And we stayed there until 1943.

So that's two years-- no, more than two years.

More than two years.

More than two years.

We were in hiding sometimes. And other times my father-- because my mother, what I was told, went to Bratislava for medical reasons. The local hospital was either not qualified, inadequate, or whatever it is. So she went to Bratislava. And from Bratislava apparently she was deported to Auschwitz. So I saw her-- the last time was in '42-- spring or summer '42.

Do you remember that last time that you saw here?

Vaguely, because I did not know she was leaving or that she won't be back. I had already some friends. I was seven years old, playing with friends, you know. So toys and so forth were my primary concern.

And '42 wasn't too bad. But then towards the end of '42, they started also deporting the Jews. So my father, and sister, and brother went into hiding, sometimes in the forest. And I was given to a family friend who so called supposedly adopted me. They apparently had a child from before. The child died. So I was--

In the place of that child?

Yes. I mean, the building or the house that they lived, in the front of that building was also a Slovak couple, and he was a member of what you would call the Slovak military. And he knew the story. He could have informed. He could have arrested us. He didn't do a thing.

So when you were in Bardejov for those three years, people around you knew you were Jewish.

Yes.

And your father and siblings would go into hiding when there would be some special event? When they were afraid that there could be a razzia or a roundup. A razzia, you could call it a roundup.

I was quite known in this city. Because for whatever reason, at that age, I was a mathematical prodigy supposedly.

Really? OK.

When I started school, I knew multiplication, division in my head. When it came to writing, I did not know how to do it, because I was just learning. So people would stop me-- say this figure, that figure. And it was popular, yes.

So I was sometimes in hiding with them in some cellars. Because some of-- when the roundups happened, it was mostly by the Slovak police. There were no Germans. And some of the policemen informed us beforehand. They informed some families to be careful. Some were very helpful, others not. Others did, supposedly, their duty, you know?

And that's how it was. And one time when they had to take to the forest because it was more serious, so I was given beforehand to that family, where I stayed for a while. And in '43--

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Excuse me, did you assume the identity of their dead child?

Yes. My name was different. My name suddenly became Schoendorf.

Schoendorf.

Yes. First name?

Herman.

Oh, still Herman.

Still Herman. I think it was Herman. Otherwise, I wouldn't know to respond.

OK. Did you have any other aliases during the war?

Yes. What would they be.

Martini and Malecki.

Did this come later?

Later, yes.

Then we'll get to those later.

In fact, after the war I asked my father, should I use my real name or some other names? Which name do I use?

Well, it could get confusing. So your mother, do you know how your parents-- how your parents-- how your father found out your mother was deported? Do you know how he got news of it?

No, that I don't know. I guess he was in contact with some people in Bratislava, maybe with my mother through letters, possibly telephone. But I found out much later, because I kept asking about my mother. And then, after a while, I stopped asking. I realized something happened.

I did not know about deported. Maybe the term deportation I knew, but I did not know about Auschwitz and so forth. That I found out a little bit later when some escapees from our Auschwitz came through our city. There were some Polish Jews who escaped, and they managed to get across the border, came to the city, and we helped them.

And they knew who your mother was?

They did not know, but we knew about Auschwitz by then already.

I see.

That it was. And people were still thinking, some of the Jews, that they were being deported to assembly point-- labor camps. Because the correspondence, the cards said they were sending back were lies basically. That was still in '42 I think.

You got some of those cards from your mother?

We did not, but our acquaintances did.

OK. The kind of cards that would say--

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That they were working and so forth. And my father told the people, don't believe it. And hide-- run whatever you can, but don't believe these stories. And some people still said, well, it may not be so bad. Because the facts of what was happening were not known. It slowly started seeping through into Slovakia. Into Hungary, among the Hungarian Jews, they did not believe it until it finally happened.

And what were your sister and brother doing during this time? Those three years that you're in--

We had various-- we had to make a living. My father was buying condiments by the pound or by the kilo, and making small packages out of it, and selling it. Then also packaging candies from volume to smaller things, selling it. And also, I remember, there was apparently, making trench coats or something like that-- anything to make a living to pay the bills.

And also, there was a dentist whose son was in the United States. And he was selling the money we had here at a discount with this guy. This guy was good enough to pay something, because he did not know if the money will be transferred somehow to his son. But it was transferred--

So in other words, he was taking-- your father had dollars.

Yes, in the bank. He was issuing checks or whatever it is.

So that the son in the United States could benefit from those dollars--

Yes.

--and your father--

And the son's father was paying us in Slovak crowns at a discount. He was selling, you might say, $1 at $0.70. As the war progressed, $0.60, $0.50. But something he was getting-- he was using it. I don't know how much it was. But I remember the dentist, because he survived the war, and he did some of my dental work. And that's how much of the money was spent.

Then in '43, my father did not know that my brother was trying to acquire weapons with some of his friends for the partisans.

Your brother was then 15, 16?

15, 16, yes.

That's about the age that a kid wants to get back at-- he wants to fight against those who are--

Yeah. I assume. What the motive was, I don't know. But what happened, there were several friends, they had a pistol-- yeah, it was pistol, not a revolver-- and they removed the magazine from the handle. The only thing is a bullet was stuck in the pistol. They did not know it, and one fellow aimed just toyfully at someone, pulled the trigger, and he shot him-- wounded him in his stomach.

Naturally, they called a doctor and so forth. The doctor said, he has to go to the hospital. It was a stomach wound. In the hospital, they tried to pretend that it was appendectomy. It worked for a short period. But in those days you kept someone in the hospital a longer period, and somehow it came out. Maybe there were also some German soldiers recovering or recuperating, but it came out that this was not an appendectomy, that it was a bullet wound.

Therefore, where did the bullet come from?

Where did the bullet come from. It pointed to my brother, and maybe someone else, and to my father. So suddenly, even

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on the radio or in the newspapers-- Slovak newspapers-- appeared-- I somehow lost the article from the paper-- that terrorism, arming, and so forth. So we had to flee to Hungary on very short notice. It was winter. I still have somewhere a picture of me and my brother just before leaving. And I see the snow around, so I know it was winter.

And we fled to Hungary.

How?

Illegally, across the border.

By foot?

We fled to another city--

By car? By?

By car up to another city, and from there by sleigh to the border, till a smuggler took us-- the whole family-- over. I remember it was nighttime crossing the border. Snow was deep, and I was tired. I wanted to fall asleep. They wouldn't let me.

Made it to Hungary, a city called Satoraljaujhely. I don't know what he English term-- there is such a city. And there was a Jewish community. We stayed there aw few days I think. Then we went to Budapest.

Let me interrupt just for a second--

Actually, if I can interrupt you, I'm getting a squeaking noise that's--

From outside?

All right.

Am I connected? Yeah.

What was I-- was there a large Jewish community in Slovakia during those three years that you were living?

Yes. Especially in that city there was a sizable Jewish community. And that city is quite historic, because it's on the entry to the Dukla Pass, which over centuries was a strategic passage. So there was a sizable Jewish-- proportionately, yes.

So were there dangers of people being taken away while you were there?

Yes.

All right. So those things were part of daily reality.

Yes.

And that's why your father, and brother, and sister would sometimes hide, and you were then given up to someone.

I would hide if it was in the city in some cellar. But otherwise, it was more serious. When they took to the forests or something, then I was left with some family. And then when the situation became serious, that's when a friend of my father's family, so-called, adopted. I was his long lost son.

Did your father's demeanor change from someone being very strict from your early years, or did it become more strict? I

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mean, he's now the only parent, and he has three children he needs to take care of.

I think he became less strict.

Less strict.

Yes. I mean, other preoccupations probably predominated. Survival, and not how I put my clothing or shoes when I went to bed, that they were proper.

But that had been the case before.

Before, yes.

OK. And what about your brother and sister? Did they then become-- in the early years, it was the [NON-ENGLISH]. It was the young girl who took care of you.

Yes.

What about now when you're in--

They're my sisters. My mother was absent, so my sister was taking care of me a little bit more. And my brother. But my sister, she was a big sister. She was--

She wasn't somebody who was bribable or blackmail-- you know.

No, no.

She didn't want to have a smoke.

She didn't smoke as far as I know.

All right. So the four of you then are the ones-- you have to leave fast because of your brother's--

[NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] or stomach wound-- bullet wound.

Who had that bullet wound by the way? Who got the bullet wound?

The fellow's name was Biernbaum.

Biernbaum.

The irony is there were two-- it my brother, him, and there were two others I believe. None of them survived except the guy who had the bullet wound, through various things, you know? That's the irony.

There are ironies.

Or fate or whatever.

These were all then Jewish boy.

Yes.

OK. So you're in Hungary. You're in a small town where there's a sizable Jewish community. You stay for a little bit, and then you go to Budapest.

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Yes.

And what do you find in Budapest.

In Budapest we are registered as Polish. As Poles. So we changed names to Malecki. And the Hungarian government historically had good relationship with Poles, with Poland. So they gave us-- there was a Polish committee, and my father managed to get papers from them that we were Aryans, not Jewish. I mean, some of them may have known, but they were quite helpful, because they were also running from the Germans.

And because we were refugees from Poland, for whatever reason, the Hungarian government was giving us a certain financial support. And we stayed in Budapest till about the summer of '44.

Which is quite long after Germany marches in, because they marched in March.

When they marched in, in March or April, then they had the list of the Poles from the government. And then we realized that our time is up. So we fled back-- that was about April-- to Slovakia.

Same place, same town?

From Budapest.

OK. But to the same town back to Slovak?

Back to Bardejov, yes.

To Bardejov.

Yeah. We fled across-- illegally again-- the border. And we lived in not-- at first we stayed in Budapest for a short period, then we lived outside Budapest in the suburb.

About how long were you in Budapest-- I mean in Hungary?

Till about April.

From what time?

From the winter-- that could have been November or December. I don't remember when we went, but it was already severe, because there was snow. So it could have been--

So it was the fall of 1943 to the winter of '44.

No, to April.

So about half a year, one could say.

Roughly from December to April. Four or five months, yes. And we fled back to Bardejov. And that's '44.

Then, after a few months in Bardejov, the order came that all the Jews and others had to leave Eastern Slovakia, because the front was approaching. So we moved to Bratislava.

[? Just to close to Vienna. ?]

Yes. We stayed in Bratislava from about June also July until we were caught.

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Tell me about the places you lived in Hungary, if you remember them.

First we stayed in Budapest in the pension. I remember the name because there was a street that I lately passed when I saw this. And it was Nador Pension.

Nador Pension.

N-A-D-O-R. And these people did not-- when we told them the stories of deportation, they did not believe that it could happen to them, to the Hungarian Jews. They were sort of not better, but it's not going to happen to them. Denial of reality-- unpleasant reality. And then we stayed there for a while. Then we moved out of the city to a suburb called [PLACE NAME]. And that's when we are living with the Germans-- the German units came to Hungary.

Do you remember seeing them?

No. And that's when we fled back to Bardejov. From Bardejov, later on in July or so, to Bratislava. Bratislava, we lived, and then we knew the war is coming. It was after the invasion. It was also after the plot on Hitler, which unfortunately did not succeed. And we managed to get phony paper-- fake papers.

Did you hear the news about the phony plot-- not the phony plot, the real plot on Hitler, but that it was a failed plot.

Yes.

You heard that?

We heard the first the invasion, June. Which is now coming up.

OK, D-Day.

D-Day.

Tomorrow.

Yes. And that was good news, positive news. And we knew the Russian front is moving forward.

So I wonder how you found out these things.

BBC. When we were in Slovakia, between '41 and '43, we had a family. We took out a room or two rooms. The name was Szada. One of the apartments, brother-in-law I think, he belonged to that Slovak-- the black uniforms. That was a guard. He knew who we were. Same story-- he could have arrested us. He protected-- he did not protect us, but he did not arrest us.

He had a radio, and we listened to his radio to BBC. He must have known that someone was using it. When my brother-- with his fantastic memory, and he could sort of recite verbatim things-- when he was listening, I was the one outside watching that the police-- there were no Germans yet-- come by [INAUDIBLE]. It was forbidden, you know?

So we had this signal. I wouldn't throw pebbles on the window. I would just throw the little rubber ball. I was the--

The watch.

The watchman on whom depended so much. So that's how we heard news. And in Bratislava, later on, there were people who had access to--

Radios.

--radios. illegally and so forth. So it was known not instantly, but within a reasonable time.

It's interesting to know that. It's interesting to know, how does such information in wartime, in territories that the normal information channels would never have publicized this, how you find out.

That was from BBC.

The BBC. OK.

I remember occasionally hearing the bells from Big Ben. Because sometimes I stayed a little bit to listen. And in Bratislava we managed to get-- there were various phony papers from neutral countries. But the good quality and from countries which were, let's say favorably disposed, like Argentina, the identity, the passports were difficult and expensive to get. My father managed to get those and again a new identity. Except it wasn't Herman, it was Harry Martini.

So now you're Harry Martini.

And Argentina. Not from Buenos Aires, just in case somebody knows or was in some things. So it was on the city Rawson, in Central Argentina on the Atlantic. It's on the map. A decent size. Not a big city, but a decent size.

Did you ever go there?

To Rawson, no. But in Argentina, a few times, yes.

To see these places that you were from, you know? To Rawson, it was down almost North of Patagonia. So I decided not to [? use. ?]

So it was a Martini family, or were you all different last names?

No, the same. Martini family.

All right. And what was your father's fake name?

That I don't know.

Or your sisters or your brothers?

I don't know. But you were Harry Martin.

I just knew Harry Martini.

So you were Schoendorf.

That was before. Before Martini was Malecki in Poland, in Hungary. And then, for a while, Schoendorf.

I have to say, I'm impressed with your father, that he managed that.

Because of him and because his advice and his urging, many people survived. He saw them hide. And later on, he said, fight. If you can get a weapon, a pitchfork, a knife, resist.

Quite a guy. I mean, but truly. When you think of it, he had his wits about him.

Yes. That's how-- wits and luck. Because during bombing and so forth. And that's not the end. So we have these papers.

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And then during the holiday Jewish High Holy Days--

September.

--we were planning to go to Hungary.

And why would that have been?

To flee closer to the Russian front and use some phony identities. But a friend of his show had parents lost but several siblings, he asked them if he could go with a smuggler the night before. And he figured, yes, go. Because we did not expect any major razzia. Germans were in Bratislava.

And the following night, late at night, early in the morning, knocks at the door-- Slovak police. A soldier in uniform, police-- there was about three of them, maybe four, came to the apartment. Identity papers.

So you give them--

So we show the papers, you know. And we had a guest, a friend or someone staying. He was not-- he didn't have the papers. He had some other papers. And we showed them.

So the police checked it and so forth, excused themselves, and left. Shortly thereafter-- we didn't go back to bed yet, we're all exciting-- they come back with a man in a long leather coat-- brown leather coat. Not a big man, but a man. He looks at the papers and confiscated them. I remember my father telling me, he said [GERMAN]-- I know it already. He confiscated the passports and told us to come with him.

And they took us to what was then a school. I remember that building. And in the school there were already other families-- Jewish families. And in the morning, from that school and other places, they marched us to what in Bratislava was called a small train station. There was a major train station. This was a small train station, I guess for freight. And then we were assembled there.

And I remember some of the Germans patrolling with submachine guns. And one of the guys patrolling was a rather dark-haired man. His name was Brunner-- the infamous Brunner. Someone pointed out to him, and it was then others. We were sitting on the ground outside. And in the evening, we are put on trains to an assembly point in Slovakia where there was a bigger [INAUDIBLE]. It was a concentration camp but not a death camp.

I don't remember whether it was Sered or NovÃ¡ky, one of the two. There were big buildings-- not big buildings, many buildings. It may have been a former army base or whatever.

Barracks and things?

Barracks, yes. They were put in so many. Then we realized that the transports are going to Auschwitz.

Did anybody say Auschwitz?

No.

Did anybody tell you-- did the official-- did they tell you, we're taking you here or there.

No. Nobody said. No information. We just knew, because some of the trains and others they heard from before where those were going. That was in '44, I think, October, during the Jewish High Hold Days. September or October.

Can I interrupt for a second? I'd like to ask-- I was not aware of Brunner. Tell us who he is.

Brunner was a high official in the Gestapo, and he survived the war. Eventually, through various identities, ended up in

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Syria.

No kidding.

Egypt first, possibly, but in Syria. The Israeli intelligence wanted to get hold of him or assassinate him. They were not successful. Eventually, he passed away. He was unlike Eichmann. He was a high officer.

And so he was known already at the time.

Some people knew already of him apparently, yes.

What was his first name? Do you remember?

I think it was Adolf Brunner. I'm not sure. B-R-U, Double N, E-R.

And did he have Gestapo coat?

Yes, the uniform. And I think, SD--

On his cuffs.

On his cuff, and maybe another sign. And maybe SS here, but he was [INAUDIBLE]. And in that camp we realized, Sered or NovÃ¡ky, not sure which one it was, we knew where the transports were going. But at that time there was partisan activity in Slovakia. So the trains, instead of taking the direct route to Poland, they bypassed. They went through Bratislava, Austria, and then up. So it was safer. Because some of the trains were occasionally attacked by the partisans, and some were liberated-- stopped and so forth.

Since we knew where we are going and what the situation was in Auschwitz, my father decided that we have to escape. Whatever it takes. Whether to the door, and then cannot open the doors, through the window, even if the window is barred. Because for me it would have been certain death and for others.

So we managed to procure a metal saw.

How?

Somehow. That I don't know-- in the camp. And, I think, a screwdriver. And that metal saw was sewn into my winter overcoat and the screwdriver. So I was the one who carried the tools. And as soon as the trains were loaded-- the freight trains-- almost 100 people-- and some of this Slovak train guards, or whatever you call it, they said, discreetly, that's where it's going, to Poland, maybe not Auschwitz.

So that was my father, sister, brother, me, and future brother-in-law.

Your sister's boyfriend.

Yes. Boyfriend. They were not married. He was also in the apartment, and he also had an Argentine passport. So we were all taken together from that point on. Trains were loaded. And as soon as they started moving, we tried to get to the door so that-- didn't tell anybody, just those who were in on it.

And there were two or more people who also were in on it. Should not spread, and then someone betray or scream.

So six or seven people knew that during this trip you were going to try and escape.

Yes. There was four, five-- seven, possibly eight. There were other people in the car, in the freight car. It was my future brother-in-law's sister, and her husband, and their son who was my age. And there was someone else later on, a friend

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from Bratislava, his uncle was in that carriage also.

That man was a giant of a man. I remember, as a kid, we used to look up. He may have been 6'6"-- huge. But he had problems walking. We didn't tell anybody. Once in the car, we tried to get to the door.

And about how many people were in that care.

About almost 100. It was squeezed in.

Would it be about as large as your apartment?

It was a much narrower.

Much narrower.

The car, I think in Jerusalem in the museum or somewhere, there is a railroad car.

We have that in Washington at the museum.

It was a car like that. So we tried to get a place by the door so that eventually we could do what we needed. And the train started going. And then people, as they realized what we want to do, some where afraid. Some tried even to prevent us, because they'll be punished and so forth. And others were afraid.

My brother-in-law's sister and brother-in-law, they were afraid. So they asked my father to take care of the child. He said, he cannot. The other man, an acquaintance whom we knew, that giant, he realized what's happening. But he realized he would not jump.

There was another-- my brother-in-law's brother was dead. His name was Kot-- K-O-T. And we worked out a sequence, who will jump first. And you had to be careful not to hit a power pole.

First, tell me, why was it that you were chosen as the person--

Because the least likely to be maybe searched.

OK, OK.

Although they did not search us. I did not notice as we are mounting. And we knew that the last compartment, the German soldiers, it was a passenger car.

In which compartment-- which of those cattle cars were you in? In the middle, towards the end, towards the beginning?

I would say in the middle. Although that's guessing.

No. How would you know. They wouldn't--

Not close to the car, because, as the story continues--

OK, please.

And then past a certain point, we tried the door. Someone tried to open. We worked out the sequence, who was going to jump first, to be careful with a post, with the power pole. And once you're down-- fortunately the night was fairly dark. stay down, just in case a guard is watching.

Someone tried the door, and luckily the hook, the latch was closed, but it could be lifted. It wasn't padlocked. So that

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was a tremendous relief.

You didn't have to saw anything.

Didn't have to saw. The windows were not barred, so as the worst case would have been difficult to jump through the little window. Door was opened, and other people were not screaming, but they were getting nervous that they'll be punished.

And the escape began. The first one who jumped was my brother in law's brother, his sister's brother. Now let's put it that way. That I just found out much later. He timed it badly, apparently, and he hit a pole. So the crash of the bones, instantly killed, was heard in that compartment. That frightened the others. But then it again began because the train was moving, and we wanted to jump in Slovakia, where we knew some smugglers that will get us to Hungary.

And then I think the sequence was my brother-in-law-- I call him brother-in-law-- my brother, me, my father, my sister, and two or three others. One was-- the name, I remember, was Ernberg. He was an attorney, Polish Jew. Another one was Reich, a dentist. And there could have been another person.

And this would have been something that had been discussed while they're already on the train.

Before the train.

Before the train.

It was organized before we mounted the train, yes.

Got it, OK.

So you're the only child, really.

I am the only child. So my brother-in-law jumps. My brother jumps. My turn comes to jump, I get to the door, I'm scared. I'm frightened. I told my father, talking in Polish--

Say it to me in Polish.

[POLISH]. So my father said, jump. I said, I'm afraid. So he said, jump or I'll leave you. I said, leave me. You save yourself, you leave me. And then I said, maybe you'll find a rucksack or something, put me in, throw me out. He was physically quite strong. So my coat was buttoned up, winter coat. He grabbed me by the collar and bent and threw me away from the tracks.

And the thing was once you land, stay down. What I remember seeing and hearing the last car passing with lights on and the Germans carousing because there were noises. Luckily no guard. And after that, my father jumped. Then my sister, then Ernberg, Reich, and maybe someone else. That eighth person somehow is vague.

And when the train passed, my father calls me, Herman, I say, "Tak?" He says, get up and come to me. Tried to get up. I couldn't. My arm was broken and I had a head injury. Some of my friends and others claim your head injury hasn't healed properly.

So mean.

Anyway, I couldn't get up. So he comes to me, lifts me. What is it, he says. My arm is hurting, my left arm. So then we assemble and we try to get away from the tracks as fast as we can because first, the escape could have been discovered and could have sent patrols. And secondly, it was partisan activity, so there could be patrols on along the tracks anyway. So we moved away.

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But by the time between when my brother jumped and I was supposed to jump, a few minutes passed. A few minutes meant a few kilometers.

OK. I'm getting a noise. Something like--

OK, go ahead.

And the mistake, afterthought, we assemble.

But your brother is there.

My brother and brother-in-law are not dead. It was several kilometers. We were afraid. We failed to make the provision if we get separated, where to meet what smugglers. We did not meet, so we figured they'll make it somehow. We cannot stay where we are. We have to move.

On the fields I could not walk. Sometimes we thought we saw something so we had to crawl. I could not sort out. Mr. Ernberg was strong physically. I was on his back. He would crawl, and I just held on to him with my right hand. And then we walked. I was in terrible pain because of the arm, and you know, over fields, it's not a smooth walk.

Then we come to a river. I think the name was Wach. I'm not sure what river. And there is a bridge, a railroad bridge. And a train passed. And usually those were patrolled or guarded. So we figure if it's guarded, we somehow have to get across the river. Swimming is not an option. First, the current. Not everybody. And then with wet clothes, where do you go?

Someone reconnoitered, and fortunately, the bridge was unguarded. It may not have been that important a bridge. So we cross the bridge. And daybreak starts, so you have roosters and dogs barking. Fortunately, we made it to the smuggler's house.

So was the jumping timed so that you would be in a location, a particular location?

Yes, close to the border.

Oh, I see. It wasn't like a random now we have an opportunity and now we jump.

It was we knew more or less how the train was going, what the trains were. That was close to the Hungarian border, or still in Slovakia near Pezinok.

So at that point, it is your father, yourself, your sister, and those two.

Two, at least two, maybe a third person.

And the giant of the man stayed on the train.

Stayed on the train. And so did my brother-in-law, sister, and brother-in-law and the kid, and other people who saw the door open. Of course, if they jump, where do they go? Or you know, fear.

Fear. Of course.

So we did not meet. We enter the smuggler's house. He said I'll keep you. So there were four of us plus two or three. No, three, Father, sister, me, Ernberg, Reich, and maybe someone else because my brother and brother-in-law, they met up. That we found out after the war.

So you didn't see them then.

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No. That was the last we saw my brother.

Ever?

Yes, because they were caught later on again. That was an interesting story how they were caught.

Tell me. Before you would continue with your story, what happened to him?

They met together, and they managed to cross the border into Hungary. And during the day they hid in some bushes pretty well. Then whatever reason, a gypsy came by and started playing around. And my brother-in-law spoke Hungarian, so he told him, go away. We had a good night's drinking bout. Just go away. He was like a pest.

So my brother-in-law had some money, Hungarian money, pengoe, and he gave him what was a big denomination. The guy took it and my brother-in-law asked him to bring back change. He never brought back change. Instead, he brought back Hungarian police. He got reward for the informing. The police arrested them, ask them to drop their pants. They did not discover that they were Jewish.

They did not?

Not, for whatever reason. And they were interned and then handed over-- I'm not sure-- to some Germans and then sent to Auschwitz again. They arrived in Auschwitz. Then the whole thing, evacuation. When the Russians came, they were evacuated to, I think, Buchenwald or whatever it is, then ended up in Austria in the summer of '45, before that. I'm not sure when they ended up in Gusen, which is near Linz. And then they were there.

The two of them, working in tunnels, drilling tunnels. They were getting at the end of their strength. My brother lasted a few more days. I wouldn't have made it physically. My brother was in a little bit better shape. And then my brother told him-- that was in May sometimes--

Well, it would have been the first days because afterwards was liberation.

In May, part of May sometimes, the Red Cross was going to take him to Switzerland in a couple of days. My brother-in-law envied him. As it turned out, instead of taking to him to Switzerland-- wasn't the Red Cross-- they took him to some forest clearing and shot him and others. That was about three or four days before May 8. So we did not see my brother. That we found out from my brother-in-law because he survived.

Oh my goodness.

Us, we ended up in that smuggler's hut. And then he said, I cannot arrange for all of you to go. So I'll have to break up the group. My father said, take us first. The boy has a broken-- not compounded, but broken arm, and so [INAUDIBLE] in bad shape. I said, OK. My father, my sister, and me he'll take first. And the others he'll take the following night to his contact that will get us across the border.

He took us and to a certain point. And someone else picked us up and left us in some place, in a vineyard that was already picked in melons. That was at night. And he said you wait here. A fellow from Hungarian side will come and pick you up.

We wait and wait. We wonder if he'll ever show up. And the question was, if we leave, where do we go? What's the option? So we waited, waited. Finally he showed up. He took us to his house. And he said, I cannot take all of you. Same story. My father said take him-- me-- first because I'm in the worst shape. And he gave him an address in Budapest, friends or acquaintances, and he will pay you.

And the smuggler said, OK, I'll take him-- me. He said, play that you're mute in case people talk to you. You are mute. You cannot talk. So we are on a train to Budapest. It so happened was a heavy raid. Heavy raids on Budapest in those days. It was a hot day. We left in the morning, came to Budapest in the evening. That guy didn't give me any food or

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any drink.

Hang on a second. You were arrested during the high holy days. So September, October.

'44.

'44 in Bratislava. Then you're taken to a sort of like a holding camp. That's where you see Brunner. Then eventually you're put on that train from which you escape. About what time? Is that still October?

Yeah, three days in that. Still October, I would say.

Still October. So when you are now in Hungary at the smuggler's house, it's still like a hot October day.

Yes.

All right. So it's sort of like an Indian summer day.

Could be, yes.

OK. So we're talking about that kind of time of year. And he had not fed you.

Not fed me, not given me drinks. Then he took me to the family and the family paid him off. And a few days later, my father and my sister came. I don't know how. By train, naturally, with him, you know. But their story how they made it to Budapest, I don't know.

In Budapest, in my condition, my father tries to get a doctor, take me to a hospital to see what is what. First the Jewish hospital, they're full. Other hospitals are full. They would not take me. I remember the hallways being with people wounded through the heavy bombing.

So then he decides to take me to a German military hospital.

Oh my goodness. And what is his logic for doing that?

The story is, we are escapees from Ukraine, from the Russians.

So you're ethnic Germans again.

No. We are Ukrainians.

You're Ukrainians.

Fleeing the Russians. Not the Russians, Ukrainians fleeing the Russians. And my arm was damaged by debris, falling debris. My father's language is German, first language, no problem, because I remember the hospital was German soldiers, German guards in front, German soldiers inside. But it was originally a German hospital, but it's German, all German uniforms.

So I remember the doctor. He spoke to the doctor. I don't remember the doctor's face, but he treated me so gently, I am sure. In fact, I think I may have told my father, I am sure that he did not believe the story. Doctor could tell whether something fell on the arm and broke it like that. He treated me gently. My arm was died to my body in something. And that was it. My arm was saved.

We left that place. And then we took an apartment in a Jewish section. That's where we could get. It turned out to be Jewish section. It was Ukrainians. To get food you had to have coupons. So we registered that. But we knew that area where we lived, as it turned out, was a large-- if not solely Jewish, a close to a largely Jewish section. Turns out to be

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today that it is that part of the synagogue and so forth.

Then we also took another apartment, a room, mind you, outside.

Outside Budapest.

No, in Budapest. I remember the address and so forth. It was on Vag utca, which abuts Vaci ut, which is Vaci ut. Ut is a avenue, utca is street. In that place we took her room. The girl, the woman who sublet us the room, she was of mixed parents, and her boyfriend was a member of the Hungarian Nazi militia.

The Arrow Cross?

Arrow Cross, Nylas. And we stayed there. They asked were we registered with the police? We said yes. Look, we have stamps and so forth. That was an address nobody knew except some friends, very close friends. Your address, that's where we got the food stamps to get the coupon. And we waited, pretending. That was already starting, I think, November because not far off was Christmas time.

And then we said we'll conduct the services. In that building was also a friend of ours, or close by. He came by and he said, we'll conduct the Christmas services, which we did. Christmas dinner was prepared. But Christmas dinner, I remember noises, bombs, Russians, first Russian air raid. Maybe not the first, but a Russian air raid on Budapest.

The next day, Christmas day, we went, my father. It was a clear day. We walked towards the center. And you know, you already could see damage. Not heavy damage like after American or English bombs that were heavy blockbusters. These were lighter bombs. But already there was nervousness.

Then after a few nights, as the bombing and shelling increased, we decided to go spend time in the cellar, bring a mattress and spend time in the cellar, as other occupants were doing the same thing. Next to us, or maybe one mattress over, was another Hungarian. He was also a member of the Arrow Cross, or [NON-ENGLISH] in the party. He had a big pistol and he said, if I would know someone who is Jewish, I would kill him right here.

And we were almost next to him. We were Ukrainians, you know. And we had some food. And we stayed in the basement from about December 27 till February 15. Sorry, till January 15.

But still, that's a long time.

Because Budapest-- the fight for Budapest was long and bloody. Street by street, sometimes house to house, sometimes cellar to cellar. An acquaintance of ours-- to sidetrack the story-- she was in a cellar where they heard from the other cellar people hitting and banging. So they helped to break through. Russian soldiers came through from cellar to cellar. And what we heard another story, one Russian soldier supposedly saw a chess board. He delayed and played chess.

In other cases, there were Germans came to the [? side ?] and Russian side was firing. An acquaintance of ours, he and his wife were sitting next to each other-- no lights in the basement, firing. He was shot and killed, and she not because firing was blind. Anyway, we were in the cellar till that time. There were already some Russian soldiers who came. But my father was afraid to say anything because he did not know whether these were Germans or Hungarians in disguise or others. So they came.

And then a few days later, more front line soldiers who came. There weren't that many Germans defending Budapest. It was mostly Hungarians defending Budapest. Were in Pest, not Buda. And then after a few more days, more Russians came. So when he felt safe, he went out. And when there was still fighting going on, and after a while, when Budapest was occupied there was pillage and rape.

So my father protected my sister by hiding her in a building. I remember screams, not shots, but screams, women being raped or people being robbed or whatever. And then it stopped. By then, I think much of Pest was liberated. And across the street there was like a yard. Not a junkyard, a mechanical yard. They were Russians. So I used to go across the street

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because I saw them working, and ask, beg for bread.

They had that Russian bread. And I remember asking them, [RUSSIAN]. And usually they gave me a piece of bread, sometimes a whole loaf, that sourly bread, and a piece of speck, which is lard. Yeah, not fat, not [INAUDIBLE], but heavy lard.

And once I was lucky. The guy had on a carriage even sugar. So I took my cap off and he filled it up with sugar. So I was begging for bread, brought it home. It was quite welcome. And once I remember standing on a street corner.

Were you in the cellar at that point?

At that point, may have been [INAUDIBLE], but we moved up. When it was occupied, we moved up to the apartment because it was warmer. Not warm-- there was no heat, but it was warm. And we are not among other people. There was, I think, maybe toilet was functioning.

Can you hold on just a second? Somewhere here I saw it's 1:29. OK.

OK. I'm rolling.

OK. So before the break, we had come to the point where for you, the war is over. And even the danger from Soviet soldiers seems to be over because you go across the street and you ask them for bread.

Begged for bread.

You begged for bread. And the soldiers sometimes even give you a cap full of sugar and so on. But during the break, you said that there were some episodes that you had left out.

Yes. There was an episode in Budapest. It's cold. I'm standing on the corner of [NON-ENGLISH] and [NON-ENGLISH].

And is this the second time you're there, or the first time that you're there?

The second time, when we are already liberated. And two Russian, well-dressed, seemed like officers, go by. And they have loaves of bread under their arms. I approach them, and I'm polite. I said, could you give me some bread? You have so much? They gave me a loaf. It was still warm. And before I reached home, which was not far, I finished half of it.

Well, I can tell you you're not alone. Just a month ago I interviewed a lady who had to go out and get food for her family in hiding. And amongst that food was raisins. The raisins would be gone by the time she got home. She was hungry. People were hungry. That you got food at all for anybody else is quite achievement in those circumstances.

So do you know the moment of liberation when soldiers-- did they come into the cellar? Did you go out on to the streets, or what happened?

My father went out after the first few. So he was afraid they were in disguise. But when the polite fire-- you might call it rifle fire, not artillery-- moved further down, and he saw more Russians, then he felt at ease. Didn't say who we were because, you know, fronts moved back and forth. But at least we felt a little bit better.

And much later, I think there may not have been any more combat, although in Buda, there was the Resistance. Finally, he met an officer who was highly decorated. I think he was captain or major. Somehow he looked Jewish, or whatever he made somehow.

And we became acquainted with him, he brought us quite a bit of food. He was the sole survivor of a family. And my father asked him. He says, we are not only fighting. I joined the Communist Party because there was pressure. You reach a level. And I'm just fighting for vengeance because my family was destroyed.

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And he was highly decorated because at one point, in some areas-- I don't remember which one-- he suspected that the Germans were planning an offensive. He was in command of an artillery battery. And he opened fire first. And he sort of nipped the attack in the butt after the battle. It was not the big battle, of course, or anything, just one. And my father, he asked-- he said, if I survive, I will not be a Communist or stay in the Soviet Union.

So he asked him for a civilian suit if he could have, just in case everything happened. He said, otherwise I'm staying till the very end. He said I don't know if I survive or not. But in case. My father never heard from him later on.

So he asked your father for a civilian suit.

Yes.

Do you know what part of this Eastern part of Europe he was from?

Poland.

Oh, so he was from Poland.

He was from Poland. He was not Hungarian or Slava. He was from Poland. So his family had perished in Poland.

Yes. And he ended up in Soviet Union. I had a friend in LA similar. He somehow ended up in Soviet Union.

Can we cut the camera for a second?

So you mentioned earlier that-- had you gone to the Swedish Embassy at any time, or had your father gone to the Swedish embassy?

Yes. My father went with me in Budapest to the Swedish Legation, where Wallenberg was.

And this would have been after the war or before?

Late '44 in Budapest when the Germsn were there. We were living as Ukrainians. There was a rumor that they were issuing Swedish passports, turned out to be, after the war, true. But while we were, waiting among other people, there was a rumor that Eichmann is coming. So naturally, the building, all the people waiting, emptied. We never tried again.

You never tried again. Was Wallenberg there?

Wallenberg was in Budapest. That's where he disappeared. Raoul Wallenberg. Well, Wallenberg, and there was Bernadotte also, you know. I have a close friend in Sweden. Once we're walking in Stockholm. He greeted a lady, and I greeted her also. I didn't know her. And then he talked to her briefly and we continued. He asked me, do you know who that was? No. That was Mrs. Bernadotte because he comes from an old Swedish family on his mother's side. There were an Admiral, senators. On his father's side was more commercial.

So when your father had gone there, had you gone there with him?

To the Swedish Legation? Yes, that's what I remember.

Did either of these gentlemen cross your-- did you see them?

No. I did not see either Wallenberg-- I just remembered the name. Especially later on it came so often. And I didn't see Eichmann.

Or Bernadotte.

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No, Bernadotte was, I think, in Sweden then, but to providing--

On the other end. Yeah, OK. I had not been familiar that he had not been at the Legation itself.

No. I think Wallenberg was head of the Legation, possibly. There was an embassy.

So let's go back, then, to a certain sense of security, feeling that the border could change again. But for the time being, you are safe. How does your life, your father's life, your sister's life-- how does it progress? What happens then?

After we liberated, Budapest is liberated, which was, I think, in February or March, we decided to return to Czechoslovakia to see who survived, what's there, and so forth. We came back.

To which town?

To [NON-ENGLISH] from Budapest. Stopped in some places because transport was sort of irregular. Some trains, some trucks, some buggies. Anyway, made it back. And then I was left with my sister, and my father said, I'm returning to Poland to see what's what, who survived, what happened to the factory, what is what.

He returned to Poland, and he looked for the authorities for his factories. And they told them, yes, you can get your factory back, not as an owner, as a manager, and others to manage. And he knew what that meant. Sooner or later he'll be told that he's sabotaging things. He could not say no because it was in the army, and you volunteer.

So he said yes, he'll accept, but he wants to bring his family back with him. He said OK. He found our old chauffeur was alive. He, I think, was Reichsdeutsche or Volksdeutsche or whatever. He had a car, and he managed to get him out of Poland.

The old chauffeur managed to get your father out of Poland.

My father out of Poland. And then he went-- that was May-- April, May. Then he went to Germany looking for survivors. In the interim, my brother-in-law appeared. He was liberated in May. He made it back to Czechoslovakia, skeletal. But he made it back. And he told us about my brother, and then how, after separation from jumping from the train, he told us the story what happened to them.

And my father said, well, maybe there is hope in spite of hope. So he went to Germany looking for his son, for my brother, and for other relatives. Didn't find anybody, and reached the conclusion that probably he's not alive.

By that point, was it pretty sure your mother had not survived?

Oh, yes. From '42, that was almost-- they knew for sure. They just didn't tell me. There was an incident, a small incident before. When the Germans invaded Russia, many German units were passing through Bardejov because that was an entry to the Dukla Pass, and it was a strategic point.

And one day my father received a notice that a German from a certain unit wants to see him.

Between '40 and '43.

This is in '41, before the invasion of Russia shortly, when the German troops were moving through continually. So he went to that village. The unit was already gone. I don't know it was an SS unit or a Panzer unit. And he asked the guy who brought him, well, how did the guy look? He said he was tall with wavy hair. That was a man who worked for my father. And I remember him and remember his name.

He worked for my father. He was a Volksdeutsche. Didn't belong to the Hitlerjugend but was pro-Hitler. Used to wear white socks, which was a notation that they were, you know. And this was the guy. How he found out on my father is

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puzzling. He probably perished. That was one small incident.

Another incident, in Budapest, when the Russians occupied our block-- that was the Army, the front army-- they took most men from the basement who were strong enough, healthy, to carry ammunition to the forward lines. My father took ammunition. The street we were in was abutting-- not abutting the Danube. It was at a 90 degree angle to the Danube. On the other side were Hungarians, mostly Hungarians. And they were shooting. He said he had very close calls, bullets whizzing about his head.

So he said, I survived the war. I'm not going to die carrying ammunition. So he cut himself and put bandages around his head so next time he won't be taken. And there are small incidents during the war, I guess, you know.

But he had luck, as you said.

He had guts and he had luck.

And wits.

Yes.

Yes.

Because as it turned out, had he stayed in Lemburg, had we been shipped to Siberia, the chief accountant who followed us with his family had three children also. He was eventually sent to Siberia, and the whole family survived. And he came back. That's why I heard stories because he made it to New York. And I heard stories from him about my father's business.

Some other stories about my father's business and my mother I heard from his friend and associate in the company, who was in Germany. And he was saved by the German who had a factory-- what's his name?

Schindler?

Schindler. Well, he and his wife were saved by Schindler, although at one time, there was a fire in one of the detention camps where he was. They were taken out, told to sit at a ditch. They pulled the triggers but there were no bullets. Fake execution.

It's a pity that he's not alive, or his wife, but they had fantastic stories. The same thing like I told you I had a cousin, my mother's nephew, probably from her sister. He came to visit us once to Bardejov. That was in '42. And happened to be a razzia. And he was taken, train sent to Auschwitz.

He and a friend, who was a dentist, managed to escape from Auschwitz, made it to the Polish-- to the Slovak border, and then they were caught, sent back to Auschwitz. And as far as is known, they were the only escapees who were not executed.

That was the first question in one's mind is, of course, becaus--

They were not executed. He survived and his friend both survived. His friend, he was-- for whatever reason, spoke German. My cousin did not speak German. The other spoke German. And so once his wife was caught later on, somewhere else in Poland or whatever, sent to Auschwitz. Was a strikingly beautiful young woman, but she held a child by the hand. He could not rescue her.

For whatever reason, the German-- he worked as a doctor-- they sort of liked him, tolerated him, whatever, until he escaped. And he also survived the war, ended up in Israel.

So are the stories that you then grew up with, these post-war stories?

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Yes. Some of the stories I just heard post-war. And my cousin with a little child in Krakow, her husband managed-- they were in Breslau in Germany, he and his father. And they escaped from Breslau because fellow Germans told them that the Gestapo was looking for them.

So they made it to Poland. He married my cousin. But when the war started, he was moblized, captured by the Russians, sent to a camp near the Finnish border somewhere.

OK. In Karelia.

Yes, in Karelia. And when the war started, they were marched-- they literally marched from Karelia to Uzbekistan. He said the soldiers walked with us. If someone fell by the side, was left. No torture, no punishment. From village to village we made it. Officers sometimes rode horses. He spent their war years in Tashkent. working in the mines.

After the war where there was repatriation, he made it back. He realized nobody survived. He found us, he stayed with us, and then he had a sister, Uzbekistan. Surviving relative. So he went to Chile. But before he reached Chile, his sister passed away. So he settled in Chile, lived there. I visited him. He visited here. He passed away some years ago.

And you mentioned that medical student. We had a friend. Similar thing. It was architectural student. So the Soviets sent him to Kazakhstan or somewhere there. And he knew sooner or later he'll make a mistake. So once we're close to the Iranian border, he managed to slip over to Iran.

Well, there was an exodus that was allowed.

No, he was not allowed. He escaped.

He escaped. OK.

Border was not so well guarded because he knew that life was impossible. In Iran he eventually joined the army of Anders, sent to South Africa. In South Africa he ended up in a brawl in a bar because something. So he missed the boat. The boat was torpedoed, no survivors.

Oh my goodness.

Became an architect in LA. That's how we found out later on his story. Very nice guy.

Oh my goodness.

So you have these disparate incidents outside. His whole family perished, naturally. He was from Krakow.

And you know, you can't make this up.

No. Truth is stranger than fiction. The other story-- because I used to like to listen to these stories, even after the war. And then you formulate your own opinion of things, Poles being often criticized. True. But I asked some people, if you and your family were to be shot for harboring a stranger, would you do it?

No. But to accuse someone, there were anti-Semites, naturally. But there were people who risked their lives. So the officers in our apartment in Krakow, they could have arrested us. Even had they shot us, they wouldn't have faced court martial.

Of course not. Of course not.

The same thing in Slovakia. People who wore the uniform of the nationalists, they were fascists, fascistica. If they knew what that is, could have arrested us, informed on us. So you know, there is no black-- I mean, there are some black

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characters, some white characters, naturally. But sometimes it's difficult.

There's a lot of shades of gray.

Yeah. Whereas in Hungary, many people, they would not help their fellow co-religionist, even in '43, until the deportations started. When [INAUDIBLE] was in Budapest, we survived and made money on the black market.

How did you make money on the black market?

You bought dollars, you sold dollars. And I was often making the calculation because I was faster.

And you were good in math.

Yes.

You bought dollars on the black market?

Yeah, it was black market then, free market. And then you sold it.

This is after the Russians.

After occupation of Buda, yeah.

But man, that's clever.

So actually, even during the war, the dollar. But there was not an open market. Some people changed it because it was like currency, if you survived, you left someone, if you gave someone something, they would do something for you.

So in other words $1.00, the US currency, was one that was stronger than--

Anything else. The Deutschmark would have been the currency. In Czechoslovakia they had the koruna. Hungary they had the pengoe. And other countries, I suppose, similar. But in that part, if you had a dollar-- even after the war, was still--

Aside from the assets your father had had in the United States, by the time the war is over, does he have anything left?

He may have had something. How much, I don't know. Not much, probably.

Do you remember being hungry?

Yes, in Budapest, because I don't know where we got the food in the basement, how we heated it, and what sanitary facilities we used. It was a cellar with a metal door for an emergency exit. But just for such things in case bomb, against bombing. They had these provision cellars against bombs. And blockbuster would have knocked down the whole building.

And about how many people were in that cellar when you were there?

The building was four or five stories, an and floor, I think it had two or three apartments. The cellar was full.

Would you say 50, 60 people?

Yes. Mattress one next mattress. And someone too much is larger [? family ?] did as much as they could. Where my father-- I know getting out, food, water was a risk because you were out in the open.

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And by the time the war is over, you had just turned 10 years old.

Yes. And then a friend of mine, not the one who was demining things. He had weapons. He pulled a pin on a grenade. We were standing around like this. Luckily, he had the the absence of mind of throwing it somewhere behind-- not a ditch, was a berm, and that's where it exploded.

When we were talking about demining, was off camera. Tell us on camera now, what was this incident about mines? And place it in context. Were you in Budapest still?

No, that was in Slovakia. Slovakia, after the war already. And that area was heavily mined by the Germans, so there were mines all over. And some people were removing mines. There weren't enough military units to clear the area. Farmers were afraid to go into fields because either their horses or cows or they would blow up. And some kids, some individuals went out and thought they could neutralize the mine. So they pulled the detonator switch. Were small pieces, little bit from black plastic and a pin. If the pin moved, hit a spark, and the mine blew.

So I was buying these detonators from these guys.

These little pins.

Yes. The pins and the detonators, basically, because it made noise. You could do it summer. Just something, you know, kids making noise, scaring others and scaring a horse or anything. Those were from black plastic. The brass ones were anti-- those black plastic were anti-personnel mines. The others, from brass-- looked like brass or something, were much bigger mines, heavier mines. And occasionally I bought those from them.

So you knew your pins.

I knew the difference, yes. I wasn't a mining expert, but I knew what was what. And then one day, just because a family lived up the street, and they said, they didn't come home all day, found on the outskirts a leg from one of the two boys. So that was our friends. And there were other people who were getting hurt.

But different thoughts come through my mind as you're telling this episode. Number one, kids will be kids. The war is over, and kids don't think they'll die because that's something that is--

It's an abstraction. And there are no toys.

And there are no toys.

And those are easy to discover, easy to play. From ordinary bullets, you you move out the led. You melt the lead, so the bullet becomes on an arrow, a pointed thing.

You make toys.

You make deadly arrows.

Oh, geez. My goodness. So tell me, at age 10, the war is over. What kind of a child are you? What kind of a personality do you have?

I think I was normal. I like to play, degree of mischief. But otherwise, I was not wounded. My arm healed properly.

Had you ever seen a corpse during all this time?

Yes, in Budapest, before the war was over. After liberation, we went one of the main streets where the black market was. And there was a woman laying-- a truck must have hit her-- with a split skull.

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And that's the only corpse you saw throughout the war.

I think it's the only corpse I saw, that I was aware was a corpse.

But still, you are, from age four, when September 1, 1939, till then, the majority of your childhood is spent a hair's breadth away from not being here.

Yes.

And it didn't have any mark on you?

No, because when the war started, the fear I had was when they were carrying me to shelters and so forth. The idea of death is different and a later on concept. So you cry and so forth. And then from '41 to '43, I had moments of fear when I had to hide. But afterwards, you're older, you understand more, because you hear stories from people who escaped from Auschwitz, others, that it's death. But it did not have the same effect as if you are grown up and you reflect on these things.

And your father, at the end of this time, did you see him-- his personality change?

Possibly. Before the war, I remember he was very energetic, very vigorous, unlike his youngest son, and very dynamic. At the end of the war, he aged more than by six years because loss of family, the events, it took its toll, yes. And he had a heart condition. In fact, I think he had a heart condition even from before the war because I would go out and buy certain medications. I forgot the name of it. And he told me of a doctor, whom I still remember the name, that he had in Vienna, Wenckebach.

Wenckebach.

Yeah, Dr. Wenckebach in Vienna. And I would buy certain medication that he had prescription pills. I forgot. I've come across that name. And he was also allowed to buy cognac sometimes, which was, for me, almost a fatal flaw because I tasted it occasionally.

You have to know if the medicine's are any good.

I was allowed, occasionally, when I had a cold, to have had tea with a little bit [NON-ENGLISH] and aspirin. Wines, yes. Well, I was allowed to drink a little bit, but never anything stronger.

Did your father become a very hands on parent once the war was over?

I would say yes.

Because you are still the child. Your sister is 10 years older. She is a young woman.

Yes. He still was-- I would say still hands on, yes, still was inquiring sometimes, approving, disapproving in strong terms and so forth. So he was still in that respect, yes, very-- not only European, I wouldn't say Prussian, but German. Yeah, traits were still there, but not to the same extent as before the war, obviously.

Now let's take up his story right after your old chauffeur, Volksdeutsche--

Probably. I'm not sure. His name was Keller. He survived a war in Katowice, and he found him, yes.

He takes your father to Slovakia.

Yeah, he manages to get him. He had a car, some kind of a car. He drives him, and the borders but were not that--it was fluid, but he managed to get him out of Poland.

So he returns back to you in--

Slovakia, in Bardejov. Yeah.

In Bardejov. And then what happens? It's you, your father, your sister, and her fiance.

She got married in '45. Then my father went again to Germany to see, maybe, who is what what. And--

Couldn't find your brother.

Couldn't find anybody, really. Nothing. Poland, he was afraid to go.

So he comes back. And then what happens to the two of you?

We stay in Slovakia. That's '45. '46. In '45, when Czechoslovakia did not, under the pressure of Russia, accept the Marshall Plan, he said, you know, I'm afraid this country will not remain neutral. Besides, the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia is the single strongest party. So he told my brother-in-law, who inherited a bottling plant of beer, where after a while, I wasn't allowed because some of the dark beer was sweet, also, but it was strong.

So he told my brother-in-law, try to liquidate. I have no confidence that this will remain. And we leave for Belgium in September '46.

He was prescient. He was very prescient.

He said I just don't trust it. Then in Belgium, he couldn't work. Belgium was expensive. And just about everybody my brother-in-law saved. And then he had a brother. My father had a brother in Brussels.

That's right. And he had survived.

He had survived, lost his family. Very embittered man.

You remember him.

Yes, because he passed away, actually, quite some time ago. But I remember him after the war.

How did he survive, and his family?

Somehow in Brussels, his family-- he went out to shop something in '43. and while he was out shopping, the police, the Belgian police and others, came, took his family. When he returned home, he wanted to join them. But his neighbors restrained him, and that's how he survived.

The other youngest brothers I told you, in Lille, he was apparently shot not by the Germans, but by the French police But he was in the Resistance, or he helped the Resistance.

And I'm sorry that I'm interrupting, but how did you find out these details about the brother?

From my uncle. That's why he knew from the people because he was in Brussels and Lille, and he knew people in both cities. He had businesses. He had bus lines, and he was an importer and exporter of raw fur from Russia to Western Europe to the United States. So he had business contacts here, too.

And was it his situation that he hid in plain sight in Belgium during the war?

Somehow he survived. He never wanted to talk to him. I didn't delve that deeply because when it reminded him of his

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family, he just went crazy. He became very emotional, let's put it that way. Even after he remarried, had a child, he still had pictures of his previous family.

How long did you and your sister and your father and her husband stay in Brussels, or in Belgium?

In Belgium, we stayed till April the following year. My brother-in-law and sister, he returned. Couldn't make a living in Belgium. He was allowed to work in [NON-ENGLISH], returned and took up his business again, and made, supposedly, good money. He had a bottling plant.

In Czechoslovakia?

In Czechoslovakia. In Slovakia, in [NON-ENGLISH]. And he also manufactured liquors, things, because alcohol was available and he somehow managed to do it. Then he had a child in April, my nephew. So then we returned, hoping to stay briefly. And then my father again put pressure on him and on his relatives. Look, things aren't going to get better. Try to leave. Liquidate whatever you can.

Finally, because my brother-in-law was making good money, it was an attachment. And we applied for a visa to the United States. My father had a cousin, a close cousin, very well off in New York, sent him an affidavit. But it took time.

And finally he managed to persuade my brother-in-law and sister and asked to leave. We left in the nick of time. Passports would not be issued anymore. And the border, while not sealed, they held you up for tax reasons and so forth. So we told our friends, except one exception or two, in case they are interrogated, that we're going to Prague, and then probably to Carlsbad for Christmas and New Year's. I wasn't allowed to take anything, my toys and so forth, chess and so forth.

And we left for Prague and then bought a ticket to Carlsbad. When came to Carlsbad, we stayed on a train, hoping we won't be taken off. Carlsbad is close to the German border, American-occupied part of Germany. We came to Cheb and Arz. Once we crossed the border, it was the first time I saw an American uniform. And I knew we were safe. I think I've seen American uniform in Belgium, so that's not accurate, really. But I've seen an American uniform in the train, so we were across.

What was the border town?

I think it was Cheb or Arz. One is on the Czech side, one German. I don't know. I think Cheb is Czech, Arz, because I took that train much later.

Did you? To retrace the steps?

Well, I took the train from Prague to Bayreuth because a friend was in the orchestra and Bayreuth orchestra, you know. Then he told me I'll get you a ticket somewhere, but it's so hot that I almost fainted. I said, forget it. But listening to Wagner and fainting, it's not for me. Opera, yes, but not Wagner's Ring.

And so that's how I knew the border. And then we continued on, paid for the ticket, ended up in Brussels.

Oh, so you continued by train.

Yes.

So you're back in Brussels.

And at the end of '47.

And how is your father making money during those two years?

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Well, my uncle helped him. I'm not sure there was a black market, not in Western Europe. I don't know. He was dealing in some things, and I think he may still have some money in the bank.

Oh, there was a black market in Western Europe, and quite a strong one.

For dollars?

Ah, well, you're talking about dollars.

No, there was a black market for cigarettes and other things which were imported to Germany and so forth. And I know one person-- I knew the person my father knew him-- he made a fortune with cigarettes and food, because each time we went, we lived in Paris after m where we waited for an affidavit. Each time we went to Paris by train, we had to give to the guard, to the customs a little bit of coffee, Nescafe, because in Paris, coffee or other things were-- in '48 and '49 were precious commodities.

I know he gave to the Cafe de La Paix next in the opera-- there was-- still is outdoor coffee shop. He gave the maitre de something. So each time I went there as a kid-- by then I was already 13. I traveled Paris on my own. And I would get something not to eat, either, or something sounded sweet, sitting waiting to meet him.

But we lived in Paris, and that's where we got the affidavit to come to this country. But the Czech passport expired.

So what happened?

So the Czech Embassy said you can get it when you return. We'll renew it. So he knew that meant a one way ticket. So true. We got a French passport because my uncle was [INAUDIBLE]. They knew the conditions, so they gave us not a full-fledged passport, but a titre de voyage, which is a travel document.

And then my father was still afraid of the Russians, that they'll come to Western Europe. You know, the tension was there with Stalin. So he was afraid before he get a visa to this country. So he said, anywhere. So he got a visa to Bolivia, which he knew he was not going to go. And then he got even a visa to Rhodesia. And when they told him it's black Africa, he said, do you really expect me to go there? But there was a visa and a passport.

So in other words, he had a plan B and a plan C.

Yes, because the way he saw it, he said if the Russians decide to advance, no one will see. He said there's no French army, no German army. The Americans, most of the soldiers were brought back home. So he was afraid. He did not want to live under the Soviets again. I get that one experience with a [NON-ENGLISH], which may have been a mistake. But you can never know.

Well, an experience writes itself on a person's mind. And it is what it is. So did you come to the United States from Paris, from France?

Yeah, from France.

And how?

By boat. Le Havre to New York City, where he had nephews from his sister, who he wanted to meet, but she also didn't make it. She passed away before we arrived. We arrived in May '49 [INAUDIBLE].

In all that time, aside from when you were talking of going to school and you were a math whiz and known in Bardejov, did you go to school anywhere?

There was a Jewish school for a year or so. And then it was disbanded. Where was this?

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In Bardejov.

In Bardejov.

So I went to first grade, maybe to second grade. And that was about it.

And from then till '49?

After the war, I went in Slovakia. After '45, I went to gymnasium.

Gymnasium.

Yes, sixth grade. Somehow skipped these. I was a certain age, and I made it to first gymnasium. In '46 when we left, I ended up in Belgium, so I went to a French school, a city in Belgium till '47. And '47, when we returned, I also start-- well, we came in April. It was too late to go, so I started second gymnasium in September. Then we left December and came to Belgium again. In Belgium I didn't go to a school till next year. Same thing in France.

Came to this country in New York City. Since I didn't speak English, they put me in a grade school, third or fourth class.

So with eight-year-olds, and you're 13, 14.

Right. And they made me a guard where you let people cross the street. And I told my cousin, who took me to school. I said, they're speaking English there, too. I don't understand. So finally my father and she went, they said, look. He had friends going to gymnasium. So they put me in high school, George Washington High School, because we stayed with my cousin who lived in Manhattan, Washington Heights.

And then there I learned English, and then I took a French class. Teacher asked me, how come you're taking French? You speak French. I said, well, in my French class I learn English. I remember that teacher was very nice. Alfred was his name. He told me in French, [FRENCH].

I had a math class. I had to do things on the board. I could not explain it. And from the math I had in Belgium, which was advanced math already, I knew shortcuts. And the end results of the formulas was correct. The teacher said, you have to do it. I said, I don't know how to do it. I just know these cuts. He says, you're stupid. I told the professor, I'm not stupid. The result is correct. And that was New York.

Well, people can be very pedantic. Teachers can be very pedantic.

Math teachers.

Yes.

And then I came to Los Angeles.

How old were you when you came to Los Angeles?

15.

And your father too?

My father stayed in New York. Then he moved to New Jersey, remarried, and had a farm, chicken farm. I don't know how he ended up on a chicken farm. I remember vaguely in '49 or '50, the price of eggs was almost as high as it is today. There was a big profit margin. Maybe that's what tempted him.

Your father really had good instincts.

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And after a while, he didn't like it. I was helping him, but I didn't like chickens per se. So occasionally I would hit him with the chickens. So he said, look, you're killing my business, literally. I said, I don't like those animals. He said, don't collect eggs because in the hopper, when you went to co-- I would-- you know.

So anyway, I ended up in California.

And why Los Angeles?

My sister moved here because her husband's brother and brother-in-law were already here. and they left also early Czechoslovakia at my father's urging. He told them, making money, you may have to run and leave everything.

Yeah. Is that what happened?

They left in time. They left with money also, they left some money.

And did your father-- did he have anything left in his American bank account?

He had some things, but very little left. Very little.

So you move in and you live with your sister.

In Los Angeles. Go to high school. And after two years, I want to skip the third year. I'm repeating many things which I took in Czechoslovakia. I took calculus in Belgium in the seventh grade, things which I took here much later. Same thing with physics. Same thing happened in LA. I knew the formulas. I could not properly explain it. So I told the professor. He understood. He was not like the one in New York.

I tried to skip last grade to go to UCLA or Berkeley. But I don't have a high school diploma so I had to go through various rings with a friend. He made it. I did not. So I graduated high school, I went to UCLA.

And what did you study UCLA?

International relations. And then I had a draft deferment. You had to register in those days for the draft. So I registered, but I was a full-time student to avoid the draft. The only thing I thought university is really something. So the first half of the semester I studied hard. I got good grades. But then I was often in a club or whatever playing chess because I played chess in high school. I was a very good chess player. So I played chess, and I didn't even attend some classes.

One of my professors-- I took a Russian, the simple reason I thought it would be easy, which was not. And he used to see me occasionally. He says, come and visit us sometime because he saw me play chess and skip class.

So he'd say, come by occasionally.

And he told a friend of mine, because he didn't know where I'm from, he said, this Mr. Majerovic, what he speaks is not Russian or Ukrainian. He invents a language when he writes. So I had to explain to him I was confused between Polish, Slovak, studying Russian, and my friends were Serbs and Croats-- not Croats, Slovene. So I was completely mixed up-- and Czech, naturally. So some of the conjugation and grammar was just confusing. He says, he understands Russian. What he translates-- I explained to him so he knew. Then he said, I see your problem.

So but tell me, at this point, how many languages were under your belt? Polish.

Slovak.

Slovak.

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German.

German.

Yiddish.

Yiddish.

And French.

And French. And Czech?

Czech I get by because it's similar to Slovak, you know.

OK. And so the Balkan languages, Slovenian.

Well, just from my friends I picked up some things. What I learned since is Spanish because I spent quite a bit of time in Mexico and in Spain. And it's similar to French. Russian I studied. Same thing. When I was in the Soviet Union they couldn't figure it out.

They don't speak Russian.

They thought I'm Armenian or Georgian. I'm in Kiev. Yes, it's Kiev. Actually, I didn't leave. I just start. And then I'm walking around by the [NON-ENGLISH]. There's a promenade here. And someone approaches me, [NON-ENGLISH]. I don't know why I answered in Russian. Then a conversation starts. Well, then I switch to English. He spoke [NON-ENGLISH]. And he wants to buy things from me.

Of course he wants to buy from you.

I don't want to sell anything. [NON-ENGLISH] Armenian? Are you Armenian? I said no. In the hotel I stayed, I sit at a table. Next table is an American couple. They look Jewish, and they talk to someone who I think was living in Kiev. Somehow I talked to him briefly before. Then they tell him in Jewish they are afraid of me. They think I'm a spy.

You don't sell anything.

That's in a restaurant. And I told the guy, tell your friends I'm not. I'm just a tourist here because you know, Soviet Union.

What year was this?

'70. Ah, well, that's still deep dark into the Soviet times.

I'm in Minsk. And the hotel is supposed to wake me up because of my visa. I got a tourist visa in Helsinki. St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, and then train out. I stay in the hotel for two nights. Once in the elevator, I get up. Guess who fills in the elevator? North Vietnamese officers.

Oh, jeepers.

I think to myself, here I am an American facing North-- they don't know I'm American. They greet me Russian. A day later I'm supposed to be woken up about 3:30 or 4:00 to catch the train Minsk Warsaw. Nobody wakes me up. Luckily I woke up myself, come to the lobby, and the clerks, the guards, everything, easy chairs falling, sitting asleep.

They're all asleep?

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Finally I woke someone up. I had to go to the train. So they found someone took me to the train. Train compartment I share with two Russian women and kids. It was already early morning so I didn't sleep. One woman, her husband must have been a high office in East Germany. The other one, maybe a lower officer or maybe enlisted man. So in Russian they talk to each other discreetly, you know, how things are so much better, especially the lady who is the high officer's [INAUDIBLE], how it is. When we cross Poland especially, they say, here it's better, but in Germany so much better.

And you hear that.

I understand everything, but I-- I do and I don't.

Yeah, of course. Did you go back to [NON-ENGLISH], to Krakow, to all these other places?

Yes. I went back the first time, get off the station. I think I remember how to find my address because where we lived, if I go to the right and then to the left, there is a [NON-ENGLISH] square. And on the left there is some kind of museum and so forth. I get off the train station. There is a [NON-ENGLISH], so I just followed the directions in the opposite way. I find the building, neglected, but I found it.

In Krakow, the same way. When you get out of the building, you go to the left, you find [NON-ENGLISH]. So I start with the [NON-ENGLISH] where my hotel was. And I go close, check the name of each street. Finally I find it, which was at the other end where I started.

And I look at the building. It's painted. I look at it. Well, it's probably either owned by a Communist or Communist headquarters. They're well-maintained buildings, were official government.

And this was what year?

That was in the '70s. First time I was in Poland when I came from Russia, I just had a three-day transit. So I stayed in Warsaw. Didn't know anybody. Walked around. And then I stopped then [NON-ENGLISH] for one day, and then Berlin. The second time I came from Sweden, and that's when I had more time. I had longer visa.

Did those trips back give you anything? Did they speak to, in a way that is beyond just like a tourist visa?

Yes.

In what way?

When I saw the building in Katowice where I lived as a child, I to turned back the clock to September 1. I think to myself, here I kicked a ball. Hasn't changed that much. Those tennis courts stand [INAUDIBLE], but they were neglected. I remember there were tennis courts you could see from our balcony. So it hasn't changed much. I just walk around.

The air was horrible, the pollution in Katowice. In Krakow, less sentimental, but still.

What about Bardejov?

I went back much later because first time I went back to Czechoslovakia, from Vienna to Bratislava, I just felt lousy. Soon as I got off the train, I remember seeing a black-- the Tatra, the Czech car with a fence in the back, big car. And I knew that was the security police. So I attached myself to two American tourists. So we looked for a place to stay. Everything was prohibitively expensive for them and for me. But wherever we went, I see a black car like that. So I think to myself, to heck with it. Finally, I found a place in a campground. And that's where I stayed for two nights.

What year was this?

That was '71.

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Still very early on for people going back.

After '68, it was still unpleasant.

Yeah. Yeah. The deep freeze.

Yeah.

And so did that meant you could go back to Bardejov, or not, really?

That time, I felt bad.

And you didn't.

And I went to Prague with these guys. And they were incredibly naive. Attending some chemical congress. Both were chemists. One had an advanced degree of chemist. They come to Prague. They said, can you point out to me a Communist? I said, what do you mean, point out to you a Communist? They look like any human. Some of them are in uniform. They may serve the government. But they don't look different. And then I realized. So I stayed in Prague a few days and then left.

Well, off camera-- saying this brings me up to another question. Off camera you said that you had had the opportunity from very early on to have your story recorded, and you said no. Did you ever tell people that you got to know just personally all that you had been through as a child?

Yes, my friends. Not the whole story like I told now, just told the story I escaped from the train, and sometimes joked about it, my head wound and so forth. Yes.

So in a personal circle, you did.

Yes, I did. In fact, it was a fellow I knew in high school, very nice fellow, American fellow. And he told me, Herman, you have to write it down, publish, make it. His name was Nathan Nagle. They were originally from Indiana. Hw said, who's going to be a listening in? Forget it. Besides, I'm too lazy to tell stories.

And then later on, other people have told me. My sister was after me because there was a time they were recording things.

Did she tell her story?

No. Maybe she did a little bit, but I'm not sure she did.

Oh, you mean you don't know if she had it recorded by, let's say, the Spielberg archive?

No. That she did not.

What was her married name?

Roven, R-O-V-E-N.

So it would have been Hela Roven.

Helen. Helen Roven, yes.

Helen Roven. And how long did your father live? Passed away in '58.

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1958.

'58. I was in graduate school.

That's pretty early.

Yeah, he was young. He was 58 or 60. I was in graduate school my first year going for a PhD. Then I realized without him, I just won't hang around. And I wanted to go to Europe. I didn't like LA. So I decided to go for a master's. And I just didn't have the discipline, and I just took off for Europe hoping to study in Cambridge. Because of the army, I came late. So instead of going to college, I traveled around Europe $5.00 a day.

When that book actually reflected reality.

Yes. I made it. It took more than five, but $200 a month, yes. And I traveled quite a bit. Today, pay for a half decent hotel in Paris that much, if not more.

Was your father, would you say-- let me rephrase this because I was going to kind of put words into your mouth. Who, from your early years, was, let's say, the major influence in your life, what person?

My father.

It sounded that way. It sounded that way.

My brother wasn't around. My sister, I don't care that she slapped me if I did things I wasn't supposed to. But yeah, she had some influence. My brother-in-law, less. And then I did not have any relatives, really. Some friends, yeah. But friends were more or less my age or a bit older. It wasn't that much.

Well, when you say that you moved to LA when you were about 15 years old, it's more or less from 15 years old, you might live with your sister, but you're kind of on your own.

Yes. Then my father came two years later, moved here.

Moved to California.

Moved to Los Angeles, yes. So then I moved, too, with him.

OK. And in what way did he influence you? What did you get from him? What kind of legacy did he leave?

About manners, morals, perseverance. I mean, general. And respect for others.

He was a gentleman.

Yes. I often went to church, not so much for services, but in some churches, especially orthodox churches, they had good [NON-ENGLISH], good cookies. And sometimes, because some of my friends were Catholic, so I went to Catholic. And I have been going. The only place I really attend to, if I do, people ask me do you attend services, religious services? And I say regularly. They say, every Saturday? No, every four years. I say regular. I didn't say often.

The only place I really go to-- I used to go to-- now with the tourists-- is Notra Dame. There's something spiritual about it, I found. Maybe because I like Paris. I like the place I've lived in Paris. There was a time also in Cologne, which is next to the train station where--

So big cathedral.

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When I was in business, I often had to change trains in Cologne because I was representing aerospace companies in Europe, traveling. So often I had to change trains in Cologne. So I would go there. There were windows, yes, glass, but nothing special. And the emptiness of it, the austerity of it, had an impact. Notre Dame, yes. St. Peter's in Rome, the beauty, you're overwhelmed by the beauty rather than anything else.

So that's the only place. Otherwise--

Was your father a religious person?

No. He observed the high holidays.

Oh, that's right. He had ham.

Ate ham, and didn't go to synagogue. Maybe on the high holidays, did go. Didn't force me to go. And I wanted to go, OK. And my mother, I understand, was maybe ham, maybe milk. And sometimes social pressures. When you lived in a small city like [NON-ENGLISH] there was a greater pressure to, quote, be a little bit more observant. That's when I went to a religious school. Sort of hey there, you know.

I didn't know about anything, and put on a cap. I put on the cap. What I vividly remember once, I used to bring sandwiches. But once he found out in my sandwich a bit of butter and salami. So he started screaming, I didn't know why, that I'm making his school [NON-ENGLISH]. And I think he literally kicked me in the butt, and I flew out of the door. I still did not know what I did wrong.

You mixed did. You mixed these things.

That's what I got at home. So that was my religious experience, which probably contributed to my non-piety, let's put it. Tolerance but non-piety. Just like in Jerusalem, first time I was there-- that was after liberation-- there was that sign, if you go to the mosque, to the Holy Muslim temples, you will not go to heaven and so forth. I disregarded it. I went to the mosque, and I went to the dome, took off my shoes.

And it was interesting, really, to see the rock where they claim that Muhammad went to heaven. My concern was if I find my shoes back, good shoes. And the same thing happen in some other well-known mosques. Not in [NON-ENGLISH]. I haven't been there yet.

I'm wondering, is there something I should have asked you that I have not asked you? I'm kind of at the end of the interview. But is there something else you'd like to share that we haven't talked about to this point?

I cannot think. You asked me a questions that brings out things. Unfortunately, with age, some things there are gaps. Occasionally I remember things. I dropped it down now. Where I put it, the n I forget it.

Not really. I guess with time, or if we had to talk, certain small things will pop up.

Well, you see, I know that we can never capture everything in one interview. But what I care is that I capture the things that are important for you.

The highlights you captured.

The highlights, and what you think has the meaning that should be part of it.

Yes. That's right. As long as my father, my mother, my brother and sister are remembered, that's what matters. Otherwise, small incidents could have happened, you know.

Then let's say their names again. Your father's name was--

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Julius. [NON-ENGLISH], Julius.

[NON-ENGLISH] Majerovic.

Majerovic, yes.

Majerovic.

M-A-J-E-R-O-V-I-C, like I spell it. Or the Polish spelling was W-I-C-Z. And the German spelling was a W-I-T-Z, like in New York, optician Mejerovic, except he has M-E. We had M-A. And he had cousins here, and they changed their names to [NON-ENGLISH].

Did your father teach his last name to Malvet as well?

No.

It was just you.

And I changed it because friends, as I told you, couldn't pronounce it. When I was in UCLA, I graduated, and I applied for graduate school in UCLA because I was supposed to go to law school, but the army took precedence. So I applied for graduate school.

My professor of Russian history comes in. And in his class, a few years before I was a citizen, was Majerovic. When I became a citizen, was Malvet. So then he sees an application from Malvet. He asks, who is this Malvet? He said, he's sitting there, Dr. Fisher. He's a bit confused. Then he's, are you [NON-ENGLISH]? I said, yes, Dr. Fisher. I started-- and he says, I understand.

So you are the only one of the family who-- OK, would have been your father.

My father did not. He said, I didn't come-- Why should I? If someone has problems with my name-- and I had friends who told me, Herman you're crazy. Belatedly I thought I should have left my name, just put a Mac. If it were Mac Majerovic, that would have been a knockout, like McCohen.

They asked me when they changed your name, I said why? Go through all that thing? And when I came to Chile-- I have a cousin who survived in Uzbekistan.

Oh, that's one.

I informed him I stayed in the hotel. And that was a period when Allende was taking over. And I think the Communists, because he told me later on it was not only Allende. There was a hard core of well-trained come in town, individual. So I called him. I left a message. He comes to the hotel. And I must have forgotten I left the name Malvet.

He looks and said, there's nobody. And then Majerovic. He looks for Majerovic. There is nobody. But he says, but there must be an American. Nobody there. Other Americans in the hotel. Finally he says someone who came here, and that somehow we connected. He said, I looked for Majoerovic. I said forgot to tell you. I forgot to leave the message.

That happened in Vienna with the man who carried me on his back when I jumped off that train. I came, I found him.

He lived still in Vienna.

He was in Vienna in the '70s. I'm not sure he's around. And I come to the house, and I knock at the door. And I gave my war name, my name. She cannot remember. Then I started telling her the story, and then she opened her door and says he wasn't home. And then he comes later. She introduces me. Tells the name, doesn't ring a bell. Afterwards he just exploded.

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So how many years had passed by since you had last seen him?

When I say in the '70s, it seems like that could be 40 years.

We were going through the names. Your father, Julius, Juda Majerovic. Your mother.

Berta Majerovic. Maiden name, Thier, T-H-I-E-R.

Your sister.

Helen, Hela.

Hela. And your brother.

Henek.

Henek or Joachim.

Joachim is Germ-- I don't know if it's a German name. All of us started with an H.

That's right.

Don't know why. Thank you.

I thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Malvet. I appreciate it.

Thank you very much. That's an interview. And I want to thank the gentlemen double, or I start counting when I jumped from the train-- when I was thrown out from the train. Then people, you were thrown out? I said yeah, I was thrown out from other places, too.

Oh, come now. Say my final sentence, and that is, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Herman Malvet on June 5, 2018 in San Francisco, California. Thanks again.

Thank you.

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