

And I'm spelling B-R-A-U-N.

OK, we're going to start that. As soon as I give an introduction, we'll start with that. So this is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Leslie Braun on September--

Come a little closer.

Excuse me-- on June 30, 2018 in Manhattan in New York City.

City, yes.

And tell me Mr. Braun, what was your name at birth? When you were born, what were you called?

Well, it was Hungarian, you know.

OK.

Laci

Laci

They calling me still Laci

Laci is that a nickname or a full name? Like--

Full name.

Full name is Laci not Laslo or some--

Laslo, yeah.

It's Laslo.

Laslo. Yeah. But at home, they calling me Leslie.

OK.

But otherwise, they were calling me Laslo.

OK. And Laci was your nickname?

Well, it's not a nickname, because that's the-- if you turn it around, you know it's, you know, your family. In the family, they not going to tell me Laslo. They're going to tell me Laci

Yeah. Yeah. It's closer. It's more--

Closer, yeah, the same [INAUDIBLE] outside. Matter of fact, they still calling me Laci

Are they? Yeah?

Yeah.

And when you came to the United States, did you change Laslo to Leslie?

Yes.

OK. Tell me, what was the date of your birth?

8/8/1926.

So you were born August 8, 1926?

Yes.

And where were you born?

Where I was born? In Czechoslovakia.

What town? What city?

The name is Vel'ke Kapušany.

Vel'ke Kapušany?

Yeah. And isn't that in the-- what part of Czechoslovakia was it in, Vel'ke Kapušany?

It was on Slovakia side.

OK. Was it in the western or the eastern part of the country?

It's eastern part.

OK. Was the Hungarian border far away?

The Hungarian border? No. Matter of fact, they took it.

Ah, OK.

They took it, you know, during the war. The Germans, they gave them over, my part, to the-- Hungarians?

--Hungarians. And the city alone, it's Hungarian.

Ah, OK. Were there many Hungarians living in--

Pardon me?

Was there a lot of Hungarian people in Vel'ke Kapušany?

Yeah. Yeah. I would say 99%.

Oh, wow.

Yeah.

It really was a Hungarian city.

Hungarian.

OK. And tell me a little bit about your father and mother. What was your father's name?

My father's name was Ferdinand.

Ferdinand?

Yeah, Braun.

OK, Braun. And your last name is spelled B-R-A-U-N.

A-U-N.

And it was always spelt like that?

Always.

OK. And do you know when your father was born?

My father was born [? as ?] 1898.

OK. And what was your mother's name?

Charlotte.

Charlotte.

Yeah.

That's a lovely name.

Chari. Chari.

Chari. OK. And when was she born?

1903.

And were they both from Vel'ke Kapušany?

My father was born there, but my mother was born in the-- it's a different town.

Close or not so close to it?

You know, over there, every thing is far.

Yeah.

In 10 minutes, you could make it.

Oh, really. So it's close?

10, 15 minutes by car.

OK. What was the name of the place she was born in?

The name of the place was Szerednye.

Szerednye.

Yeah.

That also sounds Hungarian.

Yeah, Hungarian. Yeah.

OK. But it was part of Czechoslovakia?

Yeah, yeah.

OK. But when she was born, it probably was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire--

Exactly.

--when your parents were both born.

Yeah.

OK. Did your father serve in World War I?

What?

Did your father serve in the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I? He was in the Hungarian army during the First World War. It was, at that time, Hungary's already.

OK.

So he was called in.

Do you know what he did?

They release him, you know? Because he wasn't 100%. He was sick.

OK. OK. So he was about to be drafted, but his health was not good.

Which one?

His health was not good.

No, no, not good.

OK. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Pardon me?

Do you have brothers and sisters?

I have only one brother. And he's got blind now.

Oh, dear.

Yeah.

Is he younger or older than you?

Younger, much younger. I had a sister between. I had a sister, but she died a couple years ago.

What was her name?

Her name was Elizabeth.

And when was she born?

She was born-- she was younger for me two years.

OK.

'28.

So she's 1928.

'28, yes.

OK, Elizabeth Braun.

Braun.

And your brother's name?

My brother is Alan Braun.

And when was he born?

He was born in-- six years younger than I am.

So 1932?

1932.

OK. OK. So you were the oldest in the family.

Pardon me?

You were the oldest in the family.

I was the old. We were three kids. And we came home.

The three of us, we came home. And we tried to come here, you know. We had family here, and they were bringing us out.

So this is after all these bad things had happened.

All after everything.

We'll talk now about before everything. I want to get a sense of what your childhood was like, what it was like growing up in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and 1930s. So I'll ask a lot of questions about that.

Well, under the Czechoslovakia, the Jews were all right.

Yeah?

Yeah. We had a good business. And everything was perfect

Tell me, what kind of business did your father have?

He had a restaurant and a nightclub. Yeah, was very, very-- we had a couple clubs there. And they belong there, you know, from sports club and another club. And it was beautiful, very nice, big business.

It also sounds like a fun business to be in, you know, entertainment business.

Oh, it was. [INAUDIBLE] every day.

Yeah?

Yeah. Beautiful was, yeah.

Did your father founded the business, or did he inherited it?

My father inherited from the father, from my [INAUDIBLE]. It goes down from generation.

Was he the oldest in the family?

Who?

Your father, did he have brothers and sisters?

I [INAUDIBLE]. It's a mix business. You know, my father was the youngest I know. He was the youngest. But some of them died, you know. And you know, I mean, the father died. And then they married. The Jews could marry-- how I said, marry the sister. You know what I mean?

Yeah. So when the grandmother died, your grandfather married her sister?

Married her sister, yeah.

OK.

So this is the way it was going on in Europe. I mean, not only, but that's the way.

So did your father have half-brothers and half-sisters from--

Yes, yes. But they didn't come home.

Did you know them growing up?

Oh, yes. Very nice, yeah.

Well, what were their names of all the half-brothers and sisters that he had?

What was the-- I remember the last name, because they were married.

OK.

But you know, well, every one of them had a name.

But you don't remember their names yet?

No.

OK. Do you know about how many?

Who?

About how many brothers and sisters he had, your father?

He had, I think, about three.

OK.

Yeah.

OK. And what was the name of the restaurant?

The restaurant was just Braun, you know-- and big name.

And the nightclub?

It's a nice [INAUDIBLE], a big, big, big place.

Did you visit it?

Pardon me?

Did you go to it?

Yeah, I lived there. You know, you live in the business.

Oh, so did you live at the same place where the restaurant was?

Yeah, exactly.

Ah. Above the restaurant?

No, no, no. They walk down. Not too many high rises they had.

No high rises there?

[LAUGHTER]

No, those years. But now they have.

Well, describe it for me a little bit. Was it in the center of town, or was it in the outskirts? Where was it?

It was in the center, right in the center.

Oh, wow.

Very nice, yeah.

What was the address?

Pardon me?

What was the address?

The address is Main Street.

And how would you say it in Czechoslovak?

Main Street.

How would it be in Slovak or in Hungarian?

Same way, Main Street. Hungaria you mean? Main Street.

No, OK. So you don't remember how you called it when you were growing up, the street?

The street?

Yeah, in the other language.

You don't have to call.

OK. And were there other businesses in the same building as the restaurant?

No.

OK.

Only we were there.

OK. And you say you lived at the same place?

Yeah.

Was it a house that was separate from the rest?

It was attached.

And was it behind the restaurant?

Pardon me?

Was it behind the restaurant?

Yeah.

OK. What did it look like, your home?

Very nice everything, you know, very nice-- big garden. You know, summertime they dancing outside. Yeah. It was beautiful. They were coming not only from the city, but from outside.

Oh, really?

Yeah, the sports club, you know, they had games. All kind of games they had.

Was the sports club at the same place as the restaurant?

Yeah.

OK. Was it separate from the restaurant?

Separate, yeah.

Separate, OK. And did your father have many employees?

A couple.

A couple, not that many?

I don't remember how many, but there was a good couple. They had waiters and, you know.

Yeah. Now, if you lived behind the restaurant, tell me what did the house look like. Was it made of stone? Was it made of wood?

Stone.

Stone. And was it built in the 20th century or built in the 19th century? Can you describe it for me?

You mean the restaurant?

The house, the house that you grew--

The house? It was from stone, you know.

OK.

Yeah.

And did you have indoor plumbing?

Indoor plumbing?

Like water, facilities, kitchen sink?

Yeah.

Toilet?

Yeah, yeah.

You had that. Did you have electricity?

Yes, sure. Yeah.

OK. How did you-- Cathy is laughing.

Well, a lot of places didn't. A lot of places didn't, you know?

[INAUDIBLE]

OK. Was your family very well-to-do? Would you say that they were a rich family?

Very good, it was very good. But not on the last, on the last that they took away license, the Hungarians.

We'll come to that. We'll come to that. Before we come to that, I want to find out more about what your life was like. Before it all changed, I want to know, you know, what was the world that you had. So that's why I'm asking so many details. Did your father have a car?

No.

OK.

No, he didn't.

Did he have a radio at home?

[LAUGHTER]

You know, those years, it was-- but, anyway, I mean to have a radio you mean?

Yeah, did you have a radio?

Oh, of course. Yeah.

OK. Did he have live bands playing at the restaurant?

Pardon me?

Did he have-- excuse me, can we cut the tape?

He went back with Cathy.

OK.

And the whole thing is disappeared.

Really?

They made there a hospital--

Really?

--regular hospital. And they build there a building there, another building with two story high.

And so there's no trace then of that it was a restaurant.

No, no. It's all gone.

All gone.

It's all gone.

When did you go back?

A couple years ago.

Oh, so not that long ago.

No, not long ago.

OK. Was this the first time you had been back?

I was there-- twice I was there.

OK, OK. Did your mother-- was she involved in any of your father's business?

Yes, yes.

How was she involved in it? What did she do?

Well, you know, there is a lot of things to do there, because you have to watch the people, taking care. And you know, they were drinking and registered, you know. It was a lot of work.

OK. And then who minded the children? If she helped out there in the restaurant, who took care of you and your brother and sister?

Oh, well, what I remember, I was the oldest. I was going to school already, you know And my sister was going. But my brother didn't go. So we had a maid who was watching.

OK. Did you also have people help with the housework? Did you have other hired help at home?

Yeah.

OK. Who?

Who?

Like, what other servants were there? Was there only one maid? Or was there a cook? Was there-- you know?

Was a cook, was, yeah.

There was also a cook?

Yeah.

OK. And did you eat at home, or did you go to the restaurant to eat?

That was our home. So you know, what are-- they don't make a big deal of eating, you know. They give the child some bread, something on it, and that's it.

OK. So when you wanted a snack, you could go to the restaurant easily.

Yeah, yeah.

OK. What language did you speak at home?

Hungarian.

Hungarian. Did you learn Czech?

Yeah, I went to school to Slovak.

Slovak, did you learn Slovak?

Yeah, yeah.

OK. Tell me a little bit about your mother's family. How many brothers and sisters did she have?

They were religious. And over there, you know, the religious people, they had a lot of kids. So my mother had a couple sisters. I remember about three sisters. And they had brothers, couple brothers, about eight.

That's a lot.

Yeah, a lot. Yeah.

Did you know them?

The grandmother worked hard.

Yeah.

And where they lived, they had a maid that was cooking for the poor people. They were going through there. The poor people, it was a stop there. And they ate, and then they go further.

That's really nice.

That's the way they lived, the old time.

That's a very kind thing to do--

Yeah. That was--

--for a private family to feed.

And they were happy to give them, you know? They feed them and come the next time.

Did you visit them often, your grandparent on you mother's side?

Yes. Yes, I did, summertime.

Yeah? And they were in Szerednye, right?

Pardon me?

They are in Szerednye, is that right?

Szerednye.

[PLACE NAME]. Was Szerednye a bigger place or a smaller place than your hometown?

Oh, where I was born, it's much bigger. It belonged there to small towns to that town, you know.

OK, so it was a center.

Center, yeah.

It was a center. And Szerednye, was it a small place?

Who?

Szerednye, was that a small--

A smaller place, you know, it was busses stopped there. And that's how I remember. And the taxis there and they went to another town, you know?

Did you go to visit there by bus or by taxi?

Who?

When you went to Szerednye to visit your mother's family--

Yeah.

--did you travel by bus or by--

By train and bus.

Ah, OK. How long would it take you to get there?

A couple hours.

A couple of hours, OK.

But it's nothing 15, 20 minutes to now.

Yeah. Now, it's different. Now, it would be closer. That is easier to get to. And was Szerednye also 99% Hungarian, like--

Not 99, it's was already about 40%.

OK.

Because they spoke there already Russian.

Really?

Yeah.

Russian as well as Hungarian?

Yeah.

What about Slovak or--

That wasn't Slovak, but the border wasn't far away.

So [INAUDIBLE] was within Hungary, and you lived in Czechoslovakia.

Yeah. But the Jews mostly spoke Hungarian.

Ah, OK.

They had a school.

OK. Was it a large Jewish population in Szerednye?

Yes, I would say so.

OK. What about your hometown? I forget how to call it where you were from. How do we call the town you were born in?

Kapuš.

Kapuš.

Vel'ké Kapušany. Kapus, yeah.

Yeah. Vel'ké Kapuš, did that have a large Jewish population?

Not so big.

Not so big.

But it was all right.

OK. Now, was your mother very religious? Your mother, was she very religious?

Yeah.

OK. And your father?

My-- I--

Your father, was he very religious? Your father, was he a very religious person?

No, he [INAUDIBLE]. My mother was more religious than my father. My father was--

More secular?

Well, you know, not too much, you know?

OK. And was the restaurant a kosher restaurant?

No.

OK. Did you eat kosher at home?

Strictly kosher, yeah.

OK. My mother was very religious.

OK. So did you ever eat any food that you couldn't get at home at the restaurant?

I ate.

Yeah? So you had ham sometimes?

Sometimes, yeah.

Did you tell your mother?

No.

OK. Let's go back to your mother's family. You say they were a lot of children. She had many sisters and many brothers.

Yeah.

Did you know them well?

Well, yes.

Do you remember their names?

Yeah, I would say so.

Tell me what their names were.

The name from my--

Mother's family?

[INAUDIBLE].

Rosica.

Rosica.

[? Etu. ?]

[? Etu. ?]

[? Janui. ?] [INAUDIBLE].

[? Janui. ?]

And then there was one sister was in Slovakia who I didn't know so well. And was the uncles, you know, [INAUDIBLE] uncles, one was Nandor.

Nandor, OK.

Nandor Isidor.

Isidor.

Yeah. And Nandor, Isidor, and Frank.

Was he known as Frank?

Frank, yeah. He came out to this country. He was the first one who came out to this country.

Oh, to the United States?

United States. And he made a family here. But they were in touch, always in touch.

OK. Eti, was her full name Eszter

Yeah.

OK. And so the other sister, what did you say her name was?

Rózsi.

Rózsi. So was that Rózsa?

Yeah. We call her Rózsi.

Rosie, OK.

Rachel.

OK. And what was their last name?

The last name was Braun, Braun family.

Your mother's was also Braun?

My mother was [? Herschkovic. ?]

[? Herschkovic. ?] So [? Rózsi ?] and Eszter, were they also [? Herschkovic? ?]

[? Herschkovic, ?] yeah.

OK, OK. And you say you spent the summers there?

Who?

You spent the summer with your mother's family? You would visit your mother's family in the--

Yeah, every summer.

Every summer. How did her grandfather feed all those children? How did he support his children?

Well, I tell you. See, my grandmother had brothers here. They lived in Pittsburgh. And they were very wealthy. And what was going on there, you know, every girl, every girl got-- how they call it, [NON-ENGLISH].

A dowry?

Dowry.

OK.

Every girl had dowry. And the sister, my grandmother, was a sister. They gave her money. You know, there was, I think, two brothers, but they were very wealthy.

Do you know what business they had in Pittsburgh?

I have no idea.

OK. OK. But you know that from that family the two brothers--

Matter of fact, we called up the consul when we came home from camp, concentration. We called up the consul in Pittsburgh. And I had 300 numbers to come out here in this country, so fast.

Oh, so you were like in the 300-- in line, on the list of people who could come here--

Yeah, yeah.

--you were like number 300?

Yeah.

That is fast.

Yeah, it was fast.

That's very fast, yeah.

Yeah.

So he had influence. Not only did he have wealth, he had influence.

We came out, was 1, 2, 3. 1946.

But before then, before you came out, before the war when your mother was a little girl and she lived there, how did her father support your mother and all of her brothers and sisters? What was his business?

No, they wasn't living together. They had their own home in Szerednye. Mostly they live in Szerednye.

OK. But I'm talking before you were born.

Before I was born?

Before you were born and your mother was young, you know, not yet married--

Yeah.

--what kind of business did her father have? What did he do?

My father?

Your grandfather, your mother's father.

They were handling with cows. They had-- how they call it, the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Were they cattle dealers?

What kind?

Was it cattle dealer, like someone who buys and sells cows?

Every month the people were coming there to make business. How they call it, [NON-ENGLISH]?

Was it cattle dealing? That is you buy a cow. You sell a cow.

Yeah, yeah.

OK. Was it a good business?

Yeah. It was pretty good.

OK.

Yeah.

OK. And that's the environment that your mother grew up in--

Yeah.

--and Charlotte grew up in. Did she go to school?

Oh, matter of fact, you know, I've--

Excuse me, can we cut the camera?

I--

Wait a minute.

Yeah.

Are we running? OK. Matter of fact, when you--

Matter of fact, when we came home, I went back to see who came home. And on the bus, there was nuns, a couple nuns. And so they started to talk to me. And then they said, oh, I know her. She was my student. And she was beautiful. Really they were praying for her, you know, very nice.

For your mother?

My mother, yeah.

Yeah. So she had--

She went to the nun's school. The better people was, I mean, the Jewish people went to non--

Catholic school?

--Gentile school.

That's interesting.

Yeah, yeah.

That's interesting that, from a very religious Jewish family, they sent the girls to--

Over there, yeah.

OK. And why?

You know, the difference between the other people, they is very poorly-- poor people was. And they were trying--

OK. Can I understand it this way? That if you send your girls to a Catholic school at that time in Szerednye, it meant that the girls would have a better education?

Yeah, it was a better. And they picked out the better ones, better students.

I see. And your mother, Charlotte, attended that school?

Yeah.

But did she have to go to religious classes in that school?

No, no, no, no, no. No.

OK, OK. I just never heard of that before.

No, but this is the way it was. I remember, you know. This I saw it myself that they were praying, you know. Because they liked her so much, my mother, that they started to cry.

How did that make you feel when you saw that, when you saw that reaction from these nuns?

Well, you know, how is it. I was crying myself.

Of course.

She was a very respectful woman.

Your mama?

Mama, yeah.

Yeah.

You see-- what's her name? [INAUDIBLE] how you say it--

Hungarian?

[HUNGARIAN].

Oh, [HUNGARINA]. I mean--

[HUNGARIAN]?

Peter. Peter is coming home.

[HUNGARIAN]

[? Peter ?] and [? Marina. ?]

[HUNGARIAN]

I don't know what you mean.

[HUNGARIAN]

Oh, Szilvia

Yeah.

OK, Szilvia

Szilvia

Your relative, Szilvia yes.

The mother, Szilvia--

She's the one who arranged this.

--was very close to my mother.

Ah, Eszter. Szilvia's Mother Eszter--

Eszter.

--was close to yours.

Close to my mother.

OK. Was Charlotte older than Eszter or younger?

My mother?

Yeah.

Older, much older.

Ah, OK.

Yeah.

OK. So let me go back. You say that your mother went to Catholic school. What about your father? Did he have a higher education? Did he go to school?

You mean higher education?

High school, gymnasium?

I don't think so.

OK.

I don't think so.

OK.

He was the only one. He was the only one left from the family. Before he got married, you know, they all died.

So all his brothers and sisters?

They died. This is from the First World War, you know?

Wife, yeah. So did they die, because of the First World War?

I wouldn't say.

OK. OK. And is that why he got the restaurant, because he was the youngest? And he got the restaurant from his father?

You mean my mother?

Your father.

My father, yeah, he was the youngest. Yeah. I don't think that anybody left, only was close to my mother's side. There was quite a few.

How did your parents meet? How did they get to know each other?

Oh. Well, you know, my mother was living in Szerednye. And my father was a little far away. But he used to go there because their family, also, they had a restaurant business.

In Szerednye?

In Szerednye, yeah. They used to take care on him, my father.

So that is when your father would go to his family business in Szerednye, that your mother's family would take care of him. Is that right?

Yeah.

OK. So was it a love match, or was it a matchmaker?

I don't know. That I don't know.

You don't know.

No, they probably matchmaker.

OK. Because it seems so different if he was from a secular--

I know. I know one thing that my grandmother, we call her grandmother. My father's side, the mother, we call grandmother. And from my mother's side, we used to call her bubbe.

Bubbe?

Yeah.

OK, so who were you closer, grandma or bubbe? Who was--

Grandma.

Yeah. You were closer to grandma?

I was closer, because she lives with us.

OK. Did I ask you? Did you know your grandfather, your father's father? Your father's father, did you know him?

No.

Or had he died? He had died.

Long time he died.

OK.

He took over the business.

OK. Your grandmother who lived with you was actually your father's stepmother, is that right?

Not stepmother.

Real mother?

It was from her. Yeah. I used to hear that my grandmother couldn't feed my father, because there wasn't enough milk.

Milk.

And so what she had, she had a woman. And the woman was a gypsy. And she was feeding him.

When he was a baby?

Yeah.

This is the life was goes on in ... That was the old years, you know?

Of course. Was your father a storyteller? Does your father tell you stories about his own life, about his war years, about growing up himself? Did he share much of his young life with you?

No. When we grow up already we started have trouble, you know, with the Jews and non-Jews, you know. So there was not too much talking about that.

Yeah.

And you had to watch what you saying. Because if somebody else heard that, we're in trouble.

So you're saying that by the time you would be old enough to want to know about those stories, the atmosphere had changed.

Yeah.

OK.

Every day different way.

What kind of a personality did your father have? Was he very extroverted and friendly, or was he reserved and quiet?

No, very friendly, very friendly. You had to be in that business. Otherwise, you can-- everybody knows, you know, knew him.

Yeah. He was well-known in town, in your town? Your father, was he well-known in town?

No. No, there was other one, some cousins. I don't know. But there was other one, too.

Another restaurant?

Yeah, but they were friends, you know?

OK. Was there a large Jewish community in--

Not too big. I mean, comparing now what's going on, not too big.

OK. Was there a synagogue?

Oh, yeah. There was a synagogue. They had a rabbi. They had assistant rabbi. The family was more rabbis there.

OK. Oh, so it was families of rabbis lived there.

Yeah.

Did you go to synagogue?

Yes. We had to go.

Every week?

Yeah, every week and every day sometimes.

Really?

Yeah. And was this because of your mother?

Yeah, my mother never. My mother went only New Years, Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur.

On Yom Kippur?

Pardon me?

Did she go on Yom Kippur?

Yeah. Oh, yes. The business was closed only two days, Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur.

OK. So who would take you to the synagogue? Who did you go with? When you went to the synagogue, who from the family would take you there?

What, the family?

I'm saying you used to go sometimes every day to the synagogue or every week. Who would you go with, by yourself?

Well, I had friends.

OK.

You know, they sticking together, the friends. And I had to go to Jewish school.

Did you go to Jewish school?

Yes. I had to go.

So you went to public school. You went to--

Public school and the Jewish school.

OK. In public school, you learned Slovak? In public school, you spoke in Slovak?

Public school, well, it was a Slovak school. Yeah. But inside, we spoke Slovak. But otherwise, we spoke Hungarian. The family was speaking Hungarian.

Did anybody in the family know Yiddish?

The family? Yeah, most of them.

OK. But nobody spoke Yiddish.

Very seldom.

Did you know Yiddish? Could you understand?

Yeah, I knew, but not so well. I learned Yiddish here in this country.

In the United States?

United States, I was working in the garment center.

Well, of course.

Yeah.

Of course.

They used to tell me that I'm not Jewish.

Really?

Because I didn't speak.

Because you didn't speak.

But I picked it up.

OK. OK. Well, that suggests that your family partly was modern and partly was traditional. Because if you're very traditional, most likely would speak Yiddish only.

Yeah.

And who was the greatest influence for you to go to synagogue? Who was the force in the family that says you have to go?

Well, from my mother's side.

OK. OK. And tell me, what kind of a personality did your mother have for you?

Very nice, she was very intelligent. With the schooling, she was very good.

Yeah?

Matter of fact, you know, she sit down with my brother and teach him the lessons from school. She took more care on us with the school than my father. Yeah.

And why would that be?

Pardon me?

Why?

My father never had time.

OK. Did you see much of him?

Pardon me?

Did you see much of your father?

Oh, yes, every day.

OK. But it was that, if you saw him, he was working in the restaurant.

Yeah.

The nightclub--

Excuse me, can we cut? What is it? So we were talking about your father and when did you see him and who took a greater interest in the children's education. And you said it was your mother, because your father was busy.

This always was. Every family had the same way.

Yeah?

The mother was more interested to take care of the children than the father, every family.

Did she tell you stories? Did she tell you about her childhood? Did she talk to you about how life was when she was growing up?

No.

No.

No.

Who were you closer to in your family?

Family, me? Well, naturally the mother, my mother and father, you know. I was together in the concentration camp with my father.

OK. I want to ask you something that sounds a little bit strange, but there is a reason for it. What were the values that your father had and the values that your mother had that they kind of gave to you as things that are important for life? Were there things that they thought you need to live like this in order to have a good life? Did your father have such values?

Well, you know, she was very close to my father, my mother. And this was all right. I really don't know what.

You don't know what I'm asking?

Yeah, I know what you're asking. I was afraid, more afraid from my father than my mother. You understand what?

Was he a strict person?

Who?

Your father, was he a very strict person?

He was.

He was, OK.

You know, the life was turned around. And then when we became big, you know, I came out from school, and it was hard to get a job, to become something, to take a trade then. Because everybody's was running for our trade.

Yeah.

The kids were running for a trade, to learn a trade. And that was my father involved. My mother wasn't involved with this kind of business. But anyway, she was a hard working woman, very hard working.

OK. Did your parents, did they ever talk about politics when you were growing up, about the political life in Czechoslovakia?

No, not with us. They don't have to talk to us from politic. We knew. I was already getting older. And it was a different thing going on.

Before the war--

Yeah?

--was there ever talk about what's going on in Germany, about Hitler? Did people--

Never anything.

Never anything.

That was the problem. That was the problem with the Jews. The whole Europe, they couldn't believe it what they doing.

You know, I remember a boy when it was going on. The Jews, they were taking Jews first from Poland and Russia and all over. They were taking away.

They couldn't believe that there was a young man a now. And he came to the synagogue. And he's telling the stories, what's happened, how did he's alive.

So he was telling the story that they was lined up, you know, all about a couple hundred people. And they were shooting into the grave. And he managed to walk out, and somehow he disappeared.

And he was alive. He came that. They couldn't believe him. They could not believe him what happened.

Did you hear him talk?

Pardon me?

Did you hear this young man talk?

Yeah. I hear, yeah.

So you were there?

The boy wasn't sure what to do over there, because they were so dumb, so couldn't believe it what's going on. He disappeared from there.

Did he? So he came. He said something.

He went somewhere else.

Was your father there? Did he hear the same thing that you did?

You mean, he couldn't believe it?

Yeah.

Yeah, the same way. Every Jew, the [INAUDIBLE] said, it's a lie, a lie, a lie, says, laddie, not true.

OK. And that was probably in the '40s already, probably in 1940, 1941, '42, something like that? Because that's when those things happened.

Yeah, '43.

Yeah. So tell me, do you remember hearing about the war starting? Do you remember hearing when the war started, when Germany attacked Poland--

Yeah.

--on September 1st, '39?

Yeah.

Do you remember where you were when that happened?

Well, that time, they were with the Germans.

No, I'm asking were you--

You know, the mind was with the Germans. They were so stupid.

They were saying it's good that Germany attacked Poland?

Yeah.

The local Jewish people?

Yeah, yeah. They stupid was. They couldn't believe it.

Oh my goodness.

Yeah. That was a problem. That was the problem. Because if they would have believe it, they would have more Jews stay alive.

Yeah, yeah. Did your life change after the war started? After 1939--

Yeah.

--did circumstances in your family change?

Change, of course-- they took away their license.

[INAUDIBLE] [? one. ?]

So when Germany attacked Poland in 1939--

Yeah.

--before that, they had taken over Czechoslovakia. When they took over Czechoslovakia, did that change your life? Because you--

Oh, it started, yeah.

OK. What happened?

First of all, the business disappeared. No more Jews can have any business.

The Hungarians, were they there yet or not yet?

The Hungarians, they came in right there. Hitler gave to the Hungarians to go into the group.

You mean to be part of Hungary?

Yeah, part of they gave to Hungarias.

OK. OK. And so your father's business, what happened to it?

They close up.

The restaurant closes?

Everything close up, you know, disappeared.

So did he get any money for it?

Nothing, are you kidding? Nothing. They were giving away the jewelry, a lot of money, just to stay alive. And nothing helped. You know, another week, another week, and then they--

So your father, after that's taken away, after his businesses are taken away, what year was this that his businesses were taken away?

It started 1942 I think.

OK, in 1942. How did he put food on the table?

Who?

After his business was closed, how did your father put food on the table?

Well, it was tough. It was tough. I remember my mother used to go to the mill to get bread, you know? She worked so hard at night, you know, they shouldn't see him-- see her when she's going.

Oh, I see.

It was very bad, very bad. And I remember I had an uncle, my father's sister.

OK. Your sister's husband, or your father's--

Sister's husband, but the sister wasn't alive anymore. And he was ... big business hero. And they brought some mill, you know.

And there was no bread on the table. So she had to do something. So this is the way it was life.

Did any of the people who had worked for your father, did they help your family?

Well, it was a mix up, because they took him into the army, all those people who was working for us. And we had to let them go, you know, the orders. So it was very hard. I remember it was very hard.

Were there any of your neighbors-- were there any non-Jews who took advantage of your situation?

There was not too many.

OK.

Not too many.

So they there wasn't anybody who helped, but there anybody--

You know, I remember I had a cousin. And he was in Budapest. And he was coming home, because he was afraid to stay there. He was coming home to the mother.

And on the train, he met a couple people that we went to school together. And they hide him on the train, you know? They help him out. Some of them they were honest, you know.

Were there any who hurt your family?

Who?

Were there any neighbors or any people that you knew from the town who hurt your family when these anti-Jewish types of things were going on?

Any of--

I'm saying, when you had no money and the restaurants are closed--

Yeah.

--were there any people who would take advantage of your situation?

You didn't trust nobody. Could have sell it, you know, or rented or something, but you don't trust nobody, you know, what's going to happen. So it was tough. It was close already that they going to take us away.

So did people start believing what that young man had said? When it got bad--

Yeah. They started believe already that they taking us away, yeah. We went to a ghetto. And from the ghetto, we went, you know.

They were taking to the ghetto people, you know. And they was standing outside. People were standing outside and seeing how they go, how they take away the Jews.

Tell me about the day.

Who?

Tell me about the day they took you away. When they came to your home, did you still live behind the restaurant?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

So what was that like, the day that they came?

Yeah, nothing.

What happened?

It's closed up, was ...

Yeah. So who came to take you away when it was time for you?

What is it?

What I'm saying, when it was time that they were going to take you and your family away--

They took us to the ghetto.

Yes. Who did? And when did they do it? You know, what time of day was it?

Like daytime.

Daytime.

Daytime, yeah.

Were there many soldiers?

Some people were happy that they were taking us. Some people wasn't happy, you know. But most of them they were happy.

You know, right away they went into the houses. And they took away for themself furniture and all those things, you know. Because we left everything there, nothing, nothing came.

When I came out from the camp, I heard that one family took the bedroom. So I took it back. I took it back. That's all, terrible.

Do you remember, when you left for the ghetto, did you take anything with you?

What could you take? Nothing.

OK.

Nothing. I could have run away. You know, I could have. I had a friend, and we were planning to go. But then we going to leave here the parents? It wasn't so easy.

What time of year did they come to take you? Was it spring? Was it fall? Was it summertime?

Summertime. It was, I tell you, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Pesach. Pesach, Easter?

When?

Pesach.

What?

It was at Passover?

Yes.

Was it Passover?

Passover.

OK.

My mother couldn't bake nothing. They were baking themself the bread and everything-- couldn't. Right, Passover was-- they didn't do nothing.

And so you were taken Passover what year?

What year? 1943 or '44.

OK. Had the Germans--

'43.

'43.

Yeah.

In 1943. So the Germans had not come to Hungary yet?

No, not the Germans, but the Hungarians did the same thing what the Germans did.

OK, so it was Hungarians who came to take you away?

The Hungarian.

OK. The ghetto they took you to, where was it located?

Where was?

The ghetto.

The ghetto they call it Ungvar.

Ungvar.

Yeah.

Was that far?

Well, I would say 30 miles, 30, 40 miles, something like this.

And what kind of a house or what kind of a place did they take you to?

The ghetto? The ghetto was [HUNGARIAN].

Stone. Stone.

[HUNGARIAN].

They make the stones.

The stone factory.

I want to know what the place looked like. Did they live in little houses? Did they live in big houses? Did they--

OK. [HUNGARIAN]?

You know, it's brick. They were building brick there. That's how, it's very big was.

It was a factory? Did they take you--

It was a factory. But as soon as we came in there, they stopped doing anything like that.

OK. So it's not like you were taken to a poor section of town. You were taken actually to a place that had been a factory?

Yeah.

And the factory used to make bricks before?

Bricks, yeah.

OK. So where did you sleep?

On the floor.

Of the factory?

Yeah.

Inside a building?

Everybody was-- yeah. My name was Braun. The other one was Abraham. And this is the way they were sleeping, crying at night [INAUDIBLE] and terrible.

So everybody in this one big factory?

Yeah.

And was there any food?

They didn't give food, but we find food.

How?

Yeah.

How?

How? You know, people here, there, and they still had money. How much money they had, but they-- anyway, nobody had their head. Because they could have saved their lives a lot of things.

Did you stay at this place long?

Till we went to Auschwitz on transport, we are waiting for the transport.

OK.

But nobody knew from Auschwitz. We wouldn't have go so fast.

Yeah. Yeah. Were you there more than a month in this factory?

Approximately a month.

Approximately a month.

OK. And did anybody try to escape?

I'm sure they did, but we didn't leave. That was a mistake.

So it was your mother, your father, your--

My father was separated.

Already?

Already there my father was separated, because they didn't trust them. They made him a communist. He wasn't.

They said he was a communist?

Yeah. They said, ah, who called for communist. They made him communist.

OK. And where did they take him?

Another place.

OK. So it was just you, your mother--

Mother, yeah.

--your grandmother?

No, no grandmother-- a long time died.

OK. So it's you, your mother, your younger sister, and your younger brother?

Yeah.

The four of you together?

Yeah.

And your father is someplace else?

Yeah.

When they took your father away, was it still at your home? Or was it when you reached this ghetto that you were separated?

Yeah. My--

When your father was taken away, where did that happen?

Right there.

In the ghetto?

Ghetto.

OK. OK. And how did your mother-- what did she do when you're in that factory? What was she doing?

Nothing, nothing, we waiting there. The head was working how to get some food, nothing else.

OK.

OK.

OK. So then in about a month, what happens?

Then they put us on the train. And they took us to Auschwitz. The first stop was Košice.

The first stop was Košice with the train. And they let out everybody to stretch out and the toilet. And that

time I could have run away. And so I didn't.

So Košice is still in Slovakia. Is Košice in Slovakia?

That was Hungary already. It was Hungary.

It was Hungary, OK. And what did the train look like?

The train?

The train, the car, the people?

Wagon, wagon, like cows you throw in. For, it wasn't made for people.

How long was the trip?

How long? One night.

Did everybody know where you were going?

They know already.

Yeah?

Yeah, the Germans talk it over.

Košice, they took it over.

So until Košice, it was Hungarians.

Yeah. And then from Košice, it was Germans?

German, yeah. They took it over.

OK. And it was a one night trip? What do you remember seeing when you get to Auschwitz?

I tell you. We came down from the train, everybody out of the train yelling and you know, and all kind of-- and over there was, when we came down, Mengele. You heard from Mengele?

Yeah. OK.

Yeah. So they were separating people, you know, strong people, poor people, kids. They were separating.

How was your family separated?

It was separated my father, and me, and my brother. And my brother was with us, but he was a kid yet, you know? He was 12 years old.

And he was separated. And he was coming with us. And I said, why don't you go to my mother? And there was a guard, a German guard, but he had a little heart. And he says to him, go to your father, because this goes into the gas chamber.

He said that? In German?

Yeah. It was a German soldier.

OK. OK.

Yeah. So it's at that point that you're separated from your mother and your sister?

My mother was together with my sister for a while. And then they were separated. My mother was very skinny. And they threw her in.

But your sister was not thrown in?

My older sister, they sent her away to work, to a working lager. She was working there.

But you didn't see her?

No.

Because you were-- your sister was how old at this time?

Well, I was 17-- was 2 years younger than I was, about 16 years old.

OK, so she's old enough to be a worker.

Yeah.

In other words, they could get some value out of her.

Yeah, right.

OK.

Yeah. That's life.

And what happened with you? How did your father come to be together with you again?

Well, we tried to help each other.

No, no, no. I'm talking, when you got to Auschwitz, your family was separated?

Yeah.

But you say your father was with you. The last time you spoke of him, he was somewhere else. Because they called him a communist. When did he come back?

Oh. You forgot about that. When we were in Auschwitz, you forgot about what happened before.

I know. What I'm trying to find out is, when you got to the brick factory--

Yeah.

--your father was sent away.

No.

He was separated?

Yeah. But he's right there in the same camp--

Ah.

--same camp. But soon as they were taking out people, so my father came to us--

I see, OK.

--till we went to Auschwitz.

OK, OK, OK. Now, it's clear. Now, it's clear. So you, your father, and your brother are together in Auschwitz. What happens to you after that separation?

After the separation, they took away my brother, because he was very young. And he was trying to manage with the youngsters. And they picked him out. You want me I should tell his story?

Yes, please.

Yeah. They pick him out like a youngsters. He didn't catch the height. And they gave him a number, and they separated him. But he was very smart boy. And soon as, you know, the blockalteste, you know, the-- who takes care of--

The leader of the block.

He took care on him, you know, so gave him a little more bread. And as soon as came the Red Cross truck, he knew that is problem. They going to take him away. So he went out in the back. He hide himself. And they were looking for him, looking for him. And they couldn't find him. And this is the way he came back. When the truck went away, they took somebody else.

Ah, OK.

And he stayed there. And they gave him another number, the blockalteste.

OK. Did you get tattooed when you were in Auschwitz?

I don't have, but my brother has two numbers.

Two numbers?

One number, the guy was-- that boychik, another boy, who went into the gas chamber. They took him away first, and they experimenting with him.

They made experiments with him.

Yeah, that's what they were doing. But anyhow--

So your brother saved himself--

Yeah.

--by going out of the barracks.

Back door [INAUDIBLE], then disappeared. And they were looking for him, couldn't find him.

Now, you and your father, what was going on with you two? What were you doing with your father together? Your brother had been taken away.

Yeah.

It's you and your father then who are left. What happens to you?

What happened? We were together with my father.

Yeah, but were you put to work? Were you taken somewhere else?

Yeah, to work, they took us to work. They were taking us to, like, mechanics, you know? They were taking us to France, Longwy-Thil, Longwy. Did you hear from Longwy?

No.

It's French.

So they took you from Auschwitz to France?

Yeah. They took us like mechanics. And they didn't take us like-- hard work we were getting all kind of heavy wood on the shoulder, you know. We were kids.

Yeah.

I was a kid. And I was short, so I was lucky. Because there was boys, you know, they were tall. And they were carrying the short people, shorter.

That is when there was a tall boy and then there was a short one, the tall ones had more weight on their shoulders. Because they had to-- because they were taller.

Yeah.

OK.

Was rough, rough thing. At night, it was-- once they [INAUDIBLE] took-- there was a guard, you know. I was picked out for work in a house. It belongs to people, the French people. And they took away that house.

And they had a garden there, was very good [INAUDIBLE]. I was there working, you know. And I was taking out the garbage.

And there coming a woman with a daughter. And they felt sorry for me, you know, that I took out the garbage, you know. And I made my-- and I said pain, pain, bread. Give me bread.

And the little girl was running. And this I will never forget. These girl was running down the hill.

And she brought me that French bread, that long bread. And I put it in my-- and soon as I came back, the guard, my guard, he says, where were you, you know? And he wants to kill me.

But who cares he kill me or not kill me. But anyway, I went in there. And I went down to the cellar. And I packed it in right away.

Well, you must have been very hungry.

Oh. [LAUGHTER] Hungry.

Yeah. What kind of food did you get?

We were working somewhere else.

But in France?

In the lager, you know, in the lager you were together-- to work for here. And he went to work somewhere else.

OK-- the lager in France.

It was a working lager. It didn't have a name. We were in Longwy-Thil.

Longwy-Thil.

Longwy-Thil.

OK.

OK, that's French.

OK.

We were working in mines. That was a steel mine, very cold, what used to be a steel mine, you know. And they made a factory for aeroplanes. They were making a factory for aeroplanes. And we used to go to work in the morning and at night. I was lucky to get out from that, but only just for a couple days.

Oh.

I wasn't working anymore in that building. They took somebody else. And we went into the mine.

It was raining outside and over there. And we used to take this cement papers. You know the cement where it was a cement [INAUDIBLE]? And we put it in the back of-- and anybody they caught it he has a paper in the back, they gave him.

They hit him.

They hit him in the back.

So you're not supposed to even take the paper.

No.

OK. And the reason-- I mean, most people could understand why. But for those who wouldn't understand, why would you put a cement paper on your back?

Why?

Why?

Why I put paper in the back? It was raining, and it was wet. So at least had a little bit to dry out, you know?

Were you cold? Were you cold? Was it a cold--

It was cold, sure. It was cold. The mine was cold. And it was very bad.

And over there inside, we were working with the Polish people-- not Polish. It was Ukraine people. We were working together.

And one guy told me and a young fellow, he told me that, if I want, he could hide me. You know, he wanted to hide me. And I was afraid. But I should have take a chance.

Was he a guard, or was he another prisoner there?

Pardon me?

Was this person a guard or a prisoner?

No, he was working there. But he wasn't like a camp. He was working separate. They were separate them.

They took away the families, you know. They trust them. And they were separated. We were prisoners, but he wanted to help me. I had a couple of times like this.

Did you regret that you didn't take these chances?

Which--

Did you think, later, you made a mistake when you wouldn't take those chances, those opportunities to--

You know, you blaming everything, you know?

You think that it would have been better had I gone. It would have been better if I--

If I gone, I would've been better. They missed us, you know, the partisans. You know what is a partisan? They missed us. The French partisans, they missed us with one hour. One hour we could've been liberated.

Really? While you were there?

They missed us, yeah. And they took us away. They were shooting in the air. And they took us away in no time. And then we came to Kochendorf, to Germany.

So in other words, can I understand this right, that the way you left France is because the partisans attacked? The French partisans attacked?

French partisan, they could liberate us in one hour. And they didn't, because they couldn't do it. They took us away. And we came to--

Kochendorf.

Kochendorf.

Kochendorf was a salt mine, chemical mine. And over there, we had to walk, I would say, about 4 miles, 5 miles every morning.

Wow.

And we went through a trees, trees, apple trees, beautiful apple trees. And there was a guy, SS, with a dog. And anybody picked up an apple, they catch them right away. And we tried [INAUDIBLE]. Terrible it was.

Did you see people killed?

I don't remember, no.

OK.

So we were working in Kochendorf in a mine there, salt mine.

What was your job?

It was warm-- doing the work for machinery. You know, they wanted to make a factory there they wanted to do.

What was your job? In those salt mines, what did you do?

To take out the-- going with that thing, you know, and to take out the stone. That's what we did. It was very hard work.

Were you together with your father there?

While we're there, I was together with my father.

OK. Was he strong enough to do the work, your father?

Not too good. It wasn't good. What was going on with him?

Do you know, they gave us cigarettes. And he was a big smoker. And he gave away the cigarette.

For cigarette, he gave away bread. It was very bad. I used to fight with people, you know, not to. They shouldn't take it away from him.

But all right, it's hard to say even-- that little bread, you know? I remember it was Yom Kippur, you know, the [INAUDIBLE] day fasting. And I see he has-- we were working together.

And I see, on the side, he has bread there. To my father, I said to him, why don't you eat the bread? He says, it's a holiday.

I said, never mind holiday. You want to give it away now for cigarettes. I said, eat it now.

I had to give order to him to eat it now. I said, no Yom Kippur. I said, eat it.

Did he?

And he ate it, yeah. He wanted to give me a piece. I said, I wouldn't take a half a thing. You eat it. You know, [INAUDIBLE] poor man. And he ate it.

It sounds like you became the father.

It was tough.

Yeah.

It was tough. You know, I was together with him. You know, it was tough. There was a beating. You know, they beat him up, you know.

What for? Why was he beaten up?

They beat him up.

OK. Were you there when he was beaten up?

I was there, sure.

You saw it? And was there a reason why he was beaten up?

I didn't get it.

OK. Was there a reason why he was beaten up?

I had to fight with three people that shouldn't take away the bread from him.

So it was other prisoners?

Other prisoners, you know, they gave away the cigarettes just to get the bread, that piece of bread.

Oh, that was-- you know, people become like animals sometimes. I say people become like animals.

Animals, yeah. They were. They were animals. You know, that was-- I remember when we went through that apple trees. And then they had what they give for the cows, big--

Corn?

Yeah.

--the big, big things. And one guy, I remember, poor man, they killed him. He took one of the big one in and comes that best that's German maybe the dog Yeah

and they put him in the mouth that thing you know it's a heavy thing and he should be running into the mine and he told him, now you could eat it.

I don't fully understand.

You didn't understand.

They gave the piece of corn? Was that what it is?

Yeah.

And they stuck it in his mouth.

Mouth, you know.

And then tells him to run into the mine?

Till the mine, you know. [INAUDIBLE] gave another two mine [INAUDIBLE]. Now, you could eat it, he says. What mean bastards they were, these German. It's all forgotten, you know.

So how long were you at these salt mines?

Salt mine, how many people?

Yeah. How many--

There was people working daytime, and they were working at night. We were working night. And it was terrible to work at night till you get to the mine.

And at night, you know, we went to sleep a little bit, you know. And then to go to the toilet every minute, you know, go to the toilet, so we couldn't sleep. It was terrible.

Much harder work than-- it's much harder than in the daytime.

Sure.

How long did you stay at Kochendorf?

Kochendorf, how long we were there?

Yeah.

A couple months, I think we were there about five months, about five months.

Now, when you were taken to Auschwitz--

Yeah.

What month was that when you were taken to Auschwitz?

It was Pesach, you know. So Easter, it was Easter.

Like April 1944?

'44, yeah.

OK. And when you were in--

No, not-- it wasn't '44.

It was '43.

OK. And how long had you stayed in Auschwitz?

How long we stayed? We were waiting for the transports, because we were mechanics.

OK.

I said I am my mechanic, but I wasn't a mechanic. But anyway, they throw us out. They throw me out. And my father throw me out. And my father was very quick.

He was young yet, you know. He grabbed my hand, and we run to the other side. And they put in my name and my father's name.

And that's how we went to the mechanics then. And we were so happy that we are mechanics. The rest went into the gas chamber.

Really? So I'm trying to get a sense of how long you were in each place. I'm trying to get a sense of how long you were in each place? You were taken to Auschwitz during Passover in 1943. And so about how many months were you there?

In Auschwitz? Auschwitz, we were waiting for a transport to go to France.

Right. Was that two weeks? Was that three weeks?

No, it was about four weeks we were waiting.

OK. And when--

You know, there was guards, you know. But the guards was like a different company. And they were watching us, you know? They're kicking.

They were from Ukraine. And they were terrible, terrible to us, kicking all this, you know, with the boots. They had boots. And it was terrible.

That's while you're waiting for the transport?

Yeah.

And then about how long did you spend in France in that--

Well, not too long. We were there, I would say, about three months.

OK. So that brings us to the summer of 1943.

'44.

OK. OK, if it's '44, then you were in Kochendorf for how long? Five months you said?

I would say so, yeah. Were you there during the fall?

Pardon me?

Were you there during the fall when it was already autumn and after summer? Were you there when it was cold?

Yeah, it was after summer, after.

OK. Where did you spend the winter?

It was terrible. You know what happened? I didn't tell to say it. When we were working in Kochendorf in the mine, you know, we didn't sleep so long. And we don't-- and one guy went in got the wire, the wire. It's a sabotage.

And he got the wire. And right away, we went into the camp with a barracks. And we stand up.

And they said, every second man will be killed if you don't tell me who did it. Every second man will be killed. So what he says.

One guy says, he did it. And they took him out. They feed them good. And they hanged him.

Nobody went out to work. And they pulled him out on the hang, to hang. And he was saying, yelling, tell my family what happened to me. This is and they hanged him.

Do you think it was the guy who actually did it?

Did it, yeah. He did it.

From Kochendorf, where did they take you?

From Kochendorf, we were taking and we went on a death march. I went out on a death march. And anybody who couldn't walk already, they through him into the wagon. And the wagon over there, who went into the wagon, they died.

So I had-- we were going like this with other people. And I went with a Russian. He was a soldier in the army.

And he says to me-- he knew already the tricks what to do. He says, let them go. We go in the back. Because anybody who falls in there-- finish.

Oh, so if anyone falls down while there are people marching behind him, he's going to be trampled? People will walk over whoever falls down?

Yeah.

And they throw him in. So--

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

Let's cut. So anyway, you were talking about-- from Kochendorf, where did they take you? Death march.

Death march, this will be interested what I'm going to say now. That march, we came into Dachau. Did you hear from Dachau? Came into the Dachau-- and the Oberscharführer over there asking our Oberscharführer, [GERMAN]? Where are the people? Tot.

Dead.

Dead. And they took us to take a shower. But everybody was afraid from the shower, because we heard what's going on. And we went to take a shower. I took a shower.

And I had a lot of [NON-ENGLISH]. You know what this [NON-ENGLISH]? Big pimples in the back that I couldn't move already. So I washed it down. And we went into the barrack.

And I say to the guy, I want to go to the revier--

The infirmary?

--to the hospital.

OK.

He says to me, anybody who goes to the hospital never comes back. So I said, I don't care. I'm going. That was so quiet there.

And you know, the people, the dead people was put like this, you know, in the-- [HUNGARIAN].

In the wood.

Like wood? Stacked like wood?

Yes.

Yeah, like this. You know how they are? The wood stay put.

Yeah.

They put the people like that. And I went into the hospital. I couldn't hear one word, quiet, nothing, no people, no people.

Wow.

And I'm standing there. And it comes [INAUDIBLE]. And a big officer, a doctor, big officer, he comes to me. And he says, [GERMAN]? What I want?

What do you want? Yeah.

I'm showing him. He says to me, stay here. He went. He went, and he brought, I don't know, maybe it was a spray, some kind of spray.

And he brought a knife. And me cut me off, cut me off over there. And he sprayed. And he through me the toilet paper, you know?

They didn't have anything else. They throw me-- now [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. He threw me out.

He says, now I could go. He let me leave. He let me leave. That was something.

Yeah. You know, stories like this you don't hear.

No, no.

OK? So that was it. And I came to the--

Did it help? What he did, did it help on it?

Yeah, of course, it helped.

OK.

It helped. I came there. And he says, you lucky. Nobody came back. So we stayed there.

And after two days, they packed us in a regular train. And they took us to-- how they called it [INAUDIBLE] now. I forgot. I forgot the name.

Swiss border, towards the Swiss border.

What?

Towards the Swiss border, your wife says.

What?

Were you taken towards the Swiss border, so Switzerland?

Yeah, the Swiss border they were taking us. And it's a beautiful place. And we came there, you know. And we had to hide from the German soldiers, because they were running away from the front line.

They were running already. And you know, first, they take us down with a wagon to the there. And they killed people in the water.

They were killing. I mean, we didn't go-- we went to up of the hill, you know, in the-- and we find the place where the-- you know, there are people who works in the trees. they fixing the trees and everything. They working there. And he lived there.

And luckily, the wife was in the hospital. And we went in there. And he says, let us stay here for the night.

He says, ah, you have any lice? I said, no, we don't have lice. Soon as it gets warmer, it was coming out like fly.

And over there, next day, we hear the tanks coming. I ran out, you know. And I see. I look at it, you know. And I hear the big noise.

And I went in to the barrack. And I said to the people, our people, that it looks like the tanks are here. So he says, let's go out.

Who's this?

And it was the tanks with Black people.

Oh. So this was not German tanks?

No, no. No, not German. It was already Americans, American tanks on the front line.

Wow.

And we went there. And we look at it. You know, I had never seen a Black man. Never seen in my life a Black man.

And they laughing, laughing, laughing. And I says to him, give me something. And he took a piece of chocolate.

He gave me a piece of chocolate. Oh my god, chocolate. So it was really good.

They were laughing. And it comes a captain. With a bicycle, he comes.

And he was a Jewish guy Jewish captain. And he spoke Yiddish, he spoke. And he says, I'm going to put you in to a place where you're going to stay there for a while.

And you're going to eat what they eat. And you're going to eat the same thing. So he took us there, you know?

Was your father with you?

No, my father was dead already.

Tell me, what happened to your father?

He died. He died.

Where? How?

How?

Did he die in--

How like anybody else died over there, he couldn't take it anymore.

Was this in Kochendorf?

Yeah, in Kochendorf.

He died in Kochendorf.

Yeah. I took my wife back to see where is it, where is the place where I was. I went back.

OK. So did he not wake up one morning?

Pardon me?

Did your father not wake up one morning?

No, no.

What happened? How did he die?

He went into the hospital there. They couldn't help him.

OK. And was that because he hadn't eaten?

Pardon me?

Was that because he would not eat, but smoke instead?

Well, it wasn't completely that, but it helped. It helped.

Was he starving? Did he starve to death?

Starving and it was very bad, very bad. So--

So from then, you're on your own.

And we were in-- not Kochendorf.

Dachau you said.

How they call that place? We were together there. You know, it was a--

[PLACE NAME?] That's [PLACE NAME.]

It was a beautiful place in the Alp.

In the Alps, OK.

In the Alp, you know? And we stayed there. We went into the city. And we had plenty food.

They wanted to put me in the hospital. You know, I was sick. And I didn't know want to go.

What city was this? Was it Munich?

Near Munich. Munich was--

Because that's near Dachau.

Munich was Dachau.

Yeah, Munich is Dachau. Well, you're talking about other cities that would be near the Swiss border?

This was in Tyrol.

Ah, OK, so in Austria.

Beautiful place.

OK.

Beautiful, but who could-- and we were there for about five weeks. Four, five weeks we were there.

Was this Austria already?

Who?

Were you in Austria?

No, no, it wasn't Austria, no.

It was Germany.

This is Tyrol. You know, it's in the Alp--

Yeah.

--in the Alp near Switzerland, not far from Switzerland. Switzerland didn't want to take us, you know? We came down from the train. We stopped the train.

And officer, a German officer, stand up on a chair. And he says, you're all free. You could go all over.

And we stayed there. One night, they were taking us back.

Really?

Yeah. They changed their mind.

Really? But we didn't go. I mean, my people didn't take us, you know?

You didn't go?

I didn't want to go. And we went up the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. How they call? I forgot the name. Oh my god.

Anyhow, we went up there. And well, a week later came the American trucks, came American trucks. And they took us to Czech Republic.

To the Czech border?

To Czech-- inside Czech.

Inside Czechoslovakia.

Yeah, Pilsen.

Oh, yeah, Pilsen. Pilsen, yeah. They went up to Pilsen.

And we are free already. You know, we are free. We took the railroad.

We went into Prague. In Prague, we went to the YMCA. And I got a nice room, beautiful, free man.

Did you have a chance to get different clothes? You know, because you had, up until that point--

Oh, yeah, we changed. We changed.

Yeah?

We changed. Some of the-- they were full with lice.

OK. So when did you get rid of the clothes that were full of lice? Was that still in Germany when you got rid of your prison clothes?

Yeah, we went into army base, a big army base a German army base, you know? And we were looking for some kind of clothes. But the clothes wasn't good, because full with lice was. So we got the different clothes.

OK, OK. And so you eventually end up in Prague free.

Oh, yeah. I had a room in YMCA.

OK. How long did you stay in Prague?

Prague, we stayed about three weeks.

OK.

And then we went out to the station.

OK.

You speak Czech?

No, I speak a little German. What is the station? What is the station called?

The station is [NON-ENGLISH]. I don't know.

Oh, yeah.

[NON-ENGLISH], that means the place, yeah.

You mean the main central station?

Yeah. And the people were coming. And I met my sister over there. Yeah. It was--

By accident?

--happiness. Where is my mother? Where is the father? Nobody. It's gone.

So your sister was able to tell you about your mother?

Yeah.

What did she tell you?

She tell me that they took her already to the gas chamber.

OK. What did she tell you about her own experience? What happened to your sister?

My sister?

Yeah, after your mother is taken to the gas chamber, what happened with your sister?

My sister went to work there in [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. You know, not far from that camp near Prague there is a camp there.

Theresienstadt.

Theresienstadt, yeah.

OK, so she was working in Theresienstadt?

She was there for a while. And then they gave her another place they took her. She was young yet, you know. But anyway, she ran through there.

OK. What was your sister's name again? Your sister's name? What was your--

Elizabeth.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth Braun, OK.

Yeah.

And so where did you meet her in Prague?

In Prague, on the [NON-ENGLISH] is the station house.

You met her at the station, the train station house?

The Czech station.

Interesting. By accident?

Pardon me?

By accident? Or did you know?

Yeah, by accident. Yeah.

What a surprise.

I met my brother in Budapest. He was standing in line to get money for food to buy food from the Jewish agency, from UNRRA. And somebody comes and tells me your brother is in the front line. He's going into for money. I said, where? And I left the line, and I run over to my brother.

Wow. Wow. But first, you meet your sister in Prague.

Yeah. And you know, the first thing, where is my father? Where is my mother? It's all gone.

Yeah, yeah.

So this is what it is.

So from Prague--

Pardon me?

In Prague, you meet your sister. Do you stay together then, you and your sister?

We together already.

All right.

We didn't let each other away.

Yeah.

And over there, I met my aunt, Szilvia's mother.

Ah, your Aunt Eszter?

Eszter, yeah, I met. And we were together. And she was, that time, single. And then she got married. And it was like a station we were together.

And then we met my uncle. He was a Czech soldier. He came from the front line. And he met us. And he

stayed near Prague.

Near Prague, we stayed in a farmhouse, farm. They gave him, the government gave him, a whole farm, gave it to him with cows, with everything. They took away from the Germans, and they gave him.

Ah, I see. I see.

So we were there for a while. And then we came here.

So tell me, did you ever go back to your hometown?

Yeah.

At that time?

I went there twice.

OK. Did you go back right after the war ended when you were free or later?

Oh, after everything when I was already a rich man.

[LAUGHTER]

OK, so that's after you come to the United States. I'm saying, from that time when you meet your sister in Prague and then your aunt and your uncle, did you go back to your hometown?

Yeah.

At that time?

When?

Right when the war ends, did you ever go back to your hometown in 1945?

Oh, yeah, yeah. I went back.

Yeah?

I had my home there, but it was bombed down. So [INAUDIBLE] nothing.

And then you said you went to Szerednye to see if your mother's family was alive?

Yeah, yeah.

And that's when you met the nuns on the bus?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

OK. And was it at that time that you also went to Budapest and met your brother?

No, that was before. But I went to Budapest. That was before, right after the war when I was liberated already.

You know, people was going left or right. He's going home. He's going this way. The train was full with people.

Did you go to Budapest from Prague?

Yeah. Yeah.

And then did you come back to Prague with your brother?

With who?

Your brother.

My brother? Yeah. We was together. But my brother stayed with Eszter.

Your Aunt Eszter?

Yeah.

Your mother's youngest sister.

Sister, yeah.

Yeah. And how long until you came to the United States?

I came '46.

That's early.

Yeah.

That's very early.

1946.

And how did you get here? Remind us again. What was the way that you got here to the US?

To come to the US? 1946.

Who helped you come here?

Not too long, not too long.

Yeah. Who helped you come to the United States?

My grandmother's brother, they live in Pittsburgh at that time. But I don't think they are alive anymore. They were very wealthy.

OK. Did you stay in Pittsburgh? Did you stay in Pittsburgh?

I didn't go there.

Where did you go?

I stayed near Prague.

OK. When you came to the United States, where did you end up living?

I stayed with Eszter.

And she lived where?

I forgot the name. [HUNGARIAN].

Lower East Side.

Huh?

The Lower East Side.

In New York City?

No, that was already-- no, I don't remember really.

OK, OK. It's all right. How did you come to the United States? How did you come to the United States? When you left Prague, what was the way that you traveled here?

Well, I had to get a passport.

OK.

And that was a cousin of mine who was in the Czech army. So it was nothing to get him a passport for me, got me a passport. And I sent a number for my-- my uncle sent me to his uncle and the consul. I had the 350 number.

OK. From Prague to come to the United States, did you go by train? And then by-- how did you leave Prague? By what way did you leave Prague? When you were traveling to the US, how did you get here?

To Prague?

No.

From--

From Prague to the United States?

Oh. I had a aeroplane.

Oh, you came by plane?

Plane, yeah. By plane, I went to Sweden. To Sweden we went.

By plane?

By plane. Denmark and--

OK. And then--

Denmark and Gothenburg.

OK. OK.

And I didn't have no clothes, nothing. I just go in. And I went into a nice store, and I couldn't handle the money. And I told him to take the money out.

And so they took the right money for the clothes?

Yeah, yeah. They were nice people.

What city in the United States did you arrive in? What city did you come to in the United States?

What city?

Yeah?

Gothenburg.

No, no, no, no, in the United States, here.

Here, New York City.

So you came from Gothenburg to New York City?

New York City, yeah.

All right, by boat?

No, by boat.

By boat.

I came to Gothenburg. And next day, I had to go on the-- what was the name? Stockholm?

Yeah, Stockholm is in Sweden. Yeah.

Yeah. And I couldn't go on it. I came there. And I'm standing there where the boat goes out.

I'm standing there. And nobody takes care of me. I went over. And I said to him, everybody's out and I don't have a seat. What is this?

I'm talking. I couldn't talk to them. So anyway, he says to me, stay. And he made a phone call. And a taxi comes.

And he gave me back \$70, gave me \$70. And it took the taxi. He took me into the boat. And as soon as I went on, and they pulled in already that, you know--

Oh, really? The plank?

Yeah.

So it's almost like you were the last person on the boat.

Last person, yeah. And I came there. And I have no room, no room. You know, the soldiers went home, was going home from the war, from Germany, from all over, American soldiers. And they took away the place on the boat.

So what happened?

So they gave me another \$50. So the money, they gave me about \$175 back. You know where the smoking room is?

Yeah.

There was a smoking room there. I was sleeping there.

That's how you came to the United States?

Yeah.

OK.

Listen to this. When I came there, arrived here at the boat station, came down, and I didn't have no package, nothing, just like this--

Wow.

--just like that. And I go. And the guy says, where is your package? Where is you--

Luggage.

Luggage, where is your luggage? I said, nothing. He starts to laugh. And he let me go. And they were waiting already for my uncles. They were waiting.

Oh, they were waiting for you here.

Yeah. That's how it was.

Well, you know, thank you. Thank you for telling me your story today. Thank you for sharing it, for letting us hear.

Thank you. Thank you for listening to me.

Oh.

I gave out everything.

Yeah. You did. You did. And I will say now what I will do is I will conclude our interview. And I will say that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Leslie Braun--

Braun.

--Braun on June 30, 2018 in Manhattan, New York.

Yeah.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

Yes.