

When they tell us to roll, we'll talk.

OK, all right.

OK, so before we had a little break, I was asking about whether or not anyone in your family was particularly political.

Really not. In terms of my immediate family, no. I did have a cousin, who was an attorney, who was somewhat political. But in general, really not. But what it triggered was a memory from the DP camp, where politics was somewhat taboo. I mean, one of the ironies of the DP camps, because they had been training camps for the German army, is they had a barbed wire fence around them.

And the American occupation-- we were in the American zone, so the American occupation-- soldiers had the duty of controlling the camp. And people would periodically climb under the wire, [MURMUR], and some had arrangements with local farmers. The local Austrian farmers were very happy for that fence, because they didn't want all these people trampling through their fields.

But as the camp got more organized, as it became more and more of a community, there were groups, meetings, and discussions about Zionism and travel to Israel, and back and forth, kind of. But mostly it was kind of arguments about nothing in particular, except just allowing yourself to flex your opinions in an argument.

My father and my uncle, to their dying day, used to argue about stuff that made no sense. I mean, we lived it up in central New York, and they would argue about how to get to Binghamton. Except neither of them could pronounce Binghamton. So it was those kinds of arguments. But as the character of a camp became more and more of a community, they had to organize certain councils, et cetera.

And the closest political thing is that my father, because he was former military, was named the police chief. It was a police chief of nothing in particular. He had very little authority. He couldn't enforce anything. But they cursed him-- the Americans-- cursed him by giving him an implement of his political power as police chief. They gave him a German shepherd.

Oh good god. Good god.

The dog's name was Tarzan. And my brother and I loved this dog. This dog was as gentle as a lamb. And he hated my father. And my father hated the dog. And everybody hated my father and the dog. So eventually, what I was told is-- you know, we always wondered-- well, we have a picture of my brother and I and the dog. And we wondered what happened to the dog. And eventually they gave him back to the GIs.

Oh. And what camp was this?

In Ebelsberg.

Ebelsberg.

Ebelsberg. E-B-E-L-S-B-E-R-G. There was-- but this isn't political. It's more social. For example, one of the things they did in [? Vegscheidt. ?] And I remember this because it was an awful experience-- they sprayed us with DDT.

Oh, yes. Mm-hmm.

And it was very toxic.

This is the Americans do that?

Well, they had to.

To delouse people?

Yeah, to delouse them. And people were coming from god knows where-- the camps, the woods, whatever. And they were in very close quarters. In fact-- I keep going all over the place--

That's OK.

We were deloused in it in [? Vegscheidt. ?] And then several months later when we moved to Ebelsburg, they couldn't guarantee who was and who wasn't, so we ended up getting deloused again. So there was these debates about whether we were going to allow them to do that to us, and all that. And we're not going to tolerate this anymore. Well, but you didn't really have any power or authority.

But eventually, the GIs became almost part of the community. Over time, they were inside the fence as much as they were outside the fence. They played with the kids. They would give the kids a chocolate, or whatever. And then, I remember a new building. It turned out it was a Quonset hut, from what I was told, was set up. It was a rec center.

I saw my first movie there. It was a Tom Mix movie. Tom Mix may not mean anything to. Tom Mix is one of the great cowboys of the West, going back to the '40s and '50s. And I remember how charmed, how excited the kids were. We didn't understand a word of it, but eventually, with the GIs, we start to pick up phrases and this and that. So when we got to Canada, I didn't really speak any English. But at least I had some words, and it was--

Hopefully they were clean words.

Hmm?

They were clean words, I hope.

Clean? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, clean words, yeah.

I mean, because the GIs could play tricks.

Yeah. Well, I guess we didn't run into any GIs that had my sense of humor. I would have taught kids dirty words to go home with, right.

So what was the name of the first DP camp you mentioned?

[? Vegscheidt. ?]

[? Vegscheidt. ?] So that would have been--

V-E-G-S-C-H-E-I-D-T.

OK, they're less familiar to me because they're in Austria.

Right.

And the ones the Americans own in--

They're both outside of Linz.

They're both outside of Linz. OK, that gives me-- that's close to the Czech border.

Yes.

And close to the Bavarian border. And were these almost all Jewish camps? Or where they a mix off different peoples--

No, [? Vegscheidt ?] was very mixed-- very mixed ethnicities, national origins, religion. And from what I understand from my dad, is that it posed some problems because it was just too much tension. So other camps were established that were more homogeneous. So Ebelsburg was almost entirely Jewish. So that's why you had a cheder. You had a makeshift synagogue. You had weddings that were under a chuppah.

Did you see your aunt get married?

My-- huh?

Your aunt-- your aunt-- um--

My Aunt Eshka?

Yeah.

Oh, I was at the wedding.

You were at the wedding.

Yeah, we have a picture of me at the wedding. And I was so sorry she was getting married. How old were you? Eight, maybe.

Eight?

Eight, seven or eight.

You thought you were losing her?

Well, yeah, because, well, the talk in the home was Joe, by virtue of being a survivor of the camps, had priority through HIAS on the American visa. Because none of us had been in a camp-- just a different kind of survivorship-- we kept moving down as other people kept moving up. And finally, my father-- I think they made the decision together-- said, look, we have friends in Winnipeg that'll sponsor us. Let's get out of here.

How many years were you in the DP camp?

From 1946 to 1951.

That's a long time.

Yes.

That's a very long time to be there.

Yeah. Yeah, we sailed in-- I'm trying to remember-- July of 51 out of Bremerhaven. And had you been-- what was it-- Aberscheid, Aberscheid camp?

What's that?

The second camp you were in.

Ebelsberg.

Ebelsberg camp. Were you there the whole five years, or did you move to other camps?

No, no, we were in Ebelsberg the entire time, once we left Wegscheid. Probably 4 and 1/2 years at Ebelsberg.

All right, now let's go back, because we're filling in the chronology that way, in a circular fashion.

OK, sideways, right.

No, no, it works-- makes it interesting, makes it very interesting. So, still on this trip, from global gloom boxing to the east, as far as the end of the line will be. Are there any other tidbits that your Aunt Eshka revealed to you about what that journey was like?

Not so much on the trip. Whenever it came up, it was just this door would slam. It was just silence. They would change subjects. It's convinced me that they really had some ugly experiences along the way. And their survival was, I think, a reflection of their tenacity, patience, call it whatever you will.

But the way my aunt spoke about it, when they got to Tashkent, it was like, they were able to take a deep breath. You know, it was-- I don't know much about Tashkent, but the way they speak of it, it was a place where there was fresh air, and they were not afraid, because they had protection of this chief.

Did you know-- did she-- I'm sorry I'm interrupting-- did she--

The chief-- the head of the family, or whatever. He was-- from everything I can gather, they were very good to-- well, OK-- I just remembered a piece. My 4th birthday, I got a pony as a gift birthday gift from this chief. I don't think he meant for me to keep it, but I had the use of it. And the joke in the family was, years later, that I was the only Jewish kid in the continent that had a pony that wasn't eaten. It's probably true.

Yeah. Kind of like one of those bitter jokes. Do you know how they made contact to this person in Tashkent, who became their protector?

I do not. The impression I had is that it was just happenstance. I don't remember any conversation about that. It was just suddenly there. Shortly after that, Eshka was working at the opera house with-- my mother used to joke about this little outfit that Eshka had to wear.

I don't know. I was trying to imagine her as one of those cigarette girls in those old movies, and it just didn't work. I always pictured her with overalls and a pick over her shoulders, so it was very incongruous.

But it also-- those details sound like it was a level of normality.

Yes, yes, yeah. I say yes immediately because I don't remember a great-- or hardly any detail from all that. Other than there were other kids and that I got to play outside. Whereas through the entire time of the trip, I was held very close. The minute I started to cry, I was silenced. In fact, my crying was one of the reasons they left the partisans, because I became a risk for them.

My aunt worked. My mother went to work. They would come home. I mean, it was just--

Do you remember your living quarters?

Not very well. It was small, but by comparison with what we found initially in the camp, it was luxurious. In Wegscheid, it was in a space-- it was a barracks kind of thing, in a space maybe half the size of this room, there'd be three families.

That's kind of small, yeah.

There was a potbelly stove and-- it dawned on me years later, I always wondered-- during the day there was a rotation of who could occupy the space. And I figured it out when I became a teenager, I think. I figured it out that the reason they were rotating the use of the space is the same way that we used to rotate the hotel room during our spring break trips to Fort Lauderdale.

It was the only way a young couple could have some time to themselves. At night, there were 30 people sleeping in that room-- or 20, or whatever. So there'd be an hour in the middle of the day that--

This family.

--they could be conjugal.

Yes.

But the reason I stopped is it kind of called them. And this is perhaps the most striking memory I have of either DP camp. The potbelly stove was in the middle of the room, and it heated the whole room quite efficiently. And we were always cautioned away from it. And this one boy fell against it. And they literally had to peel him off. And I never saw him again. And I always, for a while, I remember asking about him.

But, yeah, so there were incidents like that. Not so much that kind of grotesque thing. But one of the shortcomings of the camps is that there was virtually no medical attention.

The medics we're just not trained to deal with family medicine. I almost died. I had my appendix burst. And they had to get me from Ebelsburg to the hospital in Linz in some military vehicle racing down the road, and they barely made it.

If somebody had an accident or gotten very sick or something like that-- I mean, my mother was the only game in town. And she was a practical nurse who would cup you. She knew certain things to help someone, but if they were in serious trouble or seriously ill, we needed a doctor. There was, at some point in time, one man that came who was, in fact, a doctor, who they had known from back in the hometown, Dr. Godwin. And he became like the saint of the camp, because he could at least do some triage and take care of people.

This is in Ebelsburg. This is in the second camp that you were in.

Yes, yeah, in the second one. First camp was bedlam. It was just-- it was early on. Nothing had been organized. Well, I'll give you an example. One of the times I did a presentation for the Holocaust Speakers Bureau. There was a man that came before me who happened to be a veteran, an American soldier who was in one of the units that liberated Dachau.

Well, "liberated" is a convenient but inaccurate term. When the Americans showed up, the way he explained it-- and it makes sense-- when the Americans got there, all the Germans had fled. There were just the inmates, the prisoners, the emaciated there. And it was a tank unit. And they had medics, but they were not equipped to deal with people in the condition that they found. And he said, we probably killed half of them by giving them C-rations.

That kind of thing-- so Wegscheid was, in some respects, similar to that. If I were a GI given the duty of keeping control of this camp, of herding all these people in there, spraying them, breaking up what I suspected were black market rings-- it's interesting. Nobody really had jobs to work.

And they all came from places, god knows-- and how they had stuff to trade on the black market always fascinated me. Where did-- did everybody have 10 coins? I was always fascinated by that. It was kind of an underground marketplace from early on. But the first camp was chaos.

OK. Everything you say has more questions. But I'm going to start with the very first one that came to my mind. And that is how did you get from Tashkent to Linz? That's a bit of a trek too.

I don't know for a certainty. I had the impression that travel was much easier coming back. There were lots of people moving, coming back home, wherever that was, whether home was Poland or Austria or Hungary or whatever. There were people on the move.

Did your parents ever explain it?

No. All I know is that we ended up in the camp. They never thought-- yeah, it's interesting. It wasn't-- my father, you know, he kind of popped up out of the woods.

Yeah, how did he get from the partisan woods to Linz?

Who knows. Who knows. In his mind, he was on his way to Israel.

And he didn't know what had happened to you or your mother and--

No idea. When we were in Ebelsberg-- we had already moved to Ebelsberg-- Eshka managed to get some arrangement with a local farmer on the other side of the fence. And she had special papers and stuff.

He let her use a small plot of land that would have been fallow otherwise, to grow some vegetables and potatoes and stuff. And she would take them to market. And occasionally, she would actually bake the potatoes before she took them to the market, and they would sell a lot better.

And on one occasion, she was on her way to the market, and there was this large tree that was just full of notes-- have you seen so-and-so, pictures, what town, that kind of thing. The only thing I can think of that's similar to it was after 9/11 there were all these notes all over the place, because people didn't know what happened to their loved ones. It was that kind of thing.

And Eshka was going by, and by habit would always would stop to look who's coming, who's going, et cetera. And she stopped, and there was a note there from my father. And she was forever tearful when she described it. And she decided to stay by the tree. She was there like a day and a half eating her baked potatoes, and my father came by. And that's how we were reunited.

That's amazing.

Yeah, I mean, it's more than amazing when you think of the odds, of the millions of people that were displaced and going in every which direction-- some hopeless, some hopeful, some god knows what. And that's how we were reunited.

Yeah, so that means that your dad found his way there. Your mom and your aunt left Tashkent and found their way there, in the DP camp.

Well, he wasn't in the DP camp, but he was he was going to be placed there when they were coming through. But you know the word "beshert?"

Tell us what it means.

If someone has written it, it is meant to be. Whatever the term, and whatever primitive culture or religion you speak of, there's a belief that there is a karma, if you like. And that's what the karma dictated.

Do you remember anything of your travel from Tashkent to the west?

Nothing. But you do remember the DP camps, I can tell that you can remember what they looked like, and so on. So something happened in that crucial year.

I remember-- I was too young to remember great detail, but I remember Tashkent being normal, being predictable.

When you're an infant, and whether you're breastfed or not, whatever, you scream. And you don't have a memory of being hungry or well taken care of, or whatever. But when you're three, you remember a sweet or a baked good, and a regular meal or a comfortable place to sleep, whatever it is. That starts to have meaning in terms of how you relate to the world around you. So that was stable.

I don't know. I don't remember much about the trip, except it just-- it seemed to take a minute.

Like that.

Yeah, but-- and it's still a fairly long trip. It's almost the same-- I mean, from Tashkent to Ebelsberg is pretty much the same distance as from Glubokoye to Tashkent.

Yeah. Do you know why it was to Linz? Do you know-- did you ever get--

I don't. I don't. Again, because everything was just in such a flux, if they had any coins left-- which I don't know-- if they could use one of those coins to buy passage, the impulse would be to buy passage on the first train out of there. Or the first train home. And Austria was closer to home than Uzbekistan.

Well, do you-- they didn't go back though.

No, their intention was to go back. They, in fact, made some efforts in the DP camp to get permission to go back. But it was denied them by the authorities. But they gradually got word from people from the area that the town had been obliterated. And there was nothing to go back to.

Here is, now-- I waited until you could give me whatever explanation you might have, because I didn't want to influence it. But here is my assumption, hearing what you are saying. Your parents and your Aunt Eshka were Polish citizens before the war. I don't know if they had any documentation with them, whether they took any. Do you know?

The only documentation I've ever seen was one-- no. Travel documentation, you mean?

Passport, ID card.

The first thing I've ever seen that looked like a passport at all was stuff that was issued in the DP camps by the American Red Cross or by HIAS through cooperation with the American authorities. Somewhere I have my father's green card, but no, nothing from that time period that I can recall.

Well, here's the assumption. When Germany and the Soviet Union were allies, Poland was an enemy. And that meant that the Polish officers we talked about were arrested, and 10,000 of them shot. And Poles were deported to Siberia. And Jews who were Poles were deported to Siberia. And some Jews found refuge in the-- that kind of situation.

However, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Stalin needed people to help fight.

I'm sorry?

He needed people to help fight.

Oh, yeah, sure.

And the Polish government in exile by General Sikorski came to an agreement with Stalin, that the Poles are going to be released from the gulags. And that they are free to leave the country if they want, if they can prove some military kind of connection. And many of them did, under General Anders. Not everybody-- I mean, this certainly isn't everybody.

But fast-forward, many Jews did not leave the Soviet Union, but they were free to move around the country. At the end of the war, Jews would also have been Polish citizens as well as Poles, ethnic Poles, who had the right to go back to

Poland and cross the border. Whereas, people who-- for the Balts, for example, did not.

Now one wrinkle is that, what we found in the little break that we took, is that your mother and your father's villages were in Belarus, which had been part of Poland, and then got absorbed into the Belarusian SSR. How easy or difficult it would have been for your aunt and your mother to convince the Soviet authorities to let them out, given that they were Polish citizens, but the territory is now part of the USSR, is something that would have, in my mind, been something they had to deal with. And how they got to Linz would have been a story on its own, because there are these bureaucratic policies and--

Too late.

Yeah, but I mean it makes sense that the ticket out was the Polish citizenship. You know, that that is what helped them get West.

That's ironic. Well, you know, it's interesting. One of the ironies, in terms of Polish citizens and where you are, my father, who was in the military and then this other cockamamie outfit that they put together, was never far from home.

That's right. The entire time he was close to home. And then after the war he-- I don't understand it. I think part of it is that he just assumed everybody had perished, and he was going to go to Israel. And this was the best way. It was either that or go to Greece or something like that.

Didn't he have siblings who left before the war, for Israel?

Yes.

And there's a logical connection why.

Yep, exactly. Now you also mentioned something about your mother and your aunt always closing the door pretty tight when you would ask questions about their trip to Tashkent. Was that same thing true about other aspects of their lives, their pre-war life?

No. Eshka not so much. She didn't have much to say. Her life was pretty simple.

She was the youngest. She was put upon by all the others. She saw her world in, I think, very clear but limited parameters. And she was quite satisfied with that.

My mother, on the other hand, in her own mind at least, was the eternal prom queen. And I'm serious. She danced and dated, and all the boys were after her, and how was lucky my dad was, and just this kind of thing.

So yeah, in their younger days, from everything I could tell, they had good lives. They didn't come from very wealthy families, but they came from well-to-do families. They were stable.

She was able to further her education. My uncles Morton and Milton were educated. They talked about friends. Well, one of the things that they talked about quite bitterly was how many of their former friends turned on them-- their Polish friends.

Gentiles?

Huh?

Gentiles?

Yes, turned on them afterwards.

You mean after what? After the Germans arrived, or after the Soviets arrived? Or after the war?

No, no, during all the turbulence of the Holocaust. They were suddenly unsafe in their own town, that kind of thing. My mother would talk about, I danced with him, and he wanted to turn me in. She didn't quite say that, but it was that kind of thing, that people turned.

Well, in my life's experience, I have found that when people are under great stress, under great duress, are afraid, they will turn on each other. Neighbors will turn on each other. So this is no different, except the magnitude of the Holocaust is beyond anything anyone can imagine or in any clear way understand. So that is very different. So--

That's where the policies that are set in motion get played out on an individual level. But on that individual level, people don't see what the larger policy is in motion--

Yeah. Yeah.

--until later.

Right until--

Until--yeah.

It's a door they cannot un-slam.

Yeah.

They can't undo what they've done. And I was stationed in Germany, in Bavaria in Augsburg for about a year and a half. And my father was far more upset that I was in Germany than when I was in Vietnam. He would be spinning in his grave if he knew I was driving a BMW.

Oh.

Oh.

[LAUGHING]

When I was in college, I bought a Volkswagen my senior year-- reliable transportation. And he threatened to sit shiva.

Oh dear.

I had to sell the car.

Really?

Yeah. Anyway, where I was going with the Bavaria thing is that how people who on an individual, on a small basis, will do something and not really comprehend what the larger picture is. I was stationed in Augsburg. For a time, I was the 24th Infantry division protocol officer.

So I had to travel around-- and this was difficult for me, I will tell you-- travel around the various towns in Bavaria, fostering German-American friendship. Many of the people that I had to deal with were former Luftwaffe or whatever. I mean, there were former German officers.

Look, you have orders, and you do what's necessary. But one of the towns very close to Augsburg is Dachau.

Oh, yeah.

OK?

Yeah.

And I would be down the Autobahn to Munich quite often. And on one occasion, I took a circular route, because I had never been to Dachau. And I went there.

And I spoke some German. But in talking with people, nobody-- even people who understood what was going on, didn't understand what was going on. And by virtue of not understanding it, denied it.

That's an interesting way of putting it.

Yeah. With an exception. I had already had a year of teaching behind me, so I thought of myself as pedagogical. But when I was visiting Dachau, there was a young woman-- I think she was a second or third grade teacher with her class-- going through Dachau.

And the kids were misbehaving. But they were seven-year-olds, eight-year-olds. They were misbehaving. And I was in uniform. And I accosted her. And I said, look, this is really inappropriate.

I was kind of nasty to her. And she started to cry. I said, oh, Jeez. Europe and American friendship-- we were going around abusing European women. But we talked for a while, and she explained to me and says she's risking her job by bringing her kids there, because it's not part of the curriculum.

Germany, in the early 60s, had still not gotten to the point of including the real history of World War II in their schools. That came eventually after that. And she was a trailblazer in making these kids know that this place was there. And I said, OK, I understand.

But nobody in town-- the mayor, nothing. He'd been mayor for God knows how many years. I know nothing. He's like Sergeant Schultz. And I'm serious. And--

Sergeant Shultz of the Hogan's Heroes?

Yes. Yeah. People don't want to know, because if I say I know, I have some responsibility. So--

And you answered approximately what my question, which was when were you in Germany? When were you stationed there? Because that makes a difference, too.

I was stationed in Germany in 1966, '67.

So before Vietnam?

No.

After--

After it, yeah. I--

After Vietnam.

Oh, I was eager to get to Vietnam. I wanted to be there early.

So you volunteered?

No, I was drafted.

You were drafted.

I was drafted.

OK.

I was one of the oldest draftees. I was just--

Just at the cutoff?

--under the draft line. It was before the numbers.

Oh.

So everybody was in the draft, and I was 25 when I was drafted.

OK.

I was older than my first two company commanders.

So yes, born in 1941, so '66. 1966. I want to go back again.

Sure. Go ahead.

We're back in Linz.

I'm sorry. I keep taking you--

No, no, no, because everywhere we've gone, you've given us a very interesting insight that only a personal experience can give.

OK.

So not to feel bad about that. But another one of my questions that came up as we were talking about the DP camps, and you were talking about your Aunt Eshka. And she sees the note, and it's from her father. And she sits there eating her potatoes for a day and a half and so on. You said earlier, you didn't see him until you were five years old.

Right.

Do you remember meeting this stranger for the first time?

Oh, yeah.

What was it like?

I was afraid of him.

What did he look like?

Oh, what did he look like? He looked like my father. I mean, he was, in spite of having everything he'd gone through, I remember him as a virile, strapping-- I'll show you a picture.

Sure.

I have it on the computer.

What was his manner like?

That's what I'm thinking-- it's just he was very stiff. He didn't let go much-- every once in a while. I mean, this is long after the camps. But certainly, in the camps.

It was clear that he was more than joyous to be there, that he loved us, that he missed us, that he felt blessed and lucky to have survived. And no matter what the circumstances, we were a family again. I just don't remember my dad laughing very often, which isn't much fun for a kid.

And my father was, by reputation-- and there were people in the camp that would testify to it-- a terrific soccer player. And in Europe, then, now, and 100 years from now, being a terrific soccer player is a credential that will get you passes to a lot of things. And for all of that, we never kicked a soccer ball together. Well, yeah, you make a face, but--

It's sad. It's sad.

Yeah, it is. It is. I remember two instances-- three, actually-- the third being at his grave site. First, I don't even know if there's a real chronology here, but it was an instant.

He was stiff, but there was a sadness about him. There were times, even when I was little, I remember there were times there would be nothing in particular going on, and he'd start to cry. And what's that about?

So your mother could fly in a rage, but your father would start to cry out of nowhere? That's how it looked like to the kids?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

OK.

Yeah, that's interesting. There's kind of a bipolar sort of existence. But on one occasion, it was at Passover. And we were reading the Haggadah and came to the Hebrew slaves being made to eat food of sawdust and straw.

And he started to cry. And it was one of the few times I exacted from him an explanation. And it turned out that among the things, even though they had survived, food was so scarce that they were forced to make bread out of what little wheat they had mixed with straw and sawdust.

Oh.

Hey, it was-- and my reaction was to say to my dad, what that had to do to your intestines. But to be reduced to that kind of thing for survival-- but you come to a point-- and I say this from some personal experience-- you come to a point during times of great danger and great stress and great deprivation where you will-- I'll say you sink to whatever.

It's not a matter of sink. There are breeds of dog that are really delicious, I can tell you, and other critters that are around at their own risk. If people don't have anything to eat, they will resort to whatever, including making bread out of the inedible. So that was one time.

The next time was the last year the Brooklyn Dodgers were in Brooklyn. And my dad and I went to a game. And I don't know much about the game, but I spent nine innings looking at him really adoringly, for two things. One, it was my pop. And two, he took time away from his busyness to do something with me for one of the only times that I can remember.

And the third time was when he died, and I was at his grave site. And I felt more rage than loss because now he was

gone, and we were never going to have the conversations that I always wanted to have. So political ones, maybe, but--

Any kind. Any kind.

Yeah. Yeah. And I know there are dads here and everywhere that just don't have a relationship with their kids for whatever reasons. But he was a good and decent man. And the only thing I can think of that prevented him from opening his heart to me or the world or whatever is that he had seen and been through things that he could not begin to describe, and they were haunting him.

We're back to the business of being ghosts. He was haunted. And my mother, in different ways and more active immediate ways-- she would flare up. But my dad just-- I miss him. I missed him when he was around.

Well, one of my questions was, how did what they went through affect you? And I think you've answered a good part of it.

Yeah. I wanted so desperately to be normal-- I'm now; I'm crazier than a loon-- but to be normal and in ways that allowed us comfortably to do the normal things-- go on a picnic go on the beach. I learned how to swim in Lake Ontario. my father took me out in a rowboat and threw me overboard and rowed away.

Oh God!

And I learned to swim because I was deathly afraid of sinking. And he wasn't far enough away that I was in danger, but to me, the world was coming to an end. I played hockey and baseball and football. My dad never saw a single game.

My mother came to a hockey game during which I had my nose broken. And she was up in the stands while I was out on the ice, blood everywhere. So that was the only time she came to see me play.

Do you feel like you were raised by--

I'm sorry?

Do you feel like you were raised by broken people? Do you feel like you were raised by broken people? You certainly give me the sense that you were raised by haunted people.

By what people?

Haunted.

Haunted? Yeah. Haunted and broken not necessarily--

No, they're not.

--too far apart. I've been accused, from time to time, of being my mother. It's hard to escape that, I think, entirely. I was about to say earlier, I struggled mightily to be normal, to have them-- but I couldn't say to my mom, look, forget about that.

But what I spent my life, at least while I was home, and even when I came home from school or traveling whatever, I spent my time trying to get them to look forward rather than backward, that there was a lot out there than there was-- good stuff than there was back there. And it was impossible for them to let go, I guess. And over the years, as I've become older, I've kind of come to better understand that, as some things have haunted me that I've not been able to let go.

I'll give you an example. I remember a great fuss being made to orchestrate documentation. And I say orchestrate in terms of falsify in some respects. And I probably shouldn't be doing this kind of confessional. But my mom and dad

went through this process of establishing legitimacy for German [SPEAKING GERMAN].

Yeah, to get compensation.

Compensation. I called it blood money. When I became an adult, for the longest time, they wanted to file on my behalf. And I told them no.

But for the longest time, when I was an adult, they kept trying to get me to file for it as well. And I wouldn't. Now, I don't know-- it was a pittance. It was nothing. It was like \$120 a month, something like that.

For them, especially for my mother, it was that idea that she was going to get something. I was of a mind that getting that something puts a price on what has happened, and there's no something that would be sufficient for what they went through, for the slaughter of her sister and nephew, for the slaughter of all those people and all that lunacy that went on. A few hundred dollars-- I don't care how many dollars.

And she got her [SPEAKING GERMAN] check. And I just couldn't talk her out of it. It's just--

But there's nothing in what you're telling me that sounds like it's falsification.

Well, I just remember that they spent a long time trying to put together some credible story, because they didn't have all the details that they needed to, that they could certify. So they put together something that could be certified.

OK.

That's all I meant. I don't think it was out-and-out fraud in that respect, because they had gone through all this stuff. If they were destitute or needy or something like that, where every little bit would help to buy food or whatever-- but they had enough for food.

By way of analogy, I've never used the VA. I could have initially. I was going through some very difficult times initially, and I went to the VA. And they said they wanted to give me drugs. I don't want drugs. And I've never gone back.

I know a lot of folks who use the VA. It helps them. Look around me. I'm doing OK. I don't need another few bucks by way of compensation for my psoriasis or exposure to something like that. It just--

It's a difference--

I don't need to get over--

--in principle.

--I guess, is the expression. And I always had the feeling that while they may have been entitled to it and 100 times more, they diminish themselves by taking it. It's a stupid, young idealist's view of the world, but I've never completely been able to rid myself of that. Yeah.

Did your siblings have different experiences of the same parents?

That's funny. My brother, who was the forgotten middle child-- and forgotten literally in so many respects, because there's this seven-year gap. And so he ended up being my responsibility.

I schooled him. I beat him. But we spent a lot of time together. We learned to speak English together. People always ask, well, where's your accent? He says, well, I left it under the blanket in Toronto. My brother and I, against very strict orders, would get into the same bed with a little radio, and we would listen to the radio.

Oh.

And we would repeat what we heard. We didn't know what we heard, but we would repeat so the expression of language became second nature even before we understood it. We used to play the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

Who was who?

I let him be the Ranger once in a while. But he was usually Tonto. In the morning, we'd get up, and we could actually go through a whole scene, almost word for word, of the Lone Ranger and Tonto, the Green Hornet, all those great radio shows.

David was born in the camps, in Linz. He, at least at first, was effectively the lovechild of my mom and dad being reunited. So it was a great joy, a great simcha blessing, et cetera.

He was a great, great little kid. He was no trouble at all. He was mild, kind.

But his temperament was such that he would make no demands of anybody or anybody's time. He would tag along with me and be grateful for it, and et cetera. And it's almost like he grew up in a household, and nobody realized that they had another child there. When my sister was born, that was in Toronto. She was born with dysplasia in her hips, so she was in a cast from her knees to her chest--

Oh, poor baby.

--for, God, the first year or so of her life. And so my mother's nursing instincts and motherly instincts all turned to my sister. And literally the rest of the household, for that time period, was forgotten, understandably.

But Shelly became my mother's plaything, my mother's toy almost. It was like my mother wanted to control her heartbeat. And Shelly sometimes resisted it and sometimes enjoyed it. So it was not a very healthy kind of relationship.

I'll give you an example. My sister had this gorgeous red hair. It was like down to here. She would have passed for native in Dublin, Ireland. I mean, she really looked Irish.

And my mother kept after her to cut it. And Shelly didn't want to. So one day while Shelly was sleeping, my mother cut her hair. Now, I almost became violent at my reaction to the level of intrusion into her space, into her life, into her persona. But that was the nature of their relationship.

No boundaries.

Huh?

No boundaries.

No boundaries. And what it did was it made Shelly, in some respects, dependent on my mother. But in other respects, it gave her power to manipulate her.

So they had this very, very strange relationship. I don't think either David or I were particularly jealous of it. Initially, I think we were when we were younger, because she was getting all the attention. But--

There's a price to pay for it.

I'm sorry?

There was a price to pay for it.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, and I think about that one episode, and I still cringe. But I don't know what possessed my mother to do that other than--

And she saw that she could. In her way, in her mind, it sounds--

Yeah. Yeah.

--like there was no end of her and the beginning of your sister.

Yeah, that's a good way to put it. Their personalities almost blended. As you say, I think it was, well, she must have almost been thinking as if she were cutting her own hair. Yeah. So--

Did you ever go back or-- yes, I mean, for you, it would have been back to that Northeastern corner of Poland, which is today Belarus?

No. I never have. My daughter has.

Has she?

Yeah. My daughter was working in England after she got through undergrad school. Before she went to graduate school, she worked in England and decided to take some time to travel. She said there wasn't much left of Glubokoye so that's why I assumed that that wall was down, so it were destroyed.

Well, yeah. Yeah. I want to just say for the record, during the break, we looked on the internet, and we found-- you and I looked on the internet, and we found that Glubokoye and GermanaviÄiai are close by to each other in Belarus, and that the river that goes through GermanaviÄiai where your grandfather's flour mill would have been is the Dysna.

Right.

Is the Dysna river.

Right.

Yeah. So it's interesting, then, that at least some of the story that you have, the family's history, got passed down to your children, your daughter, enough that she was interested to go back to it.

Oh, yes. Yes, very much. Very much. It's interesting, as invasive, if you like, my mother was with my sister, she was everything a grandmother could be towards my daughter-- patient and interested in what she was doing.

And she had conversations with Lisa, my daughter, for the few times-- I mean, we lived in central New York. They were in Brooklyn. So we didn't see them very often. But for the few times we did see them, I mean, they were like old chums.

They would sit. They would have a cup of tea and talk. I don't remember, ever, her doing that with Shelly. And it's just--

There's some of those mysteries of the generations, you know?

Yeah.

You can't figure it. Well, is anything else-- and I'm sure there are lots of other things-- but is there anything else that you think you'd want people to know about what your family's experiences were, what your experiences were, how you've tried to make sense of it?

Trying to think what we left out. I'm trying to think of what I may have forgotten, because we've been all over the map.

I'm typically a--

That's OK.

--fairly linear thinker, and here I've been sprayed all over creation.

But I have a feeling, and I mean--

I'm just trying to think.

--my sense of it is that I've gotten your story, as circular as it's been.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I think you have. I have, in retrospect, some reservations about having trooped out all the skeletons in my family's closet.

But you've been very gracious--

I'm just trying to--

--in doing so.

I'm sorry?

You've been very gracious in doing so and understanding of them.

Yeah. I'm just trying to think. Well, I know they always regretted that they didn't go to Israel. And I have, as an abiding regret, that I didn't go.

Early on, when I thought about going as a young man, I ended up deciding not to go, because I was convinced that if I went, I'd never come back. I had an absolutely fully-rounded opinion or imagination of myself as a soldier in the Israeli army, preferably the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Ooh.

Yeah. No, I'm serious.

For those of us who don't know, tell me--

Listen, I--

--what is the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

I mean business. You're talking to an airborne ranger here.

The [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] the underground part of-- yes.

Yeah, the--

It's the--

--that fought the British and the Palestinians--

That's right.

--initially. One of my favorite books is Leo Uris' Exodus. I identified with all the-- I mean, I'm very serious. In fact, I taught AP English, and I added Exodus to the curriculum. And I got in some trouble for it, but eventually we settled it out.

But so I feel badly about that. What else [? have I ?]? Oh, I saw recently, the name of the 50 Children-- is that the name of the film, about this couple from Philadelphia that rescued--

That's right.

50 children?

I've interviewed some of them.

I went to see it. And the son of the woman that did that was there, and we chatted. And there's a scene near the end of the film, where all the kids are lined up on the side of the ship. And they're looking at the Statue of Liberty. And it just triggered this very sharp memory of us coming into Halifax on a much smaller ship.

And it was one of the few times we were allowed out, because typically, we're below decks. They would let us up topside to throw up, and then we'd get shipped back down again. But it triggered this vivid memory of pulling into Halifax. And it must have been-- I don't know how many. There were some of us who had heard about the Statue of Liberty from the soldiers, from the GIs, and we were-- because the GIs were of a mind that everybody was going down Ellis island.

So we're pulling into Halifax, and there's a bunch of us standing there looking for the Statue of Liberty as we move into Halifax. And I shared that with the son of this woman. We got a chuckle out of it.

Yeah.

But it just triggered this scene. So maybe my life's ambition ought to be to build a statue in Halifax, right?

I have a last question. And it's about your ring.

My ring?

Your ring. Tell me the circumstance that-- how you got the gold coin, who you got it from, and how it became a ring.

I got it from my Aunt Eshka. And--

How old were you when you got it?

--she would have no reason to tell me that if it were not so. This was the last of the coins that they had. And she had become quite ill. And I think she was convinced that she was not going to be around much longer. And she called me into her bedroom and handed this to me and said, I've been saving this for you, my [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

And I think of her every day when I wear this ring. And it's a memory that, if I'm not a very good person, it's a memory that at least has made me a better person than I would otherwise be. No matter what the rest of the family would do, or no matter what peccadillo I'd be involved in, she was always there for me.

She didn't always approve, but it was clear that she always loved me, whereas other members of my family-- my uncles especially-- their disapproval always meant the withdrawal of affection. And I was always grateful to her for that

unconditional affection. So my cousin Steve is right to be jealous.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Well, thank you for sharing--

Yeah, I'm--

--these memories.

--picking a lot of scabs here.

That, I don't mean. But you have shared with us and given us a portrait of these people who mean so much to you, who endured so much, a little bit into their lives and their struggles. And one of the thoughts that I have is, if only we had all been able to have normalcy, the thing that we strive for, thing that you don't have oral history interviews about--

Yeah.

--but--

There was an element. I'm sorry to interrupt you--

No, it's OK. I'm pretty--

--as you speak. I may have, in some respects, cast a wrong picture in this respect, as no matter how stressful or toxic any given situation might have become, there was always a redeeming aspect of Yiddishkeit in it.

OK.

Whether it was the sense of tradition, the sense of-- it was always curious to me that the great celebrations were celebrations of bad times.

There's an irony.

No, no, really. You think about Passover. What are we celebrating? OK, yeah, we're celebrating the escape. But you spend the night talking about how miserable it was.

You eat all those different foods that represent all that misery. So you're eating bitter herbs. Eat some sweet herbs, for God's sake!

But there was always that piece in it. My parents were always proud of the fact that they were Jews-- not in an arrogant kind of way, but in a way that gave them a certain comfort, the same way I think that my Catholic friends derive comfort from their Catholicism, even though to me, it's 8 degrees of crazy, just like Judaism is in some respects. OK, you don't want to put that in the tape. I'm sorry.

That's OK. It's there.

I watch Bill Maher too often, I think. What else?

I think you've painted a very loving picture.

OK.

So thank you for that.

You're very welcome. Thank you. And I'll say that that, then, concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Robin Rapaport--

Oh, you have to do--

--born Reuven

Reuven.

--on January 24, 2019 in Sarasota, Florida.

OK.

Thanks.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Yeah.

We're done.

Cut.

Cut.