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This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Charles Ticho on September 21, 2019 in Hackensack, New Jersey. Thank you, Mr. Ticho, for agreeing to meet with us today and to share something of your family's story and your own experiences during the beginning of what came to be the genocide of the Jews. I'm going to start our interview with the most basic questions and we'll develop things from there.

OK.

OK? Can you tell me the date of your birth.

April 21, 1927.

OK. And where were you born?

I was born in Brno, or BrÃ¼nn in German, in what at one time was Czechoslovakia, which is now the Czech Republic.

OK. And what was your name at birth?

Well, I was given both a German name and a Czech name. The German birth certificate is Karl Huntz Ticho. My Czech birth certificate is Karel HanuÅ¡ Ticho.

Karel HanuÅ¡ Ticho.

HanuÅ¡ Ticho. Now, it's Ticho. Now Ticho.

How do we spell it?

T-I-C-H-O.

So today, what you basically have is the English translation of your name from Czech-- your name from German. Would that be correct?

Yes. I despise the name HanuÅ¡ and Huntz.

OK.

And the one thing I did declare when I arrived in the United States that I will hence forward be called Charles, and that stuck.

OK. OK. And why is it? That's kind of interesting. Very few people talk about having a name in German and in Czech. Sometimes they mentioned Yiddish and Polish, for example. But how is it that you came to have two birth certificates?

My mother was born in Chicago, but she was raised in Berlin, and she married a Czech Jew, my father, and the only common language they had was German. So at home, we spoke German. In school, we spoke Czech. And that's how come I had two names in two different languages.

OK. That makes sense. And Czechoslovakia had a very large German-speaking population before the war.

Unfortunately.

Well, that was part of what allowed Hitler to annex the country.

Yes.

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So you were born in Brno. And give us a sense geographically, where in relation to Prague is Brno?

The Czech Republic today is made up of two provinces, Bohemia and Moravia. Moravia is further-- further west, I think, and Brno is located virtually in the middle of Moravia. At the time when I was born, it was a town of about 220,000 people. It hasn't grown a great deal since. It's a very high industrial town with a lot of manufacturing and a lot of production.

Is it known for any particular kind of products?

Well, it has a munition factory.

That's what I was wondering.

It had a famous munitions factory for small arms. Skoda made the big tanks. And there was Zbrojovka in Brno that made a lot of guns. And also, motorcycles were made Brno.

So military and automotive?

And textiles. Big in textiles. But also with building materials.

Construction.

It was basically an industrial town. But textile was a big, big product of the area.

With all this industrial kind of activity, was it a pretty place? Was it a--

No.

OK.

Brno, even today, is not a very handsome town.

OK.

Sorry to say so, but that's true.

That's OK. Well, you know, when you think of industrial heartlands, you generally don't think of architectural beauty.

Well, as it is so often the case, some people moved further away from the center of town, and the suburbs are quite nice and pleasant.

When you were born, had your father's family been established in Brno for generations or was he a newcomer?

No, he was essentially a newcomer. The family-- where my father was born and where the family existed for some 300 or 400 years before that was in a town called Boskovice.

Boskovice?

Yeah. Boskovice is about 20 miles, 22 miles north of Brno and was a major Jewish community and an important community.

And so you could trace your family roots for how many generations, do you think?

I managed to trace them back to the late 1600s with the help of a genealogist. All my grandparents, my great

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grandparents, and so forth down the line.

What we ran into a problem is that when it came to early 1700s, the Jews used names that were-- they were called Abraham, son of David, Abraham ben David, and so forth. Well, it's very hard to trace because if you said Abraham ben David, Abraham, the son of David, and the next generation, you have four or five Davids registered--

You've got an issue.

Yeah. Finally, the Austro-Hungarian government got tired of that. They wanted to know how they can keep track, and they forced the Jews to adopt names. We found a document where an Abraham, son of David, adopted the name Abraham Ticho.

And is Ticho a common kind of name?

It's very unusual.

Yeah.

First of all, it means, as you probably know, silence, which was very uncomfortable when I was at school because if the teacher yelled, silence, it scared-- scared me.

Yeah.

There are many T-I-C-H-Y, which is an attributive. It is a silent man or a silent woman.

This would be in the Czech language?

Yeah.

OK.

But there's hardly any T-I-C-H-O. It was a member of our family. That's totally unusual.

OK. Well, it shouldn't make it easier, then, to identify who was a family member.

Yes. Except being many of them were orthodox and had large families, and within two or three generations, there were huge numbers of Tichos that said, I'm not related to the Tichos.

Well, that can always be in every family.

I'm afraid so.

Now, was there a particular profession or business or trade that your father's family had been involved in?

My grandfather owned a textile store in Boskovice on the main square, and that was his source of income.

And what was his name?

His name was Yitzhak Zvi.

Yitzhak Zvi Ticho.

Ticho. Yes.

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OK. And did your father have many siblings?

He was one of 13. That's what I meant, that these are orthodox families, had large families. The oldest one was a girl, was a [? womans. ?] Then there were 11 brothers, and the last one was also a sister.

Well, you know what I do at this point? You may not know, but it's going to have-- can you name them all for me?

I probably can name them all. I may not do it in exactly--

The order.

The order. But Sarah was the oldest, and Jacob Moses or Max, James, Jacob, Max, David, Abraham, my father, Nathan, Chaim.

Chaim?

The only one that died early. Alfred, or Aaron, actually. The youngest one was Erma-- [INAUDIBLE].

We're up to nine.

Yeah, well, I'm almost there. There was-- you're asking an old man to remember.

I know it's not fair. I know.

Solomon.

Solomon.

What are we, 10?

We're at-- we were at nine, and now, I'm looking for the 10th one.

Solomon was 10.

Was it-- well, my finger was on my ninth one, so I'm figuring.

Oh, OK.

And then I might ask you to repeat it. You never know. If I'm really mean.

There was a doctor in Vienna who used to boast that he could recite the names of the Tichos forward and backward. That was a great achievement.

It takes some effort, doesn't it?

It does.

So Sarah was the oldest girl, and the youngest girl's name was Erma, did you say?

Yes. Rifka, actually, in Hebrew.

So they had also Hebrew names as well as German names, would you say?

They had Heb-- officially, they had Hebrew names. Max actually was Moses. Albert was Abraham. Alfred was Aaron,

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and so forth. It was a common-- I don't know. It was just, in public, using a sometimes complicated Hebrew name made things difficult, so they used also a non-Hebrew name.

OK. And your grandfather's name was Itzhak, you said?

Yitzhak Zvi

Yitzhak Zvi. And your grandmother on your father's side, what was--

My grandmother on my father's side-- I'll probably think of it later.

That's OK.

I can think of it right now.

Did you know both of them?

No, they were long dead before I was born.

OK.

My grandmother died comparatively lot younger in the 1910s.

Well, 13 children.

That's probably a good reason.

And my grandfather died around 1920, 1921. I wasn't born at that time.

And was his-- did his store continue to exist in Boskovice, did you say?

Actually, he gave-- three sons took over their business and moved it to Brno, and they established a substantially larger textile, quite a substantial, large textile store.

So it was retail. It was retail?

It was mostly retail.

OK.

These were ages where people still made their own clothing. I mean, my grandfather mostly sold textiles to peasants and their wives who made their own clothing.

There was no off-the-rack or there was little off-the-rack.

Very little. Now, in Brno, my uncles were already selling some people that were manufacturing something. So it was both retail and wholesale.

OK. Was your father involved in this business?

My father and his brother. His brother, Paul.

Ah, you hadn't mentioned him. Number 10.

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Yes, I hadn't mentioned. You see, I'll remember them.

OK.

They were partners in the business called Brothers Ticho, and they had a factory in Boskovice that made men's clothing and they had their offices in Brno, the sales office and accounting and so forth in Brno, and sales office.

OK. What year was your father born?

My father was born in 1886.

So when you were born, he was not a-- he was not a young father.

He didn't get married until 1921.

And do you know why?

Maybe he was bashful. I don't know.

Did he serve in the First World War?

He started serving in the First World War. He was rejected and then spent most of his First World War trying to manufacture military clothing.

And this would have been for the Austro-Hungarian Empire Military?

Yes. Unfortunately, when they lost the war, they forgot to pay the bills.

Isn't that funny how that happens?

It was much worse than that, because my father invested in Austrian war bonds and they didn't pay on those either.

So there was--

He basically lost everything due to the war. That was the second time that he lost everything, and then the third time was the Holocaust.

So what was the first time he lost everything?

First time, there was a panic. There was a-- there was a-- 1909 or something or 1908, there was a economic panic and a lot of the investments that were made were worthless.

And then, 10 years later, the war is over and there he's lost again.

They start all over again.

And then another 20 years, and again.

Yes.

Man. I mean, I can't imagine what it's like for people to start over again and again. To start over once is hard enough.

I have-- when I was 53 years old, I really sat down and I said to myself, if I suddenly were to lose everything, I have a wife and three children, a house and a car, and I would suddenly have to give all of that up, move to a country where I

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don't speak the language, where I'm not familiar with how to do business, like, say, Brazil, what would I do? That's what my father had to face. And I said, I don't know that I could ever do what he did. It was amazing.

Well, people had no choice, but that doesn't mean it is any less daunting.

No, that's correct.

When we think of that, and really think of that, not just say it, but like you said, you sat down, you're this age, you have these kinds of assets, whatever they are, and suddenly, poof.

Yes.

Well, you mentioned earlier that maybe he didn't marry until 1921 because he was bashful. Now, was he a bashful person or was he a different kind of personality?

No, I don't think he was. No, I said bashful as--

As a joke.

As a joke. I don't know. I can't--

Well, was he was a reserved person? Was he a stern person?

No, he was a-- he was not stern. He was very businesslike. All of the brothers were businesslike. Three of them became attorneys, one of them became a doctor.

So they had higher education?

Yes.

And what about your dad?

My father, no. He went to industrial school and studied textiles, and that's how he ended up in that area. No, he was-- he was a very precise person, and he knew how to do things.

And my mother was just the opposite. She liked the theater, she liked coffeehouses, she liked to get dressed up, she liked to have jewelry. I didn't know how good the marriage was. They had four children. That indicates that something was working. But unfortunately, my mother started suffering from early problem in memories that became worse.

You mean dementia? Are you meaning dementia?

Dementia, yes.

That's very hard. That's very hard on everyone in the family.

And so he put up with that for a while until he could no longer handle it, then she was institutionalized until she passed away.

Oh, how hard.

Then he lived alone for the next 10, 12 years before he passed away.

All of this is post-war?

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Pardon?

All of this is post-war.

Yes.

All of this is post-war. But a very sad and a very hard-- a very hard way to take care of somebody.

It's incredibly difficult.

How did they meet, your parents? Because it's unusual.

My wife-- I'm sorry, my mother had a good friend whose husband got the job of cantor at the synagogue in Boskovice, and she was under-- and her family was from Hungary, and she was living in Berlin and she was going to visit our family in Hungary, and she just decided to stop in Boskovice to see her friend and meet her new husband, the cantor.

And of course, because she was seeing the cantor, she ended up at the synagogue, and she was introduced to my grandfather who my father said had a lot of bachelors at home, so he immediately-- he immediately invited her to a Friday night dinner, the Shabbat dinner where she met the various sundry unmarried brothers and apparently settled on my father. They communicated for a while and then-- and in this respect, it was almost like a shidduch because--

Explain that to me, please.

She returned to Berlin after the visit in Hungary and they communicated, and then he came to Berlin to pick her up and bring her to Brno to marry. So there was not a great deal of courting. So maybe it was in correspondence. I can't tell you. But there were not that much going out and--

Getting to know each other.

Getting to know each other, yeah. Was a little bit formal, as I understand.

Well, also, as it was at that time much more usual than what we would say today.

Yes.

And your mother's first name was what?

That's an interesting question. Her Hebrew name was Feige, and she was known as Francis to her friends.

And what was her maiden name?

Klein.

Klein.

K-L-E-I-N.

How is it that she-- did you mention that she was born in the United States?

Yes. That's another story.

Well, tell us it. Tell us that story.

On my mother's side, there were several members of the family who was in the fur business.

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From Hungary?

From Hungary. The family comes from Chust in Hungary. As I was told, one of the sons of my grandfather, they were farmers, basically.

One of the older, the oldest son was sent one day to-- was entrusted with the harvest and was sent to the big city to sell the harvest and come back with the proceeds. He got involved with some lesser honest people and was stripped of his money, either gambling or something, and he advised his father that he had-- what had happened to him, and he sent him money and said, go to America. I don't want to see you again, basically.

This is how I was told. This is one person, a cousin, older cousin told me this. This grand uncle of mine went to Chicago and he was in business selling eggs from a horse cart. And he was doing very well, and he was riding back to Chust how wonderful he was doing in this country with money, with gold on the streets, and slowly, the various siblings came to Chicago because life in Chust was not that great.

Can you spell Chust for me?

Well, it's several spelling. It's C-H-U-S-T.

That's what I thought. It's H-U-S-T, and there's a Hungarian name that I'm not familiar with.

OK.

So anyway, the family ended up in Chicago. My grandfather ended up in Chicago and actually had a very fine fur salon on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, was very-- was very well-to-do.

That's something. That's something.

His wife took his first children and decided to visit Hungary to visit the family. On the way back, there was cholera on the ship. She contracted it and she was buried at sea.

Oh, my. So his first wife?

That's his first wife.

OK.

As it was customary at the time, there was a younger unmarried sister in the family, and as it was customary at the time, my grandfather felt obligated to marry the younger sister. So he went and he paid off the guy that she was engaged to and married the younger sister and brought her to Chicago. This, from what I understand, was a very unhappy marriage.

I heard that my grandmother was, quote, "difficult" unquote. And mostly, she complained that there was no way to maintain a kosher home in Chicago and she wanted to go back to Hungary. And what they did, they didn't go back to Hungary, but they ended up in Vienna and then ended up-- actually ended up in Berlin.

So your mother was the child of the second wife?

Yes.

OK.

And I always suspected that what my cousin meant by the fact that the second wife was difficult was that possibly, my grandmother suffered from early problem, mental problems. Because with his second wife, my grandfather had six

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children, and four of them developed early mental problems.

Yeah.

There was a-- there was some problem.

When you see something like that happen, you have to come to a conclusion that some of this is genetic.

Yes, it would seem. I would think so.

Yeah. And again, in those days, even today, but in those days especially, such things were very hard because people didn't always understand that. They would think that people are possessed or that there's something else going on.

Well, it was in my-- the biggest damage was, as far as I was concerned, that it took a long time to recognize what was happening. For example, whatever girl I brought home to introduce to my mother she didn't like. And you get to wonder whether this was because she really didn't like it or because this was part of her dementia. And I finally actually married a woman that she never met. She did meet, but after I was married.

Can we cut the camera for a second? So your parents meet in this way. She had come-- your mother was born in Chicago, but because of her own mother's unhappiness, they moved back to Europe and end up in Berlin. And this would have been-- also, they meet her parent-- your parents meet and marry in 1921.

So all of this is taking place sort of in that world that has just been thrown upside down by World War I. And when you were born-- and one thing I didn't ask you, how many siblings do you have? You mentioned at one time she had four children.

She had four boys.

OK. Can you-- these names should be easy.

Yeah, my oldest brother is Harold, who will be celebrating his 98th birthday in December.

Congratulations to him.

Then there was a brother called Leo. Leo died at the age of 9 of middle ear infection, which few years later could be cured with a shot of penicillin. Then I had a younger brother who I spent a lot of time with and we actually traveled together during the Holocaust, he and I, and who died-- who was murdered in Chicago.

Oh, my God. Oh, my God, so this is post-war?

I can't hear you.

This is post-war?

Yes, definitely, 1978.

Oh, my gosh. What was his name?

His name was Stephen Felix.

Stephen Felix. So your older brother, Harold, will be 98, which means was he born in 1921?

Exactly.

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And then comes Leo. When was he born?

Actually, my parents married in 1920. I don't want to suggest that they're magicians.

OK, 19-- right. When was the Leo--

I'm sorry, what was it again?

Leo, when was he born?

He was 2 and 1/2 years younger than Harold, my older brother.

So it would have been '23,

'24, I think.

Something like that.

I can look it up if it's important.

No, no, no, just approximate.

I understand.

OK. And Stephen, when was he born?

He was born in 1931, April 20, one day before my birthday.

1931. So in the span of a decade, there are four boys in the family.

Yes.

And until 1932 or '33, you are intact when your older-- when your older brother, the second oldest, passes away because of the ear infection.

Yes.

OK. Describe for me a little bit your home in Brno.

Well, there were two homes that I'm familiar with. One was an apartment above my father's business. It was in the older part of the city in central Brno. It was a fairly large apartment. My room, my brother's room, younger brother's room, faced the street.

So you shared a room with your brother.

And a governess.

OK.

And it was fairly well-designed. You know, it was in an older building. It was built in 1904. And the reason I know it because he had a sign on the roof-- in the core.

But when you lived in it, then, it was a fairly new building.

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It was comparatively new. I mean, it was 20, 30 years old.

Did it have modern conveniences?

Oh, yes.

It had indoor plumbing?

It had indoor plumbing. I mean, this is an apartment house, a multi-storey apartment house.

And it had electricity?

It had electricity, water. It didn't have an elevator. It had stairs. But we lived on the first floor.

How was it heated?

Beg your pardon?

How was it heated?

It had central heating with a furnace in the downstairs and with the radiators in their rooms.

OK.

I'm sorry. Let me correct that now. There were chimneys in each room. There were large chimneys in the room where you had to-- we had to feed coal at the bottom. And--

So was it-- in German it's called kachelofen?

Kachelofen, exactly.

OK. So it was these tile types of ovens.

Yes.

OK.

There-- I hit my head on one of them and I-- so I should have remembered that this-- from there, my-- 1932, my parents decided to build a house, an apartment house, in a suburb-- not really in the suburb, but in an area outside of the middle of the city. And the first floor consisting of 13 rooms were where we live-- where we lived, which we occupied. Now, when I say--

That's a lot.

Well, when I say 13 rooms, I'm including the bathrooms and the toilets and--

That's still a lot.

Yeah, it was a lot of rooms, yes.

OK. Did you-- you mentioned a governess. Was there other help in the home?

We had a cook and a maid.

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OK. So that suggests to me that you were pretty comfortable as a family.

Yes. My father was considered a successful business man and with substantial income, which is why he was so-- arrested so early.

Such things matter, unfortunately.

Yeah.

Were your parents religious?

Yes, they were to the extent that we went to the synagogue on Saturday morning that Harold had a substantial bar mitzvah in 1934. And that we were all circumcised and we celebrated all the holidays. And after my brother died, my mother was convinced that this was punishment from God, because she didn't keep a kosher household. And the household was switched to kashrut--

I see.

--to strict kashrut, which was a challenge considering that the cook and the maid were girls from the--

Countryside.

--countryside who couldn't care less whether this knife was--

Used for meat.

Fleishig or milchig.

Yeah.

Which led to a lot of yelling and a lot of cutlery stuck in earth.

Oh, my goodness.

But that's how you turned it back to kosher.

Oh, really. So you will take the fork, you'll take the knife--

You have to wash it then steam it. [INAUDIBLE]. I'm not [? quite ?] [? perfect. ?] But we used to kid our mother, we used to tell her she's trying to grow cutlery.

Did she have a sense of humor?

We were-- what'd I say-- we were-- I was pleased that I was-- I was accused of being a wise guy, or being impolite and--

Disrespectful.

--disrespect for is a good word. That's a very good word, yes.

OK. Did you feel like you had a happy home?

It was-- yes, it was essentially a happy home. From my point of view, particularly when I was young, it was happy from the-- for the reason that my mother's younger sister moved in-- into our house, even in the old apartment, and then in the new apartment. And she was our way to get out of there, whatever we were supposed to do. She was a--

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So she was easy on you.

She was our escape artist, yes, she was. She told us a lot of stories and she-- she was a very gentle, kind person.

What was her name?

Well, her name-- official name was Francesca.

OK. I had done this with your father's brothers and sisters, your mother's brothers and sisters, who are they?

The oldest one was two sisters from the first mother. The oldest one was Gisella, and the other one was Paula.

Gisella and Paula.

Then there was Max, Ernest, Julius, my mother. She-- she was earlier than Julius. William and Francesca. I don't think I left anybody out.

OK. Now, aside from Francesca, did you know any of your aunts and uncles from your mother's side very well?

No. Well, I know Uncle Bill. I didn't mention Uncle Bill in my recounting, because Uncle Bill ran a radio program in Chicago. And part of his-- of the program-- it was a German language program-- and part of that was that he would take a group of listeners on a tour to Europe.

Oh, wow.

And when he did that, he would stop and usually stopped with the fancy American car. And so we had a chance to sit in a large LaSalle, or a large Buick, and ride around town.

Oh, how cool.

Oh, it was [INAUDIBLE].

And what about your own father, did he have a car?

Beg your pardon?

Did your dad have a car?

He had two cars. But he didn't drive.

Did he have a chauffeur?

We had two chauffeurs.

Well, I think that trumps the LaSalle.

Yeah, I suppose it does. But the cars were mostly used for business, although sometimes they did go on trips. But one of the cars, a smaller cars, was used for deliveries and hardly ever got into that car.

So it's a company car, it's a--

They were both companies cars, essentially.

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OK. And did your-- did you have a radio at home?

Yes, we had a large black Telefunken radio.

And did the family listen to the radio, was it some-- did you get your news from it?

Well, basically, the Czech stations played two things, new and classical music. And that's really where-- how I got introduced to classical music by listening to the radio. Later on, I started hearing in the news some guy yelling and ranting. And I knew he was talking in German, but I couldn't understand him.

And my mother heard me listening to him. She ordered me to turn it off. Later on, I found out that that was either Hitler that I was listening to.

Well, that's one of the reasons why I ask if you have a radio is that at what point in your life do you get exposed to the first time to anything that has to do with Nazi ideology, or the political situation of what's going on in Germany and so on. And so you just answered my question without me asking it, is that you heard Hitler.

Well, we actually learn very early because some of my uncles in Vienna, I mean, when they're-- after the Anschluss had problems, and my aunt-- Aunt Gisella lived in Berlin. And so she ran into difficulties. And she and her husband and her three children came to Brno.

And my aunt-- my uncle that is my Aunt Gisella's husband went to work for my father. And one of the children opened up a fur store. They were still in the fur business. She opened up a fur store. And the other two daughters also came. So we knew something was not kosher--

Not right. Yeah.

--back in 1934, 19-- it's quite early. We were already exposed to some of the problems.

Well, of course, when you have such large families and they're spread all over. Were most of the aunts and uncles aside from, let's say, an Uncle Bill who has this radio program in Chicago, were most of them now Europe based?

No, they-- oh, my mother's side, everybody was in Chicago except the older sister, the-- Aunt Gisella.

Who was from wife number one.

Yes, it was a phenomenal person. She lived to be 99 and 3/4. And her head was absolutely clear right up to the very end.

Oh, wow.

Remarkable woman.

And so she survived the war.

Yes, she escaped.

And where did she end up spending her final years?

In Chicago.

In Chicago.

They all moved to Chicago. On my mother's side, those that were-- they all moved to Chicago. I can't think of any one of them that-- I mean, the uncles and their wives, and in many cases-- the one cousin from my mother's side went to

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Hollywood. He was a writer and was involved in politics, and was in the film business. He lived in Los Angeles. But that was the only one that I can think of that was not in Chicago.

OK. Did your mother have US citizenship?

No. When she married, she-- when the married-- when the family moved from Chicago back to Berlin, they all had American citizenship. When my mother married my father, she lost her American citizenship.

Wow. Is this because of the Americans having such a rule at that time?

I don't know. I can't tell you what their rules are-- or what the laws were. All I knew that she didn't have. And when things got dicey in the 1930s, my father decided to send her to the United States where she had to spend six months in order to regain her American citizenship.

And when she returned and got to Switzerland is when the Nazis marched into the Czechoslovakia and it was decided she should remain there.

OK. We'll come to that. We'll come to that. But that-- it's interesting-- it must have been an American rather than a Czechoslovakian rule that you lose your citizenship if you marry a foreign national. But--

It could be.

Yeah.

It could be the one.

But how weird.

But the fact that she had to-- no, I don't see how the Czechs could remove her--

American citizenship, yeah.

They're married. This must have been some law that the Americans insisted on.

Yeah.

That's all I know. I don't [INAUDIBLE].

Did she-- well, she spoke English at some point. Did she speak English when you were growing up?

No, she-- her English was not very good. I don't remember her speaking English. She spoke German.

I see. OK.

And a little Hungarian.

And so your language at home was German.

At home-- well, even at home with my parents, it was German. I mean, at home with the servants and so forth, they spoke Czech. So it was kind of a bilingual affair.

And were there in Brno, were there also non-Jewish Germans? You say that Brno-- well, Boskovice had a large Jewish community. What about Brno, was it-- did it have a substantial one?

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It has-- it had a thriving Jewish community. But there were-- yes, there were Germans because it was close to Vienna. So there were a lot of German speaking. For me, speaking German was a-- as a child was not very pleasant because I wanted to be a good Czech. And when my mother would pick me up from school, I would run to her so that my friends wouldn't hear me talk in German because I was embarrassed that I had to do that.

Explain that to us a little bit. Not everybody knows about the inner demographics of what was Czechoslovakia. What was the Czech situation in the-- into war years. And that's one of the reasons I'm asking about ethnic composition of Brno. Was there-- would you have an idea of how many Czechs there were, how many Germans there were, and how many Jews there were? And not-- and somebody else, too, it could be somebody else.

Well, if you look at the map of Europe before World War II, Czechoslovakia was formed in 1920-- 1919, 1920, after World War I. And it's like a sausage, or like a worm with the head on one end and the tail at the other, and it stretches across Central Europe. It is touched by at least six different countries.

They are?

Well, Germany, Poland--

Hungary.

--Hungary, Austria. So maybe it was only four. Well it's [INAUDIBLE] had Romania at the other end. And each one of those countries had minorities within-- over the borders in the Czech Republic-- in Czechoslovakia.

There were some 3 million Germans mostly at the west end. There were Hungarians on the south in the western part. Romania was at the far-- far west. Poland was up in north. Austria was down in the south.

Brno is in the west, as well, isn't it?

No, it's--

More in the north?

Brno in relationship to the-- in Czechoslovakia it is somewhat off center to the left, which means they're off center to the west, yes.

OK. And in Brno, what would have that composition have been?

In Brno, they were-- I'm just guessing about-- of course, there are-- statistics are available. I would say-- and this is just a guess-- that about 70% was Czech nationals, maybe 20% German, and a balance, maybe there were 10%-- 7%-- 8% Jewish nationals. And in the Czech Republic, and in many other countries in Europe, Jews were considered a nationality, other religion, it was a nationality. So that way you could pass laws that apply just to them without-- without [INAUDIBLE]. It's a sideline.

But it's-- but it's one that's still-- that there's still discussions today of what is-- who is a Jew, is it a religion or whatever. It's just that it's a relevant question. It's not one that has been answered and put to bed.

That's correct.

What did I want to ask here? Did you as you were growing up have anything to do with non-Jewish Germans living in the area?

Yeah, I did, when they chased me.

OK. And that would have been when you were how old?

Well, when I was a child.

So 6, 7?

Yeah.

OK. Hitler's then come to power around 1933 when you're 6 or 7. Or do you think it has anything to do with--

He came to power, yeah, yeah, yeah, yes.

Do you think that there was a connection between Hitler coming to power in Germany and you being chased in Brno?

There's no question that the German majority-- German minority was empowered by the fact that Hitler was now in charge. And they-- and he had a member or-- no, I would say he had a headline was a-- was a-- the head of the German whatever organizations. And as the Nazi power grew in Germany, the head-- the German groups, the German clubs, became more and more militant. Now, the problem that we had was that there was a Jewish educational system that was run by the Jewish community. It was in Czech and the professor spoke Czech, and we spoke Czech, and all the material was Czech. But we had school on Sunday and we didn't have school on Saturday.

So was this a public school funded by the state, or was this a private school?

Well, I don't know that is supported by the state, but it was essentially under the administration of the Jewish community of Brno.

OK. So when you're talking about your mother picking you up from school, it's from this school.

Well, in the grammar school, it was maybe 500 feet from where we lived in the old house.

OK.

So it was very--

What was the name of that school, the grammar school, do you know?

It was just the Jewish-- it was just called the Jewish grammar school [INAUDIBLE] in Czech.

And do you remember the address of your old house?

No, but I remember the building.

OK. Do you-- the street name, do you know the street name?

Well, our apartment, that is, the first-- the old apartment was on the-- hard pronunciation-- StarobrnÄ›nskÃ¡ Ulice.

Starobrnens--

StarobrnÄ›nskÃ¡, the old Brno Street.

Ah, StarobrnÄ›nskÃ¡ Ulice.

Ulice 911, devÄ›t jedenÃ¡ct.

Oh, wow. And what about your new home? What street was--

The new home was DolnÃ five.

OK.

It's now called Erbenova five.

OK.

And to get from that home to the gymnÃ¡zium I had to take two street cars and just to get there.

OK. And so your pub-- your grammar school was also run by the Jewish community?

Yes.

OK. As well as your gymnÃ¡zium, your high school.

Yes.

OK. And-- and so it was-- it was these kids who-- at these schools who were speaking Czech and you didn't want them to hear you speaking--

Yes.

--German with your mother. OK. Did you feel an affinity then to-- not-- I mean, not just your friends, but to Czechoslovakia as this is my home?

One of my best friends was a Czech.

OK.

Czech, young [? man, ?] he was a year older than I was. He was one of my best friends. We had a very strong pro Czechoslovakia feeling. We listened to the soccer games, and then the National Guard, we'd listen to the hockey games when they played [INAUDIBLE]. Even today, if I hear the Czech national anthem, my eyes fill with tears, because I still have a affinity [INAUDIBLE]. So, no, that's-- we were firm strong Czech. And so was not just the-- so was the whole Jewish community.

OK.

There was no disloyalty or anything like that.

And then from-- one could express that on the other side, there was no reason to not feel it. In other words, did you feel welcome in the Czech community in Czechoslovakia?

It was comparatively comfortable. As I said, I think I'd started-- I met antisemitism at my fairly young age when I started going to school. Because as I said, we had school on Saturday and we had-- didn't have school on Saturday, and we had school on Sunday. So all-- some of the anti-Semites had to do is hang around the school on Sunday and when they saw some kid going with schoolbooks, they knew--

Who it was.

--who it was, yes.

And would these-- and it was irrespective of whether these were Czechs or Germans.

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They were-- you know, you have to understand, the Czechs were under Austrian oppression for five-- 300 years. So they appreciated the freedom. And so they were less inclined to be anti-Semitic.

OK.

What we ran into was just good Germans that felt that they needed to let their dislike be known.

Did your father feel that in his business?

I can't tell you that.

OK.

I can't tell you that.

OK. And did your brothers, your older brother in particular, because he was so much older than you were, was he still going to school in the mid-'30s, in the late '30s?

He went to the schools until 1937.

OK.

When my parents decided-- and this was done by several well-to-do Jewish families, used to send the oldest son out of the country because of what was happening in Germany. So my brother went to Switzerland to study there.

Aha.

And by 1939, he packed up and went to the United States and to Chicago. So he was gone.

And out of-- and out of harm's way.

Out of harm's way, yes.

OK. And your own parents, then there's four of you left, as far as the nuclear family is concerned.

Yes.

You, your younger brother, and your parents. Now let's come to that point, when you were talking about your father sending your mom to the United States so she could renew her American citizenship. Was that successful? Was she able to do so?

Yeah, she was able to do it, and she got her citizenship back. And she came back and ended up in Switzerland.

And what year was this?

I think she arrived back in-- well, she arrived back in Switzerland in 1939, after the Nazis had marched into Czechoslovakia. Because that's when she stopped and didn't-- she decided not to continue.

I have to confess now, my dates are a little mixed up. I think that it was March 1939 that the Nazis marched into Vienna.

No.

And there was the Anschluss there, no?

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No.

That was earlier?

That was a year before.

'38. Then March '38.

March 15, 1939 is when the Nazis marched into Czechoslovakia.

OK. See, I had that sense. Now, when did Chamberlain come to the Munich Agreement? It was--

Probably in 1938.

OK. Do you remember-- if not the date, do you remember?

I remember the discussion. And--

What was being said?

Well, after the settlement, you know, there was a great deal of resentment, because our defenders, so-called defenders, abandoned Czechoslovakia. And Chamberlain and Daladier, the prime minister of France, gave in to Hitler and ordered Czechoslovakia to give up the border lands to the Germans, which unfortunately included all the fortifications that they had built at the border.

And then of course Poland had to get their share, and Hungary had to get their share. So--

So it's like crows circling.

Yeah, yeah. The new map of Czechoslovakia looked like the old Czechoslovakia with somebody that's bitten all the edges off.

Brno wasn't part of this?

No.

OK. And were there radio broadcasts or newspaper articles about that?

Yes.

Do you remember reading and hearing these things?

At what time?

I guess before, during, and after. The whole point of my question is this-- to get a sense from you, how did your family experience these grander political events, and in this case, ominous ones?

Well, part of it was by getting stories. Dr. Oppenheimer, the head of the hospital in Vienna. He was the main [INAUDIBLE.] He was forced to clean the sidewalk with his toothbrush. That, we would hear of this. So and so-- my uncle, who had a jewelry store, one of my uncle-- Uncle Victor, which I obviously haven't forgot-- had a jewelry store. And his jewelry store was seized. He was still running it, but somebody, one of his employees was now in charge.

OK.

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These are the kinds of stories we heard, or we actually heard third hand, or heard directly from the people that were affected. So that was one way we learned. We did listen to the radio, of course, particularly Czech news broadcasts. And I didn't read newspapers, so I can't tell that. [INAUDIBLE]

Do you remember how your father was reacting to all of this?

Well, he was making preparations. One of the things he did, he started shipping merchandise to Sweden and to Switzerland, and telling-- he had representatives in both places, and said when the customers pay, don't send the money to Czechoslovakia, deposit it into account there, because he wanted to have money outside of the country. So that's some of the things that he was doing.

He told me he went to Switzerland. He didn't speak the language, but he went there to sell. And when he arrived at the train station, he looked around, he didn't know what to do until he saw somebody with a kippah on the head. So he knew he had a fellow Jew, so he approached him, and he guided him, and he was successful in making some sales in Sweden.

In Sweden, you were saying? Not in Swiss-- because if he spoke German, he would have been able to get by in Switzerland.

Switzerland he could get by, yes.

OK. So in Sweden, that's where-- is that how he established the sales office there?

It's wasn't a sales office. He just-- yeah, he had a representative there. Yes.

OK. So he was making plans. And--

As I say, my mother went to get her citizenship. My father-- my brother went to get-- went to school.

And he leaves for the United States eventually, your older brother. And so your mother returns to Europe, and it's in 1939, when Germany has actually taken over the rest of the country. Is that correct?

Well, our friendly cousins in Slovakia decided to leave, and separated from the Czechs, and established a Nazi-sympathizing government run by a Catholic priest, Father Tiso.

Yeah.

The Romanians took over Subcarpathia, the end of the Czech Republic. So that's how that was dismembered. And the year-- Bohemia and Moravia, which is now the Czech Republic, became a protectorate of the German government. You have to remember, in 1939, the Nazi methods of conquering other countries had not been really developed, detailed. So they were kind of learning as they were going along.

So things got quite-- were not as difficult as it became, like when they invaded Poland, or when they invaded--

Well, that was war. That was actual war.

Yeah, there was a period when--

Can we cut the camera, please? OK.

There was a period when things were sort of-- when Jews could still get out of Czecho-- the protectorate.

Even under Nazi occupation, under Nazi control.

Under Nazi Occupation.

OK.

Providing that they gave up almost everything that they owned, and providing that there was a country that was willing to accept them. Because all of these immigration activities started with whoever gave your visa, so you can stay there. Then you had to get the visa to the country that you pass through just before you get to them. Then you had to work your way back and get visas--

For everything.

For every country that you pass through. So for example, for us to get out, we had to get an American visa first, then a Portuguese visa, then a French visa, then an Aus-- then a Swiss visa, then an Austrian visa. And then finally we could go to the Germans and say, so here.

Oh my goodness. You know, it's true, and nobody has ever put it quite like that before. When we look and we hear these things now, we may not be even thinking. But because current reality is that most of the time you don't need a visa, if you're a Westerner, shall we say. Or maybe one visa, to the European Union. You get into the Union, and all the borders within the Union are open.

Yes.

And it's not so long ago where it was country, by country, by country, by country.

Well, it wasn't-- for example, we traveled to Austria quite often, and all you had to do is show a passport.

OK.

You didn't have to have a visa. But when the majority of the immigrants became Jews, then all of a sudden visas were necessary.

Oh.

Because Switzerland didn't want a bunch of Jews in their country. And so they required that before you could get a Swiss visa, you had to show them that you can leave, you can go through unoccupied France.

That you're really transit.

Yes, yes.

And your father was doing this. What about his brothers, who were managing the store that they had reestablished in Brno and so on?

Well, of the siblings, five died in the Holocaust, of the 11.

Five were killed in the Holocaust?

They died one way or the other. Some by starvation and some by gassing. Some by other-- whatever other problems existed.

OK. And were these brothers amongst those?

Beg your pardon?

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The brothers who ran the store.

Uncle David and Uncle Jacob who ran the store died. Uncle David died in the-- The last time we heard from him was in the Warsaw Ghetto. Uncle David, according to my cousin who survived, he died of starvation. Because in Theresienstadt, which was the place that the Czechs Jews were sent first, there was very-- the old people were most neglected, because there was just so much food to go around. So they were mostly interested in feeding the children and the younger people.

OK. So half of your father's siblings--

Not quite. A third.

A third. OK.

Well, five of 11.

Yeah.

Plus about 10 first cousins.

Your father-- remind me again, did he have his business with a partner or with another brother?

With another brother, with Paul.

And Paul. What happened with Paul?

Paul was arrested along with my father.

OK.

And spent time in a prison in Brno. And then the two of them were shipped to Dachau.

Let's walk back a little bit and take me through that event. It's after the Germans already march into Czechoslovakia. Does your life change until this event? Or does it pretty much proceed but nervously, like it had before?

Well, our life changed very quickly because my father was arrested in April. They marched in on 15th of March. He was arrested about a month later.

At your home or at the office?

At the office.

So you didn't see this.

No, I did not.

OK.

We only heard from an employee that the Gestapo came and arrested our father. And at the same day, the Gestapo came to Boskovice and arrested my uncle. And they were both put in prison.

Were you able to see him while he was still in the prison?

I was able to see him once, when he came to the apartment to transfer the ownership of the apartment to a German

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general.

Oh, my. What was that like? I mean, I--

It was a little strange, because we were in the apartment, and we had a governess who turned out to be a Nazi. And she told my brother and me to get dressed. We're going to have a visitor. So we got dressed, and then she told us to sit. We sat for a while, for quite a while. And then she came in and she said, OK, you can go. You can go see your father.

We went into the salon, which was the salon. There was a table set up. There was a high officer sitting there with a lot of gold on him. And opposite him was my father in a blue jacket and blue pants.

Like a prisoner's uniform?

A prisoner's uniform. And it was a very short visit. He asked us how we were and are we OK. And we asked him how he is. He said he's fine. And maybe it lasted five minutes. And then we were told to leave. Shortly thereafter, we were given 24 hours to leave the apartment and go somewhere else.

And it was just the two of you children at that point.

At that point, there were just the two of us, and what had happened is that my uncle Isidore and my Aunt Sarah, the oldest of the 11 siblings who were kicked out of Austria, were living in this large apartment.

That your father had just signed over.

That he just signed over.

So this is the old apartment in the center of town.

No, this is a new apartment in the suburbs. No self-respecting general, German general would have--

Taken the other one.

Taken that other one.

OK.

Also my aunt and Gisella, the older sister of my mother, and her husband came from Berlin. And they moved into another room in our apartment.

So they were there with you.

So they were sort of guardians. And then there was the usual maids and the cook and the governess, the Nazi government.

Do you remember her name?

I remember the governess' name. Her name was Augusta Miksch.

Augusta Miksch?

Miksch, yes.

OK.

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From the Sudetenland. As my mother used to say, "und Schlag soll sie treffen."

"Und Schlag soll sie treffen."

Sie treffen. Yeah.

Some people would say maybe even more than that.

Let me just make a point here. Summer 1939-- no, summer 1938, we, to our surprise, went for the summer holidays to Switzerland.

Why surprise?

Because the two previous years, we went to a very nice, small town in Czechoslovakia, and we lived on a farmstead, and had a wonderful time with a great St. Bernard dog. And there was a castle, a fortress nearby that we got to know very well, because we visited it regularly. It was just marvelous, two summers.

And we were sure we were going to go back to that place. And then we said, no, we're going to Switzerland. And then, when September came along, and we were supposed to go back to Czechoslovakia, go to school, another miracle happened. We went to Italy instead.

In September '38.

Yes. And we were in Italy for a month. And then we went back to Switzerland. Now, for us it was fun, because we weren't going to school. But it was somewhat puzzling. Of course, now we recognize what my parents were doing-- my father must have been struggling, whether to go back to the Czech Republic--

Or not.

Czechoslovakia, I should say, or whether to close up shop and leave. And a cousin of mine, a nephew of my father, met us in Switzerland. He had just been released from Buchenwald concentration camp. And he told my father, don't ever go back. Unfortunately, my father decided, I'd better go back to settle things and then we're going to leave.

And that was it.

That never happened.

OK. Can we cut for a second? OK, so it was on decisions like this that so many destinies developed the way they did. So you go back. This is the summer of 1938, and then your mother goes and she gets her visa, or her citizenship back.

She comes back. She's in Switzerland. Your father is arrested in April. Do you know when he was taken to Dachau, whether he stayed in that prison for weeks or months?

He stayed there for maybe four months.

Oh, in Dachau or in?

Yeah.

OK.

No.

In Brno?

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In the-- yeah, in Brno.

And then he is transported to Dachau.

Then he and his brother were sent to Dachau. Yes.

OK. Did you know any of this at the time?

Yes. I mean, we were just told by somebody, usually by employees or by relatives.

OK. So when you're given 24 hours to leave, and your Aunt Gisella is there, and aunt--

Uncle Isidore and his wife.

And your mother's sister is there, the youngest one.

Yeah, that's Gisella, yes.

Oh, I thought she was the oldest one.

Gisella is the oldest one.

And Francesca was it, the youngest?

No, no. She had left for the United States long before that.

OK. So it's Gisella is there, and Uncle Isidore is there. That's her husband?

Isidore is married to Sarah, my father's older sister. And--

OK, got it, got it. And was Gisell--

Gisella is married to Moritz-- Moses, [? Rus ?], on my mother's side.

So you've got at least four adults who were kind of looking after--

Kind of, yes.

So where do all of you go after you're turned out of there?

Uncle Isidore went to live with Uncle David.

OK.

And I can't tell you were Aunt Gisella went to. I do know that she and her two daughters and son ended up going to the United States. They were still, as I said, during the first four or five months, there were still opportunities for Jews to emigrate and leave, as long as they could get visas.

So you have this strange situation, where some people are arrested right away, like your father and your uncle, and other people have a means to get out. You know, you have the possibility to get out. That's so unusual. Usually it's sort of like step by step it gets worse and worse and worse.

As I said, the Germans were still learning how to conquer countries.

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Yeah, OK. Makes sense. And so--

Whatever the situation was, the Jews that emigrated had to give up everything that they owned. I mean, whatever it was.

What happened with you and your brother?

Beg your pardon?

What happens with you and your brother?

Well, we went for a while to live with Uncle David. It was very nice. His wife was a lovely lady. She was really very nice. And then, maybe-- they were both older people. Particularly Uncle David had diabetes, which is, like a comedian once said, the Jews invented diabetes. But because there were my-- there were several of the brothers were diabetic.

So apparently it was getting a little difficult. At one point, I was told that if I wanted to, I and four of my schoolmates can go to work on a farm. I would work-- we would work six days a week. We would not work on Sunday, but we couldn't go back into the village. And we would get three meals a day, and a place to sleep, and sanitary facilities. And I took it.

You're 12 years old.

I'm 12 years old, yes.

OK.

Steven, initially I didn't know what happened to him, but then I learned that he went to live with a former maid of ours on a farm someplace in a village. Now, I have to assume that somewhere along the line, my uncles, one way or the other, paid this maid to keep my brother. Because he was what, eight years old. And that was the situation for about six months.

In general, aside from the nanny, who turned out to be a Nazi sympathizer or Nazi herself, what about the other employees, whether they were household help or whether they were with the factory or the business? Was there any involvement with you after things got bad?

Yes, as a matter of fact, the word was that one of my father's chauffeurs reported my father. He claimed that he was-- the claim was that he was unfair to employees, that he took advantage of his employees. And that was the official reason why my father and his brother was arrested.

That was Hubert.

Hubert.

Hugo.

Hugo.

Hugo, yes. Nice man.

Well, had he been a nice man until then? Or had he been someone--

No, he was-- he used to work for Uncle David. And Uncle David fired him because he used to drink.

Ah.

I assume he didn't stop drinking when he worked for my father, but he maybe kept it better hidden. What happened in those circumstances, that when the Jews were arrested and there was a business, that the Gestapo stop or whoever was in charge of this operation would select some German nationals, and make them the boss or the bookkeeper and so forth, and to transfer the operation to a German operation.

So did Hugo get the business?

No, he did not. It was a bookkeeper that got it.

A bookkeeper got it.

Yes.

Who had-- aha. And this is jumping ahead a little bit, but did you ever get it back?

No.

So whatever your father had built up, whatever the family had built up, it remained lost.

Including the factory we never got back, because the Czechs then wouldn't give it back to us. We claimed it, but they said, no, it's national property. The communists said it's national property. You can't have it back.

Yeah.

Now, I managed to get a few-- the second apartment house that we built, where we lived, I managed to get that back from the Czechs by claiming it.

Is this after 1990?

This is well after 1990. This was like about 20 years ago.

Late '90s.

Yeah.

Late '90s. So at any rate, it was no longer under a communist system. That's when you were able to get it back.

Yeah, under the communist system, they absolutely ignored any claims that you made.

OK. So you then go and work on this farm.

Yes.

Was it under the conditions that you described? Six days a week you work?

That's exactly how it worked. Yes.

And how many other boys were with you?

There were four boys.

All about the same age?

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Yeah, we were all schoolmates, from the same class.

And where did you sleep?

There was a room with enough beds. And that's where we slept. There was one room, and there was an outhouse. And--

Were you well treated?

What?

Were you well treated?

We did get our three meals a day, and we were-- yes, we did normal usual farmwork.

Such as?

Weeding, pruning. You know, hauling stuff around.

Was it ha-- was it far from Brno?

It was maybe 30 miles away. It was near Prostejov, which was another large city.

And was it a place where you felt safe?

Yeah, we felt comparatively safe. Yeah, because-- yes, it was-- we had very little exposure to anything or anybody, except the farmer and his family, and occasionally somebody that came to buy from the farm, or somebody that came to us bring something to the farm. But otherwise we didn't get--

Mm-hmm.

We were outside of normal communications with other people.

And did you have communications from your uncles and your aunts during this time?

No.

Did you get letters? No.

Except when I got a postcard from my uncle saying "come back to Brno." And that was in preparation for leaving.

All right. So this is after half a year?

After about six months.

OK. So I would take this, we're talking now the war has started, it's September 1939. And you then get this postcard. Which uncle sent it to you?

Uncle David.

Uncle David.

Yes.

And so, do you go back?

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Yes.

OK. And what do you find there when you get back to his home?

I get back. I went to Uncle David. After two or three days, my brother arrived. And we were told to go to Prague and get our American visas, because the American visas have come through.

And had you been to Prague before?

No. Yes, we were. We were in Prague one time, on the day that the Nazis marched into Czechoslovakia.

No kidding.

My father took a-- we took a night train to Prague. And we ended up in Prague, trying to get out. How can we get out of the country? And We. Were told there's a train to Vienna and that there isn't a train to Vienna. You can take a plane of the country.

And then we were in a taxi to go somewhere-- I don't know exactly where-- when we ran into the Nazi army coming up the other way.

Oh my goodness.

And--

So you literally see the German army coming in.

Yes. And in Germany, they drove on the right side of the street. And in the Czechoslovakia, still drove on the left side.

Like the British.

Like the British. And so of course, when the Nazis came in, they drove on the side like they do in Germany, which gave our taxi driver just about enough time to get on the sidewalk and get out of the way of the trucks.

And then we sat there as truck after truck after truck, and each one had soldiers sitting at attention on top of the truck and towing a piece of artillery, passing by, passing-- Must've gone on for half hour, 45 minutes.

And this was totally by coincidence. You had no idea that it was going to happen.

No. Well, this is how you take over a country. You send the army in. And of course, they were going into Prague. After we survived that, we got on the train and went back to Brno. So that was the one time I was in Prague.

And now it's the second time.

And now is the second time. My brother and I took a morning train and found our way to the embassy or consulate. I think it was the same place. Embassy and consulate were in the same building. And we were told to wait. And we waited and waited.

And sometime after lunch-- not our lunch-- we were ushered into a room. And there was a very large man sitting behind a very large desk. And he spoke German to us. And he did a lot of paper shuffling, and stamping, and signing, and asking questions. And the one thing I was fascinated by was the fact that he would light up a cigarette, take one or two puffs, and then put it out.

And the ashtray was full of these long--

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Cigarette butts.

Cigarette butts. And I was calculating how much money I could make if I could just get this ashtray. Because not only were they cigarettes, which were impossible to get, but American cigarettes. God. I never got the cigarettes.

[LAUGHTER]

But I did get a bunch of papers. And we took the train back--

To Brno.

To Brno. Yes, the two of us.

And what did those papers allow you to do?

It allowed us to go to the Portuguese-- I didn't do it. Somebody did it for us. To the Portuguese consulate and say, "you see? These folks can go to the United States. Would you allow them to travel through your country?" And they said OK.

And then that somebody took that papers to Spain, to the Spanish consulate, and got--

The Spanish visa.

A visa to the Spanish, and then to the occupied France-- unoccupied France. Which was still a pseudo country. And then finally Switzerland. And then we got our exit visa. Yeah, exit.

Now, during that time-- excuse me.

Would you like a drink of water?

Yes, could you stop a second?

Yeah, sure. Let's have a drink. We were talking about the various countries and other people who were getting you those transit places.

OK.

OK. So--

At that time, while this procedure was going on, my father arrived, having been released from Dachau.

And he comes back to Brno.

He comes back to Brno, and we see him.

What about Uncle Paul?

Uncle Paul died in Dachau. He was killed in Dachau. But he stayed and then later was killed. My father looked very strange.

Tell me how.

First of all, he looked young. He looked younger.

That's weird.

Because he had lost weight, quite a bit of weight. He didn't have a mustache any longer. And the hair, where he had combed over to cover his bald spot was gone. He looked a lot like my Uncle Victor, who was much younger, the younger brother. It was very, very surprising.

How long had he been in Dachau now?

He was more than a year in Dachau.

So in other words, we're now into 1940.

We're now into July 1940. Yes. So he was in from early 1939 to 1940, mid-1940.

OK.

And all my papers and my brother's papers came through. We had our had all our visas, everything. And we got our exit permit from the Germans. And the deadline was, I think, the 31st of July we had to get out.

What about your father? Why was he released?

We didn't know. All we knew is he was released. As a matter of fact, he told us later that when the gate told him that he can go, he hesitated to go, because they thought-- he was afraid that they're going to shoot him in the back because he tried to escape.

Yeah. It's normal to think that.

You know? But he just-- they just let him go. And ended up in Munich. And from Munich, he managed to get to Brno. How that happened is that there was something that was going on in the United States, which we didn't learn until many year-- many maybe a year later.

OK.

So we had to leave before the deadline, and my father's papers were not ready yet. So Steven and I had to leave. And so one day we went to the train station in Vienna-- in Brno. And we got on a train to go to Vienna.

So you were 13 years old.

I was--

And you're the older of the two.

--just 13, and Steven was 9. And all our papers were stamped with a big J by the Germans, a big red J. So that when we got to the Austrian border and the inspectors got on the train and looked at our visa, the moment they opened the front page and then the guy that took-- got the papers first handed it to the next guy, who handed it to the next guy, until everybody in that group of police officers had to examine--

I imagine they must have wondered what these two little Jews are doing traveling to Vienna. But papers were in order. And after scaring us, we ended up getting to Vienna.

Was there anybody to meet you there?

Yes. And I have no idea who it was.

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Really?

I know what the relationship was. All I know-- I was told-- I was given a slip of paper with a name and a telephone number. Excuse me.

OK. Let's cut the camera.

All I knew, they said she's supposed to meet you there. If she doesn't meet you then, call, exchange some of the money to shillings and make a phone call. And if-- I don't remember that they said, and if she doesn't answer what do you do next. I don't remember that.

But she was there. They took us to her home. We slept there. And in the morning-- I mean, in the evening, we made a decision not to open our suitcases. We were given permission to take 20 kilos of stuff. And before-- and the recommendation was that we should have it sealed.

So after we collected what we wanted to take, which in my case was mostly books and a little bit of a photo album, but that's about all I took. And a few clothes, but very little. We took it to the Gestapo, and the Gestapo examined everything carefully, and then closed it, locked it, and then put a seal around it.

And we decided that when we arrived in Vienna not to open it. We slept in our underwear, wore the same clothes the next morning. And it was an altogether wise move. She took us to the railroad station, where we waited for the train to Switzerland. And then we got on that train. And we traveled to Switzerland.

Except the fact that when we got to the Swiss border, the train stopped. And it would not continue any further. And we were told, everybody, to get off the train. By that time, there were only about maybe 20 people on the train. Because there are not too many people that could travel back and forth around Europe.

It's wartime.

Yeah. And we were told to-- there was a wooden shack on the side of the train tracks. And on another rail, facing towards Switzerland was a train consisting of a locomotive and one car. It was just sitting there, huffing and puffing.

And we were told to just sit down, turn in our exit visa and our passports. And then, from time to time, an officer would come out of the shack, yell out a name, and would inspect the suitcases of the person that was leaving, and then give him his papers, and tell him to get on the train. And that process continued, one at a time.

So it's nerve racking.

And then we were the last ones. Now, just before we left, my father gave me an overcoat, and said "bring this to America. That's for your brother." And I objected to this, because I said, we're only allowed to take clothes for ourselves. That's what it says, and I don't want to do it. You know, and I said, this is a big coat It obviously it doesn't fit me. Nobody would believe that this is my coat.

And we had quite a battle. And he finally insisted. He showed me a certain way that you can fold it and that nobody can tell how big it is. Well, when we were sitting there, and we were all the last ones waiting for our passports, I decided it's this blasted coat that's the problem. It's this stupid coat. I knew I shouldn't have taken it.

And I went to the outhouse, which I had previously visited, and I stuffed the coat into the toilet-- into the outhouse. And it worked. Because after I came back, an officer came out, handed us the papers, and told us to get on the train.

And that little train chugged across the border to Margrethenberg, if I remember. It was a small village. And there we met our mother, who we hadn't seen for two years. And that was the way it ended. That's how we got out. After that, there was still the challenge of getting to Lisbon. And that was another problem.

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Did your father get his papers? My father got his papers, and he came and joined us some month and a half after we arrived in Zurich.

Did you tell him what you did with the coat?

You know, he never asked. He never asked.

From my-- you know something, I was convinced there was money in that coat.

I don't believe it.

OK.

I cannot believe that my father would jeopardize--

True, true.

--our exit to put some diamonds or money into that coat. And if there was, I don't believe it. I just--

OK, you're right.

Never thought it was.

You're right, you're right, you're right. I wouldn't either. As a parent, I wouldn't. And I want my kids to get out.

I cannot imagine that he would have done such a thing.

You're right, you're right. But as you were telling me, I kept thinking, "oh my God. There's something in that coat."

No, no.

OK.

I don't-- I mean, I didn't think of it at the time, but afterwards I did. And I never believed, even for a moment, that he would have done something like that.

And he never asked for it later?

He never asked what happened to the coat. I don't know. I don't even know whether he remembered that he gave it to us. He was not in very good shape at the time, you know?

Had his manner changed when he had come back from Dachau? His personality?

Not really. I can't tell. He was quieter. He and mother had a lot to talk about all the time, that we were not privy to. I know he had some-- he went to the representative that had collected all the money from the friend, who had received a letter from the New owners of his business, demanding that any money that he may have, that he collected from customers, must be delivered to Brno. And he refused to release the money to my father.

And there was a huge scene in the office with a lot of yelling, but he refused to sign the papers to release the money.

Oh my goodness.

So that went back to Brno.

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Oh, how bitter.

Yeah.

How bitter.

I don't know what happened to the Swedish money. I do know that when we arrived in the United States, we had about $8,000. And that may have been the Swedish money, for all I know. And that was about it. That's all we had.

Yeah. Do you remember any of your trip from Switzerland to Portugal?

I remember every moment.

Tell me. Tell me.

Well, the trip, we first traveled by train to Geneva.

Mm-hmm.

In Geneva, we boarded a bus, which must have been 20, 30 years old. It was an old bus. And there were maybe 15, 18 people on the bus. It was fairly crowded. And the bus started to travel. And it was an old bus. And you felt every rock, every stone that we went over.

And then it went up into the Pyrenees, to go over into Barcelona. And the trip over the Pyrenees Mountains was just hair-raising. Because first of all, sometimes you were literally-- I had the window seat. You were literally looking down--

Oh, God.

--into a precipice when it was up at the mountains. And this-- this bus ground, you know, it was in third gear and in second gear, working its way up the mountain. And then of course, when it came to the top of the mountain, they started going down. And he had it in low gears. The engine screamed.

It's like a bus with asthma.

Well, I mean, the downhill was more exciting-- more frightening than the uphill, because apparently the brakes didn't hold the bus.

God.

The engine was off, which is a common way on a vehicle, a car, or truck, or bus that has gear shift. You put it into low gear, which just has the engine working high speed, and keeping the vehicle from running away. And then of course, no sooner you were down at the bottom, you started back up again.

This went on for what seemed to be an eternity. But we finally got out of the mountains. And then we arrived in Barcelona. And we had a reservation at some hotel. And the next morning, we were supposed to catch a train to Vienna. no, to Lisbon. No, to Madrid. From Barcelona to Madrid.

And we went for a walk. And this was shortly after the Spanish Civil War.

Yeah, several years--

And Barcelona was the headquarters of the Republicans. And the city looked disastrous. I mean, every building had marks on it, or had shattered walls. And people were walking around without legs and without arms. And it was really a

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horrible sight, that we went for that walk.

We got on the train to Madrid. And the Ebro River had flooded. And so for the next hour, we were going through water. We didn't see any rails. We didn't see any ground. Just the red river water, and the train was slowly going through this flood.

What was the name of the river?

Ebro.

Ebro? How do we spell it?

Yeah, E-B-R-O.

E-B-- Ebro. OK. OK.

When we got to Madrid, I guess we shouldn't have been surprised that we missed our train from Madrid to Barcelona--

Or to Lisbon.

To Lisbon.

To Lisbon. The train had left, and that was it. Now, we had to catch a ship that was leaving the following day. And we were told, if you miss that ship, that's it. You were stuck. There were a lot of rumors. I mean, things were said and told that didn't turn out to be true. Some of them were beliefs, and some of them were rumors, and some of them were deliberate lies.

And sometimes fear. The thing you fear the most. They'll leave without me. You know?

So my father, I remember, was desperate trying to-- can we take a slow train instead of taking an express? Can we do this? Can we do that? And then, no, he was convinced that the guy that he was talking to-- from American Express, by the way, which was an express company, [? arrange ?] trips-- that he was just trying to make some money from a hotel that he'd put us up in. But we ended up staying overnight, and taking the train the following day.

We got to Lisbon on a Sunday. And we went immediately to the shipping company, whose offices were closed. That was the American export line. It was the only passenger ships that were going from Europe to the United States. Remember, the United States were not at war in 1940 as yet.

So first thing Monday morning, we were there. And they said, "no, your ship left already."

Oh, jeez.

"But don't worry. We can get you a place on the next ship." I mean, it was just like a stone fell off our shoulders, that we could stay. So now we had four or five days to spend in--

Lisbon.

In Lisbon. We walked around. It was a nice city. We went to the seashore. And interesting, I took-- my wife and I went to Lisbon. And I remembered everything, where it was. There was a-- there was an elevator, a municipal elevator that was designed and built by Eiffel. There was a place where there were two levels of the city. And Eiffel had designed a municipal elevator.

Like one of these open things that is a funicular?

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No, no, no.

Not that?

Actually an elevator.

An actual elevator.

And it was two elevators. One went up, and then the other one went down.

OK.

And I remembered seeing it. And then when we were there, we took the elevator. I had to take my wife to the elevator. I knew where the seashore was. I knew everything, where everything-- I didn't remember the hotel where we were. But I knew where the castle was. I knew all of that.

And that's decades later, when you go back.

This was like 50 years later.

Yeah.

And we got on board ship, the USS Excambian.

Excambian.

The USS Excambian became a military transport during the war. It was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine in the Pacific, and is now a great place for scuba divers to visit fish. That's what is said about the Excambian.

Do you remember the date you got onboard?

I remember the date when we arrived in the United States.

What date?

It was November 6, 1940.

November 6, 1940. Wow.

Why do I remember that?

Why do you remember it? Tell me.

Because when we arrived in New York, we arrived at a pier. That was still when were piers, where passenger ships arrived. And my mother said that somebody is going to be there to welcome us. So we were looking through the crowd that was lined up on. And finally she said, "oh, there they are, there they are, There they are."

And there were two uncles. One of them was Uncle Bill, which we recognized because we knew them. And he says, "This is Ernest." And they were waving a newspaper at us. And the front page of the paper had a big picture of President Roosevelt, which we knew what he looked like. Because we--

And my brother said, "why are they--" I said, "I don't know. Maybe he died." He must have died. Now, why they-- well, it turned out that was the year when Roosevelt was elected to his third term in November. And this was the day after the election.

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Of course.

And the newspaper was announcing that he had won the election to his third term.

Wow. The one and only time we've had a third term president.

And a fourth term later. Four years later.

Yeah.

So that's why I remember. I could look it up.

Of course.

When was the election in 1940 and what was the day after that.

Oh my goodness.

So that's how we remembered that.

So tell me now. You mentioned earlier, kind of hinted, that all of this came to pass because somebody was behind the scenes, making sure that you could get these exit visas, making sure that your father could be released. What happened? What was going on?

This was something that was going on in the United States. It was completely unknown to us.

Who was doing what?

What? Well, my mother's two brothers, Uncle Julius and Uncle Ernest, who were in the public relations business, they both were also journalists at some point. Uncle Julius--

From Chicago, bother of them--

Both of them in Chicago. I mean, my mother's family was all in Chicago. Julius had joined the Illinois National Guard and rose to the level of first Lieutenant. In 1933, Chicago staged a grandiose world exposition called A Century of Progress, marking 100 years since Chicago was declared a city.

And it was a very big event. Sometime during that-- this exposition, Mussolini, the dictator of Italy, decided to send five or six military planes to Chicago, to show off the might and the expertise of Italian aircraft, military aircraft.

And the man who was in charge of this flight was a Colonel Italo Balbo, B-A-L-B-O, Italo Balbo. And my Uncle Julius, who was a great dealer in influence, managed to get himself to be the military host to this colonel. And he saw to it that he and his pilots, and navigators, et cetera, enjoyed their stay in Chicago while they were there.

Now, seven years later, he and his brother Ernest are desperate to try to get myself and Steven and my father out of Germany. And they, again, because they were great dealers in influence, convinced a Congressman, a famous, well-known Congressman of Italian lineage--

What was his name?

I have a copy of the letter that he wrote. I don't remember.

OK.

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--to write a letter to what is now Generalissimo Italo Balbo, the commander of the Italian Air Force and governor of all the governed-- of all the territories conquered by Italy in Africa. Wrote to him and said, "you know, as a friend and a colleague and whatever, I wonder whether you will be so-- have the heart to reunite a family that is suffering from separation, people that have been friends of mine for da-da-da-da-da-da." And sent it to the Generalissimo.

And received-- this particular Congressman received an answer, saying, "I sympathize with the family and the problems that current conditions in Europe have put on them, and I would be very happy to do whatever I can to reunite them and have them reunite with their mother." Remember, this was so they could reunite with the mother, the children can reunite with their mother.

"However, my relationship with the authorities in Berlin are not in very good standing. However, I'm going to send this case to my adjutant in Berlin, a Colonel Teucci, and I will ask him to see what he can do." Shortly thereafter, within a month and a half or so, Generalissimo Balbo's plane crashed, and the Generalissimo was killed.

Among knowing people, it was accepted that the plane crashed because the Germans sabotaged the plane, because they wanted to get rid of Balbo, because he was against Italy joining Germany in any war in the future.

Oh, wow.

Upon which my uncles got a letter from Colonel Teucci from Berlin, saying "with the regretful demise of my boss, the great and late lamented Generalissimo Balbo, my influence here in Berlin has greatly diminished, and I'm afraid there's nothing I can do."

Upon which, my uncles induced a correspondent, a reporter-- now, to this day, I don't know whether it was a male or female reporter, because the name is kind of-- I don't remember the name. The name is kind of either way. They convinced this reporter to write a letter to Benito Mussolini, the dictator of Italy, which apparently-- which initially did a lot of complimenting, pointing out that this reporter was part of the black shirts, when Italy-- when Mussolini was first organizing the fascists, and that he was with him when he marched on to Rome, and then he reported favorably his exploits, and that he was always a loyal supporter of his da-da-da-da and so forth.

And by the way, he's late lamented-- one of the last wishes of the late, lamented, and great Generalissimo Balbo was to reunite this family of the two children that haven't seen their mother da-da-da, and husband. And would you see it, that you would cause this to grant the wish of Generalissimo?"

And apparently somebody in the Italian government went to the Germans and convinced them to do this. And that's how my brother and I got the exit permits and my father got released from the Dachau concentration camp and my uncle didn't get released, and was allowed to leave-- and be allowed to leave.

Wow.

That's how it happened. Now--

Wow.

--I have been lecturing mostly high school kids about the Holocaust.

Yeah.

And sooner or later, they always ask me, well, how did you get out? And I hesitate greatly to tell this story, lest they believe that this is like, well, you know--

Just write a letter and it can happen.

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I make a point when I do these lectures. Before I tell them this story, I made a point to tell them any Jew. that was living under the Nazis in Europe, and that included half of Russia, and all the countries except for Switzerland and Sweden and Spain, any Jew that lived under those and survived had a miracle. Because unless you had a miracle, you could not survive.

And then I cite some examples, like my good friend, my lifelong friend Paul, who was a 16-year-old, was in the line-up at Auschwitz, going over to the Gestapo to be selected, whether to go left or right, when a friend of his father came up behind him and said, "when they ask you how old you are, tell them you're 16." I'm sorry. He was 14.

So when he came up and the guy asked him "how old are you?" he said, "I'm 16." And he and his father went to the right. His mother and his younger sister went to the left. And that was the miracle, how he survived. Had he said he was 14, he would have gone with his mother, and he would have been dead two or three hours later.

I cite another example of a friend, who had a sleepover. She was at a different apartment with a friend on that night when the Gestapo came to arrest the family. And as a result of that, her old family, whole family was arrested, but she survived. That was her miracle, that on that particular night she was not at home. And I cite several other examples like that, that I learned.

Those uncles of yours were talented and persistent.

That's why I have a file of these papers. They approached anybody-- as I said, they were basically influence peddlers. And they-- I have letters, an answer from former President Hoover. I have letters from-- copies of letters from the minister. Minister-- say from the secretary of state, saying "I'm sorry. I can't help you." I mean, most of them were "I'm sorry. I can't help you."

I have copies of letters from the American Red Cross, and from the International Red Cross saying, "we can't be of assistance." They tried. I have telegrams from senators, copies of telegrams of senators, of several senators that were involved in trying to do something.

And letters from the-- copies of letters from the American consulate in Zurich, advising them that my mother is OK. She's living. She has money to live from, and she's surviving, although she's very just distraught. I mean, they really went after anybody that they could possibly reach. And this was desperation time.

When did they tell your father and your mother this?

When we arrived in Chicago.

Yeah? And--

We didn't know how we got there. And my mother didn't know how we got there. Although she knew that-- she was saying that your that Julius and Ernest were working hard on this. But we didn't know at the time. And even when we heard it, we didn't necessarily believe it. Because it was so far fetched.

Yeah. Really. When you think about it, all the usual sources say, "sorry, I can't help you."

Yeah. It was just--

What were they like as people, Uncle Julius and Uncle Ernest? Because they're really the saviors of the day.

Yes, they are. I regret that I never quite thanked them. You know?

You're doing it now.

I never-- No, I never did.

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That's OK.

That's all right.

Yeah.

This too I will survive.

We're coming close to the end. Is there something--

[PHONE RINGING]

Whoops. Let's cut the camera.

Perfect timing.

Is there something that I haven't asked you, something that for you is an essential part of your story, that you'd want us to know, that you'd want to share with everybody?

You have done a very thorough job. Thank you. And you've made it easy for me.

You're welcome.

By guiding me along, and by keeping track of the facts, which sometimes I have problems keeping track of. I did write a book, which unfortunately was too ambitious, and it's 400 pages long, of a large book, 400 pages long. So nobody reads it.

Oh!

One cousin said to me that it makes a good doorstop.

Oh, good God!

[LAUGHTER]

Only a cousin can get away with that.

And another cousin-- another cousin told me that she reads in bed, but I can't read this book in bed because I can't hold it. It's too heavy.

[LAUGHTER]

So it was a mistake. And as a matter of fact, I'm in the process of taking bits of pieces out of the book and making up little short stories out of-- and as a matter of fact, just today I received a copy of the Jewish Standard, which is a magazine. And they had published one of my articles that is out of that particular book. But--

In one interview I know we can never capture it all. You can never do it. What I hope with an interview is that we get down what you think is the most important, that there are-- yeah.

I approached the museum about this, because I visited the museum.

Our museum in Washington.

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Your museum in Washington. We had made a sizable donation, and they wanted to show us around. Actually, they wanted to show us where our name is hammered into the wall. Which is not the purpose of the-- anyway, and they took me to the library, where I thought I was going to find books, but I found a man with a computer. The archives.

And he explained to me what the archives are and what they're doing. This was quite a while ago, maybe 15, 20 years ago. I still have his business card and his name. And what was interesting, there was a group of high school girls that had just arrived there also when I arrived. And I said to this gentleman, "you mean you have these?" He says, "yes, I can pull up anybody you want. Do you want to listen to somebody?" I said, "all right.

One person who survived the Holocaust is a cousin, a female cousin who survived. And I'm sure she had made a testimony. Could you play her? Her name is so-and-so and so-and-so." And within two minutes, I heard her voice. She had passed away since. And she started talking about-- and the kids heard what she was saying.

And these are not kids. They were high school girls. And I was just fascinated by hearing her voice and hearing her talk in English. She learned English. And it was a heavy accented but good English.

From father's or mother's side?

On my father's side. She was the daughter of the one brother who died, quote, young, unquote. He died at 48 of leukemia.

Ah.

She and her older sister survived. Her older sister left the Czech Republic somehow. The younger one didn't leave. Couldn't leave or didn't leave, and ended up going to Theresienstadt, and from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. And from Auschwitz to a work camp.

When she was notified that she has to report, she and a man that she knew got married. Because they wanted to. And he said he wanted to go with her. So the two of them went to Theresienstadt together.

Somewhere along the line with the going to Auschwitz and so forth, they separated. Her survival, again what her miracle was, because they were working these women to death, and not only that, but it was winter, and all they had was one dress, no underwear, and one pair of something that passed for shoes.

A man came in and said, "does anybody know anything about electricity?" And she volunteered. She didn't know anything about it, but she knew how to turn on a light and turn it off. It turned out that this was the electrician that went around the camp to fix things electrical. And what her job was to carry his tool chest. And that's what you did.

And you know how to carry that. Yeah.

Yeah. And one time, he asked her, this is her-- she told this to me. Because we did talk about it a little bit. But she didn't tell me all the details. One day, he asked her to climb up a ladder. And she said, "I'm sorry. I can't do that." And he was shocked. "What do you mean, you can't do that? I'll send you back to the barracks. Why can't you do that?" She says, "I don't have any underwear."

The next day, he brought a pair of long johns, long underwear. And she said the relationship changed a little bit. Because then when the barracks had to stand at attention, because something had happened in the barracks, or something-- somebody had escaped or something, he always made sure that she had something essential to do, so that she wouldn't have to stand out in the winter with nothing on and freeze. And that's how she survived.

Wow.

That's how she-- that was her miracle.

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And so it is you at the museum listening to this?

That was some of that, yes. And the kids-- we didn't get to that part. That was something she told me. Now, she was a midwife in Theresienstadt. Believe it or not, there were women having babies. And she worked with a certain doctor. And after she was released and after the war, she came back to Brno, and so did the doctor.

And you know, they knew each other. And he was alone, and she was alone. And about five years later-- and she searched for her husband and couldn't find him. About five years later, she's walking on the street of Brno, and she runs into her husband that she had married before she went to the camp. By that time, she had a baby, a boy by the doctor.

Now, there was a crisis that I know nothing about. I just know by hearsay. And I think the reason she joined her real husband was because my uncle Alfred in Israel would not extend the visa to her if she came to Israel with--

With the doctor.

With the doctor. And so she and her real husband and the boy went to the United States. Went to Israel, Palestine, essentially. The fact that this boy was not the son of her husband became his family secret that everybody knew. Everybody knew. When I was writing the book, the real husband was driving me to the railroad station. And I asked him, "can I ask you a question? Does your son know that you are not his father?" And he said, "no, he doesn't." So it's not in the book. I didn't write it in the book.

About two years ago, this boy, who is now an adult with a wife, and children, and grandchildren, visits me, us in Israel, and says, "do you know a Dr. Ryshavy?" I said, yes. "Do you know what he has to do with me?" I says, "how do you know he's got anything to do with you?"

"Well, I just got a notice from somebody in the Czech Republic that I inherited a house, but I no longer can get it. I mean, but I did inherit a house, but I can't claim it any longer." And the house belonged to a Dr. Ryshavy. Why should Dr. Ryshavy give me a house?" I said, "because he was your father."

Oh, God.

Anyway, I couldn't have said no.

Yeah. And then did you tell him the story?

Yeah. You can't ima-- you can't imagine how much pain the Holocaust caused people. Not those that died. Sometimes the ones that died were best [? results. ?] Because those that survived had to live with it. We have a neighbor next door to us that spent five years in different camps, which she suffered from. And after that, the people that she lost and the family that-- it's just awful.

Thank you for sharing that.

Happy to do it.

There are no words to describe such a situation. Everybody lost in that situation. All four people-- the first husband, the second one, the mother, and the child.

Yeah.

All of them.

And it's interesting about my Uncle Alfred. I recorded-- I have 10 cassettes that I recorded much of the information about the family that's in the book I wrote, with things that he told me. And he said that Lilly came one day to him, and said she wants to get 100 British pounds. Excuse me.

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Is Lilly your cousin?

That was a cousin.

Mm-hmm.

And he said, "no, I won't give it to you, because I know why you want the money. Because you want to divorce your husband, and I'm not going to help you."

Ah.

So she stayed with him and remained with him throughout the years.

Wow, wow.

That was a-- I should mention Uncle Alfred. There were--

Your father's brother, Uncle Alfred.

My father. There were two brothers. One got into Palestine in 1912. That was the doctor. He was an ophthalmologist, Dr. Abraham Albert Ticho. He had a fight with-- not a fight. He was annoyed and disgusted by the antisemitism in Vienna, when he as a doctor and a diplom-- with a diploma--

Diploma.

--and everything had difficulty finding a position, a job. And he was offered a job to head an eye clinic in Jerusalem. And he accepted the position and went in 1912 to Jerusalem to accept this position. And did probably more than anyone else to eliminate trachoma in the country. And he did it by teaching the children what to do to keep flies out of the house. Because the flies carried trachoma.

You couldn't reach the adults, but he went to schools and explained that you shouldn't have a houseful of fly. In the Middle East, flies were like--

Flies.

--breathing. Yeah. And he is credited with eliminating this disease which blinded people. There were a lot of blind people because of trachoma. Then in 1914, when the war started, the First World War, he was assigned to Beirut, to the Austrian military hospital as an eye doctor, and spent the war there. When he came back, the clinic that he was heading was gone, and he started his own clinic.

And he became the leading ophthalmologist in the Middle East for many years, and was highly recognized. His wife was an artist, and is today considered one of the best known artists, Anna Ticho, that came out of Israel.

His youngest brother, Alfred, the youngest of the boys, was a member of Maccabi and so forth. And he decided that he was going to become a chalutz.

What's a chalutz?

Chalutz is one that goes to work on the fields, in the agriculture, and build the country. They were going to build a the country. And he went to Palestine after the war in 1918. Before that he took courses in agriculture, and he was teaching at the one big agricultural school in Israel, in Palestine or Israel.

And after he finished with that, he became one of the first 13 residents of the city, the city of-- there are times when my

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mind just doesn't-- anyway, he was one of the first 13 houses built in that city, which is now a considerable city. He occupied and lived there until he became well-to-do and moved into an apartment in Tel Aviv, when he had a lot of lands to administer.

But what he did as a business, particularly after the Nazis came to power in Germany, was to visit the Jews in Europe and convince them to buy property in Israel, in Palestine, and that it's a good investment. And besides that, it gets money, some of their money out of the country. Now, all of that was not exactly legal, so this operation was always under the table.

But that's how he convinced my uncles, all the Vienna uncles, with the exception of Dr. Reiniger, Sarah's husband, were able to-- and I'm sorry, saying all of the brothers. Many of the brothers, or several of the brothers, were able to go to Palestine, because they had purchased these properties and could show to the British that they are landowners.

And because they were landowners, they were not included in the quota. Because the British decided that there was a quarter of how many Jews can come into Palestine. Because the Arabs were giving them a hard time.

So with each person that you're telling me about, there's a whole world, you know?

Yeah, yeah.

It is. It is. And in those details is when we get to see what are--

The three attorneys-- the three attorneys and the owner of the jewelry store came to Palestine because they had bought property at the inducement of my uncle, and were allowed to enter Palestine.

It ended up being a lifesaver. Not just an investment, but a life saver.

No, no, no. It wasn't an investment. It was a life saver. As it turned out, my father and three of his brothers bought a large orange grove in Hadera, which was essentially in the middle of town. The main street ended up at the front door of the-- it was 150 dunams. I don't know what that is in--

Acres?

In the British-- but it was a very large piece of property. And that remained in the family. My father bought 1/3 over half, so 1/6. And the other 2/6 were bought by other Viennese uncles. And the other, the big half was bought by Dr. Ticho, the eye doctor.

And the agreement was done when he passed away, and his wife was still alive, that his wife can live in the building where the clinic was, where his hospital was until she passes away. But that after that, his half would go to the family. And ultimately, that piece of property was sold, and the moneys were distributed to the members of the Ticho family, all the relatives.

I received a portion of it, and I in turn sent-- my younger brother by that time was dead. I remember I sent checks for $50,000 to each one of the three children.

Wow.

And I think I had gotta about $150,000. And my older brother got that kind of-- from that property. So it put a lot of people into a much better financial situation than they were before. So these are some of the--

The legacies.

My cousin-- and this is a story I should tell. You know, I've mentioned that Uncle Isidore and his wife and are Gisella and her husband were staying with us in the apartment. One day, the brother who was in Dachau, who was in Dachau

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with my Father--

Paul. Paul.

Paul.

Yeah.

His mother-- his wife came over on a Friday evening. We were having Shabbat dinner. And essentially-- and this was told to me by Gisella later, much later. I wasn't there when this happened. We were not allowed to sit at the Shabbat table, not with my Uncle Isidore.

That she said, I don't know what to do. My husband is in Dachau. I can't consult with him. But I was told by some Jewish organization that if I put my son on a train tomorrow morning, the train were taking to Geneva-- to Genoa. And from Genoa, there's going to be a ship that's going to take him to Palestine.

How old was the son?

13.

Your age.

He was a year and a half older than I was.

OK.

And my Uncle Isidore, who was very religious, said, "come on. You can't do that. Tomorrow is Shabbos. Tomorrow is Sabbath. And you're not allowed to travel on Sabbath." Upon which, my uncle Moritz, Moses, turned to him and said, "but Dr. Reiniger, this is a matter of life or death, and Jews are allowed to violate the Sabbath if it's a matter of life and death."

And Uncle Isidore got up and said, "OK, then do what you want," and walked out of the room. And Uncle Moritz turned to my aunt and said, "tomorrow morning put your son on the train." Now imagine the next morning, this woman, with her younger son and her younger daughter and her older son, went to the train station in Brno, said goodbye to her son, put him on the train, and never saw him again.

He arrived in Haifa, and walked from Haifa to Binyamina. I finally found out--

The name of the city.

--where my uncle was, and suddenly showed up in the house where my uncle lived, and said, "here I am."

And the only--

And he was the only-- only one of that family that survived. Because--

Uncle Moritz.

Uncle Moritz saved him, yes.

Uncle Moritz.

That's another one of the miracles that I tell when I tell about the miracles.

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You shared a lot of them with us today.

Yeah, that's how you survived in those days. I wish you would say that the cassette has run out. I mean, I'll have to stop.

[LAUGHTER]

Well--

Because I could go on.

OK. Well, here's the thing. We're here for as long as you want us to be here.

Yeah.

As long as you have something to share, you know?

Right.

You have a lot to share. I can tell. I can tell.

Like this article that's in the magazine.

Mm-hmm.

Well, it's about Rosh Hashanah in 1939. I was in a choir in the temple. And I wrote that I was in the choir, and that I was getting dressed with my tallis and robe and my kippah. And I was wondering whether any of the family members are going to be there. This was after the Germans had marched in, 1939.

Mm-hmm.

But then I said, "oh, well, you know what? I got to do my job." I was a soprano, naturally. And I was the lead soprano, because I had a good ear, and I could sing, and I had a loud voice.

Not Ticho.

No, I certainly was not Ticho. And I said there was more to this Rosh Hashanah than in this article. I wrote that there was more to this Rosh Hashanah than just a new year. It was the beginning of the year 5,700 in the Jewish calendar. So it wasn't the beginning of a new year. It was the beginning of a new century.

And this made a big impression on me. You know? 5,700, and I'm alive for that. And as a matter of fact, at that time, I made myself a promise that I'm going to live to the year 2000, so I will have two centuries that I would survive. That was my private, private wish.

And I always just thought, "look, all the pogroms, and all the problems that Jews have had through the ages-- because we learned that in school-- we were the year 5,700, and we were still here. And the Christians were in the year 1939. We got them beat!

[LAUGHTER]

That was my thinking.

It's no comparison. You have 1939 and 5,700. Hey. We're not even close.

It's not even close. That's right. And so I said that I almost-- the other thing was that I never had a bar mitzvah. This is

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what the article was about, basically. It was not a long article, but a nice story. Since the Rosh Hashanah holiday's coming up, they felt that they should put it into the magazine.

It's that I never had a bar mitzvah. I was 13. And I was supposed to have a bar mitzvah. And the cantor, who I knew very well because I sang in his choir, was teaching me. And Uncle Isidore had written a speech for me to make.

And then my uncles decided, this is not a time for the Ticho family to attract attention. So they canceled it. Now, somewhere I had heard that God had promised all Jews 70 years. And that after 70 years, you start like a second childhood, which in many cases is true.

And there were Jews that had a bar mitzvah at the age of 83. Because it was like the second--

Childhood.

Second life. So I decided I was going to have a bar mitzvah, if I live to be 83. I decided that back in 1940.

Well--

And I had a legitimate, full blown bar mitzvah with the reading of the Torah and the recitation of the Haftorah, and all my family being there, and whoever was willing to come. Even a friend of ours came from Israel to be there. And it was a legitimate, full blown bar mitzvah.

Well, congratulations.

Thank you.

I couldn't think of a better way to say this, to end our interview.

Thank you for coming. Thank you for being patient.

It's fascinating.

And thank you for being so helpful.

Well, it was fascinating. And thank you for sharing it all.

You're welcome.

I will say then that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Charles Ticho on September 21, 2019 in Hackensack, New Jersey.

You mean it's still 21st?

It's still 21st.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah? So tell me, what is this sketch of?

Well, this pencil sketch is of my father Nathan Ticho. It's dated April 20, 1940, and was created in the Spielberg Fortress in Brno, the Czech Republic, by an unidentified fellow prisoner at a time when the Nazis were using this fortress as a prison for Jews and political opponents.

So this is when your father is in jail.

Yes. The sketch was smuggled out by a fellow prisoner, and was brought to the Ticho home, to show that Nathan Ticho was alive and well.

Ah, so this is right after he's arrested.

I remember it was right-- they marched into-- less than three weeks-- less than three weeks after the sketch was drawn, Nathan Ticho, along with his brother and business partner, Paul Baruch Ticho, was sent to the Dachau concentration camp. There Paul was murdered.

Nathan was released in early August as a result of an appeal of the Italian government in Berlin, engineered by Nathan's wife's-- my mother's-- family in the United States.

So this is part of what you have written as a description that's on the back of this particular sketch.

Yes.

Do you remember getting that sketch when it was done?

No, I remember seeing it when it was brought out.

Mm-hmm.

It was in my parents' home. We framed it. It was in my parents' home. Then it was given to my older brother, who only recently, maybe like six months or eight months ago, sent it to me.

OK. Well, thank you very much. OK. So now we'll go to the computer. OK, tell me, what is this photograph of?

This is a photograph of two of my uncles, the American uncles, my mother's brothers-- Bill Klein and Julius Klein. Julius Klein was the principal brother who was instrumental in securing my father's, and my brother's, and my release from Nazi occupation.

OK. So that means that they were able-- they are the ones who contacted everybody and anybody here, and who eventually got the Italians to ask your father to be released from Dachau, and for you to be given exit visas from Czechoslovakia. You and your brother.

And my father.

And your father, all of you.

Yes.

OK. Terrific. And this photograph looks like it's taken in the 1950s or 1960s.

That's right. It's later, after the war, yes.

OK. All right, thank you. So tell me who is this portrait of?

This painting is of my grandfather, Yitzhak Zvi Ticho.

Your father's father.

My father's father. It's a portrait. It's a painting because my grandfather would not allow photographs. It just not something that religion permitted. And he was actually photographed sitting on a bench, on a public bench asleep. And

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the artist used that photograph to create this portrait.

[? He ?] might be interested to make an interesting comment that he selected Uncle Victor for the eyes. That is, he painted it, and then he had Uncle Victor. This was a Viennese artist. He looked at some of the Sons of grandfather Yitzhak, and he decided that Victor's eyes were best suited to add to the portrait.

Well, isn't that--

And that was the result.

That's pretty cool.

Yes, it is.

OK. Thank you. So tell me, who is this portrait of?

This is the wife of my grandfather, Esther, born [? Baer. ?] Esther [? Baer. ?]

Ticho.

Ticho. Because they made a portrait of my grandfather, they had to make a portrait of my grandmother. So we would have a pair. She was not quite so religious. I think she posed for the picture. So that's how that was created.

Now, she died young, you told me.

Yes. They had 11 children that lived, plus 1 that didn't live, and one that died young at the age of eight or something. So it looks like she may have had 15 pregnancies. So it wasn't surprising that she died at the age of 53. And actually she was diagnosed with breast cancer by her son, Dr. Albert Abraham Ticho. Although he was an optometrist-- ophthalmologist, he was visiting Boskovice, and she took him aside during a Passover Seder service, and said, "I'd like you to look at something. I'd like to show you something." And the moment he touched the area, he knew that this was a serious situation, and told her to go and see a doctor immediately. But it was way too late.

OK. Thank you. At least we have this image of your grandmother.

And a very impressive gravestone in the Boskovice cemetery.

OK. Thank you.

Yeah. So this looks a little familiar. What is this now?

Well, this is the original-- or at least it's a copy of the original photograph that the street photographer took of my grandfather asleep. I don't know how come he was still holding the paper that he was reading.

Mm-hmm.

But I think his eyes are closed.

Yes, they're closed.

That's when they took his picture. And that was the source from which the portrait was painted.

And did your grandfather ever know about this photograph?

I think he would have been very upset if he had learned that that's what happened.

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I see.

It would have been a violation.

And do you know about what year this would have been taken?

Well, he died in the 1920s, 1922, '23.

And he looks like a young man here. Young-ish.

No, he was quite advanced in age.

OK.

But he could be young here.

Yeah.

So I can't tell you.

OK. OK, tell me, what is this photograph of?

Well, it's a photograph of our apartment, in our apartment in Chicago, shortly after we arrived.

In 1940.

In 1940. It's in a furnished apartment that we rented, even though we couldn't afford it.

And who are the three gentlemen sitting?

The three people there is my brother in the middle, older brother Harold, with a pipe.

OK.

Myself.

You're now--

In this image on the--

You'd be on the right.

And then the youngest one is my brother Steven.

OK. So Steve is from the left, the youngest one, the little boy, or little-ish. Then your oldest brother Harold with the pipe, and he's already a young man. And you, then, with the tie next to him, and you're looking at a book.

I think it's an album.

OK. And then the portrait of your grandfather.

And he's looking down on us, and making sure we're behaving.

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OK. All right, great. Thank you.

Go.

OK, so tell me, what is this photograph of? All these children?

Well, all these children are students at the Jewish gymnasium of Brno, and the first class, meaning some of them were 11, and some of them were 12, depending of how many years they spent in grammar school.

And you?

I was an advanced student, so I went into the Gymnasium at the age of 10. So this must have been taken when I was 11.

And tell me, where are you in this photograph?

Well, I got it-- I managed to negotiate the center seat in the front row.

Ah, I see you there. So you're sitting in front of the only adult.

That was our home teacher. Interesting, I should tell you, that is Professor Otto Ungar.

Otto Ungar.

And Professor Otto Ungar was made famous because he was an artist. And during his incarceration, he drew pictures of what was going on, and hid those drawings. And many of those drawings were uncovered after the war, and were published. You can see Otto Ungar pictures published in different books and publications.

Where was he incarcerated?

I don't really know.

Did he survive?

Well, the paintings were discovered. At least some paintings were discovered. And the Germans broke his fingers, so he could supposedly no longer draw. He survived the Holocaust, but he had a bad case of typhoid fever and died from typhoid fever. So I never had to--

The one memorable thing that I remember him for was when he was teaching us how to do three dimensions by adding shades and shading, that he liked to stick his tongue into his cheek and say, "don't forget, [SPEAKING CZECH] "every hole is black." Of course, all the boys knew what he meant.

Oh my goodness. OK. What is it? OK. Yeah.

When we moved into the new apartment, in the new building that we built, he was engaged by my family, by my parents, to draw a mural in the winter garden. Which he did. And he used to come early in the morning before he had to go to school like I did.

And he used to tease me in class, in front of the class by saying, "Oh, yes, Ticho. He comes every morning after he had breakfast, and he has to say 'good morning, Professor Ungar.'" And he had to bow. And of course, this made me feel awful.

Because he says this in front of the whole class.

Of all the class. And of course, everybody goes "hahaha!" But he was a lovely guy, and he was very funny. We were

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very fond of him. And we were very lucky that we had him as the class professor.

Homeroom teacher, yeah.

As a homeroom teacher.

Thank you. OK. Tell me, who is this a photograph of?

This is the photograph of my father, Nathan Ticho.

But when?

It was taken about maybe 1935, '36. Because he still had his mustache. After the war, he never wore another mustache.

OK. Thank you. OK, and tell me, who is this a photograph of?

This is a photograph of my mother, Francesca Ticho, born Klein. K-L-E-I-N, Klein. And she was a very lovely woman. So I think she was very pretty.

Yeah. About when was this taken? This picture was taken when she was in the United States, waiting to get her citizenship back. So this was taken around 1940.

OK. OK. Thank you.

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