

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back. I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. And this evening we have with us as our guest Judith Balassa Zucker. Judith was born in Czechoslovakia and will tell us her story. Judith, will you tell us about your childhood in Czechoslovakia?

Well, I was born in Krupina which is a small town in Slovakia. And until about 1938, '39, my childhood was really normal and happy. I had friends. And my family had many friends. And they were very well accepted in the city. The city was only about 10,000 inhabitants. And my father was one of the seven doctors there, so everybody really knew him very well. And that means they knew me also, and I had a lot of friends.

For a while, we lived in a big house in the main square.

Oh, I think we have a picture of you as a child, and your sister, and a picture of the house, which we can get on the screen now. So we'll know what you're talking about. Do you want to tell us about this picture?

On this picture is my mother and my father in the background. And next to my mother on her right side stands her younger brother, who was two years younger and in front of him is my grandmother and next to her is the youngest son, the youngest my mother's brother, who was born 21 years later. And there in the middle is my sister with a doll, and next to her is my grandfather. I wasn't born yet.

And the woman on the other side is your grandmother, I presume?

Right.

Now, we have a picture of you and your sister. You also have a big bow. What year is this?

Here, I think it was 1942. So I was 8, and my sister was 12.

Fine, and now we have a picture of your house that you had started to tell us about.

Now, this is the house that I was born in. It's in the main square of the city that has one big square. And I have a picture that I bought when I was there in 1977, which shows that they tore it down, and they built another house instead of it. Of course, we were not paid for it in any way.

You didn't get reparations for that.

No.

OK, so it looks like you had a very nice, cultured and comfortable life. And when did this all change for you?

Well, the first thing that my uncle. Ladislav, we saw him on the picture, he was--

With your mother.

With my mother. And he came to live with us. I think it was about 1939 or 1940. He was also a doctor. And he was then 34 years old.

And at that time, he worked in another village as a doctor. And as part of the overall movement of rendering the Jewish people unemployed, they also dismissed him as a doctor. And it was about 1940 that all the businesses had to be Aryanized.

An Aryan person had to have businesses. So they just took away the businesses or they closed it, or they put a Gentile person to head it.

So this uncle lost his job as a physician. Does that mean your father also lost his job?

No. My father, because he was an important person and not only that, he had a special skill and he was a dentist as well. In those years, they trained a general doctorate, which he received in Berlin, in Prague and Berlin. He had this education. And he also was a dentist. And besides that, he was the head of the Jewish community in Krupina.

Oh, I see. So he was an important person.

He was an important person. So they had to deal with him and negotiate with him in many ways.

The Nazis.

Well, yes. The Nazis, we really did not have Nazis there. We had only the Slovak people. Since 1939, Slovakia--Czechoslovakia was I'm sure you're aware of this, but it was dismembered. Slovakia became independent. And it became a satellite of Germany under the leadership of Hlinka, and later Tiso. By the way, I have a picture on his stamp. This is one of the--

Tiso.

Yes Tiso and [NON-ENGLISH], and they became the heads of the Slovak Republic, which was in complete cooperation with Germany.

So we really, I never seen a German soldier until later in '44, '45, when I saw in the distance. So just to go back a little bit in history, in 1939, then Slovakia became independent. And Moravia and Bohemia which is the Czechia, became the protectorate of Germany.

And they were dealt just like part of Germany, the Jews in Moravia and in Bohemia, which is the west part of Czechoslovakia, they have a completely different story to tell than Slovakia. They were deported also right away, and their rights were taken away.

And they, of course, everybody knows the story of the Sudetenland. In 1938, they wanted to appease Hitler and they gave a piece of Czechoslovakia to Germany with Chamberlain and--

Yes.

Yes. And by that time, also many Jews fled from that part into Czechoslovakia into Czechia.

So you're--

So we are on the east side.

--one of the more protected than Bohemia and Moravia.

Right. We were on the east part. I have a map.

Well, that's all right.

OK. We are on the east part of Slovakia. And of course, on completely on the east side is the Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Right? Which was completely treated differently. And also in 1939, when Slovakia became independent, Subcarpathian Ruthenia also became part of Hungary, and also part of Slovakia. Slovakia became a part of Hungary.

And my grandparents lived in that part which became a part of Hungary. So suddenly, we got a border between us. So really Czechoslovakia was suddenly cut to pieces and each piece was the Jews in every area was treated differently.

So in 1940, as I said before, all the businesses were taken away from the people--

From the Jewish owners.

From the Jewish owners. And also many doctors and professionals lost their jobs. One doctor-- there were two Jewish doctors in our town. And my father got an exemption, and the other didn't. And he was taken away. So--

What happened with my uncle, he lived with us. He was-- his name was Ladislav Bala. And he lived maybe two, three years. However, they wanted to create these unemployed Jews under the pretext, so they are too many people without employment.

So they have to get rid of them. They have to send them to work. So, quote-unquote, the Germany asked for in 1940, '41, for able-bodied young people to work, and for retraining. And actually, the Slovak paid per capita, I don't 500 crowns or so. They should just take them away and retrain them, quote-unquote.

So what happened to your uncle?

So my uncle, whom I loved very much, he was my good friend and he was my mother's very-- they were very close. They were only two years apart. And they were in college together. My mother was a pharmacist and they were together in Prague. And he was in medical school and--

She was in pharmacy.

She was in pharmacy school, so they were always very-- they were poor, but they were very close. They shared everything in school. So again, my uncle came to live with us. And my father tried to get him a job, and he couldn't.

And he was among the first people, because he was young. The limit was I think between 16 and 35. They needed them shipped to Germany, 20,000 people. So in order to get rid of these people, they had three concentration camps in Slovakia.

It was in [PLACE NAME], and he went to Novaki. And we have many, many cards. These are authentic cards. He wrote maybe every couple of weeks. And he-- my mother send him food. He thanks for food, and he asks everybody how is how am I eating. I was a bad eater, and every time he asked about the children. And please, how about my request? What about my request?

And the request was to get him a job. If he could get a job--

He would be exempt.

--he could be taken out from this concentration camp. And no matter what my father did, and he did a lot of things for a lot of people, he couldn't get him a job.

As I said before, because we were in Slovakia, there was a lot of people were fleeing from everywhere. We were on a path of people fleeing, fleeing from everywhere, people from Poland to Hungary. Everybody was going south because Hungary wasn't yet--

Invaded.

--invaded. And the Jews were really at peace there more or less. Unfortunately they did not know what was going on. And I have a story about this too.

Before you get on to that or something else, does your uncle write about conditions in the concentration camp?

Well, a lot of places it's crossed off. You see?

Oh, it's censored then.

It is censored.

Oh, I see.

And of course, he is not going to write anything that--

That might jeopardize him.

It is all personal. It's like I'm healthy and how are you feeling, and please look for the job-- for the--

For the special request.

Yes, and about acknowledging food most of the time. And about that we have everything. It was just put on. Because you see and it was here it was written, censored. It was just put up. It was just really a sign that he was alive.

And here is one of these. Let's say, this is my mother's handwriting. She actually sent him cards self-addressed so he can send it right away and back.

And you see here is a Star of David right here, identifying who sent it.

OK, so he's writing and your father cannot find him anything.

OK, so in the meanwhile there was a hectic pace by us. There were refugees constantly from everywhere all the time, day and night. And because our house was central and my father was the head of the Jewish community, and he had-- he bribed a lot of people there, official people.

And they let us know who is in jail when they got there. So my mother was always cooking. And I and my sister were delivering constantly food to this jail there. And I remember I'll never forget this man, this warden. He had this handlebar mustache and sometimes he appeared with this thing with this it's like a holder.

And it scared me every time. I was just petrified every time I just went to those dark halls to take the food. But my mother was always-- my parents were always sending, and cooking, and trying to take these people out of jail. And sometimes they could and sometimes they could not. And if they could not, so these people were sent.

There were transports to send to these camps in Slovakia. And from there, they were sent to Poland, to Auschwitz, and to other places.

Once my father, by mistake, they got him on the transport. He was already away. He was lucky. They got him out from about two stations down.

Who got him out?

The high-- I don't know, the higher officials. Then we discovered what happened.

From your town.

Right, well not from our town, from the next center of Jewish community. He was trying to get off somebody. And he by mistake he got on the train, and the train left, and he almost was shipped. It was awful.

What happened to your uncle?

Well, my uncle, he was deported from there. He was deported to Birkenau, which is an extension of Auschwitz.

That's all right, if you'd rather not talk about it.

The first 10 days he was there, he married, sort of quote-unquote. They were saying that married people have a better chance of survival. So there was a nurse. Her name was Alice. And they sort of married on the train.

And so she was with him like his wife. And then we got a letter from her from Birkenau. And then we heard it later on during the war. He was there 10 days, and somebody stole some bread or something. And they lined up the people and he was shot. Every 10th man was shot. And he was the 10th man.

And this is a telegram telling you that.

This is a letter that this Alice wrote. And she said in German, beautiful German, she said that Feli, Feli, is my father, her brother-in-law. He got divorced from his wife. It's all just covered up.

Just to make up. What year is that?

This was 1943, 1943. Well this doesn't, yes, it is 1943. It's June the 6th.

June the 6th. Oh my.

It is just about just an anniversary.

An anniversary.

So he was probably June the 5th, he was like tomorrow would be on Shavuot.

So that's 40 years ago.

So these cards that he wrote, it's 1942. This is June, May and June 1942. So he was about nine months, no, a year, about a year in Novaki, because he was as a doctor. He worked there as a doctor.

So your grandparents were alive when they got this news?

No. No, my mother got this news.

But where were your grandparents?

OK, my grandparents were in Hungary, what was then Hungary.

Oh, that's right. You said that they had their own area.

Yes. My mother never recovered from this. She was so close. That was her baby brother. Anyways, OK, you want to hear now about my grandparents?

Yes.

OK. My grandparents were teachers, my grandmother and grandfather. Which is really unusual that she was, so my mother too was an educated woman.

Very cultured family.

Very cultural family. And they lived in Levice. It's all together. It's not more than 40 miles. And they kept because the

borders were closed, we couldn't write. And also Czechoslovakia, you couldn't write to Czechia.

We have a whole big family there. But they became Gentiles. I have a whole slew of cousins.

They converted?

They converted.

To save their lives.

Well, some converted to save their lives, and some of my aunts intermarried. So I have really a lot of Christian families.

Still there?

Oh, yes. We keep in touch there. We keep in touch now. They are very decent. Now, in our town they are trying to eliminate our cemetery. And we are trying to exhume our family and my brother. I had the baby brother. And one of the cousins from Budapest is taking care of it.

So we hopefully, we hope to save it, not to be desecrated.

Sure.

We lived there hundreds of years in this town. So my grandparents lived in Hungary. And they were Hungarian. And they were feeling that nothing can happen to them. And from history we know that the Hungarian Jews were not aware of what was going on.

Not until 1944.

Right. Right, however, in 1942, we knew already. People came back from Auschwitz. And in 1944, for sure they knew. People escaped. Two people came back to Czechoslovakia, and they relayed it to Switzerland and to Jewish communities, and to the United States. The request they relayed the request to bomb Auschwitz.

And as we know from history, it was turned down. But we knew by then what was happening.

What was happening there.

However, the Hungarian Jews did not. And we have letters that we wrote, that my mother was receiving. They were very close contact with my parents and my grandparents, which was only like 40 miles.

As I said, my father had many connections. And these officers on the border--

Would pass letters on.

--they were bribed. And they delivered letters. And as a matter of fact, my father had a car waiting for them in front of the house they should escape to us, because we thought we will be able to manage during the war.

And I have the letter here. It is March 26, 1944. They say the flu is not so bad. He says, they are going to stick it out. Nothing can happen to them. They don't need hospital, which means that they don't need--

Your code words.

They don't need to escape.

Right.

1944, March.

So they must have been taken away shortly after that?

They were taken away shortly. And what we heard my grandmother died in the wagon. They carted them off like wagons, in like animals.

Cattle cars.

Cattle cars. And then they just threw my grandmother's body out. [CRYING]

While this was going on, you were in school in Slovakia?

However, their younger son, who was 21 years younger than my mother. And he was only four years older than my sister. So he was taken for forced labor camp. And he managed to escape. And he came to us. So he survived the war with us.

That was a miracle.

He was with us all along. Yes.

Did your grandfather die also at that time?

Yes, my grandmother and grandfather, they were 65 and 63 years old. They were deported.

They both died at the same time.

Yes, they were deported end of 1944 already, end of war practically. They did not believe it that was going on.

In the meantime you and your family are living in Slovakia.

Yes. So in 1940, I went to school for one day. That's when they kicked me out. They said Jews are not allowed to regular schools. But my sister was already in the fourth grade. This was supposed to be my happiest day, right? And I was sent home.

So that's when the Jewish community made a Jewish school. However, because of the transports, everybody was starting to be transported. And this was a small town. We had all together with the vicinity about 60 to 70 families. We had only maybe 200 people in our town.

Jewish people.

Jewish people.

Out of 10,000.

10,000, yes. So they made a Jewish school with two teachers. First one teacher, and he was coming from another city. And one day he came to school bloody. They beat him up on the way to school.

The Slovaksians?

The Slovaksians. These Slovaksians, I told you, we didn't have Germans. These Slovaksians, they were worse than the Germans. They were suddenly they turn at you. One day they were your best friends. And the next day they did not know you.

One day I was beat up. I was beat up by a boy. I was six years old, I remember the exact spot on the street. And suddenly a boy was maybe 12 years old. He beat me up.

Because you were a Jewish little girl?

And he knew me. Everybody knew Dr. Balassa, you know? He knew. He just beat me, because he wanted to beat me up.

And nobody stopped him?

Nobody. It was a side street there. So we went to this Jewish school. And we had two classes there, two rooms. And in these two rooms, there were all ages. And you will not believe what education. We had two teachers finally, a man and a woman. We got the finest education.

My sister studied Latin, the older children, German, history, everything.

That was a form of resistance in itself.

It was we got the finest education. You have a Jewish education and a general. And after the war, we went right on. We did not lose anything because we really we were better educated in these two-- talking about one room or one room schoolhouse.

They were so tremendously motivated.

But we were divided into groups. So this did something else. We were all doing something. It was amazing. So what happened was that during these years, we had to move out from our house. We had big house. You saw the house. We had the quarters in the back for the help. We had servants.

And so we moved into these quarters were servants.

The servants' quarters, yes.

My father's office stayed in the front. And a family, a lawyer, moved into the front house. Of course, all our rights were taken away.

What year was this about? This was since '40 on, '40 on. We could not go out at night. I never seen a movie till after the war, till 1945. No movies, no traveling.

Was your father paid?

My father, yes, he was paid. But they took away his practice. He was just a dentist then. We had to give all our valuables, like furs, jewelry, everything that had any value at all. I remember we just had to throw it on a pile. Everything was just thrown.

All these people that knew us very well, they just--

Grabbed.

Grabbed and took it away. A few things were saved during the war that some very decent people took like pictures, very few. Let's say we have-- very few. We have one candlestick that my mother found in the garbage, very few things were left over.

But we could not do anything. Let's say I think from 8 o'clock, we couldn't go out anymore. And this was right through



the war.

Were you permitted to have a radio?

I think we had a radio. I don't remember. I think we did, because then at night everybody closed the doors and were listening during the war, especially--

To see what the progress--

--to see what was the progress. So this was going on until 1944. In the meanwhile, all the Jews were taken away.

Except for your family?

Well, no after the war, what happened six families came back. Out of 70 60, 70 families, we were six families we were saved. And which is about in Czechoslovakia altogether about one sixth of the population was saved out of 350,000 altogether, about 50,000 was saved.

This is that came back from deportation.

That came back. They survived. Well did you-- when did you leave your home?

We really did not leave till October 1944.

And why did you leave at that time?

OK. What happened was that, as I said, we did not see a German person. However, there was an underground going on. And the Russian front was coming closer and closer by then. By the way, this would be an interest to you that there were four parachutists from Israel dropped, [NON-ENGLISH].

Right.

It was very I'm all cold. I'm all cold. They would drop behind the lines. These people volunteered to come and help the underground and to tell the Jews, the remaining Jews, that there are still people living in Israel and who are fighting for them. And these were all young people who originally came from there.

From that area.

That area, they knew the language and they escaped. Because a lot of people did leave, like in 1939 when they saw what was happening. They went to Palestine.

Yes.

And these four people were among them. And they were parachuted behind the lines to show the support.

To give a support system. That was also with the help of--

This was a suicidal mission.

Of the British.

Right. The British. That was the part of the British brigade. And they were caught very close to us. They were caught and executed in Banská Bystrica, which was just a few miles away from us.

But for us to hear that people came from Eretz Yisrael, we felt we are not alone. Somebody out there is really, really

helping us. Because till, then we did not know anything. The West was quiet, totally quiet, while all the families, everybody was killed. We did not know if we have a friend anywhere.

This was the first time we knew that we have somebody.

So it was such a dark period for you, four years and without communication.

Without any communications.

Judith, I think I remember. We have a picture of you and your friends, your girlfriends. Maybe, oh here it is on the screen. Maybe before you tell us about the resistance, you can tell us about this picture.

This was taken about in 1941. I am the one, the second one from the left. The one in front of me is a friend of mine who lives in Israel. She was saved. We were together in the mountains. And the one on the right before the last is my sister, and next to her is a girl who does live in Israel. So we were saved out of nine girls, four survived.

All the rest, the ones in the middle, they were all deported and exterminated in our small town.

Oh my. That's a big percentage. What was the reason for the picture being taken at that time?

My mother was a very good photographer. We have-- she was always this was in our yard there.

So it was just a fun thing.

Just a fun thing. We had girls there and my mother was always taking pictures. And we had the formal pictures there too. How did you get this picture back?

This is a reproduction. Somebody, oh, I know. My sister met this lady by accident. And she had the picture. And this was a reproduction from the picture. It was really some of our pictures were saved, as I told you through some very decent people who saved it for us.

Now you're in 1944. Oh yeah. I forgot to show it to you. This is a Star of David. It is about 1 inch in diameter. It's made out of plastic. And this was one worn by my father. And in the middle it says HZ.

Z, as we know it.

Which means hospodãrsky. That means economically vital Jew. That means he got exemption. The rest of us we wore the large ones made out of cloth. And it was about maybe 5 inches in diameter. And I was so little, and it practically took up all my blouse.

Did it have Z-H-I-D?

No. No.

Just a Jewish--

Just a big--

And was it yellow too?

Yellow, big, you couldn't miss it. It was so big and on little children. I mean it just about took our whole chest.

A sad picture to set apart children.

This is really something. And it's unique. And my father keeps it, yes.

So it's 1944.

1944. So as I said, the German front, I mean the Russian front, was coming--

Closer to you.

--closer to us. And there was an underground. And there was an uprising. It was a very short-lived, but at least it was the only sign that it's not everything OK.

That there was resistance.

For the part of the Czechoslovak people. And this is in Slovakia. That means, so some people went underground. And they joined the parachutists from Russia. Because there were some Russian front was coming nearer, because the Russians were obviously winning by then. And they sent some parachutists organizing. And they organized an uprising.

It was the end of August. And it was very high spirits, and we thought the end of the war is here, and the Russians are coming and everything is fine. However, it was not meant to be. The Germans still had enough soldiers left to send to Slovakia, although they were busy in the other fronts. But they still wouldn't let go of that. And they suppressed the uprising.

So from end of August till October, beginning of October, it was still going the uprising. They didn't achieve much, but at least it was something going on.

It was spirit, but it was short-lived spirit.

Right. Short-lived spirit. So what happened in October, the Germans were coming in and there was just one part in Slovakia left open where to run. There was no place else to go. And by then, most Jews were deported. And we were only about I think 25,000 all across Slovakia. And this is out of 136,000. 136,000, only 25,000 or something like this was left.

And all these people, all they went to hiding somewhere, or they fled to Hungary, whoever could. But even then in Hungary it wasn't safe anymore. We really everybody went with the partisans, with the guerrillas into the mountains, into the mountains of it's called the Niskie Tatry, which is the Low Tatras. You might know--

I think we have a picture of--

We have a picture. This is really a recreational area. It's a--

You want to tell us about this?

This is the partisans.

Are they mostly Russian? Or are they all Russian?

No, this is some Russians, some Russians in these, right. These were the partisans that were sent to help. They organized the Slovak. This must be some Slovaks among them.

And then we have a picture of the countryside.

Right. This is a beautiful countryside, it is like Adirondacks maybe.

It is quite beautiful.

It is Adirondacks. People go for vacations, for skiing. It is beautiful. It's at least 3,000 meters high. It's very--

Did the Germans come to this part too?

Right. The Germans came everywhere. So anyways, we fled, our town the 10th of October. And it was just the Germans are coming. We fled with everything on our backs that was the whole thing. And we fled till October the 28th. That's when we actually went into the mountains. No place to go. And we couldn't go with the partisans, because they didn't want us.

They didn't want to be held down by little kids and old people.

But they didn't even want a doctor, your father didn't service them?

Well, my father did service them. But they didn't want us to attach ourselves. Because we were a group of 29 people. Out of this was about seven children, and about five older people, like really old, in their 60s I mean and 70s. And the rest are adults.

So we went with them until we could. But then we were sort of independent. And when we-- we're OK?

Yes. We still have time.

OK. We were going actually from place to place to place. We stayed a few days in one place.

This was all in the mountains?

In the mountains, in the bare mountains. And it was cold. It was October.

It was October. What did you do for food?

Well, for food. This is a good question. But for water, we scraped the snow from the trees, and we melted the snow. For food, we took a little bit alongside. But you see, we had a few already-- we had a few teenagers, with us young people.

And there was a group. It was-- we had some connections in certain villages, whereas these young people would go at night.

Oh, as an advanced guard.

At night. No, no. We were up there. And they came back at night. They had-- and they paid lots and lots of money, and some peasants were willing to leave some food for us. And then they brought it up.

Oh I see.

You see? Or they were sending out some people to go, we should come and pick up some food.

So it was touch and go.

So it was touch and go we were very-- we were very strictly rationed just a few, beans or a few potatoes. And there is a story. I don't remember. But they said that I never wanted to sit down till my parents would sit down. Because they always said, oh, you eat it. And you do. I'm not hungry and things like this.

And I never wanted to touch anything till my parents sat down too. Then we found some frozen horses, and horse meat isn't very good.

But when you're starving, there isn't much of an alternative. Oh you have some memories.

Some animals, frozen animals, and cooked it what we could. But that was starvation time. It was really nothing. So these young people, my uncle, [PERSONAL NAME] who lives now in Switzerland, who is--

He's the one that's 21 years younger than--

My mother, he was one of those runners who were going back and forth. There was another girl. Her name was Gerda. And they caught her. She never came back. She was a 17-year-old. They caught her in a peasant's house there. And her mother went berserk.

She just-- she was taking-- she was painting her name everywhere on the snow, you know? It was terrible. She just could not accept it that Gerda is not coming back. She just went and never came back. It was just so terrible. I can't even begin to tell you.

When did this all end?

So anyways, we were going sometimes we slept outside. Sometimes we built such a thing like lean-tos between trees. And I remember one of those fell down on my sister and I one day. And they pulled us out. I remember this really good. They were actually pulling us out from this.

Sometimes we found such huts, where the hunters going, hunting. So there were some huts. So we stayed there for a few days. But we were always packed to go. Because you never knew when we heard the Germans are coming. And every morning we packed up all our things to go everybody has his own things to run.

I presume you had sentries and guards.

There were guards. And they were some gypsies. Gypsies were just as persecuted as Jews.

Yes. Yes.

There were some coming from one village to another. And there were some happy times. They liked to play, and they had some improvised instruments. And sometimes there were really some spirit. But the spirit was always high. We never gave up.

Was your father the leader of this group?

Right, my father was the leader. So sometimes we met these partisans. And he had-- we didn't have much equipment because it was nothing much to carry, only what we could carry. But he had this little box. And he was carrying it. He had all kinds of shots. He had a vise for pulling teeth.

Oh yes, pliers.

Pliers. He had all kinds of--

Drugs probably.

--drug and also bandages. Because you see there was a lot of frostbite. I never forget the smell of this.

It becomes gangrenous.

Gangrenous. That once my father alone almost fainted. And it becomes infected. With I don't even want to say, but with worms and everything, what my father he treated these partisans. And not to talk about every child from our group, except my sister, this Chava who lives in Israel and myself, we didn't lose any toes or fingers.

Everybody, every child lost toes.

So how did you?

I don't know. This is God's will.

Did you have boots, extra boots, or socks?

No. We had just shoes. But they were big enough. Probably the other shoes were see we were couples, we didn't have the equipment. That's why I don't like to go camping anymore.

Oh, I don't blame you.

We didn't have the equipment what they have here. Our clothes were not so warm. We didn't have nylon. This was not known. It was mostly some wool, and OK. So we were going from place to place. And my father treated these partisans. So they let us stay.

So then they fed us for a couple of days. And then we had to go. But once they almost shot us. Because they didn't know who was coming and there was a stream between us. And they were shooting on anything that was moving. And they thought there were some Germans coming. And here we are screaming, children, Jews, women, and they couldn't hear.

And they almost shot till somebody got the idea.

Well, you hear sometimes that the partisans, whether the Russians or not, were not happy to see Jews in the forest.

No.

Did you have any problems here?

No, they didn't welcome us too well. First of all, they couldn't share the food with us. And they don't want to be burdened. But they welcome my father.

For his--

Because he pulled their teeth, and he cleaned up their wounds and he did all these things for them. For which he later on, after the war, he did receive a distinctive medal with the letter A.

This is from the Slovakian government?

--for appreciation, right.

This is from the Slovak. These are the national colors from Slovakia. And he got this medal for participation in the Slovak uprising as an appreciation. Plus he has the letter also. And I have the book written by the general dedicated to him in which he describes everything.

Well, anyways, we had quite a few calls, very close calls. We had this lady. You saw this smallest one, this Chava, who lives in Israel?

Her father wasn't with us. The mother was with us. But the father, because he was about 40-ish or so. He was with the partisans. A lot of Jews went and fought with the partisans, with the army underground. And so we had the mother and his mother, who was one of the old ladies who she-- I can remember she carried pots and those pots always made noise. And when we had to go quiet you could hear the pots.

Oh, my.

These are things you do not forget.

These are images that you don't forget.

Well, anyways, this lady who is still alive, and sick now in Israel, this Lily, she had a habit whenever we went, she started to talk to the soldiers. If they didn't hear, didn't meet her husband. You see? And one day we were camped out in this thing. And she sees this row of soldiers going through the woods like this.

And we were down here like this was the little hill, down from there, not 100 yards. And for some reason she did not start talking with them. She did not call out. And then we heard these were Germans.

Oh, my. And they went and they attacked this hut that we were supposed to go later on, and they killed everybody.

So it was just fate?

It was just fate. I mean, we had so many close calls. And we had sometimes they followed us like half an hour after we left and they came on skis. They had white coats, these Germans. They came on skis. And some of them had dogs. They had specially trained dogs to sniff out the people in the mountains. That we escaped I cannot even tell you.

Did each one of the 29 make it?

It was providence that-- yes. I remember the New Year's Eve, 1944-45. About 10 o'clock, we got the news the Germans are coming. It was so cold that I'll tell you maybe like the winter of '77. That you wouldn't send a dog out there. The wailing winds, it was just unbelievable cold. So we hear Germans are coming. We got to go. So we go.

We went in a line we always went like the partisans went in a line. We went like a few feet apart but by the time you could-- by the time you came to the footsteps of the first one there were no footsteps. It was so frightfully freezing and windy. And that night we spent in the open sky. And I'll never forget the New Year's Eve night.

I guess not.

But we survived, with God's help, with God's will. I really don't know why. Although one time, my father always carried poison. He did. Because he said he's not going to fall in German's hands. It was like Masada. You know and one day we were very close and I said to my father. I said father, I said it's 5 to 12, you are not going to do it now. God will save us. It was just already 1945. It was the spring.

And he didn't give us the shots, and then we were saved.

When were you liberated? When were you saved?

As a matter of fact, we crossed the lines. It was in February, end of February 1944, we were not saved. We just crossed the front. They were shooting everywhere. They were shooting everywhere. It was just like you just ducked. We came down and then we stayed behind the front till our town was liberated. We came back till March, we came back March 15.

1945?

'45 right. And in the meanwhile, because we were so well known in town, the Germans spread the news that we were killed. They finally got the big traitor, Dr. Balassa and his family and everybody. And I came to this store in our town. And I see this woman turning white and running.

She fled. She thought--

She thought you were a ghost.

--I was a ghost, right. So anyways, we got saved, thank goodness. And my father got-- well, we didn't get our things back. We found pieces, pieces.

Where did you live when you came back?

We came back to our house.

To that little house behind the house?

It was the German headquarters. It was such a beautiful house. That was a German headquarters there. That's why it was saved. Oh, I see. And then the Russians came and the Romanians, and then my father again was really, he had all the--

He was honored.

--honored and everything, and we survived, and all our people came back, the 29 people. And then we left in '49. We went to Israel.

Oh, so you stayed in the little town for four more years?

Four more years. Yes, I was very involved in Zionist affairs. And in the other town, and then I went with youth Aliyah. I went myself. My parents wanted to stay and they said they might-- I said, I'm going to Israel to youth Aliyah. And then they followed after me.

Oh, they did follow?

Yeah.

Do you tell these stories to your family, to your children?

Yes. Sometimes. Yes, my boys know. They all know.

They know the story.

They know. Yes. And they have to know, because it's important for them to know, so they know what inhumanity can be done to--

How people can survive, and how--

How can they survive.

One person's inhumanity to another.

Right.

I know it's been hard for you. And I'm sorry that you had to go through some of these difficult times. But we thank you very much. We thank you very, very much.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

Thank, you Judith Zucker.