

Good evening. It is October 28, 1991, and we are at Channel 4 in Buffalo, New York. My name is Toby Ticktin Back and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center of Buffalo. This evening, our guest is Jules Diamond, formerly of Czechoslovakia. Jules, will you tell us what it was like growing up in your town in Czechoslovakia?

Yeah, certainly. Well, like I say, I was-- these were the ages between 1929 and 1943, '44, where life was normal. The living standard was good. And of course, this part of Czechoslovakia had a real democratic government. And we were just looking forward for some good years ahead.

What did your father do? What profession was he?

Well, we were in the vineyards. We had mostly wine country. So we made our own wine, plus my dad had a little clothing store.

So you lived well. You were comfortable.

So we lived fairly well. And we enjoyed life. And we were hoping that we'll be accepted like every other citizen in the area.

Had your family lived in this town for a while?

Yeah, my grandfather, for a couple of centuries, at least 150 to 200 years in that area.

How many people lived in the town?

Approximately 9,000 people.

And how many were Jewish?

And Jews were approximately 180 Jewish families. And they were a mixture of some people were making a good living and some people were poor, just like anywhere else in the world.

And you took care of the poor ones.

Right. And we helped each other.

You helped each other.

It was just a normal life.

We have some pictures that will be projected on the screen. And maybe you could tell us about your family.

Yeah. These are my mom's, my mother's parents. And they lived in Slovakia, another Czechoslovakia, two separate countries. That's why it's called Czechoslovakia. And it was a place called Jablon, a little small village, on a farm. And they were farmers. And they worked the land. The gentleman, my grandfather, he passed away, a normal life. But my grandmother was taken by the Nazis and killed because she was an old lady and she was useless.

Where was she killed?

She was killed somewhere in Poland. We don't have exact dates, but we know she's not alive. This is my grandfather from my father's side and my grandmother. My grandfather-- they both died naturally back home.

Natural death.

Natural death. And they started to-- they came to our area there. And they started up building their way up and from scratch and brought up a family. And they were good people.

And now, we have another picture.

Yeah. This is a picture, like I mentioned, we had a store. And you can see my mother holding me. It's quite a difference now. They died.

What kind of store is this?

This was like a shoe store and a clothing store combination. They always had that in the small villages, small towns. And some of these were customers and relatives. It was like a novelty to take a picture those days.

Oh, yes.

So we were all dressed for the picture. And as you can see, things looked very nice. Is this the only clothing store in your town?

Yes, this is the only town, yes, clothing store we had. So again, we had a busy life. We made a living. And we were looking for a future.

Now, we have a picture of your mother, I believe, is it? Oh, this is your mother and father.

This is my mother and father. I was fortunate enough to find it because I went back to my hometown.

Just now you went there?

Just now, I went back, about-- this is 1990. I went back to my hometown. And all the memories came back. And we did find this picture, which is the original of my mom and dad, which they got married approximately 1927.

And I think we-- and this is a--

This is a picture of my mother. She was in the paper before she was engaged. Of course, my mother was killed, cremated by the Nazis during World War II. She was 39 years old. And the only crime she committed because the Germans automatically killed the mother if their kid was under nine years old. So she simultaneously got killed. That was her crime. And of course, the other crime was because she was born Jewish.

And so she--

That was her crime.

--she was gassed with your brother?

She was gassed in Birkenau, Auschwitz in 1944, approximately around April.

I think we have a picture of you, and your brother, and your mother, and father.

Yeah, this is the whole family. It was like a final picture before we were taken away.

What year is this, Jules?

I'm sorry, this was the late 1943. We were taken in 1944. It was like the last picture which-- I mean, this is my little brother, which in all these European countries, you go to school day and night. And this poor kid, he never even had a chance to go fishing. He just went to school day and night. And then he got killed.

So we should talk about when your normal, happy life ended.

Yeah. So as I mentioned, life was-- I beg your pardon, I'm sorry. I keep looking there. Like I said, life was normal. And it didn't take long to find out that life isn't normal anymore.

My first encounter in kindergarten, which we had a chance to go to kindergarten because we had a little money, I'll never forget, the teacher made a statement now. OK, children, this is not a Hebrew school. You have to be quiet. You have to be orderly because this is a Christian school. And here, we have respect.

In other words, in a Hebrew school, it's just you don't have respect. We're different. This is the first time I encountered this when I was five years old. And I knew I was a marked man, a marked boy. And if this is the way life is going to be, I had a very bad feeling about it.

So you went to a Catholic school until what age?

OK. We just went to kindergarten two year, to Catholic school, and then we went to a regular public school. OK. So my daily schedules were-- people were very religious-oriented. And we were always going to holy school, to religious schools, in the morning, from 6 o'clock on till 8:00, and the rest-- and part of the day we went to public school, and then back to Hebrew school.

Then we had to fight our way going home with people from different religion because we weren't accepted. I mean, here we are in the 20th century, and we were still fighting like under feudalism. I could never understand that. I would say that the church had a big influence because of the ill feelings towards us. Because every time the people went to-- the majority of people there were Greek Catholics. It's closer to the Russian Catholicism. We also had Protestants and a small percentage of Jews. The Jews were never-- our religion was not accepted.

And that's why I'm here in the United States today, of freedom of religion. And we suffered by it. We were always looked upon as suspicious. We were always looked upon we were more intelligent, which is not true. We were human as everybody else. We were dumb as everybody else. And even today, we have that problem. And I wish people would understand that.

So Jules, in 1939, when the Germans attacked Poland, you were in Czechoslovakia. Did you know what was happening?

Yeah. And in 1934, we had some signals, found out that there is an individual by the name of Hitler, who is a powerful man. And he's just going to make order in the world. And he'll take care of the Jews. That was his first subject, his favorite. We had our whipping boy. And the people loved it. The reason he became popular in my town-- he was on the PA system-- because he can't be a bad guy because he hates Jews. So he's one of the boys.

And this is the way the people felt. And I'm being serious. Now, these are people that we have known all our lives. We have our next door neighbor-- in front of our eyes, he's a great guy. Behind our back, you got to watch these people, they're different, they're sneaky, they're tricky. And unfortunately, I hear that today too. Here we are, ages of nuclear weapons, and everything else, and space, and we're still talking like cannibals. I'm sorry, I'm getting away, just get carried away.

Now, let's get back to your story.

I'm sorry. All right.

That's all right.

I'm not making. All right, now, go ahead.

All right, so we're in the '30s. And you hear about Hitler. And you hear about Hitler attacking Poland.

Yeah, we hear about-- OK, so I'll continue. We've heard some rumors that people were being attacked, Jewish people, and taken away, and shot to death. Of course, we couldn't believe it. Who would want to kill people from there?

Were they taken from your town? No, not from my town, but from-- Poland wasn't that far from us.

You heard the stories.

We heard stories. We couldn't prove anything. But of course, we found out later that was true. And we knew that one of these days, because Germany is getting more powerful, of course, by this time now, Hungary was a German ally. So Hungary occupied our part of the country. So Hungary followed the politics of Germany as it was now. Here, we didn't even encounter any Germans. But the Hungarians did a hell of a job. They were just good guys for the Germans. And they did a hell of a job.

How did that affect you and your family when you said, they did a job?

Yeah, they did a job, meaning these first laws began against the Jews. So the first laws-- now, up till now we just had hatred, antisemitism because we were Jews. That's through people, and it goes way back to the Renaissance or whatever. But now, it was official. If you were Jewish, you had to give up 50% of your property to a Hungarian who wasn't even from that area. He came from the mainland. They had special people. In other words, you work the land. And you gave him 50% of your sweat just because they're nice guys.

So you had to give away the profits of your vineyards.

We had to give away profits of our vineyards that we've worked and sweat all these centuries. All right, but we never complained. We figured, the war will end, the Allies, hopefully, will win-- I mean, the United States, England, and the Allies. And we'll just tolerate it.

And of course, nobody ever thought that anything extreme was going to happen because, hey, these are civilized people. But it didn't take long. Germany was towards losing the war. And the more the war was going bad for Germany, the more powerful was against our people. The laws became stronger. Now, the next law was that you couldn't own any property, or you couldn't own your own business, or you couldn't get a job. Now, how did you live, right?

How did you live?

Well, some of it from savings, some of it from underground business, help. It was a struggle.

Did you have to sell your own property or possessions?

We sold our property. We had some savings, we had some dollars we turned into currencies. And we were almost running out. And things were getting real bad.

And nobody in town helped you?

There was nobody to help. You were on your own. Nobody cared. And now, if you were Jewish, the laws were the following-- the new laws begin, you had to wear an identification. After all, we're Caucasian, so you couldn't tell who's Jewish. So we all had to wear a yellow band with the Star of David, that means from the ages of three. It looked kind of ridiculous walking down the street in a small town, everybody knows you. And then there was a curfew. After 7 o'clock, you couldn't be out of the house.

What year are we talking about?

We're talking now years of 1943. This was continuing. Our people in town were very God-fearing and religious. They

used to go to the synagogue. And they were beaten up going to the synagogue by the local people. And they still kept going, just kept going because they feel that strongly about the Lord. But the hatred continued-- not only the hatred of the people, but now, it was legal. It was legal now to beat you up on the street. You couldn't complain to anybody.

So time was going on. Now, the German Armies were going through our country from the Black Sea as they were losing on Stalingrad, the losing battle of Stalingrad. And they look demoralized. They were dying. But the government never spared the toughest people to take care of us. I mean, I couldn't believe when I saw these German and Hungarian soldiers, they look like they should be fighting in the front lines. Instead of that, they're taking care of old ladies and little kids. That's beyond me. But I'm getting away from the story now.

So what's happening right now is we were actually hoping that we are going to be taken away and settled in some kind of a ghetto, like for example, like the Japanese people were interned. And we're hoping we can stay there. And the war will end soon. And everything will be over. Nobody cared about properties anymore. All we want to do is be alive. But they beat us to it.

And one day, a new law came into effect-- if you had any Jewish blood, even though you weren't Jewish now, you were a Christian, but somewhere way back, there was some Jewish blood in you, you were considered a Jew. And you will be under that particular law. So the law was the following-- in 24 hours, you all have to be packed with all your belongings, a minimum amount of belongings that you can carry, and wait in front of your door, which you will be taken to the local school to be processed to be taken away to some farm in Poland or Germany until World War II ends because we were political risks. We were big political risks. Old ladies and young kids were political risks, but OK.

So this was a real joke, 6 o'clock in the morning-- I don't know exactly, 6:00 or 6:30-- two Hungarian police come. It's like you see them in the movies, the black hats and feathers, this bayonet there with the guns pointing at us, fixed bayonets on their guns, like they're-- and said, are you folks ready? We're ready to go. They lined us up on the street, each family.

Now, we were marching as a group for about two miles towards the local school to be processed and taken away. Now, it was a joke. In that local school, all they were doing is just looking over our belongings. Because see, Jews have gold. Jews have gold hidden. They took a little boy, three years old, they put their fists in their mouth, his mouth. And these are people that have families. And always the kids, always beating the kids up. Big men were beating kids. Do you ever believe that? These were normal people.

Well, it didn't take long. About two days later, they took us to the railroad station. And they we were taken away to a main area, where there was a concentration of, from little towns, a rallying point, where eventually, they'll take us away. Am I talking too fast? No.

It's fine.

OK. Now, they took us to a place called Uzhgorod, which was the capital city of that particular area. It's like the county, the county seat. And that was a brick factory. The reason they took us to a brick factory is there was all kind of space. They pitched tents. And people coming from good homes, well-to-do, all of a sudden, they were out in the field under very primitive conditions in a tent in the month of March, raining, no sanitary conditions, no food. And in three weeks, we'll be taken away from there someplace for a permanent place.

That's what they told you.

That's what they told us. And we wanted to hear just the good things. Because there was nobody else to tell us good things, we had to believe somebody, right? So the time came. And under a PA system, they were calling out in alphabetical order the people that were going to be transported from that brick factory. And our name came up. I'll just talk strictly about our own family because this was typical with the others.

They brought us two trucks, about 15-20 people. And they say, get on the trucks with all your luggage. If an old lady couldn't take it, they grabbed her and threw her up. I mean, this is unbelievable. OK. Now, nobody fought back because

we don't fight back because we're religious. We're people of the books. We can be just hit all over the place. But that's changing.

Now, we were taken by truck for about two miles to a railroad station, where we got shocked, where we saw about 80 freight trains lined up to wait for -- to be vacated. And of course, these are the trains we had to move on. All the families got on this cattle train. There was one window for air. And in about two hours, the train started moving towards Western part of the country going towards Poland.

I'll never forget, it was a beautiful Sunday afternoon. The sun was out. It was early spring. And it was Sunday, it's like in here, the streets were empty. And they were going through the big mountain, the Tatra mountains.

And then finally, it got dark. And we, after so many, six or seven hours, we arrived to Kraków, Poland. The train stopped. And people were dying inside of thirst. There were crowded women, children, water. German soldiers now were sitting on the rooftops, not a word. We stopped in Kraków, the train, some old lady came with a little water. I'll never forget, and a German soldier kicked it out of her hands. OK?

Now, train kept moving. And about four hours later, we arrived at dawn at a destination we don't know where it was. It was dawn, was dark. I looked out through the window. We saw some very orderly barracks with green grass. It looked like a resort. My mother even made a statement. She said, maybe this is where we're going to stay because it looks like it wouldn't be so bad to spend the rest of the time until the war ends. And we'll all be free. But unfortunately, that was wishful thinking. It didn't take long. About 6 o'clock, it got lighter. The trains opened up, their doors opened up.

Did everybody survive the trip?

Some people were unconscious. A couple of people died, older people. And of course, you couldn't tell, they were so squashed. You become very egotistic at a time like this. Everybody thinks of himself.

Self-protection.

Self-protection. So anyway, here comes this, just like you see him today in the movies, a German soldier with his boots, really sharp, very polite. He says, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Birkenau, Auschwitz II. We didn't know what the heck Birkenau is, but of course, it's the killing place. He says, Arbeit macht das Leben frei, means work will make you free. That's a German expression. And hey, we were in his hands.

He says, if you're orderly, get off the train, and line up for families with your belongings, you will be interviewed. And you will march down the line. Each individual will be interviewed as to their qualifications. Well, it made sense, right? Now, meanwhile, we saw this beautiful area with the barracks, gorgeous, looked like a resort. So my parents, I had my brother with me, my mom, and my dad. We were walking, following the orders.

All of a sudden, we came in front of these three German soldiers, officers. Very polite, he says, now, now, sir, you and the boy will be going this way to our working detail. And your wife, your mother, and your little boy will go on this side. And you will be able to visit them on weekends. In other words, you will be working. And sounded very normal, didn't it? Well, we said goodbye. And of course, that's the last time I've seen my mom and my brother. Of course, at the time, I was 15 years old.

How old was your brother?

Nine. Now, I know now that they didn't go into any little resort, they went immediately to the gas chamber. And the reason I can speak openly about a gas chamber, because I was there. I have seen it. I've spent almost a year in Birkenau. Birkenau is called Auschwitz. Auschwitz I is where they do the administrative. And Auschwitz II is the killing field.

That's Birkenau. That's where most of our people were annihilated. I used to watch them every day coming in with trains. And there was a perfect engineering job that they have done. They got to be commended on it. But anyway, I'm getting away from it. I can't help it. I get affected by it.

All right, so now, my father and me went into a delousing area, where we took our clothes off. Now, my father wasn't particularly religious. But he kept a religious shawl on him. It's funny, when you're in trouble, all of a sudden you're a believer, you're a great believer. So one of the prisoners was kind of helping out there says, rip that religious shawl right off his neck, he says. You don't believe there is a God? Don't make a fool. After all this, you still observe in God? And I was bound to agree with him. I mean, this God of ours, I mean, this God of Abraham, where is he? But we're getting away from it now.

So anyway, we all got our clothes on. We got our prisoner clothes on. And I remember some of these rich people from my hometown, now, they looked like me-- the stripes. We had a number with a Star of David to recognize that you're Jewish. Now, there were all kinds of people in that camp. There were, for example, if you were a murderer, you had a green triangle. If you were a communist, you had a red triangle. This way, you could recognize them.

Now, generally, the people that were in for murder, the Germany would put them into a political camp. And they were in charge. They were in charge of us-- murder-- a guy that killed his wife was in charge of our company. OK? This is the things that happened. Of course, it just so happens, one guy saved my life, but I'll go into it in a minute. How much time do I have? OK.

You're fine.

Now, I'm sorry, where was I?

Your family was separated. What happened to you and your father?

OK, my father and me were together for about a couple of days. And then the orders came that my father will be separated because I'm not qualified to do the same type of work. So they put me away with 35 other young fellows my age. And we were going to stay there. And the thing was that we were going to stay in Auschwitz and do all kinds of work.

We were locked up for a couple of days under quarantine-- a couple of weeks under quarantine. They said that there was a scarlet fever going on. I couldn't figure that out. I still don't know. And it was difficult to get out.

Now, meanwhile, everybody was itching to get out and see what's happening outside. So I went up to one of the leaders there, who was happens to be a murderer, but he was a nice guy. I says, look, what is out chance to get out of here? He says, the only way you can get out if you can take some garbage out-- or there was no outhouse, so I don't want to go in details. I got the job taking the garbage out.

The minute I opened the door, the whole area was full of smoke and a terrible smell. We had no idea. I went up. I saw an old prisoner there. I says, what the hell is going on here? He says, oh, you don't know? This is the largest bakery in Germany for all the German armies in the eastern front that takes care of all of it. I couldn't figure out why it would need such large chimneys.

But I was still a kid. I was happy. I came back. I said, fellows, we got it made. We'll never be hungry. We're right here, there is a bakery. Well, it didn't take long to find out. Well, OK, the quarantine ended, and we were out. We were assigned to detail work.

I never could get tattooed because once you got tattooed, it's like a union card, then that means you had a job. But we couldn't get tattooed because they didn't know what the hell to do with us. We were too young to really do heavy work. And so they decided that we were going to-- our job was going to be to carry bricks. So we each used to carry about 15 bricks for about two miles. You figure 3,500 people each carrying 15 bricks.

How long did you have to carry them?

Two and a half miles. And it didn't take long to find out what we were really doing is we're delivering brick for building

the brand new crematorium, the brand new gas chamber, because the one that's now wasn't big enough to compensate all these people that are coming in, to take care of all these people. So that was our job. So what we're doing? We're building something to bury our-- to burn our people.

As we were doing this, as we were watching, I was in a called in a camp D. Next to it, on the right of me, there was a woman camp separated between electric wire. And on my left was a Gypsy camp, which by the way, all the women and the Gypsy children one night were taken and burned and killed. And the men were taken away to work detail. I've seen that. It was the saddest thing I've ever seen. So a lot of people have suffered-- beautiful little boys, girls, all gone. The only crime they committed because they were Gypsies, OK? Same thing with us.

Jules, what was the sanitary conditions like, and what kind of food did you get?

Right. OK, the food-- in the morning, we got black coffee. We were young kids. How many guys like black coffee with a little old black bread. Of course, you didn't eat it the first few days, you were a big shot. But in about three days, you would eat anything. Lunchtime, you got a bowl of soup, where a spoon will stand up. It was garbage in there, all kind of vegetables. And at night, you had some horse salami. And that was the end of the day.

You were hungry?

We were hungry. And you become like an animal. You steal from your own friend. You're not anymore a considerate guy, you just worry about yourself. It's amazing what hunger will do to you. And so anyhow, we tried to live that life. The religious people, we had some religious people. As you know, a lot of Jewish people, they only eat the kosher-- what is it in English--

Kosher food.

--kosher food. And of course, they refused to eat the food there. It didn't take long. And they passed. Again, they were the holiest people that they wouldn't eat the kosher food. And again--

They died.

--they died. And God just let them down. But of course, according to some people, that God wanted that way.

What were the sanitary conditions like, the living conditions?

The sanitary conditions were not too bad in Birkenau. You see, that's one thing about the German people, they try-- in Birkenau, was still OK at the inception. But in the later times, it got real bad. Now, as time was going on, all of a sudden, we thought things are normal. We had been watching trains rolling in every day, 10,000 people, 15,000, the next day from Paris, from Amsterdam, from all over Europe, just like us-- got off the train, processing, three hours later, the chimney went on, boom, gone. The kids, the mothers, kids with mothers, pregnant women, handicapped, old people were immediately taken to the gas chamber.

These people didn't know where they were going. A little boy couldn't make the steps up to the gas chamber. He was helped by a German soldier because his step wasn't high enough to go into the chamber. He helped him get up there.

And you saw all this?

We saw all this. And I tell you, I said, if I ever get out of this, I declared war on the world. I'm not mad on the Germans alone. I'm mad at the world. Who in the heck would believe that? It almost seems like the people in my hometown wanted to do it all along, it's just that Hitler came along and did the engineering for them. What they really said is let them do it. God bless them.

And the only crime-- and everybody is worried, they're sick and tired of listening about a Holocaust. But one thing that people don't think about, we're probably the only people that were killed and suffered because of what we are. Sure, a

lot of other nationals died-- Polish people, Germans, war casualties. This was a direct killing of a people, of little boys, little girls who haven't done nobody any harm.

Genocide.

Genocide. I'm sorry, I get carried away.

Let's get back to your story. So this is what, about 1944? The Russians are coming?

OK, now, 1944. Now, all of a sudden, a new twist came up. They decided-- we had a notification that they want to go take us to bricklaying school because they want us to be professional masons now because we're carrying bricks. Now, they're going to take us to bricklaying school. So they had a selection. They brought us to the main square. And we were all excited. It sounded like we're going to go be bricklayers now.

Of course, that was a lie. That bricklaying school was a ticket to the gas chamber. In other words, they needed-- new people were coming in, new transports. And they weeded the weakest among us. So from 3,500 people, so they-- Mr. Mengele himself, that was-- I don't know if you heard of Mr. Mengele. He was a doctor. He was a very polite guy. That was his project. He inspected you, looked you over to see if you're-- how strong you are to continue working. And it's either you live or you die.

He just pointed out, he looked me over, I still looked a little good. He's fine. So first time, they took 600. And they always do that on the Jewish holiday. I mean, they had it all planned. I mean, here they were losing the war. And they so many headaches. And they were looking at these little details.

So they did it once in the Rosh Hashanah, that's our New Year's. And then they did on Yom Kippur. Make a long story short, after 3,500 people, 600 of us were still alive. And then finally, I was selected too. I was weak. I was selected to go to the gas chamber.

Did you look weak? Did you act weak?

I was already weak. I was hungry. I looked terrible. I looked what they called in those days a Muselmann.

A Muselmann.

A Muselmann. So finally, he picked me, that was the end. So now, they locked us into a big hut. And the situation was that at midnight, they will come out with trucks and dogs and they will take you to the chamber. They wouldn't pay for somebody to gas you for five people. You had to have a transport. It would be too expensive to gas one individual. So now, I knew I was condemned to death. And something happens to you, you start crying, you become a nothing.

But Germany was always on the ball. They had people from the Red Cross interviewing us. They wanted to know information where we're from before we die, just in case, there's some inquiry. And they have excuses that we died out of a disease. So as I was standing-- this is a miracle-- as I was standing being interviewed, I was down, scared, shivering, some-- I got a tap on the shoulder by a guy that had a green triangle. He was a murderer.

A murderer.

He says, don't cry. I want to save you. I'm in charge. And this is one time maybe there is a God. And at 12 o'clock, he just happened to pick me out at random, just an accident. And I jumped out of a window about 18 foot high, never got hurt, went into an outhouse, which I was hidden by a Russian prisoner. He nailed-- I went right into the hole, into the outhouse hole. And I was nailed down overnight until all my colleagues were taken to the gas chamber because they wouldn't take one individual alone.

So make a long story short, I was saved. And I kind of intermingled with some other people. And then all of a sudden, the killings did stop because the Russian Army was approaching Auschwitz. Now, the Germans didn't want to be

liberated by the Russians because the Russians were vicious. They suffered. And I don't blame them. They suffered. So they tried to evacuate us from Auschwitz towards Berlin. So we were going forced marches. How much time?

Keep going.

We were going by train first. And then the war was getting closer. And we must have been very important because they made such an issue out of this.

You were young boys?

Young boys, now, we were mixed with older men. I've had men from my hometown marching with me, he says, please, carry me, Joe. I can't. I can't walk anymore, carry me. I carried him. I threw him down. He died right there. We walked through these beautiful little German farms, the grass was cut. Nobody came out. Maybe they were afraid, but nobody came out to help you.

And I even tried to steal a can from a milk can so if I would cross a creek, I could pick up some water. But the German soldiers came and found me that I stole it. So they were trying to wipe me out too. Things like this, they were on the ball. Here, we were dying, and I stole a milk can. And I was almost condemned to death.

After this, we came to Sachsenhausen Oranienburg, near Berlin. We stayed there a couple of days. And finally, we were taken to Mauthausen, Austria. That was towards the end. In Mauthausen, there was a bombing that took place. And people were eating from the bodies. They were eating human flesh. I've seen smoking, it looked like a picnic. Then finally, they took me to a place called Gunskirchen, which is near Linz, the birthplace of Adolf Hitler, near him. And this is where the end was going to be. They were going to burn the place, was all the stranded prisoners, and it was crowded.

How many days had you been on the road since Birkenau?

Since when?

Since you left Birkenau in this death march.

Oh, that's been about three weeks.

Three weeks since you're on it.

Yeah, three weeks on the road, by train. We lost most of our people. But everything was bombed. To me, I've seen Volkswagens, people in these small towns. No, it seems like the German people were still enjoying life. I don't mean to point just on the German people. I said before, I am at war with the humanity because they made it possible for us. They knew a lot about us. They just closed their eyes and ears.

So you're in Linz now.

Now, we're in a place called Gunskirchen, not far. We know the Allies were coming. They were going to raze the place, burn the place down, but I guess they didn't. Some of the SS were target practicing with people that were bound to the rafters on a blanket, just having a good time. I'm just telling you these little things that occurred that you couldn't believe by the most civilized people on Earth have done this. OK? I mean, even cannibals don't do that.

So now, it wasn't long. All of a sudden, the Germans vanished from the camp. We were all almost dead. I was dying. I couldn't walk. Guns were all over. Now, we wanted to get revenge. But I couldn't get revenge. It's not in my blood. I'm not a murderer. So I just walked in the fields by myself. All of a sudden, I saw a Jeep with GIs, Americans, taking German prisoners.

And I'll never forget, there was a Black GI. That was the first encounter I had. And I can still see his face, where he

grabbed one of the briefcases from the German prisoners and threw it at me. There was a sandwich in there. And that was my first food. They immediately took me by Jeep to a hospital in Linz.

And I ran away from the hospital because I thought that I'm back in Germany again because all the doctors were Germans. But of course, they weren't really Nazis. These were regular doctors that tried to treat us.

And I met up with some Russian soldiers. And they took me on a truck towards home, towards Czechoslovakia, which took weeks. I went through Hungary. And when I did come home, I found out some of the home people saw me in the town before my hometown, one town, the bigger town. And they told me that my dad is alive. And he did survive. He was in Buchenwald.

But so when I got home and I saw my dad was alive, of course, he wasn't himself. He suffered. And I'll never forget, the people in my home town, the ones that couldn't wait to get rid of us. The first guy I wanted to see is the one that folded his arms when we were leaving, he said-- he was chewing tobacco, and he spit, and he says, it's about time they take these bastards away. And I came home hoping, hoping that this guy is still there, but he just died a couple of days ago. I probably would have been on the electric chair because I would have killed him. But anyway.

Did you find your father?

I found my father.

In the town?

Pardon me?

Was your father waiting for you?

My father was waiting. He knew already that I'm coming. And we tried to put things together. But then Russia was sort of going to take this part of the country. In other words, it was going to be part of the USSR. And it didn't seem like the future looked too good. So my father told me, why don't I just stay here and you try and go back towards the west.

So he stayed in the town and he sent you out?

He sent me out. And I was then 16 years old. And again, I was-- here we go again. And I don't know if my father did the right thing. But that's what happened. And I made my way through Czechoslovakia. Then I wanted to accomplish something because I felt very strong that we suffered for what we are. And I wanted to have our own land. Am I getting close?

Go ahead, that's all right.

And I was taken to England, where--

Who took you to England?

Pardon me?

Who took you to England?

Some Jewish organization to help.

The HIAS? The JCC?

The HIAS, yeah, the HIAS-- where we were working in a farm, training.

Oh, we have a picture of that, the picture of you on the training farm for preparation for farming in Israel.

I felt very strong for Israel.

Oh, this picture before that precedes it. Do you want to tell us about this picture?

Yeah, this picture was right about two months after I was liberated. And I was given-- this was clothes that I was given. It looks good on top, but it was really torn on the bottom.

You were very skinny. How much weight had you lost?

I probably lost about-- OK, I lost about 75-- about 75 to 80 pounds.

You look very-- your eyes look very haggard.

Of course, I looked-- I was 15, I looked like nine at the time. And when I came home to my hometown, the people were not happy to see me. They were just sorry that we survived. So how come you're alive?

Here's a picture of you in the training camp in the Hakhshara.

OK, that was the training camp. I felt very strong that I want to fight for our own country. I don't want to be spit upon of what I am. We want to have our own land.

So where was this taken?

This was taken in that kibbutz in that--

In Ireland?

In Ireland. That's right.

And how long did you stay there?

Stayed there for two years.

Were they good years, happy years?

They were happy there. I was young. And I wanted to recapture what I lost and try to do the best I can. And I felt that maybe the best country in the world would be the United States because here, we have freedom of speech, freedom of religion. It's a country where maybe I will belong.

So you left Ireland and tried to get to the United States?

United States, where I found some relatives. They sent an affidavit.

Did you write to them first? How did you meet?

It was a strange arrangement. I knew they were in Buffalo, but I didn't know where they live. So the only thing I knew is the name, so I wrote to the mayor of Buffalo.

Just to the mayor of Buffalo.

Yeah, I had an idea. And the gentleman found us, the people. He found my uncles. And they got in touch with me. And they brought me here. So I was the only survivor came here. And had to start from the bottom up.

What did you do when you came?

Well, you had to learn English. Well, no, I guess you knew English in Ireland.

I spoke English. I tried to get a job. Times weren't the best.

What year are we talking about?

We're talking here in 1948.

And you lived with your relatives?

No, for a short time. Then I went to New York City. And I got a job in the-- well, New York, everything is closing, so we got a job in the fur industry. I was just learning. There was no major industry in New York then. So meanwhile, the Korean War started. And I was drafted. And they told me at the draft board, you just came here, maybe you can still get out. I says, no, I want to be in the army. At least I'll have my meals because things were not that good.

Do we have a picture of you in the army? And or is that is what, 1951?

1951, when the Korean War started. I'm a Korean War veteran. And I was stationed in Fort Dix, where I took basic training. And I was proud to wear the uniform.

How long were you in the army?

I was in the army for two years. And I was in the Seventh Army. And I enjoyed it. And I was proud. It gave me a great pride to be an American in the service. They also shipped me to Germany.

What did you do in Germany?

I was in the anti-aircraft and in headquarters.

How did you feel about speaking German and hearing German again?

Well, of course, they didn't know that. They used to speak German in front of me. They said, look at these armies, they called us. They're here. And they're taking over. They're going in first class trains. And I spoke back to them in German. I says, you look, I said, you started that problem. And now, you got to suffer too. So they got shocked when I answered in German.

But I didn't try to get even with Germany or anybody else. All I wanted to do, even while I was in the service, and that was a disappointment-- here I was excited about being an American, being in the US Army during the Korean time, and here I hear, they didn't know I was German-- I was Jewish because I could be anything. But they said, there was a strike in New York City, a duck strike, this fellow from Pennsylvania says. Them goddamn Jews are doing it all the time. Anything that happened, it's the Jews are doing it. I thought I'm back in Germany.

Did you answer?

I answered. I told him, listen, I'm Jewish. And I tell you, you keep talking like this, you won't be with us for a long time, I says. You can't train these people. It's ingrown into them. When they're young, their fathers tell, they tell them, we're different. And I'm here to show, to tell the world that we're not different.

And nobody is going to wipe us out. And we're not going to sit like in the old days. And we're proud of what we are because we are movers. There's very little crime among us. We're good people. And a lot of people tell me, is that true Joe? When you're Jewish, they put you in business. What a stupid question.

So it's 1953 and you get out of the army. And what do you do then?

OK, 1953, I got out of the army. I'm sorry I got carried away here.

Go ahead.

I tried to get my job back. And of course, I asked the boss, I says, look, can I get a little promotion? He says, no, it's a family business.

Was this a furrier business?

Yes, it's a family business. You belong in the back, Joe. So I quit him. And I went into the construction business. And I liked it. And I joined a company the name of Bennett Lumber Corporation. And I was their top man. And I was a good producer. And finally, I went on my own. I'm not one of the biggest builders in the world, but we're doing a good job. And I'm a general contractor building homes.

Let's talk about your family. You met your wife, Annette. What year was that?

Yeah, I met Annette in 1955.

We have a picture here, very beautiful.

Yeah, and we got married.

And she was American girl?

She's a American girl. And we had a good life.

You had a good life. And let's see a picture of your children.

And we had some--

We have a picture here of--

--wonderful kids.

--Wendy Beth, and?

Wendy Beth, which is she's called after my mother. And Michael is called after my father and my brother. In our religion, we're called after the dead.

We have another picture of Michael coming up.

This is Michael in his confirmation.

In his bar mitzvah.

So here we are, trying to recapture everything in a new life. And I just hope that people will get a little more civil and understand that we're all the same.

Oh, before you conclude, this was your latest happiness.

Yes, so that's my-- my daughter just got married to Aaron Weisbrot.

Weisbrot. Who's also a child of survivors.

He's a child of survivor and good people. And we're very happy about it. So again, Michael is the only survivor here who carries our name from the whole family, Michael. And that means a lot to us so we can continue carrying our family name and our religion. And I just want to finish.

Please conclude.

I just want to end, again, that I'm an American, and I'm proud to be an American, but I'm a Jew. And I believe in the Lord. And because we are great contributors to this religion and to a lot of religions. And we want to live with people. And we hope that people will catch on and understand that we're no different than anybody else. And treat us with respect. If they don't, we're going to fight them. And we're going to win because after what we survived, nobody can lick us anymore.

Thank you very much, Jules Diamond.

I'm sorry that I got carried away.

You're fine. This is your story.

Thank you very much.

And we appreciate your telling it.