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Talk to me now.

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center. This evening, we have as our guest, Mr. Edward Hilfstein, who has a very interesting story to tell us.

Eddie, could you please tell us where you were born, and about your childhood?

I was born in Krakow in 1924, September 17, to a family of five of us. I was two sisters and me, and my parents.

I started school of age six through 1938, '39-- eighth grade. My two sisters were younger from me. One was born 1927, and one was born 1934. All of them got killed in camps.

They didn't survive.

Didn't survive the war.

You'll tell us about that. Did you have a happy childhood? A normal childhood?

I had a very happy, normal. My father was up and down in his businesses.

What kind of business did your father have?

Beauty shop, and he had club-- classic cafeteria, cafe house. And where we were brought up, it would-- kids my age playing and having a good time. To the time of the war.

I think we have a picture of your father that we'll have on the screen. Which one is your father, Eddie?

The father is the man standing up, age of 22.

Is he married already in this picture?

No, my father-- my parents got married in 1923.

How did you get this picture?

They were by my aunt, great aunt.

In the States? They were sent to relatives?

My grandmother's sister, who brought me here to this country.

I see. We'll talk about that soon, too. I think we have another picture of you at a wedding, and you're a little boy. Maybe you tell us about this picture and the occasion?

Oh, yeah-- this was my cousin's wedding. My oldest cousin's wedding-- I was like a baby in the family, except my two sisters.

What year is this?

I think this was '34 or '35 this picture was done. That's me in the little circle, and my mother standing up all the way on the right.

And you remember this wedding?

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Oh, yeah. I had a good time. And I could stay-- I could stay longer up. I didn't have to go to school. And that was my mother's niece, my cousin.

Did she survive?

No, she didn't survive. Nobody--

Did anybody in that picture, besides yourself?

Two people, plus me, survive on this picture.

All the other people were killed.

One just died recently in Los Angeles. And another one he's in Israel. I don't know if he's still alive even, or not.

So in other words, you had a normal, happy life-- school, weddings, parties. Everything that-- good time that little boys would remember.

Till the time of the war come up.

So when the Nazis entered Poland in September 1939, how did that change your life?

Well, first thing when I start to, let's say, trade school, I wanted to go to college-- we start high school in ninth grade. We went from eighth to ninth grade.

This was after your bar mitzvah, about 14?

14 years old. And I went to school only for two months, because they closed the school.

In October?

In October. The school where I went was donated through my grandmother's cousin, Dr. Chaim Hilfstein. The school was named--

After?

Hebrew gymnasium donated by Dr. Chaim Hilfstein.

And who is Dr. Hilfstein?

Dr. Hilfstein was one of the founders of Zionism.

Modern-day?

Modern days, I think, with--

Was he a friend of Weizmann? Or Theodor Herzl?

Theodor Herzl, Weizmann, he was in-- from 1900, before 1880 or '90, because when he died-- and right now, around 1947, of-- he would have been about 80 years old.

So your high school, your trade school, was named after Dr. Chaim Hilfstein.

That's right, where I went.

Was he a medical doctor? Doctor?

MD.

MD. OK, so you went to your uncle's school, that must have made you very proud.

Let's call him uncle--

Uncle, cousin.

Cousin, uncle.

Right, and what happened?

From there, two months after I went out of school, I started to work-- every Jew had to work.

Because the schools were closed.

The school was closed for Jews. Not for--

Not for non-Jews.

Non-Jews.

So what kind of work could a little boy do?

So, first thing, I was working all kinds of jobs. You have to watch it, because the German was catching you. You had to wear it, already, armband, and you--

Oh, you wore the Jewish star.

Jewish star. So first, you were working all different jobs. You had to report to the committee, 7 o'clock in the morning, they send you out to shovel coal, and this, and this. And one day, a friend of my father, who I knew all my life, he used to be a policeman.

A Jewish friend?

No, a Gentile friend.

A non-Jewish friend.

Non-Jewish friend. He was a friend of my father. And he spilled on me, and I got to camp because of him. I got sent to camp Debica.

He informed?

The German on me.

And so they took you out of Krakow?

Took me out, right from the work I was working.

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In the city, and they took you--

They sent me out to a camp.

This was a work camp outside the city?

Outside the city, about 40 kilometers, 50 kilometers from the city.

Did your parents know that you had been taken?

No, I just disappeared. Nobody knew what happened.

And he informed?

He informed, he got maybe a few dollars for a day, or some cigarettes, a bottle of vodka. And he was happy with it.

I understand.

And a few days after I was there, I saw there's nothing for me there to do. I had to run. And we didn't have wire-- at the camp, wasn't wired. It was just barracks. And they start to build camps. I ran away, and I come back.

How did you escape? Weren't there guards or sentries?

Just ran away. The guards, there was not too many. It wasn't as strict as become later around. This was the start of the camps.

I see, the work camps.

Working camps. I come back home to Krakow, and through my father friend, I got into work as a plumber.

You're 14 years old.

14 years old, 14 and a half years old already. Work as a plumber helper.

As an apprentice.

Apprentice. And I got working paper then, and I was getting up in the morning, go to work every day, like anybody else.

This is still 1939?

That was 1940.

1940. What were conditions like in Krakow? Was there a ghetto already?

There was no ghetto. They was already beating up people, and the Jews-- Jews have to turn everything gold in, already. All valuables, things have to turn in. You had to work, and you were getting ration food and stuff. When they saw Jew staying in the line, they kicked him out because he don't belong there.

Everybody was rationed? The Poles?

Especially the Jew-- was ration less from the Pole.

Were you hungry? Did you feel deprived?

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No, because my parents were trying to get yet somehow food.

Was your father still working?

My father? No, because he lost the businesses already.

The businesses were turned over to the Polish people.

They were over-- turned over. So that start to be around 1940, where this rumor start to come in, people going to have to be deported from Krakow, or go to ghetto.

Did the people realize to where they were going to be deported?

Deported? Yeah, most of them they knew, yet. Because there was not yet the Vernichtungslagers, or destroying camps, or Auschwitz, was nothing built yet.

So there was no-- deportation and labor camps?

Labor camp, ghetto, or you would move out to a city, outside the city, to a small villages, where you could still survive what you had, and what you could take her out from your apartment, what they let you.

Was that legal to leave Krakow, to go to a neighboring village?

They want you to leave.

Oh, they want you to leave.

This way, they narrowed down to small amount to put to the ghetto, when they built. That's what they start to build the ghetto, already.

When did they start? In 1940?

1940. So we moved out to a little village, Mogila. Why my father decided to go Mogila, because not far away from Mogila lived my great aunt, who was helping out a little bit with food. She was a farmer.

I see, so you had something to live on.

To-- we could have something always from her. And somebody what you knew to run for help if you needed. And I had still permission, working as a plumber, come to the city every day, I had to go, I would say, approximately, around 9 miles one way, 9 miles back.

Did you walk it?

No, I had a bicycle. Or I had to go on the train.

Were you afraid? Were you afraid that the Nazis might pick you up or do something?

I used to get sometimes, hit here or hit there. Except I had permission from the government, the German government from Krakow, as I work as a plumber's helper, building their buildings for them.

For the Germans.

So they were just still needing a little bit free labor.

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I see, you didn't get paid for this.

What I got paid was 3 zlotys on a week.

With what?

3 zlotys-- that was like, I would say, towards American dollar, maybe $0.20, $0.30 a week.

So tantamount to nothing.

Just for nothing, except that was my ticket for survival-- the work. Because they wouldn't take me and send me to another camp, or another place to work.

There, we stay for almost a year, we lived there. When come the order-- every Jew from this neighborhood where we live, had to go to ghetto of Wieliczka.

So you moved from Mogila, from that village to the next.

From Mogila, we were sent-- think, meantime, in between this, my father was took to Chisinau working camp.

Was he just picked up from the street? How?

No, the order come in for him to go. And he went to Chisinau to work. And me, with my mother with sisters, we went to Wieliczka.

Was that further away from Krakow?

Wieliczka was different direction from Krakow, approximately-- from us was maybe 25 miles, 30 miles.

So you couldn't come into Krakow every day.

Didn't come to Krakow, nothing yet. And Wieliczka, we stayed just a few weeks, when come the order of Judenrein. Judenrein mean, you have to clean out the city out of Jews.

So did that affect you in the little village, too?

No, they were not more in the village, we were in ghetto of Wieliczka.

Oh, so they want to Judenrein that village.

Wieliczka-- the little towns were already cleaned out.

I see.

And the whole Jewish population was already in small ghettos all the way around. And we were picked to go to the ghetto of Wieliczka.

Right.

There, one day, come an order, every Jew, what he can carry, he should report to a--

Central meeting place?

Central meeting place.

Umschlagplatz?

Umschlagplatz, for what you call it, get-together place.

A meeting place, a central meeting place.

Where we got all together, me, my mother, and my sister, I had some cousins there, people what we know. I would say, approximately, maybe about 12,000 Jews.

Oh, so it was a big number.

11,000 Jews. We were sitting like cattle on the ground, to a one time the SS come in with trucks, big shots. And they start to look and segregate people out.

Did they have a method to that? Did they separate the women and the children?

No, they didn't separate the men and women. There was no separating children from women or men. They only looked for young, strong horses.

They were looking for working people.

For working people. And they look for people who had some traits.

Did this include women? Young women?

No, the women were not picked from this. Only men. And they picked us, I would say, pretty close to 800, maybe.

And you were picked among them?

And I was picked one of them.

Because you were young and strong, or because you were a plumber's apprentice?

Both-- I was strong, I was young, I was strong. And I was healthy looking. And plus, I had, you know, what kind of trade, and whatever.

Sure, you had a valuable trade.

And they ask you what kind of papers you had, and I had to show them, I was working for this and this and this. So we got picked up. Picked out all the men who were put on the one side. We didn't know, meantime, what was going on. And they took all the rest of the people, and they put them in the cattle cars.

And they went to--

To one of the concentration camps?

No, to destroying camp. To [NON-ENGLISH].

To Bergen-Belsen?

[NON-ENGLISH]-- where was destroying-- to the chimneys, where they were burning them.

Crematoria.

Crematoriums. We got into--

Did you know where they were going?

I come to this.

OK, I'm sorry.

OK, we got to Stalowa Wola-- what the sign said on the gate when we walked in, the [SPEAKING GERMAN]. Work makes your life sweet. And they took us and they put us in barracks, and they segregated us, meantime.

And our first feeling around, who is working somebody there. And this camp, after one week, I got a notice through a Polack that my father got a letter from my mother and my two sisters. I don't know how she got a letter out, or throw it out through the wagon, from the train, to somebody. It was sent all the way around to got to my father, how the train went to [NON-ENGLISH]-- Treblinka.

Where that, we knew, this was--

You already knew that was a death camp?

That was a death camp. They was finished.

But how did the letter get from your father to you?

He sent a note. We had Polish people working at the factory--

So he sent the letter to you.

He sent a note what happened to my mother and my sisters. In this camp, I was working in a factory. I have two cousins there. One cousin is still today alive in Florida. He was telling us, telling me, we're going to make a deal if we're going to run away. OK? I bring you what our families everything is in it.

Yes, of course.

OK. One day-- his name is the same thing as mine--

Eddie Hilfstein?

Today, he doesn't call himself Hilfstein no more. He called himself something else. I don't want to mention his name. He said, you, me, and his brother, we're going to run all three of us together. See, we're making plans how are we going to run away and everything.

I run already one camp-- this was a little bit harder already. It was not the same camp where I was the first time.

This was better--

I learned already a few tricks in the few days I was in the first camp, what's going on. In this camp, there was-- they came to destroy you. They try to destroy every person who was there. We were walking every day about 7 miles, one way to work, 7 miles back. And jogging.

Was your work productive? Was it useful work?

Productive? Yeah, we shovel coals, we work in steel mills.

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So didn't they need a strong body to do this work?

We were strong, we were young.

You said, they were trying to destroy you.

No, they come and slowly they were destroying us, because they weren't feeding us proper. Anyway, my cousin run away and left me with my cousin in camp, his brother.

And I had there my uncle, brother-in-law, who was a kapo-- another kapo, a policeman in camp, you know.

What's a kapo?

No, kapo was something-- he was a policeman. He was harmless. He said to me-- his name was Jonas-- he said, Eric, why don't you stay once in camp and relax? So you build yourself up, and you don't have to run. I said, fine.

Meantime, to my good luck, comes Leopold-- was it Leopold? Don't remember all their names. Guy came to look over from the other camp, check this camp, and talking to the director of the camp.

And he said to him, how are you healing your friend? Your sick people? And I was taking in the camp as a sick person, to recuperate.

A pretense.

Was nothing wrong with me. Because of him--

You took a day off.

I took his thing, because he knew everybody-- so I figured out, a day rest is very good to have. So he said, I show it to you. And he takes all the sick people-- and I was one of them-- in the line. And takes a gun, and start to shoot one after another.

Oh, my goodness.

And I thought, that's it. Meantime, the guy runs over to the director, he said to him, on the ears something. And he shows me, out, get out.

Your cousin, the policeman?

In meantime, my cousin, who was sick already, they killed him. His name was [? Bolek. ?]

And after this, there was no more skipping camp. I prefer to go to work, because I was safe there.

I could see that. What did they-- I'm sorry, go ahead.

To my luck, I had a kapo, the foreman of where I work, I was unloading steel from the wagons, from the trains. Throw them out, outside on the ground. He liked me.

A guy leg got cut up, so he picks me up-- out, another man, and said, you two take him to the infirmary. And his leg was hanging down. We coming in with him, the guy looks at-- he says, we can't do nothing. You have to take him to camp. He says, stay outside. You go to camp.

We go outside, and we stay with the man. He's halfway dead. We bring him to camp.

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Yanit-- Yanit-- he was a Ukrainian, he was assistant chief of camp. And he was showing what kind of big shots he was. And he start to say, take-- oh, he said, you want a cigarette? I said, no. You want a vodka? No.

So he said, so you take him to the barrack and I'll be right there. We took him in, and we had him one under one arm, and another. He comes in and shoots him.

Just like that, didn't give him a chance.

Right in my hand. I was holding him at the one hand, and the guy was holding him another. After this, he said, go in the front and wait for me.

We're coming in, we're staying. We have to go to the car is waiting for us to take us back to work. So he comes back-- Yanit-- and he said to us, get undressed. So we're looking at him. So the guy who was with me, he was a German Jew.

I was young, he was man in early 20s. So he said, why? He said, don't ask question. Just get undressed. He takes out a gun, he talk to himself, [NON-ENGLISH], shoot, not to shoot, shoot, not to shoot. He said, not to shoot. Get dressed.

And my friend, the friend, the guy what-- has a nerve. He said to him, can we have the vodka and the cigarettes?

Oh, my goodness. That's really nervy.

And the guy gives us the vodka and cigarettes. And we took off. We went back to--

So at the whim of a guard, you could be alive or dead.

Was just luck. We got back to camp, working. And they had an order-- a lot of people were running away from camp, you know. Except some of them were running the wrong way. And everybody knew as a order-- we used to go six people in the line, six, six, six, all the lines was six people, even to run.

If somebody was missing in the line, they took the next person, and they were shooting. One of these days, we were running like this, and one guy took off and start to run. I think he didn't want to live no more. He want just get killed.

And they caught up with him, they killed him. Meantime, the line was moving, and somebody yelled to me, Eddie, move up. I said, uh-uh, I'm not going no place. I'm staying here. Because I knew, if I move, I'm going to be the short one there, could be my turn again. I said, I'm not going no place.

So again, you were saved.

So the people start to run right back where they belong, and they took the next guy, and they shot him, too. Because that was the policy. You're supposed to watch you're next.

After, I was there to-- let's see, oh, 1941, I got away from there.

How? Were you sent to another camp?

I got lucky, be picked up to send to ghetto.

Back to Krakow ghetto?

Bochnia ghetto. They said, they have sending few sick people out, a Dr. Goldman-- Goldberg, Dr. Goldberg, he is in Binghamton, New York. He was to now, I don't know if he's still today, he was a few years back-- he was not quite a doctor. They called him doctor, he was medical student then.

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And he said, they need the help getting sick, they have to get them better, we should send them to get them fed up and bring them back. That's where I got to Bochnia.

In Bochnia, I was in hospital maybe four or five days. Then I know, I have to take off. And I took off, and I come to Krakow to ghetto.

In the hospital-- excuse me, I just wanted to make this clear-- they were trying to build you up?

Yeah, to send us back. Because they were needing the workers there.

But you were undernourished.

Undernourished. Some of them were sick. They were giving spells, sometime, you know-- the guy got good heart there for a while, maybe for a few days. So he said, oh, send the sick ones to the hospital.

And the Dr. Goldberg, he knew me very good. And he put me right in the transport to send me in there. And Krakow, I got lucky, I got typhus. I got sick.

Yeah, but you can die from typhus.

I know. Yeah, I was very lucky. I got to a hospital, and they put me in a section with scarlet fever people. Because I had scarlet fever when I was a young kid, so I didn't worry I'm going to get scarlet fever. I'm immune to it.

So I was there about two weeks laying sick like a dog. One day-- meantime, oh, let's bring me back to my father. OK?

Meantime, my father got sent from village, from Chisinau, where he was working camp, to Krakow, begging for-- he was transferred. He didn't have to live no more in Chisinau, he lived in ghetto. And he was going by trucks every day to work in Chisinau.

Did he know that you were in Krakow?

He knew then I was in Krakow. So come rumors are they going to shoot out the whole hospital. And here, I didn't have clothes, no nothing. I was laying there, and what, underwear.

Friend of mine, where I grew up, who is in Los Angeles today-- we just spent this year, a few days-- a day with him-- he brought me clothes. And he was strong like a horse. He was like 6 foot tall, big guy.

So that you could escape?

He helped me to get out from the hospital, to my apartment back, where I was living. With quite a few people they were living there. Oh, [INAUDIBLE].

So indeed, did they shoot the people in the hospital?

Yeah, they destroy them.

So you were again saved.

Again saved. To the rumors, I got somebody to get me out, and I survived. I got built up a little bit, and I start to work as a plumber, again. To the same company, what I used to be before.

I worked for maybe six, eight weeks, I got built up. Comes the order, when I got home, Eddie-- Edward Hilfstein, you have to report to the OD. OD was the Jewish police.

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I come there, was maybe about 11 o'clock at night, they say, you're going to Plaszow. I said, what's Plaszow? You're going to Plaszow.

I never could go back home. No clothes. That's the way I was.

And they just took you right then and there?

They took me up. Quite few-- quite few more people to a new labor camp, concentration-- that was already-- they started with a concentration camp. Where I started to help build the place.

Is this still in Poland?

It is still in Poland, in Krakow. It's outskirts of Krakow, like I would say, Canmore and Buffalo. And there, I got there around '42, year '42. I work as a plumber. And the sewers, then I work as a roofer. They tell you to do the roof, and you do it.

And the Nazis giving the commands?

Oh, sure, only the Nazis.

What kind of food are you getting in this camp?

The food was quota for bread, like I would say, 4 ounces bread.

Every day?

Every day. Soup in the morning, soup for lunch. And by night-- by night, you got soup, or coffee and the bread.

And that's it?

And a piece of margarine from time to time. I didn't go there before with the food in Stalowa Wola-- I got few things there.

Anyway, what happened-- one day, I'm looking, I have my cousin sent in. A kid who was younger from me. I said, what are you doing here? He said, he work as a-- what do you call it?

Say it in Yiddish.

Making from straw-- straw shoes and straw-- mats to clean shoes, you know the thing? He became a foreman to make them, he was 14 years old.

So he was working in this kind of factory.

In factory. Anyway, a couple-- few days after he got, the order to come in and whole ghetto got cleaned out, Krakow ghetto got cleaned out.

It was 1942?

1942. Some of them, they were sent-- destroyed, some people--

To the concentration camp?

And the rest was sent then-- they were sent into Krakow, to Plaszow to live.

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Was your father still there?

My poor father was, meantime, in Chisinau in camp there.

Were you in touch? Did you write?

No, no, no, you couldn't write.

Did you ever see your father again after that?

Yeah, I saw my father yet. I saw him for quite a while yet. In time to come.

There, I was working as a plumber in Plaszow. One day, I don't know, something happened. I was working in a water pump, where they were pumping the water up the hill. Something went wrong. And I got put in a torture chamber-- what they call torture chamber.

Was a room, maybe 3 by 4, or 3 by 3, where you had to stay in it. You couldn't even sit down, or you bend little bit, and they were dripping water on you.

Because you did something wrong?

They said, I sabotaged the pumps, or I know who sabotaged. It broke.

So they blamed it on you?

They had to blame somebody. They had to torture somebody.

How long were you in this room?

Well, they keep me there for about 18 hours, 20 hours.

So how did you feel when you came out?

Half dead. Half blind, because it was dark. And they were looking for something to torture you.

Anyway, after this, I was working where they were shooting people, where they have to cover up the dead bodies. The dead bodies-- they call this [NON-ENGLISH]. It is not the nicest word. If you want, you want me, I'm going to tell you in English, except this filthy. It's Cocks Hill.

Who gave the name? The inmates?

Because this was--

Because when they were dying?

It look like a--

I can understand it.

Like this, so that's why they give it the name. I was working there, covering up the dead bodies, because that's what you had to do.

These were inmates from the camp?

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Even I was working as a plumber, they said they need somebody, they didn't care who--

So you did that, too?

--they need it. I watched hanging there, people get hanged for nothing, people got shot. Because I could walk more, all the way around the camp, as a plumber. I would say, I go here, I fix it. I saw much more what a lot of people. Except when I was working, they need somebody, they show me, you do the same work.

I saw friends of mine get killed, and things like this.

Were there women in this camp, and children?

Oh, yeah, there was-- children, there was only a few children there. This camp had, if I not mistake, about-- in peak of the camp, was between 14,000 and 16,000 people. I was in the camp there, oh, two years. I think I was two years there.

So that was up to 1944?

Yeah, quite-- 1944. I told you, the food was-- I don't have to explain to you how, because if you see one of the pictures how I come out, I weighed about 90 pounds, 80-some pounds when I come out from camp. And if they didn't kill you, you could survive yet, halfway.

What was your attitude? Did you want to be--

My attitude was always, I have to survive the war. From the time I start with the camps.

So you never gave up?

I never gave up from the time-- the first camp I went when I was-- in 1939, already. So anyway-- and in Plaszow, then, they start to sending people out to different camps. From Plaszow, my father come in from Czestochowa, they already-- the Russian were coming closer towards Krakow. The German were losing the war.

And we heard about Schindler, who was-- the factory was outside of Krakow, where some Jews from our camp were working there, and they were staying there. That's going to be liquidated, and they brought them into Krakow, to the ghetto. And they're going to go someplace to Czechoslovakia, or something, all kind of rumors was.

Maybe you better tell us what you knew then about Oskar Schindler.

Then, I didn't know much, yet.

OK, fine. Then we'll wait.

Because we knew it was Schindler, who has Jews, he's nice to them.

And that's all you knew?

They work in the factory where they making pots, and aluminum something stuff. And he was keeping them for surviving.

Anyway, they start to liquidate Krakow-- Plaszow, and they start to send out people to different camps from there. My father, who was meantime with me then quite a few months, when they brought them in from Czestochowa-- not Czestochowa-- I forget-- Cernovice, I forgot the names.

That's all right. That's all right. So they're liquidating that, and liquidating the ghetto.

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They were starting to liquidate the concentration camp, Plaszow. And one day, they had-- before the liquidation-- they come in, the guy from Auschwitz--

Dr. Mengele?

Dr. Mengele, and we stay all of them on the appellplatz.

The roll call place.

Roll call place. And he was looking everybody, he was just pointing fingers, up, left, right, right, left.

Did you have any idea what that meant?

We didn't know nothing. We found out after they took the people what he picked. And they took them right away-- they dressed them, and they disappeared. We found out they went to Auschwitz to the ovens. He took out the skinny ones, the not healthy ones, to destroy them.

About a few weeks after, they start to send people out. We got again all of them on the appellplatz, to get together the place. And they start to call names out.

When they called your name, you had to go to the right side. If not, you go left side. And I was called to come to the right side.

From there, they picked, I think 12, 13, around 1,200 or 1,500 people they picked out, all men. And they put us in cattles--

Cattle cars.

Cars, and away we went. We got into Gross-Rosen.

Oh, the labor camp, Gross-Rosen.

Another camp. After a few days traveling, you know, they give us-- I think they fed us once in the whole trip.

We got to Gross-Rosen, everybody had to get undressed. And that was quite cold weather. Already was temperature maybe around 20 degrees, 25 degrees.

We got undressed, naked, staying all together, nothing. We saw the chimney at one side, the showers on another side. We stayed there, I think, 36 hours, without clothes, without nothing. Waiting, what's happening.

Because we didn't know nothing. Where are we going? What's happening? After 36 hours, they start to take us to the showers to wash us, sterilize us, and put us to the barracks.

Did they shave you and give you a tattoo?

Oh, no, they shave us all over left and right. They cut us up, and then they put some sterilizer where you-- when they put the stuff, you were screaming. And after we got to the barracks, they put us like sardines-- you know how sardines, you put--

In cans, packed very tightly.

Packed tight. When we sat down, first person had to sit by the wall with open legs. And then you put one to each other. And the one next to each other, too, by the wall. And before you turn around, the room would hold 10 people or 15, you had about 150.

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There, we had to work-- our work was nothing. Bless you. The work was nothing.

What we did was carry rocks, stones-- you take one pile and stick it on another pile. From another pile, to another pile. And that's how we were carrying on at work.

How long? How long were you in Gross-Rosen?

Gross-Rosen, I think it was only about three weeks, four weeks. Then, they told us we going to Brunnlitz.

And Brunnlitz was Schindler's camp.

Brunnlitz, we knew already, that was Schindler's camp. We were the first people to come in, and--

So you were going to Czechoslovakia?

We was going from Germany-- because from Plaszow, which was Poland, they sent us to Gross-Rosen, what was Germany. From Germany, they send us to Czechoslovakia.

So you were in cattle cars again for a couple of days?

Was for a few days. No food, no nothing, till we get to--

Were you with friends or relatives?

Relatives, I didn't have-- I had only one cousin, my grandmother's cousin, Dr. Chaim Hilfstein was with me.

Oh, he went.

And who, he was going slowly senile. He was an old man.

He was an older man.

He was an old man. And we got to Czechoslovakia, we start to liven up. We saw difference-- difference camp. Not electric wires, no posts, big-- we got a building where we live upstairs, and the factories were downstairs.

Were you asked for by Mr. Schindler? How did you get to Brunnlitz.

Good luck.

He asked for workers?

He asked for workers, certain workers he needing. And I was working as a plumber, and he was needing some plumbers.

I see.

So by luck, I was picked from the few plumbers that were in camp to go.

Now, last year, on the bestseller list, we had this book, Schindler's List, written all about Oskar Schindler, who saved more Jews in all of World War II, than any other person. And he was a Righteous Gentile.

Would you tell us a little bit about Mr. Schindler?

More visible.

Would you tell us a little bit about your impressions of Mr. Schindler?

Yes, Mr. Schindler, what we knew, he was a Czechoslovakian who become German. And he got different jobs, and he start to-- he start what you call, tried to save Jews. He opened the first factory-- in this factory, he was keeping people together.

He didn't let nobody to come in there from the SS, and stuff like this.

So he maintained law and order. Did you get enough food there?

That was-- I'm talking a little bit about him, when he had the factory before. This factory, he pretend he going to be building ammunition against tanks. What was never produced. He had few pieces to show what he's making.

So he's duping the Nazis.

He was cheating on them, just to try to help to survive of the Jew.

Why do you think he did that?

Well, he had conscience, a little bit, maybe, for his own pocket.

So he was making some money, but he was really--

He was--

He was really a righteous person.

--more for his, I would say--

For his conscience? He was trying to save Jews.

To do something good, because he was not a killer. And he doesn't have killer's instinct, like most all of them did. He tried to save as many as possible.

So your life, Edward, was much easier this last year than--

The last eight months, seven months, once you are there, was much easier from anything. Because Schindler, he was trying to get ammunition to help-- to people should have some guns. And for help to survive.

And there was time once, when the SS was trying to come and get us, this man would never let--

So he was your friend.

Friend of all of us there.

Was he respected by the people?

People have respect for him, and people did anything they could for him. And this man, like I had a cousin there who was a doctor.

Oh, this Dr. Hilfstein?

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Dr. Chaim Hilfstein. One day, I got caught working as a plumber cleaning sewer pipes, let's say toilet pipes. And I come into the infirmary, and bleeding, with a little infection. And I ask him to give me a shot.

He start to scream at me because first minute, he knew who I was. Two minutes later, he got for the shot, he forgot--

You said he was getting senile.

He forgot who I was, already. So Schindler hear the yelling, he said, what's going on? And he see, my finger is bleeding. He got another guy there to give me-- to stop the bleeding and give care of me. If he wouldn't care, I could have had tetanus poisoning, or something.

So you could have died from infection.

Infection.

How many people were in this camp?

Well, first we start there, I think, around 1,400 or 1,600.

Would you like some water? Thank you.

1,400 to 1,600 people. Then, they brought a few hundred woman. The few hundred women-- the few hundred women they brought, there were some women from his camp, what he had them--

Oh, from the other place.

Another place, except took them a long time to get the same people out. Because the German were trying to tell him, what's different what kind of people you have?

But he was just trying to save--

He want to save the same people because--

I presume he had gotten attached to those.

He said, he was attached to them. He had them the whole time. He tried to save them out. So he said, five more minutes?

Yes, we have five more minutes, or so. I think--

Oh, boy.

Time went quickly.

I didn't even go all through. Because you see what happened, he told the German, all the people are trained to do things what-- they know what to do. But was full of baloney.

He was duping them.

He had people there, wives of some men what were there. There were a couple of kids there, what he tried to get them in.

So he was trying to save families, too.

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Yeah. So I have there a cousin, Rozner, who was a big violinist.

Oh, they mentioned that in the book.

He saved his life. His brother, [? Poldek, ?] was another-- he was a musician. He had them. Like Herman's wife, she was in the transport of the woman, and he was trying to get them--

He was trying to save these people.

To save these people. Anyway, so mostly, he got all the women what he wanted from Auschwitz. He brought them in.

He brought them, he saved them? Who liberated that camp?

The Russian. Then, and before the war was finished, they found a couple cars, train cars, with people, half dead. And Schindler found out about them. They were Hungarian Jews, what they were transporting them away towards--

Auschwitz?

Camps, other camps. And the war was running so short. He brought them in, all the people, to us.

Oh, and he saved them.

He saved them, too, even we have to share the food. Because he was getting so much only to eat. And what he had in his stockpile. So he was serving the whole thing, just to-- to save the people, too.

So by the end of the war, before Schindler took off, a few people signed papers for him.

Oh, to give testimony of what he did.

Of what a good person he was, what he did. And Yad Vashem in Jerusalem--

Yad Vashem?

--is tree, plant by the Israeli government.

Right, in the Avenue of the Righteous.

And his name.

And he saved you, and he saved many thousands?

Many people. And that's why that's it, you find in the book, the name where I was signing for him, too, as an affidavit of his-- witnesses for him.

I think we're going to have to end soon, and maybe we want to see the last few pictures that you brought when you were liberated. You say, you weighed 90 pounds.

Maybe not even.

What is this picture all about?

This picture is-- we should show number four picture, this one.

Yeah, we'll get to that next. What is this picture?

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That is people in 1946 or '47, they brought the ashes from a Gusen.

Oh, from the labor camp.

From the labor camp, Gusen, where it was a thing. And if you see the urns, the all urns are filled with ashes.

And where are those ashes going?

They went to Jerusalem, to Israel.

Oh, they went to Jerusalem. I see.

And there, they were laying there in Yad Vashem.

In Yad Vashem. So that's a ceremony. Now, we have another picture of what you looked like.

That was here-- that was about 10 or 12-- between 10 to two weeks after I come from camp. I weighed here, you can see, there's no eyes there. My head just start to--

And you're wearing clothing that's much too big for you.

The suit I got from--

From the UNRRA?

No, that's I got from some German what I took off.

Oh, you took it off.

Right after the war, and I put it on.

So you came back to Krakow to find family.

I was looking for my family, what I found--

Did you find anybody?

Nobody from my immediate family. I found a couple cousins, survivors, from my father's side, what they're in New York, living. That's two of them. And I found one cousin who lived from my mother's side, who is here in this picture what I show you, living in Los Angeles. He just passed away a few months ago.

And here's the--

That was my identification, what I got when I ran out from Poland, right after the war, come looking for my family in Austria, Vienna.

Eddie, I want to thank you very much. We're running out of time. I know these memories aren't pleasant, but your story has to be told.

That's not even half of the story.

And that's not half of it. We'll bring you back to tell the other half sometime. And we thank you very much for telling your story.

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I hope never going to happen this again.

Amen. We hope so, too.

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