

We could just keep going, almost done this whole section. And then we'll get home.

I'd like to do that. Sorry.

OK. So we'll try that one.

OK, whenever you're ready.

OK. On August 5, 1944, you arrived here and saw the six-foot-high chain link fence topped by three strands of barbed wire. What was your initial reaction?

Well, another fence, another device to keep one in, to prevent one from going out. I noticed that some of the older people who had spent considerable time in concentration camps were much more upset about the fence than I seemed to have been. I guess, to them, the fence meant the concentration camp. I couldn't imagine that we would be living under conditions that were similar to that.

But it was a fence. There were guards. And we needed a pass, we were told. And we were quarantined for a while. And there were people on the other side of the fence talking to us. We were inside. And there was this barrier. I guess the barrier was symbolic of many other things-- the new culture, strangers coming into a small town, and so on. It was disconcerting. I wasn't panicked by it. Some people were very upset.

Now, there were a lot of people who came to Oswego. And they had family who were living in the States.

Yes.

They were not allowed in for the first time--

No.

--because of the quarantine. It must have been family reunions through this chain link.

Through the fence, that's right. And they were quite moving. And people reached over-- it was higher than this one-- reached over, and tried to touch, and tried to exchange things, and so on. It was a very emotional kind of interaction. I remember interacting with some of the townspeople, some of the young kids, talking to them. Very few people spoke English. And those of us who did sort of translated for everyone. Yet we were able to talk. People were not being kept away. We could communicate.

In addition to the tough barrier that this was, you tell a funny story because you had been given a dime on board the Henry Gibbins. And you got to this fence.

Yes.

And you met some American kids. What happened?

Well, it was just about on the spot here, or very close to it, there was a recreation hall. And we had sort of scouted around and found some ping-pong tables with the nets and the paddles, no ping-pong balls, no table tennis balls. And as you mentioned, I had received a silver dime, a Roosevelt dime, from one of the soldiers on the boat. And one of the youngsters with a bicycle, standing on the other side of the fence, sort of seemed to be interested in us.

And I asked him if one could get a ping pong ball. Those were almost impossible to get in Europe. They're made of casein. And milk and cheese products were not available.

And I dug into my pocket. And I took out the dime. And I said, can you get me a ball for that? And he said, oh, sure, I'll

get you several. And so I passed the dime through the fence. And he hopped on his bicycle. Away he went. And we continued to talk.

And a few minutes later, he came back on his bicycle and tossed the little Brown bag over the fence. I picked it up and there were three ping-pong balls for a dime. And I was so elated-- I didn't speak English terribly well. And I was so pleased, I said to him, John, you are a big ass. And I could hear the hush suddenly falling over the group standing there. And I knew I had said the wrong thing.

And he was wise enough to say, what did you mean, Adam? I said, well, you're a big ass. He says, what do you mean? I said, during the war, the pilot that shoot down the enemy, he's a big ass too. So he said, you mean an ace.

I've been telling that story ever since. It almost created an international incident. But obviously, it did not. But that was my first attempt at complimenting someone in this country. And it didn't go terribly well.

OK, good. So do you want to get repositioned and use the tripod? That was great.

Sound's real nice.

Good.

OK.

OK. After the quarantine was lifted, September 1st, that day was a grand opening. Do you remember anything of that? Tell me about it.

Oh, we all rushed into town, or as many of us as could, just to see what the town was like. The stores-- it all looked so quaint. The people, to us, to me, looked very colorfully dressed. Not unusual now, but coming from Italy and Southern Italy, particularly, where everybody wore black, all the women wore black dresses, to see red coats, and yellow coats, and all kinds of colors, scarves, it was a very strange sight. This was the new culture we were going to have to get adjusted to.

And there was a big ceremony here on the campground.

There was a ceremony on the camp grounds. I remember that very vaguely. But there was one. I don't know where I was or what I was doing at the time, but there was apparently a welcoming kind of ceremony right on the parade grounds.

When you first got here and the abundance of food that was available, that must have been a shock, a pleasant one.

It was. We had also come from a long sea voyage, about three weeks on the ocean, rather rough. And many of us didn't feel terribly well and weren't terribly hungry. So the food was a welcome sight on terra firma. And many of us had not had much to eat for several years. Food was very scarce, as you know. And everything was abundant here-- the milk, and the bread, and so on, and the eggs. It was welcome. Many of us were sort of hungry.

I'm sure. Beginning of September, you were allowed to begin a quasi-normal life in that you and the other youngsters were allowed to go to the Oswego public schools. That was a real big significant break.

It was. And it was our first exposure to the American way of life. As it was, the first exposure to the Oswegonians to what these refugees were all about. Many of us didn't speak the language. And most of us didn't know very much about the American culture. And we were strange to them, as I'm sure they were strange to us.

But we adjusted. Most of the people were very kind and patient-- and the teachers-- and awaited for our explanations and attempted to understand us. And it became easier as time went on.

How long had it been since you were in a classroom?

Well, in Rome, I had been hiding in a boarding school, which had classes I would sit in. And I would sit in the back of the class and not pay attention, absorbed in my own thing. Formally, the last time I attended class was in Southern France about a year or more-- no, two years before we arrived here.

Principal Ralph Faust describes, generally, the attitude as a thirst for knowledge.

Yes. Yes, there was. I remember one evening very early after we first came here, when someone came into the camp-- it may have been Mr. Faust-- to try and find out what kind of literature we would like to read. And people would stick their hands up in the air. And he called on them-- and Pearl Buck, and Cronin, and Steinbeck, and Shakespeare, and so on.

I guess this is what he meant by a thirst for reading, a thirst for knowledge. And many of us had been totally deprived of any kind of culture for a long, long time. And this was an opportunity to reabsorb it.

I must ask you about this fence. It's not, really, a very secure fence. And you, Adam Munz, were notorious for sneaking underneath the fence.

Well, you know, the popular song here was "Don't Fence Me In." And I took that literally. There was a hole somewhere along the fence, where many of us-- I was, I guess, one of the first to sneak under it, and take the train or the bus, and go into Syracuse, and from there into New York to see some friends that I hadn't seen since before the war and just to see the big city.

Did your folks know you were sneaking out for a night?

Oh, yes, they did. Oh, yeah, no, no. Yes. Yes, they did. They had to, sure.

Is it remarkable that no one ever really snuck off and never did come back, no one escaped or anything?

I don't think anyone would have dared. Remember, we came from several years of living under authorities that meant business. And I don't think any of us would have challenged authorities in a very serious way. Sneaking under the fence was one thing, but I think to totally disappear from the camp, I can hardly imagine that anyone would have undertaken that kind of thing. No.

OK, good.

Oh, I'm sorry. You were going to?

No, I think they could have had this camp without a fence, and no one would have left if told not to go.

OK. Let's change location.

Oh, are we on?

Almost.

Does it carry this distance? It does. I suppose you want to know what basis they used for the selection.

Yeah. So that's what I'll talk to you about. OK.

OK.

Do you remember Eleanor Roosevelt making a visit here to Fort Ontario?

Oh, yes. That was one of the highlights of our stay. There were a number of occasions that remained fixed because of their significance. Her visit was one of them. Oh, I remember it very distinctly. She was so well-known in Europe and was so dear to us as refugees. And her visit was, indeed, a momentous occasion. She was exactly what we pictured her to be.

I remember asking her to autograph my little book. She spoke very softly and very kindly in her typical voice. She gave us a ray of hope. Her coming here meant that we meant something to the American public, to the American government. Otherwise, Mrs. Roosevelt, the wife of the president would not have come to visit us. And that kind of buoyed up the place for a long, long time.

Then she went into a couple of the barracks. And in perhaps typical Eleanor Roosevelt independence, she was being directed toward one barracks and decided to go to another one to make sure that she wasn't being only in the showplace. Was that?

Right, she was a shrewd lady. I hear that that was so. I did not accompany her on her round, although I did speak with her in the recreation hall at some length. But I understand that that is what happened.

But there were clubhouses, and there was a youth group as well.

Yes.

Oh, OK.

What?

Well, he just wants to correct real quick. That work out?

Yeah, it was good. You can just stay right on out in there if you want to do a two shot.

Yeah, that clubhouse was interesting. How did you know about that?

Pictures in the National Archives of the youth group.

Isn't that amazing? In Washington?

Yeah.

Oh, I have to go see that. Is that open to the public? Or do you need?

It sure is. You just have to register as a researcher.

At what, at the Library of Congress?

At the National Archives.

National Archives. Oh, I have to go. Do you remember any of the faces, pictures that were taken?

Yeah, I have ordered the pictures. I ordered over 100 pictures.

You're kidding.

I haven't gotten them yet-- \$4.15 a piece.

Apiece. Well, that's better than Sonnenfeld's.

Yeah, because they belong to the public, they're in the public domain. And all you have to do is pay for the reprints.

Right.

So it's worth a trip. If you're ever in Washington, spend a day. And they will make copies of anything.

They will? And you pay for them there or what?

You can pay for them there.

Oh, I've got to go see that. I do. There's a collection at Columbia University too.

Yeah, mostly Ruth's papers, a lot of Ruth's papers.

That I don't know. What I saw was from the War Department, some of the pictures-- they took aerial shots of the building of the barracks and so on, those kinds of things, our arrival and the train stopping over there at the trestle.

Was that just still pictures or was there--

The only ones that I've seen are still pictures. I don't know if there are any movie cameras, movie shots of it.

I still found 50 seconds of--

There's a train, isn't it, a train arrival?

Yeah, a train arrival.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I remember very little of that train ride at night. I remember arriving here. But I remember little of the train ride. I may have just zonked out and slept.

Let me ask you about that youth group. There were lots of activities for all ages. And the youth group was a major part of that. It was. It was our way of getting together. It was where we learned English. It was where we listened to music.

It was where we learned to dance. Somebody came into the fort and actually taught us the box step way. And we became avid dancers. And it was a kind of a place where you could go seek solace. You could talk your problems over with people and find the friendships that we had lost.

Was there a real generation gap here? Was that accentuated by the experience here? It seems that for the youngsters, people of your generation, everybody speaks so highly of the experience, whereas the older folks, your parents' generation, had such a difficult time.

I suppose that being older, they were more rigidified. And it was more difficult for them to make the transition. The younger people didn't have any trouble at all. They learned the language very quickly. They assimilated to the cultural changes very, very quickly. And many of them did not-- memory is short too at that age. They didn't remember the deprivation to the degree that the older people did. And it didn't linger with them.

And the older people, again, as I mentioned, earlier, they came to the camp and they were once again deprived of their freedom. Whether the kid plays soccer behind a closed fence or in an open field doesn't much matter as long as he can play soccer. For the older people, there was the psychological barrier of being closed in that I think preyed on their

minds much more.

Let's take you just too and I'll step towards him.

OK. Let's start on two shot too and then go in. Do you remember that after six months, when you were in the camp, the newspaper that was published here at Fort Ontario, the Ontario Chronicle--

Yes.

--ran a contest for the youngsters?

Yes.

An essay contest.

Yes.

Do you remember that you won?

Yes.

Here's the banner headline in the Ontario Chronicle-- "Adam Munz Wins First Prize."

Oh, my god, I don't even think I have a copy of that.

Well, you can keep that.

I don't even have my glasses on. You're not going to ask me to read this, are you?

I'm going to ask you to read part of your composition, if you would.

Because I don't have my glasses and I wonder whether I should get them.

Can you read it at all?

The English is atrocious. I remember reading it several years later. And it is very stilted, but that's the best I could do. I'm not sure that I won on good merit. I have a feeling I won because there were not too many people who submitted articles.

Well, there was a second and third prize issued as well.

There was?

Yes.

Oh, golly gee. I haven't seen that in. And this is Sipser's cartoons. I remember him well. Do you really want me to read this?

Sure. Sure.

Let us take the example of a small little bird which you take and put in a nice and comfortable cage. You take well care of the bird. You give him his daily food. You give him some sugar from time to time. Then after a few weeks, when he's well-acquainted to the room he's in-- my god, the syntax is atrocious-- you close the window and let him spread his wings between the four walls.

The little bird will like it at the beginning, but later, he will look with a sad eye through the glass when he sees his fellows enjoy liberty. You will be surprised when, a few years later, your little bird will die. He will die because he's thirsty, thirsty for liberty he cannot enjoy. So is every single being in the world.

Not bad for writing in a language that's not your mother tongue.

Well, but looking back, it's atrocious. I think, as you can see from the tenure of the article, this preoccupation with freedom, with being walled in, with being fenced in, with being unable to go out and spread your wings, in a way, for a 17-year-old, it wasn't the best thing in the world. And that's what was on our minds-- the specter, also, of having to go back, you see, not just of being fenced in here, but of having to return to conditions that most of us did not want to return to.

OK. I touched it up. Franklin Roosevelt died in April of '45. The war was winding down almost at an end. That must have had quite a deadening effect on the people here. What?

It did. First of all, his death, per se, as the beloved president, the man who we felt was responsible for bringing us here, that giant of a democratic figure in the true sense of the word was now dead. There was a sense of gloom, first of all, at his death. Secondly, what will happen to us now? This is always the first question that we would think of. What now? We were very, very pessimistic. This new man who came on the forefront, Truman, no one knew. No one had any idea what he was like and what would happen to us as a result of the change in administration.

Shortly thereafter, victory in Europe.

Victory in Europe. And then after that--

Brought joy, but fear again?

Fear again because that, of course, signaled our having to return. The pact, so to speak, was that at war's end, we would be shipped back. Now, the war was ending or ended. And that meant that very soon thereafter, we would have to, once again, pack our belongings and return. In the case of the Munz family, we didn't know where-- certainly not back to Poland. Belgium, who knew what we would find there. The whole specter of the return to Europe was, as I said yesterday, anathema to us, to me.

Let me go back to newspapering for a moment here. You were greatly affected by the cartoonist for the Chronicle, Max Sipser. Tell me about him.

He was a superb artist. In fact, I took some lessons from him in the camp. I admired his work very much. He was a satirist. I always looked forward to his cartoons. He was a kind human being, had been trained in commercial art in Vienna, was a nice gentleman. And he would draw and paint the caricatures of many of the people in the camp. And they're priceless. I wish I had one today.

And you became an artist yourself.

Many years after that.

But even I have a picture of you painting a Buy War Bonds poster.

Yes.

What was that all about?

I took some lessons here, correspondence lessons. I wanted to become an artist, a commercial artist, probably. And I was enrolled in one of the correspondence courses. And what you saw was one of the pictures that somebody came to

take of me as studying art. Yes, I remember that picture.

And you also did a portrait of your father.

Yes. It was a pencil portrait of him, which now is in the permanent exhibit in the museum in Albany. It was a good likeness. I don't know how good art it was, but it was a good likeness. And it was done with a great deal of love. And I'm glad that it found a permanent spot.

Well, very good.

As a psychologist--

Paul.

Yeah?

It's the end of the tape.

OK, let's change. That's a good place to change it.