

Can't really. Told me-- It can't be.

I'm terrible at that. I failed Boy Scout that merit badge.

There's one tree where the cemetery is, that huge one.

As a psychologist today, you can look back and clearly see, I think, the roller coaster of emotions that you folks had to endure. There was such joy at coming to the country, bringing back down when you see the fence, joy when Eleanor Roosevelt comes, fear and trepidation when FDR dies. It was a real roller coaster.

It was. On the other hand, I think, this is what life is about too-- perhaps not as dramatic and with as many highs and lows. But life isn't a very smooth road, either. And the pains, and the sorrows, and the joys, perhaps, were not what they were like during the war for us. But heck, it prepared us for the rest of our life to have to feel those, to have to feel sadness, to have to feel joy.

I don't know whether it was that unusual. I think the living together, 982 people, with all of the problems that the different cultures, the different languages, the different backgrounds bring, I think, was a more impactful experience, perhaps, than the ups and downs, although each one of those stands out in my mind too.

There were significant rivalries among--

Oh, there were.

--different nationality groups.

There were. There were, no question about it. There were large gaps. There were laborers in the group. And there were physicians, and lawyers, and people who had been educated. There were people from varying cultures in Europe-- Yugoslavs, and Poles, and Germans, and so on. And the groups didn't always see eye to eye on all things.

Do you remember the incident where some of the German-speaking folks walked out of synagogue services when the rabbi was preaching in Serbo-Croatian?

I remember hearing about it. I was not in that synagogue. I did not attend that particular one. I remember hearing about it. But I remember another incident, speaking of languages, that most people probably don't remember. It was, I think, on the first day we arrived here. I went exploring just to see what the lay of the land was. And I remember coming around this very fort.

And just as I was rounding the bend, an open truck with a bunch of POWs, prisoners of war, German prisoners of war, were being wheeled out of the camp and out into Oswego in a way. They had been instrumental in helping to build this camp, I think. And the last remnant of them was leaving. That was a shock to me, to see the German prisoners here, with all the anger and hate that I felt for them. So there were a number of incidents of that sort having to do with language and cultures.

Knowing now what you do, that there were nearly half a million German POWs brought into this country during the war years and 982 refugees.

I have expressed myself to the effect that I'm very bitter about that part of it, that it was really, in the true sense of the word, a token gesture. Many, many thousands, perhaps tens of thousands more should have been saved in some way, should have been allowed to come in, even before they were liberated. I understand that arrangements were on the way, could have been made. I think the world did not handle this issue terribly well. And that goes from the church to the various nations to various governments, including the United States. I think a great deal more should have been done, not just for Jews.

It must have been a real slap in the face to come and see German POWs.

Yes, it was. Yes, it was. And I hate to think what could have happened if I had gotten my hands on one of them. It's difficult to imagine today what the hatred, and the suffering, and the pain could do to one.

Do you remember the Dickstein congressional hearings?

Very, very well, very well.

You had an involvement in that. Tell me about it.

Yes, I was one of the people that was questioned by the committee. And I remember that there were two congressmen, I suppose. One was from Texas, and one was from somewhere else. I remember questioning me about why my father was in danger of being arrested and deported. And he had one line-- was he a communist? Had he done something illegal?

And each question that he asked me along those lines, all I said to him was no, because he was a Jew. Well, why did he have to hide? Because he was a Jew. Why was he running from the Germans? Because he was a Jew. And I don't think that man understood what I was talking about. And I refused to understand what he was talking about because the issue of our running was we were Jews, period.

What else did they ask you? Did they ask you if you would serve?

Yes. In fact, they asked, if I were permitted to come into the United States legally, whether I would present myself to the draft and subject myself to the draft. And I very proudly said, of course. And I did. I was the first, in fact, of the young men, when released, to wear the American uniform. I think it was 11 days after our official entry into this country that I asked for a speedy induction, and was taken, and was sent to, eventually, Fort McClellan, Alabama for my basic training.

There was joy after the hearings because that subcommittee recommended that you be allowed to stay.

Yes.

And then a few months later that got shot down.

Yes.

Once again, that up and down.

The ups and downs, yes.

There was despondency here often because of the ups and downs. And it reached a real peak during the winter because of the harshness. And it resulted in a suicide.

Yes.

And that was followed by a tragic work accident, Robert [? Buchler. ?]

I'm not sure. Is that the chronology? You probably know better than I do. Yes, that one was a shocker to the camp. I don't remember the suicide. But I do remember the death of [? Buchler ?] on the coal pile, which was right near the entrance to the fort. That was a horrible, horrible event.

And the reaction was almost en masse to that event-- a man who had escaped from the horrors of the war comes to this free country and dies so senselessly in an accident that was no one's fault. But perhaps he shouldn't have been on a coal pile. He was not a laborer. He didn't know what he was doing. And all of a sudden, that was it. That was the end of him.

There was a backlash, evidently, of people who had not previously wanted to work and said, see, he worked.

Yes. I don't know. You see, I was not that close to the working issue at my age. There were a number of people who did not want to work. They felt they came to this country as guests of this government and shouldn't work. We did not know that the group was selected partly on the basis of it being potentially self-sufficient.

I remember, my father always worked hard all his life. And he worked hard in the camp here in the kitchen, in the kosher kitchen. But there were a number of people who had professional lives back there in Europe before the war started and who didn't feel like working in barracks, stoking fires, and cleaning ashes out, and things of that sort.

OK. I think I have just one other question. And we need a new location for that.

Yeah, I'm just getting going here.

Well, let me ask you this. It was December of '45 that President Truman came up with his answer, which basically said, you can come in under existing quotas. We're not going to lift those holding quotas. But we'll let you folks in. And he said, it would be wasteful to send you back to Europe, where, in turn, most of you would have applied for immigrant status anyway. That must have been some party.

Yes. Yes, it was. The feeling of release from the worry of having to go back was phenomenal. It's a very cold winter, as you may know. And I, again, remember very, very clearly the morning. The light was not out yet. The sun hadn't risen yet, very cold, snowy morning, people with torches filming the events. We boarded the buses on our way to Canada. And there was a new sense of hope. There was a revitalization. The day had finally come to pass where we were going to be free. We were going to join that big melting pot out there.

Did you understand then why you had to go to Canada to come back to the United States?

Yes, I could understand the logic of it. But there was something so senseless about it having to be that way. But it didn't matter. You see, at that point, I would have done anything and gone anywhere to re-enter this country as a free person. And heck, it was a trip. And Niagara Falls is a beautiful place. It's quite a sight. And coming back, of course, for the first time being free and being literally free to go where we pleased and to become citizens, it was really all that mattered. And that was a joyous occasion for most of us.

OK. Let's go on over to the monument, then we're done.

OK.

It stretched out to about two and a half or three years of schooling. I couldn't have gone to school otherwise. My family had very little. My father had to start all over again.

And what business did your father go into?

My father was a kosher butcher in Antwerp. Came here, they told him, we want to get back to that dirty profession for-- we'll help you to become a diamond broker. Most of his customers in Antwerp had been in the diamond business. So they trained him and he became a diamond broker, essentially, and did all right.

Great.

He's still alive.

Wonderful. And I'm sure he probably had to go back to Antwerp after that on business.

Dad?

Yeah.

I'm trying to think if he went back. I went back. Yes, I think they went back. He didn't go on business. He went back to visit the one remaining relative that lived in Antwerp, a niece of his. They went back with my mother. Yeah.

And you didn't go into the new family business.

Oh, no. No, I vowed-- my mother raised me on the notion that I have to become either a dentist or a lawyer. Maybe her aspirations didn't go to the level of a doctor, but no, I was not going to go into that profession.

Well, I think they have a reason to be proud, right?

Thank you.

You did them well. This memorial now has been defaced, vandalized a couple of times.

Yes.

And chipped off, where Jewish is scratched out.

That's very disturbing to me. I just learned yesterday that it had been vandalized after having been repaired following the first vandalization. It's a sick mind that must have done this. I don't think it should be repaired. I expressed myself very strongly after the first time that this should not be repaired. It is now part of the monument.

And I think it is highly significant that someone, typical of the thinking that still goes on in this world, that someone should have done this to a stone monument commemorating an event of antisemitism to begin with that brought us over here. That someone should destroy the very stone that commemorates that, there's something sick and sickening about it. And I think it should stay as it is. If it needs to be further protected, perhaps it ought to be taken indoors. But I don't think it should be repaired.

OK.

OK.

You tell me. That look OK?

OK, ready. And go.

When you see the monument vandalized like this, must break your heart.

Yes, it does. And it's apparently been vandalized for the second time, I understand. They repaired some of it following the first vandalization. It's disheartening because the reason those 982 people, including myself, came here was because of a kind of vicious murderous antisemitism. I can't help but think that the kind of individual that would destroy a memorial of this kind, and try to obliterate the word Jewish, and have to chop a monument to pieces is made of the same fiber that caused us to have to come here to begin with.

I don't think the monument should be repaired. I think the monument ought to stay the way it is because it not only should commemorate the fact that we were brought to this country, and saved, and given shelter, but that there are still people around who have the kind of sick minds, and larceny, and antisemitism in their hearts to have to destroy a monument of this sort.

OK, wonderful.

Great. That's great.

You want a two shot there with both of us?

And then I'll start getting threatening letters, right?

Yeah, right. Well, Steve should be right back.

OK.

Yeah, sure. OK.

What do you want me to do?

That's OK. Does that help?

Yeah.

OK. All right. Adam, just tell me what you see in your mind's eye.

OK. The configuration has changed to a large extent. We're standing probably on the spot where one of the administration barracks stood. The kitchens were lined up this way. The entrance is facing over there. And there were a series of barracks going around there, facing this way, with the entrances. There was a road going alongside the fort and around the fort, and along that street, a number of brick buildings which were the officers' quarters. The parade grounds were different. There was a dip into it that was more pronounced than it is here.

And I remember, some of the buildings from that time are still standing. The theater we used is over there. The hospital, I don't see. I think that's been taken down. But there are a number of the other buildings there that existed then and that are still here. And I remember the-- was it Fitz?

Fitzgibbons factory or something like that?

Yes, they made boilers before the war, but during the war, manufactured tanks. And I remember the noises coming out of the factory quite clearly, quite distinctly.

Can you see people and hear people when you look at the grounds like this now?

I almost can. I almost can. I played soccer on that field.

And your barracks was where?

My barrack was right over there.

Number?

161.

You remember?

Yes, first floor. And that winter, I'll never forget, I could have stepped out of my window on the first floor and slid down the snow into the street. There must have been piled 14 feet high the drifts. It was a very snowy winter. But oh, yes, I remember it very distinctly. We used to go swimming in the lake here right where those rocks are. The memories come back quite vividly. Oh, yeah.

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Great OK. And now, we have taken more than enough of your time.