

During the period that you were hiding in the bombed-out buildings, we depended for food to some extent on the reserves of food that the Germans had stored up in the basements. Potatoes had, during the fire-- these are bombed-out and burned-out buildings by and large. And we found in the cellars very often potatoes that were half cooked by the-- during the fires of the building. And we ate that. We also found some preserves of various kinds.

And I managed to get myself a case of dysentery at the time. This almost finished me off altogether. It was watermelon rinds, pickled watermelon rind, I think was what did it.

But we did find certain kinds of preserves sometimes in these basements. So we found some wine at some places. And then, actually, I had some running sores. I even managed to go to a German doctor once, who very carefully didn't ask who I was. And I--

[INAUDIBLE].

Yeah, in that period, it was still [INAUDIBLE]. It was essentially-- the war was essentially over, kind of. But I found a German doctor, and that didn't really help much. But she didn't ask him. I didn't say. It was a quite agreement, obviously. We knew what it was. We also, at one point, went into a German grocery, and promised them to pay after liberation. They threw us out. But that sort of [INAUDIBLE].

Did any of you have any guns with you at all.

No, we did not at all.

And you were liberated by the Russians.

I was-- we were liberated by the Russians. And then, after that, I ended up in a Russian hospital, and so they--

What was that like, after liberation?

The liberation, by that time, I was sick enough to really don't quite-- it didn't quite carry--

Were you walking? Or how--

Not really. Barely.

And the others who hid [CROSS TALK].

The others were better off. Actually, I had gotten dysentery, which had sort of made me in a worse-- I was in a worse state than the others. And all five or six of us survived.

There was a question of going back to Latvia. And some of us who had lost close-- wives and children wanted to go back. I did not want to go back except for the very beginning. But pretty soon it was clear that there was nothing to go back and forth to Latvia.

And in fact, after spending some two or three months in various hospitals and sanatoriums-- this is not really pertinent-- I escaped from the Russians and went to Berlin, and went as a displaced-- claimed to be a West German Jew with the UNRRA, went from Berlin to West Germany to the American zone, and then sort of established myself as a displaced person there. I then made contact with my uncle in the States. [INAUDIBLE].

You were in a DP camp in Germany [CROSS TALK]?

In Zeilsheim. I was in a DP camp for about a year. And then I worked-- but then I lived downtown outside of the DP camp. I got to Frankfurt sometime around September or October of '46, and I leave. I got my visa about-- no '45.

September or October of '45 I got to Frankfurt. I got my visa to the United States about October of '46.

And who was that?

I'm sorry?

Did you have any relations--

Yeah, I had my uncle. That's how I got the visa.

Then I got-- then there was a shipping strike, and we really didn't get on a ship. I didn't get to New York till January of '47.

Now you said you had thought about going back to--

Yeah, right after the liberation, I sort of thought of going back.

Were there other relatives, uncles and aunts, that--

There were a lot. We had a very large extended family. And to my knowledge, nobody survived.

What prevented you from going back?

Well, the final thing was that there was a question of joining the Red Army. That was the final straw. In the beginning, it was a question of going back to Riga. And of course, the potential of joining the Red Army was always there. But if we had gone back to Riga first, I might have gone.

By the time they were kind enough to put us in a camp, with a sort of destination Red Army, and this camp was all full of Latvians, we hated each other cordially, I just packed up and left. And I told them prior to going back to the homeland, I had to pick up some stuff that I had managed to have, some stuff which I had hidden in town. And so I walked away to get my stuff and never came back. Took a train to Berlin, and I took off.

And what were you doing while you waiting for the visa to come through?

There were various work. Mostly, I-- the longest time I worked as a Polish-English interpreter for the US Army. Some kind of a medical [INAUDIBLE] outfit. It's very nice. I didn't speak Polish, and I spoke very limited English. But I was a Polish-English interpreter for the Polish DPs. And so they did the KP [INAUDIBLE].

It was a good job. It had to do with the kitchen and food. And absolutely, we were-- food was the place where you--

You appointed yourself to that position?

No, I don't know. I think I managed everything was [INAUDIBLE].

[INAUDIBLE]?

Yeah, I don't quite know where who you, whom what, [INAUDIBLE].

Were you thinking at the time about going to another place but the US?

Except for the fact-- no, I had no close relatives in Israel. My uncle lived in the United States, and essentially that was the deciding factor. If not for that, I would have been in Israel. That was sort of the choice. A lot of the friends who-- people, at least, who did-- if you did not have a close relationship in the United States, at that time it was rather difficult to get [INAUDIBLE]. It was the quota system enforced more so than somewhat later. They didn't make any exceptions,

really. And part of the wait was the way to get in under the quota system.

What were your feelings about all of the experiences, all the experiences that you've encountered? [INAUDIBLE]

It's for the Latvians more than for the Germans.

[INAUDIBLE]

So the Latvians more than the Germans, because that was the immediate people that we dealt with. They were the killers, more so at least from where we sat, more so than the Germans, who managed to offer as they did. But the executioners were the Latvians. At least in Latvia, this was the case. So that, as well as hatred for the Germans.

Also on top of that, however, a overwhelming desire to get on with one's life, to get back on the-- a real determination. You have spent two years, four years there. What's four years [INAUDIBLE]? They spent four years in the various camps. Now you have to get on with living.

Were your values changed at all because of your experiences?

Yes. I think I was much more Jewishly oriented--

Because of your experiences?

--because of my experience. I was much more Zionist oriented, [INAUDIBLE] experiences, very much so. Zionism, was always at the periphery. We were well acquainted with it. There was always this questions of the various Zionist movements, the Betar the Hashomer Hazair. The communists, they were friends. And all of these movements, there was long discussions about--

After the war, this whole thing has become academic. The discussions and the movements and so had, to a large extent, become academic, and there's really much more determination and [? kind of ?] understanding which end was up, in the sense of the almost the necessity of Zionism as the only viable alternative for Jews.

What kind of feelings did you have after the war about being Jewish?

A kind of defiant assertion that my God, I'm a Jew, and I will be a Jew, and I'll be glad. And I'm afraid I have it even now, because damn it, that not-- that the Jews shall not survive. That my feeling is, then and now, is very much one that I try to do everything in my power. I try to work very hard toward the maintenance of the Jewish culture, or the Jewish entity, or Jewish identity, precisely in the sense that I feel that-- the disappearance of Jews would essentially be a victory for Nazis.

What sort of values did you try to transmit to your children?

I tried to transmit these values to my children. How successful I have been, that's another question. I don't really know.

I think that on some sense, they know it. They appreciate it. On the other hand, it is somewhat more remote for them. [INAUDIBLE].

Were you able to share some of your experiences with people from [INAUDIBLE]? The Jews or non-Jews?

When are you talking?

When you came to the United States.

Not really. I kind of feel that there is a sort of-- I felt I used the terminology that the homosexuals use, of coming out of the closet. I think that it took just about a generation before I started to talk. I really didn't very much. In the beginning,

it was really a turning off. I really didn't do much talking. I really-- you put any interpretation on it, but it was too painful for me. I couldn't, I didn't want, or whatever. I don't really know. But I did not start to do more talking, or much talking till [? several ?] years ago, I assume.

To some extent, it coincided with the '67 and the Yom Kippur War to a large extent. I had this very strong feeling of a possible Holocaust again, more so in the '67 war than in the '73, when the [INAUDIBLE] situation [INAUDIBLE]. And with that really came much more a thinking about coming back to the surface and, in fact, talking about it.

Even in general Yom Hashoah observances is only about 10 years old in any organized major-- as a major organized activity. And we started [INAUDIBLE]. And we have been doing it quite regularly since. It was at one of those that I talked for the first time, [INAUDIBLE] in public.

At that time, it was really quite difficult, maybe not being used to a sort of-- I didn't like to talk about feelings. And as you may have noticed, I didn't do all that much even now.

You have. Did you apply for reparations from the German government?

Yeah, I got, in the early '50s, I got the-- the only reparations I got was the loss of freedom reparations, which was essentially a salary. The only reparations that I would have been eligible at the time could have been claims or the damage to health, which I didn't feel I had to claim. It was very complicated.

You didn't want to because of what?

I essentially didn't want to. I wasn't sick. We, being from Riga as opposed to being from Germany, we're not able to claim any loss of damage of property or anything like that. I tried to claim a loss of education to get something. And that was it.

What is it from the Holocaust experience were you able to transmit to each other?

Well, one of the-- just from one level, more or less, the fact that it occurred, and in a sort of general sense what occurred. My history, the background of the Jews in Riga, or family life before, that kind of thing.

On another level, I tried to convey the fact that, in some sense, the Holocaust was only a more systematic and more technologically oriented persecution of the Jews, a persecution that was just one more in a long series of persecutions. It was different in kind and yet it was not different in kind from the Romans, the Spanish Inquisition, or the Crusades, the Khmelnytsky, the pogroms in the Soviet Union. The Germans brought a systematic approach to it, which the others did not. But it was just one more persecution of that type. And as such, it may not be the last.

And that kind of thing, that the fact these were the persecutions, and that one has to be aware, and fight it, and, on the other hand, to kind of stay Jewish, and persist at being Jewish, transmit the culture and the value, the Jewish values. And so that aspect I also tried to [INAUDIBLE].

Again, to what extent I am successful, I don't know. I guess I won't know that, because I keep thinking in terms of my own background, or my father-- not that my father was killed, but at the time, while I'm sure I sort of absorbed it, I didn't feed it back to him in any sense. I fed it back to my children, and if I am successful, they hopefully will feed it back to their children. If they do that, then I have done a fine job, and if I know it or not is simply irrelevant.

Well, what sort of feelings do you have about this country? About the country you live in? [CROSS TALK]

They-- it's very-- gratefulness and appreciation, on the one level. And on the other end, I don't really mean to make short of that at all. I mean, I think that is really a most unusual country than most of the world.

On the other hand, there's always a reserve. I just do not trust non-Jews, period, except that if I do, when you do start making personal contact, then I may trust Mr. Smith, who is a non-Jew, yes, when we know him [INAUDIBLE]. As a

generality, I just don't trust non-Jews. There is a total level sort of in the back of my mind that's constantly "Is he Jewish? Is he not Jewish?" And we sort of deal differently.

Once you establish a personal relationship, that may change. But as I say, there is a total distrust. And there is a kind of wariness of, watch out. They may turn. And for all the appreciation, and all the wonderful country that it is, there is this wariness.

And in a sense, just as an example, I was buying a house here, was a major sort of decision, a major emotional investment, because it meant to me you set down the roots, and God-- we didn't leave Riga because we had the house and a God damn factory, and you sat there, you sat there long after. I want you to pick up, and say, this place is not the place to live. Out.

And in that sense, that wariness is with me, here, now, regardless of how wonderful it is. This is a country of laws, and Latvia was not at its best. At its best, the laws were sort of slanted to you were a Jew, they were the same laws, but they were not the same for Jews as for others. In Russia before it was the same kind of thing.

But remember Germany, Germany was a country of laws. And while antisemitism was rampant there all the time, it was a country of laws until Hitler came. And then there were different laws. So the wariness is very natural.

Do you think another Holocaust is possible?

In the same form, probably. On the other hand, if you give the Arabs a little help, [INAUDIBLE].

In what ways do you think the Holocaust has affected your life [INAUDIBLE]? The way you're living, basically?

Well, the one aspect, the sort of a be assertive, be an assertiveness about being Jewish, or being involved with Israel, with Judaism, with Jewishness. That is kind of one aspect that is very definitely, I think, the result of the Holocaust. Beyond that, it's really hard to say how much of it is growing up anyway, and sort of developing a certain set of values.

I don't think that the Holocaust has developed anything that wasn't there in the first place. It has reinforced attitudes. It has sort of changed the perspective. But I don't think it has changed me as a person particularly. I really don't think so.

And in fact, I kind of take somewhat umbrage at some of the books, like Helen Epstein's one generation after, which implies that some people have come through, and they-- some came out as terrible people at the end, and they sort of blamed it on the Holocaust. And this is the kind of thing I really don't-- I don't see, and it is not my experience, according to the people that my friends who survived who know that. But I just haven't seen it.

I mean, these typical stories of parents who say to your children, to their children, for this I have survived the Holocaust? That's an abomination. And to blame it on the Holocaust is a [? worst ?] abomination. That kind of behavior cannot be tolerated.

And very frankly, I just don't see that that is a result. They came with problems to the Holocaust, they may have-- their problems certainly didn't get any better, and they certainly could have gotten possibly worse. But I don't know. Except for some very young people where it interrupted and changed the development drastically, I really don't think it has changed in any fundamental way. I've gotten more serious, yes. One appreciates aspects of the people [INAUDIBLE]. But that's about it.

Well, we, have covered most of the questions. If you think there's anything else that you'd like to add that [INAUDIBLE].

No, not really. I think we have certainly covered the factual as well as some of the effects of the Holocaust. The factual, you can go on and on, and I really don't think it adds very much, unless you're doing a particular research project [INAUDIBLE].

How did you feel about answering these questions?

At this point, I really look to opportunities of transmitting this information, because I think it is important that it be recorded, that in terms of [INAUDIBLE]. And I think that it's important to really feel good, in a sense, of bearing witness, even if it's disturbing, if something happened [INAUDIBLE].

All right. Thank you very much for that.

Thank you for [INAUDIBLE].