

Now, what you'll be looking for, Bernice, is the finger of the cameraman pointing to you. And that's when you start talking. So we'll come up. And when you see his finger, that's when you introduce yourself. And then introduce them.

OK.

But he'll say 5, 4, 3, 2, and--

OK. Ready, gentlemen?

Yeah.

OK, roll the tape. We're all rolling? OK, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Good morning. I'm Bernice Harel. And I'd like to introduce to you Dr. Zev Harel. I'm interviewing him today as part of the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section Holocaust Archive Project. Good morning, Zev.

Good morning.

I want to thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this project. You, I know, are very aware of its importance and the significance of having these archives available for future generations for research. I'd like to start this morning by having you tell us something about yourself, what you're doing today.

OK, I'm professor at Cleveland State University. And my appointment is in the Department of Social Services where I teach mostly courses in gerontology and research. And I'm also the director of the Center on Applied Gerontological Research. I'm married, and I have two kids. And I'm a member of Temple Emanuel.

OK. Are there any community organizations that you're involved in right now?

I'm involved with several planning and service organizations either on the board of directors or as consultant or in various advisory roles. I'm also involved with the Akiva High School and with several other Jewish community organizations.

Now, I know that you are perhaps in a somewhat different position than some of our other narrators in that you, yourself, have also done some research on the Holocaust. Would you like to mention just briefly your work last summer?

Well, I'm principal coinvestigator of a nationally funded project on the adjustment to aging of Holocaust survivors in the United States and Israel. And as part of that project, I spent last summer in Israel interviewing Holocaust survivors there. And at the same time, also the project interviews here in the United States survivors.

I guess I ought to mention it at this point-- I don't think I did before-- that, as an interviewer, I'm in a somewhat different position, too, since I am your wife. But just for the record, would you like to state a little bit about our girls and where they are?

Now, my daughter, Hadass, is finishing college. And she's taking out her finals at Haifa University in Israel. And our younger daughter, Naomi, has completed the ninth grade. And she'll be a sophomore at Cleveland Heights High School next year.

And just to kind of round out the family picture, in this part of the country anyhow, would you like to mention your family in Toronto?

My brother lives in Toronto. My brother is married and has two kids, my nephews, the older one married. And he, himself, the older one has two children.

I guess mentioning your brother then might be a good time to go back to family life before the war. Could you start by telling us something about how it was growing up and, of course, where you grew up originally?

Well, that's a long journey back. I was born in a small village. The name of the village, since at that time it was Romania, the name of the village was Bargau. And that was in Transylvania. It is located between three larger cities that are somewhat better known.

It's about 30 miles from Satu Mare. And the city of Satu Mare, its claim to fame is that the rabbi from Satu Mare comes from there. And then slightly to the east, another city about 10 miles distance, the name of that city is Nagybanya. And we moved later on to that city. And then further north is Satu Mare I'm sorry, Sighet. So the village that I grew up was in between these three cities, Sighet, Satu Mare, and Nagybanya.

And it's hard to comprehend the difference between the conditions where I was born and how I grew up. It's a small village. And no gadgets that are presently available in part of one's life were around there, no electricity, no cars.

You depended completely on what you were able to produce. We had a piece of land. And our house was the last one in the village. The house and there is the barn and then just a little bit below that a fruit garden, and then below that, land. And our land was surrounded by a small river that flow into a bigger river. And since our house was the last one, this river was kind of the border and bordered with our property.

So as a kid, I had just tremendous room to roam around. And at a very young age, I was able to read. I was about three when I read books. And those were the two things that kind of connected me with the realities around, the books, and this garden, and the land that we had.

And it was just unlimited area that you could roam around, walk around, go by the river and pick your berries, and then come up and pick a fruit. But it was hard life because you depended on what you were able to produce. And if you had a good year, then you had what to eat. And if it was a bad year, then food was scarcer.

And we lived there until I was about eight years old. We had an extended family both on my father's side on my mother's side, a lot of brothers and sisters. And even though our house was just two rooms, whenever there was a holiday the clan used to congregate either at our house or at one of my aunts' houses. And simply, they would bring in straw and spread it on the floor. And the kids would sleep in one room, and the adults would sleep in the other room. And whatever the number of guests, there was always enough room. There was always enough to eat. Of whatever there was, there was enough to go around.

Now, I gather, if people were sleeping over, then some of your family didn't live right there in the village, in your village.

No.

Can you tell me how many Jewish families were there in your village and how many people overall?

In my village, there was only another Jewish family. And this family, they were my second cousins. And it was my father and the mother of this family, they were first cousins. And they originate from the same family tree.

And our lands were adjacent. So they were at our house, and we were at their house a lot of time. But because there were only two families in this village, Jewish life was just reflected by adherence to tradition.

We had a kosher home. And we adhered to the traditional Jewish symbols. But we had to walk about 4 miles to the synagogue, which was in the nearest village where there were a few other Jewish families that together they were able to have a minyan together.

Now, who was in your immediate household? We know, of course, about your brother. Did you have any other brothers

or sisters?

No, we were just two brothers-- and fortunately, my brother and I both survived-- and of course, my parents and my grandfather.

And that was your mother's father or your father's?

No, my father's father. And when I was born, he was already in his 70s, strong, healthy man. And I remember that a lot of the things that I knew I learned from him because he would walk with me.

He had the time and the patience. And he would walk with me in the garden and teach me out to chop wood and teach me how to work. And I remember that he was out there with the peasants at the time of harvest and cutting wood or doing any of the jobs on the farm until we moved to the city.

Now, when we moved to the city, I was about eight years old. We moved to Nagybanya. That's the name of the place in Hungarian. In Romanian, it was Baia Mare. It was still Romanian occupation when we moved there.

And I was in the third grade at the time. And in the city, our house became the place where several of my relatives came in to live with us. I had an uncle who was orphaned at an early age, and he moved in. My mother's younger brother, he moved in and lived with us. Then I have a cousin on my father's side whose parents died. And he moved in with us and lived with us.

Which cousin was that?

Francioni, that's my father's mother's son. Then, also, my cousins in the village where we grew up together, the younger of them, Lotse Gotesman came in to learn a trade in the city. So he moved in with us.

And see, the style of life there was that, if you had the room, you just simply added another bed and you expanded your household. And I have to say that, to the credit of my parents, that whatever we had it was always made available for anyone who came by.

In the city, also, one of my mother's sister, Rezie Nene, and her family lived in the same city. So then we got to see more of them. They were often in our house, and we were often at their house. And this city, it had about a population about 70,000 and several thousand Jewish families. So it was a larger city.

The name of the city is Nagybanya, which means the great mine. And it was known both for its beautiful view-- it was a place where painters from all over the world came because the view was just so magnificent, so beautiful, that they had a painting school there. But also, it had several mines, a gold mine and other chemicals, well, actually, other materials that were extracted that they produced various kinds of fertilizers.

This must have been things like sulfates, that sort of thing.

Right.

And you said that, in Nagybanya, there was approximately 70,000 people?

The population of the metropolitan city-- and I think about 2,000 Jewish families.

So that was already larger than a little village, one would say.

Right. This was a city. And the city had movie houses. And the city had electricity. So I came from the horse and buggy to some elements of culture that were there at that time. And this is 1939.

So at the age eight, electricity was something new to you.

Right.

Had you heard about it? I mean, what was the communication like in those days? Did people in your village know that there was electricity and, if you went over to the city, that different things were available that weren't in the village?

Well, that was the first time that I came to the city. I wasn't to a city before that. So this was my first exposure to the electricity and some other things that were part of the city, cars. And that was that.

Now, of course, in your village of Bargau-- which by the way, what was the name of your village in Hungarian where you were first born?

Kissikarlo.

Ah, OK.

Now, we lived in Nagybanya or, at that time, it was called Baia Mare under Romanian occupation. And in 1940, the Hungarians moved in and took over. And that area was bilingual. Especially in the village, there were more likely to speak Romanian. But then in the city, they were more likely to speak Hungarian.

So the transition from the fourth grade to the fifth grade was very simple with one exception. When the Hungarian moved in, they excluded Jews from attending high school. See, the school system was such that the public system had eight years of elementary school years.

And those that wanted to continue high school at the fifth grade, instead of continuing the fifth grade elementary school, they would start the first grade of high school, which in Romanian was lyceum, in Hungarian was gymnasium. Strange names, but that's what the reference was to high school.

So I know that I was very disappointed. Because at the age of three, I read. And I was always at the top of my classes, but I was precluded from being able to attend high school. And I had to continue just fifth grade elementary school.

That also marked the beginning of the sensitivity towards the issues that had to do with antisemitism. In the village, with the exception of one or two occasions-- like I remember before just before, we moved my brother attended high school in the city, in Baia Mare. And that was one of the reasons that we moved to the city.

We would take him in the morning to the railroad station. And he would take the railroad station to the city, attend school, and then come home when school was over. And one of the times when we were on our way to the railroad station, one of the villagers who lived just close to the railroad station stopped us and said, come on in to my house because there are [NON-ENGLISH].

And those were members of the party that were politically aligned with the fascists in Germany. And they were holding a killing party on the train. They were locating Jews and killed them off. And that was--

Already, that was 1940?

No, that was in 1938. This is still in the Romanian time. So this is the first time that I became aware in a very serious way that, as a Jew, your life may be threatened.

Then the second time, shortly after we moved, after the takeover by the Hungarian, in the village adjacent to ours there were two small merchants. And the German army didn't occupy yet Hungary, but they were passing through. And these two merchants were taken and were not returned for a few days until about a week later when the rabbis of the city and some of the leaders of the Jewish community tried to find out. They found the graves. Simply, the Germans took these two poor men and just shot them and left them there. And--

It was for no apparent reason.

For no apparent reason-- and I remember I was, at that time, about 11 years old. I remember that the synagogue had a gathering. And everyone was crying. And the rabbi held a very moving sermon.

But I don't recall that there were any kind of expressions of how this can happen, why this is taking place, except that since then, as a Jew, I began to realize that there are a lot of restrictions. I said already that I could not attend high school. I had to attend just elementary school.

But even there, like, one day the principal could say, I want all the Jews in the school to come to my office. And for no apparent reason, he would send us home. And then two or three days later, we would get letters saying that on such and such date, which was immediately the next day, to immediately appear in school. And the grades were also reflected that Jews would not get the best grades and all that.

So what you're saying is that as a youngster, from the time of age eight, there were a number of incidents which you, I guess in your way at that time, began to realize that Jewish existence was becoming rather precarious. You say that it was really at the whim of others, that it was not rational.

Right. Now, understand that I'm an 11-year-old when I remember this incident. And immediately after that, I remember that there are people who fled Poland and fled Czechoslovakia that are drifting through and going through our city.

And what year was that--

'41.

--that people from other places began to arrive?

'41, '42. And as a kid, I didn't comprehend it, but I remember stories about the fact that the Germans are killing Jews. But again, I don't recall that there was any organized effort in any kind of way by the community. Life continued to go on, restrictions on Jews.

Like, I remember I was playing soccer, but I could not play soccer on a regular team. It's only Jewish kids that we were finding our way of playing on a team. My classmates were more and more expressing their antisemitism.

And then in '43, there was an imposition that all Jewish young people-- well, the Jewish adults were taken to forced labor from Hungary. That was already in '41, '42, continued through '43. And those who were 12 years or older, they had like the equivalent of boy scout system.

But we were taken to forced labor. And once a week, then twice a week, we had to come to a certain place where we were working. And mostly, what we did is we were digging, like, trenches, defense trenches.

Let me ask you to be a little more specific on that. Those of us who grew up in this country, of course, heard of the Nazi youth groups and of people being taken away to forced labor camps. But you're saying that there was, in the early part of the war or the earlier days of the war, that there was a system of recruiting the younger boys, I presume-- or was it boys and girls-- and having them do forced labor around their villages?

Right. This is not boys and girls, boys only. See, men who were 21 or older were recruited to military service, but they did not go into regular military service. They were taken to forced labor units. In Hungarian, was called [HUNGARIAN].

And our city, Nagybanya, was one of the places where they were processed through and then sent away from. But the younger Jewish boys, that is those who were 21 years or younger, between the ages of 12 and 21, '42, '43, through '44, once a week or twice a week had to appear on a certain place and were given shovels.

And it was worked out and arranged that we were engaged in digging mostly ditches. And I assume that that was for protective purposes. And this is now already the time when Hungary allies itself with Germany and antisemitism is all over.

Before we get too much into the war period, I want to ask you a little bit more about life in the village and in the city where you grew up. You mentioned that your family was very traditional, not Orthodox I gather from what you said, but observed all the traditional customs and practices. And I presume in your village and back in Bargau that your family existed solely from the land. So did both of your parents work on the farm, so to speak? Or did your mother do something else? And what did you and your brother have to do?

We all worked. See, in the village, you worked. And whatever work needed to be done as a kid or as an adult, whatever work you needed to be done, you pitched in. And you were involved in it.

And that's one of the things that I remember that as a kid at a very young age I would go and pick the eggs or I would go and pick fruit. And I did whatever I could. And it was expected. And that was that. In those days, whatever it was expected of you, you were complying with.

So in the village, life was relatively simple. We had land immediately adjacent to our property where our house was, but also further away. And the land was worked. And we had wheat and corn and other farming products that were produced, potatoes and carrots. And you ate what you produced.

Did your family or your village, that particular area, have a major crop, so to speak?

No. See, life there was simple. You had to produce everything. You didn't market. You produced what you ate. So you had your fruit, and you dried your fruit. You had your potatoes, and you sheltered them over winter so that you have what to eat in the spring.

Then you had your wheat, and you produce your flour. And if you had access, then you sold it. But the farmers in our area did not have that much. You had the land that was enough for your livelihood, and that's about it.

So that was another change for you when you moved to the city?

Yeah. When we moved to the city, then my father took a job with one of the companies, Fernex, which was a mining company. My mother was at home.

My brother when we-- for another two years, but when the Hungarian moved in, he finished four years of high school. But then because he was Jewish, he was excluded from being able to continue high school. So he started to learn a trade. He started to learn carpentry.

And how would you describe your family financially at the time, poor, average?

Well, we had what to eat, but we worked for our living. So we had enough what to eat, but that was the extent of it. Like as a kid, I was expected to work, earn the money in order to buy myself a suit or something like that.

So we were not a wealthy family. I never remember in the family of not having enough to eat, but there were different ways. Like during this time, a 12-year-old kid, I would take the train and go to the village and come back with a bag of fruit or in other ways. In other words, you contributed in whatever way you could to what the family's livelihood was.

So this is life. And life is getting more and more difficult. Because like I remember my father, because he was a Jew, at the end of '43, he was kicked out of his job with the Fernex company. And after that, he had to look just for odd jobs.

Excuse me, what was the name of that company?

Fernex. And he was kicked out of his job. And after that, he had to look for odd jobs. And that's when life started to be

rough. That's the end of '43.

And the sense in the air is that it's no good. And I remember that at that time we had a radio. And an expression that was prevalent that listening to the music-- and music was supposed to make you feel better. But the sense was that all the news is just bad news, that things are going from bad to worse.

As a kid, in the end of '43, I'm 13 years old. I can't say that I understood very much of what was going on or that I was able to relate to that. As a kid, I had my dreams. I wanted to be a soccer star. And I wanted to have a lot of good things and all that. And I wasn't really comprehending what was going on.

I just remember the things that I observed. And that is Jews, strange Jews, coming through our city and being at the synagogue and people talking about what was occurring in Poland. And I remember the expressions that the Germans killed the Jews and that it's no good to stay and to wait around. Because, eventually, the Germans will get to us, too.

Although there were two kinds of things that were said. There were those who were saying, well, Hungary will never do to its Jews what Poland did to its Jews or the likes. But then there were those who would say, well, you have to try to get away from here because things are getting worse. And the Germans will do here what they have done in other places. But it was very definite realization on the part of the adults of what was going on.

Now, it sounds like there were basically two schools of thought, those who felt that they should leave and those who felt that things would not be as bad as in Germany. And of course, as you said at the time, you were looking at this through 13-year-old eyes. In looking back, did people's opinion seem to have anything to do with whether or not they were Zionists, whether they actively had ever thought about going to Israel or had such discussions in their home?

Well, thinking back now, what I realize is having an environment that's basically there is the Hungarian government and then the general population being basically in agreement with what the Germans were doing. I don't know what the options were, what was realistic. But it was mostly rescue fantasies that people were talking about. Because realistically, as later on I became aware, there wasn't anyone who was willing to help the Jews. Or there wasn't anyone who was willing to take in the Jews.

You mentioned there was basically-- as things got more difficult, you found very few people willing to help. You did mention-- of course, this goes back a few years-- this man who warned your brother not to get on the train. Was he Jewish or not?

No, no. In the village, we had a close knit relationship with some of the villagers. In the city, that changed. In the city, it was just our family, which I mentioned already, and some of the other Jewish family that we related to. I attended the public school, but the non-Jewish kids would not play with the Jew. So I was mostly dependent and depended and more and more segregated into associating primarily with Jews.

Now, did you ever then really have any non-Jewish friends in the school since you were going into the high school grade and they had already excluded you? So you never--

No, no. In the public school, there were other non-Jewish kids, but the non-Jewish kids just would not associate with Jews. And not only that, but I remember when we were taking-- and that's what happens now in April 1944.

The Jews were rounded up in the city and taken to the ghetto. And so some of my classmates who were serving in the Levente, which was the equivalent of the Boy Scout, wearing the guns, volunteered their help and helped round up the Jews and escort them to the ghetto.

And this was done by the teenage boys from the city? They were helping the Hungarian police who were carrying out the rounding up of the Jews in the city. And so here-- where my grandfather was taken away from us.

And I understand that they were taken first to the synagogue. He was, at that time, 86 years old, but he still had his faculties and was with it. He was taken to the synagogue. And that was the last that I heard or seen of him. And I

understand that they were killed there. Then we were taken to a brick factory. And that constituted the place for the aggregation of the Jews of that city.

Let me ask you. Was your grandfather singled out, or was it that at that point they just took away all the old people?

All the old people.

So that was really your first major family loss from the war.

Right.

And until that time, had your family directly suffered any antisemitic incidents other than what you've mentioned about the kids not playing with you in high school?

Well, my father was kicked out of his job. And generally, the non-Jews would treat Jews with indifference at best and with open hostility.

So there was a definite progression of things just getting worse and worse until the Hungarian police rounded everybody up?

And took us to the ghetto, right.

At that point, were there already actually Germans in Hungary?

Yes. I remember when they came in. And they were going through the city on number of occasions. But they moved in, and they had their headquarters, which was adjacent to the school that I was attending.

And you could see them engaging in their drills. And to this day, I can hear the footsteps of how they are marching. And it's not a pleasant memory.

When did the Germans first come into Hungary?

I don't know the exact date of when they came into Hungary. But into our city, they came in toward the end of '43. And I won't recall the exact date.

So is that the point at which you were first aware, again, as a youngster that there was actually a war as opposed to a persecution of the Jews? Or had you been aware already of the scope of what was going on in Europe?

Oh, we were aware of what was going on, and there was constant listening to the news. And you heard that this city fell and that city fell. And were the Russians defeated? Because that's about what you heard on the Hungarian radio and the progress of the German army and their victories and all that. That was a constant source of concern.

Now, one other thing, when the Germans came in toward the end of '43, then Jews were ordered to wear a yellow star. And there were limitations as to what were the hours that you were allowed on the street. You had to wear your yellow star. And you--

You had a curfew imposed.

Right. And I think it was like two hours during the day that you were permitted to be on the street. But here is when being in the work detail once or twice a week was, in a way, helpful. Because it permitted me and my brother to be out of the home at other times.

Did you have any opportunity then to bring back things your family needed, or were you too closely watched for that?



Well, we took our chances. Because I remember until we were taken to the ghetto, since my appearance was not in any kind of way indicative of being Jewish, I would take the train and go to the village and pick up a bag of fruit and take it back and bring it back to the train or go to the villagers and try to get flour and get flour and bring it back so that my mother can bake. We did that until the last day, until we were taken to the ghetto.

So in a sense, you know, that forced you to become an adult earlier because you were expected to contribute. And your family depended on you. And when your family depended on you, you had to do the things that were expected of you. And for that reason, then you had to relate to things with somewhat of a greater maturity.

And I remember that it wasn't that easy. Because as a kid, you would rather play. And you would rather live in the world that kids like to live in. And this was forced on you when you know that the train is full of Hungarian police and German soldiers and that they are going from one to the other and trying to single out anyone who is not supposed to be on the train. So obviously, you are in fear that they may catch you. But you know that your family depends on you getting back with what you have. And so--

You go ahead and do it anyhow.

--you go ahead and do it anyway.

During this period when things became more difficult, but before the worst happened, before you were taken to the ghetto, do you remember what kinds of thoughts you had then about the future, about how things might turn out?

Yeah. As kids, we had a lot of wild thoughts about America. And I remember that I had an uncle in New York. And my father was supposed to come to this country, too. So we had all kinds of discussions about what America is like, what life in America is.

And as a kid, I remember that as things were getting worse that we couldn't wait for America to get into the war because the Americans will beat the hell out of Germans. And so there was a lot of talk among the adults, but more so among the kids of-- I don't know how realistic that was. But the expectation was that, when the Americans will enter the war, then they will beat the hell out of the Germans.

And we were getting more and more disappointed of the relative ease that the Germans were beating the Russians. And that was a source of distress, seeing how the Russian bear was crumbling and how the German machinery was just so successful in finishing off Russia. And up to '42, there was very little hope that the Russians will indeed withstand and will be able to resist the German successful occupation.

But it was mostly in the form of rescue fantasies that especially kids were thinking about. The Americans will join, and then the Americans will conquer the Germans. And then we'll be free, and all this will be over.

But what this has done? In a way, it has blocked any kind of normal aspirations. Like you didn't think, like you usually do when you grow up, what it is that you want to do when you grow up because of the war setting and not being able to attend school regularly, being out of school.

And even my brother, who started high school-- and my parents made a great financial sacrifice to make it possible financially for him to attend the high school. When the Hungarians took over Transylvania, he was kicked out because he was Jewish. And he could no longer continue attend high school.

And so the thinking of kids was not very much that the future is great. The immediate concern was how the threat posed by the German occupation, and then the Hungarian alliance with them, how that will be stopped. And the only rescue that I can think of at the time was thinking that the Americans will do that.

So your future thoughts really just went to the end of the war. And after that it wasn't known.

Right. That was a constant line that you looked forward to. The war will be over. The war will be over, and we'll

prevail. And that I remember even in the hardest of times. That thought never left me. In other words, there was never an expectation that whatever the Germans are doing will do me in.

The thought was, first, I can think that I was expecting the American might to do that. Later on, I began to realize that there are some things that I will have to do on my own in order to get through. But there was always the end of the line that was real, that I perceived it to be there. And I was looking forward to that.

But in the meantime then, as you said, the things got much worse before they got better. You mentioned that the Nazis came to your village at the end of 1943, or your town that is at that time. And by April '44, you were all taken to a ghetto. And that ghetto was at a brick factory.

Right.

They used the brick factory as the ghetto. And that was outside of town or in the town?

It was at the outskirts of town. And people were given place like sardines, enough space for one person to be next to another person. And so on the floor, there were-- I don't remember the number of people in the room. But the rooms were packed like sardines. And each one got a small space. Like we were at that time--

But you were still-- other than your grandfather, who had been taken away, you were still together as a family.

Right. The four of us were together. In the meantime, my uncle was taken to forced labor. My cousin was taken to forced labor. My younger cousin was taken. And so there were the four of us who were together in the ghetto.

Had any of your family already been deported at this time?

No.

And then each part of your family, those who weren't living in the same village or town with you, were living elsewhere--

In other places, yeah.

--nearby. And they were all taken to forced labor.

Taken to their respective-- well, the older ones, the older men, were taken to forced labor. They families then around the same time in Transylvania were all taken to ghettos.

Looking back, how did the Jewish community react at the time? Was there any reaction?

It did not react. It did not react. And I have a hard time explaining and understanding that. The realities were there. You know, obviously, as a kid, I didn't comprehend them. But the only thing that I remember is a very fervent prayer that Jewish holidays have become more and more expressions of just very loud and very expressive form of prayer.

And I guess, in part, there was a real hope that God will help and save. And so that's about what I recall. Because even--

But in other words, in your town, there was no organization?

No form of resistance of any kind.

Or was there a Judenrat or Jewish council?

There was a community Jewish council that had the responsibility in the ghetto, the administrative responsibility for taking the lists and for carrying out the orders of the German police that cooperated with the Germans. And the ghetto

life-- see, unlike ghetto life where in other places was a lengthy experience, we were in the ghetto to the best of my recollection something like two and a half or three weeks. So it was a very, very short stay.

We got there. We didn't comprehend yet what was occurring. And they were rounding us up and taking us to the railroad station to be taken to Auschwitz.

Did you know at that time where you were going, where others were going?

I recall very definite discussions of that the trains are being taken to Germany and that, in Germany, those that can work will work. And those that cannot work are killed. And to what extent those were-- I guess they were substantiated because there were a lot of Jews from other countries that were wandering through our town, our city, and were telling people as to what it is that they saw and what it is that they know.

And one of the things that kind of stuck in my mind that may be kind of ridiculous now, but I remember the day that we were rounded up to be taken to the train. The people who had money were looking for places. Like, remember the Wailing Wall that there are places where you can stick in something? The people were looking for places where they can hide jewelry, where they can hide money.

So those people did have some hope, apparently, that they might come back?

So some people had the thoughts and people with the money. But what stuck in my mind-- and it looks ridiculous. And probably that's one of the reasons that to this day I don't attribute much value to money or to financial matters, seeing people that they are trying to divest themselves of their possessions that they have and hide them somewhere that they may find it when they will get back.

Instead of perhaps using the money to buy their way out? Or was that already too late?

I don't know how realistic because I don't recall in those years that anyone from our city could find his way out or that tried or that succeeded.

In looking back, do you attribute that to any particular reason? I mean, generally while it was difficult, we know a few people from different places succeeded in buying their way out. And in any time or location, you're usually able to find someone who is willing to take a bribe.

Probably hindsight or being a Monday morning quarterback is a lot easier than being in this situation then and there. The overall atmosphere, as much as I can recall it in retrospect now, was not one of discussions of let's go into hiding or let's go and find our way out of here or any such discussions. It was a lot more like let's pray to God and God would help. And God will not let happen to us too many bad things.

I guess, in some ways, the adherence to the religious ways and the placing your fate in the hands of God was what characterized the Jewish leadership in my community. And the expressions have to be prayer to God. And you place your hand in God, and God will save you. And if you will do just right with God, then God will do right with you.

OK, I guess this is perhaps an appropriate point to take a pause. And we'll come back with the second part of the interview in just a short time.

OK.