

This interview is part of the Holocaust videotaping project conducted by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section. I'm Dr. Zev Harel of Cleveland State University. And the guest today is Mr. Jack York.

Mr. York, at the end of the previous tape, you were telling what conditions were in the camp-- in the work camp that you were in Oberbayern. When did you leave that place? And what were the conditions?

Well, we were working in those camps, as I was in these camps in the Oberbayern, and part of Niederbayern. There are two connecting up. It's like the South and the East, that's what they call us out there.

We were strictly working on the outside. Like I said before, we were working in the fields. We were working on railroads. We were tending to horses. We were doing carpentry work, everything to maintain the German status of war, to help them to maintain-- remember we were taking on trucks in the mornings. And they put us on the army trucks, and we go out and to work.

And they would have what they call a kapo, which was like a foreman. And he would set you up. I remember they put me on a jackhammer. I was only about 15 years old. Put me on a jackhammer, and I would work on a jackhammer, dig up some things.

If you ask me what I was doing there, I didn't know. They dig, and you dig. The next day, they come. They say, cover it up. You cover up. That's what their thing.

But while we were there, we were aware of the situation getting nearer because we already heard more planes. At night, you could hear shooting in distances and planes and certain things like that. So we were put-- in one morning, we were put in boxcars. And we were shipped out, destination unknown.

But as we were driving, as we were going with those boxcars-- they were open boxcars this time-- as we were going, they had the SS troops sitting on top of the boxcars looking down on us with machine guns, like we were the real criminals of war, or whatever. We were seen planes coming overhead. Sometimes we threw our heads in the air and saying, hooray. And while we do that, somebody would shoot at the heads.

I wind up in Buchenwald. I didn't know, but we wind up in a camp called Buchenwald. They took us into Buchenwald. And I was in Buchenwald there.

As they took us in, I was in Compound 53, or Block 53. I don't know how to describe that particular thing. But I think in Block 53, on Compound 53. There were a lot of raids going on. The Germans, either they sensed they were near the end of the war, or something was going on because they were coming around and destructing. A lot of Ukrainians was there, a lot of bad situation all the way around.

I remember I hid in a room with another couple of guys. There were about 200, 300 dead people in this room. And we were laying there for three, four days. We were hiding out with the dead.

And then we came out, and they regrouped us. And they shipped us out from there. I wasn't there more than maybe a week or 10 days, maybe two weeks. I know when I came out, I don't remember if I even could walk at that particular time.

But they regrouped us. They put us on boxcars again. And they start shipping us. And we were again being chased by airplanes, by the Allies. Might be Russian or the United States. But we were chased by the Allies. They were bombing-- the planes-- the trains at the particular time.

The amazing thing was we had a guard sitting inside the train. And they would shoot and sometimes shoot the guard and not touch us. It was amazing. Not too many of us.

But what the bad situation was there were probably about 5,000 or 6,000 people on this boxcars. And I don't think we

came out 1,500 or 2,000 alive. When we actually came to the destination, there were not too many left alive because people were just riding back and forth because this rail was shot out, so they put us on another track.

And then I remember one time, after weeks of not eating, or a week or so, we were drinking water. They laid out-- I remember some guy took the sole of a shoe, of the wooden shoes we were wearing-- they call them clunkers, or clompers, or whatever they call them, their wooden shoes like the Swiss people where. They took those shoes off. They ripped off the interior. And they boil it on the fire with water and drink the juice.

Some people were cooking grass. I myself was drinking grass juice. They say it's healthy. So I drink grass juice. I guess maybe it was healthy. I'm here. I don't know. But that's what we did.

And then at one time, they laid down a blanket on middle of the field. They chased us all out, whoever's alive. And they cut a loaf of bread in maybe 40 or 50 pieces. And they said, go get it. And as the people jumped in to get a slice of bread, they were shooting in the pile. So actually the bread was not bread. It was a bloody bread. It was all a mess.

That was when the invasions were beginning from the Allies really to put pressure on the Germans. We were losing a lot of people at that particular time. Like I said, I think we were 5,000 on those boxcars. I think we came out maybe 2,000, maybe, I don't remember exactly. I was a baby. I don't remember exactly.

But you grow up to be a man. You grow up. Your mind is like a man. It works like a man because the United States have a saying, the survival of the fittest. And as I was young, like I said before, I made a statement before, that I don't believe with my whole heart, God forbid if those things would happen today, that I could survive another Hitler, another Germany, another uprising, another true life the way it was. I do not believe I could do that or see what I saw in my younger life.

So where were you liberated?

I was liberated-- I wind up in Theresienstadt. It's a part of Czechoslovakia. It was also cavalry. I think was a Czech cavalry or soldier compound. We're liberated there by the Russians. That was a part of the Russia that--

Do you remember the liberation? What you remember about it?

I can tell you exactly what I remember. We were in this compound. And there were Germans, of course, on the outside, all around. We woke up in the morning whoever could walk. I think we were about 1,500 people in this compound, or 1,000, between 1,000 and 1,500.

We woke up in the morning, one morning, and it was all full silent. We did not hear nothing drop, awful silent. And, of course, as the younger boys, we were a little boisterous. We went and opened the gates. The gates were heavy. I don't know how to describe you European gates, but there were heavy, wooden, old type gates. It take about two people to pull a gate open. You know what I'm saying, those heavy doors, gates. You probably know those things.

And we looked out. And there was no soldiers around. There was nobody around. We didn't hear. We didn't know. There was nobody. We just walked out on the streets.

And as we walked out, it was worst than it happened before because until the Russian got to us and the Red Cross got to us, a lot of us died of dysentery, typhus. Typhus was the worst sickness. I remember in this compound, the Red Cross came to us. And in this compound when the Red Cross came, it was just a blood bed in there. I think 600 people died of typhus and died of dysentery.

They removed-- they burned everything to the ground in there. I think they even burned the pillars, the pillars they held it up. Everything was burned because of the dysentery and the typhus. I think 600 people died in that particular compound.

I myself weighed 58 pounds-- 58 kilo, which is about 108 pounds I think, right? That's what I weighed, 100 or 108

pounds. I myself was a structure of bones. I was hardly a walking thing.

But what saved me was the Red Cross got to me somehow, I don't know how, but they got to me. And they were treating me with shots and soup. They were giving me-- I remember as of now, they were giving me a little bit of soup. And they says, just drink that and don't drink the water and don't do nothing. They were talking to you. And they were giving you vitamins, certain things, types.

And as you progressed, a week's time, I was strong enough that I worked with the Red Cross to help my survivors. The ones that were dying, we buried. They were giving me typhus shot. I remember I carried one of my friends. I carried him on my shoulder. He had typhus to the hospital. And somehow or another, they said that my resistance was such that they gave me that I survived him and did not get it. We had cholera in the camps. I have never knew what cholera is until I got out of this camp.

And as the survival-- as the thing progressed, the United States Army came around. And the Allies got together. And then what they call the UNRRA or the ORT-- UNRRA I think it was.

UNRRA.

UNRRA, that's what it was, the name. UNRRA.

United Nations Relief.

Right. They came around, and they start take us and what they call delice us. Delicing means--

Cleaning you up.

Cleaning us up from our lice and the worms they ate us up. Everybody had sores. So cleaning, the fitters got cleaned up, delicing us, cleaning us, and bathe us, and put us in fitness back together, and try to work on our minds to get us back, whoever was possible to get us back. A lot of them wind up in the hospitals, the ones who could survive, be survived. The ones that couldn't, we help bury. And that was the beginning of mine--

Yeah. I know you would like to get away from thinking about this. But I want to hold you a little longer. Looking back at this time, and if you had to explain to someone who has not gone through what you did, what were the greatest losses that you experienced during those years?

What I have lost through my life? Well, first of all, I lost my family. Like I said before, my mom-- I made a statement yesterday to Dr. Zev Harel. I made a statement. And I'd like to repeat the statement.

I told him, I said, it just came to my mind a couple of days ago. I was dreaming about it, and I says to Dr. Zev Harel, well, you know, Doctor, I lost a brother and I lost my mom. And I don't believe, if they would come in front of me right now, and somebody would say one of your brothers is alive or your mom, that I would recognize either one of them. I don't believe-- in my vivid memory, I cannot remember my mom's face.

Although when I'm talking about it, it's just-- like how can I say? I got tears inside of my heart by talking. And it's just hard on me right now at this moment. But I would like somebody to come and say, your mom is alive or we got one of your brothers alive. And it's hard to believe that I would even recognize them. I don't believe that.

One of my brothers I did find when I went up in Germany back again, which I did not get to this part--

Yeah, we'll get to that in a little while. But think a little further, what were some other things that you lost during these war years?

I lost my education. Who knows what I might have become? I might have become another Einstein. As it turns out, I had to go through life and do the best I can with my life. So I lost my education.

You lost your family, education--

I lost my family. I lost everybody. I lost all my family left over. All I had left after the war was my dad and my brother, which I found way past after the war.

You said before that you don't know whether you'd have the strength to go through again. But--

Oh, I believe I never would be able to.

Looking back, what do you think got you through?

What got me through, first thing what got me through was my youth. Thanks God for that. Second what got me through is the stamina to think in my mind, what was implanted in my mind by my elders, about my grandpa, my father, by everybody remember, he says, you're the oldest of the kids. I was the oldest son.

In Jewish tradition, if you're the oldest, you carry a burden on your shoulder. The burden is implanted in you like I implant in my kids now to say, you're the oldest of the family. You have to carry on with the tradition and with life. And you try to do so after I'm gone. So you implant.

Those things were implanted to me. Try with whatever strength you have. Survive and tell, if you ever have kids, whoever you come in contact, whoever you talk to, to any kind of people, to any groups, tell them what happened that should never happen again, that should remember that tyranny should not exist. It should be wiped out. One human being should be able to respect another human being for what he may be. His religion, his creed, his color, or wherever he may be, he should be respected.

So you think that you had some inner strength. Where there times that others helped you?

Of course. Without help one another, we had-- there were-- I remember we got together with a group of guys like ourselves, youngsters, that were about my age. And we were the ones that were the strength for some of the elder people in there. We would go out actually what you call and we would sometime go out and sneak out and steal some bread with the risk of our lives. We would steal some bread, some cigarettes, some tobacco.

I remember I stole a pack of tobacco. And I had it in the boxcar. And the Wehrmacht-- not the SS, the Wehrmacht because the SS would kill you. But the Wehrmacht is just a regular soldier. He would sit on a box of his food, his ration food. And we were sitting there and rolling cigarettes. And he say, who got the tobacco? And when we said, we got tobacco. He gave us some bread in the boxcar. The wind up was they took him out and they shot him because he helped us. But the meantime, we survived.

So you helped each other?

That was-- we had to.

You lost a lot. But--

I lost everything. I lost-- if somebody would come to me today and say, we'll give you 20 years of your life back of what you lost, I don't think you can buy it. People say they'll go to jail, and they lose two or three years for a crime they commit, if it's stealing or whatever, they commit a crime. Those people don't realize they lose two or three years of their life what a precious thing life is.

I, myself, I don't believe that anybody can buy my life back. 20 years of my life they couldn't buy it back because exactly what I lost is more than 20 years of my life. If I got my sanity today, and I've got my life today put together is because of my drive, of my inner inhibition, of my self-being, saying stay up and prove to the world that the world is not as bad as some people make it look bad. Try to correct it. I try to do so if I can.

So you lost a lot. But do you think that these experiences that you have gone through have given you any strength or anything that others don't have?

That's exactly what I just said. By going through what I went through, it gave me-- although not having as much education as I would like to have, but it gave me enough education like to say-- and the United States has a saying, calling street wise-- it gave me enough street-wise education to know if I see something wrong to teach that this is wrong. I try to inflict those things in my kids mind.

The strength that I have I try to put in other peoples. I had some school sessions with some schools from here, like Wiley High School for Dr. Rubinsky. I just had from Burton High School some. And we tried to inflict my strength, my point that I have learned into other people's mind, especially the younger generation, this thing should never happen again. That's what that gave me, the education.

OK. So we left off at liberation time. How did you go about starting life again?

Well, when I was liberated in Theresienstadt, in Czechoslovakia, like I said, I was helped a lot by the Red Cross. Somehow through my-- like I said, through my inhibitions, maybe I was more put together to my strength than the rest of them. I worked with the Red Cross.

There was an English doctor there. I never forget it. I don't remember his name. He told me, he says, if you got nobody-- and he saw that I was what they call a hustling kid. I was helping people. I was out to do for the people. And he says he will try and talk to his superiors and see if he can take me with him.

I didn't understand it then. But I understood later that he wanted to adopt me since I didn't know if I had any family left. But one morning, we went out on the streets. We were walking. We were free to walk then already because was liberated.

I was walking with a bunch of fellas. I don't remember. We were walking either to the UNRRA to get some clothes. Those are the only things we could go, either to UNRRA or to see what life is going to bring all about us again.

Some gentleman came up to me, or some bunch of people came up to me, and said, Jack, what are you doing walking here? Do you know your father is alive? Those are the exact words of the man said. You know your father is alive?

And I says, yes, where? He says, your father is in Poland. He is in your hometown in Poland.

When did you last see your dad?

My dad was here in the United States.

No, I mean then, before--

My dad, the last I saw my dad when they separated me from Auschwitz.

And you were sent away to the labor camp.

I was sent away. I didn't know where my dad went. I didn't know where my brother went. I was a brother that is a year and two months younger than I am.

So here, you heard that your father is alive.

Exactly what happened. So I went up to this doctor. And I said to him, somebody just came now, told me my dad is alive. What should I do?

He put me on a transport, dressed me up, gave me some Red Cross supplies and some food, dressed me up, put me on a transport, and sent me to Poland. And I came back home to Łódź, which I did find my father. Dramatic, I cannot tell you. It's indescribable what a dramatic situation.

But that's all. There was just me and my father. My father worked at his trade because that's what he knew. He was a barber. And I stayed with him in Poland.

And there was occupied by the Russians. I did not like what the Russians were doing because later on the Russians were acting almost the same way like some of the German soldiers, except they were not killing you. They were coming in and they were raiding you. And they were taking you out of there and send you to Russia. I did not like that. So I made up my mind that I'm going back to Germany to one of displaced persons camps.

So how much time did you spend now in Łódź when you came back?

I would say four or five months, maybe more.

But your--

Four or five months I spent in Łódź.

With your dad.

With my dad. And I told my dad, I says, because of my age, the year of my age, they were drafting into the Russian army. I did not want to join the Russian army. I just went out of a situation. I was just cut up. I was not even healed. I didn't have my strength back. And they tried to send me already away to Russia.

And I didn't feel that I belonged there. So I felt my best way out is go back to Germany and see if I can start my life there. And somehow or another, I smuggled my way in back to Germany because from Poland I had to smuggle my way back.

And your dad stayed behind in Łódź.

And my dad stayed there. My dad married in Poland to a lady-- my dad married in Poland to a lady that-- well, she was like a friend of the family for years back. And she came back from the concentration camps. My mom did not. And they married. And I have a stepsister, which lives in the United States. She lives in Seattle, Washington.

Do you remember what was like when you came back to Łódź after all these years?

When I came back to Łódź, everything looked strange. The people were strange. The Polish people itself was strange to me because I felt that they betrayed us. So to me it was a strange thing.

I felt very strange in this particular home ground when I was walking. I could not stay in the house that we were living in, or the place-- no, there was no house. There was rooms in the apartments, compounds, because I believe there those people betrayed me. They betrayed my life, my family. I lost everything.

I went back to the house where we lived in, to the room we lived in. People, the Gentile people, they were not sent to the concentration camps, or whatever. They occupied it. When I came in there, they would open arms. They were trying to greet me.

But there was false greetings. It was all false. And I believe if I stay any longer that I either go insane, I'll commit a crime. And there was one other reason that I had to leave. At that time, I was going on 18. And I felt if I do not leave I will commit a crime. So I had to leave that particular time because I would commit a crime then.

So you just didn't feel that you can readjust there?

I could not adjust there because everybody that came up to me, they would shake my hand and would say, oh, you're alive. Good to see you back. But that didn't mean it.

They would ask you questions just like I'm telling you now. How did you survive? They did not mean it. They were not sincere because a lot of the Poles-- there were some they did help. I don't condemn the nation any more than I condemn the German nation. I condemned the people they did the wrong and the people that follow the wrong because not everybody is bad. There are some humane people.

And I felt that I could not stay there because of the betrayal of the way the Polish people were themselves conducting towards the Jews. And then when you come back, they were trying to say, like somebody says, oh, how did you make it? And it was all false, under false pretexts.

Do you remember what went through your mind in those days are still-- you realized you can't stay there. But what were you thinking you're going to do with your life?

Well, I was thinking when I would go back to Germany because they were saying the UNRRA was saying that there is a way they were helping us. If you go back to Germany, either I can-- I was young enough to learn a trade. They would take me to a trade.

Or I was going to Aliyah to the state of Israel, at that time was Palestine. And we were trying to get our own country back at that particular time. And they said they needed people. And I figured if I do anything with my life that's the life I was going to do with. And in order to get to Palestine, or today, the state of Israel, I had to wind up in Germany somehow, which that was my goal.

So you started off to Germany?

Right.

Where did you go to Germany?

I wound up in Landsberg am Lech, which is between Augsburg and Munich. It's right in between. It's a small town between Augsburg and Munich. I would say it's 70 kilometers from Augsburg and about 85 or 90 kilometers to Munich. So we were right in between, the small town.

And as I got there, we had the UNRRA, the ORT. We had the Jewish displaced persons camps that you register. We were self-sufficient at that particular time. Everybody did their own-- people were working in certain jobs. People were dealing in markets. There was a lot of black markets going on too.

We had our own police force, which was acknowledged by the United States Army, which I was then drafted in to the police department. I was a policeman. I was a motorcycle policeman for the displaced persons camp of Landsberg am Lech. And I worked there. I was there until 1949. I got there in January of '45, I think. Or late '45 anyway, late '45.

Probably in January '46 probably.

Around '46, right, that what it was. Late I think it was, late. Got to be '46. And I became a policeman. And I worked as a policeman.

And I worked for the provost marshal, which is the provost marshal is the same thing as a mayor of an occupied zone. I work for them as a courier on a motorcycle between camps and between-- understanding between the United States Army and our own displaced persons camps. We had our own mayors, what they call, our own people.

We had things like that, the life was starting-- they were starting forming a life for us so we did not go on killing or feeling-- because a lot of our people had their part in our heart where we had a bad animosity about Germans. A lot of

times if a German would start something, we go in and just run in and, you know, cause a whole ruckus in the whole town, or whatever. So they were trying to teach us to bring us back-- we were like wild animals-- to bring us back to the normal civilized lives. And that's what actually happened.

So you didn't have really a youth. And you didn't have the opportunity to live a normal growth.

Oh, no.

How did you start getting yourself set and thinking about life in normal terms? Do you remember?

Well, what I can remember, and I can tell you a little bit about it. Like I said before, you grow up before you age. Your mind works ahead. You grow up before you age. You follow some of your elder system. You connect yourself into an elderly group. And you see and observe what those people are doing, how they do what their lives.

And you're trying to form your own life. You meet people. Girl boy meets. Girl meets boy. And you try-- the girl says, well, maybe you should go out and learn this kind of trade. Maybe you should do this. And you say, well, let's get married. And should we have kids? And a lot of them-- that kind of way and we start forming our own life and forming our own inhibitions, our own selves together.

In this displaced persons camp? Right.

In Landsberg?

Right. Right. Right. We had a lot of trials in Germany. As a matter of fact, in Landsberg am Lech was the jail, the famous cell is there or the jail I think where Hitler painted these things or wrote the book Mein Kampf, one of the two. And I was one of those cells. But I don't remember what he wrote. I was one of the-- matter of fact, I was guarding one of those things one night.

So you were about three years in Landsberg.

Right.

When did you decide to leave? And how did that happen?

Well, we had quotas. In the United States was issuing quotas.

And you applied for a migration to the United States?

And I had nobody in the United States. As you probably know, I have no family. I had nobody in the United States. And I was single.

So they had quotas. One day they issued a quota. And I applied. I went in and signed my name. So they called me. A week later or so, or two weeks later, they called on the-- they used to have microphones out in the camps. And every day you would go out there and listen to the microphones.

And they would say, Jack York, please, such or such a date, come to Munich. So I took that day and I went to Munich. In Munich, we had what they call, like the Jewish Welfare-- I forgot what they call it.

The American Joint Distribution.

Joint Distribution, yeah, that's it, the Joint Distribution. And I went in there. And I gave them my name. I says, you call my name, and I here I am.

And so they asked me if I have family in the United States, or if I have anybody in the United States. And I told them I



have nobody in the United States, which I did not. And do I have any relatives that live here in the United States? I says, not to my knowledge I have nobody. I didn't know. I was too young to know if I did have anybody.

And so they took all this information down. And they looked me over. And they sent me to about five doctors or so to check me over. And I was, I guess, young. And I was pretty, by then, enough recuperated. Figured, you know, I will not be a burden of the United States. So a few months later, a month later, they sent me to the United States.

So when did you arrive in the United States?

I arrived in the United States June 2, 1949.

Where did you--

June 2, 1949, yeah.

Where did you come to in the United States?

I came to Boston Harbor. And the way I came to Boston Harbor? With a small suitcase, which I think I dropped in the harbor after I landed because there was nothing in it. I just had a shirt that I changed on the boat and the old clothes I threw it. And that's all I had. So I think I left it in the harbor. If somebody is fishing down there, might find it yet. But that's what I got in the Boston Harbor.

And I landed in Boston. And from Boston, they brought me to Cleveland. And Cleveland, the Joint, I think is it-- no, the Jewish Welfare, the Jewish-- on Taylor, what do they call them? The Jewish Family Service, that's right.

The Jewish Family Service assigned me to a lady by the name of Mrs. Greenberg. I never forget that lady. She was very nice. And I reported to her. And she had for me-- I lived in a rooming house at 105th and Superior on Olivet with some Jewish people there.

I stayed there. And they found me a job. I worked at 142nd and Kinsman by Kraus. Two brothers, they owned a dry goods store. And I was packing merchandise. I was helping bring it up. I was like a stock fellow. I worked for them because like I said, I did not want to be a burden of the Jewish Family Service or of the United States. So I did that.

And then I met some people while you were around. And I got a job in Fisher Body. I worked in Fisher Body. I worked in Fisher Body, I think, for two or three years. I don't remember exactly how many years there.

And from Fisher Body, I went to work for a plumber. I work in a plumber. I was digging sewers and putting in water lines. I work for Schweiner Plumbing Supply Company. And then Mr. Schweiner went out of business. Because business was bad, he went out of business.

So I went to work for America Whole Chain Supply Company as a truck driver. I drove a truck for them with plumbing supplies for all of Cleveland, a very big supply company. And I also drove a cab in the city of Cleveland part-time. Then I got married in the United States.

When did you get married? When did you meet your wife? And tell me--

I met my wife-- that's a nice thing. I wound up in Bremerhaven, which is Bremen port. Hafen is a port. I wound up in Bremen port in Germany going to the United States. As we were standing in line to go on board the ships, we had-- our ship was General H. Muir.

And as we were going to the ship, this lady stood in front of me. She had an accordion. She wore a hat and all this with a veil on her face. I remember as of now. She had a red hat on with a veil. And I asked her if I can help her carry the accordion. And she kind of allowed me.

The ship was maintained by ourselves. We were our own maintaining people on the ship. In order to promote people on the ship to come to the United States, we had to maintain our own-- we were serving our own food. We cleaned the ship. Except driving the ship-- we're painting inside the ship, not the outside, the inside-- except driving or taking care of the vessel--

Navigating, right.

We were maintaining our own thing. I was a policeman inside the ship. Matter of fact, I don't know how they found out, but they made me a policeman inside the ship. My wife was a waitress overseer for the little kids. She took care of little kids like we all took care of ourselves. And that's how I met my wife on the boat coming to the United States.

Did she come to Cleveland as well?

She came to Cleveland because her father lived here. My wife has a-- if I'm allowed to I can tell you a small little story about that. My wife comes from a small town in Poland, which at one time was Lithuanian, at one time was Russia, and at one time belonged to Poland. Whoever was the strongest one. She was--

What's the name of the town? That's OK if you don't remember.

It's not far from Vilna.

OK.

Not far from Vilna. I remember. While I'm talking, I'll remember. I'll get it together here-- Oszmiana, Oszmiana. And they were living there. My wife's family had a brother, her father's brother lived in the United States for many or many years. He had a man's store on Broadway because I helped him in the store when I came to the United States-- a man store on Broadway.

So in 1938, before the war broke out, my father-in-law received a visa to come to the United States. And then when he-- with the idea that if he is here for a few months or so, he can bring his whole family over. So he left at home a wife with three little kids, three little kids and a wife.

And when he came over here, the war broke out. And he could not go back. And he could not bring the kids over. So they suffered through the war by themselves. My wife lost a mother and a sister. They were in Stutthof. There were all kinds of camps.

The story is very ironical because when I was going to marry my wife in the city of Cleveland-- I married my wife in Cleveland. My father--

When did you get married?

I married in 1950. 1950, February the 18th.

You better remember that.

February 18, 1950, I married my wife. But when I was going to-- if I may tell you this story, it's a very interesting story.

Sure.

When I was going to marry my wife, my father lived in New York-- in Paterson, New Jersey. And he was married then to my stepmother. Of course, I wrote them a letter. And I says, I'm getting married in Cleveland. And I sent him-- at that time, they didn't have any money. And I already working for Fisher Body then. So I had made some money. And I sent them tickets to come to the United States, coming to Cleveland.

When they came to Cleveland, we went to the railroad station, the Terminal Tower, because they came by train, and my wife-- and my wife to be then-- we get there. As my father gets off the train with my stepmother, I turn around and I introduce my wife. And I says to my wife, this is my stepmother, and I'm going to marry you.

And they both faint. They were both in Stutthof in the concentration camps together on one bed. They were both helping each other. They were both working on farms. And I didn't know about it. That's how they got to know the whole family of theirs were with my wife. There were three sisters. And my wife was with another sister in the concentration camp in Stutthof. That's how they-- it's a small world, a miracle how that happened.

So you are in Cleveland since 1949.

'49, I'm in Cleveland here,

So and you establish yourself here in Cleveland.

I'm established. I opened up-- I went into the nightclub business, which I've been since 1958. Until 1958, I was working, like I said, I was driving a truck, and I was driving a cab. And I was working--

You worked hard.

I paid my dues.

Worked hard, but you're established now.

I am established in Cleveland.

And you are married.

I am married.

You have children.

I have two beautiful kids. And I have three grandchildren, which I love very much. And we are very happy family right now. And I'm teaching my kids and my son, and my daughter knows-- my daughter knows-- and my daughter, as matter of fact, is the second generation called Israel Foundation. She was one of the founders with Helen Frum of the second generation Kol Israel. So you see that my work did not go fruitless.

OK, I want to ask you a few questions about what you think, looking back at this experience and where you are today, in what way do you think that your experiences affected you, your health?

Well, my health is not the same because, like I said, I had blood poisoning in my system. When I came to Landsberg, I wound up in the hospital. I was in the hospital. And they had to transform the blood system.

I remember as of now, I don't know what the meaning of it was, but they were taking blood out of my rectum and inserting it in my arm. And I went through this procedure a while week because my whole body was in sores and my whole system was poisoned with blood. That was already after the war. I would say close to about six or seven months after the war when my system stopped bringing the whole thing out. So I was blood poisoning.

I also had blood poisoning over here. My legs are shattered. My knee, which right now I was told that I have to operate because I got chipped bones, which I never took care of, which I became arthritis in my knee. So I have to take care of that now because this infected my back.

I have back problems. I can very seldom walk and do a lot of things. At one time, let's see, two or three years ago, I was bedridden that I haven't walked. For two months I haven't walked. And through the doctors here they made a walk. But

now they wanted to operate on this particularly to relieve the pressure.

So your health is certainly affected by--

Oh, yeah, I got knife cuts on my back. I got a knife cut under my leg here, all from the blood poisoning that I received to release the-- relieve some of the poisoning that I had on me, the sores and everything. So I've been cut up pretty bad shape there.

How often do you think about your experiences that you went through?

Well, you don't forget those experiences. A lot of times, we sit. And you see, a lot of our friends now, somehow or another through the war we got affected enough in our body and our system. As we get older, the bodies don't withstand the tremendous impact that it had on us. It doesn't withstand. A lot of close of my friends are dying beyond their age.

Or near.

Beyond their age, way beyond their age. And when you look at it, I had a very close friend of mine died way beyond his age. And when you look at it and these dying, those things keep coming back in your mind that in normal circumstances, he would have lived a long time. Under normal things, he would have been a great person maybe, a good life, a good family, whatever it is. So those things inflicted.

A lot of times at night, you sleep. You get the nightmares. Those things look at you, and you see barbed wires. You wake up and you think you're counting sheep, but you see barbed wires. Those are the things that visualize that come to me.

And there's nothing you can do about it. You just try to make a day-to-day life. You've got to know-- I sweat many times. I get up perspiring, water pouring over me. My wife will tell you. She says I'm a walking zombie sometimes at night. I walk down, I drink water. I take orange juice. I sit in a chair to dry off. And then I go back to sleep. That happens quite often.

But you don't talk about it because I don't want to put fear in anybody else. And by saying those things and everything else, I might put a lot of fear into to my kids or whatever about my own thing. So I just don't say too many things.

Looking back at what we have experienced, what do you think is a survivor that we can tell the world?

I stated before, as a survivor, and also as a survivor right now, as I look back at it, what I would like to tell the world is to respect one another, to live with one another. Forget about tyranny. I stated it before and I keep saying it whenever I have a chance to talk to whatever I go to, please do not forget and do not let those things happen again. Treat any human being the way you want to be treated yourself with respect.

Remember, life is precious. You cannot buy life. You can only kill it out. So remember-- I keep talking to the youngsters-- the most important thing is the young generation that's coming up should remember. Do not follow somebody else's path. Let your own heart and your own mind be your guidance. And guide yourself to respect other people. And do not let this kind of thing happen again, ever.

You are a member of the Kol Israel Foundation. And you are an officer of the organization. What do you think the foundation can do?

Right now, I'm the vice president of the Kol Israel Foundation, Survivors of the Holocaust. And our organization is in existence here to see that we help other people, there are survivors that we can help. We try to keep as a unit together to help each other. We try to talk about our experiences to other people. We spread ourselves around. We try to build archives, museums, and whatever you have now.

So we spread ourselves around to talk. The younger people and people in school should get an education that they

should remember that something like this did happen because a lot of people come around today that write books and they say those things did not happen. I like one of those people to come and face me. Jack York is asking one of those people to come and face me and tell me that did not happen because those things did happen. This thing existed. And I hope it will never exist again.

That's what Kol Israel stands for, the survivors of the Holocaust stands for, to see that those things will never happen again. And we teach our kids. And our kids will teach our kids and other kids. And we hope that it goes to school, to education, that the education should improve people's mind, those things should not happen.

In what way do you think we can honor the memory of those that we lost during the war?

Well, the way we do, Kol Israel Foundation has built a monument here. I don't know if some of your people are aware. But if you're not, we have built a monument for the 6 million Jews. We have built a monument for the 6 million Jews out here, which stands on Mount Zion Memorial.

We brought six urns and six caskets. In the caskets, we have bones and hair and teeth and whatever you have now from all the concentration camps and the crematoriums. Every year on the High Holidays, between the two High Holidays, which is Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, Kol Israel Foundation, Survivors of the Holocaust, have a memorial service set up for the 6 million people.

We have some dignitaries come. We have some people, high office people come. And they conduct a prayer for the 6 million people. We usually have about 500 or 600 people. They come and participate in our memorial services for the people that we lost.

I know, Mr. York, that you are doing everything you can to commemorate both the memory of those that we lost during the war years and to have people learn from the bad experiences that unfortunately survivors had to go through. This concludes this tape. Mr. York was the guest today on this tape, which is part of the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section videotaping. I'm Dr. Zev Harel from Cleveland State University. Thank you.