

I'm Donna Chernin. Today, we are interviewing Ezra Lazar, a Holocaust survivor. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, the Cleveland Section. Mr. Lazar, I think we should maybe emphasize your youth at this time when you were struggling in the forest. You were how old?

About 15 years.

And you were saying that you think that that was almost younger than an American of 15 would be today.

Definitely, it's younger. We didn't have all the communication, no television, no radio, no newspaper, just everything by word. If it didn't come by word, we didn't know much about it, especially younger people.

And you found out about things you said from your uncle?

Yes. My uncle, my mother's brother, they took him earlier to Poland. The authorities, the fascist authorities, accused the Jewish people in that area they are not Czech citizens. They are Polish origin. And they took them by trains to Poland and just slaughtered them there in the forest and in the fields.

And one of them was my uncle. He was a survivor. He came back from Poland.

And I was even younger, about a year younger or two years younger. And he was telling that story to my mother the first few days when he came back from Poland. That's why it gave me the courage.

Because you heard what he said about everything--

Yes.

--all the atrocities and the murders. Otherwise, maybe you wouldn't even have known about it.

No, I wouldn't be--

Maybe that really did affect you because that made you realize you had to survive.

Definitely.

Because that was the alternative.

The thing--

They didn't know you were hearing this. They thought you were sleeping?

Yes. My mother-- my mother never know that I did hear about it. It would be too revolutionary to say to hear the uncle. But he passed the yeshiva, and almost a rabbi. And it's much longer than to be a rabbi here in this country, in the United States, to say where is God? How could they kill people like that, like animals? And that really gave me the courage not to go into it.

Yeah, that's really amazing. Now, is he the uncle that you talk about that lives in Cleveland?

Yeah.

He's the same man.

I have two uncles. One is a survivor. And one came here about 60 years ago.

The one who's a survivor is he the one you overheard talking. No, his brother.

His brother.

Brother, he didn't survive.

He didn't survive?

No.

The one that you heard--

He was with him together in a concentration camp, and he had typhus.

The one that you heard, then didn't-- well, your stories are so courageous about your life in the forest and how you helped the other people. The four women and the two other boys survive. Before we talk about the liberation, I was wondering if you had any other stories that you could recall from those 10 months in the forest.

It's hard--

To remember, sure.

--to remember. And for you it would be hard to ask the question, the reason you don't know. I really am amazed with the technology what we had there, my friend what he-- was supplying me food. He could have been get killed, that was the law.

Is this your Christian friend?

Yes. The Catholic family. He used to walk to a river about 10, 15 kilometers to grind the corn and sell me-- sell it-- it was a black market, just as another citizen, just as another citizen would pay for it. And that's amazing to me. I just got to give a lot of credit for that family.

And then, on the other hand, I had experience, some people neighbors came out and took out our pillows. And I recognized after I liberated they wouldn't give it to me back.

They wouldn't give it back?

No.

Amazing. So you had good people and bad people. Well, do you think you could have survived in the forest longer if you had to or was the war over at around the right time?

If the war was over in the right time--

What was happening right before the war ended?

It started already, the leaves start falling in the forest.

Oh, getting cold.

It's cold. And you couldn't-- the leaves are covering you up, you can go much closer distance. Or if the military are looking on the hills, in the forest, if there is no leaf, they can spot you miles away. You couldn't move around. We was very worried about that thing.

So you used the leaves as a protection.

Sure. In the summer. There was another thing. I am Jewish, this is why I'm a survivor. If there wouldn't be partisans in the forest, I really don't think I would have a chance. They would know just that there is Jewish people there. If you didn't have the power-- if you didn't have the power, they would follow us.

Like I was saying before, all the marchers, they had dogs. And the people had rifles. If you were passing by beside the horses, they would kill you. Or they didn't know there was partisans in the forest that was a big plus. It did protect us.

They helped tell you what was happening.

No, they didn't know who was walking, if that's a Jew or that's a partisan.

Oh. Wouldn't they kill the partisans too?

No, like I was saying before, some of the partisans for what they was cooperating with the Germans and with the Hungarians.

Oh.

They killed some of them. They used to come to the house and kill them at night time. So this was a plus for us Jewish people. We was walking at night time. The civilian didn't stick out their head, or the dogs was tied up. And they wouldn't shoot on you with a gun.

Oh. So that worked to your advantage then.

Yes.

And then what happened towards the end of the war? What was going on in the forest? You were surviving the same way?

We were surviving with picking up food from the fields, corn, potatoes, like earlier in the summer, just mushrooms.

Were your spirits getting down? Getting depressed? And did you have any idea the war was going to be ending?

No. No, we were really afraid if we would be gone through the winter, it would be-- would be a slim chance to survive. Except, the partisans, the Gentile, the partisans were Gentile, except they would make some arrangements for us to go somewhere, somewhere to bigger group, somewhere where they had some camps where they had control.

We didn't have control on the forest where we was. We just running. Even we had underground quarters. Or once they discover something, we run away.

Well, how did you find out that the war was ending?

We had-- like I said, there was already the-- I'm not a military man or a-- there, at that time, was three fronts, first front and second and third. We was in the third front. And they had already camps with Russians, what the Germans took prison, had them in camps.

And it was getting like to the end, and some of them Russians got out of them camps. And they was running around the forest too. So we used to pick them up. And they was with us.

I didn't find any Jewish partisans-- Jewish-- them soldiers were from the German camps. This wasn't in Germany. This was in Czechoslovakia in the Carpathians.

In the Carpathians?

Yeah. So they were telling us. They had experience. They was-- they had experience. They was years in the Russian army. So they found out we are Jewish.

So it was close to the end of the war. I mean the Russian passing by, so it was kind of liberation. So he says, you people, don't run, don't run out of the forest too fast. There's some people-- some people maybe where they have your pillows or your property, they'll kill you when you come home.

Oh.

So he says, better watch. We did watch. We did watch.

So what did you do then? Did you just spend more time in the--

We was walking like on nails. He was walking-- even if you was liberated, we still had-- we were scared of the population. The reason it was antisemitism, a lot of them.

Antisemitism?

Antisemitism. Only one thing, I'll tell you another story, what happened to my family's house.

Did you go back there?

Yeah. Yeah.

How much after when you heard the war ended? How long did you stay in the forest?

About 10 months.

No, but after you heard the war was over?

About a day.

Oh, that's all. OK, so then did you go immediately go back to your home?

Yeah. It was just about 15 kilometers. And I come home. My father-- there was a couple, a Gentile couple. They didn't have any children. So I don't know. Somehow I was too young my father. My father bought his property. When they going to pass away, so it'll be ours.

And he used to come to sit by us in our house a lot, that person. He liked our family. So he sold-- he says, don't have no children. He gave it-- he sold it to my father. Father gave him money.

He was a funny person. He had guns in his house. I never went to him to reach him when I was in the forest. I never went to his house. I was afraid.

Because the guns?

Of the guns. I thought maybe he will turn on me. After the war, I come home. It looks like he is waiting for me, like when my parents are home, waiting for me.

He says, Ezra, you know what I did with the house and with your oven? The ovens was there different than. Here he says he took off the metal, the steel. And he took it to his house. And he took a hammer and spikes and spiked up the windows.

And he told the rest of the population-- I mean, it's popular saying, the Jew was trying to buy me out, now I'm taking his property away.

Oh, no, he totally switched it like.

He told the population, for the people. And I came home. I found the house in good condition. He gave me back the steel for the oven. And he brought me food. And he brought me the big pots to cook up the lice, excuse me.

From your clothes.

And that's really the two families really what I had to really help.

Isn't that nice? So then your home was in just the way you had left it, except for the pillow?

It was empty. It was empty.

They had taken everything, but it was--

The windows wasn't broken. The windows wasn't broken. It was already beginning of the winter. At least I could heat the house. And then we, all of us, lived in that house.

Who lived there? The seven of you?

The seven of us.

Had you become real good friends by then? The girls, how old were the girls?

The girls with all older than me.

Oh, all the girls were older? How much older?

Two, five, seven years.

Oh, so everybody was like a family. That was your family then.

Yeah. Yeah.

How long did you stay in the house?

I stayed in the house till about the war ended in May '45. Then some survivors, the uncle was here in-- what he is here in Cleveland, he came back from concentration camp. And some other relatives came back.

Were you there for some months then or a couple--

Yeah, I was a good half a year. I mean--

Did you keep waiting to hear word about your family?

Yeah. Meanwhile I did go-- like I said, from Czechoslovakia, from the Carpathians, I did go out to the world, what was unusual, I took a trip to Romania and Bucharest. I was there for a while, look around. And then--

Were you looking for your family you mean?

Yeah. And--

How did you have the money to do that?

You see here hobos riding on the train. I was riding-- I was riding in a train, traveling in Romania, on the roof.

Oh, my God. And you were looking for your family at that point still?

Yeah.

And how much money did you have left from the 3,000 that your father--

I used it up.

You used it up in the forest or--

I used it up. And when I came home, when I came home somehow, the partisans, they had families. I had some. Food and that person what we bought his property, he gave me some food.

That was nice. And about how old were you then at that time?

There wasn't really much difference.

16, 17?

No, just about 16.

16. And did you start to go to school? Or--

No.

No.

There was no school nowhere.

Were there a lot of people that came back to the village? Or--

No.

Very few? Mostly--

Very few. There was just a few came back.

Were you treated as heroes? Or was there antisemitism?

Generally, yes. Generally, yes. I mean in the one that was good was good friends.

Right, when it was good, it was very good.

Yeah.

When it was bad, it was very bad probably.

Yeah, yeah.

No in between.

No.

Well then what happened to you next? You were waiting and you went to Romania.

I went to Romania. Then I came back. I came back. And whatever people came back from concentration camp, and they said, let's go. I mean, nothing here. How do you leave the Russians? It's not that plain.

So I went to the mayor. He was a good person. He says, I'll give you a paper.

A paper? To leave?

To leave and to identify for the Russians if they catch you on the train, where you going. So he wrote me out a paper I'm going to look for my family. I left.

Did you go with your brother?

Yeah.

And where did you go then?

We stopped in Hungary, Budapest.

Was it hard to leave the village knowing you probably wouldn't come back?

Nah.

Or you didn't like staying there when nobody was there anymore, right?

We had such a big family. What do you have any more left? Even the houses broke apart almost.

It's just your brother and you out of all the people?

Yeah. There were no relatives. I had dream to come to America.

You did?

So we stopped at Budapest for a week. And we had to get rid of the Russians. How do you break the Russian border? So there was an organization. I think it was a Israeli organization, a Zionist organization from Budapest. There was-- how to call it? It's not official.

You used to hold trains. And by night, we did pass the front. It looks like it was paid off. So I got rid of the Russians. So we was in Austria in a camp with the British was. Stayed there for a week.

Just the two of you?

No, my uncle was he's in Cleveland.

Oh, he came with you then?

Yeah. Yeah. We traveled together at that time, three of us.

And you were in Austria?

Austria. It was very bad though by the British. I mean I could be hungry, or it was nothing what to eat. I used to-- my uncle used to say it's a soup like in the concentration camp.

It was like what?

A soup like a concentration camp. So nothing to eat. I didn't have special anything what to stay in Austria either.

Were these camps that you were in?

Yeah.

Like for people that are survivors?

Yeah. The UNRRA or the Joint or things like that.

The what?

The Joint. They call it the Joint. That certain camp was run by the British. And we were there-- we was there for a week. And then we crossed to Italy. And I was in Italy for about 8, 9 months, 10 months.

Really, 8, 9, 10-- and what did you do there?

It was in camps. There was, they call it, UNRRA.

What was that? What did that mean?

It's a United Nations organization. Or there is-- and you had already in Italy, you had a lot of Israeli people work on trying to organize to go to Israel illegally. And they made kibbutzim in Italy.

Or at that time-- that was in '46, '47, at that time, it was still-- the British was in Israel. You cannot-- OK, the Zionist organization, the Israelis did work with the Jewish people. They still couldn't come in free. So after a while, we said, OK, we're going to take you-- we're going to take you to Israel on a boat.

Who said that? The British?

The organization.

Did you meet your wife in Italy at that time?

No. No. I said we-- I mean we did know-- it was a camp set up on the ocean, the last camp.

Did you go to school or work? What did you do during the day to pass the time in the camps?

Nothing. There was no arrangement for any--

No school or anything?

No.

So your schooling really stopped right when the war ended.

My school-- I don't think I finished eighth grade. That's what we had all of it. I don't think I finished it. It came in

already-- it came in already, the principal was the operator of the young people, and the Jewish people couldn't go certain-- they couldn't go certain places.

In your village? Started to happen?

Yeah.

You have to wear badges and everything?

Yeah. Yeah. And they had like youth organizations. Like here they go training like military. We had to go and cut wood for the principal. We wasn't-- we wasn't trained anymore. I mean, we were second citizens.

This was back before the war?

That was in the war. That was in 1943, '44.

You had to cut wood instead of going to classes for the principal?

No. That military training, to that youth movement.

Oh.

How we jumped around to--

So then you were back in the camp in Italy.

Yeah.

And you just didn't do much during the day.

They didn't have--

No. No.

So it was shelter and food.

When I didn't-- when I wasn't in the organization, go to Israel, I was working in the camp. I was trying to work in the camp, like in the kitchen or something.

Oh.

I could get food. And I could get for my brother or my friend.

Wouldn't there be enough food in these camps anyway for people?

All the time you could use more food in that age.

Yeah. Were you in a real weak condition when the war ended?

No. I remember when I came to Italy-- when I came to Italy, we was so-- even it was so-- we were so hungry, I used to go out in the field and pick-- how do you call them things on the holidays? They are brown like beans, on Jewish holiday when they eat fruits. We used to go in for food there in Italy was so hungry, even it was the UNRRA. It's a UN organization support refugees.

So then they took us to that-- take us to Israel, to make a short, to get more--

That's all right. This is very interesting.

They put us in a boat, put us on a boat.

How many of you about?

600.

You're all crowded?

A fishing boat, crowded. They gave us-- we didn't have any water. They made shelves, not wooden shelves, out of material-- cloth shelves, that was already some small kids too. People got married, and had some little kids.

They put us on the boat with a lot of salamis. And water we didn't have. I thought I'm going to die there.

Without water and all that salami.

And we traveled. We traveled in that boat, in a little boat.

How long did it take to get--

I cannot remember how-- it took a long time. Or when we came to Haifa, the British came with four big destroyers and throw on us tear gas. And my friend got blown up like that from the tear gas.

What friend was this? The one that survived?

That was in '47. The British wouldn't let us go in.

Terrible. What, was your friend killed?

No, he survived. They threw that gas and he just blowed up like that. And then they throw us on a big ship where they holding prisoners, and really prisoners. Then they throw the-- I was the first-- the second-- the first and the second boat in Cyprus to put us in camps there, in Cyprus. Food was very poor.

Did you go to Cyprus then?

They took us prisoners.

Oh, my God.

They took us in Haifa. In Israel, in Haifa, they put us from our boat, they put us on a military prison boat and took us to Cyprus and throw us there in camps.

The Germans didn't make you a prisoner. The British did. That's amazing.

And I wasn't-- I was never in Germany. And like my uncle, he says, the British had the watchmen with high up around the fence. He says, it looks like Germany, it feels like.

Oh, that's something. That's awful.

After I was lucky--

Did you go to Cyprus then to a camp?

Yeah. Was there--

Did they make you work in the camp?

No. No.

Just they wanted you away from Israel?

Away from Israel. After I think six months--

Six months you were there?

Yeah.

How many people were there in Cyprus?

Oh, to the end, there was thousands. Before Israel had independence was thousands of people. Were a lot of camps. We was the second-- I think I was the second boat there. And the Jewish organization helped. I called it the Joint. The British used to give dry potatoes, or the Jewish organization, I mean world organization, send in some fresh vegetables to cook in the kitchen. So people would have a little more vitamins, things like that.

And after about six months, the lucky thing, they used to allow 1,500 certificates, 1,500 passports to go into Israel.

How many?

1,500 a month. So they let us in. Instead of taking immigrants from Italy or from Germany, they took from Cyprus to lesser the camps. Or whatever they made less of the camps, more people came in, more and more and more every day. So it was already a fight where are the people going to go? Where the people are going to go?

So many, huh?

So many Jewish people, were are they going to go? They don't have no reason to go home. Nobody's waiting for them there. So they came a lot of them. And they stayed there. Most of them really got out when Israel got independence.

Did you go before Israel became independent?

Yeah.

And you were just lucky that you were able to get-- and did you go with your uncle and your brother still?

Yeah. Yeah.

And then what happened? You went to--

I was in Israel. I was in the army, independence by--

Where did you live in Israel?

I lived in a kibbutz. And then I lived in the city, Rehovot, where Dr. Chaim Weizmann lived. I was by his funeral.

Did you know him or you just went because everybody--

It was a national-- it was a national funeral.

So you then-- you were in the army also?

Yeah. Yeah.

And you fought for the independence?

Yeah. Yeah.

That had to be really exhilarating for you to experience that. And how was life in Israel for you?

Life was nice. In the kibbutz was nice. You don't have-- financially, you don't have no worries. Or then you are used to a different life, like family life. And it's a split. It's a split really there in the kibbutzim.

The older generation didn't agree to the split. They left, like two different parties. One was saying it's better to have the kids at home. And one was saying better to have the kids-- the most of them lived separate, the kids.

So they were arguing about that.

Yes. Some of them did separate. Some of them left the certain kibbutzim, and they went-- they opened up another kibbutz where they have the kids in their house.

Oh, they have them-- they live together.

Yeah. Yeah. Like a regular family.

So were you working in the fields or training for anything then?

Yeah, I was working on different things. Then later on I was working. It was very modern in agricultural and vegetable garden. Used to have about 200 people. Used to ship right from there to Jerusalem. Fresh tomatoes picked this afternoon and have it in Jerusalem next morning on the table.

Now, where you lived, were you wanting to get to America? Thinking about it or--

Like I said before, I had a dream from my parents on, I says, are we going to make you go to school to school, or school didn't work out, or we you going to send you to America. And I did have my brother in Israel. I mean we went together. But I still say, I still hurt so much. I still want to see-- I still want to see my uncles and my aunts. I didn't figure they'll be that long in here.

In America?

Yeah.

At that time had you met your wife?

Yes.

Where did you meet her?

I met my wife in the kibbutz.

And you were saying, where was she from? From Tripoli?

From Tripoli, Tripoli, Libya.

And how long had she been in Israel?

Oh, about 4 years something, 4 or 5 years.

Did you get married then?

Yeah, we married. We got married in the kibbutz.

And then you wanted to go to America? And what about your brother at that time and your uncle?

My brother somehow, he didn't care to come. He's a quiet type, something.

Was he on the kibbutz with you?

Yeah, for a while. Yeah. He is now living in the city.

Where? In Israel?

Yeah.

What city?

Ramat HaSharon.

And then where were you near? The kibbutz was near that same city?

No. It was near Rehovot. It's near where the first president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann. And I have a saying to say, what I did read a few books from Dr. Chaim Weizmann. He was sick for a while. He was a-- they called him really to the right, or as far as in Israel, he was very-- he was a big Zionist. And he didn't matter what the kibbutz says if he's on the left or on the right, he was supporting it. And another thing what I did like about Dr. Chaim Weizmann, he says, before he died, he is just sorry he didn't learn enough.

I'm sorry I didn't learn enough. He knew so much.

Oh.

Amazing man.

Yeah.

Well, then you had this dream to come to America. And was it hard to get the money to come here? And how old were you?

Oh, at that time I was already-- '53, I was around 24, something like that, roughly. Some of the money I got from the relatives here for the tickets.

So you had the relatives here. And then also when you came here, did any organizations help you?

No.

No Jewish organizations?

No, I didn't get no support. Except my aunt couldn't come and pick me up from New York. So the Federation called New York, so somebody picked me up. And at that time was still boats, picked me up from the boat and put me on the train to Cleveland. And there was a charge for it. I think \$30 or \$35. And I paid for it. And I didn't ask for any more any help.

Well, you had your family here too. And did you then begin to work at your profession that you--

No, I didn't-- I didn't have no profession here in Cleveland. I was working in agriculture in Israel. And then through people, I was working for a construction company. And they send me down to the union for apprenticeship. And I learned to be a bricklayer. And I was working for a few years by somebody. And then I had my own company.

Oh, you did? That was wonderful.

Yeah. Yeah.

That's great.

I still have it matter of fact. It's not in operation right now.

But you could start it again if you needed to, if the business got better.

Yeah. Yeah.

That's good that you still have it. That's wonderful.

Yeah, I mean I'm now professional. I can pick a plan for a house or a small shopping center or apartment, things like that, look it through, and just put it up, finish it.

That's wonderful. So you're in construction, building.

Yeah.

Well, have you liked your life in Cleveland?

Yeah.

And do you feel close to Judaism? Do you belong to a temple?

I don't belong to a temple.

Your wife was not in the war? She's not a survivor, is that right?

No. No. No.

You do not belong to a temple?

No.

Why is that?

I said in the beginning, I didn't think I'll be that long.

In Cleveland?

In Cleveland. It just pulls away one more and one more. And I hope this year-- this year to leave.

To leave Cleveland?

I mean, I love America.

Where would you want to go?

To Israel.

Oh, you want to return to Israel.

I'm an Israeli citizen.

Oh, I didn't realize you were still an Israeli citizen.

Yes.

How long did you live there all total?

About five, six years, five years.

And are you active in Israel causes right now? Do you--

No.

--work for Jewish Welfare? But you feel strong-- closest to-- and you've been here all these years though.

Yeah.

You've been here for 30 years, is that right?

I pay my-- I pay for the-- I pay my dues or-- I'm not special active.

Where? In Federation?

Federation.

So you would like to-- you and your wife would like to return to Israel?

Yeah.

How do you think that the Holocaust, having lived through it, has affected you today? Do you dream about it, have nightmares? Or--

I used to have. I used to have. I used to be so bad I used-- it's like you have rheumatism. I used to-- I used to run-- I used to run in sleep.

Run in your sleep?

Yeah.

Because you were running all the time? Sure.

Yeah. Yeah. I was-- till I was hurting so much till I woke up and I said, no, it's not. So--

How do you think it's affected your life? Has it made you more cautious or negative or--

I feel-- I feel-- I'm not a complainer. I feel-- I feel I did pretty good.

And you were lucky to survive.

Yeah.

It was your resourcefulness. You're like maybe being in charge of everybody helped you too to survive?

That's why you asked me like what did you get from-- what did you get from the help from the Federation or something like that. I'm sometimes a complainer. I think a lot of people are asking too much. Whatever I got in my life, I worked for it.

That's wonderful. That's good feeling to do that. So do you feel like Judaism is important to you, your belief in the religion? Or it's more like in Israel, in the state?

I think you have the right. I believe it's a way of life.

So it's more going back to Israel, to return there then?

Yeah. I'm not a practicing religion. And on the other hand, talking about philosophy, if we are going to look in different philosophies, I think the Jewish philosophy is wonderful.

I agree. I do. Well, do you have any ideas on how the survivors should be remembered or the Holocaust should be kept alive for people?

I think definite-- I feel very strong-- I meet Gentile people, and I do tell them-- I do tell them I'm Jewish and I'm a survivor. And I had experience in the United States when I came here, some people were saying-- what do you call it? DP.

I said first of all, I'm not a DP. I'm a citizen. Then I'm Jewish. I said it's too late to avoid it. From my experience, people were trying to avoid it, and they couldn't avoid it. If their parents was-- their mother was Jewish, their father was Jewish, Hitler didn't care. As long a half or a third or whatever percentage this, you was going to the gas chamber.

And on this side, I think it's-- I think religion should stay in their side as to whatever we have in this political season. I don't with it. I think politics should be staying out of religion.

Should be separate?

Yes.

Politics and religion should be separate.

Yes. The reason, going back during the war, the priest-- what I never found out he was married. So I don't know what kind of priest he was. A Roman Catholic? I don't think so. All he did was managing how to pick up the Jews. And then after the war, they put them in jail.

They put the priest in jail?

They put the priest in jail.

Why? Because he helped the Jews?

No, he helped to deport Jews.

He helped deport?

Yes. So on the other hand, like I was saying about the rabbi, in experience, I'm not saying they could save all the Jews in Europe. I'm saying, and I think I have the right to say, the reason I did it myself, what my mother did, she had her three daughters. She couldn't leave him.

Or I think still there were some people, they served in the Czechoslovakian army. They had experience. Why did they have to be that passive?

Oh, you think people were too passive?

Sure. I mean why go into the ghetto? Why go into the ghetto? Why go into Germany?

Maybe they didn't know what was happening? Or you think they did?

If I know, they did. They know. They know. They did know.

So you think they were too passive? Many of the people--

Then I hear around here too, people don't understand what I'm saying here.

Well, some people say that they did have a lot of active resistance groups, but they were--

In Poland, in Warsaw ghetto.

But maybe not Czechoslovakia.

Yeah. That was-- yeah, there was-- some of them was Jewish people was in the partisans and the Russians in the forest. What I'm talking about the majority of the population. It's not much. Just my opinion.

Well, do you feel that it's very important for survivors like you to speak out about this so that there's a record of it?

Definitely. Definitely. Definitely, they should speak out and talk about it and explain to people. I hope it would help generally for the people in the world.

To have it recorded so that--

To have it recorded anyway it's possible.

You were saying if people want to go into libraries and they could see--

Yeah. The way the world gets more sophisticated modern, it's much easier to go in the library and see a movie about-- see a recording than reading a book. That's the fact today.

That's right. It's what's happening now. So they could see somebody talking about their problems.

Yes.

Is your son religious?

No. No.

Not particularly. Will he want to go to Israel when you go?

Yeah.

Oh, he'll go also?

Yeah.

Have you been back since you left?

Yeah, many times.

Oh. I went myself, had a wonderful time.

I'm going-- I'm leaving the 25th now.

So you go back and you have family that's there?

Yeah. I have my brother. And my wife has brothers and sisters there.

Do you feel that having been a survivor sets you apart as different from people who didn't go through the war?

You mean Jews or Gentiles?

Yes, Jews too.

As a survivor, I don't know. I don't know if I'm a survivor or I think--

Yes, you are.

No, no, no, no. I say I don't have the feeling. I mean they'll call you-- they'll call you a green or whatever it is, or whatever so on and so. I feel a lot of people-- I'm talking about Jewish people. And the way I come across, they should have a little bit more education about history and--

You think they should, everybody should?

Yes, definitely. If they would if they would have watch just heritage, what-- it showed on the educational channel, heritage. It even was talking about, it gives you a good insight. You talk to some American people, I ask some of them, a businessman, I said, was you in Israel? He says, maybe I'll go 45 anniversary. I say, how can you do a thing-- like how can you do a thing like that. It just the experience of life to see a Jewish state. Instead, he could be a dual citizen. I mean I think America is wonderful. Or Israel is something else--

America is wonderful, and Israel is something else. That's a good way to put it. So they're both good.

Yeah. Yeah.

But people in America, the American Jews, should know more about Israel and what went on.

Right.

Well, perhaps projects like this will inspire people.

I read the Jerusalem Post, and I read-- when they start the Jewish News in Cleveland, I got it coming every week. It's holy. I read it all the way through, whatever I do. And sometimes you see-- I don't know where I saw it. I see statistics how many Jewish people have never been in Israel. I don't want to use the word. It's ridiculous.

They should go. It should be required. It's wonderful that you keep going back.

It's education. It's education. I'm not talking anything to give or to--

I found it fascinating. I just loved it, being in Israel. I was wondering, are there other things you'd like to share that we haven't touched on that you would like to talk about?

There are things-- there are things probably will pop up again.

You've done such a wonderful job of remembering and recalling the difficult times.

There's more. You just don't-- it's not-- it's not the way you practice. It's the way you remember. Sometime you remember. Sometime you don't.

But is there anything else that-- I don't want you to leave here and feel that maybe you didn't say things that you wanted to talk about because we have another hour if you want it or we can end it at this point.

What I think I said that it bothered me much how it's happening with that thing-- I mean, there would have been probably a lot of them being killed anyway. They couldn't survive. What I'm just saying how don't people learn here or there? I didn't have the experience. Why do then they learn to identify the things.

You mean to identify what was going on?

What was going on there and what was going on in some other place, certain other-- in Asia or somewhere else. I'm not-- I'm right now interested in talking about Jews. Or I meet some young, people Jewish people, they didn't learn nowhere nothing, as far as Judaism.

Didn't learn anything.

Practical things. Maybe they learn to pray or something. Or a way of life, no.

Or not how to survive the way you did.

No, I don't want-- I don't want that kind of thing.

And nobody should have to go through that again, which is a reason for talking about it now. I something I had in my-- just popped my-- just left my head.

What?

I just can't-- maybe you have-- maybe you can come up with them.

Well, I think that-- I want you to feel that you've said everything that's on your mind. But I think that it's a really vivid picture of a courageous survival. And I appreciate your sharing this with us.

I'm Donna Chernin. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Ezra Lazar. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, the Cleveland Section. Thank you very much for sharing this.

You're welcome.

I know it was difficult. And you did just a wonderful job.

I hope it could help, can help for somebody else.

For sure it will. It touched me.