

I'm Sally Weinberg. Today we are interviewing Tibor Messinger, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section. Tibor, I know you are a survivor of the Holocaust. Today I want you to tell your story. And we will start with a little bit about yourself. Please tell me how old you are, where you live, and what kind of work you do, or if you're retired what kind of work were you doing.

Presently?

Yes.

I'm 66 years old. I was born in Budapest, Hungary. And presently, I'm retired.

What kind of work are you retired from?

I worked for an insurance company for the past 30 years. The last 15 years, I worked for an insurance company dealing exclusively just with clergymen, all denominations. And before that, I worked 12 years for Metropolitan.

Are you married?

I'm married and I have two children.

Are they girls, boys?

My girl was born in 1948. My boy was born in 1955. And my boy is presently in Los Angeles, and my daughter is in Brunswick. She lives in Brunswick.

Brunswick, Ohio?

Brunswick, Ohio. Yeah.

And does your wife work?

No. My wife certainly works at home.

OK.

Now we're going to think back on your previous life. Could you tell us what your life was like before the war? And let's begin with 1939. You lived in Budapest, Hungary, you tell me.

Yes.

Can you tell me something about the city, the part of the city where you lived? What was it like, what kind of house you lived in?

I think it is better if I go a little bit back farther than 1939. Because my occupation would enter in it also. You would like to know, I assume the schooling. What I had.

Right.

OK.

I went like regular, like everybody else, at age six. In Budapest, we had through the Jewish community, we had like Jewish public schools. And I went there, what we called accelerated elementary school. Where the eight years, this means that age 14 equals here the high school. When I finished that, as it used to be in Europe, I did not decide what

occupation I wanted to seek. But the family conference decided on it.

And as long as I had small hands and very quick, they decided I should seek something what were small articles are involved in it. So they decided, and I went to a company and to trade school for three years to become an electric instrument maker.

How old were you at that point?

From 14 to 17. Three years, I was 14 maybe 14 and 1/2.

What year was that? Do you know?

Oh, that was in 1918-- 1932.

1932.

To 1935.

1932 to '35.

'35, yes.

OK. Tell me, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had two brothers.

Older, younger?

Two older ones.

So you were the youngest child?

I beg your pardon?

You were the youngest child.

I was the youngest.

In your family. And what did your father do in Budapest? Did he work?

My father was a manager in a wholesale house. And he was involved with salesmen coming in, in that particular store, all not from Hungary, from different states, because he knew several languages. So that's what. I would call we were really a middle class family.

My older brother, he was a ladies purse maker. My brother, the middle brother, he was at that time like a CPA would be here, working for a textile company.

Did you have to help your family financially, or you were just in school at that point?

No, for the three years, my income was weekly, what would equal here about \$5 a week. I mean that just was a token pay. There was no pay, someone who was learning a trade.

When you lived in Budapest with your family, were you living in a strictly Jewish neighborhood? Can you describe the area where you lived?

It was strictly a Jewish neighborhood. And I don't know if you heard about the-- one of the most famous temples in Europe, or maybe in the world, the Tabak temple.

How do you spell that?

In Hungary, you don't spell it that way, but the translation would be T-A-B-A-K.

T-A-B-A-K.

You could see in constantly pictures of Jewish publications or even non-Jewish publications. And I don't know how many, 4,000 or 5,000 people there is room in it.

That was the synagogue that your family--

Well, we lived there for about-- I mean from there, about three, four blocks. So that was, I would say, the central Jewish neighborhood.

And your family attended that synagogue?

And that's the synagogue what we attended, if I was not in school. Because during the first eight years, I attended services in the school itself.

In the Jewish school?

Because it was Jewish school.

So you were educated in the Jewish school?

In the Jewish school. Yes.

Would you consider your family was conservative or Orthodox?

Conservative.

Conservative Jewish.

Yes.

And did you celebrate all of the Jewish holidays?

Till my-- till the war I would say yes.

Until the war?

Until the war. Almost.

Did your family have any connection or interest in Zionism?

I was the only one who before the war, I joined a-- maybe it comes the name.

That's all right.

Betar.

It was a Zionist youth group?

I think it still exists, the Betar.

And this was a Zionist youth group that you personally joined?

Yes.

Was there any other political organizations that your family was involved with?

I was never interested in politics, one way or the other.

And what was the main language spoken in your home?

German.

German?

Yeah. The Hungarian Jews, you heard about that part of Hungary, Maramaros and other places, what was actually closer to the Eastern Europe. They were talking Yiddish. But Budapest itself, I would say 90%, they were talking German, in our house also.

And in your home you spoke German.

Yes.

Was there a theater in your neighborhood? Did your family attend the theater or did you?

Yes.

Was that--

There was theaters, movies constantly, including Jewish theaters. And there was a lot of activities in that temple what I mentioned. Because there was other smaller temples. Most of them in that neighborhood were Orthodox, the rest of them. I don't recall that they had any reform temple there at that time. I don't think so that we had any.

Did your family ever go on vacations anywhere together?

Yes.

Where?

There was a big lake called Siofok. That's where everybody went.

Do you know how to spell that?

Yes. S-I-O-F-O-K. Or up in the northern mountains, what was the Carpath mountains. And after my mother passed away, she passed away-- she was lucky. She passed away in 1940. And I just call her lucky. She didn't know nothing of what happened. She didn't have to go through anything. She had cancer. And she was 54. And she passed away.

In Budapest.

1940 in Budapest, in the Jewish hospital, so everything connected. It was at that time the Jewish hospital, or any

activity, it was connected to the Jews.

Now let's talk about personally at that time, get an outlook on what you thought about yourself and your life. Were you healthy?

I was in very good health.

Did you have any special hobbies or interests when you were a young boy?

Everybody in Hungary was playing what you call here soccer. I played ping pong. I played billiard. And I was pretty good in both of them, and attended almost all sport events. I was very sport-oriented, even if I couldn't participate in it because I wasn't a size to participate in it.

So you were small for your age, is that what?

No, I wasn't small. I wasn't big to play. You see, like basketball, I couldn't play. They put the basket too high up. And I wasn't short. The basket was too far up.

Tell me. Did you have any non-Jewish friends? Your family and you?

Yes. Yes.

And how did you get along with the non-Jews?

We never had any problem before the war or after the war. You see, I cannot talk too much what happened during the war, especially the last three years, from '42 to '45, because I wasn't around. I was somewhere else.

What do you remember about antisemitism in your days with your family in Budapest?

It was a sad situation. In that respect that people didn't want to believe it, that it's happening. They said, oh, it happens to someone else, and somewhere else. Well, we heard about what happens in Poland. I knew that one of my best friends and his family was taken away. And the name, again, escapes me. I told you that's where I have my problems with the names. Where they took the Russian born Jewish people, this means my friend's father only was born in Russia. So they took all the family, his father, mother, and his brother. Where they took all the Jews out to Russia.

Now are you talking about before the war?

That's before, during the war already.

All right. We're still talking about before the war.

You mean before '39?

Yes. We're still talking back when you were in Budapest with your family. Think about, the answer to the question. Was there antisemitism in the neighborhood, in the area? Did your family feel anything against them?

There was, I would say, I lived in an apartment house. That was a three-story apartment house. We lived on the second floor, 24. The 25 was a Gentile family. I don't recall ever had any word with anybody. 23 was the other Jewish family. And all around were Jewish. Maybe there was one, two more on the same floor. But there was never what you can call-- now we had a big problem or anything.

By 1939, when the war broke out, where were you?

In Budapest.

In Budapest.

Budapest, yes.

OK. At that point were the Germans coming in to take people away?

No.

When were you first aware that there was a war?

Well, we knew what's going on. We read papers. In 1939, I was 21 years old.

21.

I was born in '18, So I was 21 years old. We knew what's going on. But we made the big mistakes, what people are even making today. We didn't want to know. We didn't want to hear it.

What were you reading? What were you reading in the papers?

We knew what's going on. The Germans are occupying all the other nations up to '39. We kept an eye what is Hitler doing. All the Jews trying to escape, and the unfortunate who didn't want to escape, who said, no. They won't touch us. We saw the sign there. But we didn't do nothing.

I remember parents with smaller children, they said, oh, don't tell them. You will scare them. Don't say anything. It was kept everything from the little ones. They couldn't keep from me or my brothers, because we were older. There mistakes made, a lot of them. Like put your head in the sand. I don't see. I don't hear nothing. No, it wasn't true.

It was the opportunity, I would say, for everyone to escape. It was the opportunity in time. But including myself at that time, I didn't do it. I made that mistake one time. Later on, I tell you that I did not make the mistake second time.

Tell us what happened. How did your family situation change and when?

What family?

With you and your brothers and your family in Budapest, how did the war affect your family, and when did this happen? When did it--

Can I go beyond '39, or up to '39?

Let's say we're after 1939 now. You're in Budapest.

OK, 1940, that was the first real sign that something is happening in Hungary also. All three of us, almost all the Jewish people, were taken away to labor camps for three months only.

You and your brothers, and your father?

Yeah, everyone, no, not the father. He was in 1940, he was 65. He was born in 1875. So all three of us were taken away to labor camp. Consistent--

To the same one?

No all different, but they always broke up families. Very seldom you had families going together.

So where did you go?

I went where the Karpaten Mountains, one of the place.

Do you remember the name? Was there a name?

Oh, that's a long one, Satoraljaujhely. That's a long one. I can spell it but.

All right. Spell it for me.

S-A-T-O-R--

S-A-T-O-R--

A-L-J-A--

A-L-J-A--

U-J--

U-J--

H-E-L-Y.

H-E-L-Y. And that was where did you say?

I went there for three months to build what we didn't know why, what's the purpose of it, railroad tracks. Did you go wider.

When you say you went away, did police come to get you?

No, no, no. We had to report to the military.

Who told you to report?

The Hungarian government.

The Hungarians.

They sent you a-- how you call them, when someone has to report for military service.

A draft notice?

A draft notice, report here and here at this and this time.

All right. Was that only the Jewish families?

Just the Jewish men.

Just the Jewish men.

Yes, just the Jewish men.

In your section of Budapest.

They said three months, no, not just Budapest, from all over.

From all over.

So that was they said for three months. The work consisted of making railroad tracks. But we had no idea why we had to make it wider than like in Hungary. But that's what we were building, railroad tracks. Later, it turned out that the Germans needed the wider ones, because the Russians, they had wider railroad tracks. And if they captured Russian locomotives or trains, they needed the wider tracks. So it lasted three months. It wasn't the best treatment. It wasn't what I would call too much beating or anything. It was military treatment.

Less than three months during the summer, go home.

Did you wear a uniform?

Yes. We had a were not used Hungarian military uniforms.

Did you have any discussion with the other men when you were in this labor camp as to why you were doing this or what it was all for?

We knew it, because we were Jewish. That was the answer. The only reason was because we were Jewish. We had some of the guards, some of the guards of the Jewish compared during the war, some of our guards were Jewish officers from the First World War I. They didn't make laborers out of them. So they were appointed as guarding us.

Did you wear any symbol to show that you were Jewish?

The yellow armband.

A yellow armband. And at what point did you have to wear this? When you went to the labor camp, or before you left Budapest?

All the time. All the time. We left with that one. That was part of the uniform. But we didn't care because we know that I would say at that time, who was in charge in the Hungarian government, I don't know what would be his title, Horthy?

Horthy is his name?

Yeah, Horthy.

How do you spell that?

The governor. H-O-R-T-H-Y. And I think he was from all the nations around the Germans, I think he was the last one who tried to hold them back as long as he could.

Hold what back?

The Nazi atrocities. And to take away the Jews. At the end, I think I don't know what happened really. I didn't even read about him what happened. I don't know. I know he died.

Well, how did you feel about this three-month service? You came. You say you now came back home after the summer. And what were you expecting to happen then?

Nothing. We figured, OK. That's it. We are through with our duties, what the Germans want from the Hungarian government. And that's it.

So tell me what happened? What year was that, 1940? That was still 1940?

That's 1940, because it was--

It was the end of the summer 1940. From that point, did you go on to work?

I went back to work, just like nothing happened. I went back to the same place where I worked, do the same thing. And I think at that time if I'm correct, I was working for a store, I think selling radios and similar things.

And how long did you stay in that job?

I think that was-- I think that was the last one, till '42. So you worked in that job until 1942?

Oh, I was called-- no, I wasn't called in. In 1939, a funny thing happened. You know who got the draft notice? Number one, I worked in this radio store for my cousin and his partner. They had a Mercedes. The Mercedes got a draft notice.

What do you mean Mercedes?

To report, the driver. The Mercedes, the car, got a report, the draft notice to report the car with a driver, to this and this place in the military. They needed the cars. So they drafted the car.

They drafted the car?

Yes.

Not the person, the car.

The car. So I was the driver of it. I had to take it. They found that I'm Jewish. They sent me and the car back.

To where?

Back to Budapest. That's why they could draft me in 1940. Otherwise, I would have been in regular military service. They drafted the car.

What happened after your two year working in Budapest, 1940 to '42? Then what happened to your life?

I got the other draft notice to report to Nagykata.

N-A-G-Y--

Say?

N-A--

N-A--

G-Y--

G-Y--

K-A-T-A.

K-A-T-A.

To report on May 26 of 1942. And they said to me, happy birthday. Because that's when I was 24.

24 years old.

That day. My brother reported sooner, a few weeks earlier to the same place.

And your other brother?

He escaped. He got in meantime, he saw what's coming. He got Christian papers for a while. But then later on, his story changed too.

Then he was called by mistake to the regular army. He went in. They found out he is Jewish. Threw him out. They said, he has to report, like I did, to a labor camp. He made a U-turn. And he didn't report again. And he was hiding all over, actually till the end of the war.

On the end, actually, he was in the Jewish ghetto in Budapest. But then now we went, we jumped three years ahead, you know what happened.

Well, let's get back to your draft notice in 1942. Tell us what happened to you and your life at that point.

In 1942 from Budapest, the younger Jewish men were drafted, about 55,000, 60,000. Report to that city for labor camp duty. And it was May. And everybody knew three months, all what we need, summer clothes. That's it. We're going in again. That was the rumor, we're going in for three months.

How were you transported there?

With the train. That was about, I don't know, 50, 60 kilometers. That's about 30, 40 miles from Budapest, or we got free transportation on train. They were really nice, until we got there. Then the whole thing changed.

Tell us about the change.

Oh, they had a commander, Muray. I think, M-U-R-A-Y.

That was his name?

M-U-R-A-Y. Lieutenant Colonel. He was a Lieutenant Colonel. By the way, all these names I will mention there are several books about them in publication in the libraries. I don't know if it is here, but I know they are in Hungary. He was one of the, if not the most vicious man I ever saw.

Among this group who was reporting at that time on May 26, we had an Olympic fencer who won a medal for Hungary.

In your group?

Yes. Petschauer.

But he was Jewish.

Jewish.

He found out he's a famous man, so he made him crawl in the dust, in front of thousands of people, his family, everybody.

Was that the first day you were there, or this was?

The first day, just to degrade everybody. He had speeches before we left. And he told the guard that-- let me go back.

They formed from this 55,000, 60,000 people, they formed about each battalion had about had 216 I call it slave laborers. About 16 guards, including the commanders.

Were those guards German?

No.

They were Hungarian?

Those guards were uneducated peasants, no good for military service, known or declaring that they are hating the Jews, because that was at that time it was good to hate the Jews in 1942. And they volunteered for the services. This Muray told all of them that in case they wanted to come back, they can come back after none of us are alive.

Did you hear him say that?

Oh, yes.

But at that time, when you also be going, we're not going for three months, we're going to Russia. We're going to the Ukraines, to the front.

Were you told that, or you were just guessing?

No, that was the rumors.

The rumors.

The rumors, and it became stronger and stronger, because we found out that battalions before us left sooner. They wrote back. We found out they all went to the Ukraine, All the way up to the front to the first line.

Well, tell me about your work here in this labor camp. And how long were you there?

30 months.

30 months? And what did you do there for 30 months?

Our main work was build trenches, wire fences, bunkers, whatever was needed, cut trees for the winter time for heating purposes or building purposes. We built underground bunkers, underground how you call them-- where you put the horses in it? Stables. So that their horses wouldn't freeze in the 40 below degree winter.

That's how far north you were that it got that cold?

Yeah, we were almost up to Stalingrad.

This labor camp?

In 1942.

The labor camp you're telling me about was near Stalingrad?

No, Nagykata?

Yes.

No, that's in Hungary.

Well, you said where how long we were in the labor camp, and what were our work. In Nagykata, we didn't have the-- that was just a reporting camp. But we were not working there.

OK.

You were sent from Nagykata to where?

To Russia.

And where in Russia, do you know?

First, we went to Kyiv.

Kyiv.

And then I think it was Seredyna-Buda.

Do you know how to spell that?

S-E-R-E--

S-E-R-E--

D-I-N-A--

D-I-N--

D-R--

D-R--

Wait a minute.

S-E-R-E-- D-I-N-A--

D-I-N-A--

Dash, B-U-D-A.

B-U-D-A. And that was in Russia?

That was our get out from the train. OK. Now the train ride meant that 50, 60 of us in it. When they had the mood for it, they might even opened up the door. I don't even remember how many days we traveled in the train.

All men?

All men. Yeah. We arrived there. It was about in sometime in June. And up in Russia in August, September, it starts to everything freeze. And we had our summer clothes. And later on, if anybody by any chance had left any warmer clothes, the guards would take them away or steal them away anyway. So it didn't matter. You see that it was such an unbelievable circumstance that who didn't see it cannot believe it.

Were you mistreated by the guards?

Yeah, if you would get closer you could even see the kick on my head right here. It's still there. Everybody was mistreated. And only one who cannot say that he was mistreated who is not alive. But each and every one of them was mistreated.

Did anyone try to run away?

Many of them.

Did they escape?

Many of them escaped. Now what happened, I could not recall too many things. So this year in July, I went back to Hungary.

July of 1984?

1984, yes. Because when I retired in 1982, maybe I had time. I decided to keep quiet for 40 years. It is enough. I said it is high time that I don't hold back, because I felt I might be committing another crime not to tell really what happened. And I took my dear old tape recorder with me, and I went back to Hungary. With all the sad memory together, I said, I don't care. I noticed three of my friends are there.

And we sat down in the hotel room. Nobody was allowed to come in, no phone, no nothing. I said now there's four of us. All the time interested to recall what they were together with me, not after when they escaped, because two of them sooner or later escaped.

Were they with you in Russia?

Yes, yes, for a year and a half, two years. One of them of the three from the beginning to the end was with me, who actually I can thank him that I'm alive that I will tell you later on.

What is his name?

George. Just call him George. That's his name, by the way. You know? So we sit down, and we rehashed these and that, and that, and that. And one after the other, things came back.

Well, let's do that right now. Let's think back, so that you can tell us your story, and your friends.

No, I would not mix up their story. No, it would be strictly just that I was there, you know? So you wanted to hear.

Let's go back to--

Incidents, what happened, or our treatments.

Yes. Let's be very specific and tell us what actually happened to you those 30 months while you were in this labor camp.

Number one, the commanders somehow they selected, I don't know how all of them, they must have been volunteered that they wanted to clean out complete battalions. They, may be most of them did not kill people directly, but gave the orders. Now, who was beating me up? Can you picture this? 6 foot 8, 300 pounds, a professional boxer.

And why did he beat you?

He was in the mood. That's all. They didn't need any explanation.

Was this while-- were you beaten while you were working or while you were in your barracks?

While I was working, while I was in my barracks, while I was resting, while I was doing nothing, while I was walking maybe too slow or too fast for him. They didn't need any excuse, whenever they felt. One night, I had to go outside to the latrine. We don't call it toilets. Latrine, and he was on guard. He took his rifle and started to beat me up.

I was lucky. I knocked off his where he keeps his bullets on his--

Belt?

Belt. I knocked this off. And he had to pick it up. So I had a chance to escape from him. He didn't have to report to anybody. That was the situation. No one had to report to anyone. May I tell you this? The Hungarian guards, you heard stories about the SS, not Germans, not the Wehrmacht, what is the German military. I'm talking the SS. Strictly the SS and their hate for Jews. But they were worse. They had--

Who was worse?

The Hungarian guards outdid the SS in almost all the cases. They wanted to show them that they are worse than the SS itself.

Can you describe your living conditions there in the camp?

There was never a camp. You're talking concentration camp?

No. The labor camp.

There was never a so-called labor, I said labor force, or forced labor. You have to picture this. We are out in Russia. Small town, villages, a few houses, everything the German army passed through, burned up.

Do you know the names of any of those towns?

I would need a big map. Then I could recall every place where I went, almost all of them. But I wouldn't even try. Gomel, Minsk, Pinsk. But they are big cities.

Those were places you were near?

They are big cities. We are in it. You know what just comes in my mind. Seredyna-Buda, Gora-Calvary. No, that's later on. That's in Poland.

All right. Well let's continue on with your description of what your living conditions were like.

We went in to a place. Let's say the battalion first, the whole thing. Maybe we went in, walked in, put at this way. That's walking never riding or anything. In many cases, almost always the guard itself, they were riding the horses, or riding the horse drawn wagons, or sitting under Jews drawn wagons. Because they wanted to save the horses. Maybe eight, 16 Jews were pulling the wagons. OK. They had to save the horses. The Jews was not important. OK, just the horses were important.

OK, let's say we arrived in a small town. What was left? A burned out house. That's where we slept. No ceiling, no ceiling. These are just-- 40 degree below, that's what we had. In the other place maybe there was everything there except no windows. We were lucky. That was considered a very warm place.

You slept on the floor?

Floor, on dirt floor. Usually in Russia you had dirt floor at that time. Because all the better places, where someone could

sleep or stay over, it was occupied by German kommandos, Hungarian officers, or Italian officers. Because the Italians were with them, not that they were fighting. Because I think the Italians were more of lovers than fighters. They didn't want to fight.

They were nice people. And I don't think any of them was ever involved in any fight. They were playing--

You're talking about Italians.

Italians, accordions, and so on.

Let's go back to your situation.

So that was always our resting place, where we rested. Now, if we stayed in a place a few weeks or a few months, we were lucky. We could do something to that place. If we didn't have the side of the house, we could cut trees and make up the side.

How many were in your battalion?

Originally 216. And I was thinking the other day, I don't know if 50 came back. And we were considered one of the luckiest battalions, one of the--

Why?

Because we had about 50 coming back. OK, I mentioned about my older brother. From Nagykata, he went out a week or two weeks earlier, same place, somewhere in Russia.

Is that the name of a place?

I don't know. Somewhere. I don't know where. I don't know. I never could trace it. We got the notice. My father got a notice in Budapest six months later, he is dead. After the war, after the war, July 1984, I found out how he died. We got together. We were about 12 of us that we could call up and we got together on a Sunday afternoon.

Now each battalion had a twin battalion. We were 101-11, and we had a twin battalion 101-10.

And some people from 101-10 came also. We were constantly together out in Russia, close to each other. And one of the men said then when that battalion was wiped out, there was a few men left. He got to the other battalion where my brother was. Because he asked me. Was your brother named Julius? I said, yes. He said, when did he die? In November '42, around then?

I said, yes. I said was he with Toronyi? T-O-R-O- I will get back to that man too, T-O-R-O-N-Y-I.

What this was a?

He was the commander, a lieutenant. He was the lieutenant.

The Lieutenant Commander of your brother's--

No, no he the lieutenant. He wasn't the Lieutenant Commander. He was a lieutenant.

Lieutenant of what, your brother's?

Of that battalion.

From your brother's group?

Yes. And he told me what happened to my brother. And don't forget. We're talking constant 35, 40 degrees below Celsius. What equals 40 degree below Fahrenheit. OK? 40 below Fahrenheit. If we had 25, we said oh, that's a nice day.

So he told me what happened to my brother. He was heavy. And Toronyi didn't like heavy people. So he was chased outside, put the bucket of water on it constantly till he froze to death. So that was the end of my brother.

But he was lucky again. He suffered just six months. Now Toronyi, I will get back later because our battalion hit the jackpot. And when Toronyi wiped out his battalion, he came to us, what was also a wonderful situation.

What year that?

That was later on. That was later on. Yes.

All right.

And where were we? In 19--

42?

'42, what was I saying the last one. You're still talking about your battalion and you're in Russia.

I don't know. OK, it's gone.

OK. Did you have any contact at all with the local people?

Oh, I said, we went Kyiv and Gora-Calvary. OK. That was the first place where we, let's say we settled down. That was our first experience with the Russian people. Now, you have to understand--

Are the Russians now in charge of your battalion? Is that what you're saying?

No, no, no. The Russian women, children, all the men are with the army or with the partisans. Don't forget. I'm in German occupied territory. Where all what I see, the Germans, just my guards are Hungarian. They were too chicken to fight, all they could hold the gun against us, not against the enemy. But at that time, let's say to them was the Russians.

So the Hungarian guards followed with you into--

Sure, all over, yes. Oh yes, to the end. We had the Hungarian guards. Except when later on, I will go a little bit into detail, when we went on work details. When the Germans said we need here 20 men, we need here 50 men, then we were with the Germans. Was it the SS, or the SA, or the Wehrmacht, depending who asked for us.

So you asked me about the first incident with the Russian people. So that's where we met first the Russian people themselves. Now don't forget when I'm saying about the Russian people, I don't mean that today's Russian government. I'm not talking about the Communist government. I'm talking the Russian people. Who, in my opinion, they love two things, music and children. Now how bad can someone be if they love these two things? I don't know. You be the judge.

So we knew one thing. We have to learn Russian. What we did, I would say that I learned that much in Russian that not as much as I know now in English, but I could talk everything, and I could understand everything what they said.

How did you learn it?

From them. From them. Where there was-- I forgot, by the way, everything. Since 1944, I had no Russians around me, except for a few months In Hungary when I went back. But I had no opportunity to talk.

So you're saying the Russian people were allowed to mingle with you?

We lived in their house. If there was no other place, there was the poor Russian woman sitting there with this I don't know, maybe sister and the little kids. They said 25 in this house, 35 in that house. And that was good because we had sometimes a little bit warm. Because they were there.

Now I would say that all the time that we were among the Russian people, the most wonderful people,

And what years?

--most good hearted.

Tell me.

'42, '43, and I would say till we left in '44, because at that time we went to Ukraine and Poland.

So you stayed in this area of Russia, living in a Russian home until 1944.

Each stay was a certain length of time. There was no set time. Now for running--

You kept moving around.

Constantly moving around. Don't forget, as the front moved, we moved too. Because the German moved.

Back up in a moment notice, and go. Sometimes we had the battalion together. Sometimes we had maybe in 10 different places the whole battalion. Sometimes half of them went over to the partisans. We just had half of it left.

We'll stop our discussion right now, Tibor, and take a break. And we will continue your story when we come back.

OK.