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, we left off in your experience with the war in December of 1944 where you are waiting to be transported you think to a concentration camp. Is that what happened to you?

Yes. We were put in the wagons, and about, again, 50 or 60 of us as I recall in a wagon. They closed it up, this Ukrainian SS uniformed guard-- no water, no food, no toilet facilities, nothing. I think we went about a couple of days like this. And finally, the door opened.

Was this wagon being pulled by horses?

No, that was train.

A train.

We were in the wagons, yes.

A train wagon?

Train, yes.

All right.

And we saw-- we stopped in Weiden, Germany, W-E-I-D-E-N. And next to it, we saw a sign pointing to Flossenbürg, F-L-O-S-S-E-N-B-U-R-G, beautiful surroundings, up in the mountains. The day was December 25, 1944, Christmas Day.

They started actually to chase us. They said we have to walk a few miles up the mountains. And on both sides, we noticed people in a striped kind of uniform, or like a pajama, shouting to us we should give to them everything, our cigarettes, food, rings, whatever we have because they will be taken away anyway. So we didn't listen.

All of a sudden, we arrived to a couple of big doors. And there it said Flossenbürg concentration camp. We saw about double fences about 15 feet high with watchtowers, machine guns, SS guards all over with dogs, watch dogs.

And all of us, at that time we were about 800 of us because they picked up people from all over. And we were all standing in a big place. And we saw barracks, green ones, large ones.

Then suddenly, we noticed that maybe a little bit better dressed people with rubber hoses shouting, hollering. They started to beat everybody to let's go. They drove us into a building. And they said to drop everything.

What it meant what we didn't know. It meant everything. We try to save pictures, including what I mentioned before that Russian pilot's family. That's where we lost them. I don't know which one of us had it, but that was the place where finally we couldn't hold on to it anymore. We couldn't hold on to anything anymore. They checked our mouth, every cavities, that if we have anything. Then they chased us into a other room.

At this point were you naked?

Naked, completely naked. Then they chased us into another room.

Were these men and women or just men?

Just men. And don't forget constant hollering, beating, rubber hose, wherever they can-- they find anybody.

And we saw showerheads. So we heard from the rumors what's going on. I said, OK, now that's the end now.

All of a sudden water came out, not gas, water for a few minutes. We couldn't wash ourselves because there was no room to move. So again, the hollering, everything, moving to a other room where they started to throw at us under clothes, pants, something, clothes, and wooden shoes. The size didn't matter. Whatever you got that's what you got.

Then all of a sudden, out in the cold again-- and don't forget, December 25 up in the mountains.

Of what country were you in Germany?

Germany. Now we are in Germany. All of a sudden they chase us back in the Barrack 20. And we notice there are the well known-- how you call them-- the three tier bunks.

So we look around. And there was about 800 of us, I said before. So there comes the block commander, who is called kapo. I think that's Italian for head, or who is in charge. And with his cohorts, they are asking for people who know the German language so they can tell everybody the rules and regulations of the camp.

So some of us went over there. And the room was full of these bunks. Middle of the room, there was a little table with a small Christmas tree on it. In the four corners were the kapos. And there was a little room in that barrack. And that was for the block commander. And if anybody would touch anything what belongs to them, it would be dead. OK.

So he started to tell the rules and regulations of the concentration camp. Now don't forget that we were used to almost everything what is possible to here. But we were shocked.

Number one, on that bunks, seven people. There was room for three. When we walked in it, that big Barrack 20, they gave us a soup plate. They said, if you lose this or if you break it, no more food. And if you're interested, I can show you how this little souvenir I carried all the way through after that, all the way through the concentration camp and back home.

That was the one you got in Flossenbürg?

That's what I got in Flossenbürg.

And let's see the other side, how deep it is.

OK. And that's heavy. I would say a few pounds. OK. So I didn't lost them.

So he told all the rules and regulations. Now, may I tell you this? All the, let's call them inmates-- personally, I called our group always that we were prisoner of wars of the Hungarian army supervised by the German SS. Now, these people, the kapos, everybody had a different color of triangle.

How do you spell capo?

C-A-P-O.

Capo.

I think that's an Italian-- it means head. A triangle with a number to it. I think-- I don't think so that's important-- the black was a criminal. And I think lilac was homosexual. Red was Communist.

Oh, yes.

Yellow was Jews and so on. Red was what is important-- political, who didn't agree with their system. When we went in, and we were in German uniform that time when we entered the concentration camp, the

Germans didn't know what group they should put our group into it because we were in German uniform. So they decided they gave us the red triangle. Maybe that's what saved us that they thought we are political.

But you still had the yellow armband?

No, that time we took it off. We took it off. They gave us the red triangle. Maybe that's what they saved us. We don't know what-- luck and the man upstairs.

OK, so he is telling all the rules and regulations, all of a sudden-- oh penalty, you drop anything, you break anything, you talk back to the SS, something you don't do right, penalties wanting death and death and death. Everything is death.

All of a sudden, we hear that for the barrack door opens up and someone hollers in something. We didn't know what. But all of a sudden, the door opens up again. And they start to holler that all of us out again in the cold.

So we go up, and we had to line up five of us, again. And it was a problem for us. We were always used to line up three of us. That's a big change all of a sudden five.

Five in a row?

Five in a row. But we were always three in a row. So what was the big problem? Our wooden shoes stuck to the ice and snow, and it fell off. And in that moment, we were holding back the rest of them. There came the rubber hose treatment.

When you say treatment, describe what they did.

Hitting wherever they could reach us. That's the treatment, with big rubber hoses. Because if they wouldn't do it, they would get it. There was no choice.

Then I noticed from all over-- that whole camp was on different levels. And on different levels were the barracks. And all of a sudden, from all the barracks-- I didn't see any SS yet-- I see all these people in pajamas, what turned out was the striped uniform in the concentration camp. And they all coming out from every barracks in the middle of this-- how you call them, this place, middle of the big--

In the center.

In the center, OK. And then I noticed the SS all over because they turned on the reflectors. You could see the watchtowers, the machine guns directed at us. And middle of the place, we noticed a few people working very diligently around something like looks like a big soccer door. You know what's a soccer door? Playing soccer, you have the big door, you know where they kick the goal in it. And they were working on it.

Then we see that they putting-- that's where my mind goes out always. What you put someone around the neck.

A rope.

A rope, they're putting a rope around it, six of them. And then suddenly, I think from the left side, came out six men with the pants on, shivering, nothing on the upper body. Quiet, not a word, just like cattle going for the execution.

In the meantime, these people working around this soccer door that they put benches underneath. The six just stood up on it. Then the SS started to holler what was their crime, that they tried to steal food from the warehouse because they were hungry. And the penalty, as usual, death.

And then he waited a few seconds. And he said, sentence to be carried out. In the meantime, they put the ropes around the people's neck. And then they knocked off the benches. And the beam just sagged. Now

you could see all the bodies, you know, shaking, everything.

And then later, on a few minutes, just the wind was blowing all the bodies. And that was Christmas Day, December 25, 1944, in Flossenbürg. Behind that, beautiful Christmas tree.

How long were you in Flossenbürg?

After New Year, they came in-- I will answer you right away. After New Year, they came in and they looking for about 100 skilled metal workers. So at that time, just George and me were together. All of a sudden became metalworkers, skilled metalworkers, just to get out from Flossenbürg. About middle of January, they came for these 100 people. And we went to a other place called Niederoderwitz.

How do you spell that?

N-E-I-D-E-R-O-D-E-R-W-I-T-Z-- where we were working in a factory making mercury for the lamps with the Germans.

Did you volunteer to do that?

Yes. Yes. That we are skilled metal workers, you know. I think from the 100 that there was maybe three really who was metal workers. But who cared?

So luckily, we had to work on machines what they showed us what to do, and we were doing it. That time, you see, in the camp, anywhere the food was like water. They put something to color them, and that's it.

In that place, in Niederoderwitz, in that particular factory, they had all the German workers who were no good anymore for the front, who were wounded, they were working there. And the factory personnel-- and don't forget, these people were fed up with the war. They were treating us really beautiful.

We got soup there that you could put the spoon in it, it would stand up, as much as you could eat. So that really helped for the rest of the four months, what we didn't know at that time how much.

How long you would be there.

We were there about two or three months. Then we get transported to a other place where they needed us very urgently, Leitmeritz, L-E-I-T-M-E-R-I-T-Z. There, the Germans were building an airplane factory in the mountain. I felt sorry for them because I figured they never will finish it because at that time you could hear the war is coming to the end because constant bombing by the Russians.

But it was a good place because it was around March, April in 1945. That meant we didn't have to worry about the bombing to hit us because we were in the mountain working. We didn't have to worry about the weather either because we were inside, nice and warm.

So one night, around middle or 20th of April, if you saw the Terezin exhibition, you could see that there was around later part of the April when the last transport to Theresienstadt. And I think that's where I was in it also because from Leitmeritz, we went to Theresienstadt.

Theresienstadt, the first beautiful sight was that they left off the SS, and it was replaced by the Czech gendarmes. They were the guards.

At Theresienstadt?

Theresienstadt. I think the building where I was in it, one of the military barracks, was called Hamburger. And I was actually till the end of the war. Where one day something really nice happened, I couldn't believe it, because, you know, you go so many things through. One day around, I think what is almost end of the war, maybe 4th or 5th of May-- and don't forget April-- April-- Theresienstadt that time, I believe, as I heard, it was under the, not the direction, but the supervision of the International Red Cross because the Germans

wanted to make a sample camp out of it, how good they are to the inmates.

So all of a sudden, the door opens up-- and I never mentioned this for three years, and I don't think it ever entered anybody's mind-- several white dressed women walked in, some nurses. I never mentioned women because it never came to anybody's mind. They were from the Red Cross bringing food.

Came May the 8th-- oh, that time, I remember I was on the third floor, in one of the room. I was on the upper bunk. George was underneath. I couldn't walk anymore. So when I had to go downstairs to the latrine, George just carried me down.

Why couldn't you walk?

I was about 60 pounds.

Even though you had had that good food from previous--

Oh, that was four months before for a short time. About that time, I might walk in, I was maybe 60 at that time already. I couldn't walk anymore. So George took care of me.

So came May the 8th the Russian came in. One Russian opens up the big door with a machine gun. You would have to see that to appreciate really. And George goes down. He comes back. He says-- and we knew Russian at that time, don't forget. He said, he just announced 24 hour free robbery. We can go anywhere, any warehouse, take anything whatever we see and do with it what we want.

You were being liberated at that point?

May the 8th, yes. That's when they came in.

That was your liberation--

There was still fighting--

--by the Russians?

By the Russians, in the morning. There was no Russian forces yet. That was the advance troop who liberated Theresienstadt.

So George went out. He came back. He says, you know, I saw people taking buses and started to drive home. It's a few thousand kilometers to drive home, I mean to Hungary or whatever. I said, what did you took? He says, I brought you candies and food. That's all what he did. He was feeding me. Next day--

You remained in your bunk because you were too weak?

Yes. Next day, he went to the hospital. And he brought nurses. And they carried me to the hospital.

Which was where? What city?

In Theresienstadt, the hospital. So that was May the 9, the first day of peace. And that's the day what they celebrate there, May the 9, not May the 8, because there was still fighting.

And there it happened something very interesting-- by the way, there they gave me a other kind of plate from the Germans, this kind.

Was this in Theresienstadt?

That's Theresienstadt in the hospital.

Oh, in the hospital.

In the hospital, yes. And it was May the 9. And if you notice, at the beginning, I said May 26 was my birthday. And that's where I had I think one of my nicest birthday present.

How old were you at that point?

27. A second bowl of Pablum.

And you got your strength back at the hospital?

What happened, so many thousands of them died after liberation because they got the food and they stuffed themselves to death. Thousands of them died next day because of constipation. I forgot to mention even earlier in the concentration camp, like in Flossenbürg, what happened when a train came in. People, they lost their mind, their reason. And they thought they went to the train and they stole the ordinary coal. And they said I'm eating steak or fruit or whatever they had it on their mind. And next day, they were dead because of constipation.

You don't know what hunger can do. I was lucky that I got to a hospital. And they slowly started to build me up. It took me, I think, a month.

You were in the hospital a month?

Yes. Then they released me. I came out, no place to stay, no clothes, no shoes, nothing. Where is good old George again? He was there.

So with his help again, and I got on a train. And I went into Prague, to the city of Prague because I decided--

Which was very close to Theresienstadt.

Yes. About 30, 40 miles. I said, what should I do now? Go home? Who is alive? Is anybody alive? I didn't know nothing about my other brother, my father. I didn't know.

Before we get to that, did you have anybody to direct you or help you? The war was over. You were getting your strength back. Was there anybody at the hospital or any officials that were trying to direct you and give you any help as to construct your life again?

No, not in Theresienstadt itself, no, because I said I wanted to go home.

You told the--

So they helped me to get to the train station and to get home. But I had to go to Prague first where I had experienced the type of what the Czech people. You know, I walked on the street and smelled the fresh bread-- no money. The baker comes out with a bag full of food.

And you couldn't eat it?

Oh, I could eat at that time, yeah.

Well, I mean you had no money to buy it.

Yeah. But he didn't ask for money.

Oh. No? He gave you?

He gave me, yeah. I said, I'm tired. I can't walk. They said go on the streetcar. They were fighting who

should pay my fare.

These were the Czech people?

Czech people, yes.

They wanted to help you at this point.

Yes.

They wanted to--

They knew from where I'm coming. You didn't have to explain to them. They knew what's going on in Theresienstadt. Don't forget, Czechoslovakia was called before the war the Little United States. That was really a good democracy there.

So you did get on a train to get back to--

To Prague, and then I went to Bratislava.

Where was that?

Czechoslovakia. That's-- you want to spell it?

Sure.

You spelled everything out. B-R-A-T-I-S-L-A-V-A. Why I went there? I had my aunt there.

Oh, you thought you had a relative--

Yeah. My mother's brother, he passed away before. But his wife is there. OK? So I go there--

Or at least you thought she was there? You didn't know for sure.

No, she was there. I mean, I thought she was there. OK, I go to the Jewish Agency. And I said, I'm looking for this and this lady. Said, oh, she lives here and here. She's there. I went to her house.

This is your mother's sister?

My mother's brother's wife.

Your mother's brother's wife?

My mother's sister-in-law.

Yes.

OK. So I go to her house, knock the door. She opens the door. She doesn't recognize me. So I tell her who I am. I said, I've just come from the hospital. I had the typhus.

And she slams the door. She wouldn't let me in because I had the typhus. I couldn't explain to her that she can't get it. Once I came out of the typhus, I'm not carrying typhus.

They let you go from the hospital--

Yes--

--with typhus?

No. I was cured already. No, they wouldn't let you out with typhus from the hospital. Once you had typhus and you're cured, you can't give it to anybody else.

You're not contagious.

No, and you don't get it again either. She wouldn't let me in. So back to the Jewish Agency. I told them what happened. She said, we can't do nothing.

So I walk in Bratislava. So a couple of days, some young woman hits my shoulder, my cousin.

From?

Also, from my mother's side, who also, her aunt-- her mother and my aunt were sisters. So she was even a little bit closer. I told her what happened. She said, I don't believe you. I said, let's go back.

We went back. She wanted to let her in, but not me. We grew up together with my cousin. It's two streets away from each other. If my parents were not home, I was with them.

So what happens? She would let her in, not me. I said, don't jeopardize. It is your aunt. Go, stay here. I said, I found a Russian truck driver. He takes me back to Budapest. So I sit on the truck. He drove me back and arrived to Budapest, I would guess, around the middle of June.

Of?

1945. Now a little different than Czechoslovakia. I had to walk through a newly created bridge because the Germans blew up all the bridges. So I arrived from the Buda-- that's two sides. Buda is one side. Pest is one side. So I went from the Buda to the Pest side where I lived before.

You went to find your home, former home.

I went where I thought I find my father or my brother. I go on the street car. Where is the money? I don't have it. Get off. That was the Hungarian. See the difference? I had to get out, and I walked home.

I found out that my father died in the ghetto about a couple of months before the Russians came in.

In the Budapest ghetto--

They came in I think in February. They liberated Pest, that side, they came in first. I think he died in November or December. But my brother is alive.

So I went there. I found out he lives in a room by a family, but he is not home. So I walked over one block to my uncle and aunt and my cousin. They were all alive. They were the Judenrat in the ghetto.

I go up. Who I am again? The only difference, they screamed. You know?

They were happy--

Yes.

They were happy--

That's the difference. So I never forget. She brings in a coffee and some pastry. And my hand went like this. It went for several months, you know.

And then, I found my brother. He came home. For several months, I wasn't sleeping in a bed, just on the

floor.

Of your family, your uncle's home?

No, no, no. I was sleeping on the floor. I couldn't sleep in a bed. I was used to the hard--

Hard.

Hard, I couldn't sleep in a bed.

Oh, I see.

So then I found a job. In the meantime, I gave an application-- in Hungary, they had two different kind of police-- political and criminal. So I said, just in case, let's put in an application for criminal police. I would like to catch some of the guards and rest of them.

OK, meantime, I found the other job where they were making-- that's new to you-- all the windows, almost all of them were blown out in Budapest. So came the winter time-- you know I went home in June. So in July, August was the time to do something. They made paper windows. Yes, this could be done. The cold doesn't come in as bad paper windows.

So my brother and me, we were the supervisor this. Then in the meantime, I met my wife. So she was working for me. I don't now--

Your wife, you met your future wife--

No, I met her at a dance somewhere.

In Budapest?

Yes.

After the war?

Yes. You want to know the date? I know that one too. It was just now November 28, 1945. So it was now just 39 years old.

And she also survived the war?

She was at that time not Jewish, that time. OK? So in Budapest, we got married, December. Yes. Wait a minute, which one was-- we got married three times.

So it came-- I saw what's going on. I had a feeling. You remember when I said at the beginning, it happened to me one time. Said it won't happen again. I had a feeling, I said I saw what is coming. I said to my friend-- he's in New York-- come on, let's get out from here. We went to--

Who is this, George?

No, no. George is still there. That was the other one. With that one, I was working together before the war. OK? I said, let's go. So we went out to Austria.

With your wife?

No, I left her there because I was ready to go back to a DP camp, not knowing what is the situation if someone is not Jewish. OK? I said, I come back.

And I saw everybody who didn't have a Jewish wife. They took their wife, and that's it. So I said, heck with

it. I said, come on, let's go back.

He chickened out. He wouldn't come back again to Hungary. I went back. OK, the English-- that was English territory, occupied by the English. They caught me. They put me in the jail.

So what can they do with me? I said, I'm just coming from concentration camp. They couldn't prove it otherwise. So back to Hungary. I was hiding there for four or five days.

I said to my wife, you wanted to come? My brother, you wanted to come? And my friend's wife, you wanted to come? Yes.

I make the arrangement through the Haganah. We get out. We went back all of us to Austria.

Now how-- when you say you made the arrangements with the Haganah--

I went up to the Betar again.

And did you have to pay to get everyone out?

No.

Just made application?

No. No. We just went up. I said we wanted to leave.

And they didn't care whether your wife was Jewish or not Jewish? They just wanted--

They didn't even ask. They just wanted--

To help.

I said my wife and that's it. They said, throw away your marriage license. You can't walk out with any paper. If you get caught, we don't want you to have any paper on you. OK.

So now we are in Austria in English zone. I became a driver there for the UNRRA. Who know the UNRRA?

UNRRA?

United Nation Rehabilitation and Relief Agency. And I was a driver for the chief doctor there who got transferred to Vienna. So I said to him, now what I am doing here now? He said, I go up to Vienna and I will get you there.

He kept his promise. Officially, we went up through the Russian zone, we went up to Vienna. That was in 1948.

What now? You heard about the Rothschild Hospital?

Rothschild?

Uh, huh, hospital. That was the center for everything.

In Vienna?

Vienna. Went to the Orthodox rabbi. She wants to learn, turn Jewish. OK. We had at my friend's, who is in New York, his wife too. They went together. They studied. They had the--

Oh, he married a non-Jewish girl too?

Yes. And both of them had together, we had a double wedding in the Rothschild Hospital by an Orthodox rabbi.

And your wife--

So now, we had a Jewish wedding certificate--

But before that your wife had to study before they would perform the ceremony?

Oh, that Orthodox rabbi? Oh, my God, but how.

How long did she have to study?

About six months. Then we went to the authorities in Vienna. And we got a regular wedding license too. So that's what we have now. And my daughter was born there in 1948.

And did you have a decent life in Vienna at that point?

I was working. I worked for the UNRRA. And when the UNRRA was disbanded, I went over to the American Jewish Distribution Committee as a driver, where I became the school bus driver. But they had to be very careful, you know.

And I was driving between camps, all the camps. And I was lucky enough, from all the camps, I went in, here they gave me a little food, there they gave me a little food. And I had no problem.

What do you mean by all the camps? What camps?

The different school buildings what was turned over to the Jewish refugee organizations, where all the refugees were staying, like Rothschild itself. But that was like a headquarter, you know?

So what were your plans for the future? Did you decide to stay in Europe? Or--

No.

--did you want to leave?

No. In Vienna, I said, we are in the international zone surrounded by the Russian zone. Let's try to go over to the American zone in Salzburg. I made that too.

So we went over. And my daughter was-- she was born in March. We went over in October. So that-- was she was about six, seven months old, mouth taped so that they can't hear the cry-- again, the Jewish organization. We walked over from the Russian to the American zone. And we arrived in Salzburg, working again for the American Jewish Distribution Committee as a driver. There, I had--

And they had a place for you to live? They found a place--

They had the camp. But I went out from the camp. And I lived private because I earned enough money. And I had enough food to do it.

So there I found out that my aunt from Bratislava, her two son, my two cousins, my first cousins, they are in Australia. So I wrote to them, what's the situation? I'm still waiting the answer from them. Nothing. Then came the Truman's DP law, you know, who were in 1948 are eligible to come to the United States. So I put in the application there. So--

Is that because you were unhappy in--

Salzburg?

--in Salzburg? What should I do in Salzburg? How long will be the Joint in there. When all the DPs disappear, that's it. There was no future there.

At that time, I still was just 27. No, wait a second, that time in '49, I was 31 already. Time went fast.

You see, they took away not three years from me. They took away seven years from me, from '42 to '49, till I arrived here. And in '49, when my application came through from New York, that the committee in New York-- in Lorain, Ohio, I think they signed for 24 families that they accepting.

Who signed?

The Jewish committee in Lorain, Ohio. So we were one of them.

How did you happen to write to Lorain, Ohio?

I wrote-- they wrote to New York. Looks like they pulled out the file from Lorain, Ohio.

So it was just happenstance?

Yeah. So I got there. Three days later, I had my Social Security card, worked in a factory.

In Lorain?

In Lorain. A year and a half--

When did you learn English?

In the neighborhood house in Lorain. We came here knowing what means no. That's all. No, we moved out from a neighborhood where anybody could speak German or Hungarian. We were not interested in that one.

So was a year and a half, then the manager of the Metropolitan was very anxious to get someone who knows Hungarian because of a Hungarian neighborhood. So he got me theirs at the same time when my son was born.

But you had actually no relatives in the United States when you came?

No. No one.

So the help that you got was from what organization?

The Lorain Jewish community, I would say for about three weeks. Then I stood on my own feet. They paid my room and food. And after three weeks, I got my first paycheck, I said thank you. If I need them, I let you know. Thank God I never needed them.

And then your son was born in Lorain?

In Lorain, yes. And we laugh a lot about because originally my wife was born in Yugoslavia. I was born in Hungary. My daughter was born in Austria. My son was born in the United States. And I told her, if she gets pregnant, we have to move to Canada or Mexico just to keep the records straight, from every state somewhere.

So in meantime, we get active there. She became for a couple of years president of Hadassah. I was in B'nai B'rith. She was involved in it. I was involved with B'nai B'rith until we moved.

Did you join a synagogue there?

Oh, yes. Yes. I still belong there in Lorain. Because I moved to Cleveland, I got a promotion into management at Metropolitan into Parma. And that was where I live now in Brook Park. That was the closest not to be far away from Lorain, Ohio, because my daughter was still in school there. So that's why I never moved to East Side.

So you live on the West Side of Cleveland?

West Side, uh, huh.

Well, how did it feel to be a Jew in the United States after all of the things that you had gone through in Europe?

You know, is no problem actually. I find some things what I don't agree with it. But, you know, that you can't change people. It's--

Can you tell me how the Holocaust has affected you as a person? Have you any feelings in the back of your mind?

Oh, definitely affected me. Number one, I told you, I received a life sentence. I can't get out of it because other people, who may be the result of the war got maybe 15 years, they are free today. I am not.

You are not free?

I'm not free because I'm--

A life sentence from whom?

From the Germans whatever happened to me. That's on my mind all the time. And there was the other thing I forgot to tell you. I said I will get back about that Toronyi. When I got back to Budapest, the newspaper advertised they're looking for witnesses for Toronyi.

And there was all of us who were at that time arrived already to Budapest. And there was just one journalist was enough, a very well known journalist, he was the only witness who from 216 people, I think six of them were alive from that battalion where my brother was. They just listened to one man. The penalty? Hanging.

For Toronyi.

Toronyi, yeah. And they just gave two hours to say goodbye to the family. And then we could watch it that they hang him. What wasn't strange to him because he gave many of these orders anyway to others.

And they hung him in Budapest?

In Budapest in the jail, middle of the jail.

In the jail?

Yeah. So at least he got-- and this murder, he got the same-- before I even got back, they caught him.

Do you talk about the Holocaust very often with your friends or family?

For 40 years, I didn't say a word. I mentioned that I just was in May-- in July in Budapest. I came back. And what I put down-- I put certain things down on paper. And I sent to my son, who is in California, he's 29 years old. He just found out. I didn't talk about it.

And your family, your children never questioned you?

They tried. But then I was so strong refusing them that I don't talk about. I was foolish really because I thought I can forget it. It's impossible. You just can't forget this.

Do you feel better now that you have told your story and gotten it on paper?

Definitely, yes.

You feel relieved inside?

Yes. And if I have a chance, I would even like to be involved in it to talk others into it who are still reluctant to talk about it because I know they would not be reluctant to talk, maybe not to you, but talk to others who were there. And I feel there is a way to approach every body who were there.

Don't forget one thing, when you're talking Holocaust survivors, that group cannot grow. There is no newborn Holocaust survivor anymore.

Only children of survivors, of course. Of course.

Holocaust survivors there isn't--

That's right--

--anymore. It is just less every day.

Did your wife ever ask you questions even before you came to the United States? Didn't she wonder what happened and what people were doing to you?

When I questioned her why she wanted to change religion, she said, I suffered enough for my religion. If we have children, she doesn't want any discussion on it. She wants them to be Jewish. This was her answer. She never pressed me to talk about. What I appreciate. And now that she read it too, maybe she feels better. I don't know.

To what extent do you think the Holocaust experience has affected your outlook on life?

I would say if today everybody would had just two or three months of Holocaust experience, you wouldn't have any problem in the world. But each one would have to go through at least two, three months of actual experience--

And you actually went through how many years?

37.

How many years?

Three years.

Three years.

So May to June, May '42 to June--

'45.

'45, yes.

Do you think that survivors are different from other Jews?

I think that survivors are neglected. My personal feeling, and I made my views known that I feel-- and don't

feel bad about this-- I said, that's my feeling, OK, that second generations are trying to overtake what happened to the survivors because they learned from somehow or somewhere or from someone what happened. You cannot give back if you just learned about this or you read about. It is impossible.

I don't believe in it that anyone can give you back-- I can't even give you back. How can I give you back that feeling in that moment when that Russian soldier opened up the door and he said 24 hour free robbery? You're free. How can I describe it. It's impossible. Now, how can someone else tell others that this is the situation, this happened? It's impossible.

Do you appreciate--

My advice was to some people let the second generation advise the survivor and work very closely together. But don't try to overtake it. You cannot. Very hard to talk to any second generation person today what they should do. They're not interested. They know everything better than anybody else.

Are your children interested in partaking--

No.

--of helping the survivors or any programs with the Holocaust?

When I sent this copy to my son in about August or September, I told him, I said in your neighborhood is the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Go there. I even sent him the name of the rabbi there who is very involved in it. He still didn't go there. I didn't give up. I didn't give up because in the very near future, we are going to visit him. And I wanted to go with him together to the Simon Wiesenthal Center and get involved in because he has the brain to it.

Our last question to you, Tibor, is do you have a personal message that you would like to share with us regarding the Holocaust and your experience?

In what respect?

In how you feel about your freedom, living the United States, what people should do in the future, any feelings that you might have that you would like to share with us.

I would like to close it with this, what I heard from Simon Wiesenthal, that there is no guarantee that any next or future Holocaust would involve Jews only. It could happen to anybody else. So if people don't watch out, and they continue this hate campaign in any direction, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Ireland, what do they do, killing each other, that's all what they're doing. Nothing else. And result is killing, killing, killing.

I want to thank you for your candid story and telling us your experience. You did a wonderful job. And we do appreciate your taking the time to be with us today. This is Sally Weinberg. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Tibor Messinger. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section.