

3, 2, 1.

I'm Judie Wayman. Today we are interviewing Henry Miller, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section. Mr. Miller, before we were talking about when you got to Birkenau, you and your family.

Yes.

And you have a book with you called The Auschwitz Album, which you had gotten recently. And how about telling us how you got the book, how you heard about it?

The book, first of all, I had a brother-in-law in Israel. He is dead now. And he sent me small pictures, what he find there, my wife with my sisters. I was here in the United States. He was in Israel. And he sent it to me those pictures, a few of them, with his wife, what I showed to you, the mother. This was his wife, one of those with the kids.

Where did the album come from originally? Where did the pictures come from?

The pictures come from a lady who survived. She find. This is explained here in book. She find the pictures after the war. She was so sick. She fall asleep in a barrack someplace. And the next day when she wakes up, she was cold. She took on her blankets. And next day when she wakes up, this lady she took the blankets. And fall out of there some pictures.

And then she saw from her hometown, she recognized some people. So she put together all the pictures, and then she took it with her after the war, after the liberation. And she put it away. She hide it. And then she started to put together the book, you know? And my brother-in-law wrote me. He says, Henry, there's going to be a book so and so. So I looked all over for the book to find it. And I bought it here in Cleveland.

What does the book show?

The book show there the pictures when the people came from the cattle-- excuse me.

Cattle cars?

Yeah, excuse me. From the cattle cars down, they made pictures. It's there. My sisters is there. And my wife with her sisters on the picture.

These were taken by the Germans?

Was taken by the Nazis, by the Germans.

Would you show us the pictures of your--

Yes, I can show you for my wife and for my sisters the picture. What my sister told me, she remembers now when they took pictures, when we came down.

And that's the one there on the upper left? The upper left, let me see. This is my wife.

OK, with the white scarf.

With the white scarf, that's my wife. And here is her sister. And here is another sister, hers. And then let me-- here is, this is my sister. She lives here in Cleveland. And here is another sister. This one, they never came back. She died in concentration camp, in Bergen-Belsen. She died. And this sister here lives in Montreal, Canada. That's my sister. And this one here lives in Israel behind.

The one you could just see a little bit of her head?

Yeah, just a little bit her head, her eyes. So she lives in Israel.

Which was the sister whose child went with your mother? Which sister was that? She is this one here. She has here on the coat a yellow star, a little bit. See it?

The one in the lighter coat?

Yes. The whiter coat is it. That's my sister. She's still here in Cleveland. She sees in Menorah Park. She is ill. So those in that picture, there's the seven sisters, four of yours and three of your wife's.

Right.

And one of your sisters died--

In Bergen-Belsen.

And your wife and her two sisters, did they both survived?

Yes, they survived. Yes.

How about some other relatives in some of those pictures? They--

You had it on another page.

It's on another page. I got some more pictures. This one here, this one here, is my brother-in-law, was my brother-in-law's wife. And this lady here, what she has the child, this is her mother. They went in the crematorium when from the cattle cars we came down. Everybody took his bundle and with the kids, see, this was my brother-in-law's wife. And this one here is her mother, what she has the child in there.

And those was four children, her children. No one came home. They all was cremated.

What about the other group of pictures you have there, near the front?

No, this I don't know those people.

No, the one where you had the tab for another page.

Yes?

Near the beginning of the book.

Let me see. Yes. This one, this one here is my aunt. She didn't came home either.

And those are her children with her, the two girls?

The two girls was her children, and one child came home, not from those. She went with my sisters on work at work, you know? And she survived after the war. The only one child was survived from her whole family, because the kids were smaller. And with the smaller kids, they took the mothers in the crematorium.

And here is another my aunt, yeah, this one here is an aunt. My father's brother's wife. She didn't came back either with her children.

All four of those children are hers?

Yes. She didn't come home either.

Then I got in that book a lot-- from my town, I got that there [INAUDIBLE], I got there the druggist. I got there the doctor. Here in this book I recognize them. I recognize them. All of them, I can show you which one is if we have the time. Let me show you.

Did any of them survive?

Pardon me?

Did any of those people survive?

No. No, they didn't. They didn't. I cannot find it now. You know how it is.

While you're looking, how were you treated by the people in the camp, by the guards?

By the guards, they didn't do nothing to me because I was working. My father was working. We went to work. And it was nothing treated too bad. I mean I don't have nothing apart with them, because I was working. And I was always to see they shouldn't touch us.

How about your brothers and your sisters?

My sisters, till they was in Birkenau they didn't work. For instance, this family, the whole family is from my hometown. None of them survived. I recognize them through the pictures. I know them very well. And when I showed that to my friends, I had a lot of friends from my hometown in New York. They said, Henry you are right. This is the family. They recognized them also.

OK. Why don't we just put the book down then?

Yeah. Can I put it back now?

That's fine.

Yeah. Ooh, I'm sorry.

Don't worry.

Water, I spilled water.

OK, that's one of my tricks. What sort of work did your sisters do there?

No, till October, you see we went to work. My father and two other brothers with myself, we were four together on work. Every night when we came home from work, we went to see. We couldn't go in, in the camp. Just far away, they knew when we came home. They was watching us, the sisters. And my father couldn't talk to them. He just used to wave with the hands. That's all.

And they didn't work till October. October, they took them away in October for work. They took them to Fallersleben, Salzwedel to work. I was there till end of October in Birkenau. In Birkenau on October, there was there the Sonderkommando cut the wires, the electric wires. I was still there. We went to work. They knew the next day they're going to crematorium them.

The Sonderkommando, they called when they worked with those people, they put them in the oven. They burned them. And they knew everything. They had the information always more than anybody else, and was there a Jewish girl who she worked in ammunition factory. She brought in explosive material and grenades, all kind things. And they knew, the Sonderkommando, they were so together that they cut the live wires with they run, because they knew they're going to be killed anyway.

So whatever they could kill Germans, they killed. And they tried to run away. When we came home from work, we had an order to go to pick up those dead people. Because they shot them. The Germans, they shot Germans too, that's no question. Just I don't believe if it was one at least could survive in there. I heard some of them survived. They ran away. I don't know how.

Anyway, next day, the next camp lager was the Zigeunerlager they called it, the gypsy lager. A few weeks before the crematorium, they killed all the Gypsies. And the Sonderkommando, they took them in over there. And I talked to the friends, to the boys were a lot of friends of mine. They said, Henry, they're going to kill us today. And I saw them when they took him to the crematorium with the hands up like that. And they shot them, every one of them. And like that, they went to the crematorium.

I saw them go. And I talked to them before. He says, we tried to escape. They caught us. We couldn't do nothing anyway. They're going to shoot us. And I saw them when they took them out from that camp. They took them in the crematorium, because the crematorium was to the left-hand side further up, not far, where I was. Where was those wire barracks together.

So they shot them. I don't know if you saw the picture, a film, when the girl was hanged. That girl what took in an October the explosive and the grenades, they hanged them. They caught her and they hanged her up. She says, I don't care.

I saw this picture. My God, I thought I couldn't talk. I saw the picture. I saw the girl when they hanged her. So anyway, end of October they took us away from Birkenau to this-- I don't know where. We went in the cattle trains. They took us to Stutthof was the name camp. They took us. I was there with my two brothers and my father. We were still there in November. In November, it was horrible there. A piece of bread, and that's all what that was.

And this was I couldn't tell you what kind life we had there. It was already cold with us, and even my father was mad of us that we put together three pieces of bread, and we bought a pair of boots for my father for the winter. So we was there in November, end of November, December, end of November. Then they took us to another place.

That was I think Tailfingen was the name in the German place. This was near Stuttgart. From where do I know Stuttgart? I was watching always outside through those little windows. The names, if I see something to read. Then I saw Stuttgart was written down. So I know we are not far from Stuttgart someplace. That's all.

And then we went there also to work, worked with me my father and the two brothers and myself. When they took us from Stutthof, to the Tailfingen place to work on the streets, we made the streets with stones. Then they took away my two brothers to another place, and me and my father to another place. They knew. They find out I think we are together three brothers and a father. So they put us away, me and my father to one place. And since then I never saw my two brothers.

My father passed away in December there where I was with him. He couldn't take it anymore. He couldn't take it. He was a very strong man. Just he couldn't take it. Since then--

At this point, did you have any idea where your sisters were?

No.

OK, you'd lost contact then at that point.

No, no contact, no nothing. All of a sudden, I was by myself.

Did you expect help from anyplace or from anybody?

No. I tell you the truth. I was so lost, I didn't care.

Did you have any feeling towards Jews or governments in any place else in the world, like what they were doing or what they weren't doing?

Feeling? I thought those time it's no world. No world, nothing.

The world, because they weren't doing anything? Where did you go after this? Where was the last camp you went to? There's Kleenex under the book.

That's all right. Then I lost my father there and an uncle over there. I saw to the people, you see when somebody died there, he died, for starving. This was already December, cold.

Where did you go from there? Did you go to another camp?

Yes. From there, they took me myself to Allach. That was near Dachau. There I didn't work, no work, nothing. This was already in January. This was January, because my father died in December.

In Allach, was so weak those time. I saw a man. He was a short guy. He's in New York from my hometown. He used to learn tailoring under my hands. I call his name.

When I told him my name, he says, who are you? And I told him my name is they called me at home Henny. I'm Henny Miller.

He says you're not Henny Miller. I knew very well Henny Miller, he said. He was my friend. I called him Mortsy. They called him at home Mortsy. I say, Mortsy, that's me. Don't you recognize me? He says, no. You are not Henry Miller.

I couldn't stand already on my feet.

How much did you weigh at this time?

Who knows?

About this was soon before the end of the war. When I-- then I told to myself, I look like that. He didn't recognize me. Then OK. Then I'm done too with my life. I didn't care. My father was dead, the brothers I didn't know where they are. My sisters, I didn't know.

I didn't know where my wife-- it was my girlfriend, they were together. And I knew that my mother is dead. I wasn't dumb. Those times I was already. I was dumb. Those times, I knew they put her in the gas chamber because I had friends. They were there. They told me everything. I didn't want to tell for my father or for my sisters. They didn't know nothing. And yes, before, I told them all the time, I was the head always of my sisters.

I mean I wasn't the oldest. Just I told them, listen, I said. In case when if it will be after the war, everybody should come home. We're going to meet each other at home. That's what I told them the last. And when I was there by this Mortsy what I said in Allach. Then he said, yes, you're telling me everything. So you must be then Henry Miller. I told them so and so.

He says, OK. Don't worry. I will give you what to eat. I am-- he was a short guy, a little guy. So the ages was good, his age. Just they keep them like, he cleaned the shoes, something by the kitchen. He brought me every day a little bit soup. This was enough for me. And then on a nice day from Allach, I was there till April. He gave me all the time a little bit

of soup, and this was enough.

And then me they took us. They said when they took us away to work. It was an April 1945. And they put us in the cattles, in those. And they took us to those time I didn't-- this time I didn't know where they took us. I tell you what that was. They took all of us to Tyrol was the name. They wanted to shoot us, to kill us there in the-- this was big mountains. They want to shoot us. Just we was the lucky ones. American came from the other side. And they couldn't take us.

For 10 miles we was a whole week back and forth, back and forth, because the Americans came around. And then I saw something. What's happened? We was just here. And back and forth. Still we didn't know what's going on. And they gave us a little piece of bread. And from there, all of a sudden this was April, end of April.

All of a sudden, they was stopped the train. And we saw they start to run away the Germans. They're running away.

Then this was end of the war. So that's what that was.

So you were on a train, a cattle car, when you were liberated.

We're liberated.

Who liberated you?

The Americans. By Munich.

What was it like? What had happened? What did they do? It came the Red Cross came to the wagons, maybe they made a mistake too. They gave us packages, care packages. People was hungry. They start to eat. And then it was women too in the cattle cars. It was a long. And I find there between the women, my brother-in-law's sister is also there. So they gave us, they came down from the Red Cross a man. He said from now on, you are free.

And he gave us care packages and everything will be OK from now on. Everybody was hungry. I tried to tell for the neighbor, for the girls, for my brother-in-law's sisters, don't eat. Don't eat. There was milk, those [NON-ENGLISH]. What do you call it? What they make from milk?

Cheese?

No, even now for coffee they're putting in.

Cream?

The cream, dry, the dry cream. I made a little fire by the kettle down. We don't have no Germans, so we thought we are free. And I took water, and I boiled the water, and I put in the for milk. And we was drinking. I said a little bit, not too much. If we are free already, let's keep it on. Watch it. Watch it. And still we was eating, because we were so hungry.

It was there full of bread a cattle car with bread. And who was strong, they went there and they broke open the doors, and start to throwing bread outside. Everybody grabbed a bread. I run with the bread and another came to me, took it away from me. I didn't blame him, because I would do it the same thing.

Don't get me wrong. I don't blame nobody how it was there. In that Allach, where I was in Allach, was there such a hunger. I go back to Allach. Was at night, people went to the dead people and cut piece of meat on behinds, excuse me. And they was put them on-- and they eat it from the dead people. I was there. This was in Allach before we were liberated.

So what can I tell you? It was terrible. From there, is not far was the name Feldafing. The Americans took us to Feldafing camp. That was the Germans something, a big I don't know what, by Munich. And then they changed right away our clothes. We went for a shower. And they gave us already to eat they give us. And we had a clean bed. Who

saw it till I was in?

So then I start to be a little bit, to come to me. Still, what is my life?

Was your health improving at all at this point?

A little bit. A little bit. Because if you eat, you was strong, just I felt a little bit better. And still it was in my mind my home. I knew my father is dead. My mother is dead. And the two brothers, I don't know where they are. The sisters, I don't know.

Anyway, I was there for a few weeks till I came better to me. And there was an order from the Americans who is from Czechoslovakia, and who wants to go back home, the trucks is going to take you to Prague. I was the first one. I said, I go. I came to Prague. I find people was home already. This was already in May. Because why do I remember so good? May the 1st was a big snow, a day before I liberated. Was there a snow in May, May the 1st was snow in 1945. So I went to Prague.

I asked a lot of people did you see my sisters, my brothers? Nobody. From there was next stop for everybody who wants to go back home to the Karpaten, where I was from Hungarian, we have to go to Budapest first. I went to Budapest. I registered myself. Everybody registered. That was there they gave me eat, not for me only for everybody who came got it.

And then I was there a few days. And then I find there in Budapest my wife's brother. He was a partisan. I talked to him. You know, he was all right. He gave me-- you know, we know each other from the hometown. And I used to go with my wife. So I say, listen, did you hear something from-- for whom did you hear? He says from nobody. I don't know nothing.

Then I find out my sisters and my wife, they're coming home. They are in Prague. I went to the train from Budapest. And I said, I go to see my sisters and my wife who was my girlfriend. And some friend came across to me, he says when I went to the train I want to go to Prague. He says Henry, don't go. I saw your sisters. They're coming home. They will be here tomorrow.

So I didn't went there. So I was waiting till tomorrow. And they came, came three sisters.

And your girlfriend.

Pardon me?

And your wife, future wife was with them.

And my wife. And my cousin what I showed to you, the picture, only she survived. This was her mother. They didn't came home. And she only came home from the whole family. And then came my wife's three sisters and my three sisters. One sister didn't came home.

Did you go back to your home?

Yes.

And what happened there?

Yes. I came home with my wife. I find out those times I have my brother, the second brother from my oldest, the older from me is in Kosice. He lives, he is there in Kosice. So I took my sisters and I went to my brother, to Kosice. My wife came too with us. And I found him in Kosice. I knew the address from before the war. It's late.

That's OK.

Before the war. I went there. And I told them the story from my father, how it happened. He survived of papers he had from Gentile papers.

He passed.

Yeah. So he survived, my brother in Kosice. Then he says to me, our brother-in-law, my sister's husband, is home. So I said like this, for my other two sisters, you stay here in Kosice. And I go home with my sister to her husband. So we went back home. When I came home, not far away I saw our house.

I had a dog. And the dog was--

The dad was still there.

Yeah.

The dog was waiting there by the house. When I whistled once, he came to me.

Had the neighbors taken care of him when you were gone?

Yes, then he cried, the dog. He don't let me go nowhere. But he was after me, I cannot tell you. I couldn't go away from him. All of a sudden, I took my sister. The neighbor told me, Henry, we see the dog is all the time by the house. He didn't move from the house. We gave him to eat and so and so. And I didn't gave him the satisfy to tell him that my father and mother is dead. I told them they are by my brother in Kosice.

So then I said to them, goodbye. And I went with my sister to my brother-in-law. He was in another town where he lived before. I came there. And it was we were together very nice. I said, Joe, we're not going to stay here anymore. We're going to go to Germany. First, we're going to Czechoslovakia, because over there was almost Russian came in those time. Now it's full of Russians there. And we had an option to stay in Czechoslovakia. Because till the 15th of December, if somebody gives papers and we could stay because we are from Czechoslovakia.

And I don't want to stay over there, so I could stay in Prague, or wherever I want. So I said, we are going to go there, all of us.

I'm going to move you up a little bit because we are running a little short, and we wanted to wrap up a bit on some things.

Yeah, OK.

How did you end up coming to the United States?

The United States, then I knew I have a brother-- I had an uncle a brother in America. Go look for American. My brother in Israel I knew his address by heart. Is Jakob Miller, [PLACE NAME], I used to write. Then he knew my uncle was in Cleveland. He's the oldest brother. He knew my uncle was here.

And he put in the paper he is Jakob Miller, the son of Moses. You know? And Moses had a brother in Cleveland. His name was Chaim. And a cousin of mine read the paper on a Sunday. And he saw, what's going on? He called up my uncle, and says, Chaim, so and so I see in the paper is-- do you have a brother, his name Moishe Hersch, so and so. He says, yes.

He says his son is in Israel and he is looking for you. So right away, they got in touch. And then he sent him my address. I was in Germany already. I was in camp, in DP camp in Germany, with my wife and my sisters. All of us was there. So then he sent me papers to come to the United States. I want to go to Israel. Just my wife was pregnant with my son. Then this time wasn't Israel yet, end of '46, '47, '48, or '47. And they don't let me.



They said, you got time to go to Israel. Your wife is going to have the baby, and so and so. And then my uncle sent me papers to United States, I should come. So I came here in 1949 to United States .

How often do you talk about your Holocaust experiences?

How often? This is in my mind every minute. Just what can I talk about it, when my friends was the same way like I.

Do you talk with him about it a lot?

Yeah, sometimes. They knew it the same thing, because they went through the same thing.

How did you tell your children?

Same thing. I told them how it's happened.

How old were they?

Maybe my son was already eight, nine years old. We started talking. They know.

And at that age, you feel they're able to understand?

Yeah. Because he was asking where is my grandpa, where is my grandma?

How do you feel, to what extent has the Holocaust affected you now, to your emotional health, your physical health, mental health?

Let me tell, you emotionally I'm very hurt. , Physical let's say thank God I'm all right. Just I cannot talk about it.

Did it affect the way you talk to your family members, relate to them, or how you relate to other people?

To my family, which one? The Americans or--

Any family, has affected that? Or has it affected your social relations with other people.

Let me tell you something. When I came here to this country, and they asked me, my uncle's friends, if I told them. They said, how come you survived? Go talk.

Do you feel they're asking, accusing you of something, or were they wondering?

No. They said if it was so hard, so how did you survive?

I said, just by accident.

Those are people who weren't there. What do you think would be an appropriate way for those who did not go through the Holocaust to relate to the survivors?

Let me tell you. Nobody can believe it. If I wouldn't be there, I wouldn't believe it either. Nobody can believe it that could happen.

Do you think survivors are different from other Jews?

They are different. Let me tell you. Some other Jews like you call them, they look on us a little bit different. They look different on us. Just I can say nothing, because when I came to this country, my aunt told me, Henry, I'm going to make

a shower for you.

I say Aunt Bessie, what does mean a shower?

She says, the family is going to come together. They're going to bring you a towel, a dish. I say thank you very much. I didn't want it, such a shower. I am here in America. I'm going to do it myself.

Did you get help from other people when you came here, organizations?

No.

The Jewish community?

No way.

Not even a penny. I didn't want to take and nobody gave it to me, not even a penny.

How did the Holocaust affect your outlook on life?

Outlook on life? You know, outlook on life, is to me the whole world doesn't care for the Jews. And I told myself, wouldn't be better off I shouldn't be a Jew? I should convert myself? I saw it doesn't help, it doesn't help.

I was born a Jew. I'm going to die a Jew.

How do you say it doesn't help to convert?

Why? I saw by Hitler was generations and generations who just came, [INAUDIBLE] Jew, they took him away also. It doesn't help.

You said you were Orthodox. Your family was very Orthodox.

Yes.

Before.

Yes.

Did it affect your religious outlook or how you look upon God?

Let me tell you when I was liberated I didn't believe in nothing and not God. I didn't. Let's say I was three years in Israel, three years ago. My neighbor came five years ago from Israel, from my hometown, my neighbor. I find out where he is. I went to see him. He was gracious Simhah, you know. We was very happy, cried on the shoulders. He didn't recognized me. I didn't recognize him. You know it's already since 1945, '44. We didn't see each other.

So anyway, he says, Henry, I have your father's [NON-ENGLISH]. And I give it to you. So I thanked him, and I took it. It's by me very-- I came to my brother to Israel. And this time, my brother couldn't go. He is sick. He couldn't go there with me. Just I hope just next year I go to Israel I'm going to go there with my brother.

He says to me, Henry, how come you was there in 1945 after the war. Didn't you see there the [NON-ENGLISH]? I said, my dear brother, I saw the talisman father. I saw that shtreimel what he had for Shabbos. I saw all the [NON-ENGLISH] on the floor. I didn't want to look at it. I didn't believe it anymore. Why should I grab a book from there, when I don't believe it? This was all false to me.

Now so many years pass by, it's very dear to me. If you want it, I give it to you. I told him. He said, no. That's yours. So

you have to believe in something.

I brought up two kids.

You mentioned your daughter teaches Hebrew.

They are not too religious, like me, not too religious. They know they are Jews. They know to daven, my daughter and my son. They know for Shabbos they're riding on Shabbos. And I ride to on Shabbos. I don't say no. I am not so religious like I was at home. I am more religious now than I was after the war.

You're getting older. You have to believe in something. Because I learned before the war I was religious, my parents. And I know a little bit the Bible. I know the Gemara. I learned Tanakh.

So just after the war, I didn't want to believe it at that time. I said, no way. Just you have to believe in something. Now I believe. I'm not so religious like I was. Nobody can tell me something about those things. I think still very nice what we went through, and we believe. I believe it in God. Yes.

A friend of mine asked me, Henry, he's very religious. Henry, he says to me. If you're going to die, you come of the other world. And God is going to tell you why you did that and that. What are you going to answer him? I'm going to ask him just one question. Why he sent Hitler to us.

What is the God like that you believe in now?

Pardon me?

The God you believe in now, what is he like?

What do you mean?

What kind of a God is it?

It's a Jewish God I mean from the Torah, from Moses, from Abraham. This God I believe. Now that's no question about it. Just I'm going to ask him if he's going to ask me why don't you believe it like before, then I'm going to ask him why did you send Hitler. If you want to punish me, why didn't you punish me myself. Why didn't you took away my life? Why did you allow to see those Germans to do what I saw what they did with those?

In your opinion, what would be an appropriate way to commemorate the memory of those who lost their lives during the Holocaust?

What you mean, what is commemorate?

What would be a good way, an appropriate way to show, to give from memory?

Respect them.

What would be a good way to commemorate the memory of those people?

Still I go. I go in shul, in Shabbos. Do you think the Jewish community or the world should do anything as a commemoration for the 6 million?

Oh, yes, we build it here a monument for the 6 million in Cleveland. You know that? The Kol Israel. And we going there once in a year between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with rabbis. We got their ashes from Auschwitz. We got their bones. We got everything. And I go to shul too. And we have four times a year Yizkor for the 6 million, for the parents.

Why did you decide to share your experiences with us today?

Why?

I know it's a very difficult decision to make and--

Yeah, it was a difficult decision for me. Believe you me. First of all, I'm not that English man to speak so good English, and this and that. So still the world should know what we went through. And it should never happen again. That's why I came. It should never happen again.

Is there anything else you'd like to add? We have about another minute.

What can I add? I can add just this. All Jews should see to it we should have a strong state of Israel. That's the only hope for the Jews, the strong state of Israel. Everybody had to see to it the state of Israel should live forever and ever and ever. If we would have at those time a state of Israel, it would never happen this.

OK. Well, thank you very, very much for giving us your time today. I wish we had a lot more time. Because there was so much more that you had to say.

Oh, yes.

And to hear. This is Judie Wayman. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Henry Miller. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section.