

Ben, we're coming back for the second part of the interview. And I think you were discussing the time now that you were 19 and you were brought to Auschwitz. Could you tell us a little bit what the life was like at that point and what was happening?

Well, when we came in that evening to Auschwitz, it was quarantined because every time somebody was coming in, a transport, they locked everybody in the barracks so they wouldn't know what goes on practically. That's what they wanted to do. And the next day, they assign us to a job, which was a DAW, they call, Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke, which meant that the outfit, that section, was producing for the Wehrmacht, for the German war effort barracks so they could assemble it on the Eastern Front.

So that morning, they took us all from the blocks. They were brick block building. And they were-- my section was 18A and 18B. There was one building in here. And that building housed only those carpenters and cabinetmakers.

And they lined us in front of the building like they did every day. And it's 7 o'clock in the morning after-- it was counted each block by block. From the whole camp was counted out that everybody's present and everybody's accounted for. The music started to play. And you marched out, out of the camp, to your assigned job, which was in my case was this DAW, which this was a factory with working machinery, and that we were working with wood for the German Wehrmacht.

And as the music played, you kept your step with the music beat so they could count it easy. That's the reason they had the music playing, a band playing. We didn't know what the band was-- we thought it was a welcome for us. That was the reason they had the band so they could count. So in the morning, the music played. And when we were coming back after the day's labor, back into the camp, the music played so they could count us.

And there, the first day we were strangers there. I knew my way around the woodworking. But they had such a modern machinery I never seen in my life that I couldn't go to a machinery. So I was assigned-- also, they had kapos who were Polish people who were prisoners. They were Polish officers and all kinds of people from all over. They were from Holland, people from France, all kinds of people, who were assigned into this hall that we were working.

And there I got acquainted also-- I had assigned-- I had a bench and I had assigned tools with a lock. And I was responsible for that thing.

And then we had kapos who was one of the-- in charge-- also a prisoner like me, except he must have been either-- he was not Jewish. He must have been a Gentile. He must have been either a Polish-- you couldn't find a Russian over there. But you could find anyone else in this camp, in Auschwitz.

And their work-- I was assigned to making barrels, that section where I worked making barrels, which out of wood. They had a steel rim around them. And they had to be tested. We poured water in it so it doesn't leak in here. And I didn't know anything about it.

But again here, there was a guy over there. He was a Polish officer in the Polish army. And when they caught up with him, they put him into a camp, into Auschwitz. And by profession, he was an engineer. And he figured out how to make these barrels so it was precision so they were not leaking. Because if they were leaking, he got beat up. And in turn, he beat up anybody who was working on it.

So he showed me the trick how to figure out. He showed me a compass you have to put three times to figure the bottom so the bottom fitted in. And he took a liking to me.

And I told him, I said, listen, you know I'm Jewish. He says, to me, you're a person. And I told him like-- I think that he was an officer. He told me he's a Polish officer. I says, I know that my friend's father, who was my next door neighbor-- and he wasn't my next door neighbor. He was across the river that I was mentioning before-- he was also a Polish officer before the war. His name was August Franczek.

And I know that he was taken away-- or maybe he's here. The minute I said August Franczek, the guy now, you know August Franczek? I said, he's my neighbor. He would know me.

He's here, he says. He is the chief cook for the Gestapo. He's the best cook they have so they idolize him. He can do a lot of things for you, if you're telling me the truth, I says. All you can do is just if you see him, you tell him that Jumeck Nebel is here. And if your response, if it's not true, then you know, you can kill me. You can do anything you want. I'm telling you the truth. If you telling me he's here, then he's here.

So he told me what block. He says, I don't want to get involved in it because maybe they're watching. I didn't know at the time what he meant. But he says he is in Block 4, which was the elite block in here. And he is an old timer here. His number was 630. My number was 174163. So he was an old timer over there.

And so I came over there. You couldn't get in. I told him I said I want to see August Franczek. He says, what do you mean you want to see Franczek?

They gave newcomers who came to the camp, they gave him the worst clothes that didn't fit. I go over there. I know him. He must be a liar, so he threw me out, this guy, at that block.

But I persisted. And I said, look, just tell him that Jumeck Nebel is here, just tell them. So this guy goes over there and tell him. When he told him, he says, and you didn't let him in. So he pushed him away. And he came running down. He was a heavysset fella. And he looked at me, he started crying.

Well, how many people were in your barracks at that time?

Each barrack must have had-- there must have been about 250 on each block. And there were three bunks they had over there. But this was only the barrack for these people here.

But this guy here, when he seen me there, he says to me, don't worry, you're not going to get lost. He gave me food. He gave me meat. They didn't have-- nobody had-- he had everything because he was, as I explained to you, he was the chief of the cook for the Gestapo. We had nothing in the camp. The camp was water in the soup and the black bread once a day.

But he had access here. He was heavy. So he told me you come over here every Friday, Saturday-- no, every Sunday. And he told that guy who was the Blockalteste, who was the block eldest, he says, you let the guy in here next time.

Every time I came in, he already-- he gave me a thing. And he took my number. See, I had a number tattooed on my arm. And he took my number, this Franczek, because this was the father of the guy I used to study with. And we used to-- we grew up together. He knew me. I used to come over. I was more in his house than my house.

But he could help me. And every Sunday I came over there. And he gave me-- and he took a number, my number he took off in case-- watched it because, see, every so often they used to have a selection in the camp in here. And whoever was skinny, he had glasses, unworldly sometimes-- they used to pick up the number and they used to send them away to Birkenau, which wasn't far away. It's only seven kilometer. And there were the chimneys. And the crematoriums were and the gas chamber was in Birkenau.

So he watched for me. And once they picked my number because I wasn't-- I didn't have no beard. I wasn't shaving yet in here. And the fuzz was coming out in here. And it didn't dawn on me that I have to shave. And the guy, the Gestapo, wrote my number and he caught it. And he pulled me out here because they used to take these-- they call them Muselmann if a guy was skinny, not shave or something.

But he gave me different clothes in here. So I could get around already. So it didn't take long that my food, what I was getting, was so bad in here so I was giving away to friends of mine. I gave to this guy, that rabbi's son I got acquainted. And I helped him as much as I could in Auschwitz itself because I had already helped from this other fellow.

And there was another guy who was the name who was Krzywdzinski who was also-- I knew him. He was also an officer in the Polish army. And after the occupation, they caught him. And they brought him also to Auschwitz. But he came in later.

And he knew me. He knew my family. He knew me. And he also was working as a butcher. But he was working as a butcher in a camp cook, in other words. So he couldn't give me any good food.

But whatever he has, I had enough food from both of him, that in turn I had some other friends of my friends that were starving. I gave him my food in here. So in turn, we help each other in here.

And this particular, his name was Morrie Hayes, this guy, the rabbi's son, that I took liking to him. And he was my age. And I sort of kept an eye on him.

He had an older brother that he came together. He was from another town here, Rzeszów. And he came here. And his brother wore glasses. He was older than him. He was maybe 10 years older than him. And the minute the first time the Gestapo seen him in camp that he wore glasses, they took him away. And that's the last time he seen him. So we were together, sort of keeping together.

But I had a good job there. In Auschwitz, this guy helped me with the barrels. So when there was any good job-- in return, he knew that I told him the truth that this guy is a friend of mine, an acquaintance. It was not a friend, because this guy was a big shot. They had an underground in Auschwitz. And that's why I didn't know.

He had connection. He already knew-- my town knew that I'm alive, that I'm in Auschwitz because this guy had channels there. And that's why they couldn't get to-- not everybody could walk up there to this block. And the Germans didn't know that. But then I found out that he has contacts. They already knew.

Well, how did he help you and without the Germans knowing? Or would they punish him or what?

No, he had access to the German because since he was there, he was a-- he didn't work physically. He was a chief cook. He procured the food for them. And this was for the SS, not for the guards, for the officers. There were officers there. And there were visitors coming over there. And they had a cook especially. He had influence.

And he says, look, I have a boy over there, that number in here. And you better don't do anything, to the chief of Gestapo here, because he was-- we didn't have no hair. Everybody was shaved. He had hairs. He had privileges in there.

I see.

So he could do things. And he did. He probably did for others too in here, see? But that's where he-- for me, he did in here.

And as far as the job over there, once the other guy knew that kapo, that the engineer who was working with the barrels in that shop, that I was telling you the truth. So he already had respect for me too. He knew that I don't lie.

And also, he taught me this trade, how to make the barrels in here. We used to make barrels. And we used to make tables with doors and windows. And they used to ship this to the Eastern front, to the Russian front for the Wehrmacht, for the German army.

And I used to go also on an Ausserkommando. That was a job that used to send out carpenters and cabinetmakers out of our streets into little towns to help for the German who lived there, the German civilians. So I used to go out over there. There you had contact with other people.

In other words, you were going out of the camp with a guard, SS guard. His job was just to see that we don't run away. And we marched two of us, or three at the most, and one guard with a gun, with a rifle. And we used to go out to this place here, called itself Gaertneri Raisko, which was there a place that they grew up vegetables and tomatoes.

And they was in charge, in our place, in that DAW, in that section was in charge a German officer who was-- not necessarily an SS man. He was a German officer in uniform with a gun in here. And it was usually older people, almost retired people. And these people never bothered us, these people who were in charge in here.

So this guy was-- they call him a Meister because he used to go, and he used to tell us what we have to do in that and this section here. So he used to come over with a suitcase-- not a suitcase, an attaché, he used to come over. And it was always empty. And I thought maybe this guy needs something maybe.

So what we did, and I says, Meister, I used to-- give me the suitcase, this attache. And I used to fill him up with tomatoes and everything. And he took it with him. He's going back with an attache. So he never bothered us. And whatever you want to do in this camp in here, in that Gaertneri Raisko I brought in to the camp tomatoes and fresh vegetables and everything because I had the chance in here, as long as I was going out of here.

Used to even take letters. There were women working over there, which there's only contact I had with women. They were working in this camp also as helping in harvesters in here. And they used to contact-- I used to go over. I was supposed to work in this and this section. I go over there. The guard knew that I'm in surrounded there, that I wouldn't run away.

So they used to tell me, you know this and this guy in block? I know a friend of mine. I have a brother there. They used to slip me letters. And I used to put him in my shoe. And I walked into the camp, and I gave it to him.

In return this guy didn't know what. It's is a miracle here. My sister alive. So he was a blockalteste. In other words, he was the oldest one in the block, that he was in charge of it. So in return, he did me favors. If I need something here, he says just come over here. So you see that's how I helped. He helped me and I helped this fellow, this Morrie and other people here.

Yes, people had to work together.

The people-- that's where we helped each other in here. So in Auschwitz in here it wasn't bad over there with this contacts in here. And I had food to spare and to give it to somebody else while other peoples were starving. But this was already 1944. And I still work in this DAW.

And you could see new people coming in here. They came in the transport. And in July, they came people from Hungary. Hungarian Jews came in, all kinds of young people. You never seen anybody older anymore. Everybody who you see was just young people over there.

Were there any children in the camp?

Not in this camp. We never-- there's nine then-- you find a little fella here in the uniforms. So what they did as a gesture for their pleasure or something in here, the Germans let in a little fellow. So he must have been 10 or 11 years old, 12 years old. He told them he's a midget. But he was a child in here. They gave him a nice uniform, and everybody catered to him. So the guy never went hungry in here. How he got there, I have no idea.

See, the main thing in here, I was told once by one of the guy who was first when I came into this hall when I was working in this office, this engineer that he taught me to make the barrels, he says, I'll tell you once and I'm not going to tell you again in here, only once, if you want to survive-- we all want to survive-- but if you really want to survive, you stay away from volunteering for anything no matter what they promise you. And stay away from a kapo that he hits you, that he hurts. You stay away from it. And mind your own business. Just go anywhere, but don't be in front of it. Go in the back. When they ask for five people, go in the back. Don't ask for it. Don't go.

And I heard him. A lot of times I've seen where it where they promise you, they give you this and this to go away to volunteer to go work, what I found out the volunteering that was the Sonderkommando, which was go burying people. They took people from Auschwitz to Birkenau to-- because these people in Birkenau knew what goes on. We didn't

know exactly. But they were burning every day people. The stench of the smoke and the smell, it was unbearable. And you knew that what they do.

And some of them, some people there, they are all kinds of murderers, all kinds. And they antagonize you. He says, the only way you're going to get out is like this. They show you, they meant with the smoke.

But this was the life over there. There were people were not humans in the camps. They were animals. Everybody was just trying to survive. And that's how the life was over there.

Did you notice any kind of religious bringing together, any kind of secret prayers, or any kind of services or anything?

Well, I was brought up, as I explained to you before, I was brought up Orthodox. And this fellow, this friend of mine, this Morrie, he was a son of a rabbi. And I knew every-- whenever holiday it was, like it was Yom Kippur, we knew Yom Kippur. He didn't need it. And I says, why don't you eat? He says, don't you know what's the day? Today is Erev Kippur.

So I knew about the holidays. I knew about everything here. What could I do? You are in conflict with your sovereign here. Is there a God? You start thinking about it. What goes on? Is this possible? Is this humanly possible? What goes on in here?

And towards the end of 1944, it was getting worse. You could hear movement. People were moving. New people coming in. They were moving the people from the Auschwitz itself.

When you go out outside, when you used to go out there, the smell from burning was so intense in here. And it was terrible. And you knew that, well, when it's my turn? You might as well do whatever I can now because there's no tomorrow.

And towards the end of '44, we used to lie down into-- before the snow came in-- we used to lie down on the ground. And you could hear thunder, you know, like thundering. And you figure in November, it's thundering, there's something wrong. There's no thunder. And that was already you could hear the heavy artillery when the Russians were coming in. You could hear the shooting already.

And in November, about mid-November of '44, they were closing up Auschwitz. So in one time, they says all the magazines are open. You go freely into the magazine and take whatever food and clothes you want. That was the order.

In other words, they open up the magazine. And what they're trying to do is, so the Russians were coming in here, and they tried to get everybody out of the camp. So they entice them so they open up the thing, they get it, so they can get you out of here because a lot of them, a lot of boys, a lot of people were hiding in the camps. So they used to come out with dogs to sniff him out.

I have this friend of mine, it's Morrie. In the meantime, this day, they took this Franczek, this guy. And they shipped him out. They took the Polish people, they shipped them out before they took the rest of it because they figured they're going to kill us. And the Polish people they didn't want to kill because the atrocities that they would have to face later on.

So they took him already. I had no influence or anything. So I already was again on my own. So I took this guy. I says, either we go together, we march out, or we hide in here.

I've seen that they brought dogs to sniff. And I says, I'm not going to stay here because if we are found, they're going to shoot us right away. This way, we have our chance.

So exactly what I did in here, we load us up with meat. They had cans, tall cans with meat. And I figured the only thing we can survive is-- the bread will be stale if you load up with bread. They had bread, and they had meat, and they had all kinds of things just to get you out.

Clothes, the only thing they gave you is a coat. And it was already winter. So we picked up a coat and a blanket. And we loaded one bread each. And we loaded ourselves with the meat in cans, the knapsack in here, and start walking out because you had to walk out.

And at the gate, the last time I was walking out from the gate-- you had to walk out with-- everybody was walking out in Reihe, in Reihe. I seen this Dr. Mengele staying at the gate in here. I looked at him here because I knew him when I was working in the Ausserkommando. We were working also in a hospital. He was in charge.

There was a hospital for the German wounded. They brought him in from the Eastern Front. And he was a doctor there attending them. So I knew him personally because I worked in there. He never bothered me when I was in that hospital. But he was staying at the gate and counting out. That this the last time when I was walking out from the camp.

And we walked there to the railroad track, which was about 3, 4 miles. And while we were walking away from the camp in here-- it was already towards the evening-- we hear shots firing in here. That was a partisans. From the mountains, they came out in here. And they tried to block the railroad not to leave, so they tried to sabotage. But they brought in reinforcement because I've seen some more Gestapo coming in, more people coming in, running in here.

And then instead of putting us on the railroad, they marched us. And that was a death march. We started walking. It was in November. And there were no food provided for us anywhere.

And we walked for about two weeks in here. And while we were walking, it was already cold in here. You could see when we were walking-- we didn't know where we were walking. We were walking away from Poland, going more west towards the German border in here. And you could see piles of people dead. They couldn't walk.

So those who were falling behind, they were shot right. And you could see, every morning when you used to get up in here, you could see people laying on the side. They were dead because they couldn't walk anymore.

But we started walking. And twice, he says, I'm giving up, I give him up. And I says, no, Morrie, you're not going to give up. We're going to walk.

And we did walk into a railroad track. They load us up on the railroad track. And that train went towards Germany-- towards Austria actually this track.

And then after a couple weeks, all we had is they gave us a soup in the evening. And they were railroad tracks, there were cattle tracks-- cattle boxes on the railroad. And that's where we were staying. And each one had 80 people over there. That's all you had.

So every evening, they gave us soup. And we had to eat with what we took from the camp. And all of a sudden, I take a look over, and one side it says Vienna. We passing Vienna, Austria in here. And I know the next camp had to be Mauthausen, because that was next to Vienna.

And sure enough, we come over here. Everybody raus. And they marched us from the railroad to the camp, which was Mauthausen.

The day we come in Mauthausen, you could see mountains. You had a 1,000 steps going up to the thing. And that's how-- they were killing these people were just doing nothing because they had no work that much. So they were walking them up the steps back and forth and beating them up. So they fell off, just dropped dead over there.

And there in Mauthausen, again, you're going to the new process of putting numbers on him. But this time they didn't tattoo your numbers like they did in Auschwitz. They gave you a number here. I had a number 219237 in Mauthausen here. But they just give you on a lapel. And that's what your number was in Mauthausen.

And there they gave us that evening, they gave us soup in there. And they assign you in the barracks. You had to be in

this barrack. Every morning they had to count. In the evening, you had to count. And they didn't give you nothing, just water in here. And you was just starving.

They told us that they're going to assign us to work. And there, in Mauthausen, there was another place not far. There were three camps around Mauthausen. The title of the camps were all Mauthausen. But they had different sections. They had Melk. And they had Ebensee. And they had another camp, I can't think of it-- Linz.

That camp in Linz, they had-- in the mountains, they had holes dug in here. They were supposed to store art in this. And we were supposed to be working from the camp, from Ebensee camp, into this camp, for Linz for whatever they had we had to be done.

So everybody wanted to go to a Melk because this was the best camp in here. And whoever was strong enough, he went to Melk. I had no strength anymore because we didn't eat for weeks. And this guy was just falling apart. Whatever I had, he had once a day, we had the ration, we had a little bread. So I gave him a little bit so he should not fall apart.

So we were assigned to a camp. Ebensee, which was the next camp here. And we walked for a day and a half. That was in the Alps. And it was winter. It was in January of 1945. And just people were dying, just walking here.

And then this camp, we came into the camp. They told us to undress to take a shower. And open up the showers, the cold water is running. There's nothing there. You almost froze to death just from that. This was the worst camp that I went through to the whole camp in here.

And this fellow, [SOBBING] he couldn't take it. He had glasses. He says to me, I can't take it. I'm going to the wire. See, the wires were barbed wires.

He says, I'm going to go to the wires. I can't take it. But here, this is my-- you have our members for me. He gave me his glasses. He says, here are the glasses.

And he went to the wires, got a hold of them. And he was electrocuted on the wires because the wires were fenced in. And there here, I lost a friend. I thought I can hold on to him. And I didn't care. I really didn't care anymore.

But you see it bothered me here, the glasses. I always had the glasses. He says, you have to live to tell the story. You must. And I had to do whatever I could. And he had to too.

So I tried to stay away from beating because they just kill you there. On a job, you were weak. You couldn't do nothing. You couldn't work hard. So you try your best in here just try to get the day through in here.

And this is cold there because this is in the mountain. This is snow. This is on the border of Italy. And it's very hard.

And it was, you just talking going here, I know. But it was already April. And you heard this that the war is going to be over. The guards, who were guarding us, they weren't so-- they didn't beat us as much. They beat less. You could see something is changing. You didn't know what it was in here.

And I says, I got it now. I got to stick this through here because I owe it to this guy here. And that was already in April, yeah.

And then in May-- I think it was May the 6-- we hear the first rumble of tanks going through the doors of the camp in here. We didn't go already to the work already for, what, three or four days. And we knew something is going. We didn't know what it was. We didn't have no contacts or anything.

So sure enough, in here that one day, in here, I see the first tanks coming in. And then it was helmets. And I looked across it. It didn't sound like the Germans. That's not the Germans. I thought maybe there's whoever this was near the border of Italy, maybe the Italian coming in or something. And then I see these American flags coming in here.

So naturally, we were enjoyed this. Something is changing here. And the next day, the camp was close in here. And they were looking. You see, there was a lot of German guards, SS men, they came into the camp. And they changed into a prisoner uniform in here. And they tried to mingle with the prisoners.

But there was a lot of people who were prisoners of our prisons in here that they were stronger in here. And they knew, most of them were French. They didn't bother so much the French people, the French prisoners, the French Jews even, as much as they bothered anybody else in here.

So they locked the thing. And they start looking for them. And they around them up in here. They kill them right there here, right on the camp in here. And they brought in some food. And they brought medics. They brought American medics.

And I remember this thing, the first thing that-- I didn't understand a word of English, of course. And I ask him. He wrote it down 281. And then I says, that's his outfit. So actually what it was it was the 281st Engineers Combat Battalion. That was the outfit that it came in into the camp.

And from there on, they gave us examination. And I was 98 pounds. I got a 98 pounds-- I had a ticket. It was 98 pounds weight when I weighed in here. I had water in my knees. I couldn't walk.

And it didn't take long, maybe two or three days, we got some shots. We had the entlausung. They took us in to clean ourselves up. This was all by the American Army, by the Third Army. They had the people. And they brought nurses. And they-- to this particular camp, because that's the camp I was liberated in, Ebensee.

And from there on, they says you have to have identification. And then they formed a committee of the prisoners. And they brought in officials from the American Third Army there who was a captain and a colonel. It was Colonel Green.

And they gave us identification. We had fingerprints in here. They didn't take no pictures because they didn't have so many cameras in here.

But in the meantime, there's a lot of people, a lot of people my acquaintances, they overate. And what happened, they got diarrhea and they were dying like flies, see. But this guy here had another guy there that--

In the meantime, this Franczek in here, I bumped him into Ebensee, he was in another camp. But when they liquidated the camp, the last minute-- the last month, they brought him into this camp in here. And he says, I'll help you here too. He has other connection.

So he gave me, after the liberation already, he gave me some food. And he told me, he says, look, don't over eat in here. Don't be a pig in here. You eat slow. And you get back to your strength. Then you're going to eat later. But right now, don't overdo it. And I listened to him.

And this is what I was liberated on on this camp. And then I thought the only way to get out of this mess in here, after liberation, I don't want to-- I don't want nothing from-- I just want to get out of Germany altogether. And I knew that I had family in America. I had uncles and aunts, I didn't know where they lived.

We never talked home of addresses. I knew that I had an uncle. There was an Uncle Chaim. There was an Uncle Moishe. And there was some Uncle Jacob. But where they lived?

So I figured the only way I could do is to go first to repay for the liberation. So I look for the 281, 281 I knew. And finally, I found out that was 281st Engineers Combat Battalion. And they were moved from there-- they were marching further to liberate the rest of it. So they were in Salzburg, which was another town in Austria here.

So I got another acquaintance of mine who was in the camp. I helped him in Auschwitz. And I was here. So he sort of says, I'll do anything with you. What do you want to do? I says, I want to go and find where these people are stationed. I says, why? He says, because we owe them something.



And I took this fellow. And we went down to Salzburg. And I went over, and I looked over the 281st Engineers. And there was a guy with the name of Colonel Sass. That's what his name.

And I says, you were the one that liberated us from in this camp. I already had my papers that I could travel freely wherever I wanted it. He says, yes, we did. And I says, I want to volunteer for you. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it.

So he says, yeah, we need some help in the kitchen here. He said, OK, you two guys give us uniforms. They gave us-- we were back already a little bit more fat. So we weren't hungry already. We were clean, already shaved. And he says, OK, we make soldiers out of you-- not as soldiers, but as civilians in uniform in here.

And me and the other fellow volunteered. And we work for the-- help them out. And they had KP duty. So we volunteered for them. Instead of the guy was cleaning, we cleaned the pots and pans. They fed us.

And they made the Germans-- the German civilian government that they were organizing here, they made them pay us for the work, which we got paid for in here. And the only reason I did, first of all, to repay them for what they did for us. And then I figured the only way I can get to the United States is, first of all, they have to find if I have family.

And this Colonel Sass in here, he and another guy over there, he was busy with his thing there that he had to do. So he called in a major. His name was Kuntz. And he happened to be Jewish. So I could communicate with him.

So I talked to him Yiddish. And I tell him, look, I have a family here. This is my [INAUDIBLE]. He says, no problem. He goes in and he calls the Red Cross. And he gives them the date. And he gives them everything, where about they would be. I knew Cleveland, New York. Who knows where it was? And this guy didn't take long, and in three days, they had a reply, urgent, yes, this is my nephew. And I had an answer that there is an uncle here. He was in Cleveland, Ohio, and that he is willing to give me any paper necessary I should come to the United States.

So and then I had the address, already wrote him. And I wrote him who I was in here. I wrote him. And I said, Dear Uncle-- he still has the letter. He says, Dear Uncle, I don't know if you know-- I wrote him in Yiddish-- I am a such and such guy here. My father was there. My grandfather lived there. If I'm your nephew, then you answer. If not, then I'm sorry.

It didn't take long, I had a letter already from this uncle. And I had address. I had an uncle in California. I had an uncle in New York, which they had children-- the uncle in New York had a son who happened to be in a lieutenant. And he was assigned to Greece. His title was American Mission for Observing Greek Election. That was his title, I remember it was. Because it came in a cable at night, they woke me up in the 281st Engineers Company. There's an urgent message for me. And it was from that lieutenant, who my cousin, who happened to be in Greece, that he is planning to visit me in such and such day, that I should be available for his visit.

And that was-- I was walking by the Lieutenant Gustafsson. He was with the 281st Engineer. He was in charge of that night duty. And he personally-- because he knew me. Everybody knew me in this company. It was an H and H company. That he's coming to see me. So I wasn't already a stranger. I had somebody left from my family, that there is somebody left in here, that this is going to continue.

And it didn't take long. I was called before the German consul. I was called in November of 1945 in Munich. I was-- this outfit went from Salzburg, from Austria to Munich. And they took me with them here. And they gave me lodging. They gave me-- and they were preparing me to go to the States.

I had to speak English, of course. So whatever I could, I learned before. When I came here I already knew a few words. And that's how I got called before the German consul.

And in 1946, in-- I believe it was in March, I was called that I have to pack myself and go for being shipped to the United States. In the meantime, this company, the 281st, they were already on their way back home because they were--

everybody was discharged already. And they were shipping them back home.

But I couldn't go with that 281st, with this company. I had to go as a civilian. I had to give them back the uniform. I didn't have to give it back. But I couldn't wear any more the uniform once I was out of the camp, which was OK. I had civilian clothes in here.

And end of April that 1946, they took us to Bremerhaven. And from there, I came into the United States in 1946. May 6 of 1946, I arrived in the United States. My tickets paid, my uncle paid for the tickets. And my assignment was to come to New York.

And in the meantime, my cousin, that one who was in the army during the war, that lieutenant, he was already also discharged. And he came in in New York. There was a big sign. His name was also Ben Nebel, Ben Oscar Nebel. So his sister, which my cousin, they had a sign prepared for him because he came a week before, Welcome home, Ben Nebel, from the war. And then the same sign, when they came in, I seen it from far when I was still on the boat. In fact, they took pictures of it.

And people who was acquainted during the trip, the boy, he says, somebody is looking for you, he says. For me? Why would somebody-- there's a big sign. He said, why would somebody write a sign? And sure enough, there was a sign, Welcome, Ben Nebel. But it was the same sign as for my cousin.

Yeah.

And that's how I came to the United States and came to New York. I came to New York, they were waiting for me at the pier. And I had to go through the HIAS because they were the ones who were helping subsidize those who couldn't pay for the ticket. But my ticket was paid civilian. So my cousin says, don't worry about it, you come with me.

So we walked out of here. And we forgot to report that he's taking me with him. Nobody stopped him. He was in a uniform yet. And I was with him here. So all I had to do, I had a little luggage, what else could I have, so I had my luggage with me. And we walked over here. And they were looking two days from here in New York. And here, I was in his house, in my uncle's house. And they were looking for me over there.

Well, HIAS is the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

That's right. That's right. That's right.

OK.

And I was in New York over there. And I had a choice. I says, I have to go to school. I had no education at all. And in the meantime, they took me shopping. They bought me clothes. And they bought me shoes. And I stood with them. And I said, that's not good for me here.

I had another uncle who was in Cleveland. And this guy had a gas station. And it had accessories for used car and parts for cars. And I figured, well, New York was such a hustle and bustle, I didn't like it. I came from a small town. And I didn't like this. So I told him, you mind if I go and see that uncle over there.

I don't know. I didn't make up my mind yet. Maybe I'll stay there. I'll visit you.

She said, no, you go wherever you are. It's free-- this is a free country. You can do whatever you want in here. As long as you can do it, what can you do it, better yourself, go ahead.

So I wrote him a letter. And I called him. I says, I'm coming over here. He says, come on, I have a job waiting for you.

He had two daughters and a son. They were kids. The older girl was my age. And, OK, so we got me the ticket and the railroad ticket. And they're going to wait for me at the station.

So there was an-- East Cleveland had a station at that time, railway station. So they told me to get off at East Cleveland station. And I got off at the station. There was one small station at that time.

And they bought me a hat. They tried to Americanize me too soon. So they bought me a hat. And I came over there. I walked past him. And here, they were staying waiting for me. They were waiting for a greenhorn. And I passed by here.

I had the address to where it is. And I said, what do I do here? They're not waiting for me. So I knew the address. I took a taxi. And I told them, take me over there. And I came over there.

And the people upstairs-- there was a two-family house. They were living on 154 and Kinsman, a two-family house. And there were people living upstairs. And they were living downstairs.

And the taxi pulls up in here. And there's nobody in the house. So I rang the bell. And the people upstairs knew that they went to the station to pick me up. And I talked to them. And I talked to him English.

He says, how do you know English? It's a long story how I know English, you see. Where is my uncle? He says, he's in the station looking for you. In the meantime, they knew they lost me. So they call home. And they says, hey, he's here. He's having coffee, you know. So they came running here. And that's how I came to the United States.

And when you came to Cleveland found that you enjoyed staying here and--

Well, it took a while here. My dream was to learn a trade, a trade I thought I had some knowledge of it already. I didn't like the-- I worked in the gas station for a couple of weeks just to see what goes on here. It wasn't nothing-- it was boring actually. It wasn't my-- and I figured the only way I could do it is to go to school. That's the only thing.

So there was John Hay High School had a course of English, remedial. And I went over. I registered right away. So before I even register, I went to school. And the teacher introduced everybody, new people coming in.

And they told me, he said, you have to go and register for the draft. I said, why? He says, because that's the law.

So I went, and I registered for the draft. And they says you have to report for induction. I says, I just came in through hell in here. Why would you want to do that to me? So they wrote, I think-- I don't know, Vanik was congressman already at that time. They wrote a letter to him.

And it didn't take long, maybe two weeks, I was let go. They didn't bother me anymore. I had a registered number. But I never had to report or anything.

And I went to John Hay. And then I got-- there was an ad in the paper for cabinetmakers, millman, making windows. That was apply only if you qualified window mechanics, they were. So I answered the ad. That was Big Four Lumber company. On Bessemer, they had a shop.

I didn't know how to get there. So I told the guy, I says, if you want a man that knows a little bit about it, you have to pick me up because there's no way I can get-- I'm a stranger in here. He knew from my accent who I was in here, that I'm a greenhorn just came over from the boat. So he says, I'll pick you up.

An hour, he came over to on Kinsman and picked me up. He took me to the shop. And I says, oh, I know, I did this. I did this in here. And two weeks later, he says, you're in charge in here. And I had five, four other guys in here to show him how to do to make frames, window frames and windows.

And little by little, I worked over there. They didn't pay much, whatever it was I was on my own. And I went, I said, this is not enough. I have to go. So I was finishing high school.

And the minute I finished high school, which took me another year, I joined the Cleveland trade school. And there, you

had a place on West 45th and Detroit that I went to school over there and learned the trade, not only manually, but you have to figure things, see. So they taught us how to make rafters and how to build houses in here. And I joined the union, the carpenters union, Local 1750 at that time. Goldberg was the agent at that time. That was 1946.

And there I went four years to trade school. And then I graduated. When I graduated, I changed the jobs because they didn't pay that much at Big Four. So there was another opening that they were looking for it. And at that time already, I had already a car. And I got married in 1948.

So I was already established that I knew my trade. I went to schooling. I graduated from a trade school. And I could choose my trade whomever I want to work for it. So the freedom that I felt, it was so joyful. You exercise something that you were denied.

Right. How old were you at that time when you--

When I was here, 21 years. I was 21 years old when I came. And I got married when I was 24.

Did you join a synagogue or anything?

Well, I joined a synagogue, Warrensville Center Synagogue. They had a place over on 147th and Kinsman. They had a place over there.

But you see here, again, I found out that the hypocrisy in the whole setup. For me, it was against what I was taught in here. Either you are or you're not. You cannot have both ways.

So I just pay my dues and I never went over there because the pockets-- I was brought up that way, but it just didn't make sense in here. They were cheating themselves. They were hiding-- they were denying that they're Jews in here. I was proud that I was Jewish, that I went through--

And it bothered me another thing in here, you see. I had cousins in here when I came here. The older ones were not to go on that. And I told her, I says, you know what I tell you, it's the truth. But just, if you want to listen, and I try to tell-- ah, what are you talking about? He said, that's nonsense. You don't have to exaggerate. It hurt me. They didn't even let me say it out, you see.

Once, he says, I'd like you to take you out with her girlfriend. She says, I'll take you out to the art museum. We went out to the art museum because I told her, you know, I'm interested, could you show me what you have in art and here? I was curious. Sure enough.

So we walk over into the art museum. And I walked, all of a sudden it hit me. And I started running in here. And I ran as fast as I could.

And she couldn't understand. What, are you crazy? What are you running? I says, well, you wouldn't understand. But I'm not going to even tell you. He said, no, you tell me. So I says, I'll tell you if you never repeat this again. Come on, I'll show you.

So we started again at the same place. When we walk, you see chimneys there. The chimneys were as high as you could see. The minute I seen this, I took off.

She couldn't understand why. I says, you see, when I told you the other day something, you said, that didn't happen. That couldn't happen. Human beings don't do to the other human beings. A culture nation like Germany, they don't do these things in here.

And then later on also in here, we had discussion here, why didn't you resist it? Why didn't you do this? Why didn't you do this in here? And you look at them in here, he says-- I thought to myself, I says, where were you here? You had all the freedom in the world. Did you say something? You didn't know? If you didn't know, how could we know when I

was inside? Can you reason-- can you give me an answer here?

That's what it bothers me all these years. I never open up. That bothers me much.

And if not this fellow in here, that Morrie in here, I would never come over here. I would never live through because, you see, this, what he gave me his glasses, he says, you remember me here. You remember so you can tell. That's why I'm here because of his glasses.

We certainly appreciate that.

It's not an easy thing to go through in here. And as you can see, I'm all shook up. But it had to be told.

Yes. And then we appreciate the fact that you did come and did share this with us. And I know it was a very hard experience. But if you've never done this before or shared it with anyone, I'm hoping that it will help you understand--

I hope I can sleep tonight and tomorrow night. I didn't sleep many, many nights.

I'm sure. I'm sure. You've thought about this over the years and--

Well, you see, it's in you. It's there. It's coming out, you know. It's flowing out of you. It's so much to say and details in here. That it's not even to many-- you heard it so many times. It's the same story, the same thing here.

But each one of us has individual stories, his own things that he went through in here. And these are true things. It happened. And those who say it never happened here, either they want to hide something for one or other reasons, or they don't know. But this happened. It happened.

Well, I thank you very much for coming and sharing this with us.

Well, I'm glad that I could. As I explained to you before, it drove me here. It was on my conscience. I had to tell the story. They didn't want to hear before. My cousin never want to hear it. Nobody wanted to hear before because, ah, it's not true here.

At least now I can say, well, it happened. It happened. And at least, they hear me. This is going to be recorded so you know it happened.

Well, this will help other generations not forget what did happen. Thank you again, Ben.