

I'm Sue Danford. Excuse me. Today, we are interviewing David Roth, a Holocaust survivor. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section. Let's pick up in the spring of 1945 when your brother came out of Auschwitz.

Yeah, he came home.

Now you have two brothers home.

Now I have two brothers home, yeah. And of course the older brother, he was a religious man from the beginning. And here the kitchen now the house is not kosher, because we cooked everything whatever.

Matter of fact, we didn't have any utensils. We picked up utensils in the city community thing where they gathered all the utensils from houses, empty houses. We picked up some utensils there and there where we cooked them.

So the question was now, I asked him, if he wants to keep kosher in the house or he wants to keep with us. So right away, he said he wants kosher. OK.

There was already from several of the survivors who came back, they opened up a kosher restaurant in town. And so I told him, if you want kosher. I can bring you kosher food from outside, and we will make kosher at the house. And you can cook in the house afterwards.

OK. So this was a brought a good Purim meal, because it was exactly Purim then. And next day, we started to clean house and prepare it for to have a kosher house.

And what happens here in a day or two later, the militia came in looking for laborers. So my brother, him, they let go. Because he was still very badly, you could see that he is in no shape yet to go to work.

My other brother, he was traveling now. He tried to make business, buying things, selling things. Because this is what he learned too. He was he was a clerk in a store what he learned. And I was in my sign business.

So they took me, two youngsters 16-, 17-year-olds with rifles on their shoulders, taking me to the city hall. From there, they will ship me out to work because the railroad station was destroyed by bombs. And this way they tried to clean up.

And I was not in the mood yet to start working as in a labor camp, whereas my taste is still bitter from labor camp. So they took me to the city hall and gave me over to those people there, who took care of the business to sign up people for work. One recognized me from home from a long time. And he said, sit down here in the corner.

So he took of the rest of the business. It was about 1 o'clock, 1:30 after lunch. And he let me sit there till 5 o'clock. Other people came in. He assigned them to work. He left me there.

After 5 o'clock, he says, all right. They stopped working already now. You can go home. But of course, he didn't remember my name and didn't want anything to do in the office, because you never know who is watching over your shoulder.

So he took me out and we walked together. We went in a yard under a gate there, asked my name. And he just struck out my name on his list. And go home. So if it happened today, it can happen tomorrow too.

So I told my brother, let him rest in peace now. He died. That I am leaving. I can't stay here any longer.

So that night, I walked over to a village what's about 20 kilometers away. It was a village where my brother's wife was from. But she didn't survive. She didn't come back. And there I knew a couple of boys came back. So I went there. And I slept there through the night.

The next morning, I went to Irshava. That's another city. And there I used to live there for a couple of months somewhere before I moved away from there to Budapest. Because there were, they gave me a hint that I have invitation.

And from there I went back to Budapest. Because I lived in Budapest before labor camp. And to labor camp, I actually went in from Budapest. Matter of fact, in Budapest itself after I went into labor camp, three weeks later, some secret police came to my house where I lived looking for me. Where I am? So I found out that after the war when I came back to Budapest. Because I lived in the same house again for a while.

And so the trains were free now by the Russians. All you have to get on the train wherever you can. And you have to go with the train wherever it goes. Because there was no regular schedule.

So I had luck. I arrived to Budapest. It took me four days, what an overnight trip usually normally.

And in Budapest, I started to look around for my belongings, some things I found, some things I didn't. And I went to the shop where I used to work. And I found an old master whom I worked for there. It was a nice reunion. He wanted me to keep on working for him.

In Budapest was a big hunger then. There was no food. Everything was expensive. So after being in Budapest for over a week and seeing that it's a very hardship to live here now, I figured maybe the dust was settled already and Munkács and I will go back home. At least I have one brother there whom I'm sure he is there, and the other brother is on the road somewhere, still comes home.

And so I packed together my belongings in a big suitcase, enter the train. The only place I found on the train room to travel on is on the roof. Because everything was filled up. OK, I tie down my suitcase to the roof there with a string sitting on the roof, and hoping for the best.

We came to the biggest town. It's about an hour away from Budapest. We stopped there. And here the Russian soldiers are crawling all over the train looking for IDs, asked for my ID. So I had already a Russian ID what I got from the Russians in the hospital where I worked for a while. I thought it's a good idea that they wouldn't bother me.

But while one soldier is looking at my ID, the other guy took a knife cut off the suitcase, and threw it down. I already grabbed the ID from the soldier, and I'm running after the suitcase. That's all, that's all everything what I have. I had there some tools what I gathered in Budapest. I will have now what to work with. So the suitcase disappeared.

I went there to the railroad station commandier, a Russian. I complained what happened. He says, bring me the thief. I will arrest him. That's a nice saying.

So the train starts off going further. I'm on the train, try to look maybe I will find my suitcase somewhere.

Day break came, I see from a certain car things are throwing through the window, I recognize some of my stuff what they threw out through the window. The train is going full speed. I would have jumped off, but what's more, the few belongings or my life?

So I figured I'll see. Maybe something will be found. Finally, the train stopped again. I came to that place, to that car where I saw the stuff flying through windows, even the suitcase went out already. They threw out everything.

There was a girl she told me that, yes, she saw what's going on. That was my suitcase. But she can't say anything. She is afraid. OK.

So as long as I have no tools nothing to go with, so no use for me to go back home. Because in Munkács I couldn't buy any tools. So I figured I will go back to Budapest.

So there we got together a group. When something like this happens, you get right away some friends who feels with you. And they gave me an idea that they are going to buy food in a certain village, and they are taking it to Budapest.

This is the way they are making some money, and for themselves food too.

So OK, so I went with them, stopped in that village, slept over the night. I bought there a couple of hams, smoked hams, and a bottle of whiskey, I mean plum brandy. They call it slivovitz. And this will be a value. If I can make double my money in Budapest, and I'll see what I can do.

So the next day we got back to the train and we arrived to Budapest. The only thing I can do now is start looking for a job. I went back to my old job where I worked. I got my job back. And I got my suite back, where I used to live, same place.

I'm again in Budapest. But of course, it's still everything upside down. Not every streetcar is working yet because everything was bombarded, destroyed in Budapest, couldn't find one building what didn't have a crack from the bombing.

And so I lived there for a while until everything got settled. And May 8, when it was known that the war is over, of course it was different atmosphere already. And I start reading papers. I'm waiting for friends to come back. I noticed in the paper a note that people from survivors of the 109 point slash 32, whoever survived will have a meeting there and there, then and then. OK?

Time came, we had a meeting. We found out that we are 54 known survivors. And it was pretty sad. But what can we do? And so my brother came to Budapest. We met there, who is here now.

The older brother remained in Munkács. He didn't want to go no place anymore. He had his house. I says, I have my house and a few years what's left he will try to live it out.

The brother the game with you was the one from Auschwitz?

No.

Brother who was from Auschwitz, he remained in Munkács.

Who came with me-- who didn't come with me but who I met in Budapest, he was a survivor of a labor camp too. But he was luckier than I. He was in the country, in Hungary. He wasn't shipped out of the country. In the country wasn't as bad yet then out of the country.

So we made plans what we will do, that I will register with a Zionist organization. And they will take us to Vienna. And there we will make our next step that we will come to United States.

In the meantime what happened, he went back to Czechoslovakia. And the border got closed. And he didn't get in touch anymore, except by messengers or by mail.

And I registered with a Zionist organization. I entered the Hachsharah, what they call. It's a preparation to go to Israel. They lived together in a group of people working, everybody pitches in, in a commune like life.

All right. Then here I am again just in my business, the sign business. Whatever I make, I pitch in into the kitchen. And it came about in February 2 of 1946, when early morning everybody arose with a backpack on his back.

We go to the train. The back starts in on the boxcars. This is called illegal traveling. And it was that we are traveling to Israel, to Palestine better to say than yet.

Our road is south from Budapest to Yugoslavia. And we will cross the border from Yugoslavia to Greece. And from Greece, we have our organization what will take us further with boat. In the meantime, we got all the way to Beograd. And with boxcars, we got to Yugoslavia.

The first city in Yugoslavia, Subotica. There they sterilized us, took us in a steam bath, and our clothes steamed, so not to have any bugs or any sickness coming into the country.

And from there, we were traveling already like people, like men and in passenger cars, not in boxcars anymore. And we came to Novi Sad around soon. It's called Novi Sad in Yugoslavian. There I went into the Jewish organization. And we shouldn't have talked no other language, just Hebrew, because we have all false papers now that we are Israelis, Palestinians, who came during the war or before the war to Europe. And we got stuck there.

And we are survivors of camps and Holocaust, and we are going back home now. This was, and so I went in, and started to talk Hebrew. Again, I was the linguist who spoke a little Hebrew. Because that's all the boys from our group spoke only Hungarian, and a few of them spoke a little Yiddish. So I'm coming into the Jewish organization, JCC, or whatever they called it.

And greeted them, Shalom. And started to talk Hebrew that who we. We are in transit, and we are going home. Nobody spoke Hebrew. And I don't speak Yugoslavian.

A partisan came in, partisan clothes, Yugoslavian who was with Tito's partisan group. And he was Jewish, and he spoke Hebrew. And he starts to speak Hebrew with me. Turned out that he speaks Hebrew and I don't.

So I didn't know what to hear. I was scared a little bit. I'm in a jam. Here is a partisan, Yugoslavian. They will take me as a spy or stranger or whatever. So finally, he spoke Hungarian too. And we spoke between us a little Hungarian. So don't worry I am with you. I will help you. So he was the Yugoslavian fellow who spoke Yugoslavian there, told them what I want, what we want better to say. And they sent out help to the railroad station for us.

And he came with us traveling til Belgrade on the train. And he gave us over to another partisan there, and told them to take good care of us, who we are, and took us there to the Jewish organization too. We got help there. We slept overnight in Belgrade.

In the meantime, in Greece a revolution or something broke out. So word came from the illegal organization who has taken the people to Palestine that we have to change directions.

Instead of going down to Greece, we have to go west to Zagreb. And so the next day we boarded the train, again boxcars, again because now we will go illegally all the way. No, I'm sorry. We still had regular train, still traveled as people to Zagreb.

In Zagreb, again we had there one of the group, the leader of our group, he had all the information but got from one station to another. In Zagreb, they were waiting for us already. Because they had radio communication or a telephone communication, whatever. The Haganah were stationed all over.

In Zagreb, we arrived. They took us to a place. There we had German cooks, Germans from war-- I don't know how you call it. Prisoners of war. They were cooking there in the kitchen. So we had very decent food there. And we were there for about two days in Zagreb, until again it was the organization takes us further.

Now we are going to Italy. We will cross the border to Trieste. Again, we had our information what to do. And we arrived to Trieste. Yeah, from Zagreb to Trieste we were in boxcars again closed. And in one place, the boxcar was opened by the border guard. And the leader of our group had a letter, gave it to him. He read it. And the doors were closed again. Go further. It was pretty nicely organized.

And as far as he said to us, and he asked when we get off the train. We don't suppose to go by group, as a group. Like individuals. Everybody has to find his own way to a certain address what we got. Everybody wrote himself up the address.

And we arrived there. It was a synagogue. We slept in the synagogue overnight.

Here was the first oranges what we saw in years. Everybody got the orange. Next morning, we got our breakfast. And we were traveling now by train going to Milano. We arrived to Milano. Again, we were stationed there for a couple of days.

During the day we had free, I went to sightseeing a little bit. It was very nice to see the last supper what from Leonardo da Vinci and the dome was nice artwork there. I enjoyed to see it very much.

And then we were put into trucks and they took us to Torino. It was north Italy.

There it was cold already. There was snow. It was winter. In Milano, we didn't feel any winter, nor in Trieste. It was nice weather in February.

But in Torino there was snow, real cold winter. There we were put in a group. We were there for three weeks doing nothing, just sitting, eating, and enjoying ourselves.

Matter of fact, there were two weddings there, while the local rabbi came out and made the wedding ceremonies. And the youngsters went to school there, for the Italian school for the short time that we were there. We never knew how long we will be there. And of course came the UNRRA or whoever was came to take information about us.

Everybody had his own papers, whatever we had, not the real one. We survived. We came all from labor camp, from Auschwitz, from everybody somewhere else. Everybody had his own story. Here was not the real story. But we had to have something.

Again, here I was the interpreter, because I spoke German. And I didn't know Italian. And whoever came to take the informations spoke English or German. So I was a German translator from German to Hungarian. So after three weeks, we were put in trucks again. And we were taken overnight to a camp not far from the sea.

And there we were briefed and checked through, what we have, so not to take anything what we are not supposed to take. It was strictly the Haganah now here was strict with us, gave us strict information, what to do and how to behave.

OK. We were put on trucks again. We were taken to a boat. Of course, we're dreaming of a nice big boat. They came in the dark. We were loading to a little shipping boat, shipping vessel, I mean fishing vessel.

So we thought this is not the vessel we will travel on the sea. This will take us to a big boat somewhere in the middle of the sea. Turned out that we were put there like sardines, 240 men in one little fishing boat. One touched the other like hammocks underneath the other, built in the hull of the boat.

And there we are traveling now. Now, we'll go to sleep because it's night. Everybody is tired.

We woke up in the morning. We feel that we are on the sea. We are rocking. Coming to the deck, and there is rain. It's wet.

Meantime, the whole group, the 240 people were divided into 24 groups, 10 people to a group. And every 10 people had one man who was responsible for 10 men. For our group someone else was put as the head of the group.

But then the guy received cold feet. He saw the boat, what we are going with. He turned around, went back into the truck, and sat on a corner.

They didn't know that he was there. The truck went back I don't know where to. In the meantime from the boat, ship to shore communication, that one man is missing. Because when they called his name and we looked for him in our group. We knew that who we are in our 10 people, he is not there. So we told them that he is not here.

So from ship to shore they found him. He is there. He left behind. OK, so he put me as first guy of the nine people. Because now we are just nine. And everybody, of course, gets seasick, most of the people. I don't know. I was lucky. It

didn't bother me.

For breakfast, he got a can of hot dogs, canned hot dogs, cold hot dogs. I come to give the hot dogs for the people. Nobody wants. One guy or two took a hot dog. I don't know if he ate it or not.

I took one and the rest of the-- can I take back to the guy who gave it to me? He said, eat it up. We don't want back no food. So I sat down in a corner, I eat one, two, three hot dogs. It doesn't go further.

So here, take it back. He took it. And threw it in the sea. We don't take back food. We are Russians and this is the way it's supposed to go. OK. So it was pretty rough traveling.

How many days did it take you?

It took us seven days.

Did everybody survive?

Yeah, the boat ride everybody survived. We stopped on the road in the Greek isles somewhere. And we're waiting until the sea gets calmer, because we almost got there because it was a big storm, and the boat almost didn't take it, didn't make it. It was a pretty sharp guy, the captain, and he pushed us into a natural water break or whatever you call it. And we were there for about a day or so until the sea got calm, and we went on our way again.

Now again, the sea was calm. It was like a mirror. It was a pleasure to travel. Everybody was up on the deck, dancing, chorus, and singing. We enjoyed our traveling now. Now it's open sea.

And before we got to the shore of Palestine, we were briefed that we are coming into Tel Aviv. It will be at night. And maybe we'll have to walk in water. Be prepared, and be quiet, and so on, and so on. And be cooperative with each other and don't panic.

OK. During the day, of course, some plane flew by and everybody had to duck when somebody hollered that a plane comes. Everybody had to go in the hull, but it looks like the plane noticed something. And we saw the shores of Tel Aviv, the lights. We are happy that now we are coming. Most of us were already on the deck waiting for--

All of a sudden, a stream of light hits us. And a loudspeaker yells, stop. You are illegal travelers. That was the British, afloat or whatever you call it on the sea.

And of course, the boat is still traveling. And then they said stop or we'll shoot. So came the first shots in the air. So the captain changed clothes, of course, changed into civilian clothes, and was briefed. Nobody knows who the captain is. Fine.

And the engine stopped, but not before we got a second warning shot now in the water what came in front of the boat, underneath the boat, it went right by. OK. Now we had to stop. And they throw a line to the boat. And where they came over, looking for the captain. Who was the captain? They went to one guy. Who is the captain?

And he didn't speak English, just a word or two. He says, you captain, to the British. No, but your captain. We don't have captain. The boat went alone by itself. OK. So they looked through. They didn't find the captain. Of course, nobody pointed him out. And the Haganah people who helped along, nobody knows nothing.

So we were put on tow, and the British boat towed us into Haifa instead of being in Tel Aviv. Meantime in Tel Aviv, the Haganah people were prepared to take us, to welcome us. And matter of fact, one girl got killed there, [NON-ENGLISH]. [SOB]

What happened when you landed in Haifa then?

In Haifa, the British took us off the boat already, and took us to Atlit, it was a camp, British camp. And from there, we had to be taken out by the Jewish Agency. And they had to give up.

It was everybody had to have a certificate to come to Palestine. And the British had a quota. And now that we came, so they took off so many people from the quota.

So we were there in that camp for four days until the Jewish Agency arranged our freedom. So our group of 35 people, we were taken to a kibbutz. Kibbutz Tel Yosef in Emek, Israel, valley of Israel. And there we were assigned for work as temporary members of the kibbutz. So we did everything what the kibbutz asked us to do. Of course, I was a city boy, and not a good farmer.

I almost lost my life in that kibbutz once. I was assigned to two mules to distribute food into the-- how do you say it, where the animals are? The barns, for the cows, for the horses. Of course, I made that route a couple of times so I knew already the route. And so here I was alone now with the wagon.

I knew I have to drop off. And when I come back to take the two mules out, lead them to water, and the time and place, my job is finished. Of course, I didn't know that a pair of mules has to be handled together, not individually. And I after I finished my work nicely, I went to one mule freedom, and started to go to water with him. And came back to unleash the other mule, and the other mule started to run. And I was in front of the wagon. I jumped on the center rod, what holds the two mules in the wagon together.

Luckily, I held myself and the mule was used to go into the barn, to the other side, because that barn was a building. It had two doors from each side, openings. And we ran around and through the other entrance. Here people noticed what happened. But they couldn't do anything. And here they thought I am finished.

Luckily, I was on the left hand side of the thing. And as he turned around and went into the barn, the wagon got stuck at the door entrance. Then I released myself. If I would have been the opposite way, I would have been on the other side. I would have been there a flat a little patch on the wall there.

How long did you stay in Israel then?

I was in that kibbutz for three months. Then I went out into the city, Tel Aviv. There I found myself a job, same day as I started off found myself temporary quarters through the [NON-ENGLISH]. That's the Jewish Agency.

And I lived in Tel Aviv '46, '47, until the UN, the partition of Israel was voted on. And then it started already the fighting between the Arabs and Jews. And on May 15 I think it was, when the Jewish independent was called, when Ben-Gurion proclaimed independency. The next day I was a soldier in the army already.

So you were there when Palestine became Israel?

Yeah. And there I was a soldier. We are fighting for the existence of Israel.

And how long did you stay in Israel then?

I was eight years in Israel until 1954.

Did you meet your wife in Israel?

I met my wife there. And after I came out from the army through a friend of mine, introduced her to me. And after a couple short months, a few months of knowing each other, decided to get married. We got married in '49.

Oh, in '50, my wife got sick somehow. She was in hospital. And it wasn't sure that she will be able to have children, bear children. But luckily she got pregnant. In '51, in December 29, my oldest son was born.

And so of course, after the war, Israel wasn't so easy. It was a hardship. Everything was long lines. Now, I have to track back a little bit. From Italy, when I was in Italy, I wrote a letter for my sister who lived in Wooster, Ohio. No she lived in Cleveland then yet.

Of course, I was a poor guy, who didn't have enough money for air mail travel mail. So I put it in a regular. And I don't know how long it took. But it took more than three weeks. Because I was three weeks there in that camp in Israel, in Torino.

And then when I got to Israel, to Palestine, I wrote a letter to her again. She sent me a telegram to Torino. But the telegram didn't find me anymore. Now, she didn't know what to think of. Finally, when she got my air mail letter from Israel, she started to write me. Now that you are in Israel and then Palestine, make your steps and come to America.

I felt like that I was no Zionist before, I became a big Zionist now. I felt that this is the land where I belong to. I wrote her back a letter. She still have the letter somewhere hidden. My dear sister, if you can come here, I will gladly see you. But this is the country I want to live in. I wrote the letter, how nice it is here how the weather is nice, and everything is nice and beautiful.

Of course, after the war we had some hardships. And she wrote me now she knew what hardships we go through. Come on. No, I didn't. And then the boy was born. The boy needed care. And we wanted to have the best for the child.

I got up in the morning sometimes 5 o'clock or 4:30, went with a bicycle to a friend of mine. He had a farm for milk, so we should have milk in the house. Here and there I picked up a chicken there not legally. We had a little meat in the house. But you had to stay in line for a piece of meat, and stay in line for milk, stay in line for kerosene, stay in line for a piece of ice, for ice packs because no refrigerators. So it wasn't so easy.

But I still didn't decide to leave the country. And my sister, in each letter didn't give up. Finally, I broke down, and I told my wife, listen, we'll go to America. We will be there for a while, until the situation will be easier. We'll come back.

OK, she told me. Go alone and you will send me money from there. No, we are a family. Let's be together. There was enough losing families. And my brother in the meantime was here. His way went from Czechoslovakia to Germany, and from Germany he came out much earlier, five years earlier than I to America, through the mass transportation from Germany.

And so I have already--

He was here too? He was here in Cleveland too?

Yeah.

OK.

So I have already two brothers and a sister in America. So I have where to go to. So fine. So one brother who was here I never met him, because he left eight years before I was born. He was my oldest brother. But he was one brother from the same father, but a different mother.

And so we made steps. We sold everything there. I made enough money from all the belongings to pay our way to New York. From New York we have to walk.

So in the meantime, another brother who didn't survive, who survived Auschwitz but didn't get home, his son got here. He wound up in Holland. He was in Auschwitz and he survived. He was in Holland for a while. From Holland he came out to America.

He was here, so he sent enough money to bail me out from New York to Wooster. Because in the meantime, my sister moved to Wooster, Ohio. And so there we wound up in Wooster. And there I lived for three weeks, couldn't find a



decent job. So from Wooster, I came to Cleveland to look for a job. I think I'll pick up later.

Did you have your brothers help you when you got to Cleveland, or who did you live with? We have to finish up. We have a few minutes here.

OK. To be honest, my sister helped with a couple of weeks being there in her house. She wanted me to find a job in Wooster. And I found a job for one week, because Wooster is a small town, and they don't need any sign painters there. So after three weeks, after a week working there no job, so I came to Cleveland and looking for a job.

So my sister came to help me find a job because no transportation. I don't know how to drive a car yet. I have no car. I don't know the language yet. No English, just a few words that I picked up in a few weeks of Berlitz night schools in Tel Aviv. So it was not so easy.

I finally found a job. Not long, three days, I was unemployed. After three days, I found a job. And I worked here. I helped myself.

Did you join a synagogue here then?

Not yet.

I went to a synagogue where I lived and, after I found a place to live in 148th and Kinsman, there was a synagogue there where I went to, but I didn't sign up yet. I didn't know yet where to belong. It was the beginning for everything. I was in baby shoes here.

Well, your story is certainly an enlightening one, and it's obvious that you succeeded once you got on your way here, and you have three lovely children today. And your life certainly took a lovely turn. What made you decide to share your experiences of the Holocaust with us?

Well, it's a very simple answer. I belong to an organization named Kol Israel. It's all Holocaust survivors. And we have meetings and events at certain times of the year. We get together. And it started to be forms given out for it will be taping or interviewing, if whoever wants to. So I figured, if I have something to say, if people want to listen, I'll gladly say my story.

Do you feel the Holocaust experiences affected your whole family?

Affected me. Affected my wife too, of course.

She's also a survivor?

Yeah.

But we try to survive. But we can't forget it.

No, I'm sure. And your children know your story?

Yeah, not exactly the way I say it here, not in detail, just fragments whenever we get together. I tell a story what happened there and here, Maybe if they will put it together, they will come up to the whole story. But they have an idea what we went through.

Well, you went through a lot. And we thank you very, very much for your time and your effort to share this experience with us.

I try to remember whatever I can. I leave out a lot of things. But it doesn't-- what skips my mind sometimes, certain words skip my vocabulary and I can't find them too.

Well, you did a wonderful job. And we thank you very, very much. This is Sue Danford. Our Holocaust survivor today has been David Roth. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section.