

I'm Sylvia Abrams. Today, we are interviewing Marcel Weintraub, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section. Mr. Weintraub, you've been telling us about your experiences in the various labor camps that were all around Kraków, and you mentioned to me that when you were in the brick factory, that you went with someone to try to get some things from his hometown. Please add that incident before we go on.

Well, there was a fellow, a tall fellow by the name of Moishe Brenner. And he came up to me one day, and he said, would you go with me to Miechów? And I have some valuables. Maybe I can get something out of it, and I'll give you whatever. I said, sure, I'll go with you.

And we went to the train station. I bought two tickets, one for him, one for me, and we got on the train and got into Miechów safely. And I decided-- I said, you're going to walk first because I don't know Miechów. I don't know where you're going. I'm going to follow you in town when we get there, and that's how we get to the place. And he said, all right.

So we got off to the railroad station. We went to-- the railroad station must have been at the center of the town somewhere. We went to the main platz, the center of the town. And he must have been 20, 30 feet ahead of me, and all of a sudden, I hear something. People are running, [SPEAKING POLISH], Jude, Jude, and the Polacks learned already that name for a Jew in German.

And it got to be so much turmoil that I kind of stopped, and I said, well, wait a minute. Where am I going here? And I walked in in a-- behind the door and a big gate, the front door of apartment homes and stood there behind the door, and I didn't know what to do. And I stood there for a few minutes, and then I heard two shots. And I was afraid to stick my nose out. I don't know why, actually. I had no indication that I was Jewish. Nobody knew me there. It would be a coincidence to pick me out from the crowd there, almost 99 to nothing.

But a little kid came in, and I say, what happened? [SPEAKING POLISH] What happened? So they just shot a Jew in the middle of town. I said, oh, I must have been Manny Brenner. I had no other way to identify or-- but I waited, and I walked around the town again. I didn't see nothing, seen in the middle-- I didn't-- laying there something. I couldn't tell who it was or-- so from there, I went back to the railroad station.

I just didn't know what to do and took back the train, went back to Kraków because that was the town I knew more about than any other. I didn't explore to find out, but there was no there was no more ghetto in Miechów. There was no more Jews in Miechów. So he never came back, the kid, so I knew that was him.

You had many experiences happened to you in these labor camps that are amazing, considering that you were 15, 16, and 17 years old. You started to tell us at the end of the last tape how the whole Kraków area, the ghetto and the labor camps, were all going to be liquidated and everybody shipped east. Tell us what happened the second time you came back to Plaszow, and you said you were going to be put on a train. Let's pick up from there.

Well, they ordered everybody to take their belongings, and we're going to-- by trucks, I think, they brought us out to Plaszow, back to Plaszow. And the trains were there already with the cattle cars, and so as soon as we got off the truck, we loaded-- but I took a pail of water, a 5-gallon can of water with me. I don't know why. I don't know why. Nobody told me. I didn't know about the transport, what to prepare air yourself.

But I took a pail from marmalade, a can, and I filled it with water. And I carried it from the truck. I carried it on the truck, and I carried it-- and the Germans-- they actually didn't care. They didn't care what I've got in there. They didn't-- just get in. They piled you in.

Did you know why you were going to be transported west? Were you aware--

No, we didn't know.

--that the Germans were losing the war?

In a sense, but you couldn't feel it. You couldn't see it yet. Their expression was just as mean. Their acts didn't change a bit. They never said anything. The Polish newspaper never printed anything. The only news what you could get is from one person to another, but other news didn't travel. And radios-- there wasn't any radio. Nobody had a radio. So I don't know how the news-- even if it traveled, it traveled very slowly.

So when so when you were being loaded on these trains, did they tell you where you were going?

No, no, they-- Germans never apologized, and they never told you what they're going to do. Never did they do anything like that. But we knew wherever we're going it's to a worse place than we have been already. And we've been to many bad things, but it's got to be worse than that. So they loaded up 118 kids in a train, and you just stood as a mass.

One was holding up the other. There was no way of turning around 118 people in a car. You've never been in a car that tight. It's like you pack sardines standing up. But we had that 5-gallon can of water. For five days we were traveling, and as long as we were in Poland-- and then the train didn't travel too fast. There's many clog-ups, many bottlenecks in there because-- we didn't know it, but today I realized why. The Germans were retreating, and they just couldn't go that fast.

I guess you can go forwards a lot faster than you go backwards. I don't know why, but it's a law of nature, I guess. So you had to stop. And then it came to me, and I said, now is the time to run away again. It's a long way in Polish territory. We know the territory. We know the language. That's one thing. And I said, the best thing is to rip the floor. And as soon as we stopped one by one to get out-- so we had one gentleman, Mr. Eisenberg, an older gentleman-- he said, no way. He wouldn't allow nobody because if you run away, they're going to shoot us all.

And we had a couple of younger kids. It was Oleg Przechatski, Romek Fatz. Some kids wanted to run away. I said, that's the only-- we have one chance out of 100 if we do run away. If we don't, we go straight into the oven and out the chimney.

You had heard-- they heard about the concentration and the death camps?

Yeah, we heard about the crematoriums, too. I couldn't imagine how they work. I don't know. It's not a simple thing. It's not like making a hamburger. I don't think so. But I knew they have something in mind.

And I heard-- as Hitler said, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. I knew that he's not bluffing. He's telling the truth. That's what he wanted. That's what he wanted to accomplish is to get rid of all Jews. And as much as I didn't believe it can be done, he was doing it, and if the war goes on a lot longer, he will get rid of everybody.

So you're on this train five days. What happened on the train?

Then everybody was against it. So I said, well, it's just a dream, I guess. We're going into the ovens. So we finally-- we stopped at-- we knew-- I don't know how we found out, but somehow-- so many trains, I guess, you could hear-- the machine is talking between one another, and they said "This is Auschwitz." Or maybe there was a sign.

So you couldn't see out of there. I couldn't see. There was a little window for cattle trains. There's a little window there, but it's all with barbed wire. You just can stick your finger through it. So I couldn't see any signs. Maybe somebody taller than me could see and say, we are in Auschwitz, Oswiecim. It's a Polish city. It wasn't known for nothing. It wasn't known for any good thing or for any bad thing, just another city, nothing unusual about it. But Hitler made it--

And when you went through it, you didn't know that it was a camp. You knew it was a--

Yeah, we knew that Auschwitz was a camp. We knew that Oswiecim-- we knew Oswiecim existed. We knew, yeah, there was a crematorium. We knew it was a terrible place. But we had no choice. We stopped there.

So we waited for a while. Then finally, the train took off. And we almost ran out of water too. We had a

little-- finally, we had to ration the water. Everybody gets a little bit, 118 guys. I was the only one who had a pail of water there there. It wasn't mine. It was everybody's. You couldn't say "It's mine," not in a crowd like that. You'd never dare to do it. But then there was nothing yours anymore. It's ours. It becomes a law, everybody. It's a survival thing. Then we finally-- we got to Mauthausen from there.

Mauthausen was in Germany.

In Austria.

In Austria.

Yeah.

And that's where the train stopped?

That's where the train stopped. And then we're marching. We were all so thirsty that I thought that that was the end already, no food for-- the little food what we had with us was gone the first two days probably.

Tell us about your arrival in Mauthausen.

Well, we arrived, got off the train, and somebody was spraying the streets in Mauthausen, I think, or the cleaning the yard. Mauthausen was-- I don't know-- not an impressive camp, quiet, a serene quietness, no-- you couldn't see a human being there. I didn't see the couple prisoners spraying the sidewalks in the streets. We walked up a ramp. It was built probably like Sling Sing, on a mountain, on a hill.

And as I looked around, I said, oh, this is impossible to run away from here. That's the end. This is it. This is the end already. I could see it. Somebody was spraying, and I got some water in my mouth from that big hose. Now it's something, I think, to keep me alive yet for another hour or so. And from there, we stood there for a while on the main street.

That was the whole trainload or just this car?

The whole trainload.

Whole trainload of people.

Everybody. But you didn't have contact with one another. They just-- the Germans kept you so-- you couldn't get out of your line or out of your place. But anyhow, from there we got stripped. All your clothes-- take your clothes off, and drop your clothes. From there, we went into the bathroom, from the bath to another door, and they gave you a pair of underwear.

And from there-- oh, I had my I had my papers yet, so I throw them in the sewer. I said, from now on, I will not need any more papers. That's the last-- the terminal trip, I think, I made. That was the end of it. So I threw away-- that was the all possessions I had is my Aryan papers yet when I had-- so finally, they gave us the underwear, and we went into what-- they call this quarantine.

Every barrack was separated with barbed wire. It was one camp-- it was not enough one barbed wire around it. Every barrack had barbed wire on it. I don't know why, but the Germans evidently felt that was the way to go, so quarantine. We stayed there for a couple of weeks, I think, and--

Who were the guards?

The guards were the Gestapo, the SS. They were all SS. That's all they kept in there.

All German guards?

I imagine so. I never seen the guards, except on the towers, and who the hell looked for them? There was

nowhere-- you couldn't run away from-- not that I'm ingenious and-- I was good at it, to run away from places. As a matter of fact, one day, I got caught-- I was back in Poland. I got caught as an Aryan on the other side.

They used to do it to the Polish people the same thing, catch them and send them out to Germany. So I got caught. I said, I will go back now. I don't know if I should come up with it or not. But anyhow, I got caught as a Polack, as a Polish kid, and they took me into a school in Kraków.

And there was about 500 other kids there, and the next day, we slept outside, the next day, going to a doctor, the artz. The doctor was sitting like this, and the kids are walking by, links, recht, links. I didn't know what the hell it meant. But I guess some of them were able to go to work, and the others are not able.

So as I walked out the door to the school, there's two SS in the front of the door, the big doorway. So as I walked out, I had my shirt. Instead of going straight, I walked to the right, walked down the steps, me and two other kids. They were following me. And I walked out the door, and nobody said a word. I got dressed, put my shirt on, and I walked away from it, just lucky, that's all there was to it. Otherwise, I would have been sent out as a non-Jew. I walked away, right walked away from it.

But now I'm back. I don't know where I'm at now. In Mauthausen?

You were telling us in Mauthausen.

Yeah, in Mauthausen.

Let me ask you a couple of questions about the conditions, and then you'll tell us what happened to you. How many people do you think were in the camp? Could you tell?

I could never see any. I could see only very few prisoners, very few. Oh, I saw Americans. I saw American Negroes, Black people carrying the latrines on their shoulders on the other side of the wire. They must have had a camp there with American prisoners, prisoners of war, and I guess they treated Blacks as the Americans were treating them here in their own land, maybe worse. So I seen only Blacks carrying the buckets, every morning going by with the--

How many people were in the immediate barracks you were in, do you think?

Oh, about 500. I think they packed 500. They had four in a bed to sleep.

Were they all young men? Were there any children younger than yourself, or were you among the youngest?

No, I must have been one of the youngest one.

You were 17 at this point?

Yeah, yeah, one of the young ones, not the youngest but the young ones.

How long were you in Mauthausen?

Two weeks, two weeks, yeah.

Why what happened that you didn't stay there?

I don't know. We were going into the stone quarry every day. We had to pick up a stone-- I don't know-- 25 pounds and carry it 190-some steps up. Oh, I had this. And not always you could find it. So many people went up there to look for a stone like that.

It was just-- they didn't need the stones. We know it. But you couldn't take a too small stone, and then at the same time, you couldn't pick up too big of a stone. It was until you find the right stone to carry it so the

SS doesn't hit you over the head, and they were riding with horses and watching you going up and down the steps. And you watch that, and they said-- hard labor if you build something productive, you build a railroad or so, but this is just to get rid of you, just to exert you to the point where you collapse and you die. They save on a bullet.

And so for two weeks, and the last few days I said to a friend of mine-- I think he is still in New York, a little kid. I knew him from school, Mietek Schiff, a friend. We used to meet quite often. And I said, Mietek, if I have to go tomorrow, I'm going to go on the wires, on the electric wires. I say, I can't take it anymore. I just can't take it physically anymore.

And I said-- and then why to suffer? So why to prolong your suffering? There is no way out. There is no way out. Why should I suffer a day longer if I can avoid that? So let's go on the wires. The hell with it.

And at one time-- it comes to a point where you are fighting it, and you can't anymore. You don't see any hope. There's not a spark in the tunnel, and so what for? You might as well terminate. And we decided, yeah, we're going to do it.

So the next day, we don't go out to this stone quarry. I said, what happened now? Are we going to the oven? And as we looked, the oven wasn't burning there. There was no smoke coming out. So I said, what are they doing, just puzzled. There's fire. There's smoke. You don't see any.

We see the chimney, a big chimney sticking out there, and I thought that-- the crematorium, if you went in, that was the end. We never talked to anybody who came out from there, so we didn't go out. What happened? We're going to get clothes now, get uniforms, new numbers. All right. Well, that was not a matter of choice. We get uniforms? We get uniforms, all right. I'll wait for that.

Got the uniforms. Next day, loaded on a train again, go out to another camp. Well, I said, another camp can't be worse than this one. So we went to Linz. We came into Linz. Linz was a nice, little camp. It was about 8,000 people. They didn't have any Jews yet. Oh, you--

This is way at the end of the war?

Well, it's in '40--

It's close-- this is '40-- it's '44 or '45 already.

'44.

'44.

'44.

And so they're going to-- this had been a political prisoner camp or what?

No. The political prisoner camp was in Mauthausen on the other side of the wires. It was a camp, and it was subdivided in so many other camps and quarantines, whatever they call them, quarantine. There's a barrack with wires around They call it a quarantine. I don't know why. Well, it is a camp within a camp within a camp.

So suddenly, after two weeks, you guys are all given uniforms and sent off to Linz?

Not all of us, but--

How many were sent?

I don't know, maybe 800 or-- quite a few.

Quite a few of your friends who you'd been with up to then?

Yes, yes. We all came to Linz.

So describe for us what you found there in Linz.

Linz was kind of an amiable place. Most of them were Russians in there, and then you had Greeks, French, Italians, Yugoslavs, all nations. It's like a Babel. Everybody spoke a different language, never seen that in my life. All of a sudden, I'm confronted with all these people. And they all talk, and I can't understand any of them. So many nationalities they kept, young people. I said-- you never ask a guy, "Why are you in camp?"

You said you were the first group of Jews to be transported into Linz?

Yes, the first thing-- oh, Zhydy, Juden, the Juden. And we treated-- a camp has its laws, its own nature laws. We're always the weakest one. The predominant one was the Russian. The Russians-- because I remember when I came there the Russians every day used to congregate after work and sing their patriotic songs.

They had a full stomach, and they would say [SPEAKING RUSSIAN]. That means "Let's start a song." They were full of patriotism, [INAUDIBLE]. They hated the Germans, and they had their own patriotism for their country, for-- none of the other nations did that. None of the other nationalities did that.

How many people would you say were in Linz altogether?

I think somewhere around 8,000. I think so. I'm not sure now.

And how long were you there? You were there until you were liberated?

Right, yeah.

So how long were you there?

Oh, almost a year.

A year?

Yeah.

Let me ask you some questions then about Linz in particular. What work did you do there?

I worked on the Stahlbau, Stahlbau. They built tanks, but I worked mainly in the outside. The Americans-- there was another camp-- before we came there, that camp was bombed, and the factories were bombed. So we were just straightening out the craters, the railroad tracks. They did a lot of damage there, the American bombing. There was a lot of bombs yet laying around, the guns. And they were cleaning it up, a lot of debris. So that's what I was doing in the outside.

That's what you did most of the whole year you were there?

Yeah, yeah.

Who were the guards in Linz?

SS.

Again all Germans? No other nationalities is the guards?

No other nationalities, no.

Was this camp organized like the camps had been in Poland with Kapos and--

Kapos-- we had mainly German, the German-- the verbrechers, the real criminals or the deviants, the homosexuals what were in prison. And then there were probably some innocent, but I never seen any of them what had really an innocent face. The Germans-- they were real hard criminals, and they made Kapos out of them.

There was one guy, a French guy. I don't remember his name, but he seemed like a-- he spoke good German. I don't remember, but I think that's the only guy I seen in Linz who was decent. All the rest of them were verbrechers, the crooks.

What there any contact with the local population there?

Yes, we had contact at work, yes.

There were Austrians also working in the camp?

Yes, yes. Not in the camp, but when we went outside to work. We used to come home to sleep. The camp was the home.

But the work that you were doing, fixing up the bombing damage, you were taken out of the boundaries of the camp to do?

Right, right.

OK, I got that straight. I had to understand what that was.

Right, and that's when we got in contact with the Germans, yeah.

Now, what did the Austrian and the German populace-- were there any reaction to seeing you prisoners?

No, not to us. They just thought of us as scum, something useless, yeah.

What was the reaction in the camp between the different nationalities? You mentioned the Russians were the strongest.

Yes, the Russians were the dominant part. They were the strongest one, yeah. All other nations, the nationalities, were the weaker sex, yeah. They were. But a lot of them died, a lot of the Russians. They were there for a long time.

I had a friend of mine. We were once caught in the wintertime-- before that, one day, they wouldn't let us out, for some reason start counting something they're missing. Two guys were missing.

And the two guys-- they were working on the railroad. Some other factories-- there was-- a whole stretch of the factories were built outside towns, and those two Russians or three of them-- I don't know, two, I think-- they were working on the railroad. And there was a car that was damaged evidently. That's what I got news.

And they got in the railroad car, and they found some food and wine. And they got drunk and fell asleep, and they were declared missing. So we come-- they started looking for them. There's two guys missing. There's trouble. We're not going out, two guys missing. If you would have had a diamond missing for-- 10 carat diamond, you wouldn't have looked that long for them, but they were looking for the two poor Russians.

But finally, they found them. They were sleeping in the car. They had dogs out and everything else. So they brought them in the camp, and the gallows was there. The gallows was a picture like you look at it-- a fiction. A camp had to have a gallow, right?

So they took the two guys up there, and then one day we're all on appell. We go all out and got to watch the ceremony, being hung for they run away. They didn't run away. They just ate themselves and fell asleep. But the Germans declared them-- and as they were being hung-- I seen people being hung. I seen a girl in Poland being hung.

But those two guys said [SPEAKING RUSSIAN], for our country, for freedom. That was-- it penetrated so deeply. And I said-- they hung those two kids, two young kids, Russian kids. And so I didn't know. I said-- I used to have a formula. Whenever I see somebody killed or shot or hanged, I said, I'll run away.

But I had nowhere to run, and I was-- in Germany, you run out from the camp, you back in the same camp once you don't talk their language. Where are you running? It's just-- you're in the same place, practically, except you don't have a fence around you. So they hung those two guys, and work went on, life went on for the rest of us same.

So one day, in the wintertime, they had a train from Riga-- that's Latvia, I think-- came back with big crates. We unloaded the crates. So we unloaded the crates. I said, what the hell do they have there in the crates? It was a curious thing.

So I opened one crate, and I see big belts, transmission belts-- and leather was a commodity, uniforms-- and the crates. So I knew what-- we transported them into a little building, a little building. So I said, oh, that's a good idea. Now they locked up the doors. And I said, well, whenever I get a chance, I'll break into that building and cut some of that leather off, and I can sell it to the guys in the kitchen.

The kitchen was the high life of working there, the elite of the camps. They were well dressed, well nourished. I said, well, if I can get some bread or soup for it-- so one day, I knocked a hole up top over the door and got in there and cut off-- I had a spoon and a-- what they call that? A dish hanging on you. So that was the daily-- the dressing code. You had to have that.

So I cut a piece off, and I went out in the kitchen. I found somebody who needed it, and I got some soup for it. And then I said, well-- I said [INAUDIBLE], I know, so I can make some more. I might not be hungry anymore. But I came back a day later or two and bricked up with bricks. I said, well, somebody evidently spotted it. Well, all right, for me to make another hole is not that great of a deal.

So I went back up there one day, start pounding the bricks away, and a German opens the door and-- I got you. What can you say? I got you. That was already in '4--

It must've been '45 already.

'44.

'44, toward the end of--

Yeah, in '44, in the wintertime, yeah.

In the winter, just before the end of the war.

Before the end of the war. And that guy is screaming. He's beating on me, and I said, well, you want to run away, you want to run away, you want to run away. I didn't say a word. I don't know what the hell I said, but anyhow, it got me down, and from one-- delegate me from one top man to another higher top man to another higher top man.

And it got so-- and everybody was beating up on me and finally got me into the camp, took me back to the camp. I was a dangerous element. So I stood there at the camp, and they let me back in the barrack. The next day, in the morning, we count, and somebody goes-- I don't know. Everybody goes out for work, and they let me stand there on the very end.

I'm alone already. Oh, I say, well, it doesn't look good. Again, doesn't look good. That's the end of it. So the

sergeant takes up all the lists with the numbers and the counts, goes up to the lagerführer, to the commander of the camp, and he says, this is the guy who evidently-- I don't know what the hell he said. To him I didn't listen. I couldn't understand him any. But I knew what I was doing, and so I knew the accusation.

He said, that's the guy-- he said, 25 [NON-ENGLISH]-- 25 or 50. I don't remember anymore. But anyhow, the SS took me into the office, and there were sticks already, 2-by-2s, something like that in the corner, full of them. So they had their purpose. And lie down and counted out kicked me out the door and back to work. I got away with murder at that time. It must have been the-- they knew already that they were losing the war.

And they said, evidently, why should we kill this innocent-- he will die yet. So I got away with that. But they beat me up so badly that-- the war ended, that little cap we used to wear-- I cut it in eight places to slide it over my head. It was all swollen up. And I had blood in my ears, settled somewhere, and I couldn't hear. I didn't have a taste for anything. I couldn't taste sweet or sour.

Well, then after that-- and all my friends what slept in the same corner. I finally turned to a Muslim. When once you got a name of a "Muslim," that's the next step being dead, Muslim.

You were like a Muselmann at that point?

Yes, yeah, yeah. Once you become a Muslim, that's the next step to die, another day, another minute or so.

You were so depressed by that point and--

Well, and because I was so--

--just in such bad condition--

--beaten up already. Yeah, I was so--

--in such poor condition.

Yeah. That was already at the end, and I could hardly move. I don't know what propelled me at that time. But I waited it out, and not long after that, I got-- then they stole my shoes. Somebody stole my shoes in the wintertime. I don't know. I don't know why. They were not that good.

But anyhow, I went out one day without shoes to work on snow. You wouldn't believe it, that somebody can walk on snow and not to freeze his feet off. I didn't believe, but you can't stand still. You had to keep on moving your feet. And it probably-- it felt like I had some 5 pounds on every or 10 pounds on every-- but finally, an SS got pity over me. He said, come on. No shoes?

And they were watching every 50 or so. He dragged me out, and I walked with him to the camp. It was another about 2 or 3 miles, and he got me a new pair of shoes. Can you imagine that, a new pair of shoes? And I came back to work, and all lice and all other things-- I didn't think that I survived. I didn't.

So when were you liberated then?

5th of May.

And you were in very, very poor condition by that--

Yeah, I couldn't go out and see-- I couldn't go out and see how the liberation looked like. I just didn't have enough power to walk to the window or walk out the gate.

Who liberated the camp?

The Americans.

So you were liberated-- you were lucky you were liberated by the Americans.

Yeah. Well, I don't-- nobody ever came into the barrack and look in if there were any sick, and they were all-- we were all sick. I mean sick, unable to walk and just bones and skin. That's all, I guess. I found once a piece of mirror and tried to look at the face. I couldn't find a piece of mirror. And I just couldn't believe myself. I couldn't believe myself. But if you don't look at yourself every day, I guess that's the surprise that you get.

Before we go on to what happened to you after the liberation, you've told us an incredible story of a young boy going through every single kind of thing that could really possibly happen to you. I'm going to ask you to look back over it. I'm going to ask you some questions about surviving it to liberation, and answer which ones you can. If they're too painful, then we'll skip some of them. Did you think you'd survive?

No, I didn't think I-- I didn't think it was worth it to survive. I didn't think that-- there's so much punishment that a human can absorb, and we have to die after all. We realize we're here temporarily. We have to go. I don't think it was worth-- but at the same time, I said I wanted to see the end. I wanted to see the end of Hitler. I wanted to see the end of an injustice.

What gave you strength to go on?

I don't know. I don't know if I-- what gave me the strength, actually, to go on. Life itself is a-- I don't know. I guess nobody would volunteer for the electric chair. The same thing, nobody would volunteer to be killed. But the pain-- now you start looking back and see the pain they exerted on you was so much. Is it worthwhile? Why to suffer that much? We know we got to go, so why to suffer that much?

I think it was a good question and committed suicide-- I was never a hero myself, so just sheer luck, I guess. I wanted to see the end of the war. I wanted to see justice to prevail. I wanted to see what's going to happen. I knew there the whole world was wrong in doing things.

Now, you even succeeded in hiding as a non-Jew, yet you came back in to be with--

--with the rest of them, yeah.

--with the rest of them. What made you do that?

I don't know, just the feeling of being Jewish. I said, what's going to happen with the rest of them? I said, I don't have to survive to tell the story. Who am I going to tell it to? Another-- who is not Jewish will never understand it. So who--

Did any particular memory sustain you during all of this at all, any past memory?

I don't know. I know how not to do things. If I would have to do it-- if it ever-- let's hope it doesn't happen, but I'm not so sure it won't. I would know what not to do or what to do to avoid all that. I would never collaborate with the enemy. No, I think a dictatorship should not exist anymore.

Now, if there is a question of God, I don't know if there is a God. I don't believe in him, never proved it to me. I don't know if the God is there to prove it to anybody, but I had never any signs that there is a above-- something more than a human, a superior power. I don't think there is, no.

Of all the experiences, what was the most painful?

None of them were pleasurable. I don't know. The most painful--

It's a terrible question to ask.

It's like being hit over their head or over your arm. It hurts wherever. It feels good when you stop. That's the only thing.

Did you ever think, what about the other communities in the world? Where were the Jews in Palestine?

Yes, I thought about it. I was very mad at the Americans. I said, why should they be privileged? I didn't commit no crimes. Why should they be the privileged one? They were probably drinking wine, and I'm hungry here, starving. For what?

You wondered why the outside world didn't help.

Helping-- I don't know why the outside-- personally, I never needed any personal help, but why should we be singled out and suffer?

Is there anything else about those particular years you want to share? Is there anything we left out before we go--

Oh, I don't know.

--on to what happened to you at liberation?

I don't know if we left anything out. Like when I came here, all applications we had-- they had what faith? I never filled any of those out. It's none of nobody's business. I would never fill out-- not that I'm ashamed to be a Jew. It's none of their concern.

When they offer me a job, I, in return, give them the service. It's none of nobody's business what kind of religion I am. I never fill that out. I'm glad they finally eliminated that from all applications. You don't see that anymore, "What religion are you?" That's one of the greatest mistakes we ever-- in a democracy like that you should have never-- that's why I said to-- you put it right there in writing. They got you whenever they want you.

Let's go on to liberation. You were liberated by the Americans. You said you were in very poor physical condition. What happened to you when you were liberated then?

I didn't know what to do. Sing? I couldn't sing. I couldn't scream. I didn't express any joy. I just was like somebody who is dead and forget to fall over, I guess.

How did you recuperate physically?

I guess the food, whatever I-- I think that during the war my brain became a stomach. The only thought-- one thought I had, an empty stomach, "hungry, hungry, hungry." That's all it said to me. That's all feeling. I never saw a newspaper or read anything or smelled a flower or listened to a bird.

All this didn't exist. Maybe there weren't any. I never seen flowers during-- oh, yeah, I seen flowers on a tomb somewhere in Kraków, but I never smelled anything or smelled good. I don't know, just different world. And your stomach takes domination over your body, I guess. Hunger and the cold weather-- it's the worst thing.

How long did it take you physically to recuperate?

I don't know. I got better. One day, I walked somewhere by, and I seen-- in Linz-- a hospital or something. And I went into that hospital, and I said-- I couldn't-- I didn't talk German, but I told them, my ears, ears, ears, something, ears, ears. And they start looking in. They found out right away, didn't have to be a doctor, I guess. I had a blocked ear.

So they washed it. They laid me down and talked to me, I guess. I don't know what the hell they asked me. I just-- no, I didn't like to talk to Germans. I just couldn't stomach-- I don't hate them now. I don't hate

them. I wouldn't go there for a million-- if somebody gives me a free trip and \$1 million, I wouldn't go to Germany. There's too much blood there. It's not a place where I want to put my feet on.

So in the hospital, they--

They cleared up my ears, yeah. And then I started eating pickles, and I knew a pickle was a pickle. I ate pickles, and I never could feel that sour--

So your taste came back.

Yeah, yeah.

Did you try to find your family?

I knew that they were-- I lost them. I knew that nobody survived. I had two aunts in Kraków, and they survived, both of them.

The aunt who had the restaurant?

Yes, they survived, both of them. One of them died just recently, and I went to visit them. In 1975, I took my boy with me, my son.

Did you ever find out what happened to your parents or your sisters?

No, no.

You never could find out what happened.

No, the Germans asked me the same question when I made that Wiedergutmachung. They asked me what happened, if I had a death certificate. I said, well, if they can show me that they are alive, I don't want anything. Just give me that they are alive or where they are.

You never heard from anybody what happened to them exactly?

No, no.

You never found out?

In the camps.

No one knew where they disappeared?

Nobody knew. No, they just took the whole transport, I guess, and they got rid of them. They knew how to do it.

You didn't go home after the war.

No, no.

Tell us about the various countries you went to. You told me beforehand you went to quite a number of places.

Oh, yeah. Well, after the liberation, I finally got a little better and start-- got some clothes, I think, and my hair started growing. We had that Lause Strasse, they called it. I don't know, shaved--

The shaved haircut that--

Yeah, shaved haircut. It's something in reverse of Mr. T. I don't know if we looked as good as he does. And the hair started growing, and I started getting better.

You have the papers from when you were liberated, don't you?

Oh, yeah, right. This is the paper they gave us in Linz from the camp.

And it has that you were liberated--

The birthday-- yeah, the liberation day. I think so.

And that was from the displaced persons camp there or from being liberated out of Linz?

Being liberated. I think they formed the liberation-- somebody, some organization right after the war started forming, I don't know, UNRRA maybe. I don't know if the American or-- actually, that must have been the prisoners themselves. Some of them were in better physical shape than me, I guess, and they had more education than I did. They could read and write better than I did. I had my-- my brain was stale for five years, and the little I learned-- probably half of it I forgot.

What we need to do now quickly, if you'll tell me the names of the different countries you went to because I want to get that on to that for you-- you were in several countries before you came to the United States.

Right, right.

Where were you?

Well, in Italy, and from Italy, I joined the Polish army. I was not prepared for a life in civilian life. I was just not prepared. To me-- like I say, I probably was 13, 14 one day, and the next day I must have been 60.

So you were in the Polish army, and then after that you were--

In the Polish army I got discharged. From Italy, they took us back to England, and in England, I found my aunt. I found an aunt in Belgium. She emigrated before the war, and I never had any contact with her and never knew much about her. But something stuck in my mind, [NON-ENGLISH]. That's the name of the street. And that's--

So you found her in Belgium?

I found her to the Red Cross, I think, and one day, I got nine letters, nine letters from her. And then one day I demanded-- no, I asked for a furlough to go to Belgium from England, from England. I still have the papers what they gave me.

And they gave me for the train and for the boat and for the train and France and for the train in Belgium, all kinds of tickets. And I packed myself in the uniform and what I've got. I didn't take a coat. That was what we wore.

And you went and you saw your aunt in Belgium?

Yes, I saw my aunt, and she had a baby. She was hidden during the war in Belgium, out in-- they survived, and Monique is still here. She's a teacher in Syracuse.

And when did you come to the United States?

In 1952.

How did you happen to come here?

They asked--

You have to tell me in about 30 seconds, but let's see if we can get it in.

In 30 seconds? I signed once papers. What do you want to do when you get discharged? And I said, well-- choice of countries where I would like to go. I mentioned United States in the papers. I know, well, whatever, if I'm going to go, might as well go to paradise.

So you came to the United States?

So from there I went to Belgium. I lived in Belgium with my aunt for five years, in 1947 to '52, and felt good about it. My aunt treated me like her own son, and she was quite well-to-do. But I had no future yet, nothing. I didn't learn anything.

And in Belgium, you had to have a permis de travail, in other words, a permit to let you work, and the work what is picked as an étranger, as a foreigner, is only consist of down the mine or--

So you made it-- so you decided to come to America.

Right, so I decided-- they called me one day or sent me a letter if I still want to go to the United States. And I said, what else? Is there anything else?

When did you get married? Did you get married in Europe or in the--

'54.

So you got married in Cleveland?

Yes.

Did you marry a survivor?

No.

You married an American?

Yes.

OK. You've told us-- at the beginning of the tape, you told us about your life and your children and what a nice life you've built today. As the very last thing, would you talk a little bit about how you think the Holocaust experience affected you? How do you think this has affected your life?

I don't know how it affected my life. It's hard to go into the past and bring out what would happen if it wouldn't happen. I don't know what I would have been today. I just don't know.

I know if I would be able to help the Ethiopian people today with food, I would carry it over myself. I don't trust any organizations. I don't trust them. They don't do the good what they should for the money we spend. I would go myself. If I would know anybody who was hungry in Cleveland or any other place, I'll take them something to eat. Yeah, I feel sorry for hungry people, yeah. I'll do it today anytime.

I want to thank you very much for sharing your experience with you. I think it was a very important thing. You went through an incredible amount, and the fact that you've let people know what you've gotten out of it-- you're a very strong man. Our survivor today has been Marcel Weintraub. This is Sylvia Abrams. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section.