

And we could start with a family tree, which would be the easiest thing to do.

All right. Start it with my name, right?

Yep.

My name is Danny Gevirtz. And I come from a small town in-- today is part of Russia. When I was born it was Czechoslovakia. Later it became Hungary. At any rate, the name of the town is Vary, V-A-R-I-- V-A-R-Y. It really could be spelled either way.

It borders on two rivers. One is the Tisza, which is really one of the biggest rivers in Hungary. And it was the dividing line between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The big city, the big shtetl next to it is called Beregszasz or Berehovo. And I think today it's called Beregovo by the Russians.

How would you spell Tisza?

T-I-S-Z-A.

T-I-S-Z-A was the one river.

And the other one is Borzsa, B-O-R-Z-S-A It's a smaller river. The Borzsa actually is-- it connects with the Tisza. What do they call that when the one river flows into the other? I can't remember. Well, at any rate, that's what it is.

Now, this is where Hungary borders on Czechoslovakia?

Well, today Hungary borders on Russia actually.

OK.

As I indicated, it's part of the Ukraine today, is my area. Now, as far as my family, I come from a family. We had six children in the family. I was the fifth. And I had a younger sister, an older sister, and three older brothers.

I had-- my grandmother was still alive. And I had-- let me see-- one aunt and uncle, aunt Vary [INAUDIBLE], numerous cousins throughout the area, not in Vary but throughout the area, most of whom did not survive.

Now, of the family members, six children-- remember the names?

Yeah, of course. My oldest brother, who just died about two and a half years ago, his name was Nusin or Nandor in Hungarian; my brother Joe, who is still alive, Joseph Yankel; and then my brother Elimelech, he didn't make it. And my sister Sura, she didn't make it. And my youngest little sister was Rivka. She didn't make it either.

Now the first one, how would you spell his name?

OK, you want a Hungarian name?

English.

Well, in English he called himself Andrew.

Andrew?

Yeah.

OK.

His Hungarian was Nandor, N-A-N-D-O-R, or which is very similar to Andrew. And my second brother, who, thank God, he's still alive, his name is Joseph.

And Elimelech and Sura?

Elimelech.

Yeah.

Sura and Rivka didn't survive.

They did not survive.

Now, you're the third son?

I'm the fifth.

I mean-- I'm sorry.

I was the fourth son but the fifth child. We had-- Sura was two years older than I was. And Elimelech was about three and a half years older than I was or four years older, somewhere around there.

All right. So of these, the numbers of the family members, for example, that perished, you had--

Well, my parents, both, my grandmother, my aunt and her daughter. These, I saw my aunt, my mother, and my cousin, and my little sister walked to the left in Auschwitz. I was there.

Now you mentioned the aunt and daughter. Then we're talking about--

This was my father's sister.

As far as your brothers, your two sisters, and two brothers--

I had three brothers. Two of them survived and one didn't.

So one brother perished and two brothers survived, neither of the sisters--

No.

--and no parents and no grandparents.

That's right.

So all right. So to run down that again, you had a grandmother, both parents, two sisters, and one brother who perished, an aunt, and a daughter. And two brothers survived. OK.

As far as your date of birth--

Well, actually I was born in 1929. But somehow my record got mixed up during the war before I came here. And I'm now listed that I was born November 20, 1930. And I keep that as my official birthday.

All right.

There's some there's some ambiguity as to exactly when it was. And even my two brothers disagree. So I just let it go at that.

And you were born in Vary?

In Vary, yeah.

Vary.

And that's not too far from Munkacs either. It's about, I would guess about 25, 30 miles or so. I know you know Munkacs because you have written about it.

And there was a story that Judi showed me of Yoli, her friend, who went back to visit Uzhhorod.

Yeah, Ungvar, Uzhhorod.

Ungvar-- and also went to Poland, to Auschwitz, and came back.

She showed me some pictures where they-- where they put up a statue with a cross.

So beginning at the beginning--

Beginning at the beginning.

Yes.

OK. I suppose I should really start it when I was in third grade in 19-- you know, the years after a while, I'm not too sure. It was either '37 or '38. The Hungarians came in and occupied my country. I remember vividly because, all of a sudden, we lived under the Czechs in freedom and really full freedom that they never bothered the Jews officially.

The townspeople, actually, were quite antisemitic. But we really didn't have that much trouble to speak of. Every once in a while, you'd be spat upon or thrown stones at. But these are the type of things that you just learned to live with, and you really don't worry too much about.

However, when the Hungarians came in, things really changed, like immediately. Real drastic changes took place. They closed down all Jewish businesses. My father, for instance, had a seltzer factory, a very small one. I mean, he was really eking out a living out of it. And he was also a shoemaker. And within a couple of months, they took-- and over their, you need a license to-- much like here, you need licenses over here for professionals, like doctors and dentists.

You have to have a permit to operate any kind of business. And this was taken away from him. And therefore, he, whatever business he conducted, he did it illegally. And he suffered the consequences. He was taken away innumerable times, beaten up, locked up in jail for a period of time. Then he would come home.

And what is he going to do? He still had to make a living. So he went back for more. And in school, really, the people were beginning to show their color. The teachers were violently antisemitic. I mean, they preached it every day. Everything that happened in the community or anywhere else in the world, it was the Jews' fault. I mean, it was just beginning to go downhill from here on in, from there on in.

About what year would you say that was, when the change took place?

OK. When I was in third grade, I would say I must have been nine years old. And I was-- this was in 1938, I would guess, '38 or early '39 or thereabouts. Now, things went along that way for a while. And the war-- the Phoney War was going on between Hitler and France.

Of course, when the war broke out in Poland, that's when we really started getting real problems. And as I mentioned earlier, that I lived on a river, the Tisza. It was about this time, in '39 or maybe '40, when dead bodies began to float down the river. They were tied together with tallaisim. Husband and wife tied together, sometimes children tied together to the father or to the mother. And we as Jews would try to take them out of the river and give them a burial such as prescribed in Orthodox Judaism.

And our townspeople would come out and start deriding us for it. And they would tell us, it's a shame it wasn't you that this happened to. And if you keep this up, you're going to be next. But again, it was really not very pleasant. But compared to what was to come later on, this was a picnic.

What was happening now, when the Hungarians, instead of-- they were-- not monopolizing-- they were calling people up into the army. And at first, even the Jews they were taking into the regular army. But then all of a sudden, I guess they got an order from Hitler, where this was very quickly done away with. And the Jewish people were put into a what they called-- the Hungarian word for munkatabor, which means work camp. And the Jewish people, instead of being in the regular army, at this point were given-- instead of guns, they were given pickaxes and shovels.

Like a labor battalion.

A labor battalion. And they actually became the cannon fodder for the regular armies. Now, I'm rambling now because I probably jumped the gun by about a year or two over here, where they put these Jewish people-- Lou Freeman was in that on the Russian front. And they were actually put out there to pick up the dynamites. And instead of looking for it like we do over here with the minesweepers, they were using human beings, the Jews. And if it exploded, it was only a Jew who was blown up. It really didn't matter too much.

My oldest brother, Nandor, was in this. And my second brother, Joseph, Joseph, who is still alive, he was also involved in that. Somehow or other, they both wound up in Budapest towards the end of the war in 1944, the middle of '44. And eventually they wound up in Mauthausen, in Austria, which was nothing more than a death camp really.

Now, as to my-- well, this kind of a life, which was really miserable, in order, for instance, there was no food available unless you had-- my words fail me all of a sudden. I can't think of words. You needed tickets.

Like ration coupons.

Ration coupons-- thank you-- to get any kind of food at all. Now, Jews were not allowed ration coupons unless they were able to raise their own food. How do you raise your own food when you're not allowed to own land? Well, we managed. What we did was, when the townspeople-- and there were some good townspeople. In fact, I know one or two families that really deserve to be mentioned. They're no longer alive, I'm sure, because these people were my father's age. And my father would be about 95 years old today.

And they would leave some of the wheat in the corner of their fields, much like as described in the Torah. And we Jews would go out there and pick this off and literally beat the wheat out of it. And we would go to the market and say, hey, look, we got our own wheat. And then that way, for some reason, we were able to get matching amounts of food or beans or corn, whatever it was. So we survived. We survived.

And in 1944, in March or towards the end of March in 1944, I was walking along the Borzsa River to one of my friends. It was Pesach, comes to think of it. I had to be later than March. It must have been-- well, maybe it was late March. I don't know in 1944 when Passover came out.

At any rate, it's immaterial. I was walking over to one of my friends to play after davening in shul. And the gendarmes, the Hungarian gendarmes were coming along. And they told me, hey, Jewish boy, you go home and stay there. I had no idea what it was all about. And I said, why. So he just smacked me. Don't ask any questions, just go home. So I ran home.

That's when the Germans came in to occupy our territory. Even before that-- let me backtrack a little bit now. We were baking our matzohs. And I think this had to be in the middle of March. That's when we heard that the Germans occupied Budapest because I think it was at this point that Horthy, who was the director of Hungary, gave up to the Russians. And the Germans came in and occupied all of Hungary.

And at this point, we really had no idea what was going on. We were just trying to wait the war out. The war will soon be over, and everything would be OK. We had no idea anything about Auschwitz, had never even heard of those things.

Anyway, now to get back to what happened during Passover-- this was the probably the seventh day of Pesach when this happened because on the eighth day, we were told to take all our belongings and go to the schoolhouse, take all the jewelry with us. Everything had to be taken with us. And when we got there, as little jewelry what my family might have had-- my mother probably had a wedding ring, maybe an earring or something like that-- and this was all taken from her. And they were so cruel and so-- so really-- they even gave my mother receipts for it. And they knew damn well they would never give this stuff back.

And a couple of days after that, we were taken to, as I mentioned earlier, the town Beregszasz or Berehovo. At that time it was Hungarians. It was called Beregszasz. We were taken there into the ghetto. Now this ghetto they put up into an old brick factory. This was an old brick factory before that.

And it was-- they really didn't have closed buildings. It had like a roof but no sides.

Be more like a shed.

Yeah, it was a shed. Yeah. That's where they kept the bricks, drying I suppose. And this is where they put us into, no blankets, no nothing. They just threw us in there. And I think we stayed in this place for a week or two. And then they started taking people away.

We had no idea where they were going. What they were telling us-- at this point, it was all handled by the Germans. What they were telling us was that they're going to take us away and put us into on farms, where we could-- because most men are in the army and now they need to work to produce food and so on and so forth. And we said, well, [NON-ENGLISH]. You know, it's not the end of the world. We know how to work, and we'll work.

But of course, it was far from the truth. What they were doing was putting us on these-- people describe them as cattle cars. They're really much worse than cattle cars. Cattle cars have openings where the animals can breathe. But these had no openings at all. There was no air anywhere. And these were the means of transportation that they had--

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

For us to take us to Auschwitz. Want to stop this for a while?

No, because we can edit that out. I wanted to go back a bit to the--

I wish you would because I know I'm rambling. It's a long story, you know.

Of the things that we didn't touch on in your-- from the time you started to go to school, the sort of things that you-- experiences that you had in school and then your bar mitzvah, experiences of that sort, which would show the kind of life that you had until--

As I mentioned earlier, while the Czechs were in rather than Hungarians, at least the government did not allow open antisemitism. And we did have daily clashes and fights, and we handled ourselves. You know, we didn't shy away from it. We fought back.

But once the Hungarians came in, it was an entirely different story. There we had daily beatings. And in fact, the teachers encouraged it so much so that, after a while, we were just afraid to go to school. But if we didn't go, it was even

worse because they would actually drag us and make us go to school.

And they had us do menial tasks. They had us cleaning the toilets-- toilets-- it was the outhouses. We didn't have any toilets in those days. There were no modern facilities in my town. In fact, I think electricity was something we only heard about.

No, that's not true. In the mill, where they made-- ground the wheat into flour, that was done by electricity. That's the only electricity that we had seen. But at any rate, I didn't mean to pass over it.

Coming through there. Excuse me.

Do you have to because I've got this all hooked up.

Nope. I'll just let it go.

Thank you.

In comparison to really what was to follow once we got into concentration camp, this was-- what I'm trying to say is it was tough, but everything is relative in life. And compared to what we had afterwards, it really wasn't all that horrendous.

What I remember, my father talking to some townspeople whom he grew up with. They were friends. And these were Gentile people. My father's family on my grandmother's side, I believe, goes back as many as perhaps 300 or 400 years in that town. I mean, we were not newcomers into town who came in and we were pushing people out of food or job.

How big a town was it in terms of population?

I believe we had maybe between 3,000 and 4,000 people. That's it. That was the whole town. And again, there's a dispute between my brothers. One says we had about 60 Jewish families. The other one says we only had 40 Jewish families. I don't really remember.

We had a nice shul that we went to. It was pretty big. But just how many Jewish families were there, I don't know exactly. But I do know that most of them didn't come back.

Well either way, 40 or 60 out of a population of 3,000 is--

Well, 40 or 60 families probably amounted to about 200 to 250 people.

So it's less than 10% of the population.

Yeah. Yeah. And before the Hungarians came into-- but you've got to-- maybe I should give the history of the area. This area was ceded to Czechos-- there was no Czechoslovakia before World War I. They cut up Austro-Hungarian Empire, and this area was given to Czechoslovakia.

Now, listening to my grandmother tell stories-- and I lived with my grandmother because she lived in town, but she had nobody else. I used to go and sleep with her. And I know many stories that my brothers don't even know.

The Jews, for the most part, didn't have it too bad in that community. They had good rapport. They had good relationships with the Gentile people. They are always antisemites, one or two or three. But for the most part, the leaders of the community, of the Gentile community, would not really allow anything to happen to the Jewish people. They became part of the community.

It's only once the Hungarians came in and these, the Nyilas-- you ever hear that expression? The Nyilas was-- I guess they would be called the fascists, you know, movement came into being. And their sole reason for being was to be

antisemitic. They thrived. This is what flamed their-- this is what blew their flame is what I'm trying to say.

They thrived on this. This is where they got their energy from because there is always jealousy. What people don't realize is that the Jewish people have a history of working hard, putting their meager earnings away for a rainy day. And I can't ever remember going hungry until the Hungarians came in. We never had that kind of a problem.

On the other hand, the general Gentile community, by and large, were very poor people. They owned land. They owned farm, and they worked the farm. But when the farm season was over, instead of putting their money that they got out of it, putting it away and saving it, putting it away for winter use, they wound up in the nearest bar. I mean, we had in that community about five or six different bars. And the whole community wasn't that big. And came to winter time, the Jews always had food. So there was always jealousy.

Now, when the Hungarians came in, this is what they would see. The Jews have food, and they have money, and you got nothing. Are you going to put up with this? And next thing you know, we're being beaten up. So when I hear that it was only the Germans who were so bad, it's not true. It's not true.

The record of the history in Eastern Europe--

Yeah.

--whether it was in your part or going farther east into Ukraine and Poland and Russia--

And I got to tell you, this is for what it's worth, and I can only tell you from my experiences. I don't know how anybody else-- what anybody else would say. I was with a lot of Ukrainians in Dora. We'll be touching on it, I'm sure, later on, in Dora concentration camp. These Ukrainians, by and large, were far worse than the Germans, far worse.

And in some cases, they were in Nazi uniforms. They were our guards. But we also had them as inmates. They were captured by the Germans from the Russian Army, and they were inmates. And they were relentless antisemite. They just-- the minute they found out we were Jews-- found out-- it was no secret. You wore a yellow star, and they knew what Jews [INAUDIBLE]. But by and large, my experiences have been, with them, were just awful, just plain awful.

OK. I don't know if I rambled away.

No, that's-- as it comes to you, that's the way to go with it. And I'll jump in.

Getting back to the ghetto-- this-- I mentioned to you, there were some good people in my hometown. And they were. One of the things I remember very clearly is one of our neighbors came to the ghetto and brought us some food. And he found us actually. He was our neighbor in Vary, and he came into the ghetto in Beregszasz. And he really put his own life at risk to do this. He brought us a whole loaf of bread.

And his name was Somogyi. I wonder if he's still-- he might still be alive. If he is, he must be in his 80s by now. But there were some good people who did help us out.

Now life in this ghetto was-- I really can't even remember too much about it. There was so much tumult there daily. We were just pushed into this small area with barely room to lie down, a lot of children crying and people pulling their hair. The young people wanted to escape. And then the older people, like my older brother, who didn't make it, wanted to escape. And my father wouldn't let him.

At that point, I think he was about 16 or 17 years old. Where will you go? What are you going to do? My brother said, well, I'll find-- I'll fight. I'll find the--

Partisans.

--partisans. And my father just absolutely would not allow it. And for what it's worth, I'm sure my father meant well.

But it just didn't happen.

My father also suffered a great deal. He had very poor vision. In fact, he was blind in one eye. In the other eye, he barely had light perception. I remember when he was reading newspaper, the paper was practically touching his nose. And he was also put into this work camp in the town.

Towards the end it got so bad that they came into town. And anybody who was willing, who was able to get up and work were forced into some sort of labor force by the Hungarians, even before the Germans came in. And my father, nebuch, he couldn't see. And he had a lot of problems with that.

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

Oh, I'm sorry.

He had a lot of problems with that. He had a lot of beatings. I remember one time-- I'm going back. I don't know how much this tape is.

Don't worry about that.

I mentioned that my father was a shoemaker. Now, one of the rarest commodities during the war was leather, of course. It was impossible to get. And my father had a connection in a town not far from us, up the Tisza river, called Ujlak, which means, literally translated, I think means "New Town." You know? It was somewhat a bigger town than ours. And there we could get leather.

Now, my father was afraid to go to get it. They had to go on a train and walk to a railroad station, which was six kilometers away from us called-- in a town called Borzhava. And from there we went to Ujlak to pick up the leather. My father usually sent me to do this because he didn't think I would be suspected since I was a young child. And if he was carrying it, with his beard and all, if he had a package with him, he was sure that the gendarme, somebody, would get a hold of him.

And I brought this home one time. And as I was walking to the house, there was a lot of excitement. And I very quickly went and hid this leather in my neighbor's backyard, who were Gentile people. I put it into some bushes. And not much later then, maybe a half hour or an hour later, sure enough, these gendarme-- you know, they were-- the gendarmes, [HUNGARIAN] it's pronounced in Hungarian, they were searching for something, I don't know what. But they were searching every Jewish house.

In fact, our synagogue was ripped apart. I had no idea what they were searching for. And they came to my house also. And usually what we used to do when we got the leather, we used to hide it. We had like a little barn at the side of the house. And in the barn we had hay for-- because at one time we had a horse and a cow. At this point we didn't have it because they took it away from us. And we used to hide the leather in this attic like. It's a structure.

And as they were pushing my father up there so he should throw everything down, and he started pleading with them. Please, don't send me up there. I'm afraid to go up. I can't see. I told him in Yiddish that you don't have to worry. The leather is not up there. I hid it in a neighbor's house.

But that kind of saved us because my father told me later, if they had found it up there, he would have been sent away to Galicia. Now this we heard-- he heard somewhere, that Jews who were punished for some reason or other, they were being sent to Galicia-- no idea for what. It was a work camp. They were sending them away for that-- to that. As it turned out of course, that was Auschwitz not Galicia.

Little stories like this-- I mean, this is how we survived. And then I used to go to Beregszasz to pick up merchandise from my father too. And you learn very early to-- you become street smart. You know, I was 10, 11 years old, or 12 years old at the most. And you really learned these little tricks.



The quantity of leather that you would be getting from a hide?

It wasn't even a full hide. It was probably be enough to make two or three pairs of boots. But you know, that that's a livelihood. If my father made one pair of boots, you could live on it for two or three weeks, you know.

It would be something that you could roll up. It would be soft enough.

It was rolled up in a plain paper bag. It could look like I'm carrying a loaf of bread, you know. I was never stopped. Sometimes we would roll it up in newspaper. You know?

Luckily I was never stopped. But there were times when the train was being searched. And you know, we had to go two- three stations-- was Borzhava, Bene-- three station-- Borzhava, Bene, and then Ujlak. And at one time I remember coming back from Ujlak, I saw the gendarmes get on right after I did. And as soon as the train stopped in Bene, which was not my station, I got off because I was afraid they were going to search right through the trains. And I walked home that way, which was a little bit longer. This was about seven, eight kilometers instead of six kilometers.

But these were challenges, you know. And these were almost-- I hate to say this-- but for a kid 9, 10 years old, it was exciting. You know, I was helping my father make a living. To me it was a very exciting thing to be able to do, not realizing how badly we really were off because, you know, even though things were-- my father, I'm sure, knew more than he let us believe that he knew. OK?

To get back-- then, from the ghetto, there really isn't much to tell. This was just a way station. It wasn't a ghetto like the Warsaw ghetto that we read about. This was just a way station where they collected people, kept them there until they had enough freight cars to carry them off to Auschwitz. And this is where we stayed.

And now we were scheduled. One morning they came in. OK, it's your turn. And then they undressed everybody to-- even the women, they undressed them totally, completely naked. And I don't have to tell you how Orthodox and religious these people were. To undress in front of each other, naked, it was a terrible thing. And then they would let them put some clothes back on again. And now we rode off. We got on the train, and we went.

I remember we made one stop somewhere along the line. And a Gentile came over in Slovakia-- Kosha-- Kassa, not Kosha, Kassa. Today it's called Kosice. It's part of-- ever hear that name, Kosice? It's a relatively large city.

And I don't remember what he said. I don't know what he said. Some people he said something to. But I remember my father, among others, saying to the effect that it's impossible. It can't be. This is not the age of barbarians. We live in the 20th century. This is-- I won't listen to that kind of story. OK?

I assume this man must have told them flee for your lives because they're going to gas you. OK, but yeah, who's going to believe? In this day, in the 20th century, you're going to kill people like that? It's impossible. it's not going to happen.

When you say 20th century, what about things like newspapers, radio?

There wasn't.

In your town?

Well, you've got to remember, we-- I don't even know. We didn't have a local newspaper. They wouldn't-- even if-- I'm not aware of one. We used to get a newspaper from Budapest. And for the most part, it was funny. There was more blanked out spaces in the newspaper than printed. They--

Censored.

--censored everything. In other words, you never, ever read or heard anything about the war. I mean, we knew there was a war on because people were taken away into the war. But that's all you knew. Yeah, but when they were victorious,

they're pushing the Russians back, this they trumpeted up. But adversities or what was-- you never heard about it. OK? And radio, we didn't have a radio in my hometown.

And one has to remember, too, you're talking about a town of 3,000. About how far from Budapest?

Yeah, I really don't know. You know, everything is relative. Today I don't imagine I would think twice hopping into a car and going to Budapest. But the farthest I ever got in my life while I lived there was two Beregszasz, which was exactly 15 kilometers away. And I walked there many times. It wasn't-- you just don't go to these places.

Budapest may have been no more than, I don't know, 150, 200 miles away from us. But over there it was an overwhelming distance. And we just never heard anything. We didn't know, really.

And people didn't travel in terms of--

We couldn't, especially Jews. They would not allow you to travel. For instance, I mentioned that I traveled to this Ujlak or to Beregszasz. There were many times I was thrown off the train, many times. Jews are not allowed. So I would walk. You know, I wasn't deterred. And I knew this could happen, so I walked.

The minute an official or a soldier was on the train, they throw the Jews off. Even while the train was moving they would throw.

Even before the '40s?

No, this was in the '40s already, but Hungarians.

But what I mean, how about what was the experience like even before then?

You're talking about under the Czechs?

Yeah.

The Czechs, there's no problem. Yeah, no. No, there was no problem.

So then there would have been some travel possibly for those who could afford it.

That's it. Who could afford to travel. For instance, my two oldest brothers, Joe and Andrew, they both worked in Budapest. They're tailors. They learned their trade. One learned his trade at home from my uncle, who now lives in Los Angeles. He got-- my father's youngest brother, he got out just before they closed the borders.

It was under Czechoslovakia. He got out. He took his family with him a year later. And they lived in Los Angeles now. My oldest brother learned his trade from my uncle. He became a tailor. And my other brother learned his trade in Beregszasz and Munkacs. And they both worked in Munkacs for a while. And then they both went to Budapest until--

See, even though the Hungarians came in already, they still-- if you had-- you could work for a Gentile person, but you couldn't have your own business. So that's what they did.

And they would come home once in a while to visit us. And, oh my God, what a big to-do that was. You know, my mother would bake and fuss around for two or three days because my brothers were coming home. And to us it was-- to imagine such a distance as to go to Budapest, it was something far-fetched.

It would be exciting for the younger part.

Sure it was. I mean, we used to wait by the hour. When they were coming, we all ran. Anyway. All in all, it's-- we had a good life because it was a family life. It was it was a togetherness that today you don't even know about. You don't hear

about it. There was no television. There was no radio. There was nothing. There was just each other. I mean just--

What about the shul?

The shul was, of course, the center of the community. We didn't have a rebbe. We couldn't afford one. I mean, rebbes only came to communities-- not that they were well paid, but you still had to be able to afford a rebbe. I don't imagine it was so much financial as you had to have enough people.

We probably didn't warrant a rebbe. The highest we got was we had a dayan, who was a judge, you know. And then we had the shochet, who was a ritual slaughterer. And that was about it.

But everybody was well learned. Everybody could daven. Everybody could sit down on a Saturday afternoon and lead people in study and in Gemara and Rashi and this.

Self-taught?

Each other, from each other we learned. You know, it's--

So it would be self-teaching?

Yeah, more or less. There were some people who were sent off to yeshiva in Beregszasz and Munkacs. There are some very famous yeshiva in Beregszasz and in Munkacs. And then they would come home, and they would teach us.

For instance, I went to cheder. I never got to yeshiva. My father was planning to send me to yeshiva. I remember him saying, at least one of my sons should go to yeshiva. And I was going to be the one. Of course, I never got there. But even in cheder, we learned a great deal.

The Chumash, every week you had to know every-- the [NON-ENGLISH] you had to recite. You had to translate, you know. And the funniest thing was that we translated it into Yiddish and then into Hungarian because not everybody spoke Yiddish. For instance, my brothers to this day speak very poor Yiddish because my mother comes from Hungary proper, and she spoke no Yiddish. And my father, of course, knows Yiddish. He knew Yiddish very well.

But my grandmother insisted when I-- as I mentioned earlier, I stayed with her. She spoke only Yiddish to me. And I picked it up. I spoke Yiddish fluently. And well, I've forgotten most of it. But I still can handle myself.

You'd mentioned that your family had been in that area or that town for 300 to 400 years.

Yeah.

Coming-- do you have any idea where they had come from?

No. Oddly enough, I know more about my father's side than my-- my grandfather's side than my grandmother's side because, as I-- you know, if you were in that town 200, 300 years, how much further can you go back? Now I know my grandfather, his family came from Galicia somewhere. And in fact, I'm a Galician, but I won't admit that openly.

And they dealt in spices. Therefore, my name is Gevirtz, which means all spices. And it's a German word meaning spices. That's where my name comes from. My uncle tells me this, that he-- see, my grandfather had a brother here, who died about 10 or 15 years after I came to the United States. And my uncle was close to him. And he's the one who told him about this.

So really exactly what part, what section, what town they come from, I know very little, really very little. I just know that my grandmother's maiden name was Szanto, which is-- Ackerman is the same name, you know? Hungarian is Szanto. Ackerman is like a farmer. I guess that's what their name would be.

And they lived there for years. In fact, I'm named after my grandmother's brother, who was in the United States. And he died here. Now I also had-- this is just an aside. My father had three brothers and a sister in the United States. There's only one brother left now. All the others have perished since. The only one left at home was this sister that I mentioned earlier, my father's sister.

But, no, I'm afraid I couldn't-- my children tried to get me to build a tree, and I can't. That's just-- that's as far back as I can go. I don't know anymore.

And unless people kept records and passed the records--

And we did. And we did. You know, like my grandmother would say she was born right around Passover time, no [INAUDIBLE], what year? Who knew? But I mentioned earlier that my birthday is mixed up. I believe I was born September 20, 1929 because this is what I was told. And there are records. I mean, by the time I was born they kept records. But today it's in Russia. And I'm not about to bother with it. I'd rather be a year younger. It doesn't hurt me any, you know? So I won't bother with that.

Picking up with leaving the ghetto-- where next?

OK. The next thing I can-- well, we were on this darn train for-- I really don't remember how long. You're memory fades after 40-some-odd years, 43 years already. Probably three, four days-- I don't really know. There was no water. There was no food. There was no sanitation. And people were screaming.

And I don't know if anybody actually died in my particular car. But in other cars, I know people did die, older people, some people who weren't too well. I remember one time we got under a tunnel. And the engines that were pulling these trains were coal-burning engines with these ungodly fumes. And in this tunnel, you know how they can let the puffs out. And it just permeated right through the whole-- and he was blowing his whistle like-- we were stuck in this tunnel for hours at a time. It was dark, pitch black.

I don't mind telling you, I was scared stiff. But I was with my father. And my father is-- he was a-- in every way imaginable, he was a big man. I don't mean this physically, but he was physically a big man. I imagine he was about 6' 2", 6' 3". And I don't know how my brothers and I became midgets, but compared to-- my cousins here from my father's side, they're giants. It's only my brothers and I.

Maybe it's-- they told me I was retarded because of the concentration camp. But that's convenient excuse. Probably take after my-- my mother was very little.

Anyway, here I was-- 1944, early '44, so how old was I? 13? 14? Somewhere around there, but not quite 14. And scared? Yeah, I was scared out of my wits. But I had no idea what was in store for us.

And then eventually, after-- this could not have been too far away from Auschwitz because, from what I recall, after this we didn't travel too long. We arrived at a place. And all of a sudden, they told us, Aus, aus, aus, aus, los, los. You know, run, run, out, out.

And as we were running, as we were walking, I was walking-- as I mentioned before, my father couldn't see too well. He actually had to be led almost like a blind man. If he had to walk fast, he just couldn't see. And I imagine he was a German. He came over with a dog, and he pushed my brother and me away from my father. Leave him alone. We'll take good care of him. But we wouldn't. He caught up to us again a little bit later.

As we were marching along in this manner, one of the inmates came over to me. And I'll never forget this man. I wish-- I only wish I would know whether he's alive or is in existence. I owe my life to him because he came over to me and told me in Yiddish, [SPEAKING YIDDISH]

You know-- should I translate.

No. Right.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH] And he ran away. I never saw him again. I don't know who he was. When I got up to the line, a man, a German comes up to me. [GERMAN] This way. But if I had said 15, I would have gone the other way.

Now, I mentioned my aunt to you before. And this sticks in my mind so vividly. Her daughter was about the same age as my oldest brother, maybe a year younger. She was a sickly girl. I just don't know what was wrong with her. I don't remember. But we always sort of catered to her because very sickly girl.

And as we got up to the line, they wanted to send her to the right and her mother to the left. And my aunt started to cry. Please, let me have my daughter. I've got to take care of her. She's a sick child. They finally-- oh, you want your daughter? Go ahead, have your daughter. You know, and they pushed her with her.

That-- obviously, that was the end of both of them. My father went off to the left. They noticed-- first of all, my father wasn't that young anymore. He was-- this was in 1944. My father was 54 years old. And if he had been in good health and good vision, they probably would have sent him to the right. And they would use him for as long as he was able to work. But they sent him off to the left.

And he had a coat. And my sister, my oldest sister was carrying his coat. And she went off to the right. But you know, the man went this way, and the women went up that way. And we were separated by a wire fence. And she yelled over to us, I have Daddy's coat. Do you want to take it? Maybe he'll be with you. They're separating men and women.

And of course you couldn't. You couldn't throw it. So we said just keep the coat. Don't worry about it. And of course, my little sister and my mother went off to the left. They were sent to-- you see, if a mother walked with a child, there was no chance at all. The mother would be sent with the child off to the left.

And my mother was only 44 years old. She was 10 years younger than my father. And I imagine she could have survived because she was a strong woman, because that was the last time I saw either of my sisters.

Should I stop now?

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

All right. We'll go with this.

It's not taping. Are you trying to do--

Just as a backup in case there's any question.

OK. As I said, this was the last time I saw either of my sisters or my mother or my aunt and my cousin or my father. My sister wound up in Auschwitz. She worked there, my oldest sister. She worked there for a while. And she worked through it. She lived through it. She wound up in Bergen-Belsen, where she died after liberation of typhoid fever. She was actually liberated.

And should I keep going?

Yes, of course.

My brother and I went together with my uncle. You know, this aunt that went off to the left with her daughter, her uncle wound up with us. He was with us in Auschwitz. Now, we didn't stay in Auschwitz very long. It couldn't have been more than a week or two at the most because, as I started relating this whole story, it started on the last day of Pesach. And by Shavous, we were in Buchenwald. So I could not have stayed too long in Auschwitz.

It's sort of-- you lose track of time. One day goes into the other, and you don't really know what's going on. I can only

remember being in Auschwitz. And there they dehumanize you over there. I mean, if we were not dehumanized from before, they really-- this is what they were such experts in.

They take your clothes away. They cut your hair. And then they issue these striped whatchamacallit-- haftling clothes. What is that called?

Or slave--

Slave clothes, yeah. And food, that was non-existent. I can only remember one time getting some kind of a stinking, smelly thing on a plate. And I said to my brother, what is this? He says, don't worry about it. Just eat it. You know, he says to me, it's like a cheese. I said, it doesn't smell. It stinks. He says, eat it.

I had no idea where it was. And I ate it because, for however long I was in Auschwitz, this is the only food I had over there. I have no idea what it was or how long we were there, whether it was three days, four days, or two weeks. I just don't know.

From there we were shipped to Buchenwald. My brother and this uncle, we were all, the three of us went together to Buchenwald. And again, in Buchenwald we only stayed for about two weeks. This is where we were given a number. I was never tattooed in Auschwitz. I didn't stay there long enough.

My number was 55011. And this became my whole identity. After this there was no name. It was just a number. And from there we were, by truck, we were sent to Dora.

Again, I don't know how long it took. But I'm pretty sure it was no more than one day's travel in this. It was an army vehicle, I believe.

Which brother was this now?

This was Elimelech. Yeah. Now he was the only one who was as tall as my father. He was a big kid. He was 16, 17 years old. He was strapping, big, strong kid.

And we-- we got to Dora. We were still-- now, my uncle got left behind in Buchenwald. I never saw him again. I have no idea what happened to him. But my brother was with me in Dora.

We got to Dora. I think it was the beginning of June or thereabouts of 1944. Now Dora was really a lousy, desolate place. I can remember the mud. There's no roads there. It's just mud. And we were put on a road gang.

My brother and I both worked on a road gang carrying stones, cracking stones, putting them down, carrying railroad ties, real hard, hard work. And just it seemed like there was so much rain there that it would never stop raining. And it just kept getting deeper and deeper.

This went on for about maybe till September or October or thereabouts. And then we were put on a side of a mountain, on top of a mountain, to dig some ditches. It was very much like a sewer line. You dig a ditch like this for a sewer line or water line. I have no idea what they put into this thing.

All we really did was dig the ditches out. And it was on this mountain that I was really first became known what cruelty really is. Aside from our daily beatings, when we didn't get done what the Germans or-- if you recall earlier, I mentioned how nasty and bad the Ukrainians were to us. We had-- our guards were Ukrainians and Germans and Schwabs.

I don't know if you ever heard the expression Schwab. These were Germans who lived in Hungary, certain areas of Hungary. And they retained their language. They were Hungarians, but they spoke a jargon of German. And they became-- also became Nazis. And they were guarding us.

And aside from the daily beatings, these people decided to have some fun with us. They would take out a couple of guys and make examples of them. They would tie their-- tie handkerchief around their eyes and send them running down the mountains. And then they would start shooting. They didn't necessarily hit them. They just wanted to scare the hell out of them. And they succeeded.

And after a while, we realized that this was just a game. So we were willing to play that game with them. But it wasn't so much fun for them because they realized that we knew what the game was all about. And at this point they really started-- not only did they start shooting in the air, they hit some of them.

And of course, the terror, it was just unbelievable. You thought about nothing but surviving, surviving. And for some unknown reason to me to this day, I never doubted that I would survive. I have-- I can't explain it to myself to this day.

Maybe it was my youth in my favor. I was so naive as to think that I was indestructible. But the proof of the pudding is that I did make it. How or why, this I don't know.

But getting back to some of the things these people were doing to us-- when this-- now I'm going to go back a little bit to building the road. They were bringing in stones on freight cars. And I remember seeing on the signs, Koln, on the freight cars. I always thought we were near Koln somewhere, which is possible.

I still don't know where the heck Dora is. Maybe if I read that book I'll find out exactly where it is. All these years, I really never wanted to find out. I never wanted to hear about it. But you reach a point where you say, well, you can't just keep that in you for so long.

Anyway, the reason I'm bringing up these freight trains, to show you some of the cruelties that these people played on us. We were unloading the stones. And one of our chaverim who worked on it with us slipped and fell between the two trains, between the disks. You know, the two disks that hit each other. OK. He fell in between those. And somehow he got caught over there.

At this point, they must have signaled to each other to move the train because this poor guy was just smashed up, made a pancake out of him. And this was so much fun that they decided to do this almost as a daily exercise, just for no other reason, just plain cruelty.

Now mind you, I have to tell you this, that in Dora there are all kinds. Just about every nationality imaginable was in this camp. But the biggest cruelties that they perpetrated were against the Jews. Any of these things that I'm describing to you now about running down and shooting at them and the train and all this, only with Jews.

We had German political inmates. We had French. We had Italians. We had Russians, as I mentioned. Now, I have to tell you that the Russian inmates who were there, they were captured from the Russian armies and who came from Russia proper, they were good people. They didn't give us any tsuris. It's the Ukrainians who did.

In fact, the Ukrainians told us that they had it much better in a concentration camp than they ever had it in their lives. They didn't want to go home. They wanted to stay in a concentration camp where they had it good. They were fed. They had food and clothes. What more do they need?

And obviously, they were not discriminated against as we were. We were completely separated, the Jews. The only ones, other than a Jewish group, that I can ever remember being in a barracks with were some Italians, who were brought in after Mussolini-- after-- what was his name? Badoglio, is that prime minister who surrendered? And then they captured some of the Italians and put them into concentration camps. And they probably had no room for them, so they put them in with the Jews.

Dora is near Nordhausen.

I don't know where Nordhausen is either.

Here's a-- and it shows where Buchenwald is on that little map.

Oh, yeah. OK. OK. So I was right. Buchenwald is not that far from Dora. It's Ellrich. I'm going to talk to you about Ellrich in a minute. OK? We worked-- after-- I think it was becoming wintertime, October, November. We finally got this road built. It was passable.

Incidentally, they had us march in and out every day, every morning, with the ax and the shovel on our shoulders. And we had to sing and to march to numbers-- [GERMAN], you know, sing and all that. After about a month or so, six weeks or two months, our people were just beginning to die like flies. And some people who felt that they're going to feign sickness, and maybe that way they won't have to work and then they'll-- because they were told there was a hospital in Dora.

But all of a sudden, we realized nobody ever came out of there. They put them in, nobody ever came out. Now, Dora had a crematorium. They did not have a gas chamber, but they had a crematorium. And after a while we began to see truckloads full of inmates being brought in. And our own people were dying and being-- and the smell, the stench of human flesh burning is still in my nose. I don't think it will ever leave me.

But anyway, after-- it must have been early fall because they put us-- they had a-- put me anyway into a gartneri, which is like a garden. They were growing-- vegetable garden. They're growing vegetables and stuff like that. And my brother was put underground, where they were making the V-2 rockets.

I worked in this gartneri until I guess everything could be gathered in, the potatoes. And after that they put me into this V-2 rocket place also. This was-- it was unbelievable. There's a whole world under this mountain. I mean, it was huge. I can't begin to explain how huge it was. That tunnel is minuscule in comparison.

And they put us in here to work. And after that I don't think I ever saw daylight till they started marching us away from it because we went in there before sunset. And we didn't come out until-- before sunrise-- we didn't come out until sunset. Daily sustenance was some liquidy soup with some what appeared to be rice. I don't even know what the heck it was really in it. And every once in a while you'd find a minuscule piece of meat in there, some vegetable. And at night, of course, was our biggest meal, when we got a slice of bread, again with some soup. That was back at the barracks already.

Now, they had hangings about as often as you could shake a stick at because people were committing sabotage on these V-2 rockets. I'll tell you, honestly, I had no idea what I was doing. I found out after liberation what this thing was. I was standing in one place there were 10, 12, 14 hours a day. I don't even know. And every once in a while you'd start dozing off. They'd wake you up very quickly with a whip.

My job was to turn this one lousy screw. You know how boring that is? I'd rather be out digging. I was happier digging ditches, building-- not happier, but at least it's-- just standing in one place, it's impossible. I can't begin to tell you what torture that is. Turn one screw.

Now, then when I-- it was an assembly line. It went on to the next guy. And at every third or fourth spot, there was, unbeknownst to us, he was dressed up like an inmate, but obviously he wasn't, because every so often somebody would be hauled off like this. Somehow or other they knew who did each job. If I didn't turn my screw right, I probably would have been hung too. I don't know. But I had no idea what I was doing.

And there were hangings. And they would take us. They had this big square, where they would count you every morning before you would go to work. And they count you at night when you come back. And this is where they had the hangings. I mean, it was like they were having a ball.

They were accused of sabotage. That's why they were being hung. And they were being made examples of. If you want to hang out-- wind up like this, you go ahead and commit sabotage. If you do, you know-- even if we just suspect you, you're going to be hung and so on. This was daily.



Of course, the biggest joke of it all is-- and I'm sure you've heard this from other people. When you get to these concentration camps, outside, just before you enter in-- "Arbeit Macht Frei." You know, work will make you free. I mean, it is such a-- biggest joke that I've ever existed.

Now, at one point-- I don't know exactly what-- maybe a month or six weeks into while I was in this underground, my brother came to me in the middle of the night. We were separated. We were not in the same barracks anymore. They found out we were brothers, and they purposely separated us.

They, somehow or other-- my brother came to me in the middle of the night that he's being transferred. He had no idea where he was being transferred to. And that's the last time I saw him too. We cried. We kissed each other, and that was that.

[CRYING]

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

No. You never have to apologize.

I mention before I'd talk about Ellrich. I don't remember how, but I found out that he was in Ellrich. And we communicated with each other because there was an overlapping. We worked under the same factory, so to speak. One came in from Ellrich, the other from Dora. And I don't know. There might even have been a third concentration camp in that area. I'm not sure.

And then in March of '45, we went out-- I worked in this place for till-- I guess it was in March '45. We began to see the American planes flying over us. And we rejoiced. We knew the end was near. It should be near.

One story that I really should tell is bashert. And I mentioned to you before, I knew I would survive. I really had no right to believe that, but I did.

We used to get air raids. And this was becoming more and more frequent as the days went on. And they gave you three, four hours a night to sleep. And I just said to myself, the heck with this. I'm not getting out anymore. They never bombed the barracks. They never shoot the-- they're not going to. They know what it is. And I never left.

This one night, my bunkmate-- I was top, he was under. I was the third-- in the third bunk, by the window. He literally pulled me out. Come on. You got to go. You got to go. If they find you over here, they're going to shoot you. All right. I went out with him.

When we came back to the barracks, my bunk was riddled with bullets. For some reason, the airplanes either were misguided or didn't know where they were. They started shooting. They came down so low they were using machine guns, so guns from the planes.

So if I didn't-- if this friend of mine didn't pull me out, I wouldn't have been here today. This friend of mine didn't make it either. In the march he died. But now I owe my life the two people, the one, the first one in Auschwitz, and this kid.

And then in March, I believe it was, they started marching us away from Dora. They gave us a loaf of bread. And I'll never forget this as long as I live-- a can of what appeared to be meat with its own juice. And we hadn't gotten any meat to speak of. And somehow-- I guess they gave us a can opener. No, it was like a sardine can with a key. You could open it up. That's right.

We opened it up, and we ate it. And this thing was so salty that we were dying of thirst. We were marching. And luckily, it was snowing. And then they put us on a freight train for a while. And then we marched again. And once we finished this loaf of bread and the meat-- and as I said, we ate this meat and we were dying of thirst. To this day when I get thirsty, every time I get thirsty, I remember that can of meat. And it was just 40-some-odd years, and you still remember.

At this point, people were really dying like flies. I mean, we were marching. In some cases-- I had-- I had a pair of shoes that the soles were so bad that I was filling it up with papers. And now you're walking in mud and snow. And it was freezing cold. And people were, as I say, were just dying.

We were trying to help each other. We were carrying each other. But we really didn't have enough strength to carry ourselves. And the minute you would sit down, bang bang. That's the end. I mean, it was just-- even-- and they knew already, the bastards, that the war was over. They'd lost the war, and they were still killing people like that.

Finally, finally we got to Bergen-Belsen, I guess at the end of March. And I got very ill very soon after that-- no, not till after the liberation, actually. We were liberated April 15, 1945, at exactly 1:00 PM by the British. I think it was-- I know it was a Canadian-- there were some Canadians there because one Canadian officer came over to us. And he asked [YIDDISH]. And of course, we all went over there. And he had a couple of bars of chocolate. He gave it out. We almost killed each other running for the chocolate.

Yeah. Bergen-Belsen was, best of my recollection, was nothing more than just a bunch of barracks. I don't know if that was ever a working camp or anything of that kind. But when we got there, there was nobody there. There was no food. There was nothing. There was absolutely nothing. And for two to three weeks, however long this was between when we got there and the liberation, there was just nothing. There was no food.

If we a potato peel, that was a whole meal. And we shared. For as little as we had, we still shared with each other.

I remember the trees started budding. We had no idea what kind of trees they were. We picked a bud off, and we were eating it. It might have been poison for all we knew. But we had no choice.

And the bodies were growing by the day. I mean mountains and mountains of bodies and all-- in the middle of the camp. And right after liberation, I started walking around looking for my brother because we knew that Ellrich and Dora, we were all sort of marching away in the same. I was looking constantly for my brother. But now that I figured we're liberated, I'm free to go where I want to.

You had very close restrictions. You couldn't leave your barracks after a certain hours. So I didn't have much chance. And I couldn't find him. Couldn't find him. Finally I found somebody from my hometown who was probably a few years younger than my father was. But he and my father were close friends. And they were, you know, from the same town. So they'd grew up together and everything.

He had two children that he lost. And he took me with him. And he finally told me that my brother died. To this day, I don't know exactly how he died. He says he died very suddenly. So my assumption is that my brother tried to escape during the march, and they shot him, which is a shame. But that's how it went.

Now, after the liberation, as I mentioned earlier, I got very ill. I did. I had typhoid fever. Almost everybody in that camp did. And I don't remember much. We were transferred from Bergen-Belsen to another camp. I never remember the name of that place-- not a camp, it was a place to rehabilitate I guess in a nearby city. Judy Freeman knows the name of this camp because she was in there too. But I don't remember what the name of it was.

The next thing I remember is sort of opening my eyes. And I saw this girl. I mentioned earlier, we had a shochet in my town. They were our neighbors, directly across the street. And this was his daughter. She's about a year younger than I am. And she was wiping my head. And I must have been feverish or whatever.

So Malci-- her name is Malka. We used to call her Malci. Now, I found out later from her that my sister nursed her back to health. She got ill. She had typhoid fever too. But then my sister got ill, and she died. She never made it.

And I guess we stayed there for a couple of weeks. And she had a brother there, who was with me all the way through. Her brother was with me all the way through. We helped each other. We worked with each other. We carried each other. And he developed TB and died. He died two or three months after liberation.

Now, at this point, as I mentioned earlier, this friend, his name was Linder. His last name is Linder. His first name was Hermus. I don't know what-- Herman, I guess would be closest to it in English. And he found his wife in Bergen-Belsen. I mean, this was one in a million, maybe one in two million. He found his wife. His wife survived, Dora.

Can you imagine such-- her name is Dora. And he was in Dora and in Ellrich. And I believe to this day she might still be alive. Because the last time I was in Israel, while I didn't see her, I spoke to her. We just couldn't get together for some reason. I don't remember what it was. At any rate, I went home with them.

From there, Malka and a couple of other people, we decided we were going to go home to find out-- it's the only way to find out who survived. We had no idea. We really had no way of knowing. And we got home by-- it was summertime, must have been middle of June or July. And I got home, and there was nobody from my family home yet.

And then somebody came-- Malka's brother came home. That's what it was. He's in Israel now too. Malka lives in Israel. I looked her up last time I was in Israel. That was after 30-some-odd years that we hadn't seen each other.

He told me that he saw my brother in Budapest. And they found my name. Because as you went along in every city, you put your name down where you were from and so on so that this was-- incidentally, one of the things, as we started walking around looking, you see-- look at each other. [NON-ENGLISH]. You know, you're Jewish, [NON-ENGLISH] our people.

Anyway, my brothers, both of them, came home in July. And needless to say, that was a great dream, yeah. And we started to sort of recuperate in my home, back in my hometown. Of course, at this point the Gentiles were welcoming us back home. Oh, they couldn't-- they didn't know what to do for us. They were so good to us.

They could have been a little better beforehand. But anyway, that's-- then all of a sudden, around September we heard that this area was going to be given to the Russians. It's not going to be Czechoslovakia, like we hoped it would be. So here we go on a march again. We escaped. But they closed the border, the Tisza. You know, the Tisza is the border between Hungary.

We had to-- we hired a canoe. And I'm not a great swimmer. Neither are my brothers. And this Tisza is a very rapid river. But we came across it. We went into Hungary. We went to Budapest. And from there we went to Prague. And we settled down in Podmokly. It's a town in the Sudetenland.

What they did here, you know, it's strange but that you never hear of this, not that I'm saying for a minute that they didn't deserve to be pushed out of there. But every German family was pulled up and pushed out of the Sudetenland and sent back to Germany. And what most people don't know is that these people lived there for generations and generations. But simply because they were Germans and they were Nazis, the Czechs decided they don't want them within their borders anymore. And they pushed them out. That was their solution.

And I watched these people leave with their belongings on their backs. You know what? I didn't cry one bit because they did the same thing to us, only worse. We sent them home. They didn't send us home.

And in this Podmokly, we got an apartment. It belonged to a German at one time, obviously. And we stayed there for a while. This was in 1945, September, October, November, somewhere around there. And by 1946, my brother got married, my oldest brother. And then we found out that Masaryk was going to be overthrown, and the communists are taking over.

Here we go again. We picked up. But by this time, my other brother, Joe, not the oldest but the middle brother-- see, my oldest brother wasn't taken into the army because I was still only 16 or 15 or 16 years old. And I was his ward. He had to take care of me, so they excused him. But my other brother was taken into the army. This after working through the work camps of the Hungarians and the concentration camp, back into the army he went.

So he was afraid to escape with us because he's in a uniform. If he's escaping, he'll be shot on the spot. And the

communists did take over. They were just on the verge of taking over. Masaryk was sort of still in power. It wasn't much later than that that he fell out of his window. Of course, we know what that was. He was a little bit pushed, but you know.

And we wound up in-- we went-- we crossed the border into Germany, West Germany, back into Germany of all places because we felt that was the only way that we could get to Israel. If the communists come in, then we knew them well they're not going to let us out of there. There was no secret about that. They made it very clear that they didn't want anybody to leave, even then.

Anyway, we wound up in the Funkkaserne in MÃ¼nchen, Munich. You ever heard of that?

I was in Munich. I was stationed there in the fall of-- the war was over in '45. We were in Czechoslovakia, outside of Pilsen.

Oh, I was in Pilsen.

We went back to Munich.

Was that Aschen? Is that the border town? I don't [INAUDIBLE].

Oh, no. Aachen is on the-- near the Rhine River.

Oh, no, no, no, no. This is Aschen, not Aachen. A-S-H-E-N, I believe. I'm not sure.

I'm not familiar with it without looking at a map. But we wound up in Munich in the occupation.

Well, you might have been there when I was there. I was in Munchen, as I said, in '46, February, March, somewhere around there, March or April. And we stayed in the Funkkaserne until they built up more and more displaced persons camps. I wound up in a place called Wasserburg. That's where I met the Freemans, Lou and Judy Freeman, in Wasserburg.

And my oldest brother was with me at this point. And I joined a kibbutz over there, trying to get to Israel. You know, we had kibbutzim formed in Germany. But I never even got on a transport because the ones ahead of us kept-- they kept turning them back. They wound up in Italy and on Cyprus and everywhere. And they just said, well, we'll wait til it gets better.

Finally my-- we found our uncles and aunts over here in the United States. Not only had my uncles here from my father's side and an aunt, I also had an aunt and uncle from my mother's side in New York. And I don't know. I guess my brothers tracked them down somehow. And they finally started writing to us. Come over here first. Plenty of time after you recuperate, you go to Israel afterwards.

And my oldest brother convinced me to. I didn't want to come here. I really-- I was a committed Zionist. I got to tell you. I got to go back a little bit now, way back. My brother Elimelech, I mentioned to you, was a big, strapping fellow. Unbeknownst to my father, because what most people don't realize is that a lot of Orthodox Jews before the war was totally against Zionism. I mean, totally and completely against Zionism because you have to wait for mashiach. And when the messiah comes, we'll all go.

If my father found out that my brother joined the Betar group in Czechoslovakia, he would have-- I think it would have killed him. And my brother used to take me with him to these meetings. I was, you know, inflicted, injected. I was a Zionist. From the day, nine, 10 years old, I was a Zionist. My brother always had me swear that I would never mention anything to my father, my mother, my grandmother.

I mean, it was a total secret. We went to meetings in neighboring town at night. And my parents used to think we were asleep. And we snuck out and went to meetings. Jabotinsky was our hero. But anyway, that's neither here nor there.

So the reason I'm making that point is to reinforce the fact that I really-- I had no thoughts, inclinations, or desire to go anywhere but to Israel. This was my place to be. Yeah. Of course it didn't happen. I wound up over here and then went to high school over here. I met my wife, and we got married. And what can I tell you?

Now I have grandchildren. Someday I hope, at least part time, to live in Israel. You know, two, three month out of the year.

Oh, yeah?

Yeah. That's my aim in life, if I can ever convince my wife to do that. Well, we'll see. You know. Anyway, that's-- I don't know. That's pretty much my story. I don't know what I have-- I'm sure I left a lot of things out.

I think you've covered a lot of ground, and you've done it very well. It's a-- if you'd like, we can put it on rewind, see what it looks like.

OK.

Didn't take that long. Well, you did too. It's a quarter after nine already. Boy, I rambled down a long time.

Well, that's--

I was going to bring-- I have notes and stuff, and I didn't want to-- I wanted to be spontaneous more than anything else. Is this still going?

This still is. Good.