

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Tibor Borsos, conducted by Gail Schwartz on July 29, 1996, in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is tape number two, side A. And you were talking about--

Budapest--

--the war conditions--

--and the war.

--in Budapest.

So 1944, we are talking about '44, we are talking about from July on, till we left, which is December. And I did not personally see any atrocities. I did not see-- which came much later, by the way, anyway-- but I personally didn't see any atrocities. I didn't see anybody being beaten up or dragged or anything like that.

But we knew there were ghettos. We knew that the ghettoization. We knew about the Swedish passport. We knew about the Vatican passports. We knew about the Swiss, some of the effort. And there was some Spanish effort, if I remember right. I don't remember all of them, but there was all kind of efforts from various organizations, trying to save this and that. They put a building up and put the sign up on it and so forth.

Had you heard of Raoul Wallenberg by that point?

Oh, yes. Of course, [INAUDIBLE].

What did you know?

Well, we knew that he was a Swedish, whatever he was, diplomat. We didn't know what he was, but that he was constantly in contact with the Germans, and that he tried to save as many Jews as possible. The Swedish protection was the big one, more than anybody else. I mean, there was some Vatican protection, but very little, and some Spanish. But the primary protection was Swedish, and we knew very well that Raoul Wallenberg was there.

Interesting enough, we also knew, of course, a great deal about the German occupation forces, because they were everywhere. I mean, you cannot go anywhere in Budapest, there was no Germans. There was just swarming with German soldiers-- not like Debrecen, which was Nazi. Budapest was swarming. I mean, it was it was gray everywhere. But they didn't bother anybody. There was no interaction with the population.

So did you feel threatened when you saw them?

No. No, never. Never. I never. First, I never felt threatened, no. They were not-- didn't bother anybody. They were there at that time for two reasons-- one to fight against the Russians, and second, the other is to round up the Jews. That was the two purposes they had. And if you're not Jewish, again, it's a very strange thing, if you're not Jewish, and you are not actively opposing them, they left you alone.

So you were never stopped and have your papers examined?

The Germans didn't do that. It's the Hungarians who did it. They were always mixed together. I mean, if stopped in the street, it was the Hungarians, police or somebody asked me what's your papers are. Germans never stopped me, never. Maybe others did, but I was personally never stopped. I'm not saying that didn't happen. It didn't happen to me.

Were you aware of the terrible tragedy at the Danube when people were--

That was afterward. That was after December '44. I knew about that only after the war. I did not know anything about it during the war. This was after. I know about this incident at the ice. Yeah, I heard about it later. There was nothing of

the sort, not when I was there. October 15 was a key date. That's when Szalasi took over, the Nazis took over, when Horthy was put to Dachau. He was taken to Dachau himself in the concentration camp, where he survived, as you know, and then later went to Portugal, I think, and lived forever, happily forever.

I don't think he was a war criminal. I mean, I didn't like him. Nobody liked him. We lived with him. We had to live with him [INAUDIBLE] necessary. [INAUDIBLE] but I don't know anybody who liked Horthy, not one. I don't know a single person in my family or anywhere else who said, great guy, Horthy. No, never. Just you lived Horthy, OK, you lived with him.

I don't think he would have-- he was not like Marshall Pétain, who deliberately gave Jews up to the Germans from Vichy area, which was not occupied. As I said, Horthy never, as far as I know, gave a single Jew to the Germans.

Were you--

I'm not defending him. I'm trying to state a fact, which is to my mind, a fact. Yes, question.

Were you aware of his desire to have this secret pact to go over to the Allied side?

Oh, that's why the occupation occurred. Oh, we knew about that. Sure. And we knew what's going to happen. We knew that the German would occupy. This was all known. I mean, the middle class Hungarians knew everything.

How did your family get information?

I have no idea. But it was known. It's [INAUDIBLE] I suppose like water seeps through things, or rats going along, scurrying. It's just all over the place. We knew that. And everybody knew it. They were not a secret.

So now your parents decide to leave.

OK. No, the decision was not-- no, no, it was not possible until the order came, a strange order came, in which the Hungarian government made an agreement with the German government to establish the Hungarian Medical School in Germany. And if you think that's crazy, it's true. Middle of the war, the war is lost, the Germans are fighting to the last breath now. They know it's gone. I mean, we knew that the Germans lost it.

When Stalingrad occurred, we all said, you know? We knew that the Germans lost the war. That was the turning point. There was no question in our mind after Stalingrad. As a matter of fact, in 1941, when they marched into Russia, we knew that the German lost the war. Every Hungarian knew it. There was no question in our mind that was end of the war for Germany. Hitler's finished. The question is how long will it take.

What was your first reaction?

Oh, we were elated. But at the same time, afraid of Russia. This is a terrible thing, the constant Stalin, Hitler, Stalin, Hitler. We knew about the Stalin camps. We knew about the Katyn. We knew that it was the Russians who did it, and not the Germans. We knew it already.

Why we knew it? Because one of my father's colleagues was in the group of pathologists who went to Poland to investigate it. And he came back, and he said, it was the Russians who did it. There's no question about it. Even though the Germans said that, and it was propaganda, we knew it's the Russian did it. It was some firsthand experience from my own father's colleague.

And do you know how he came to that conclusion?

Well, he was out there and saw the evidence, which was the bullets, the various, the way the execution occurred, the people who were talking about it. There was the investigation. And it was happened to be an honest investigation-- one of the few honest investigations the Nazis did, because they were right. It's the Russians who killed all of Polish

officers-- I think 2,000 or 20, I forget how many, it was enormous number, all laid in a grave and--

So the colleague of my father was present at the exhumations and at the investigation. So we knew that, that the Russians did that. Anyway, coming back, so the crazy order occurs. My father gets the order from the government, that official order, under the death penalty if you don't go.

When you went back to Budapest, did he work and teach, and what did he do from the time--

Yes, he worked, but, at that point, we just, we lived. Believe me, we were living, that's all we did. He went to work at one of the university hospitals, as a professor-- no, as a pathologist, helping out with the autopsies. But there was the chaos. It was unbelievable at this point.

And what did you do in those months in Budapest?

I had a hell of a good time.

Like what?

Look, I was 17 and 1/2. I didn't go to school anymore because there were no more schools, right? I had a hell of a good time. I had plenty of money. Money was no problem.

Where did the money come from?

We had money. At this point, money was like paper money. It's like Monopoly. We knew that the money's going to be worthless. Everybody knew that the war is finished, the money is going to go. And so whatever money we had our hands on, I say just spend it. So I went to every restaurant you could go to and every bakery-- not bakery, the various pastry shops. And we just had a good time.

You could drink as-- Hungary had no laws against drinking. And so we had wine and beer, and with friends, and we just had a good time. I'm not kidding. This sounds very strange. But I, as a child, had a good time, 17 years old, no?

So now your father gets the order to--

And now the question is, do we go? Because if we go, the chance that [INAUDIBLE] by the Nazis will be a very good one, because if you go to the Nazi government, to Nazi Germany, under Nazi orders, they might say that you are a sympathizer, that's why you went. If you don't go, we'll never get out. Budapest is going to be a terrible place to be, because Russians are coming, and this happens to be a terrible place.

And so the question argued back and forth. And I remember the arguments. And my mother said, we are going. And my father said, I don't want to go. And my mother said, if you don't go, I go, because I will not stay here. I want to get out of Europe. I'm finished with Europe. I want to go to America, and that's it, if I have to swim across the ocean.

And so the order came, and we complied. And a big train was put together, in which about 20 or 30 professors of various medical professions were put on, hundreds of medical students, families, children, and so forth, and the train was directed toward Germany. And I was on the train.

With your parents?

With my parents, my sister, and her baby. Her husband, a physician, was in Hungarian army and in one of the MASH units, somewhere in the front, the Russian front. So she had no idea if he was alive or not. So it was a baby, and my sister, my brother, my mother, and father, and I in one compartment, went in the train, and went through Vienna, outside Vienna, outside Prague, into Leipzig, which is-- and then via Dresden into [INAUDIBLE] where we were quartered into a huge office building, which became the university building, where all the teaching was done. The students were quartered in there. And the professors were quartered into German homes.

Now, were the students Hungarian students or German students?

It's a Hungarian university. There's [INAUDIBLE] Germans. It's a Hungarian university transplanted into middle of Germany-- a Hungarian medical school, lock, stock, and barrel transplanted in two trainloads, or three or whatever, I can't remember how many, into the middle of Germany, in the end of the war. Now, if you want to have a Kafkaesque story, this is a Kafkaesque story you ever heard in your life. I mean, who-- I mean, this is crazy. This is December '44. OK?

How did you feel about going into Germany?

Excited. It's adventure. When you're 17, it's an adventure. And it was. I don't know how to tell you, my father, my mother, my sister, and the baby had two small rooms assigned to them in a villa, in a private home, a German home. The rest of the students all stayed in the big master building. And they were supplied to the Germans with food. Everybody's starving. There's no more food in Germany. And they are feeding 400 of Hungarian students. I mean, I'm sorry you don't have a tape to show it because that's just so crazy. I mean, it's unimaginable.

So here we are, 400 students, 20 or 30 professors, and they're teaching, they're having classes. The bombs are falling everywhere. Germany is burning. The Russians are in front of Berlin. The Americans are already-- the Battle of the Bulge is just on, OK? But Paris has fallen already. And they're teaching medical students medicine in middle of Germany, Hungarian Medical School.

Now, there are no Jewish students there. I mean, that's clear. I had to laugh at this because it's so crazy. If I were to invent it, I would say you're lying. This went on until around March. Now, I'd become 18 that March. I was being drafted into Hungarian army, to fight against the Russians. Right? Of course, I'm 18 years old. So I didn't want to go into Hungarian army.

So I got a piece of paper, with lots of stamps and lots of signatures-- Europe is full of stamps and signatures-- in which I was supposed to find a Hungarian unit. And I went on a train ride for the last two months in Germany, I spent on a train, traveling in Germany-- the last two months of Germany. You're looking at person who survived two months of train ride in Germany, because I was looking for my unit, but I never found it.

You were purposely looking for your unit?

Of course. I was looking somewhere else. So I went-- if the train went South, I went North. I kept on traveling on a train.

To avoid finding your unit?

Of course. Of course. Of course. And this piece of paper, which I had in my hand, was written in Hungarian and German, both were sufficient to permit the travel on the trains, which were running. And in every train station, main train station, the Nazi women's organization had a kitchen, and with this piece of paper, I could go there and get myself some food. So I was traveling all over Germany, mostly southern Germany.

But before that, there's one incident I want to tell you about.

Were you by yourself at that time?

Yes. One incident I want to tell you about, which is a very interesting and crucial incident in my life, and almost cost my life. As you might tell by now, I'm a big mouth. I like to talk a great deal. And I'm not always afraid. And we had a German officer assigned to the Hungarian students, a supply officer who was in charge of food and so forth, and 400 students in an office building with a few toilet facilities, not a very good place, no showers, nothing.

So the toilets clogged up often, and he was yelling at us. He told us in German that we are filthy Eastern Europeans,

pigs, I mean, call us all kinds of names. So I finally got-- I was the only one. I was just sitting there. I said, you shut up. I said, you're a filthy German. You lost the war, and what are you talking about.

Two weeks later, I got a Gestapo order to appear at the Gestapo headquarters. Whoops, I'm sorry. I forgot to unhook the telephone here. Anyway, so I had an order to appear at the Gestapo headquarters. And this is in Holland, this is Holland, and I didn't tell my parents. I just, I kept my mouth shut. I didn't tell anybody. So I go there.

Now, you have seen movies of the Gestapo, probably. You have seen movies in Hollywood. It's exactly how it was. You go in, and every story had its own-- every-- gates, with magnetic gates on it, with a guy sitting there, Gestapo man, and you show your paper, and the gate open up and clang behind you. So I finally get up to the person who wants to see me. And he sits so that I don't see his face. The window is behind him. He is facing me, and I'm facing the window. So all I see is the silhouette of the guy. I mean, like in the movies, I'm not kidding you.

So I go in there, and the guy looks at me and papers. And he says, are you so-and-so? I said, yes. He said, I heard some bad things about you. I said, what is it? I said, you said that the Germans lost the war and-- I said, yes, that's true. I said that. I said, don't you know the Germans lost the war? I mean, you are the Gestapo. You ought to know it by now.

And he looks at me and said, you talk too much. I said, I know I talk too much, but you should watch what you're telling me, because you will not survive the war. When the Americans came, they're going to shoot you. He let me go. He said, keep your mouth shut. You are too young. Just get out of here. And that's the truth of my Gestapo experiences.

And so anyway, around April, end of April, I found a Hungarian unit, whom I knew, actually. I met some of my friends from Hungary who were in this unit. And they took me under their wing and fed me. And I joined them-- not to the army, but I joined them as a sort of hanger on. And May 8, 1945, the last of the war, Patton's troops finally got there, and got to the end of the war.

And my brother and I met on the streets of Miltenberg, one day before the Americans came in. He was also fleeing from the Germans and Hungarians, same way. And we all met in that one little town in southern Germany.

And what were your feelings at that time--

It was fantastic.

of liberation?

And then the Patton troops came in. And there were nasty, rough son of a bitches. They were really-- I mean, they just came through Dachau, they came through concentration camps. And they hated everybody. I mean, they were really rough, that's a rough-- I mean, those people were rough. And they rounded up every male in the neighborhood, every single male, including me, and civilians, at that point people with Cossack uniforms, the stripes, Cossack uniforms.

They were all over the place, coming out of the concentration camps, foreign laborers, the Italians, Poles, Ukrainians, milling around. Everyone was rounded up, and put them into a big camp in Ludwigshafen. And we were kept about 2 or 3 million people, by my estimation, in this camp. And that's the end of the war for me.

Did you talk to any of the camp inmates?

No, no. There was no chance to talk to anybody. It was just milling around, people were milling around like-- And if you can imagine, that there are a few million people in an open field, just milling around, and the American soldiers around them.

Were you shocked to see some of their condition, their physical condition?

Yes. Not only this, but there were children among them. 13-- these, they looked 13, but they may have been even younger. I can't tell you. But there were not many of them. I mean, they were not-- I don't mean that there were

thousands and thousands of them, but there were plenty that you could see, the striped uniforms. And they looked pretty much like skeletons. But they were there.

Were any of the survivors Jewish survivors?

I cannot tell you. They may have been political prisoners, they may have been anything. I have no idea. There's no way of knowing it for me, what they were, who they were. The American troops were not very helpful to separate people from each other. And there were a lot of people who were in there for several weeks before they were finally sorted out. Even those who were what we would think concentration camp inmates.

How long were you there?

In this camp, not very long. But I was in an American camp until November, 1945. A POW camp.

What was the American camp?

A POW camp. Although I was a civilian, but was still in the POW camp.

Which camp was that?

The last one was Heilbronn on Neckar. Heilbronn is a small town on the river Neckar. And it was a POW camp. That's all.

What were the conditions like there for you?

In the beginning, it was terrible. I mean, can you imagine so many people to be fed, housed, the eliminations, and so forth? And one scene I can describe to you, which is not very pleasant, but there were bomb craters full of water, and that's what we used as toilets. And you should see [INAUDIBLE] it. The picture's not very pleasant. I'm not blaming anybody. I'm just saying that this is how it was. And what can the Americans do with so many people?

What were the sleeping facilities like?

None.

Bare earth. That's it.

And food?

Food, it was a little bit like a zoo. The trucks came by and they threw food into us, you know, like this. And whoever catch-as-catch-can, that was it. And in the beginning, it was a real chaos and very chaotic problems. Later, they got organized. And we were full of lice, of course. And if you ever had lice, it's not a very pleasant thing to have. And the first experience I had with DDT, which is a miraculous substance, no matter how dangerous it may be.

Big trucks came up, like oil trucks, benzene trucks, gasoline trucks, and with hoses coming out of it. And there were guys with uniforms, completely covered with glass faces, and like a space uniform. And we had to line up, and they had these hoses, and they squirted the cloud of DDT into your shirt and your pants. And all the lice were dead in 24 hours. It was a miracle. I mean, it was fantastic.

How was your health at that point?

Very good. My health was very good at the time. There was no problems. I mean, remarkable how healthy you are even though conditions are bad. And once things were sorted out, my brother and my misfortune was that we happened to get into a camp in Heilbronn, where the commander did not like Hungarians. And so he decided none of them would be released from the camp no matter what. They all had to go back to Hungary. And none of us wanted to go back to

Hungary.

And my father did not know we were alive. Nobody knew anybody was alive, OK? There was no communication, none. So my father became a Red Cross representative, International Red Cross, to investigate atrocities, investigate camps, and so forth. He was a very well-known scientist and pathologist all over Europe.

And he decided to try to look for us. Maybe he can find us. And he could not find us. Finally, somebody said to him, there is a camp in Heilbronn, which is full of Hungarians. Maybe you should look in there. And he did. And he found us. And you know how we got out? You won't believe this. The commander said to my father, all you have to say, they're Germans. We'll release them. And they did.

Another aside, which is something which is very sad, in the first few weeks of the camps, the American camps, guess whom the Americans put in charge? The Germans. The SS and the other German people were in charge of all the camps, including the people who came from concentration camps, because the Americans felt that the Germans were well-organized. They were disciplined troops, not like this Eastern riffraff.

I'm sorry to say, this is, again, true. There was a riot, a riot you had never seen. The people rioted. And the Americans had to shoot in the air, was such a riot, and then finally decided that that doesn't go, and got rid of the Germans. But that's happened to us, that the Germans were put back into-- the German prisoners were in charge of the other prisoners.

So then you left with your father?

No, I couldn't leave with him, but we got papers. Then we got afterward into [INAUDIBLE] where we lived by that time. And he became [INAUDIBLE] that is a German university town and a British occupation zone. And he was named by the British to replace the Nazi professor in the university. He was put in charge of the Forensic Institute of Medicine in the university, and ran the Institute for four years.

He became also a-- French government asked him to be in charge of the exhumation of French prisoners. He was in charge of that in Germany. And he was exhuming and identifying dead French prisoners, who were killed by the Germans, either in the camps or by murdered. He was very active in the Allied cause. And we got in contact with American friends.

What did you do in those months?

What did I do? Black market. We had to eat. We had to survive. And we organized, my brother and I, my mother, organized a black market ring. The black market ring included such things as buying half a cow and butchering it in our basement and selling it to the public. We discovered one day that you could buy in pharmacies a stomach bitter, as they called it. It was 20% alcohol.

So we bought up all the supplies. And we bottled them and sold them on the black market as vermouth. I dealt in cigarettes, and coffee, and in anything, you name it, diamonds, you name it. I was in the black market. That's how we survived. Tape.

As displaced persons, which we became ultimately. Now, British thought we were enemy aliens because Hungary also declared war on Britain, of course, obviously. But ultimately, we managed to become displaced persons, which meant that there were some privileges. Not much, but some. One of them that we were not under German jurisdiction. Not under German jurisdiction. And so that was important.

And the second thing was, of course, that my father got in contact with all the American friends. And they sent us packages, which was very important for survival. And also they started to work on the papers for us to get the American visa applications and so forth. But this is, of course, '45, '46, and it takes time to get out.

And so, now, I had at that time very little contact with people who were out of the camps, because I was not in a DP camp. I lived in Germany. But my brother-in-law became a surgeon in a displaced person camp. And through him, we

met many of the survivors who were in the displaced persons camp. But outside of that, not much. Then I later became a clerk for the Australian immigration office in 1948.

Oh, and just to go back a bit, what was it like for you to meet survivors of the camps?

It's very curious, they didn't talk about it. They just wanted to get out of there. They wanted to get out of Germany. They wanted to get anywhere-- Australia, Argentina, Palestine, whoever they were, Jews or non-Jews, they just wanted to get out of there. That was the primary driving thing. We want to get out of here. We don't want to ever stay in this place. This was a very interesting reaction that there was no discussion of anything.

What was your reaction when you heard what went on in some of the death camps?

Almost disbelief. Although we believed it, but at the same time it was almost disbelief. That's a very curious problem. We realized the extent of it. We knew it. There was no question about it. There was no argument about it. That's how it was. And then this is what the Germans did.

And it was a very strange feeling to live among the Germans who did this, although we were a part of it. And we lived among the Germans, so what can you do? And my father was at that time teaching in the German university, to the point that actually they asked him, ultimately, when the German government was established, proper German government, and became a pro-Western German government, I don't know, and so forth, they asked him to stay on and become professor in Germany.

He said, under no conditions, would I stay in Germany. So we worked out coming to America, and which, ultimately, we did. The interesting sidelight was that when we came to America, you had to go through a camp. The last camp in Europe before you come to America is in Hamburg. And that was 90% Jewish, I would say, or 95% Jewish. And we lived together with them for about a month.

And that's the first time after the war that we had been back again with an enormous number of Jews, almost all Eastern Europeans, almost all orthodox type. Wonderful people. That's where I learned a great deal of Yiddish. I learned a lot of Yiddish. I knew some Yiddish before. And it was very interesting to see these people, how resilient they were, and how full of life and full of getting out, and get going.

I didn't see any more depression or any kind of-- I don't know. They just wanted to go and get going. There are full of vigor almost, until we got on the boat. And they got all seasick. I never seen so many seasick [INAUDIBLE] people. Those poor people. Oh.

They were never been in the ocean. They were coming from the ghettos of Eastern Europe somewhere. And they step on the boat. And we were not even on the ocean yet, they're all seasick. My father being a physician, of course, tried to help, but it was impossible.

What was the name of the boat?

SS Harry Taylor. It was USS Harry Taylor. It was an Army troopship. Harry S. Taylor, that's it. And December 10, 1949. And I'm quite sure you can find a ship manifest in the archives. And there were about 1,300 people on it, all living in the Army troopship conditions. You know what that is. I don't know if you know what it means. It means that you have bunks on top of each other in the huge room, which is awash with vomit. And no air conditioning.

This is tape two, side B. You were talking about the conditions on the ship, coming to the United States.

Yes, it's interesting. And what is interesting about it, again, it sounds unpatriotic. I'm as good an American as I can be. I really love this country. I couldn't live anywhere else. But sometimes one wonders what kind of people there are. The people in the consulate in Hamburg were the most unfriendly, nasty people you could ever imagine. They were just hating us that they come to America. They were absolutely-- looked down upon us as riffraff coming. I mean, they were really nasty.

On the ship-- it was run by the Merchant Marines, of course, as a troop carrier-- the captain wanted the people to line up and paint the ship. And my father, being elected as a chairman again-- poor fellow always got in trouble, in spite of himself. He knew, of course, English very well. And he had a very imposing appearance. And he went to the captain and told him and said, you cannot do to these people. They're surviving this horrible war that's coming to America. These are civilians. You have no jurisdiction over them.

So that was the end of that. But he wanted these people to stand in the corridors and paint the ship, an American troop ship. Come on, this is ridiculous. So we arrive in New York. And it was a ship. Now, I came under public law, I think, 480, if I remember right. Don't quote me on a number. This is the law which admitted 100,000 DPs outside of the quotas. And I was an outside quota person.

I came without a-- most of us had no passports, none of them. I mean, people on this ship had no papers. I was let in this country by being checked off on the list. A guy standing at the gangplank, you come off, he says name, Tibor Borsos, check, go in. And that's it. I got to America. No papers, nothing.

And, of course, we got our green cards after a while when we get to the post office, and the papers came in. And, ultimately, we got the green cards.

Where did your family settle?

I came to Washington.

Why?

Because my father's colleague, who signed the affidavit for us, was a high officer at NIH. OK? He was a director of nutrition program. My father went to Oregon because his friend, Professor-- I can't remember his name right now-- signed his affidavit to Portland. So we separated in New York. My brother and I came to Washington. And just another aside, my big mouth again, my colleague of my father, who lived in 6615 Hillmead Road in Bethesda. And this is Hillmead section, which was, of course, totally non-Jewish at that time.

I tell you why I remember it. He looked upon me as somebody who would come to the house and help a little bit, be a chauffeur, kind of a houseboy thing. And my English was almost non-existent, but he knew German quite well. So we talked in sort of half English, half German. And one of the first thing he started to tell me about is and this is-- why, even today, I don't know-- he was talking about NIH, how many Jews are there, too many Jews, and too many Jews come to this country, and blah, blah, blah.

And I said, finally, Dr. Doft-- this was his name, D-O-F-T-- I said to him, 20 to 40 million people died because of this kind of talk. I cannot stand it anymore. I don't want to come to this country and listen to this. So he kicked me out of his house. And 10 days later, I was on the streets of Washington, because, again, I spoke up.

And with \$10 in my pocket, literally speaking, I was on the streets of Washington, because I spoke up again. I'm not making myself better. I just can't stand this kind of thing. Even today, no matter what it is. As long as-- of course, I would not do it on the corner of-- in a Ku Klux Klan rally. I wouldn't speak up too much, obviously. But, I mean, on a one-to-one basis, I will not let people get away with it.

He wrote a letter to my father, which we have, in which he said that I have no chance of being anybody in America ever. The irony is that I rose to a higher position than he ever was at NIH. I got that doctorate in seven years after I arrived. I never went to school. I still don't have my high school diploma. I have no high school diploma. I never finished high school. I couldn't.

How did you move from being on the streets with \$10 in your pocket? What then happened?

I walked the streets of Washington, looking for a sign-- dishwashers wanted, anything. And I saw a building on

Pennsylvania Avenue just right close to the White House, which said Kossuth Building. Now, Kossuth was a famous Hungarian freedom fighter against the Austrian in 1848. And several buildings in Washington, his name is on it.

And I see that there is a Hungarian reformed insurance company. Now, I'm not reformed, and Hungarian, I was not so proud of that anymore. So I knocked on the door. I said, I'm here. I need a job, anything. And they said, well, we have nothing, but I know somebody else. And then that person knew somebody else. And I wound up in the Corcoran Gallery as a janitor. The best wonderful thing ever happened to me.

And from then on, everything went just uphill.

Then, what happened after that?

While I was member of the international student house, I met my wife, who is a concentration camp survivor in Bergen-Belsen. And we hit it off very well. And we got married within five months, with nothing in our pockets, 46 years ago.

Where is your wife from?

She was born in Frankfurt. And she was caught in Holland, trying to leave for America, and was in Westerbork and in Bergen-Belsen. And although I'm not converted to Judaism, because I'm not religious-- I cannot-- I consider myself a Jew.

So where did you get your schooling?

My father became professor of pathology at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, which is a Jesuit school. And so we went to Omaha, and to the university there. And he died. And so we came back to Washington. And because I went to a Catholic school, and because the only chemistry department in Washington was the catholic university, I went to catholic university. That's an irony, you know? And I graduated cum laude in chemistry, and then went to Hopkins and got my doctorate at Hopkins.

And did you go to NIH at that point?

No, I was four years at Hopkins [INAUDIBLE] faculty at the medical school. And then I came to NIH, and spent 27 years at NIH, where I rose to a higher position than Dr. Doft was, which was a wonderful feeling, I must tell you.

And what is your field?

Immunology and cancer research.

Well, can we talk just a little bit, since you've brought us up to date, about some of your thoughts about what you went through? What do you attribute your bravery in being outspoken and your--

Don't call it bravery. Call it stupidity. Bravery is not the right word. But I learned one thing early in my life, and that is that it's better to speak up-- under certain conditions, not always, because sometimes you get killed. I mean, you have to know when to speak up. I mean, you cannot speak up all the time. That's not possible because sacrificing yourself for nothing is not worth it. That, to my mind, is stupid.

You can go on [INAUDIBLE] march. You can, like Martin Luther King did, you can march with 2,000 people. But one person can't march. Can, but he's going to be killed. But I learned that usually attacking first is better than being attacked and then defending yourself. This may be a character flaw in me. But I have done this all my life. I will just first, I wade into it. And it's not bravery, it's stupidity, probably.

Was your open-mindedness a reflection of your parents--

My mother.

--raising of you?

My mother, not my father. My father was not close-minded, but my primary-- my mother was also a tough cookie, and she was outspoken. And she was very outspoken, always. And so we didn't always get along, of course. That's because of this. But when I married a Jewish girl, she said but you married a Jewish girl, at least marry a rich Jewish girl. [LAUGHS] [INAUDIBLE]

So she had no objection whatsoever. There was no problem. So it's-- although my wife doesn't quite feel this way, but that's obviously a different feeling. But I never felt that Jewishness was a problem.

Does what you went through and what you saw during the war years still affect you?

Very much.

In what way?

Well, how can I put it? I get very emotional. And I'm very upset when I see people being persecuted. And I also feel very strongly that Jews have a very special meaning, in history and in life.

It's hard to put it in words. I'm sorry I wasn't born Jewish, but at the same time, I glad I wasn't, because this way I could choose it.

Are there any images that remain with you that you think about 50 years later?

One image that's always with me, which is a strange one, is the camp before we came to America, all those wonderful surviving Jewish races. Beautiful people. That's one image, always stays. Other images, I don't know. I had a happy childhood. I'm a happy person.

Did you talk about your experiences when you got here?

Always. And also I made sure that my children always knew about my wife experiences. I always made sure that my wife always talks about it, that she never denied, never just be quiet about it. I always made sure that it doesn't die out.

I was very active in the-- I'm still, not as much now, we belong to a small Jewish community called Kehila Kedosha. And I was vice president, as a matter of fact, at one point. They wanted to elect me a president, but I said, wait a minute, a non-Jewish, it's not a very good idea for a Jewish community, you know?

But I was vice president for a year or two, and program committee. And so I'm very active in this kind of a Jewish circles, but not in the large Jewish circles. I am not active in the large community very much, but in our small community, I'm very much part of it. And I feel very accepted and happy.

How many children do you have?

Two. Two. But they are very conscious of being half-Jewish, if I want to put it this way. But they have no connection to anything of the sort. They are not religious. And there's not real connection. My youngest son married a Jewish girl, but they got divorced, unfortunately.

My oldest son married an a non-Jewish girl, but she is absolutely and completely non-Christian, if I may put it that way. He could not marry a Christian girl. I mean, by Christian, which is a very bad way of putting it, a believing Christian, somebody who is committed to Christianity. Neither of my kids would be able to function under those conditions, which I'm very proud of.

Why?

I have studied a great deal the role of Christianity in history, also Mohammedanism. I'm one of few people who read the Quran, for instance. And not many people did who were not Mohammedans. And I also know a great deal about the Christian history, the history of Christian anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, more than anti-Semitism first, anti-Judaism-- the incredible hatred that was developed the third and fourth centuries against the Jews, mainly due to the Christian fathers of the church.

It's [INAUDIBLE] to me that I get very upset when I talk about it, because I feel that this is the most evil thing ever happened in the universe-- the emergence of this kind of Christianity. I think it's unforgivable. I'm writing a short story whose name is "And Lucifer Was Right," in which Lucifer is the only fallen angel-- the only reason he's fallen because he knows the true nature of the Christian God, which is hate.

I'm sorry. I'm on tape, and I want to be on tape because that's how I feel about it. It is a very hateful religion, teaching love. And that's what I don't ever forgive them. We are the model of being love, and yet at the same time, they teach hatred all the time.

Did you find when you would speak about your experiences to people not in your family that they would listen to you-- friends?

I'm sorry. Would you repeat that? I'm not so sure--

When you would talk here in America to other people about what you experienced--

I always talk exactly what I feel all the time. I never do it otherwise. My FBI record must be very long.

But people did listen to you?

I should hope so. I'm loud enough, and I'm forceful enough.

Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish?

Yes. An interesting sidelight, when the Holocaust Museum was proposed several years ago, my wife was very much against it. And I was too [INAUDIBLE] about it. I was also sort of against it. But I think it's a great thing. I'm very glad it's there.

So a lot of the people, and her, she belongs to a survivor's group, Child Survivors, which I go to all the time, but I not speak up very much because I don't feel it's proper for me to speak up in a group like this. There was a lot of debate among those people whether the Holocaust Museum is appropriate, especially on the US government [INAUDIBLE].

And I think that most of them now feel this was correct, that opposing was incorrect. But this is now how it is. So I'm glad it's there. I saw it. I went there once only. We were at the outside when the festivities were over. But it was raining, and I didn't let my wife stay there. So I'm very protective of her.

But I was inside, and it's an interesting experience, to say the least.

Well, thank you very much for doing the interview.

Thank you.

This concludes the interview of Tibor Borsos. It was done under the auspices of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.