

An interview for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum with Robert Kertesz. Esther Finder's the interviewer. Today is Wednesday, August 7th, 1996. This is tape 1, Side A. I want to thank you for doing the interview with us today. Can you tell me, what was your name at birth?

Kertesz, Robert.

When were you born?

I was born on June 9th, 1933.

Where were you born?

In Budapest, Hungary.

Is that where you grew up?

Yes, until we immigrated to Germany, into a displaced person camp. That's where we were.

Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to grow up there?

Well, I only remember-- not only, but I mean, I remember a very happy childhood prior to the war, or what I remember as the war, because I'm sure there were problems already back even when I was born in '33, '34, '35 with anti-Semitism and everything. But my parents and I, and later on my brother, we were very happy family, and I had a normal childhood.

My father was a barber and a beautician. He owned his own shop. My mother was a seamstress. Actually, in Hungary, she did not work. She only worked after we came to the United States because my father was earning a decent living. As far as I know, we were always comfortable.

Did you live in a Jewish area before the war?

Not in the beginning. Actually, the Jewish area in Budapest-- I remember later on because it became the actual ghetto in Budapest-- was quite a distance from where we lived. We lived not in the suburbs, but we lived in a very, very nice, I would think, a multi-racial area.

And if I remember correctly, and I do, there was anti-Semitism right there in our building. We lived in a four-story building on, I never forget, [NON-ENGLISH] ut 21. [NON-ENGLISH] was the name of the street, and "ut" means street in Hungarian.

And we lived on the fourth floor in apartment 12 B, because 13 was an unlucky number, and I guess it was. But neighbors next door to us, they tolerated us, but they were-- I won't say Christian faith, but I mean, they were not Jewish. And we were friends, but I didn't have any real close Jewish friends myself.

Did you go to public school?

Yes, I did. I went to public school, elementary school, and started the junior high-- no, actually, just elementary school, because when the whole business started, I was too young to go to middle school or to high school in Hungary.

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Yes, I do. I have one brother. His name is George. He is six years younger than I am, and he is now residing in Florida.

Was your family observant at all?

My mother kept high holidays, Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, but it wasn't that we davened every day, or anything like that. We my father really didn't speak either Yiddish or Hebrew, or anything like that. I'm sure that he did not have a real Jewish upbringing. I think he was a Jew strictly by birth.

My mother, I think, had a little bit more of that because my grandmother lived with us towards the end of the war. Yeah, towards the end of the war. And she was quite religious. I mean, she read the Old Testament. But I don't remember going to Hebrew school or to the synagogue on a weekly basis. But we did observe the high holidays and we did know we were Jewish.

In what ways can you tell me that you knew you were Jewish, or that you knew there were differences?

I think a lot of people reminded me that I was Jewish, simply because, as I said, I think the people that lived around us were non-Jewish, and we observed holidays at different times than they did. And I wanted to know, why didn't we have Christmas? Why didn't we have certain holidays that they had?

And I asked those questions. But I was told that we were of a different faith and that was not our holiday. In fact, I don't think before the war, my parents were very upset about Gentiles so much, until after the war, because they felt that they were the crux of the whole problems that they went through.

I remember my mother and my grandmother, who, by the way, was born in Germany. My mother was born in Germany in Pforzheim, and we spoke German and Hungarian at home. And my grandmother living with us, they sometimes would have certain sayings because they didn't agree with some of the Gentile friends that they became in contact with.

Do you remember any scenes where perhaps you observed anti-Semitism toward other Jews when you're growing up?

No, not really, except just verbal abuse by cursing at someone, you dirty Jew, or something like that. I've never seen anybody before the war being beaten, or anything like that. I have seen where they would draw a Magen David or something on a building or on a business, and I believe that was one of the reasons my father, even though he was doing well, he had a rough time staying in business, because of the growing anti-Semitism in Hungary.

Did you have any idea of what was going on outside of your immediate area, with respect to the way Jews were being treated elsewhere in Europe?

Not as a child. Not at that time, not prior to the war.

When did you begin to realize that things were not right?

I think the first time it really hit home, as far as I was concerned, was when my father started talking about selling his business and leaving the country, leaving Hungary, and trying to go somewhere else where it would be safer for us. I don't know if I understood what safer meant because, personally, I was not really mistreated in any way. But I could see on my parents that they had growing concerns, and that's the first time that I ever thought that it might have something to do with us being Jewish.

What kinds of discussions did your father have with you? Or what did you overhear your parents saying, anything specific?

I think it was basically generalizations, like we have to leave before we cannot leave. In other words, we should leave before everything gets closed down and we won't be able to get out. I remember them saying, have you heard about what happened to somebody else? Not in mainly the neighborhood, but in Budapest, in other words, some of the areas that they have known. Maybe they read in the paper. Of course, I didn't.

But I heard them discuss, have you heard that such and such a person, or some incident happened someplace and it involved other Jewish people? And I think that's when my father started to think that he would have to leave, and that's

the first time that I realized that maybe something was wrong. But I was still a child, so I didn't formulate any conclusions to my thoughts at that time.

What steps did your father take to get out?

Well, first of all, my father sold his business. And really, from what I understand, it was almost like a distress sale. He just wanted to get rid of it. He had a beautiful barber and beauty shop. And I remember it vividly because it was on the same street where we lived, except a little bit further down in a very, very beautiful area.

He sold his business. And I remember him talking that we will probably go to South America, where we already had some relatives. It was my mother's brother who lived in South America. They invited us to come there, that it was a safe place to be. As I remember, my parents did buy passage for the ship, to get out.

But before we had a chance to actually leave Hungary, with all the passports and paperwork, I guess, that it took to get out, things really tightened down. And Italy entered the war, became part of the Axis with Germany, and they would not allow ships that carried Jews through their waters, and that was one of the reasons why we never did get out of Hungary. Believe me, I don't actually remember what year that was, but it must have been '41, '42, somewhere around there.

Were things beginning to change for the Jews in the area that you can remember specifically?

Not really that I can remember. I mean, I don't want to fabricate any stories here, but I do not remember anything really changing, except that my parents were getting more and more concerned, since we couldn't get out of there, what was going to happen to us. That's the one thing that I do remember, is the concern of my folks.

So what did your folks do next? They couldn't leave. Then what? Did they try to do something else, maybe another escape route?

I don't believe. Actually, by that time, it was a little bit too late. My father was inducted into the Hungarian army, and that stopped us completely from leaving, because, of course, my mother wouldn't have left without him. And at that time, he was actually a soldier in the Hungarian army, and not till later on did he get pulled out into special forces, where they used the Jews to do some really dirty work.

Like they had to go ahead and dig trenches-- this is what my father told me-- dig trenches or clean up. They actually became almost like slaves of the Hungarian army. They had to wear the Star of David, but they were slaves by that time.

Do you remember when your father was drafted to having go off in uniform?

Oh, yes, I do remember. At that time, I thought it was really great that he was a soldier. And I remember in the wintertime, he had this heavy woolen overcoat that was part of his issue. And two pleats-- I'll never forget this-- two pleats had to fall on either side on his back.

And I would make these pleats with my hands, and he would put his big, wide belt around him. And those pleats had to be held so that when you looked at it, it looked nice and neat. And I thought that was great that he was a soldier. What did I know?

After he was drafted, what happened to you, your mom, and your brother?

Well, prior to that, of course, we lived on our own. And after my father sold his business, we also gave up our apartment where we lived. Then we moved in with my grandmother and my aunt-- my aunt never married-- and my uncle, who had an apartment. And this is the apartment I was telling you about on [NON-ENGLISH] that we moved into.

And we lived there altogether, almost like a commune, but I mean, it wasn't. It was just a nice big apartment. And when I said big, actually, come to think of it, it wasn't that big. We were pretty crowded. But we lived there while my father was gone, when he was in the army, because that was the only protection we had, was living with the family.

I don't think my mother could have done anything on her own. And I think maybe at that time, my father would be sending her money until he actually got taken into this work force that I mentioned to you. And we would be living a very, very, I wouldn't say, poor life, but I mean, certainly, the economics for us changed quite a bit.

How did things start to change in the immediate area, the Jewish community, for you after that point?

Well, it changed by-- I remember, Hungary had their own Nazi party, so to say, and their insignia was two arrows. They used to call them Arrow Cross. In Hungarian it's called [NON-ENGLISH]. And the Arrow Cross, on each end of it, had an arrow on it, and that was their insignia. And they were really just thugs.

Well, as I remember it, they were really worse, even after the Germans came in to Hungary. The Arrow Cross was really worse than the Germans were because they were Hungarians who-- I would equate them with the Ku Klux Klan, maybe, during the Civil War over here. They hated Jews. They hated non-Aryans.

Well, they weren't Aryans themselves, but they hated Jews mainly. That's when we started hearing more and more. When this party started getting stronger and stronger, we heard more of beatings and of killings and of desecration of synagogues. I think that's when things really started to change. That's when we really started to get afraid and didn't really know what to do. We were-- when I say we, we were just kids, my brother and I.

But my mother, I remember, was very, very concerned, especially since my father was somewhere. To be honest with you, I don't even know where he was, whether he was on the front or where he was doing his duty. But my mother was completely reliant on the family, the immediate family, because we had no one else that we could turn to, and she was quite scared. My father's family lived in a small village in Hungary called [NON-ENGLISH].

But they were folks, country folks. They had a little like a farm, I guess, and they lived off the land. So if nothing else, they had plenty to eat. I think they were even more persecuted than we were in the big city because things really started to turn real bad for the Jews at that time, whereas in Budapest, there was a ghetto, and there Jews could get together and talk things over, or at least have a little bit of unity.

Out in a country, Jews were a rarity and they did not have the commune or the togetherness or the support of other Jews. Unfortunately, they all perished in concentration camps, every one of them. But there's only some-- I believe I have some nieces and nephews still left, but I really don't know.

Did your mother try to do anything to protect you and your brother?

Yes. This was not until about 1943, I believe. When she saw how things were really deteriorating for the Jews, they actually already started to hurt Jewish people into the ghetto and started to confiscate their homes and confiscate their apartments, and what have you.

They would relocate older Jews into this one Jewish area, that I mentioned before, that eventually became together. And at first, they just had checkpoints, where they had a guard. Going in or out was, of course, checked by the guard. Jews were, of course, not allowed out once they were in.

And they were systematically taking different sections of the city and picking up Jewish people and putting them into this one, I don't know, maybe 15, 20 block area, or whatever it was, that eventually became the Jewish ghetto area. The main focal point there was on a street called [NON-ENGLISH]. So there was a big Jewish synagogue.

My uncle, who lived in [NON-ENGLISH], lived almost across the street from the synagogue. And I think that's where we became more and more aware that we were really Jewish, because now you had nobody but Jews all around you. At the same time, by moving Jews into the ghetto, they were also taking all the non-Jews out of the ghetto, who lived in a ghetto, and they were moving them to relocate them outside of the ghetto so they could completely seal off the ghetto just for the Jews.

So what did your mother try to do for you?

That's right, I'm digressing here. When she saw that things were going that bad, there were some houses that were supposedly safe houses by the Red Cross. I don't know what she paid. I'm sure it cost money. But I believe somewhere in the fall of 1943-- early fall, or late summer, early fall in 1943-- she took my brother and I and put us into this house that was supposed to have been under the protection of the Red Cross.

And my brother and I moved into this apartment house, where every apartment was full of mainly kids. We lived in a small room with maybe 15, 20 kids in a room, just enough room to lie down and sleep. We had food. I mean, we got food there and everything, but that didn't last very long. It only lasted less than a month.

And then Arrow Cross came in one night, middle of the night, and practically beat us out of the apartments, down into the street, and forcefully marched us into the ghetto, where we had to fend for ourselves. There was no direction where to go or what to do. As long as we were behind the ghetto area, they didn't care what happened. So we just wandered around aimlessly until we found some family that we could move in with, and they gave us a place to stay, gave us a place to live.

When you were in the safe house, the Red Cross safe house, how frequently we were able to see your mother?

I think we only saw her maybe once or twice, because I believe not very much after that, she was picked up and she was taken away. I know that she spent time both in Mauthausen and in Gunskirchen, which were two of the concentration camps, but I don't know which one she went to first. But we only saw her a couple of times, and after that, we did not. It was not until after the war that we saw her again.

So when you were taken out of the safe house and brought to the ghetto, you were without your mother and without your father at this point?

Yes.

How long did it take you to-- well, I was going to ask you how long it took you to connect with relatives, but how did you manage to survive until you caught up with relatives?

Well, I was always a survivor, I think. And my brother and I would scrounge food, if we didn't have it right then and there from the family that put us up. But we also would go out and look for other places to be. We didn't just stay in one place. We kept on looking for somebody that we knew that we could connect to.

And by this time, the walls were still not put up around the ghetto. There was still ingress and egress from the ghetto for non-Jews. We had to, of course, wear the Star of David, and I just did not like it. Even as a 10, 11-year-old kid, I just didn't like the idea of being confined and being away from anybody that I knew. And I'm sure I was scared, and I had my brother has to take care of, who was just four or five years old.

I know this sounds unbelievable, but we attached ourselves to a large family that were going out from the ghetto. I took off his Magen David, the yellow star, and I took mine off. And we actually escaped by attaching ourselves to this family, and we walked through the gates. They didn't question us. I mean, there was just so much movement going on, back and forth, that it just happened. We just walked right through and we escaped from the ghetto at one time.

I have an aunt, who was a Christian woman, who was going to marry my uncle, whom I mentioned to you used to live with us in the apartment. I knew where she lived. And we started towards her house, and there was an air raid. And we ducked into an air raid shelter to get out from the street, because we had to be off the streets. As soon as the air raid was over, we went to her--

We are doing an interview with Robert Kertesz. This is Tape 1, side B. When we left last time, you were telling me about an air raid. Can you continue, please?

Yes. After the air raid, we went to my aunt's house, who was a Gentile lady, and she lived not very far from the shelter where we took refuge in. We went to her house, and she-- after some manipulation or whatever, I don't know what she did, she had some relatives in a country and also in the city.

And what she did, she split us up. She took my brother, because he was very young and small. He went with one of her part of the family, somewhere in Budapest, as a nephew or as somebody of that family. In other words, that's how he was presented to everybody. And that gave him protection, so he was not in the mainstream of all this persecution and everything.

And I, because I was older, they wanted for me to get out of the city. And she had family in a country, and I went to stay with some of her people in the country, again, on a farm. I was, more or less, hidden there, because there would have been questions, where did I come from?

At this time, she was still not-- when I say she was my aunt, she is my aunt now, but at that time she was the fiancée of my uncle. And she did the same thing for my uncle. She got him hidden someplace in the country somewhere with one of her families. He actually stayed the whole war, stayed completely out of the city and out of ghettos and concentration camps, or anything, because he was well hidden and well taken care of.

And only after the war I heard about many, many non-Christians who really-- I mean Christians who took care of a lot of Jewish people and hid them and took care of them so that they would not have to go through the horrible ordeals that a lot of people did.

You said that you had to pretty much stay out of sight because it would be easier to just keep you out of sight than to explain where you came from. What did you do during the day? Where did you stay? How did you stay out of sight?

Well, being on a farm, I fed the chickens. For me, I mean, I was still a kid, so it was kind of fun being in the country and being among horses, and things like that. I think as kids, we recover much quicker from calamities than people who have much more thought put into it.

And I guess it must have been fun for me to be out in the country and to enjoy just being free and not worrying about air raids, because out in the country, they certainly didn't come to bomb the countryside. They came to bomb Budapest. So I guess I was happy.

Were you given any instructions that, should somebody come, that you should go get out of sight?

I really don't remember. I would imagine that they did tell me, because by the time I was, as I said 10, 11 years old, I did have comprehension of directions and orders. and I'm sure I realized that everything wasn't normal the way it was before the war. I'm sure I was given certain directions to do, but I can't really remember.

Did you have contact with anybody from your family, or your brother or aunts, uncles?

Not at all. No. I think that must have been one of the stipulations, that we should not try to contact-- of the family that took care of me-- not try to contact anybody. Maybe they did on their own when they talked to each other. When my and talked to her relatives or something, I'm sure she asked questions. But I personally did not have any contact with anybody from my family.

Do you remember having any feelings about being out of touch with your family?

Well, as I said before, I'm sure I was sad. I'm sure I was missing my mother and my father. I guess there was nothing that I could do. So I just lived day to day, waiting for, eventually, something to happen, which it finally did. Apparently, it was getting a little bit sticky for these people.

Maybe word did get around that there is a stranger living here. As I said, the Arrow Crosses and the sympathizers of these people were, of course, all over. by that time, everybody was looking for Jews, as I'm sure you know. They wanted

to get all the Jews out of Budapest and ship them to the concentration camp.

Of course at that time, I didn't know about that Wallenberg, but I know now. In fact, later on, we did stay in another house that was like protection of the Swedish council, or something, that Wallenberg set up. We stayed there for a while again. But what happened was it was getting too dangerous for my wards, who were taking care of us. They were afraid that they were going to get found out and that they would get in trouble.

So eventually, we did wind up back in Budapest. Both my brother and I wound up back in Budapest. And we went to one of these-- well, we went back to the building where we stayed. Not in the ghetto, because only my brother and I were in a ghetto, taken from the house I told you was the Red Cross house.

My aunt-- my other aunt, not the one I told you that helped us out, but my mother's sister and my grandmother were still somehow missed, and they were still living in this one apartment, where they used to live, and we went back there. But then this aunt, who was my uncle's fiancée, put up some money and put us into one of these Swedish protected houses that, apparently, was one of Wallenberg's ideas. I found out about that later. I didn't know it then. And again, we lived in there for only maybe a month, a month and a half.

When you were taken from the farm and brought back to the city, did they give you an explanation? Did they tell you anything about it, or all of a sudden you were taken? And how did you get there, if you could clarify that a little bit.

Well, I don't think I was given any explanation whatsoever. We were just-- not we. My brother, of course, was somewhere else. One day I was just told that I'm going back to the city and back with my grandmother and my aunt. And I was happy about that because, of course, we were back with relatives again.

I knew there was something wrong, but I guess I didn't realize the gravity of the situation as much as I should have. I was just looking forward to being back with my family, people that I knew and that I love, because after all, these people were strangers. They were nice, but they were strangers.

So when we got into this other house, that only lasted, again, for only a few weeks, until one night, again, we got robbed in the middle of the night. Everybody out. Just take the immediate things. And that's when we were marched off to back into the ghetto, this time as a family. In other words, my aunt, my sisters, my mother's sister, my grandmother, myself, and my brother. And then we moved back together.

When did your brother come and join you? At what stage did he come?

He must have come just about the same time I came back from the country, because we were both together in that house when we were raided. I remember that.

When you got back to the ghetto, can you describe to me how conditions have changed since the last time you had seen the place?

Well, by this time the streets were filthy. The people had nothing to eat. We were completely cut off. To me, it always seemed, after I reflect on it, it always seemed to me that the ghetto in Budapest was the same as being in a concentration camp without the ovens.

That's the way I always felt. We were beaten. We were shot. We had, of course, curfew. We lived most of our lives, by that time, in the cellars or in the air raid shelters. We didn't really have air raid shelters. We had basements and cellars.

During the day, we would go out and go to what would be best described as like a soup kitchen, or something like that, where you could get a bowl of soup or get a slice of bread, or something like that. The people the hungry. People were starving. People were lying dead in the street from the bombings, because nobody had the strength or anything to clean them up, although eventually it did get cleaned up. The cities started to become really bombed-out rubbles.

By that time, Budapest was no longer the city that it was, especially the ghetto area. I also always believed that towards

the end, the Germans themselves came back and bombed and everything just the ghetto area, just to get rid of the Jews. I'm sure that was just a fantasy of mine, but I know that the bombings are becoming more and more frequent and it was harder and harder to get food. It was just a miserable way to live.

Where did you find yourselves housed when you came back to the ghetto? What were the conditions in that respect?

Again, I don't remember if there was any particular house that we lived in. I remember the house that we finally went and lived, in the air raid shelter. The house next door got a direct hit from a bomb. And I remember spending most of my time in the shelter and really not even having any reason to go upstairs because it was unsafe.

The main thing that we worried about, because then I started hearing people saying, well, if the bombs are not going to get us, then the Germans will come pretty soon. They're probably going to take us out of here someplace. And by this time, I'm sure that the elders have heard about the concentration camp, and things like that. They knew that people were taken out of Budapest almost on a daily basis and they never see them again.

It seemed like they knew that the day will come when it will be their time, or everybody's time, that we'll be taken out of here. And we've seen evidence of that because we've seen people getting put on trucks and taken out from the ghetto. Myself, my family, I guess shall we call ourselves lucky? It just didn't get that far because by that time, of course, the Russians came in and so-called liberated Budapest.

You talked about being in a Swedish safe house. Can you elaborate a little bit about that?

Yeah, I remember it was near a park. I think it was a nicer part of Budapest. It was an apartment house, and the whole apartment house, with every one of their apartments, was filled with Jews who, apparently, they were supposed to have had visas to get out of Budapest. And this was like a midway point to wait until their turn came that they could get out.

And this is why I know that it was the Wallenberg hand in it, because that's the way-- and this I found out, of course, later on. But I remember that we had Swedish passports-- my brother, myself, my aunt, and my grandmother-- and we were supposed to have gone to Switzerland.

But whether that was just that somebody sold them something or whether it was the real thing, I do not know. I mean, I don't know if this was really a Wallenberg thing or whether somebody took advantage of the fact that these things were happening, and maybe they just set us up in this house with false passports. But eventually it didn't mean a thing because when they did come, they did not pay any attention to these passports. They said those were not valid.

Who came into the ghetto more often for the beatings and the rounding up of the Jews and everything? Was it the Arrow Cross or was it the German and the SS?

It was mainly the Arrow Cross. I think the SS came in just to get us out of there, to actually transport us, and so on and so forth. But I'm sure there were beatings at that time, or whatever. But the Arrow Cross were really, really mean and bad people.

It was just, like I said, giving some thugs some authority and picking on a certain type or certain person or certain nationality, or something, no matter if it was a child or an older person or anybody else. Simply because we were Jewish, they hated us. They did not think anything about beating somebody to death. And of course, coming into the ghetto by that time, of course all the walls were up on the ghetto.

The second time we got back into the ghetto, my family-- I mean my brother and I-- by this time there were only a couple of checkpoints where you could go in and out, whoever had business. I don't know what business, you know. But the actual ghetto was walled up and there were no escape routes whatsoever. Now, there might have been, but I certainly didn't try again. I had no place to go.

When you think back about the time that you spent in the ghetto, is there any memory that sticks out in your mind more than anything else in the episode that comes back to you?



The main thing was really the dead people on the street that sticks in my mind more than anything, the corpses that nobody cleaned up. As a young kid, I don't know, but you can get immune to anything. That's what really kind of blows my mind right now is that I took it all in stride. It was an everyday thing to walk among corpses half-mangled people.

It didn't mean anything. It was just survival of yourself that you were mainly interested in. And by this time, we knew that-- when I say we, my brother and I-- we knew that there were people who just wanted to keep us in the ghetto and who were mean enough to beat us, and things like that. It was definitely to save our own lives. It was the most important thing at that time, to save my brother's life, who, of course, didn't know anything. He was four or five years old followed me everywhere.

I had him to take care of, especially while we were just on our own during those few times that I mentioned to you. The rest of time, of course, my aunt and my grandmother were there. But my grandmother, by this time, was in her late 70s, early 80s, and she was quite ill. She starved to death she'd. We all slept in the same bed, and one morning she just didn't get up. I think she was about 81, 82 when she died. But that was the whole thing.

It's funny. There was nothing to bring back. You would go out and scrounge around for food or something like that, but there was nobody to scrounge from because everybody was in the same situation as you were in. Everybody begged from each other or went through the same things. Everybody had the same idea. They just wanted to survive.

You just mentioned that there were times when you and your brother were on your own and he followed you and you were the guide. I'd like to ask you to explain a little bit about how the two of you managed without any supervision. In the safe house, in the Red Cross house, when you were first separated from your mother, did anybody give the children any supervision or guidance or anything?

Well, there were people there who, of course, watched us and monitored us. Like I told you before, we did get some food at that time. Our days were just trying to entertain ourselves. We couldn't go outside. I mean, there was no place to go because the safe house was exactly what it said it was. It supposedly had been safe from any beatings or anything else that could have happened to us.

So we stayed we stayed right in the house. I don't know how we entertained each other. Maybe we played some funny, little games or we kicked the ball around. We used to make soccer balls out of newspaper and tie it with string and just kick it back and forth. I mean, anything to entertain ourselves. But there were some older kids and there were some older people who actually, supposedly, was supervising us, but we were pretty much on our own.

And it didn't really last that long. There was nothing, no trouble that we could really get into. There were just too many people around. So we just tried to fend for ourselves. We were, more or less, unsupervised, but there were some people there who were watching over us so that we wouldn't go outside. But that was the life in that place.

How about when you first came with your brother? The two of you were taken from the Red Cross safe house. How did you manage to fend for yourselves and how did you manage to keep your brother from harm?

Well, my brother cried a lot. He was a scrawny, little thing. He, of course, didn't know. He wanted his mother and he wanted love. And I guess maybe I wasn't always good. I must've lost my patience with him. But I always had him by the hand. I knew that without me, he would perish.

I mean, there's no way I could let-- because when my mother left me, or us, that's the last thing-- I think that's one thing that she dropped into my head, is you are the one that is responsible for your brother. You don't let him go anywhere. You, you, you, you, you. I would, maybe sometimes forcefully, but I wouldn't allow him to do anything. I guess I was the boss.

But we survived. We both survived. What does a four, five-year-old kid do? I mean, he can cry, but eventually I will be the one that will tell him what to do. And as long as we found a little bit of food, or what have you.

Even right now, you write a book like this, maybe nobody would believe it because these extraordinary things just don't happen. And when they do happen and it comes to a good conclusion, you know somebody will say, well, that's just somebody's fantasy. There were so many extraordinary things that happened during the war to a lot of people.

I'm sure you're going to get to that eventually, but just the idea that my parents-- actually, even though my father was taken into the army, and from there into the work force, and from there, eventually, into the concentration camps, my mother was in a different concentration camp. And the two of them found out about each other somehow and they met in Mauthausen. They met in Mauthausen They came home together after the war.

About four months after the war, they came home together. That's the only way they both survived. My father-- and he told me these stories-- my father was, as I said, a barber and beautician. He used to cut hair and shave some of the Germans who were in charge in a concentration camp. My mother was very, very sick, but he begged for her life and he actually saved her life by, I guess, being close to some of the hierarchy over there. But they came home together.

Now, that's a miracle. And they were taken two different times, two separate times, and they came home together. Now, if that's not a miracle, then nothing is. That happened, I guess, about three or four months after the war ended.