

The following is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gerald Averback. It is being conducted on October 28, 2016 by Gail Schwartz and is taking place over the telephone at the museum and in Saskatoon, Canada. This is track number one. What is your full name?

My full name is Gerald Isidore Averback. Averback is spelled A-V-E-R-B-A-C-K.

And what is the name that you were born with?

I was born Averbuch, and it's spelled A-V-E-R-B-U-C-H.

And where were you born?

I was born in the province of Bessarabia, that's Romania, at my grandparent's place. And they were living in the village or town of Soroca.

And that's where you were born?

That's where I was born, but we lived in the other side of Romania. And they called it Transylvania in the city of Oradea Mare-- that's in Romania, Oradea Mare. And the Hungarians called it Nagyvárad-- nag meaning big-- Nagyvárad.

And let's talk a little bit about your parents and their background. What was your father's name?

His name was Samuel, S-A-M-U-E-L. And my father was born in Ukraine, that was before World War One. And they moved, I don't know when, his family moved to Romania. And I was told the reason they moved because they really wanted to go to America. And from Romania, Constanta is the port especially after World War One, they could-- many people moved to the USA.

So that's where they were. And then his brother moved on to Canada, and two brothers-- there were two brothers, they stayed in Romania. And then they married girls in Romania and they stayed in Romania.

What kind of work did your father do?

My father and his brother had a clothing store. And they also-- this had happened during the war, World War Two, people had approached them from Italy to set up a plant to have men's shirts. Because in those days if you needed a shirt you went to a tailor, and he did. But this was, for the first time, it's ready-made shirts.

So they actually when the war broke out the money came from Italy. They set that up and apparently they were extremely successful, because it was very reasonably priced. But the material came from Italy and the Italians owned 80% of the factory. But the Germans stopped that because Jews were not supposed to own anything, whatever it is. So they were approximately three-and-a-half years in operation. But very successful because the demand was great.

And your mother's name?

Is Esther. And her maiden name was Elgurt, E-L-G-U-R-T. And she was born it was pronounced [PLACE NAME], but that's a village in Bessarabia right close to the river Dniester. In fact, just a mile from the river Dniester. And the river Dniester divided this Bessarabia from Ukraine.

And so let's talk a little bit about extended family. You said your-- I know the relative who went to Canada. Did you have any other extended family in the area?

Well, not on my father's side. My mother's side were all residing in Romania, not outside Romania.

Yeah. OK, so let's go back to your earliest memories. For instance, where did you go to school? What kind of school

was it?

Yeah, well, I just went to [INAUDIBLE] kindergarten and school. And that was of course Romania, then became Hungary.

Yeah.

So I went to school all the way until I was about 13 with no interruptions at all.

Until 1943?

Correct.

OK, let's talk a little bit, though, about your life before 1943. First of all, do you have any siblings, or were you an only child?

No, never had any siblings.

OK, so you were an only child. And what kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a mixed neighborhood?

It was a mixed neighborhood. It wasn't a Jewish neighborhood. It was a mixed, and nothing-- well many people there were originally of course Hungarians.

And during the Austrian Hungarian World War One, many of them-- talking about the elderly gentleman, they were part of the war. So some were captains, and although there was no distinction during the Austrian Hungarian period of time, World War One. And so my friends were their kids. And so nothing eventful--

Was your family very religious or secular?

That's a good question. Originally, I would say no. But during the war more so yes. And so we did go to synagogue on Saturday and holidays and whatever it is.

Oh, so you did--

I had my--

You did observe holidays?

Yes, we did. And I had my bar mitzvah when I was 13.

Tell me about your bar mitzvah.

Well, the war was already on. But my relatives who were in Romania, we were talking by telephone at that time. And we had quite a few people in the synagogue for my bar mitzvah, and then we had at home a reception. And being the only child, and a boy of course, they made a big deal my parents about my bar mitzvah. I had to deliver speeches that day and whatever.

Did you have non-Jewish friends when you were growing up?

Yes, yes. We did.

And you played at their house?

Correct. Correct.

Yeah, did you experience any antisemitism before the war started-- before '43?

Well--

Do you remember any antisemitism?

Let me tell you this, under the Hungarians, when they took things over, being Jewish they wanted the Jewish boys-- and I was over 13-- to show up once a week to do free work. And I went to a-- I had to be-- I went to a cemetery with a group of people just to clean up here and clean up there.

This is in '43 you're talking about?

That is in '43, correct.

Yeah, OK.

So at that time the laws for antisemitic under the Romanians it wasn't, because the war didn't start until '39, '40.

Right. But up to '43, what kind of our childhood--

After '43--

--was it for you? Did you have any unpleasant--

I would say very normal.

Very normal.

I was not discriminated.

OK. Did you--

We were under the Romanians at that time, of course.

Did you feel very Jewish as a Jewish child?

Oh, yes, very much so. I would say 80% of my friends were Jewish.

Oh, OK. OK, were you interested in sports?

I used to-- the only sport that I was interested in and I was good at is running. And yeah, because even when I got to Canada at high school I was winning awards, winning in running.

OK.

So running apparently was--

Good. And what about hobbies? Did you have any hobbies?

I can't think of any. I play the violin.

As far as-- yeah. I was pretty good at it. And--

So life went on as a relatively normal childhood up to '43?

Yes, very much so.

OK, and the first change-- what was the first change that you remember?

The first change really came in after the Hungarians. And also-- well, now we're talking about the war was on. Do you know a name Jabotinsky?

Yes.

My dad was a great mover and shaker of the Zionist movement. In fact, he arranged for Jabotinsky to come to our town, Oradea Mare, to deliver a speech, which was unheard of.

Oh my, when was that?

That was-- I can't remember. But it was in the '40s. The war was on. And not only that, because of that I remember when he came I was one of the Betar, Betar is Hebrew.

Yes.

And I was a young kid, but I had a uniform on collecting money, and I would say everybody was saying that 60% of the people attending were not Jewish.

Oh, my.

And so it was new in that area, the Zionist movement and so on. And I remember that Jabotinsky delivered a speech, and so on and so forth, I didn't pay attention. But he was telling whoever there what the Holocaust that's coming, and what's going on already in Poland and other countries. And just a matter of time it's coming our way, and so on and so forth. That's what they were talking about.

So that was 1943, '44-- '43 definitely. Maybe even '42, I can't remember that, but '42, '43. So the Zionist movement was catching more and more, but getting to Palestine was not easy. But you had countries in the Balkans, like Yugoslavia and so on, that it was very difficult apparently to go through, regardless how much money you had, and so on. But we knew that problems are coming.

How did you know? You had a radio?

Well, because--

Newspapers?

Because we had people coming from that area, from Poland and so on. They were officially-- they had IDs-- non-Jewish IDs, and they came through to tell us that what happened--

You mean, they were Jewish but they had non-Jewish IDs? Is that what you're saying?

Correct, correct.

OK.

And that was a way for them to travel. Mostly younger people in their 20s and 30s. They were hopefully going towards Palestine. It's a long way and there were many obstacles to get there.

Did your life change in any way in 1939 when the war started in Poland?

No, it changed in about '43-- '42, '43.

OK. All right, well let's move on then. Let's get to '43, and you have said some thing about that. So what are your memories of '43? Your first memories?

My memories of '43 is that the war was going on. We were hoping that the Russians-- that was Stalingrad times-- had a break through, and therefore, any concentration camps that other countries nearby had that it would not come our way.

So your parents--

The Hungarians were anti-Jewish, but not as active in the war until late '43 and of course '44, because the Russians were very close to Hungary, namely the Carpathian mountains. They had to cross that to get into Hungary. And so we were just hoping that because of the war that would miss concentration camps. We knew what was going on in Europe.

You did know? Yeah.

Oh yes.

And how did-- is this--

Well, you never know the whole thing, the whole truth. But you know that being Jewish is not safe. And--

How did your family handle this with you? You were only 13, you were just a young teenager. Is this something your folks talked about with you? Or your friends or?

Well, they talked about it in the sense that I overheard, because that's what they talked about with the other adults constantly. And even they thought about that they may would like to take this chance to go through the Balkan countries to reach Palestine. It was extremely precarious, and many people who tried it-- if you were single you could get around and make it. But for a family and the young child and so on, that's it. And it would have been dangerous.

Did you feel-- [COUGHS] excuse me-- under threat? Was it a frightening time for you as a teenager?

It was only a frightening time by the time the ghettos were, because we have then realized that we may not be able to avoid all this that we're hoping and praying that it wouldn't come our way.

Yeah, OK. So then the next change that you remember? Well, the next change was the ghetto, and the ghetto was in the same city. In fact, they were bringing in Jewish people from smaller centers into our city because a portion of it was a ghetto. A portion of it, and we had barbed wire--

is in Soroca? You're talking about the ghetto in Soroca, right?

No, no, this is a ghetto in Oradea Mare.

Oh, OK.

Yeah, Soroca is where my--

Oh, that was where you were born, I'm sorry.

Born, and at the other end of Romania.

Yeah, I'm sorry, right, right.

But at that time-- by that time the Russians or Ukrainians took part of Soroca, so Romania didn't have it. And also, Hungary took the other side of the province-- a portion of the province of Transylvania.

So let's talk now about the ghetto. What did that mean to you, and--

Well the ghetto meant that we were hoarded in this area.

So you had to move out-- had you been living as a child in a house or an apartment?

In our house.

You were in a house, OK. So you had to leave your house--

Yes.

--to go into the ghetto?

Actually, our house was you walked in and there were three houses inside, and they had three owners. And side by side inside a yard were three houses. But you had to get into the yard. They were all Jewish, all the three people-- the three families.

And we had to leave that. We had to go into the ghetto, which was maybe eight, nine blocks away and stay there. And they had a fence around the ghetto, barbed wires and police that you couldn't get out. But you had to look after your own existence. They didn't feed you there.

What did you take with you from home as a teenage boy? Did you take anything special with you?

Not to my knowledge. We just took so many suitcases and whatever. And many things we had precious we hid by digging up a hole in our yard to leave there. And that's how we were doing.

And I know that after the war I had an aunt in Iasi-- Iasi is a city in Romania-- who survived everything because she didn't go to camp at all. And she was a pharmacist there, and her husband was a professor at the university. But they had no children, so I contacted her.

And I contacted her by the time I got to France. And she was alive and so on, didn't go to any camps at all. And she, many weeks later, went where we used to live. And I told her all the places that I hid.

Oh, my.

And it was still there.

Oh, my.

And so yeah.

Yeah, so now you're in the ghetto. What kind of living conditions was it?

The living condition is that you had to share it five, six people in a room, whatever it is. That's basically-- they are very tight. And the--

And how did you get food?

Well, if you had the money, and everybody had something, you could go and buy food.

Inside the ghetto?

Inside the ghetto make food. But we did not stay in the ghetto that long. And we knew that because they were planning to get the trains going through the ghetto to pick up the people. And so we knew it was just a matter of time. In fact, we were the last or almost the last people leaving the ghetto by train. So--

What language did you speak with your parents?

Mostly Yiddish, but I could speak Hungarian and Romanian.

And what about to your friends and in school?

I would say there mostly Hungarian, because that was Hungary. And so in school, when they were teaching Hungarian, most of the kids already spoke Hungarian at home. Not us, we didn't speak Hungarian at home. But we spoke Yiddish I would say. Yeah, my dad was fluent in French, but not my mother.

So what did you do during the day in the ghetto?

I would say as a young person nothing.

OK, were there many other children that you saw your age?

In the ghetto?

Yes.

Yes, of course. Yes.

And did you talk about with your friends what was happening? Was this something that you spoke about as a young boy?

If I have I cannot remember.

OK, so how long were you in the ghetto?

Not that much, not that long.

Approximately do you know? Approximately?

Approximately I thought maybe two months, two-and-a-half months.

OK.

Now, you see, that came fast. It came fast because the province of Transylvania is closer to the mountains, and the Russians were on the other side the mountains. And so we were just hoping and praying that they cross the mountains and attack, but that did not happen when we were still there.

Did your family have a radio in the ghetto? Were you aware of what was happening?

Yes, there was a radio. We were able to listen listened to it, but they were listening to the radio.

Yeah, and what about newspapers or just to find out what was happening in the rest--

I can't remember there were newspapers, because I would say no.

Yeah, and any classes, any lectures in the ghetto?

Not in the ghetto.

OK, so now it's '44. And the next--

It is now '44-- spring of '44, yes.

And what happened next?

Well, we were told that the trains are going to come and take us away, and they did come whenever they told us. And within five to six days they emptied the ghetto. And we the last or second last in the train to leave. When we left, there was nobody else left in the ghetto.

Do you know why you were among the last?

I don't know, because they distributed certain areas.

I see.

You go first, you go second, you go third, forth, whatever it is.

Yeah.

And they had the trains coming in into the ghetto to put you into the train.

Did you know where you were going? Did you know where you were going?

No.

No.

We were--

How did you know-- how did your family know that you were supposed to leave?

Oh, they were telling us. They were telling us which district. So the gendarmes came in and they went from house to house and we just joined and to get on the train. And they were saying, the gendarmes were actually saying-- and I heard that with my own, ears-- you don't need this. They were asking for money, they were asking especially jewelry. Wherever you are going, without telling us where, you won't need it.

Yeah. Were there any antisemitic incidents with the guards in the ghetto?

No, there were not that many guards inside the ghetto. So you can walk in the ghetto from one street to another and you wouldn't run into anybody.

OK, so now you're told to leave.

We're told to leave. We get on the trains. Well, the trains were cattle cars. And they had approximately less than 100, 90, 91, 92, whatever it is in one of those cars.

And at that time they also had two gendarmes in the car-- inside to travel. And they were the worst, because they really



wanted money, jewelry, and whatever. And they kept telling us, and they were right, that wherever you're going you wouldn't need it, and so on and so forth. So some were gave them something, some did not want to. We didn't believe a lot of things, and they said it's just a bunch of [INAUDIBLE].

What nationality were the guards?

Hungarian.

Hungarian, yeah.

Yeah.

So you're on-- and what was that trip like getting into the cattle car you said? Can you describe some of the conditions, if you remember?

Well, the idea is that the cattle cars also had containers used for--

For sanitation you mean?

Sanitation purposes. It was, mind you, this was spring, so it was [INAUDIBLE] of course. And we did stop at the border when we left Hungary. And therefore-- why? Because the Hungarian troops or whatever guarding us left us at the border, and I cannot remember who replaced them. I don't think that it was German troops. Somebody else replaced them at the border.

Did you have any food? Did they give you any food, or did your mother bring food?

We had to bring our own food. They weren't feeding you during that. I don't know about water, I can't remember. But I think that they brought in or allowed containers of water for everybody, whatever it is, but not food. And everybody had to bring their own food. But it was packed, because people were bringing whatever they could bring.

Could you lie down to sleep?

It's mostly sitting down.

Sitting, yeah. And how did your parents handle this with you?

Well--

Were they comforting, or were they frightened?

No, no they-- well, my father was in command, so to speak. And so I was under his umbrella. Because we knew that we would be separated and they were hoping that I can go with him, wherever it is. But we knew that they separated us when we get to Germany. We did not know anything about Auschwitz or Birkenau.

OK, so you did not know where you were going at that point?

No. No, no. In fact, even when we arrived in Birkenau there were no signs saying Birkenau or Auschwitz.

And in the car-- we'll get to that in a minute. On the train, on those few days of the trip I think did you say four days or something? What was the atmosphere in the car like? Were people quiet or were they very upset?

Well, everybody was upset--

Do you have any memories of that?

--and everybody was quiet.

Were people comforting each other? Do you remember?

The answer is probably no. Because I've been on similar trains while in camps and so on where people there during the night and so on, they became mental patients. They were ranting and raving and so on and so forth. But not on this trip to Auschwitz.

So now you arrive at Auschwitz, and what was that like? Can you describe when your train came to a stop?

Well, early in the morning-- we arrived early in the morning. And actually, we must have arrived during the night, because early in the morning like 6:00 the train was someplace else, and that's when they start going into the camp, which is a slow motion way to wherever they had to stop. And then we looked out the cattle car we saw troops there.

And I can't see remember to this day whether they were German troops or Polish troops, or whatever it is. But we definitely saw them standing side by side with bayonets and holding onto bayonets on both sides of the train. Because you could open the car on each side.

And then there were actually even prisoners who were working to help us to get out of those cars-- prisoners who were in Auschwitz helping us getting out of the cars. And telling us, of course, no you don't need that, just leave it in the car. Because the orders were leave everything, all baggage, in the car. And so they insisted and people didn't listen. They still wanted to take this bag or that bag, whatever it is. And they said no, no, no.

So and that was people who were actually working in the camps. So they were prisoners who said no, no, don't. They didn't say anything except that. That was their job, and to line up and so on.

And looking back, the tragedy was that everybody was shocked. Whatever the guys seen they were in shock. And families being separated right in front of their eyes, the shock and so on. And I can understand now, but not at that time.

Of course.

Because the only thing my mother wanted that stick to your dad, go where your dad is, and so on and so forth. Well, that's a wish that didn't happen. Because she could see, I am guessing, that even when we went to the area where for men and boys that they were separating us right there. You could see it.

They were only half a block away or less. So my mother definitely could see that they took me away from my dad. But I went with my dad to where I was told to go and so on, so forth.

And I would say now, thinking back, looking back that most people were in shock. Because whatever they expected was worse. And so but the mothers were clinging to the kids. The kids were crying, and so on and so forth, so it was chaos. Yeah.

Yeah, so then did your parents say anything to you especially?

Yes, I think I wrote that down, because I can't remember the word that they said. I know they were talking to me. I know that my mother was crying. But my mind was blank, because I honestly-- and I thought about it many, many times what my mother said. And I cannot remember a word. And I know that she was talking to me.

So you were then taken to a group of young people?

Yeah, but first of all, they separated my mother and my father and I. My father and I went to the right, but not very far, because I would say 20 or 30 feet we were separated. We were separated, and I can't remember whether we were separated after somebody asked my age or whatever it is. But they said no, you go here and you go over there.

Yeah, and you're 14 years old? You're 14 years old?

Yeah, that's right.

So you went to this group of young people?

Yes.

Was it young boys? Young--

Yeah, I would say between 13 and maybe up to 17, 18 thereabouts. And they said--

But it was boys only? It wasn't--

That's right. I ended up with the boys only. But first I ended up with my dad and myself.

Yes, yes. And then where did they take your group? Where did you--

Well, they took us into a camp. You see, these camps are camps within a camp within a camp. So we marched at, I can't remember, maybe five, 10 blocks or more into this other camp. They opened the gate and we could see that there were young people there.

And there was somebody in the camp, a Jewish person who looked out of the camp, and he took over the group and found spots to-- here, you stay here, you stay there, and whatever it is. So and then the rest, of course, were talking to the young people there. And--

So how did you sleep? What was the conditions like in this camp?

Well, they had these wooden bunks.

Bunks, yeah.

Two or three up. And so they all looked alike, and they said, well, this is where you-- this is yours. And that's sort of non-eventful. Yes, but you didn't have a cover, you didn't have a pillow.

Did you have to share your bunk with anybody or did you have your own bunk?

Everybody had-- everybody was given a bunk. Yeah, well you shared it because somebody was next to you, so to speak.

Yeah. OK, and what about food?

Food in concentration camp-- and that applied all concentration camp-- we were fed approximately early evening. And that applies everywhere in the concentration camps that I've been. It was soup. You got soup, and you got a slice of bread.

Were you still wearing your clothes that you came with?

That's a good question, because the answer is no. So we must have gone to take a shower or whatever. Because when I got to the camp, inside the camp-- the group-- we wore what was given to us except for shoes.

You could keep your shoes and the rest you left before you went to a shower. And you didn't see the clothes again. Your shoes were on and you were allowed to keep your shoes.

Were you wearing a uniform, a striped uniform?

A striped uniform, yes. That's right.

Oh, you were?

Yes, yes.

OK. Were you tall or short physically? What was your physical condition?

That's a good question. I can't remember the height. I wasn't very short, but I was very tall.

Yeah, you were average? You mean average.

Average, whatever that means.

OK, and the other boys, did you talk with them?

Yeah, well we talked with the boys. But there again-- actually, we were trying to find out from the other boys how long have you been here and whatever it is. So whatever information we got was non-eventful or they didn't want to tell us, or they did not know.

So what did you do during the day?

Nothing.

You just--

Absolutely nothing. I know that some boys were cleaning this and that, house cleaning and whatever it is. But I didn't get to that stage I suppose where they said this is what I want you to do and so on.

Were there roll calls? Did they--

Yes, oh, yes. Oh, yes.

What was that like for a 14-year-old?

Well, it's an eye opener that the roll call was extremely important. They talked to you over and over again. Originally twice a day and it was important. And if you were lectured about something or something that's when they announced it while you were standing in roll calls. We're going to do this and that, or whatever, whatever.

So roll calls that's when somebody, a uniformed German, came into your camp, and he accompanied whoever to look you over, just walk by you, look you over, whatever it is. And also telling whoever looked after the prisoner to tell the people about this and that, and that announcement. But roll call was very important to them. And definitely you have to be up there and so on and so forth, and they counted you-- everybody twice a day.

Did you know-- you knew you were in Auschwitz, right?

Oh, yeah. I--

What did Auschwitz mean to you?

OK, to be honest with you, I didn't know the word Auschwitz.

What it meant, yeah.

Yeah, I knew that I was in a concentration camp.

Concentration camp called Auschwitz, but you didn't understand what it meant. Yeah.

I knew nothing about Auschwitz before I got there.

Before you got there, OK. So you're in this camp, and one day is like the next you said? With roll calls--

That's right.

And you ate once a day. Did they give you any bread at least?

Yeah, when they gave you the soup you line up for bread. But I remember other camps-- I can't remember where-- where because of my condition and so on, that's almost at the end of the war and so on, where by the time I was standing next to get the soup and there was no more soup. And so they gave me nothing. And so it was very important for survival that you line up you half an hour or an hour before. But I know that nobody gave a damn the fact that the soup ran out. Yeah.

So you just spent the days with the other boys. And then what was the next event--

I spent the-- yes--

And then what happened?

And that's why I wrote that, because I did nothing unusual being a boy like that. I was closer to the main entrance, just curiosity wanting to know what's going on. But I wasn't the only one.

And there was always, especially when you saw people coming in, especially you wanted to make sure that the soup is coming for the day. And so on, so you wanted to know whether we're going to get it. And so I sort of congregated. But we must have been-- I'm guessing now 20, 25 people just loitering in there, and just watching, really.

And so that's why my story, one of my escapades as what has happened. And I always thought about it, and I thought maybe the hand of god or something. That somebody will ask me to grab a hold of the empty can. And the person who asked me, never seen him in my life before or after, and walk out this camp. You are still in camp when you walk out from this camp. It's a camp within a camp.

Did your barracks have a number at all? Or a label?

If there were, I do not know. If there were, I'm sure there must have been. But I can't remember.

And did you ever have a number on your arm, or they didn't do that?

No, by the time we were-- before if you were taken to Auschwitz, not Birkenau, they were doing these things. So many coming in, prisoners per day, that they discontinued that and definitely not so much in Birkenau. If anything, if you arrived and you were in the Auschwitz part, which is the older part time, they used to. And that's how they kept track of you. But when they start bringing prisoners into Birkenau they discontinued that. They couldn't keep up.

So you said--

I don't have a number.

You said that some man came over? Can you tell me about what happened? Some man asked you to take hold of the

soup cans?

Yeah, I was there and he says, boy, grab a hold of the container. Well, it's an empty container. And so I did, and follow me. And by the time I realized it took two or three minutes. I realized I was out of that barrack.

At first I thought he wants me to help them to take it out, and then he'll tell me to go back. But nobody told me to go back, we kept on going. And the funny part is that I saw the soldiers right at the door, and they just followed the 10 people.

And so it just dawned on me once I was in the other camp, in the senior camp, when somebody told me when I started to put two and two together. That's when I became very panicky. I said, they can shoot me or this and that and so on. And I was told not to say anything, and of course I said nothing.

So here you have a 14-year-old one who is-- I never face these things. And I was wondering here and there why these people have done that, I haven't got a clue. Because whoever talked to me, no relation of mine, and in fact, they said very little. Whatever they said it was just one sentence things.

And definitely they didn't want me to recognize their face. In other words, because if I get into trouble I will identify them, and that's the last thing they wanted to do for their own safety. So who--

And this is an adult camp in Birkenau, right?

Correct. So therefore, I would be sticking out as the very young person. Not only that, in my voice. Because when once [INAUDIBLE] was asking somebody-- shut up. Because people would hear a young boy. You've seen them and turn around, and so on and so forth.

But at that time I just I was totally in panic, shock, and whatever. And but many, many months while I was sitting in the camp I was trying to put these things together part of my life as to why this happened and that happened. And that's why I said in my mind, it just-- and especially I remember, and this was my first eye opener, when it started to rain terribly.

So everybody-- not everybody, maybe 90%, were running out putting their coats above their head. And these adults-- I knew, but not knew. I saw them before, two or three on each side of me, running with me, doing exactly the same thing. And I remember still this is a German soldier who was carrying a machine gun or whatever it is standing next to the truck, and everybody was running into the truck.

We had to go up three or four steps. And I was told also, go right to the very back in the truck. It's sort of a truck had a canvas on it. So they--

How did they know what language to speak to you, the other prisoners?

Well, this was Yiddish.

Oh, it was all Yiddish. OK.

Yeah. And because some people, notwithstanding that Yiddish and German is very similar, but some people didn't speak German at all. Just Yiddish, We understood more or less the German language.

So you said it was raining and you ran?

Oh it was-- well, it was a rainy week or whatever it is. So it was not unusual, but they were telling me ahead of time in case it rains, we will run beside you on each side. These are adults, and have our coats above our heads.

Up high, yeah.

And you run in between us. You run in between us, so therefore they knew that, and they expected-- I don't know what they expected-- and hoped that it would rain. But it didn't only rain, it was just coming down in buckets. So everybody-- everybody meaning the other ones done the same thing who had nothing to do with me.

So running to the trucks, to get into the trucks with your arms up over your head, everybody was doing that. So in other words, nobody paid attention.

So you got into the trucks? And were you--

Yes, we get into the truck with the rest. And of course, when they had the-- I don't know how many per truck, we left the camp.

I'm sorry, you say you left the camp?

Yeah, we left. Well, the truck left the camp.

Oh, so how long were you there? Do you know, in Auschwitz?

All in all?

Yeah, total.

I would say from seven to nine-- 11 days or whatever.

11 days you said?

Maybe, maximum. I don't even think-- if you put all those things that I wrote together, maybe 10, maybe 10 and a half, whatever.

And this is summer of '44?

Correct.

OK, so now you're in the truck. And what's the next--

Now we're in the truck and we're going to-- I did not know where, but Breslau, and I haven't got a clue where Breslau is anyway. And we know that it is in Poland, and it's north-- north of wherever Auschwitz is.

I don't-- what about your parents? Did you--

No, I never seen them again after we arrived.

OK, and did you try-- I mean, you didn't know, of course. Did you try to get in touch with them? Was there any way that you thought you could? I know you couldn't-- I know you couldn't. But did you try?

Well, I didn't have a clue. So obviously, they did not go through the gas chambers, because my father-- and that's what I put in my thing. I heard that he was in Flossenburg, which I was too. But he was--

Yeah.

Yeah, and then my mother I heard later on-- later run after I was--

So I just wanted to make sure, you had no contact with them in Auschwitz-- No I had no contact.

-- when you were there and they were there in different parts-- in different parts?

That's right. That's correct.

OK.

That's correct.

OK, so now you're on the truck. You said you're going to near Breslau?

Yeah, we're going towards Breslau. And when we got there-- we didn't make the city. I don't know, it may have been 30, 40, 50 kilometers from Breslau. But you could see the city in the distance.

We were in a castle that was built prior to World War One, or during or whatever it is-- a huge castle. And they were fortifying it. They were fortifying it before we got there, and to do that they cut this wall out and that wall out, and built other walls, and so on.

And they had lots of prisoners. Not all Jewish, not all from concentration camps. And what I remember is women-- Ukrainian women, and apparently they had a camp not too far from there. And they were working in the same place.

So they had a hodgepodge of nationalities building this-- well, the castle was built, just enforcing it. And there were lots of Air Force guys, German Air Force guys. Because obviously, it was something the Air Force was involved-- German Air Force. But they were building for this fortress that they were hoping to use, this castle and whatever.

But they had been working on it at least a year, year and a half before we got there. You see, and that's where we were sent to. But of course, the place was closer to wherever the front Russian German front was than Auschwitz was. But it was north of there. I never was in the city of Breslau, but we could see the city. So anyhow, and again, we did not stay that long there.

Did you have to work there at all?

Yes, oh yes.

What did you do?

What I did is they had-- hard to explain. They had wooden little platforms that on each side they had handles on. So you put stones or garbage on it, or whatever, and you carried it-- two people-- and you carried it uphill, downhill, wherever you had to dispose of it. So there is a name for it. So that's what I was doing all day, taking things from here, taking it half a mile away or more, up or down the steps inside to the people who were actually putting it together.

Were there any air raids at all?

Pardon?

Were there any air raids? Was there any bombings?

Lots of air raids, but not air raids that you could actually tell. Especially in the evening you could see in the distance where they were bombing, but not us.

Good, yeah.

Yeah. And so we had a small camp, not a concentration camp, small camp not too far away, like maybe four kilometers, 10 kilometers of barbed wire. And it was a work camp they called it. And early morning, we went there, and 5:00, 6:00 in the evening we went home. And every day, and so on so forth.



Enough food, did they give you enough food?

Yes, the conditions were very good actually, compared to the concentration camp. We got two meals a day.

And you're still wearing your striped uniform?

Oh, yes, oh, yes. And so--

Was there any badge or any marking on your uniform?

No. No the-- but, like I said, it wasn't all Jewish. We have stripes, the other ones were also in camp, but I don't know why. And Ukrainians, and so on and so forth, and I remember women doing the same thing that us young people were doing.

And so the conditions-- the security you knew that nobody would harm you if you do your job. And I do remember things, lots of things, because some people just tried to get lost. And they were hung later on. And we had the roll call, and we had to watch the hanging, and so on and so forth, because they wanted to make sure that nobody leaves the area or just walks away. The opportunities were there to just walk away.

How does a 14-year-old handle something like that?

Well, not-- it's a shock, because they catch somebody, and you get a lecture and think it's all over. Then about 10 days later some SS officers arrived, and they hang somebody for the same person. Because what he was accused of he has done two weeks ago or three weeks ago, or whatever it is. And you get a speech to go with it.

And they made you watch it, you mean? Watch the hanging?

Yes, that's right. Is that don't they are doing this, and don't they are doing that. And the funny part is that I remember the incident, one of the many, that they have hung two people, and one was not Jewish at all. But he was in the camp because he married a Jewish lady. And therefore-- and they--

But my question was how does a 14-year-old handle watching a hanging?

Not very well. Not very well. It's a shock. Everything is a shock. And--

And do you talk, again, did you talk it over with the other boys your age?

I cannot remember.

Yeah, OK.

The fact is that-- I'll answer your question. One of the things in my life that affected my life is that I don't trust people. So even when I joined large law firms I decided not to. It's in me that don't trust people, and I cannot get rid of it. You have that, and it's perhaps going back all those years.

Of course.

That if you want to live long you don't trust people. Just walk your own way. It's built in, and I cannot get rid of that. So I don't make a good partnership, whether it's business or education or whatever it is. Because I have this genuine mistrust, and I think it comes from those days and whatever it is.

I'm sure.

Because you had to fight your own-- you don't depend on somebody-- risk your life on what somebody says they will do for you or whatever it is. Be independent, make your own decision without having to rely on somebody else, and it's built in.

So you're now working in this work camp. And how long were you there for?

Not that long, because they were advancing-- we already been told by the others there that they were told to prepare that they will have to be evacuated depending-- because the fortress would not be ready. It would not be ready-- I don't know how many months they expected whatever it is. Even though they had lots of Air Force soldiers there, because well, that was their department obviously, and so on and so forth.

And we had nothing to do with the soldiers, but they were there because this is part of their project. So the project was not completed, I would say maybe 50% or 60% completed, whatever it was. And not only that, I mean, it didn't take too much to figure out that the Russians can-- if it's the Russians, they can go around it. They don't have to attack that specific thing. But anyway--

So you left that work camp after how many days did you say?

I would say almost two months, but short of two months.

Two months, oh my, OK. And then where did you go?

And when they told us that we have to retreat this time we had to walk. We had to walk. We don't know why. Well, I can imagine that the railway cars were too busy with the troops retreating, so it was walking.

So we walked at least three days on the highway. And the highway was packed-- not quite highway-- packed with civilians carrying whatever baggage they had and whatever it is. So they were retreating. Don't know why, but they were retreating as well. Nothing to do with the army.

And one highway retreating we all went the same direction. And I cannot remember whether it was south or east or west or whatever it is. And but the soldiers were around us, bayonets and so on, each side and just marched for three days or three and 1/2 or whatever it is. And at night we stopped, and then we left the highway. But we were surrounded by soldiers, so we actually slept wherever we were right on the ground.

Did you find the soldiers very frightening with their uniforms and their bayonets?

To be honest to you, I--

Or did you just get used to them?

That's a very good question. I stayed away from them. I was going to say miles away-- I stayed away, not making any conversation at all. Because especially at this time, when you're not dealing with kids anymore because you're dealing with people of all ages, I felt again, I don't trust people. Don't get involved, don't talk to them. Yeah, so I had zero conversation with soldiers, because you did not know whether they were genuinely German or maybe Polish, maybe what. And--

So then it was three days of marching I think you said? Did you say that?

Yeah, three days of marching.

And then where were you after that?

I was someplace in Czechoslovakia. Because they were saying-- because you could see signs, which were most often in German. And so we knew that we were in Czechoslovakia, or maybe somebody was saying. And then we walked

towards-- because we ended up at the railway station, namely Prague. It said Prague.

And there they had a cattle car waiting for us. Because when we arrived there they were saying there is our car, everybody can get into those coaches. So somebody arranged it, and so on and so forth.

So we were back in a cattle car and so on, and we said we'll continue. We were happy because we don't have to walk. We'll continue to the [INAUDIBLE].

But those cars-- and we got something to eat there before we got into the cars. But those cars were stuck there for almost two days. And I don't know why, but I can assume because the orders probably they had to decide where to send us. I don't know. I did not know.

And so but we knew that we were in, like I said, friendly territory in the sense that the people who lived there knew who these people are, and they were trying to help I suppose. And the only thing that they said they can help is leave some food.

Leave food, yeah.

Yeah, it's not much to survive, but they did. Which means that they are in solidarity with you, whoever they are, so on and so forth.

Did they let you get out of the cars at all--

No. No.

--to walk around?

They would not. That you couldn't do, and the soldier was not allowed to let you out. But they said because you are in a train station that you can go to the latrine. So if you had to go, there were always groups of maybe seven, eight, nine people going at the same time with two soldiers to the latrine. Because you were in a train station that you had other people there, and so on and so forth.

And then you came back and you went by your train and some food. They didn't allow you, or looked the other way, whatever it is, when you bent down and picked it up and brought it into the car, and so on and so forth. And so some of us went to the latrine more often than we had to.

And then how long-- you were there what, for two days in the car?

For almost two days at the train. And I'm just guessing that they did not know where to take us. And that's why, I'm just guessing.

And then we left there, and I can't remember how many days we traveled, but we went to a concentration camp, which is I think Flossenburg. And apparently that was a very large concentration camp.

So we're talking about close to 1945 now? Or the winter months?

Yes. Yes, in the fall-- late fall.

Of '44?

Of '44, correct.

OK, so you go to Flossenburg, and what was that like and how long--

Yeah, it was a large-- a very large concentration camp.

How long did you stay in Flossenburg?

Not that long, because they were sending out people wherever they can to work camps. And that's exactly-- and I remember, I wanted to go out to work camps. So I stood in line and they put a number on a forehead.

And I got three quarters, and apparently you had to have four, so I got rejected. So I stood in line again next day, and so on, until I qualified to go to work camp. You see, and I remember also that I was crying because another fellow, more or less couple years older than I, I kept saying he's my brother, I want to go with him. I remember that.

Could you please explain why they turned you back first? I didn't understand.

Well, I cannot tell, except that I was-- they looked me over, obviously. And they said well, he's not a big fellow, or he wouldn't be able to do whatever.

Oh he's, I see, yeah, couldn't do the heavy work.

They were saying-- but I remember they put a number on my forehead with a crayon. And obviously, the number was 3/4. So obviously, when I kept on going-- kept on going meaning another 50 feet-- the fellow there, the officer would say no, no, no I was rejected.

I see.

But I tried again and again, meaning a couple of days later on another project. And then I was telling-- well, I was telling the officer, I said I want to go with my brother that you just took. And there was no brother. And so finally he relented. And I wanted to get out of the concentration camp.

What were the conditions in Flossenburg?

I can't remember, but nothing unusual. And it was a very large camp.

You slept in bunks and barracks? In a--

Yes, same thing. That was very common, that was almost identical. But I learned, obviously, the best place to be is outside of a concentration camp. Work camp, no problem. You do what you can and so on and so forth.

And I also knew-- well, not knew, that I remember when we were still walking, and I can't remember from where to where, walking. And German people were starting to leave food which we couldn't get. Which was unusual for places, because normally German people, saw people, going by and so on with soldiers and so on, they just turned the other way. But this way, this was-- my interpretation was at that time that the end must be coming, nearing, and people have realized that things are not working out.

Not working out.

The population.

So from Flossenburg then you were there and for how long did you stay?

Well, Flossenburg, I can't remember, but I didn't stay very long.

OK, and then where did you go?

Well, they sent us to a work camp. But I don't know the name, because we never got there. Because they put us on train,

and we got to another place, which was I think a semi concentration camp or whatever, Freiberg or whatever it is. But we only stayed there for a day or two.

So from Freiberg, maybe from Freiberg they sent us to this place that we never made it. The last one we left Freiberg, and it was only few days from Freiberg again. They were taking us to a place or places where it was already bombed a lot.

And so we had to gather this and gather that, whatever it is. And I don't know to this day why. But anyway, so even when we went there different places, we were always interrupted with air raids. So we--

Were you on a train? You were on trains, right?

We were in trains, yeah.

Was it a cattle car or passenger car?

Yes, we were 90% of the time in cattle cars. The only passenger car we were in is the last few days. There was one that it was a real train that we were on. And I don't know where we were going, but we were daytime.

Their planes-- the train was bombed. But didn't hit, the bombs were falling. And I remember that we speeded up and we got into a tunnel. And we stayed in the tunnel. And we stayed in the tunnel most of the day.

And so the answer was, you don't use a train anymore because you must be very close to the fighting area. So we left for a train, and about an hour later air raids again. So the orders were everybody down, the train did stop.

And I remember, this is a real train that I went down the floor. And the order was everybody down, so I had to go onto other fellows, young fellows on top of me, but I just didn't mind. And I was there almost an hour, and I could hear bombs falling, I heard a machine gun and so on.

But it was through, and I remember there was also some water close by. So there must have been a river close by to the train. And then we heard raus, everybody to get out, and so I got some out, the people who were on top of me. And one fellow, more or less my age, maybe a year or two older, I got him off me. And I looked at his face and both eyes were shot out.

Oh my.

So I was, again, lucky that I was down, down, down on the floor and others were on top of me. Yeah, and from there everybody had to get out of the train and we were chased up the hill. And we were there for four or five hours and then marched back into the train, because [INAUDIBLE] so on and so forth.

And so they started to use trains then for anybody, no longer cattle cars, because I suppose that meant they had to organize if a train is-- so anyway, but we were still on our way to this war camp. I don't know what it is, because we never made it. So then one morning, and this is back to the real train, we see other prisoners are opening the doors and so on. And they said that everybody's gone, there's no soldiers here.

And now this time the train had-- they had the war prisoners. In other words, not the concentration camp people, but--

Prisoners of war?

Yeah, even Auschwitz had those and some camps. And they were saying that they had whoever is running the locomotive is gone, and that there's no soldiers. So I didn't go out, but others did go out to look and they all come back. They say there's no soldiers.

And then somebody was saying see the village over there? Let's go, and of course these prisoners are saying it's terrible

to be here alone, because you never know what's going to happen. Somebody is going to come and start shooting at you from whatever.

So anyway, everybody went out and we decided to walk the three or four kilometers, because you can see this little village there. And about a half a mile before we were stopped by German soldiers. So said who are you, and they explained to them. So there was two soldiers around us, and they marched us downtown into a church basement.

What was the name of the town? Do you know?

Tuttlingen.

Tuttlingen, OK.

It wasn't a camp of any kind, and they had nobody else there. So when we got there they say well-- they were obviously expecting allies coming or somebody, soldiers, because there were soldiers in tanks all over. And so they took us down to a church.

And remember, just not half of us, but not everybody was Jewish there. They had Russians and mostly men that were in camp, too. So down to the church basement, so we were there until three, four hours. Then somebody-- well, they had soldiers guarding us up there.

They ran down and were saying-- and we knew that bombs are falling, you could hear it. They said everybody out because the church is on fire. So everybody was running upstairs. And you opened the door, and you see tanks all over. And but it was very hilly, and you can see hills, so hills and lots of trees.

And so really it was a village, notwithstanding that there's a downtown and whatever. So we started running, everybody was running out. But there were planes above us. We saw that, because they were coming down and with machine guns.

So I was running after whoever ran in front of me, and so on so forth. And bombs were falling, and every time [INAUDIBLE] it got us where it was close by everybody just hit the ground. And after a while nobody-- there was one explosion very close, and I hit the ground. And then I had to sit up, I couldn't.

Whoever was in front of me didn't move. The other two people close to me on each side didn't move. And obviously, so I couldn't tell, but I didn't have the time to investigate. So I assume that they must have been killed, whatever it is.

But that's when my leg was hit. So must be a sharpnel or something that hit it. Because it was bloody, and I just wanted to get out of there instead of sitting down and finding out what's wrong with me.

And so it's still going up the hill, crawled up and I noticed some bunkers. It was not only hilly, but there was trees there, a bunker. So I was-- it took me time to get up there.

And then I was trying to get in one of the bunkers, but these are civilians down in the bunkers. And they weren't happy at all to allow me in. They didn't trust me or whatever, and there were children there, German men and women, young and old.

And you spoke German?

Yes, I spoke German, I could understand German and respond. So I asked for to let me in. Well, I could understand, they were talking and they were not happy to let us in because they didn't trust us. I mean, they knew what was going on because they could see it.

But they told me that because the bombs were still falling below, the village was below. And they said all right, let the boy in, but temporarily. Well, that was great as long as they-- but nobody I didn't ask, and nobody would touch my leg. And I couldn't stand on it, but I could crawl.

And so the last thing I wanted to let them know that I have medical problems. I was happy that the less they know, as long as I can just get into this bunker in the corner and sit there. So late afternoon somebody did approach me and say no, we don't want you here over night. They were afraid of everybody there.

And they said, well, the rest of you are still down there. Why don't you go down to the village? You could see the village because we were high up. And so anyway, I was out, so I was trying to crawl down, but I never got down. Because the further down I went I could see everything was burning. Many tanks there with people on the tanks. In other words, dead people on the tanks.

But very, very quiet. It was-- you could hear the burning of wood, whatever it is, very quiet-- extremely quiet. So I decided, no, no, I better not. A, I didn't have the energy, because I thought if I got back down I have to start climbing up, and climbing up is twice as hard as going down.

And so I was-- I just stayed put. And I slept overnight, stayed the night there. And early morning I heard tanks-- I didn't see tanks, but I heard tanks. I heard [INAUDIBLE] and whatever it is. But I couldn't see anything, and so I was there for at least actually until about 11:00 or noon before I actually saw tanks. And I could see it's not a German tank. So that's why I decided to crawl down.

And I finally got down there. And these were people that were soldiers, they had stopped and they made their own meal or whatever it is there, and spoke French. And then later on I found out they spoke French, and some were actually speaking even German. I found out that they were the Foreign Legion.

Oh, OK, the French Foreign Legion?

Yes. And I heard about the Foreign Legion before the war started and whatever it is, and so on and so forth. But they were not helpful. They didn't want to share any food at all. They said, well, you find yourself some money and so on and so forth, or find our officer, or whatever. But there was nobody around.

But they left all of a sudden. Obviously, they were only there for two hours, three hours, whatever it is. And they just got back in their tanks and so on, and about an hour or two they were gone. But they were telling me that the rest of the army is just-- it'd be here in no time.

But nobody did come. And nobody did come down the rest of the day and so on. But so I was lingering on in that area, and I saw some other people from the camp also. Some were actually in a bunker, which was all full. But next morning I could see many of the allied tanks coming in and so on and so forth.

And that's when I went down. And I finally found somebody who looked like an officer. And I showed him my leg and so on, so he took me for re-bandaging and so on and so forth. But he says he cannot take me back to the hospital, and so on, there are too many snipers.

And he says I may have to wait a day or later in the day. Well, later in the day turned out to be the following day. That he had also wounded people that he had to send back to the base. So he put me in the Jeep and two or five Jeeps, and we expected that when they have snipers, but there was no snipers at all, which is fine.

And then he took me to it-- I don't know if it's a town or just a military base or whatever. And there they took me on a stretcher, and they took me to the so-called airstrip. It wasn't an airport, an airstrip.

And when I got there, there were many tents there. And everybody there in the tent were on stretchers. So these are the wounded that they were planning to ship back home [INAUDIBLE]. But I don't know how far back home was, because they put me on a plane on a stretcher with the other stretchers.

And the place that we arrived was Strasbourg, so that was France already. But even at the airport, back in the airport, there were soldiers and so on and they said we cannot get you into the hospital downtown. But whoever was on with me

and so on, they decided to send into Colmar. Colmar is a town in Alsace-Lorraine. If you look at the map it's south of that province.

So that's what they did. They put in ambulances, not air-- ambulances. And these ambulances had the four stretchers per ambulance. And I remember the sirens were on for two or three hours while they were traveling full speed down to Colmar.

When we arrived there they knew where to go. When we arrived there, they took us to a so-called hospital, but basically that was a school at one time. And obviously, now it's a hospital.

So they left me-- meanwhile, nobody fed you, because if you are wounded they are not supposed to feed you. Because they don't know what's wrong with you and so on and so forth. So I begged for food, but nobody would give me anything.

But they got me in, and within about half an hour or so on it's a fellow, obviously a doctor, who was in charge came to see me. Because I was a young boy and I [INAUDIBLE] and I was not in the army. So he said-- so he was talking to me when we found out that he is-- he asked me where I was born, you see. Because I had problems speaking, because I wasn't-- I knew a little bit of French, but not very much.

So finally, when I mentioned Romania, he starts speaking to me in Romanian. And so I said-- so he was telling me that he's born-- that his parents were Romanian, still are, living in France. But he was born in France, and of course, and so on. Now he's a captain, and so on and so forth.

And he put me in a ward. Mind you, there were at least 20, 30 people in that ward. And he really looked after me to the point that I was bedridden all the time. But I had people coming in to give me injections about four or five times a day. I don't know what kind of injections. And I could hardly sit on my fanny, because we all-- yeah.

So he took care, not only of my own wound. My wound was the leg. But he did, and I remember from time to time soldiers died in the ward and so on, and more people came in.

Do you remember his name?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Do you know his name?

No. He didn't have a Romanian name. And so because when he told me, oh almost two, three weeks before I left that they are going to close the hospital because the school would start in September, and they had to close up, and that he will have to send me someplace. And he didn't tell me where he's going to send me, because he didn't know.

So the war, obviously, is over by now?

The war is over.

This is summer of '45 we're talking about?

That is correct.

OK, so the war is over. Did you know that the war was over when it was over?

Yes, I-- yes, I did.

How did you know? How did--



I was just in a-- I remember-- and I think that it must've been over before I left Tuttlingen. Because I remember--

Celebrating? Did they celebrate or?

No, because I remember there sitting when somebody from a house walked out, a gentleman-- an old gentleman, and saying I have good news for you. The war is over, and you're going to go home. And that's the first and the last time I saw the fellow, and I said nothing.

So he told me. He didn't give me details, He said the war was over last night, or whatever. So I was in Tuttlingen when the war was over. And the war was over May 8th, right? May 8th or 9th, so that's when I was still in Tuttlingen just hours before I was shipped.

Yeah, because I remember that's what he said. And he took the trouble to get out of his house. And I think he crossed the street-- he did cross the street, because I was sitting there, to tell me the news. In fact, he says now you're going to go home. Of course, I did not. But--

Did you still think your parents were alive at that point? Did you--

Yes.

You thought they were? OK.

Oh, yeah. You would not know until after that to understand how many people died and whatever took many, many, many months later.

Yes.

And that was actually when I was in Switzerland where you had the newspapers, and you had radio, notwithstanding your [INAUDIBLE]. So you don't know what's going on.

Well, we'll get to that. Yeah.

And I can talk to you for hours about Davos.

Well, yeah, we'll get to that. Let's-- you're back-- you're still in this--

I'm still, yeah--

With the Romanian doctor talking to you in Romanian in Colmar.

In Colmar, and he was sending me back. But he sent me back to to--

Strasbourg?

Strasbourg, and Strasbourg kept me in the hospital. This time they put me in the hospital. And I remember many people, mostly military people, coming to see me to photograph me there. And even women in the army, so obviously, I must have been talked about. Because the boy and so on, and they took many, many pictures constantly. I was only there for two, three days.

Yeah, and they didn't want to feed me, because they didn't know what's wrong with me, [INAUDIBLE] whatever it is. And then they shipped me to Paris.

To Paris, OK.

To the main hospital, yeah. So in Paris somebody [INAUDIBLE] the railway station to take me to the hospital. And that hospital, it's a huge hospital, I never seen so many beds side by side. And it was all those wounded. It was an eye opened.

But they looked after me, but they didn't have even room to take me to an operating room or anything. They just right there where the bed is, and to test me and so on and so forth. And I think I mentioned that they discovered I had TB.

And then when they found that out, I was persona non grata, in other words, they wanted me out, for good reason. Because they had wounded soldiers, and so on and so forth. So that's when the Red Cross came in. Because they did all the arrangements, the Red Cross, and to get rid of me via the Red Cross.

So obviously, because I didn't really belong there. It was an Army hospital. This was all the wounded. But I suppose this was an opportunity for them to get rid of me. But also the Red Cross was extremely efficient-- extremely efficient to make all those arrangements.

So they took you to a children's hospital?

Yes, because it takes time. Obviously, it takes time. So they took me to a children's hospital, and there they kept me isolated from everybody.

In fact, when they brought me food they didn't want to even see me. They just left food on the table. Well, they did not know. You can understand.

Sure, sure.

They did have kids there. And I don't know-- I didn't see how many and what ages, because I was very isolated. I had nobody to talk to, because nobody wanted to talk to me. Many of yeah, and so on, so when you call isolation and that was fantastic isolation, and so on so forth.

And they kept me because they had to arrange, because I wasn't the only one going to Switzerland. So that takes time and whatever it is. But it didn't take that-- 10, 11 days sounds like a long time, but it isn't when you have to make international connections and find a sanatorium in Davos.

So the only thing I want to add when it comes to Davos--

Well, how did you get there? How did you get to Davos? Did you go by train?

Oh, by train.

You got a train OK, to Davos?

Yeah.

OK, with the Red Cross and other--

The Red Cross, it was a train--

--and other young people?

Yeah, another four I think. I wasn't the only one. And those four, not all were in camp. I think out of the four at least two or three were in camp. The other two I do not know.

And so the funny part is that the lady who took us there, working for the Red Cross, was originally French, but raised in Algeria. And she also had TB. So they found somebody who-- so she looked after us, but herself too. And she also

stayed in the same sanatorium.

So but anyway, that's what it is. But I was going to say about Davos, in case you don't know, I didn't realize how many sanatoriums there were. They must have had at least 60 70 sanatoriums. It was very hilly-- very hilly.

It was an international place at that time. Now, it's a commercial international in Davos. But at that time, I suppose some of these hotels or semi-hotels or sanatoriums, it was famous before World War Two, obviously, and during because of being a sanatorium, which is up, up, up in the mountains.

In the mountains, yeah. So they took--

They used different methods. But I was going to say, is when I was able to walk around in Davos, some of my friends went to the other sanatoriums to talk to people who were in the concentration camp. I did not do that, but so my information comes from them. And they said that the place was packed in Davos after World War Two with people from concentration camps with tuberculosis.

In fact, many would not have made it, and my roommate there came and told me, you talk to them, knowing they're extremely ill, [INAUDIBLE] and they have great dreams that they're going to get better, and they're going to go home, and do this and that. When 60, 70% are told that their chances of survival is nil. In other words, TB has advanced.

And many have come from the concentration camps ended up in sanatoriums after the war. So and they had big dreams. I remember one that actually came to visit us, and he had big dreams. He lost a leg, but he was big dreams that he was going to Israel, and he was going to fight and all this.

I mean, dreaming in technicolor, because he was very ill with TB. It was as simple as that. But those are people, young people, who came out of the concentration camp had very high hopes and dreams. And yeah.

So you were in Davos for?

I was in Davos for about eight and 1/2 months.

OK, and then where did you go?

And then they sent me back. And the Red Cross was still involved. And then they put me in the OSE. OSE stands for--

The children's, yeah.

Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants, it's an organization for children. The Red Cross initiated it initially, apparently, before World War Two.

So you went back to France? You went back to France?

Pardon?

You went back to France?

I went back to France, correct.

OK, and where did you stay?

I stayed in Versailles. With the OSE. OSE is the organization for children.

Yes, right.

Yeah.

And then so you stay there for?

Until we were approached by the Jewish Congress from Canada there. The Jewish Congress had a permit from [INAUDIBLE] before World War Two started to bring 1,000 kids, orphans, and so on. Well, during the war they couldn't do anything about it.

Now, did you at this point know about your parents, or not?

I'm thinking now. I did know about my parents. Actually, yes, I knew about the parents before I left Switzerland.

Switzerland, yeah.

So obviously-- not obviously, I'm 80% sure the Red Cross--

Found out?

--had some records. Because they gave me those records. They were the one who found my uncle in Canada.

I see. When you were in Versailles, what did you do? Were you able--

Yeah, when, OK--

Did you go to school?

Excellent question.

Did you go to school?

Excellent question. I insisted that I want to go back to school.

School, yeah.

And they sent me to [PLACE NAME] which is two, three blocks from the Sorbonne in Paris. It's a school. It's not a university. And I went there because to learn French and to learn-- to finish my high school diploma, which I didn't finish until I got to Canada.

So every morning-- I wasn't the only one. About six, seven of us took the metro, subway, and we went. And that's where it was located. It's located on the way to Versailles, actually. It's outside of Paris, if you know where Sorbonne is. It is only two-and-a-half blocks from the Sorbonne. And so every morning the group, we went down and went to school.

Where did you live in Versailles?

In a home.

A children's home? In a children's home?

Yes. It was something, more than a children's home. But it was something built by somebody before the war. And I don't know how they got it to use, or the government gave it to them. It was-- we had approximately there 60, 70 kids. So it was a large place. And boys and girls.

And your health was good by then?

Well, when I was there my lungs were OK. I still had the wound. That didn't heal exactly. It's still not healed all these years. I still have wounds that don't heal, and they're saying it's circulation problem because of that. And so I have more problems now than I did five or 10 years ago. And so when I came to Canada I wanted to go back to school, which I did.

Now, you knew that your uncle was in Canada?

Yes.

Oh, OK.

Well, I knew when I was in Switzerland, because they found him. I knew that he was in Canada from home. And I think I mentioned someplace there that my dad, before we got to the concentration camps and whatever, made us-- made me remember his address, and so on and so forth. Well, I only remembered the city. I forgot the details.

So when I was in Switzerland I said to Red Cross what I know.

That you have an uncle in Canada?

That's right. And while I was there, they told me that they found him. They gave me the address, and he wrote to me also while I was in Switzerland. So when I left Switzerland to France, I knew that [PERSONAL NAME] is there, and he's is trying to take me out to Canada.

Wonderful.

Yeah, well he didn't have to do that, because the Jewish Congress, meanwhile, got a permit to bring in 1,000 kids, and I was a part of that. And I was in the first group who made it into Canada.

Oh, OK, so when did you--

I end up in the fall of '47, in September sometimes. And I was the first of the group. I think 22 of us arrived here to Canada, and I was the first of that group to arrive. And that's how I end up in Edmonton-- Montreal first, Edmonton second. And I went to the Alberta College to get my English.

And after one year I wrote the exam, and I was admitted to university. I wrote the exams for high school, and that entitled me to go to university.

So you went from Versailles, and then you took, what, a boat from England to Canada?

Yes. I did say that in my report. In Versailles, it took me a while to get the OK by the French-- no, I'm sorry, from the Canadian Embassy. But then they sent us to London, because that was the gathering point of so on. So I arrived to London, I only stayed four or five days ago. There were only six other kids that came in from camps from Germany.

So we had about 22. So 22 of us took the train to [PLACE NAME] to deport. And the Aquitania was a boat that took us over the ocean. And when we arrived in Halifax they were telling us that now you're going to take the train to go to Montreal. And Montreal is a big city, and that's a gathering point.

Before the day was over somebody from the Jewish Congress there says no, there was a change in plan. He said, there are so many people waiting for you fellows in Montreal, and we decided to fly you to Montreal. [INAUDIBLE] on the train.

So we didn't realize how many people were there. So finally, they put us on a plane. The same day we arrived in Halifax and we arrived there at 2:30 in the morning in Montreal. And they took us to a place, it wasn't a synagogue, it was someplace else. And the amount of people there are unbelievable-- unbelievable who waited for us. And I think I said in my report that-- I'm trying to-- that when they saw us extreme emotions by everyone.

I can imagine, yeah.

And I put something down here, which even today I just give me a second. Yeah, and I said this, which is true, the amount of people waiting and embracing us was fantastic. They kept saying, and I will never forget that, these are the surviving children from the Holocaust. And basically, they were there hoping that one of us there would give them some information on the relatives that we-- that's right, and that was very emotional.

Yeah. So then and then how did you get to your uncle?

I didn't need his help, because the Jewish Congress said, we'll put you on a train. It's a long journey, and you'll get to Edmonton.

So you got out there by yourself.

And I did that. They advised him, and he met me. I never met him in my life before. So he went up to the train station and met me.

My uncle, at that time, was a widower, because his wife died during the war. And so he lived in a small place and whatever, and I was with him for a while. And I asked the local Jewish community that I want to go to school, and whatever it is.

So they helped me out, and they found me a home. A home of a couple that had kids more or less my age, and they wanted to help me out. But they were paid by I think by the local community. So I stayed with them for about four years, and I went to university.

Did you know any--

[INAUDIBLE].

Did you know any English before you got to Canada?

No.

No, so you learned it when you got there?

I learned it, and that's why I took one year out, because I needed to know the language. So that's why I went and put a call, [INAUDIBLE] go to college in Edmonton. And the many things that I wrote exams I actually learned also in France. But language something that I was trying to pick up, which I've done.

And I then admitted to the university, got my arts degree. But I always wanted to be a doctor, because that's what my parents wanted me to do, and I many of my family going back, back, back, are all professors or doctors. So the truth is, that it takes a lot a lot of money, and I just didn't have it.

Did you--

And not only that, I used to work in the summertime. Well, you don't have enough months, because the medical school only gets two months off. And you cannot earn enough in two months for tuition.

I was also lucky that [INAUDIBLE] that the Germans sent. So by that time, and this was in the '50s, they paid me. Well, I tell you what I got, I got 6,000 something twice, but I don't know what they paid because I had a lawyer in Montreal handling it. So I don't know how much he got commission. I got 6,000 something twice, and that helped me--

This is reparations you're talking about, right?

That's right. It helped me, which plus the fact that I worked too. So I decided to go for a law degree hoping that.