

We are interviewing William Basch at the Holocaust Convention on April 13, 1983. Will you please begin by telling me where and when you were born?

I was born in a small village in Carpathia, which is part of Czechoslovakia. The village is called SÃ¡zava. I was born on June 4, 1927.

How many members were your family? What were their ages? And who were there?

It was my father, mother. There were three brothers and two sisters.

Will you please give me their names?

My father's name was Martin, Martin Basch, or Mordechai as he was known at that time. Mother's name was Gizi, Gizi Hartstajn. My older brother was Arthur Basch. He perished.

My second brother was Ted Basch. He survived in the Israeli underground. My sister following that-- oh, sorry, next one was myself, William Basch. Then I have a sister, Edith Basch. She survived in Auschwitz. Then I had a younger sister, GyÃ¶ngyi. She died in Auschwitz.

Can you begin by telling me the names of your grandparents and any early recollections that you have of them?

No, I do not have any recollection of my father's parents. They were old. And they died when I was young.

My mother's parents died when she was four years old. Therefore, my mother was adopted by her mother's brother. So they were my grandparents for all practical reasons. Their name was Hartstajn. My recollection is very vague since they died when I was about six or seven years old.

Do you remember anything about the way they dressed or the way they talked? Or were they Orthodox Jews?

Yes, they were very traditional Orthodox. They were more or less Hasidic oriented. Their education was limited. However, they were very bright in their own way. They were self-made people. Whatever--

What did your grandparents do?

My grandfather owned a general store in a small village. It was the only one in that small village, small community. Most of the people were Carpathians and they were Ukrainians. They were there for many generations, my grandfather.

My father married my mother. Therefore, he moved into our village. He was born in a different area. But he moved into our village. And then he continued the family business.

Can you tell me about what he did specifically? Any remembrance of that?

My father or grandfather?

Father, please.

My father, I recall, yes. My father was a rather a cultured person, highly studied in the Talmudic ways of life. But he was also a very, very bright businessman. He didn't want to be a businessman. But marrying my mother who was the heir to my grandfather's fortune, he was sort of forced into business, which he never really liked. Therefore, the pleasure he got out of life was mostly when he was able to study the Talmud, study the Torah, meet with debate-- on debates. We had the only priest in town in our small village. Many hours he spent with him debating culture, debating the religion, which was rare for that time.

Do you remember anything about your mother?

Yes, my mother, while it was in a very remote area of Czechoslovakia or Carpathia, surprising part of it she was-- today they would call it a liberated woman. There were five children what we had. Two servants, they took care of the children. And my mother was preoccupied helping my father in the business.

She was very deeply involved in business affairs, which at that time was rather unusual because most parents, most mothers, their job was to take care of the household, take care of their children. But to be a businesswoman was taboo. But that was not our case. She was sort of liberated.

Did she work behind the counter in the general store or managing? Or how did she work?

She worked alongside with my father since our business was so varied in so many ways. My father was involved in buying land, selling land. We had a large vineyard. My father was involved overseeing the planting of the grapes, the making the wine. My mother overseeing the actually selling of the product, the final selling of the product. So she worked hand in hand. Later on when my father was taken away from us, my mother carried on the business. So she was involved in business in every way.

Do you have any specific memories of the holidays? Shabbat? Passover?

Those were the most beautiful days that I recall. The Shabbat to us was not a religious holiday. It was a meaningful traditional-- it was holy in its own way, not only because God said Shabbat is Shabbat. It was meaningful a family reunion, as a day to commemorate a week's activities. It's a day for discussion in the family. That's the day as being together. It had a tremendous meaning, the day on its own, without just saying that it is a holy day because of religious meaning, the traditional and family meaning to us.

What about the Shabbat table, do you remember how it was set up?

Well, it was probably the way you've heard it from so many people, a very typical way. Friday business closed just before sundown. My father used to go to the, what was called, mikvah. It's a bathing, bath house. My mother prepared the table with children, with family. We went to temple.

However, if I recall, the Shabbat dinner took place before we went to temple. In our area, there were mixed-- they were both Orthodox-- for some reason, they were-- not Orthodox. They were-- was Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Our tradition was more Sephardic.

I've never found out why, but my father carried on the Sephardic tradition. And we had our dinner-- oh, we had our dinner after we came to the temple. First, we went to temple. And when we came back-- it was called a little shul, small temple. There were 30 Jewish families in the village. And then when we came home, we carried on our Shabbat dinner with traditional set with challah and with zemirot, zemirot singing. It was typical, traditional Hasidic Orthodox manner.

Can you tell me about the school that you attended? Did you attend cheder or a gymnasia?

Both. I went to cheder. I started off cheder first. When I was born, originally, it was Czechoslovakia. But the people were Ukrainians. However, we had two Gypsy maids in the house. They spoke Hungarian.

So while I'm Czech, my mother tongue is Hungarian. When I was age four, I started going to cheder. That was the most important thing to my father, to learn the Torah, to learn about the Talmud, to learn about Jewish tradition. So cheder started at four.

--telling me about cheder. Now tell me about the next school you attended.

The next school I attended was a Ukrainian language school because the population, 99% of the population in the village, outside of the Jews, most of them were Ukrainians. They were not even Czech or Slovaks. So since they spoke

Ukrainian, that was the only school. I went to school up to the fifth grade.

After the fifth grade, the Hungarians occupied the country. And they insisted that we stop speaking Ukrainian and forced upon the population to learn the Hungarian language. So at fifth grade, I stopped going to school. But Ukrainian school is really what I attended.

Do you remember any antisemitic incidents when you were young that occurred to you or that occurred to people in the town?

Oh, it was a continuous incident. It wasn't one. It was steady.

We were constantly known. It was very common when we left public school. The kids knew that we would be going to the Hebrew school because we went from 4 o'clock to 8 o'clock to cheder, 8 o'clock till about 12:00-- oh, no, 2 o'clock in the afternoon, we went to public school. Returned back to cheder till about 5 o'clock.

Cheder was not a sideline. It was a full-time thing. From left 4:00 in the morning. We returned at 5:00 at night and took a long lunch in a lunch bag. So whenever we went to cheder, it was quite common, why don't you go to Jerusalem? In Russian language yelling at us, Jews, you don't belong here.

It was a continuous antisemitic remark since I'm a child. I never recall not being-- not feeling the sense of prejudice. It was always that. It wasn't a one-time thing. Again, thousands of memories, thousands of incidences. So it's a one-time, one continuous antisemitic feeling.

You mentioned antisemitic feeling. Any physical acts of violence against Jews in your town before the war?

Well, if you are referring to pogrom no, because realizing that in Czechoslovakia, the control-- we never really had pogroms, not in my times. But the people themselves, I think it was really partly church involvement, partly the church continually reminded them that we are suffering as Gentiles because our Lord Jesus Christ was hung by the Jews, killed by the Jews. And the children looked upon us as the killers of their God.

So it was very normal for them to hate. It was not abnormal to hate. It was an accepted thing. A Jew has to be hated. So the question was, forgive me.

Any physical acts of violence against people in your town or you personally, rock throwing?

Well, on one occasion, I recall there was a physical act. We had what was called a shochet. A shochet was the man who killed animals for kosher food. And why we didn't have a rabbi? We were too small.

But the shochet, as we were walking home to cheder, he had long payots, which we all did. But he was exceptionally long payots. And two or three kids, they came up to him. And they started just pulling on his payots for the fun of it.

My brother and myself, we jumped the kids. But we were beaten up terribly by about a dozen kids and yelled and screamed at. Go to Jerusalem, go to Jerusalem, in a rough Russian language. And many, many other incidences like that have occurred in my life.

OK, will you tell me about the events leading up to the capture before the war? Who was in the house? Were you in the house with them?

As time went on, I was approximately 13 years old. And at that time, the war was on already. It was approximately 1941. I was born in 1927. So it's 13, 14 years old.

At that time, the Hungarians, Germans, and Italians, they made a peace pact that they would not attack each other. So actually, since we were occupied by the Hungarians in 1939, in 1931, the Hungarian German ruled. They have forced all the kids that were able to work in forced labor camps to go to forced labor camps. My father was taken away into forced

labor camp.

So I left to Budapest as a kid-- I was at that time approximately 13 or 14 years old-- so that I should not have to do forced labor since in Budapest, itself, the Jews still had some freedom of movement. Therefore, I was not with my family when they were deported. I was away from them.

Did you hear about their deportation?

Yes. I've heard that all the people-- I came back. I only had an opportunity to come back once for a Passover dinner. And that was in-- the last time I seen them was 1942, Passover. That was the last time when we were together, the family. That made me 15 years old.

And after that, my older brother left in order to save himself. Actually, my second brother left to a different town to save himself. And I left to Budapest. So the family was dispersed. And my mother, father, and two sisters, they were left at home. But I heard that they were deported through second-hand sources.

Can you tell me about Budapest, your life there until you were taken?

When I came to Budapest, there was quite fairly liberal freedom yet for the Jews. But as time went on, things got harder and harder and harder for the Jews. It was a slow, slow kind of squeezing type of effect.

I'm being at that time about 15, 16 years old. I had the spirit in me. And I joined an underground. We referred to it as Dror Habonim underground. But it was really an affiliate, or a group, that worked with Raoul Wallenberg's group. We were in the underground arm that made it possible to deliver all the passports that were printed to the Raoul Wallenberg organization to kids that saved themselves either from Carpathia, Czechoslovakia, or from Poland. They were able to get in into Budapest.

So we had to get them out of there. And the only way, only means, to get them out of there, to get them passports, get them through to Romania with a different group of underground to go where they got them to the Black Sea. And there were boats. They were purchased. And then they were sent off on the ocean to try to get into Palestine, because Israel didn't exist at that time. So that was my first experience in working with underground.

Can you tell me about life in the underground and how it was for you living illegally practically?

What-- illegal living meant being a Gentile because the Jew was free game. There were several ways in Budapest itself at that time. As a Jew, you were either caught and thrown in jail or killed, either you were sent to forced labor camp outside of Jew. Or there was one ruling that the Hungarian government had that if you worked for a contractor who did work for the military, you had to report every morning to work. If you missed one day, they found you. They executed you. However, if you worked every day without any pay, you had the evenings off.

Therefore, I volunteered to work for the contractor who worked for the military. And at least I had my evenings available. And All my evenings and late afternoons, I spent working for the underground.

So it was constant fear of being caught. But the fear was not for myself. The fear was caught, the fear strangely enough was that my work was stopped, that I won't be able to do what I want to do. The fear of death was the last thing. It was part-- it was part like we know we're going to get hungry. Well, we accepted the fact that someday our time is going to run out. We're going to get killed. So the fear was not as great as-- most people imagined fear of death must be horrible thing. When you live with it day after day, you accept it.

Can you tell me some more things about life in the underground, how you lived, how many people were in your group, did you make contacts secretly?

Well, my specific job was-- the underground was organized. It was very well organized. It was organized in a way that if I was captured, I wasn't able to tell too much. So it was organized into groups, subgroups, and subgroups, and

subgroups.

Even so, I worked with Wallenberg. I have seen him only once. And I didn't know that he was the man who I'm seeing. It was called in Hungarian Weighted House, which meant a protected building, the Swedish protected building. They had Red Cross protected building, Swiss protected building, and Swedish protected building. We had six or seven of those. I don't recall exactly.

And we knew that if anyone we can get them in into those protected buildings, that the Germans or the Hungarians won't enter. That was the deal which is so well documented that Raoul Wallenberg made through diplomatic sources with the Germans.

Well, the division that I had or the job that I had mostly is to get this passports that were made available to me to the people that distributed the passports to the kids. That was specifically my job. So I was not involved from the beginning to the end. I was involved in the specific.

So my way of getting around since I've had so many sets of passports on me, and on the street corners it was constantly guarded. The street corners were guarded. Or from time to time, soldiers would surround a complete area. And anybody passing through that area, they would search them, do bodily search.

Knowing that walking through the streets I'm exposing myself any moment being searched, so I used a sewer system, which I knew very well. I knew it as well as I knew the streets. I used the sewer system to get through the sewers and knowing exactly which manhole to get out.

Now, the buildings were those square huge buildings, like they have them in Paris or most central European countries, with giant courtyards. But every courtyard in the center had usually one of those manholes to get out in the courtyard. And we knew, through being trained and working with others, how to get into the building through the sewer system and get out in the center of the courtyard. So that was my way of getting around, carrying those papers, from one building to another, from the printing press to this survivor-- unto these people who were waiting to get a passport because there was no other way to deliver it.

OK. Can you tell me something more about then how you ended up from being in the underground to being in your first camp?

Buchenwald.

Buchenwald.

Well, I have worked in the underground for quite a long period. It was over a year. I was very fortunate because more than I'd say the majority of the kids that eventually were caught one way or another. And in 1944, when it was still-- when this was really we were very active, then in '43, the beginning of '44, when we were active actively doing this, some of these kids, they somehow escaped from Warsaw. Many of them were from the Warsaw ghetto. They couldn't stay in Poland because the Gentiles turned them over to the Germans.

So if they had a way through the underground system to get into Budapest, because Budapest was still free, free to a degree that it was not as bad as in Poland-- I lost track of thinking. Oh, yes, so what happened that I was able to survive, it was sheer luck. I cannot say it was through my own ingeniousness. It was just fortunate.

Don't worry about it--

And I recall it was a very gloomy day. And I was tired. It was around 4:00, 4:30 pm, something around that time. I was delivering a pocket full of papers to one of the protected houses, one of the Wallenberg's houses. And I came out through the wrong manhole.

When I came out, to my astonishment, I came out of the manhole right in front of the building. Now, the building on the

outside was guarded by Hungarian soldiers. It was right next to the Danube.

And at that time, if anyone was caught or a Jew was caught-- just being a Jew, they didn't ask them why, it was quite common that he was shot on the spot and thrown into the Danube. The River Danube was flooding full of bodies. But it was a common sight to us. Death was a common sight to us.

We knew when we were trained that if we get caught, mainly to try to save the passports or try to save any-- not to make it possible for them to trace where the passports have been printed, who is behind us, who is our leader. So we would rather be shot than be caught.

Nevertheless, as I walked out, they were right in front of me. There were three Hungarian soldiers. They grabbed me by the arm, pulled me over against the wall, spread my arms apart, reached into my pockets. And they started pulling out-- they found 5 or 6 sets of passports, different pictures, which was supposed to be delivered to some kids that were waiting inside the building.

They were astonished. I don't know whether they ever heard about it or knew about it. But it was astonishing to them that I had got so many papers on me. And they were almost sort of in shock.

They all had rifles in their hands, loaded rifles. I knew at that time that that's it. This is the end of it. Well, I could not save the papers. I thought, well, there's no point in giving my life unless I have to.

So I had split moments to think what to do. And our training was to distract them as much as possible. So while we're reading, I didn't need any distraction because they started laughing and joking. And they were sort of like discussing with them, well, whose turn is it now? Who is going to shoot?

Realizing this-- I was young. I was skinny-- I dashed quickly. I ran as quickly as I could and zig zagged the streets, and kept bending down, jumping up, bending down, jumping up, do the unpredictable things. I heard the bullets fly by me. But I wasn't shot.

And I noticed a group of Jews being transported. So just at that very instinct, the first thing that I did is I bent down very low. And I joined this-- I practically crawled on my hands and feet. And fortunately, the German soldiers that were transporting these Jews, which was the last transport, by the way, out of Budapest since the Russians were already in the outskirts. And we heard the guns already, the heavy guns. So we knew that another few months, Budapest would be liberated, possibly a few weeks.

But I didn't know all of that. I didn't know where this transport is going, whether they're putting it into-- whether they're being transported to Dachau or wherever. There was no way for me to know.

But I dove under. I started marching. Now, the last thing the Hungarians would think that I would join a transport that is being sent to a death camp. But as I marched with them, I thought, well, I looked at the soldiers, they didn't see me, but I saw them as I walked by them. And they were just bewildered that I completely was lost.

So unpredictable-- the thing that I didn't know and I couldn't predict that we were only two or three blocks away from the railroad station. My thought was, well, I'll get out of the transport just like I got in. I'll escape again, and I'll continue my work. But I wasn't able to. We were like three blocks away from the cattle car trains. And about 20, 30 minutes later, I find myself being shoved into the cattle car and being transported to Dachau.

Tell me about your experience in the train. How many people were in your car? What did it look like?

In a car. It was just an empty cattle car train. And they pushed in as many people as they could. I can't remember the numbers.

But I recall the first thing we did we had to organize ourselves into subgroups because it was chaotic. And we would trample over each other. There was one pregnant woman. And she had-- eventually, she had the baby. We had to throw

the baby out because there was no way of keeping her alive. It took four days to get into Dachau.

We may have been as many as 100, 120 of us. We were so cramped that actually we had to make time one was sitting for two hours and three were standing. And then another one was sitting and then the rest of them were standing. We couldn't all sit down. There was absolutely no room for everybody to sit down. Some had to stand. Some had to sit.

Only one once a day the train would stop. They would give us one bowl of soup. And we were fortunate. Some transport didn't even receive that. But we were lucky. They gave us one bowl of soup.

Several people tried to escape through a small little window. There were four of us young boys. We organized each other. And we pushed the first guy out. He got shot.

We said, well, OK, the three of us still have a chance. So we jumped on each other's shoulder. The second guy crawled out through the little window. He got shot too. I was the third guy to go out. And I must admit I chickened out. I saw the two of them didn't make it. I told myself maybe there will be another chance next time. So I didn't jump out. And I just wound up in Dachau a few days later-- in Buchenwald a few days later.

Tell me about getting off the train in Buchenwald. What was the first thing that caught your eye? Feelings that ran through your mind?

It was a strange thing. The Hungarians were in charge of the train. Hungarians were brutal. They were cruel. They came in daily.

And they just whipped us with rifle butts for no reason at all. It didn't have to be any reason, just to make sure that we don't do anything. Before we do anything, they made sure that they did it to us.

They were inhumane. If they had killed us, it would have been merciful. But they were more worse than that than that. They bled us slowly to death.

So after the four-day train ride when we got off the train and we saw the German soldiers, and they were so methodical and so organized in their killing or whatever they did, the sensation was strange. It was almost as, hey, I'm liberated. I'm now in righteous people's hands. Now they do properly.

Because realizing that Dachau-- I mean, Buchenwald at that time, at that time there were many people were killed. And they needed-- the war was coming towards the end. And they needed every able body to do work for them because this was now December 1944. So instead of killing everyone, they tried to save as many working bodies of people that were able to work as they could.

So instead of indiscriminately shooting everybody, they gave us some food as we got off the train. So for some strange reason, I thought they are good people. They're humane people. But we knew all along subconsciously they're killing everyone. We knew through the underground that there are gas chambers. But to us, at that moment, that seemed to be a celebration.

Can you tell me about life in Buchenwald?

[AUDIO OUT]

Life in Buchenwald for me was short, one of the most horrible feelings I remember. But after we did get into camp, they lined us up into small little groups. And the first thing is that they stripped off all our clothes, naked. And we stood in winter-- it was an evening. It was a night. We stood in a winter night, cold, naked freezing.

Some of them fell down on the floor and took them away. Well, subconsciously, we knew that they took them away to kill them. But we just didn't think of it in that way. The only thought in my mind was what can I do now for myself to survive the next hour? It's not what's going to happen tomorrow.

So after they stripped us naked, they took us through a large-- it looked like a tub, bathtub. And they shaved our heads. They de-lice-- they sprayed some powder on us. And then everyone had to duck under that water, which was a chemical. It smelled horrible. It had I don't know what kind of chemicals, but to disinfect the whole body because what they tried to do is save the people for work later on.

For some reason, I didn't freeze to death. And I was waiting for hours and hours and hours to get into a barrack, which there were thousands and thousands of people just sitting and sitting in one place, crouching next to each other to keep warm by holding-- from other bodies, cuddling together. Well, a strange thing again has happened that my biggest wish at that time was only one thing-- to get into that barrack. And I thought getting into that barrack where there were thousands of people. Well, that's done. Now, I'll be safe.

So it was always just the next movement and I'll be saved. So my first experience was that to get into that barrack. And I did survive that ordeal. And I got into that barrack, which was my home for the next three, four days.

Tell me about life in the barrack and what you did in Buchenwald.

Well, life in the barracks, since I was what was called a holding tank to be used for labor was a blank. It was absolutely nothing. It was sitting. And there was only one thing that we were waiting for, for that one loaf of bread that six or eight of us got.

They had different systems. If I say the word how many to a bread, most people would not realize what does it mean how many to a bread? Well, when it came, yelled in German, five to a bread, we knew that five people, the next five people would get one loaf of bread. It will be up to us, between the five of us, to divide that loaf of bread. And that was the highlight of the day. It was absolute a total blank all day long, just sitting and waiting for that moment when that loaf of bread would be divided.

The trick was to figure it out when they announced it, that five to a bread, to figure it out how many loaves of bread do they have because if they had 20 loaves of bread and I was 121, I knew I wouldn't get any bread that day because only the first 100 would get it. That was one thing.

The next thing I had to figure out to get it in with people that didn't have any hooligans and any rough, big guys because I was small. I was thin. And if I got in, and one of the five is a big guy and he doesn't divide the bread and takes it for himself-- the Germans didn't give a damn-- the other four of us starved. So it was all day long figuring and manipulating. That was the whole highlight for us.

I only spend about a week or 10 days, I don't recall the exact time, in Buchenwald. But the main thing was not to get sick, not to get injured, not to get beaten up. Because if you did, any moment that you got beaten up or you got sick, then you were sent to die. And as long as you were able to work, and I was able to keep myself alive, there was always hope where they'd send me to work.

My greatest wish was to be sent to work. It was the greatest desire. And that's what we all were fighting for-- to be selected to work.

Tell me about your transportation to Dachau. How did you get from Buchenwald to Dachau?

OK, they lined us up. We didn't know for what. We were hoping that it would be a selection.

Selection meant several things to us. Selection meant either selecting whereby one of the Germans went through and looked over who is weak and who is strong. The weak ones selecting them to execute them. Why feed them if they're weak?

Selection also at that time meant selecting for work. I was only praying that this is selection because each day they called us up for selection to eliminate all the weak ones. We never knew which selection this is. Fortunately, this was a



selection for labor.

And of course, pretended I'm healthy. I'm strong. I stood up front. I stood on my toes to pretend that I'm taller than I am.

And fortunately, we were selected, a group of us, approximately 500 of us were selected. We didn't know for what or what purpose. But all we were told to step aside, you'll be sent to a labor camp.

And a couple of hours later, we got into line and were marched to a railroad. That railroad was called an Eisenbahn brigade, which means-- it sounds fancy, for Eisenbahn brigade. But Germany, in Germany, they had several groups like that.

What it consists of is a railroad, which was completely equipped with all equipment necessary to fix the railroads. Realizing that this was already towards-- around January 1945, the Allied forces were approaching. The transportation was constantly interrupted. So they needed people to fix the railroads.

There were no Germans available to do the work. They were all either fighting. They're running. They're hiding. So that's one of the reasons was I'm fortunate that I'm alive that too many were killed by that time. And they needed us.

So we were equipped with everything that was needed to repair the railroad after the Allied forces bombed any railroad. Now, the job was where the railroad, which consisted of about 20 cars, four or five of them guards, and equipment, the rest of them were put into cattle cars. And in each one of them, there were 24 shelves. And they were like bins.

And each one of us had one of those bins. 24 on one-- I'm sorry, 48, 24 on one side and 24 on the other side. It looked like fabric bins or storage bins. And then we had one table in the center. That's the transport that I was put on, working transport. And for the next few months, my job was to do the railroad repair. Would you like to know how that worked?

Please tell me.

OK. The way that worked that we were continually somewhere-- we never knew where we are because our car was constantly locked, was constantly closed. All we knew that we were going either forward, backward, sideways, somewhere. The train was constantly moving.

Well, whenever the Allied forces came and they bombed an area and they destroyed the railroads. There was one of these transport was nearby in that vicinity. We were always up close to the front line.

So in our case, it was quite common that it would be 2 o'clock in the morning or 2:00 in the afternoon, at any time of the day. We would hear a whistle and some shouting and yelling. And a German guard would come over and slam open the front door and scream in German, raus, raus. So we all went out.

And the first thing is that we saw the German guards with the machine guns pointing outward. And we were ordered to dig ditches. They were later on for the Germans to move in with their-- OK, the way it worked we dug the ditches. And we were ordered back into the cattle cars.

When we got into the cattle cars, the German soldiers moved in. And they set up the machine guns facing the train. The ditches were dug, or as they called them-- I can't say at this moment memorize the name, where the soldiers--

Trenches.

The trenches. They were trenches really. So with the German guards, and they were in the trenches, other Germans would open up their door. And then we would get our equipment to start working on the railroads. While we were repairing the railroads, just after they were bombed and after they were destroyed, we had no choice-- well, OK, if we tried to escape, then we were immediately shot by the Germans because we were constantly facing them.

If we worked and we got injured, then it was always one small little transport guard waiting to take all the injured ones

away. Now, they were-- while they were merciless, the Germans, they had a way of always never telling you that they were going to kill you, that they are taking them away to a sanitarium.

But we heard the gunshots about 50 minutes later. And this little transport car came back and no more than 15, 20 minutes. There was nothing around for miles and miles and miles. So we knew in our hearts that we didn't go to a sanitarium. They were taken to be executed. So we were very, very careful to do anything they want. The greatest fear was to be injured.

Now, if we survived the hunger and if we survived the cold and the pain and the beatings that we got from the Germans, most of the people in our transport were actually killed, or a large portion, were killed by the Allied forces. And that sounds strange. But it's understandable to us why.

Because after they had a mission to destroy a railroad, the Allied forces sent a reconnaissance plane to see whether the mission was a success. Because if not, they had to come back again to destroy it. Well, as they dove down low and they saw that people are repairing the railroads that they just passed the last several planes destroying the transportation so the Germans could not bring back up ammunition and back up soldiers to the front, the Americans dove out low, and they kept machine gunning and shooting at everybody because they saw Germans. And they also saw slaves or whatever if they knew that what we were, whatever they called us.

But they were indiscriminately machine gunning because they didn't want the railroad to be repaired. So it was quite common daily occurrence for 30, 40 of us to be either killed by the Germans, either to be killed by the Americans that came back. Yet when we saw the Americans coming, the strange things was we knew that our chances of being killed is very strong, we welcomed them.

We didn't mind. The fear was not great. The pleasure was they were also shooting at the Germans. So the fear that we would get killed because it was very common for us to envy those that died. We didn't pity anyone that died. Never. I never felt sorry for anybody that died. Anybody that says, my God, you're over it, you bastard. I have to go on. Your day is finished.

Yet the instinct said go on another day. Live another day. Survive another day. Tomorrow things may change.

But at the same time, there was no pity. There was no sorrow. We tried to help each other. We tried to protect each other, but not pity each other, never.

I never recall anyone pitying me. I never recall pitying anybody. It was just not in my heart to do it. We weren't able to. We were so conditioned that the only thing that mattered-- survive another day. So that was our life.

That lasted for approximately-- and, of course, within limited time, I can only describe so much. But there were many incidences that has happened. One is that it happened that we discovered one car that consisted some foods, which we didn't know at that time, and was overturned. And about 50, 60 were able to get to that car.

And the only thing that car contained was most-- many other things, but one box of saccharine, or chemical sugar. It was saccharine we called it. And at least to my memory, there were at least 50 or 60 people that they just grabbed handfuls and kept shoving it in their mouth and eating it and eating as much as they could because we ate anything but wooden, anything that was chewable, anything that was edible, whether it was live or dead. We just ate it.

And a few hours later, they were all moaning and screaming in pain. And they were dying because they were poisoned. They were poisoned from overeating saccharine. And they couldn't take them away because they didn't have any ways of transportation. That was one of the most horrible days because that was the only time when I visually saw about 50 or 60 people right in front of me machine gunned down and shot to pieces.

So this lasted for about 3 and 1/2 four months. By that time, all the SS, which were in charge originally, had to go up to the front. The Germans were short of soldiers. And they took everything. And they turned us over to the Wehrmacht.

Well, the Wehrmacht was sort of like the National Guard. They were not as bad as-- some of them were even civilians that were called in to serve as guards. And we were 45 of us. And the question was, do we get rid of this 45 of us or what do we do?

So there were about four or five Wehrmacht soldiers that they volunteered. And they said we'll save these people. And they made a deal with us. They said they were going to try to get us-- they say that they'll get us into Dachau.

We've heard from far away distances-- this was the Munich area-- we heard that the German soldiers are approaching. They're near. We're constantly under bombardment from above. We're constantly being shot from below, the Germans. So it's a miracle that we lasted even for that long.

But these Wehrmacht guys, they really didn't want to save us. They wanted to save themselves. And they felt if they are caught by the Allied forces with 45 Jews that would give them immunity, that possibly they would not be killed. So they decided they were going to bring us back into Dachau. And that's when the march to Dachau started. And that lasted for about five or six days.

I would like to recall a-- it's a [SOBBING] tragic memory for me. And because we have to make decisions all our life. Now I was injured during work on a railroad. I was hit with a shovel on my knee.

When I was a kid and most people were older, I recall that they treated me-- the people who treated me, I mean other prisoners, with kindness. And they helped me to overcome the injury so I shouldn't go to the doctor. Because if I went to the doctor, the next day they knew-- I was a kid. And I was wild. And I was not as understandable as they were. They knew that I would be killed.

And they didn't want me to. They tried in any way to save. It wasn't a question of pity. It was a question of doing it robotically practically. But nevertheless, it was the kindness of them.

And they cautioned me, don't go to the doctor. We're happy to tell you what to do, how to bend your knee so they don't know that you're injured. And while my knee got infected, I was not discovered that I'm injured. And it healed up. I suffered a permanent wound as of today. It still is there. And from time to time, you know, the pain comes back. But it's a broken bone under my knee.

Now, I survived this. What has happened that as we were marching back with this Wehrmacht towards Dachau, three of us, three boys that we were together in Budapest in the underground, I discovered them that they were in Buchenwald. They somehow got to Buchenwald before me. Well, since we survived working with Wallenberg in underground and since we wound up in this transport, we thought it's a fate that we should live.

We made a bondage, the three of us will lay our lives down for each other, but we will all survive. We won't let any one of us die. If necessary, we will die for each other. Well, we didn't know what we said at that time. But the intention was there.

But at that time, I was only 17 years old, 16 or 17 years old. And under marching, underway marching back to Dachau, it was the second day, as this Wehrmacht troop was taking us back. Several people if they got ill, they got sick, they were just left behind. And the Wehrmacht soldiers, they didn't want to leave any evidence behind, or they didn't want anyone-- they didn't want to drag anyone either who couldn't walk and who couldn't march through the snow, through the mud, through the rain, through the hail. And we had no clothes on. We had the striped pajamas on, or stripe prisoners uniforms on.

One from the three-- I only recall the first name, Yankel, but I don't even remember his second name. One from the three of us he slipped. And he injured his knee, very similarly the way I did.

Now, the three of us held on to him. And we kept marching for about another day or so. And we ran across a group of SS soldiers. And these Wehrmacht guy, he had some sort of a documentation that he is taking us into Dachau legitimately.

And they just looked us over. They walked by us. And just as they were leaving, they turned around. And they noticed this one of the three he was injured.

And one of the German soldiers walks over to him. He says to step out of the line. We knew what he meant by that. He was going to shoot him.

And we didn't let go. So he orders us to let go of him. And we didn't let go. He says, all right, I'll count to three. Either the three of you step out, or you let him out.

And here was bond that we made, that we'll die for each other. And we couldn't keep that bound because-- now I say maybe I should have been a hero. But when it comes to the question of dying, you can't be the kind of hero that you want to be. And this memory haunts me.

And the question, what would have been the right decision still haunts me. Logically, I say, well, why should three people die? But what is logic? I mean, what's logic at one time is not logical at other times.

So we had seconds to think. And we did let him go. And we saw him being shot in front of us. That is one of the worst memories that still haunts me because directly I was responsible for somebody. I feel it was my responsibility to save him, as others saved me. But I couldn't.

This was just one of the many, many thousands of memories. And all I can say is that anyone who makes a bondage or bond that he swears never to break, don't do it. Don't do it because you don't know at the time when you're really faced with that decision whether you'll be able to do it. The intent and the action is not always the same.

So it's just one of the very haunting memories that as I get older it keeps coming back to me. And I'm trying to find some sort of a philosophy, some legacy that I can leave behind for my kids and for the future generations that to realize it, that life is very, very precious. Don't swear to it that you will give up your life for anything.

Swear that you will try to live on no matter what because it's worth living on. It's a must. It's an obligation. I look upon life not as a gift. It's an obligation God has bestowed upon us. It's not to question whether we should live or not to live. It's an obligation to live it.

And if it's-- whatever it is worth, I feel it was my obligation to survive that I can live to tell the story. Or possibly that I'm saying this to myself because it's easier to survive and keep my sanity. But I feel that it was the right decision. But yet, subconsciously, and I cannot control my conscious mind, it's haunting me continually.

Would you like to leave a message to future generations concerning your experience?

It's very, very difficult to know at a moment's notice without thinking about it what is the message that should be left that is of any value to anyone. If any message, I'd like my children, my grandchildren, and future generations to remember, yes, I have lived all these atrocities. I've lived through death. It was an accepted thing. I have envied those that died.

I have had courage. And I have lost courage. I've known all. I have seen all.

But the most precious things in life that I have learned is love for humanity, love for our race, love for tradition. And please do not have hate. I don't have hate for anyone, surprisingly not even for the Germans.

It was a time, which was a maddening time-- it would be the easiest thing, most normal thing for me to say I hate the Germans. I hate the Hungarians, they tortured me. I hate the Slovaks, they tortured me. But that, the hate, by itself will accomplish nothing. In my experiences, I have learned that to carry on life in a manner where I serve as an example how to live and how to survive in a time when it isn't easy is much more valuable than to live in bitterness and live in hate.

I don't speak often of my memories, but neither do I hide my memories. I hope that many lessons could be taught from my experiences. But one of the most precious things that I keep telling to my children is remember what has happened, never hate, and never allow anyone to hate. Because that is hate and jealousy, and that has caused my pain, that has caused the loss of my family.

I do not hate anyone. I have nothing but love in my heart because my life in this country has been good. Therefore, those that will come after me, live in peace with one another, no matter what race, no matter what religion, no matter what country. That is the only way the future generations will survive. If hate and prejudice will continue, it will be self-destructive. Then we are better off to destroy the world quickly without pain.

Thank you very much for that interview.