

Being interviewed is Adam Beer-- B-E-E-R. And this is an interview at the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors.

Mr. Beer, I'm just going to ask you a couple of questions, and then I'd like you to talk. First of all, where were you born?

I was born in a town called Liptovsky Svaty Mikulas, Slovakia-- Czechoslovakia-- on February 5, 19-- February 25, 1922.

Would you--

I am--

I'm sorry.

I am medzi. I had a sister and one younger brother. My childhood was a regular, unusual, just nothing, nothing unusual, a regular boy who was born from Jewish parents, went to Jewish grammar school for four years. After that I enrolled in high school, what we called in Czechoslovakia gymnasium, where I went to school for eight years and graduated from the school in 1940.

I always wanted to be a doctor. And I hoped to enroll into the medical school in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. However, my country was divided. Czechoslovakia was divided in 1939 into so-called Independent State of Slovakia, which was a puppet state of Germany, of Hitler's Germany, and Bohemia and Moravia, which became a protectorate of Bohmen und Mahren under a German governor.

As soon I graduated from high school in 1940, the law was--

Enacted.

--enacted. It said, number one, Jewish men, student, could not study in high schools and also couldn't study in the institution of higher learning. So therefore, I could not enroll into medical school. I was left 18 years old, young man, without my ambition to go to school.

My father was a very well known electrical contractor in my hometown. He was still allowed to conduct his business. But he was-- I don't know what the English word would be. He was [NON-ENGLISH]. That means he was taken over by an Aryan, which means a non-Jewish man, who was responsible for the business part of the business. And my father worked then for a salary.

So he asked the supervisor to take me in. And I was enrolled in the electrical trade, which was-- which was going on from 1940, let's say July 1940, so all the whole war years. Now what I must say is here this, that the laws in Slovakia became stricter and stricter as far as the Jews are concerned.

We had to wear a star. We had a curfew. We couldn't go out after 8 o'clock at night. We couldn't go to movies. We could not have a radio. Radios were confiscated. We had to give all our golden things, watches rings and so on. So the law became very restricted.

However, my father, being rather important as an electrician in a small town, he got an so-called [NON-ENGLISH], which means economic exemption. That means he did not have to wear a star. And he was able to work. And also his children were allowed. But I must say then, in between, in 1942, in March 1942, the first transport of young men and women were collected to go to work camps.

At that time, we had absolutely no idea what this work meant. We went, they were bona fide, honest-to-goodness work. My daughter, who was two years-- two and a half years older than I am--

No, sister.

My sister, I'm sorry. My sister, who was two year older, got a written notice to report to a collection place two weeks ahead of the time with 300 other girls from the town to be able to take, if I'm not-- either 10 or 20 kilograms of package with her. And they are going to work. As I said, because we did not know what it means to go, we certainly didn't mind.

Although, we had some doubts, but there were 300 other girls who went. So we just said, OK, they're going to work. And that's it. And on the 27th of March of 1942, the 300 girls were waiting to be loaded on a train and go to a town of Poprad, which was 40 kilometers east of my hometown. And from there they were supposed to be transported to work places either in Germany or Poland. But I say, we didn't know absolutely nothing at the time about Auschwitz, nothing.

My sister was a beautiful blonde girl. She looked-- she didn't look Jewish at all, Aryan. If we would have known what was going to happen, she could have gotten false papers and moved to a bigger town, lived under the false paper, and nothing would have happened. But we didn't know the thing.

As I said, 300 other girls left. They took them from this place of Poprad, out. And it didn't take us five days maybe after that that we found out that these people went to Oswiecim, or Auschwitz. Then already we were rather scared because we already heard then that this is a concentration camp and that it's very hard living. We still didn't know about actual deaths, the gas chambers and so on.

But it was too late already. My sister left. So left 300 girls. And no one ever came back. She was able to, on the train going there, she was able to throw in a postcard from somewhere, Poland, which we got at home. And it says dear father-- mother and father, we are going here. And I'm doing as Uncle Julius did.

Uncle Julius was a relative of ours who was also taken away. And we knew there was not nothing good. That was about in May. So we lost contact from her. And by August '42, we already knew that they were not alive. They were gassed very shortly, and 300 girls died with them.

Now you probably will ask me how come my sister wasn't saved. Because a verdict that my father and my brother and I will be under the exception came about two weeks after she left. So if he would have hidden her two weeks later, she probably would have been alive today. So she had to die at the age of 23 in Auschwitz.

I feel very guilty about it because, as I say, I was there. I was waiting with her at the station. I could have told her, sister, please, go away. But I wasn't alone. We were 300 parents-- 300 parents and brothers, and nobody-- it was a [INAUDIBLE].

Probably felt there was safety in the number, 300 going together.

Some hope. Some hope. Some hope. Like they say now, 40,000 French cannot be wrong, you know. So if the parents of 300 girls let them go, then maybe they-- maybe really nothing is going to happen. But we were very much [INAUDIBLE]. And I have a guilt complex.

I mean, I'll just say this, that about a year later-- and I knew already the time that they were not alive-- that a young man who was not from the German SS but from the Slovak collaborators with Hitler, he was called Hlinkova garda, came to the town and came to our house. And again, as I said, we were-- we didn't have to wear the thing. We were more or less safe because we were working.

He came in, and he asked us, are you the Beer family? I said, yes. Yes. You know your sister is in concentration camp in Auschwitz. And I came here, and I can get her out. And I can bring her home.

Now you know, when someone tells you that, you will be [INAUDIBLE] because you want to save your sister. I said, what do you mean? Now, I am a guard there. And if you give us 5,000 crowns-- crowns was the money in Czechoslovakia at the time-- I can bring her back.

I said, very well, fine. I will give you the money. But one thing I want to do, I want to go with you up to the border. And I want to wait at the border. You bring her. And the man, he was in uniform, this guard's uniform, like SS uniform but in Slovak. He said, fine, come with me. Never did I realize that if he-- and I went with a train to him. We Jews could not travel on the trains unless we had a special papers, which of course, I didn't have.

But I went to him. And may I say this to you, I never told my father. My own mother was dead already so I had a stepmother. I just went there with him, left the house. I went to bring my sister home. He could have called immediately on the station a Gestapo, the police, and I probably would have ended the same way as she did. For some reason it didn't happen.

So we went to a small border town, which is called [NON-ENGLISH]. And he told me, OK, I'm leaving you now here. You will give me-- and I'll give him the money. I was holding to the money. And you wait here. I'll bring your sister. Then you give me money. I said, fine.

He took us to a house of a farmer, where I slept. He probably paid him something. And two days passed, and the guy didn't come back. I waited another day. He didn't come back. Then I woke up, and I said there's something false about it. And of course, I left.

I left. I went home. And I wasn't [INAUDIBLE] to come home. My father almost died from sorrow because my son-- I lost already a sister. You-- you want to be too. I said, but Father, I believed that this guy could-- there was a fraud.

Now, how did he know? And he described my sister very, very clearly. He said she is tall, blonde girl, blue eyes, a good-looking girl. He's ever seen. How did-- how did he know? If he didn't see her, how could he know it?

Of course, I found out how. Before he came to our house, he did go to another house, where the daughter also went. And this daughter was very good friend of my sister. And the father of that girl said-- oh, no, he asked, do you know any other girls who left and who would like to go back, come back.

Sure. My sister's name was Ella-- Gabriela, Yeah, he says, Ella Beer, Ella Beer, the same. Please, go. They live there and there. And they will be very happy do it. That man, of course, took all the information about my sister, her age, her eyes, how she looked. And he came with facts to us. But we didn't know that, of course. So I say, maybe God was on my side and brought me back without my sister.

But that was the opposite in '42. I continued to work in my father's place to keep my exemption. And the life was tough, but we were relatively protected by this decree that he was indispensable. And that lasted, again, I'll say, from 1940, when I graduated from school, '41, '42, '43.

But we knew. We knew that eventually the time will come that this will not be good enough, and we will be either deported, which already we, of course, knew what it means, deported. It goes to death. Or we have to get away from the--

So four families in my hometown, we were good friends, the parents and the kids, made the decision to build a bunker in the mountains because I must say that my hometown lie in the beautiful-- in the valley of beautiful mountain of Tatra, Tatra mountain, which are very known mountains there. And we decided that we're going to build a bunker. And when the appropriate time will come, we will go away and, hopefully, save our lives.

We hired a carpenter to build the bunker for us because my father was electrician. Nobody was an expert in building a bunker in the mountains. And this man was recommended to us because he was a communist. He was a known communist against the regime. And he said, sure. So he built it.

It was a-- now, I remembered, he did it for money. We paid him good. And he built us a bunker. This bunker was completed, I would say, by end of 1943. We stayed there, high in the mountains, surrounded in a little plateau. We brought up there canned food supply to live because how are you going to survive there? And we would supply, which probably would be good enough for a whole year, four families. We digged the ground there and buried the food there

and left it there and came back home to work.

In '43 and '44, of course, the situation for Hitler became worse. He was losing. There was Stalingrad. And it was going bad. But Slovakia was still fully occupied and still fully under Hitler's regime. Also, the president of Slovakia was a Dr. Jozef Tiso. He was a Catholic priest. He was a-- he was the president of the country. And he signed a decree to get us out, the priest.

It was very precarious living because anybody-- anytime a Gestapo or people can come and get us away, get us out. Then a revolution took place in Slovakia in August '44. By that I mean there were so-called partisans, who either were men who escaped from the Slovak army and joined the partisans in the mountains, which were run by Russian officers garnizon and so on. There were some Americans who were parachuted down. And these people then were hiding in the mountains, collecting men.

So not expecting it, on August 29, 1944, I was working with my father in a house installing electricity there. Suddenly we hear machine gun fire, rifle fire, and big tumult. We looked through the window, and people were saying, freedom, freedom. Partisans are here and freedom.

So we run out from the house to investigate what's happening. And we already see a few uniformed men. There are few uniformed men come out. We find out that these were the partisans coming from a town called Banska Bystrica, where the center was, which was maybe 60 or 70 kilometers from my hometown. They came with military vehicles, maybe two or three tanks, automatic rifles, and maybe in force about 500 or 600 men.

First mission what they had was to-- the vehicles came there. And the first mission was to get any Germans there, to kill them. Now, there were two small hotels in my hometown. This hotel was called Hotel Krivan. I remember that very clearly.

There were about 20 Wehrmacht men, which were soldiers, who manned a telegraph communication with the front. The front was, at the time, maybe between 50 and 100 kilometers from my hometown. They surprised them in machine guns, with machine gun. And the whole 20 men, they killed them.

The next mission was to get the Volksdeutsche, which was-- which was-- were the local Germans who were living there and who had a part there, and they were wearing those uniforms. They got the main, the-- I forgot-- the gauleiter or whatever the name was. His name was Brunner. I remember very clearly. He had a long beard.

They took this man, surprised him where he was working, took him, took a horse and bound his beard to the horses-- what do call it?

Tail.

Tail. And stripped him practically naked and let the horse run with his body on the ground so for several kilometers there. So the man was bleeding all over. Then when he was already unconscious, they took him to a tree and shot him. And they caught several other Germans, and all were executed.

Now we knew very well that there is no more to say because any Jews would be, of course, hanged immediately. That was August 29, '44. The same afternoon-- it was still freedom. The Germans were still 40 kilometers or more away. We went to our bunker with the four families. We packed our things and went there.

Sure enough, next day the German Panzer came to my hometown, Mikulas from Kezmarok, as I said, from kilometers away. And at that time any man, whether he was Jew or not, who was found in the street was just put a telephone tree because as a punishment for the German killed. And the city was occupied by the German troops. But we were already in our bunker.

From beginning, the bunker, we had a good life. I mean dull, but we had our food. We had a radio. We had a radio, shortwave. We could listen to the BBC broadcast, picking up BBC. And we knew what was going on. And we brought

our supplies there. And we had it fairly good there, as I say.

We were not dependent on any supply from outside because we had enough. And we lived together, these four families there. The women were cooking and so on. And we were watching and [INAUDIBLE].

But we started to hear-- there was still some communication, for instance, some villagers who were sympathetic to us. And these [? gentlemen ?] came out and keep us informed of what happened there. But we didn't trust anybody. And we had a very good lookout from the place.

And I remember, I had a big-size binocular. And every day another man was on duty to watch what's going, what's happening there, just to watch what's going on. Remember, this happened August 29, '44. There was September, October, the winter months. In Czechoslovakia snow starts very early. So we were already snowed in there.

Suddenly we have observed that some movement of men is going down in the valley. But then maybe there was 10 or more kilometer air distance, you know. So you couldn't see very clearly. It could have been the partisans. It could have been villagers. But it could have been Germans. And we thought, now, we don't know who these men are. But we should make some precautions.

It just so happens that not far from our bunker was a cave in the mountains. So we decided, every morning before-- and it was dark already because it's winter months-- we will leave the bunker, and we'll go to the cave and stay there. Also, it was-- it was almost naive there because we had to walk through the snow, and you could see steps. But we did it still.

And there was-- we were doing it maybe for six weeks or more. Meanwhile, partisans, which were the Russians and Slovaks and so on, found us because they were marooning the mountains too. They were running away from the Germans. They found us. And they said, look. You have to share all your bunker with us.

And of course, we didn't mind it because we felt protected. We didn't have any weapons, so [INAUDIBLE]. And my father, who was a very decent, straightforward man, he was so grateful for these partisans. So one morning he calls the captain, who was in charge of the partisans. He said, captain, I want to tell you, here is our food. And we are willing to share it with you. And the captain was very grateful. He said, we thank you. You know, and so on.

Next day or so, we went to get some supply. And we see that everything was opened, and all the food was taken away. We had absolutely nothing left. And some of the partisans left too, with the food. So that was a shock to us.

Of course, everybody blamed my father for his goodness, you know, that he shared it. What are we going to do? There was no food left. Maybe we had a few cans in the bunker itself, but everything else was out there.

So we were there, several young men. I was, at that time, in '44 I was 22 years old. I had a good friend there. We were several young men there. So we said, either we die from hunger or we have to go for the food. So at night-- at night only because there was a German patrolling down in the villages-- we went there to the-- we had some gun or some rifles. We went to the village, to the Slovak peasants.

And of course, we had to show the guns because that way they could say that they were forced to give the food out. Otherwise, somebody could say they were supporting the Jews. And therefore, they could be shot, executed. So we had the gun on them.

So we went to the village. And we get our food. So we got some chickens, some bread, and so on. And it was enough to keep us alive.

This abruptly ended on December 15, 1944, which was a Thursday, I remember very clearly, and about noontime. Remember, I said before that we always left morning the bunker and went to the cave. We are in the cave, and suddenly we hear, about noontime this day, terrific fire, machine gun fire, rifle fire, which lasted maybe half an hour. Later we were just waiting that they will come and finish us. But nothing happened. Nobody came.

At the night, when it was almost dark, we left the bunker. Pardon me-- we left the cave, went to the bunker. There was no more bunker left. The bunker was completely burned down.

What happened is that we were-- somebody told on us, that some villager came up. They brought 600 Germans and Ukrainian troops to find, of course, these partisans because they said there are partisans, not only Jews but partisans too. And the partisans, they were, of course-- they didn't want to leave the bunker like we did because they had weapons. And they were not afraid. And they were surprised.

And before they could get to their machine guns, to their rifles, they were machine gunned down. So I don't remember exactly, but I think about six men were killed there. When we came back, they were dying-- dead there. I remember very clearly one partisan, who was stripped with his whole boots. And some had some ring, and they cut his finger off to take the ring off. And these six men were lying dead there.

But we were all saved because we were in the bunker.

You were in the cave.

I'm sorry. We were in the cave.

Yes.

I had a younger brother, who is four years younger. He was also with us in the cave. But when the machine gun fire started, somehow he got very scared. And you know, it was terrible chaos. He ran out of the cave, my brother, my younger brother. And we lost him.

When we came back, he was nowhere around. So what we thought, of course, he was captured by the Germans. That's it probably. I didn't know, only after the war, that he somehow was able to run down from the mountain to a village, knocked on a-- at night on a house and said, look, I'm a Jew. I just ran from him. Please, take me in.

He was taken in by a woman and a young girl. And they were hiding him. This happened December 15, 1944 until, I think, January 15 or January 7, something like that-- I don't remember the date-- when the front came through that city and was liberated. This young woman, who were holding him there, is now his wife.

She saved his life. She's of non-Jewish origin. But of course, he fell in love with her, or was it from grateful. I don't know. But he married her. And he has a daughter with her. The daughter lives in America, in California. But my brother still lives in Czechoslovakia.

But doing this, he saved himself about three months because he was liberated around the middle of January. I don't know the exact date. We were liberated April 7, 1945 because we had to wait until the front went over through the mountains. But we didn't know. We thought he was gone.

Now, you understand now, there was no bunker. Everything was burned down. We had only maybe a few things on us in the cave. And it was December, so it was to freeze to death or-- but we knew of another bunker not far from that place. And we set out to look for this bunker. We found it maybe two hours later going into the mountain, which was another huge family from my hometown.

But this family was very reluctant to take us in. In other words, they were scared. And they said they don't have enough room. And I remember very clearly that the father of this family, his name was Mr. Stein, said-- he told my father. Look, Mr. Beer-- in Slovakian, of course. He took an can of sardines. You know? And he opened the can and says, see, there are so many sardines in this can. Can you put few more sardines in? You can't. They're the same thing.

And we said, you're right. So we just left him. And we continued to live in the cave. But we knew we couldn't make it for too long. So we-- so we started to build a new bunker again, different location. That means to cut trees and try to make it as good. And we were about six men or so. And we did a pretty primitive bunker. We built it ourselves,

whatever we had left.

We stayed in the bunker, and I said, till a soldier was sent to get us on April 7, 1945. Food, we didn't have. So again, we had to go down at night to the village. I had a good friend. His name was Paul Braun, who was with us, who is today a doctor in Czechoslovakia. He went-- his mission was at night to go to bring food.

And it was bitter winter, high snow. And he couldn't make it any farther. He went under a tree and almost froze to death. But he was a medical student before, so he knew that if he will stimulate himself, somehow he will survive. So he had some pins on him. And he was sticking himself to stick himself so he shouldn't fall asleep because he was freeze to death. And in the morning, we went down to look for him. And we found him already come back, half frozen but we saved him. And thanks God, he's living. And as I say, he's still in Czechoslovakia. And he's practicing in Bohemia, medicine.

It was very miserable live then because we were-- by that time, we were loused. We were full of lice. And you could watch. We had to use the snow. There was absolutely no hygiene. I mean there was no nothing. But you know, you want to live, so you survive.

One day a Czechoslovak soldier comes in Czechoslovak uniform and say, are you the Jews from there? Yes, we are. I was told by my captain, by my leader, to bring you over the mountains, maybe a few miles, to our captain so he will bring you safely down to two to the liberated area. Of course, we didn't trust anybody. We thought maybe he is a spy who will-- who will take us to the German center and execute us there.

And we had a council. What should we do? If we stay here, we'll freeze to death or we just die from hunger. If we go, maybe we'll have a chance. So what we do? We said, OK, we believe you. We questioned him, and it looks legitimate. But you know, we didn't have any trust.

But we let him go always forward, and we followed him. And so maybe if-- if it's [AUDIO OUT]

And the Russian captain greeted us there. And the greeting was one hand shakes and other hand, the watch was taken. I had so-called Canadian boots, high boots, which I prepared for the living in the mountains, which he took from us and giving me some torn, miserable shoes, which were not good. He took my binoculars, remember, which I told you I used for seeing. Everything we had was taken away from, the radio-- everything was taken away, but we were living.

And I don't remember now, but maybe a day or so after that we were taken down to a village and with trucks taken down to my hometown. My father, my stepmother-- my brother, of course, we lost-- and the other family, which I told you were with us, we came down.

The house where we lived wasn't there. What happened, our house was located on a strategic point where the Russians and German duel took place, cannon battle, yeah. The house was completely leveled. And there was no house there.

But we came down. And we stayed in some other house. And of course, we felt pretty good by that time. The population, I must say, wasn't very, very, very, very nice to us. No, they thought that maybe all the Jews were-- why? Because number one, they took the things away from us, naturally, everything what we left there. And they didn't want to give it back.

But there were many Jewish partisans and soldiers and officers. And of course, they had to give up the thing. And father, as I told you, was an electrician. And he buried some material, like wiring and things, in the backyard of the house. And it was there. He took it out. And it was-- he started business back right away, practically, whatever he had.

I told you, I want to become very badly a doctor. We came April 7 liberated. May 1, I was already enrolled in the medical school of Slovakia, in Bratislava-- it's called Komensky University-- as a medical student, which I was very happy because it was all my goal. And I stayed there in Bratislava from May '45 till August '48. I was a junior medical student. I wasn't a doctor yet.

But in February '48, Czechoslovakia, which was a democratic country, was lost to communism. I know about it. And of course, I said I don't want to stay under the communism. I had an aunt living in Cleveland, Ohio, which was my father's sister, an older sister.

We got in contact with her, that we survived the war. And I told her that I would like to get away. I want to leave the country-- whether she could send me some papers to come to America. She was very helpful. And I told her that I'm a third-year medical student, and I like to finish medicine in America. But I had no idea about system, American system as compared to my system.

And she brought-- she sent me paper from the Cleveland College, which was in Cleveland, which says I was accepted. I understood that I was accepted to medical school. I brought my papers. I come to Cleveland College and say here I am. Here is my paper. And please, which school do you-- which class do you enroll me in.

What do you mean which class? You are accepted in a freshman, first-year freshman. What does it mean, I asked him because I didn't know. Well, you have to have four years of pre-med. And then if you are good and if you have thing, if you qualify, we'll get you to-- but I had already over three years of medical school, and here are my papers. But we don't recognize your training because it was after the war, and the training was very miserable. We just don't give you any credit.

Now that was a terrible shock to me because, as I say, I came August the 5th, '48. I was 26 and 1/2 years old. And they told me four years of pre-med. And we cannot guarantee you because, number one, I must mention that I didn't come as an immigrant. I came as a student for one year only. And after one year, I was supposed to go back to Czechoslovakia. But I asked for asylum-- asylum. And I got it, and I stayed and became, in 1954, citizen.

So I said, no, that is not for me. I just-- I had no money. I had \$2 and my passport, which I came with absolutely no money, nothing. So I looked for a job, something connected with medicine. And they told me, no, you were a medical student three years. We can use you in a hospital to work. OK.

I don't remember now who helped me, whether it was a Jewish family or so. But they took me to a so-called state hospital. But I must say, the state hospital in Czechoslovakia is a hospital owned by the state, operated by the state, no private hospitals. And I was, as an extern working in a state hospital. So I thought, fine. But I came to the building, and I see-- I see closed in-- how do you call them?

Oh, bars.

Bars, yeah. I said, why are these bars? They looked at me, and they said, you know, these are insane people. So, OK. I came there, and-- I came there. I had a physical examination for my health, which was fine. And then they sent me. And then we want you to go to another doctor, and he will examine your feet.

I come there. And this is a doctor, white uniform. And he looks at my feet. And I said, who are you? No, I'm Dr. So-and-so, and I'm a chiropodist. And I said, what is a chiropodist? I am a foot doctor. What is a foot doctor, you know. And so I inquired.

And I told him my story. He said, oh, maybe you could go to our school. And he gave me the address. And I went there. And the dean of the school, before I had to chance to say A-B, he grabbed me and signed me in. And I don't have to tell you anymore, I'm a podiatrist today.

Except for that he graduated number one in his class.

That's not important. I was valedictorian, but that's not important. But that's how I ended up to be podiatrist. And I am now, thanks God, a podiatrist for 30 years, practicing in Cleveland, Ohio. And I have two beautiful children.

This is my daughter. She's a journalist, graduate journalist from New York University. And my son is home. And we're making nice living, thanks God. And now this, my story ends there.

Meanwhile, I must say that my father died in 1976 at the ripe age of 86 and 1/2. My brother, whom I told you escaped, [? Zeron. ?] He still is in Czechoslovakia. He was visiting us already twice here. But he still lives in Czechoslovakia with his wife, who saved his life, and his daughter living in California.

And is that where I should end?

You end where you want to end.

What else can I say? You tell. Help.

Did you talk about your sister?

Yeah, I told about my sister.

Tell him the fact that--

Yeah, my brother, I told him how he was saved.

Did you tell him about the fact that he's married to--

I told that this girl saved his life by taking him to the house. And-- and--

Let me ask you a question.

Please, do.

A couple of questions.

Sure.

The city that you were born in and lived in, how big a city was it?

There was, at that time, about 7,000 to 10,000 people, small town.

And how many Jewish people?

We had about 700 families there, which could mean-- could multiply average by three.

Was it a active Jewish community?

It was active but not Orthodox. It was Neolog. We called it Neolog, which would be probably equivalent to Reform here today.

Reform.

Between Reform and Conservative.

Conservative. We had a very beautiful temple, which still stands there. My father, when he lived, he was a [NON-ENGLISH]. He was. The government, under communists, wanted to take it away. He said temple make a-- what is it? Museum, I think.

A recreation center.

A recreation center. But my father was fighting it. And I don't know what happened today because he's dead now. But it was kept as a temple until he died-- beautiful, beautiful temple.

Were there community facilities.

After the war?

No, before.

Before the war? Oh, we had a dayan, Dr. Deutsch. We had chazzans. We had shochet. We had kosher butcher.

Community center?

Community center, no. No, because it was a very small town. There wasn't such things. But there was a WIZO, WIZO organization, WIZO-- women organization, Women's Zionist organization. They were active. There was, after the war, a hakhshara, but nothing like here in America. I mean, there was no money for such thing, you know.

Were there Zionist organizations?

Yes, there were. There were Zionist. Yes-- quite strong. And they become very, very vocal after the war with making hakhsharas for Aliyah, to go out.

By the way, I didn't mention that. When I came back from the mountains, we had to repatriate. It was called repatriation. And they gave us a white card, repatriation card, which had this statement-- where do you want to go? And I wrote Palestina. You know what Palestine means? Palestine-- because there was no Israel yet.

I want to go to Palestine. I was sure that I will leave because I did not want these people. I hated them. I mean, they killed my sister. And I just was-- and I didn't want to see them. I said I didn't want to stay there. I despised them.

But meanwhile, I enrolled to the medical school. Then we got in touch with my aunt. And then I thought, maybe, maybe that I would come to America. Also, I must say that when I was in medical school, I met my wife, who was two years younger in the school than I. And she enrolled as a freshman medical student.

Her father was a physician named Dr. [PERSONAL NAME], who practiced in a small town, Topolcany. And we met at the school. And this is the end of it. We got married.

That's the end?

The beginning, right. And she-- her parents wanted her to go to America. So she came here before me, several before me, January '48.

You were already married?

No. We were engaged there, but we married in New York after we came. I want to say this story. She left in January '48 on Bais Yaakov school. And I got my papers seven months later because I didn't speak any English. And I went to the American Consulate in Prague. But my English was so miserable, when the consul told me, Mr. Beer, sit down, I stayed because nobody said to me.

So he said, you are not ready to come as a student. You study more English and come back. In two months later, right, I think I came, and I passed the test. And I was able to leave the country, Czechoslovakia, in July 25, 1948. I arrived on a marine boat. The boat name was Marine Jumper. I remember I was sick 10 days on the boat because it was terrific waves and you know. But I arrived in August 5 in New York.

My fiance was waiting for me there. We immediately came to Cleveland. As I say, I had to enroll in school. I went to

the private school, [INAUDIBLE] was there. And we live now in Cleveland.

I want to ask you another question.

Please.

What was the-- what were the non-Jewish people like in your city?

A very good question. My city was divided in two religions, Catholic and Protestant. The Catholics, almost without exception, joined the leading party, the anti-Jewish and the Hitler side. It was called Hlinkova garda, which was equivalent to the Hitler Party. And they were collaborating 100% with a trend, with the trend.

The Protestant or the Lutherans, they-- not because they exactly love Jews, but because they didn't want the Catholics to [INAUDIBLE], they tried to show us-- I mean, they tried to fight the Catholics a little bit. So they tried to be helpful. For instance, I didn't say, a Protestant minister gave me some papers, you know, Aryan paper, which said that I was-- I was [NON-ENGLISH] that I turned--

You converted.

--converted, that I was converted. I never had to use it, but I had the papers, where Catholics would never give it to you. And some of them were hiding in their houses, Jews. But I must say, generally, generally they didn't love us, didn't love, didn't love us.

Can I ask you a very personal question?

Please, do. Please, do.

I know you have discussed this with your daughter and I assume your son, your experiences and so forth.

Sure. Sure.

Do you have a feeling that you have transmitted anything to them about your experiences--

Very much so.

--in terms of their commitments in any particular area.

Well, my daughter is very committed to this. She came. She left work. She came here. She's very, very interested in that. And I say that she really, after we are gone, she will probably tell the story further.

I would say she totally identifies with my experience in Auschwitz.

Because my wife was in Auschwitz. I was not, you see.

Totally. Really. So she's very, very, very much involved in this thing.

So you said something quite interesting before, that you felt guilty about your sister dying.

Yes, I did. I still do.

Well, you know, I don't agree with you. I don't think you should feel guilty.

I know. I know.

But that's, you know, something for you to work out for yourself. But in a way, I think those Jews who did not sustain the trauma and the suffering, to some extent we feel guilty because we couldn't share it with you.

Well, you couldn't. You were in America.

Well, even so, there is a certain peoplehood that we have together. And I think you will find that, if you dig deeper, deeply enough with American Jews, they feel that too, that we wish we could have been more supportive and more helpful.

May I tell you something which comes to my mind now? There were two boys, two Slovak Jewish boys, who were taken to Auschwitz. And luckily, somehow they were able to escape. These two boys came to my hometown because, as I say, the border between Poland and where I was was very close. They came, and they spent a few days in my house, in our house, hiding them.

They told me all the story. Of course, by that time I already knew that my sister was gone because-- but they were able-- may I say, give you the information? My hometown is in mountains. And about 12 kilometers from my town was a little town of Liptovsky Hradok, which was known for exporting woods-- woods, out-- lumber, lumber. And lumber was imported to Switzerland there.

We were able-- no I personally, but people involved were able to barricade these two boys into a train, into a train, the wood, and get them to Switzerland. It was a miracle they made it because, as you probably know, dogs were used on the stations to sniff. But somehow they were so deep in, and the wood was so they couldn't get them.

These two boys came immediately to Switzerland, to the embassy and said what's happening. It was in 1943, mind you. And they were not believed that. And nothing was [INAUDIBLE].

They said, look, there are people dying there. They had the tattoo numbers on their hand. I lost track of them. I don't know where they are now. But they were not believed so. And nobody made much thing about it. So from that standpoint, I say that maybe people should have been listening more in the free world, what's happening.

They were the living examples what's happening there. And yet, their voices weren't heard.

Voices were not heard.

Yeah. So--

If there's anything else, doctor, you would like to say on this, this is a record, and it will be kept, hopefully, perpetually. And if there's anything else you'd like to communicate, I'd like you to say it.

All I can say is that we are very grateful for America that we could be here, that we could establish our life again, and that, hopefully, our children will have an easier life than we did.

I think America is richer that you are here.

Thank you very much, sir.