

[NON-ENGLISH] And then his name and the date. This is Sarah Kestenbaum. April 13th, 1983. 2:30 in the afternoon. Interviewing Mr. Dan Berkovits of Brooklyn, New York.

Yeah. OK.

We just have to say something so we can see.

Oh. My name is Dan Berkovits. I live in Brooklyn, New York.

Good. And you're going to [INAUDIBLE]. Just talk normal. Normal.

OK. OK. My name is Dan Berkovits. I live 367 Avenue. That's Brooklyn, New York. I was born August the 6th, 1922 in NyÁrmada, the name of the town in Hungary. My history, as far as on November, 1943, as a Jew, by reaching military age of 20, I was drafted in a labor unit on the Hungarian army. I was there for three years. Previously, I lived in Budapest. They put me in a unit and sent me to [NON-ENGLISH] near Zsibo.

The government built a storage tank, bomb-proof for gasoline. The gasoline tanks, they were drilled and carved in the hill. And when we come there-- so they had the 53,000-liter tanks. They were ready and placed. As a machinist, they put me in the machine shop with another electrician. And the chief machinist was a very arrogant, antisemitic man in the beginning. Then when he saw we are real professional, he started to like us and helping us all along. And through us, he was helping all the rest of the Jews, too.

All right. His name was Janusz Bogarti. On January 1944, the Germans take over this whole project. They were all technicians in the beginning, and they treated us in the beginning with courtesy. In April 1944, they asked for 20 boys to go to different places to install those 100,000-liter tanks, but they guarded us very carefully. We spent time in different airports in Hungary. And we put those tanks down and we installed them there.

Right?

Perfect.

And then we had no other work. We went back to the builders. We had a builder who was the contractor. He had a garage. He was staying over there in Budapest, in the city. As we arrived, we saw the Germans rounding up all the Hungarian Jews there with the help of the Hungarian Nazis there.

And I know they planned us to ship back to our original unit near Zsibo. I escaped and hanged around in the city of Budapest without money. My relative lost their apartment because they had to move in a different area where they had the ghettos there. So I couldn't locate my family, and I had many cousins there.

So no food, no shelter. But I had things to do. I teamed up with a couple of thieves. We stole and we did pickpocketing. We helped prostitutes. Whatever the lowest thing what we can do, I did. Luckily, I had an innocent face and I get away with everything.

But back of my mind, I always thought, if I ever survive this Holocaust, if I ever became a normal society, what kind of person would I be? Would I be normal? Would I be an innocent man or a useful man to the society? But this was always in the back of my mind.

Any time, when I stole something or I robbed something, there were some people. Somebody recognized me. I know he had some Jewish blood with him, some young fellow. And he starting-- he was yelling in order to get the attention for the authorities. Luckily, a friend of mine come along. I grabbed his gun. I shot him. You see, I never felt any remorse about him. I never even think about him. Just a great satisfaction.

So all this time, Mr. Wallenberg, the Swede, he tried to help the Jews. They printed up, by the millions, all kinds of

papers, all kind of papers, like we are Swiss citizen. And we thought in the beginning they respected those papers. We thought we are going to be safe.

And then they told us, go to the Olbert army base, where we can find shelters and food. So I went in and I was there about a week. Suddenly, in early morning around 4 o'clock, SS troops, Hungarian troops, all kind of troops. More than thousands and thousands of soldiers, surrounded the base. And they marched us to the railroad station, put us in a cattle boxcar. And then in a couple of days, we arrived in Austria, Bruck an der Leitha. We were here about 15,000 Jewish boys in my age, around 20 to 21.

That was the name, Bruck an der Leitha. Der Leitha means a small river. And this was close to the Hungarian border. So here they thought they were able to hold the Russian and we had to build-- we were digging trenches. They building their defense line. Yeah. And at night, they put us in a barn to sleep. I remember this whole winter, I didn't see a fire or I didn't see anything warm. I don't have any warm food in my body. And I didn't see any fire whatsoever till the spring.

So the Russians started to push the front. In March, they put us near the Danube. There was some kind of a river boats. There was a river boat where they pulled three grain storage places. About close to 6,000 people were in the street boats. And whoever died of malnutrition, we had no other choice. We had no place for them. Just we threw up into the Danube River. Yeah. I was lucky. The reason I survived the four days without food and shelter, because previous day, they bombed the town and they sent us out to clean up there the Germans.

Bombed the [INAUDIBLE]?

No. The Americans bombed the station and we went out to clean them up with heavy guard. I was lucky I find a bag full of grain. So I took and some strings on my pants, end of my pants, and I filled up my pants as much as I could with the grain. And this grain saved my life and saved my cousin. Yeah.

How old were you when this was going--

Huh?

How old were you?

Now I'm 60.

And when this was going on?

I was about-- I think it was 21. 21. So after we arrived, they put us in there. After we arrived in Danube River-- it took us four days-- we got in the famous concentration camp, Mauthausen. We are lucky, because early arrivals, we have a place in a cell, a barrack. It means-- how shall I explain you? OK. We're staying in the barracks.

One day, I remember-- one particular day I remember the place was bombed. But inside the barracks, the place was so small-- everybody had such a small area, we couldn't even stretch out. So I figured, I told my cousin-- we were together-- let's go outside and sleep. So the way I was sleeping, suddenly the bomb fell down.

The bomb come down not far than 20 feet from me. Luckily, the way the bomb come down, it made a tremendous big hole. I was covered with sand. Nothing happened to me, but people far away, 100 feet, by the hundreds, was killed by the bomb. So I told my cousin at that time, I'm a lucky person. And we have to survive. We have to fight on because this is our fate.

Finally, in Gunskirchen--

Where is Gunskirchen?

Yeah. Yeah. What? Oh, yeah. After Mauthausen, the Russians, they were coming closer. So they put us, with 17,000,

about 50 miles further. The name was Gunskirchen. And inside the woods they were building. They had a camp. Luckily, they had no crematorium there, but they built-- whoever died of malnutrition, they had the big trenches and just they put them in. There were 17,000 people. Finally, the commander get together some of our leaders, whom they designated as leaders.

How did you designate them? Voted?

Everybody said, you will go down there. He told us, he said he had an order from Himmler to destroy the camp completely. And all the bomb-- what do you call them-- all the ammunition, everything is under it. Everything is ready to blow up. But in order to save his life, he said he wouldn't do it because the Americans are coming. They are close. He said, if we are able to hold up two or three days, you're lucky. Otherwise, I don't know what I'm going to do, and what can I do? So it was May the 4th when--

'19 what?

1945-- when the Americans arrived. We expected them to come in, but this camp was so much outside the road, they were so busy pursuing the Germans, they didn't come in. They didn't come into the camp. We started to march all the skeletons right down. There was a very big city. The name of the city was Wels. It was eight to 10km from-- and over there, the American forces put them in a big army base. This big army base was so tremendous, big. I don't know how many divisions they were able to support.

We find over there rooms. We find over there a place where to stay. And naturally, they broke up all kinds of food storage places. We can see so many food, what the Germans had over there. So we started to eat like a pig. But all the American personnel, especially who was in charge of that, he warned us of the place. Take it easy. Don't eat so much. Slowly. Who could listen to them? After, a couple of days later, at least 20% of the survivors died.

Why do you think they died?

What?

Why?

Listen, they thought they will put an end to it. And by Poland, they had the experience. Then they come to Hungary. Whatever they could accomplish in Poland, within a month, with their experience later on, within three days, they did it in Hungary. So luckily, the main city, this fellow Wallenberg, what the president mentioned in his speech, with his great courage, he saved a lot of people. Let me see.

Then over there, this army base they called [NON-ENGLISH] Camp. I was small. A skeleton I was. But I was very positive, and this kept me alive. I still can't understand how good I pick up a bale of hay, because my cousin, in the meantime, was so sick he couldn't walk inside the camp, eight, 10 mile.

Finally, I find a railroad car. And I picked this bale of hay, spread them around, and put my cousin in there. And within four days, when it was a little order, then the American ambulance picked them up. Thank God he survived and recuperated very fast. As soon as he recuperated, I get sick. Then he nursed me. And I know it-- if we wouldn't be together, none of us would be alive today.

What's his name?

His name is Sandor Katz. He was in Canada, in Montreal, Canada. But he married a French girl. He moved back to France. He lives there in France now. He has two kids.

Tell me what his mother's name is and what your mother's name is.

My mother's name is Matilda Katz, the Katz name. And he was-- my grandparents, they were brothers and sisters, with

his father there.

OK, my sister will give her own recording, but just a little briefing I would like to say, how fate it is. She was a small, little girl. And when she went to Auschwitz, they selected her to the left of the gas chamber. Suddenly, she saw the whole family-- mother, father-- disappeared. She is all alone. Then she sees her cousin and another girl, her friend-- two strong, husky girls, who was selected to labor.

So at night, she went over to the other camp to stay with the girls. Somebody saw her following day. They threw her back to the left [? camp ?] for the girls. At night, she walked back again to these two girls, to her cousin. After, they asked for 100 girls, and the two cousins picked her up in order to show her she is tall, put her heels on her. Actually, they picked her up and they walked her out. And she was staying, stood out there, and stood her in a different camp there. But she survived. She lives here today.

I had an uncle, who was my mother's brother, and he helped me a lot. He wants to help me. But I was always an independent man in my life. I told my uncle, I was in Germany-- I was in, previously, from the liberation, I lived in Munich. I did a little business. I had a couple dollars. And I told him, I'm an independent man.

He even joined, called me up a lot of times if I need any help. I told him, I really appreciate and I'm very proud I have an organization like this, but thank God I don't need them. I need to work. I had a good trade. I was a tool and dye maker. I made a good living. Later on, had my own business, a tool and dye shop.

In Munich?

No, this is in Hungary. No, here in the United States. I'm sorry.

Oh, that's what I figured.

Here in New York City, near City Hall, there was BMW. We have a couple of my own patent in Washington. But lately, I have two partners, but we disagree. And in 1970 I sold out my share. I was ready to buy them or sell them out. So then I figured, before I go into another business, let me have a little rest a couple of months. Let me collect unemployment. So in order to unemployment, I needed a job. So I started work at Grillmaster Inc.

But as an organizer-- you know what? I told right away the management, how could you ever survive with a production like this? I started to change around the production. The same week-- I started Monday. Saturday, the boss called me into the place. He said, Berkovits, if you want to stay with us, you're going to get \$75 raise right now. So ever since I'm with this company-- I am the plant manager now over there.

Did you every marry?

I have to say, I married a girl. She's a Sephardic girl. She's from Syria. We have a wonderful two boys. One of them is 20 and 21. You can imagine a combination like this, they are really dynamite. Yeah. Sorry. I wanted to bring one of my sons here, but Monday morning he started a new job. And he planned this one for so many months, I don't want to bring. Otherwise, I would bring him here, too.

When I was there in this army base, there American doctor. Too bad I couldn't record his name. I know he was a psychiatrist. So he brought us together, young boys. He told us, he said, listen, boys. You went through a lot in your life, but mentally, you should be healthy. This is very important. Never tell yourself-- all those years, be positive. Never tell yourself, I went through a lot. I'm a sick man. Only thing, you talk to yourself and tell them, thank God I survived with mental and physical good health.

If you're going to live like this, you're going to be healthy. You're going to physically and mentally, and a good thing. And that's what I recommend everybody. They should never say, that I am a sick man or I went through a lot and my nerves are shot, things like this. Be positive.