

This is an interview of Mr. Paul J. Blank at the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors on April the 12th, 1983. Mr. Blank, would you tell us where you were born?

I was born in Poland, in the town of Belzyce.

And what was the birth date?

July 2, 1923.

And what was the size of your family?

Well, there was four children, two sisters, two brothers, my mother, and my father. And I had, of course, aunts, uncles, cousins, was a very large family. And my mother had four brothers I believe, three sisters. And there were cousins-- I can't remember offhand how many, but there was a family, I'd approximate about 70 people.

What was the size of the community in general? How many people lived in--

This town this town had 5,000 Jewish families. And when the Germans came in 1939, it was about the time of the year, the Jewish holidays in the fall, which Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos. The Germans were already in town.

As soon as they came in, they started their damned work. And, of course, I was young then and innocent. And I was very, very angry at this behavior. I thought perhaps that people are nice, like we were taught in the Jewish tradition were nice. And they seemed to me idiotic and insane and as if the devils came into the town and started doing these things.

The first taste that I got, to give you an example, is that I had-- I've known an old rabbi who was teaching children the first Jewish letters, alef--

Alef-bets.

And this man was, I thought he was a stern man, you know, because if we didn't pay attention, he would pull our ears and things like that. And thinking back, it was lovingly, but he nevertheless tried to discipline us.

But they rounded up the whole town. It was Erev Rosh ha-Shanah I believe. And he said, this Hauptmann, this SS man said that if one man out of the Jews will come out and volunteer to die, the rest of the people can go home and celebrate their holiday. And so, I saw this. I was amongst them.

And he says, but knowing Jews, he says, nobody's going to volunteer to die so that the others go home. He says, nobody will do that. Is there anybody that will?

Well, this old man with a little red beard, very old man, frail, he stepped forward. He says to him, Mein Herr, you can do with me whatever you want. Just let the people go home and celebrate their holidays.

And so he says, well, what have you got to say before you're going to die. You know I'm going to kill you. He says, well, I just want to pray. He did his prayers. He killed him. And he took us too.

So this made me very, very angry. It was unfair, you know. And soon afterwards, they called for my father to volunteer to go to a labor camp. The father being the king of the family, the head of the family, even more the king of the family, of course, I volunteered to go to my father's place because it was unthinkable to take away my father from the household and from the family.

And I wound up in this camp, Jozefów in Poland where we worked in the-- it was a big-- the biggest river in Poland is the Vistula. I worked there up to my neck in water digging some kind of ditches. And I started from this dampness and the constant exposure to the cold water spitting blood. When I realized what was happening to me, I tried in every way

to change my workplace until I succeeded to change my workplace to a drier place and this subsided. I still have it with me now, this kind of thing. I sometimes bring up blood.

But it just happened that for some reason, they got a new shipment of Jews. There wasn't-- the thing then was not to cleanse the towns of Jews, just to get the most labor out of the Jews. So we were there maybe about six months. We were already tuckered out, so to speak.

And they got a new shipment of Jews. And we were let go. We were let go to do some work in our town, the same kind of work. So that we can go home, sleep home so that doesn't cost the Germans any money, and then come back to work.

Well, this was going on for some time. And then periodically, Germans were coming into the town, surround the town, and just take people. Nobody knew where. Nobody heard of them.

Well, I had an idea. I knew that they're not going to any kind of picnics. We're not going to see them anymore. This was my premonition, that my father being that he was a prisoner of war in Germany, he says, well, they're such highly intelligent people, highly civilized people, they won't do anything like that. It just-- the youngsters, they didn't pay attention to him.

He says, what could I do? You know, the Germans, we speak almost the same language, you know. And my father was a businessman. And he had a lot to do with Germans, rather Poles of German descent. They spoke German. So he knew them all. And he figured he is safe.

Well, it happened that little by little, they started taking out people from the town and shipping in people to our town from strange towns, from Germany, and from Prussia, and from all over. And this was like a center of deportation it became. I felt it. I knew it.

But my father, my mother, nobody wanted to move. And it was unthinkable I should run away and leave my family alone. This was the greatest tragedy in the Jewish behavior.

Well, it came a time where they surrounded the town. And they grabbed my father, my uncles, my older cousins, they grabbed. They shipped them off. And I succeeded in breaking through the ring of the SS on the fields in running away.

After I did that, I felt guilty. I left my family, you know, running away. After a day or so, I was hiding out in the fields. And I heard everything is quiet. I came back into town. I saw my mother and my two sisters and my brother.

She turned to me, and she said-- [CRYING] she said, my son, you are the head of the family now. Have such a weight on, I couldn't bear it. I said, I'm going to step into my father's shoes? Who am I?

Well, be that as it may, I tried. It came another time when we were surrounded with the Germans. And this is the part that I get-- is blanking out because I guess from looking back I don't want to face it. I ran away again. I ran away to live.

And my mother gave in. She was running too. And they shot her in the field someplace. After a day, I came back to the town. My mother is not there. My youngest sister there, my older sister, my brother. My mother isn't there. What happened to the mom? They said we don't know. She went someplace.

She always kept on herself the few rings. She had a diamond ring, my father's ring, her ring, a cocktail ring. You know had a few things, every Jew had a few little things. She kept it on herself.

And I walked on the fields where I would normally know if anybody runs which direction they would run where it's better, where it's worse. And I found her on the field dying. I said I got to have somebody to tell me what happened.

Well, I found a Pole who was tilling the soil at that time. And he said, she was running. She was a little hard of hearing in one ear. And either she didn't hear or something. Anyway, she was stopped. She gave him the rings to let her go. He said to her, walk ahead. And he killed her. words

This was my first-- the last experience that this knocked out everything of me. I knew what the Germans were then. To kill a person, an unknown person, a woman, there was nobody to bury her. I buried her myself. If I didn't go crazy then, I never will I guess.

Well, that was bureaucracy-- I had no more mother. And my sister-- my two sisters-- no, my little sister was taken at the same time my mother was killed to Treblinka to be gassed, eight years old. So now I have my bigger sister and my brother.

I didn't trust any ghettos, any camps. But I said, we're going to do, we're going to try to live in the outside of town. There were forests. In the forest, we're going to try to live there.

Want some water?

We lived in the forest for about maybe three weeks, a month. I was going out at night trying to organize some food. What I did try to get acquainted with the dogs in the farmhouses so that they wouldn't bark at me. And I came, and I took the food from the dogs, from the pigs.

They fed the pigs. They had some stored carrots, you know. They usually stored them in the earth, you know. They cover it in mounds of earth, and inside are carrots. I knew all of that.

And we lived like this. But it was impossible to live like this because there was-- I knew there were other people living like this. And they were caught and executed.

Well, this time, we were in town trying to get some things that my family had in the house. And we couldn't get it anymore. And then, we went to this place to sleep, someplace in the fields, in a stack of hay. This was wintertime.

And apparently, the Polish militia, the ones that cooperated with the Germans-- they all cooperated with the Germans-- were waiting for us. We had to pass a certain cemetery, the Polish cemetery. They waited for us. And they caught us.

They didn't catch me. But they caught my brother. But my brother was caught. I was caught. I felt he's my responsibility. I was caught.

So I went over. And I says, what do you want with us? He says, well, you shouldn't be roaming the countryside. You should be where you should be, in camp, concentration camp, because someone is hiding out someplace and you know where he is. He's supposed to be some resistance fighter. We didn't know. But anyway, you'll have to take me and show me where he is.

My sister-- we all stopped at that time and talked to this man. I said, you know, you better talk to him because you're a woman. You're a girl. And maybe you can influence him, you know? She tried, but she couldn't. Then she said to my brother, you go with him. You go with him and show him.

I'm sure that this is the way it happened, but pain can sometimes play tricks on you. And she is not alive today. She's not here to defend herself. But I blame her for sending my brother with this guy to show whoever, whatever. But instead, they took him to jail. And they executed him.

And when they caught him, there was no more place for us to hide any place. They would bring in every day to the-- it was a ghetto, but it was actually a work camp in the town. Took in people from the fields with throats slashed. They were hiding out by Polacks who took them in for money. And they took away their money, and they killed them. They threw them out in the fields. Dogs tore them apart, you know. It was really I saw that if we're going to survive, we're going to survive in the camp, not outside, not in Poland anyway. There was nowhere to go.

We had neighbors, Polish neighbors. On the Sabbath, they would come in. My father would invite them in and give them to taste different goodies, fish, challah. And they loved it.

And they were talking about the army. You know my father was in the Polish army. He was in the Russian army. So they talk the army talk, you know. And I thought they really loved each other, liked each other. They had a nice rapport.

But when it came down to it, they grabbed my sister, the older sister. And they wanted to sell her for a pound of sugar. But I was there. And I said to my sister-- he was holding her by the coat, by the collar of the coat-- in Jewish, throw off the coat and run. And she did that. She saved herself for the time being.

But he grabbed my cousin, my mother's brother's daughter. He grabbed a lot of others that I knew. And this is what got me so angry. Here, he was coming in and eating with friends. And here's he's selling us out.

So I saw this is the end. We have to join the camp. Myself and my brother and my sister joined the camp. My brother that same night was executed. And in the camp, they asked who volunteered to bury the dead. I wanted to know what happened to my brother. I raised my hand. I want to volunteer.

I volunteered. I got there. I saw him. I buried him. And now, I am me and my sister.

We were taking to this little camp inside this town, Belzyce. We were surrounded. About 3 o'clock in the morning, and the SS was selecting people to go to work, to be killed, taken away. They want to make the town clear of Jews.

The Polacks were standing outside of the camp and laughing and making jokes while people were being killed. The people, mainly the women, 500 women were lined up against the synagogue wall and being shot. We were shoved inside the synagogue with machine guns and grenades. They threatened us if we make one move.

And they were selecting people for burying, that can handle to bury the dead. They asked me-- I looked small and scrawny-- if I can work. I'm a child, you know. Maybe if I can't work, then they're going to execute me.

So I said I can work. And they said, you have to show me. And of course, I showed them. I saw these people being half dead. And we're covering them with dirt. And they're hollowing out from the graves, don't forget, remember us. We are not dead yet. Don't do it.

This was-- [SOBBING] but when we finally-- they selected whoever they wanted to select, the rest was killed and buried. And we went to a camp named Budzyn. This was in Poland.

When we got there, this Oberscharführer, the head of the camp, the German, the SS man said that whoever has any gold, silver, any kind of valuables, watches, money, to put it into this basket. And he says, he knows where Jews are hiding money. He says, in the heels-- I'll never forget it-- in the hems of the jackets, in the shoulder pads, sewn in, just almost any place. I know all these places. I've been schooled for that purpose.

Well, everybody got scared. And everybody gave whatever they had. And you had to pass through single file in front of him to see if you're going to be killed or are you going to work. We didn't know which was which, which line was which. Right and left, right at that time and to work. Left meant to be killed, to be executed.

For some reason, I wanted to go to the left. He gave me a kick in the back. I can still feel it. And he said, go this way. And I guess I was meant to live.

And he at that time, selected about 150 people to be killed, very young people mostly and older men. Well, that lasted, this camp lasted for about a year. Then we were moved to Wieliczka, also in Poland, southern Poland, near Kraków. This was the salt mines near Krakow.

We worked down in the salt mines. We didn't see the light of the day for about three or four months. And at that time, I still saw my sister in that camp before I went down to the salt mines. When I came up, I didn't see her anymore.

Well, I found out later on that my sister was living until the end about two days before the war ended. And she was

shipped with another transport out to Danzig on a ship. And the ship was mined. And they were all drowned, two survivors in Israel. And I learned through them that she was one of the dead.

So now, I'm alone. After-- well, I-- yeah, before-- after that, I went to Flossenbürg. In Flossenbürg, we arrived in Germany. From Wieliczka to Germany, it was a long way. We got a little piece of bread that had to last us, I think, about 8 or 9 days. And whoever was strong enough to grab it from another person, this piece of bread, did it, not amongst Jews, but amongst the nationalities. They didn't-- some of them had no pity on anything, just to preserve themselves.

And there was an incident where they didn't have enough cars, cattle cars, to put us on. And the head of the SS said whoever is not getting on this train is going to be killed here. People are people. You know how they start to panic. And evidently everybody got on because it was so packed.

And it didn't take long, people started dying because it was packed-- no air. Sanitation was abominable. The lice, the stench, they put on some kind of powder. I think it was calcimine powder that fermented and gave off the gases that killed you.

And when we arrived over there, you couldn't walk straight anymore. And you had to bend over the bodies laying, you know. To give an example, if you were 500 people-- it sounds phenomenal. I don't know how. They're pretty big cars-- 500 people standing in the cattle car, and you got there, must have been about 50.

And it was it was the most excruciating feeling to experience for a young boy. I got hardened. I felt as if I'm not there. I'm somebody else. I'm experiencing this, but me, I'm above it all. I felt after that like indestructible. They can't touch me. My body they can have, but not me.

I got to this camp I said to myself, I was sitting-- I was friends with a fellow from my home town. I said, you know, we both help each other, no matter what. You have something, you give me half. I get something, I give you half. We live like this. And we looked out for each other.

And I says-- Nolach was his name-- Nolach, how come these people don't move? Look, they're getting hit. But they don't move. He says, I don't know.

And the first thing I think to ask one of the prisoners, how come when they hit, you don't respond? You don't move. He said, it takes much more energy to move than the pain. They just couldn't move. And after a while, I understood because I became that way-- very little energy.

We came into Flossenbürg. I saw the smokestacks. And I smelled the stench from the crematorium. It was awful.

And it said on the gates, you come in through here, you go out through there, meaning the chimney stacks. This godforsaken place, till this day, I can't place it quite where it was. I know it was in Bavaria someplace. I can't place it. I know where Dachau was. But this Flossenbürg was such a godforsaken-- all you could see around for miles, for miles, were just mountains and sky, nothing else. There's nobody around.

But they shipped me at the time to Herzberg. In Herzberg, we were working on building a railway, extending the railway, and digging in the mountains. I don't know what the hell we were doing in the mountains, digging some kind of ore. They called it Stahlbau. Later on, we thought it was the uranium we were extracting.

And over there, we could organize a little bit of food. We could pick up on the way going to work some potato peels, some apple peels, something. We could always pick up something. This was considered to be a good place to work.

It didn't take long, I got sick. I don't know what happened to my hand. But my hand was puffed. And I had an infection. And my finger was amputated.

And I was shipped to Dachau. Going to Dachau was quite an experience. It was also a death march. The first order,

whoever couldn't march was killed. Coming-- it was already near the liberation. I felt it's coming to the end because I could hear from far away cannons. I could hear-- I don't know. I don't know-- maybe it was bombings. I knew it was something was happening.

We were marched through fields and across creeks and slept in barns, heavily protected by SS.

[AUDIO OUT]

OK, as my wife says, I left out a lot of gory details. I feel you go over it over and over again, it's very, very difficult. It's taxing. It's needless to say what I saw while being in these camps--

I was in camps with all kinds of nationalities, with Hungarians, with Dutch, with Poles, with Russians, with Ukrainians. And I saw people eating the flesh of the dead bodies. And, of course, I didn't see too much of Jewish people should do this. Not that Jews are above it all. But I haven't seen that. I don't know-- it's revolting. You can't bring yourself to do these things. But I saw it happening.

Of course, I saw countless of people, countless of bodies being cremated, being mutilated, being stamped, being crushed, doing anything. Buried, it's out of the question. It's more than just if-- you handle garbage better in the streets than we were handled, dead bodies of the people, of Jews. It's undescrivable what I have seen. It's unimaginative.

I cannot-- how should I say-- language was not created to describe this. You have to have a feeling, a sixth sense to describe this, the horror, that a young man or a young woman or a person, a grown person could see and still be sane. I bring this here, this material here, so that people, maybe somebody will be there to listen and will try, whoever remains after me. I'm getting on the years. And this is the reason why I came here to talk about it.

It's horrible that anybody should go through a thing like this. We do this for the generations to come, they should remember and not make the same mistake what we did. We didn't listen. We didn't hear. My father wouldn't move any place, even though he had some inkling that Hitler was saying he meant it because they were starting to throw Jews out of Germany and mistreat them this much.

I become sometimes a blank. I can't think anymore to bring the right words to-- it's like Elie Wiesel said, he is the one that feels. He knows he can put it in words. This is a car doesn't mean to us a car. A train doesn't mean to us a train. A selection is not what the dictionary says, selection, to select something better or something worse or something nicer. A selection means death. Train means deportation.

There's so many other words. For example, if I'm not sure if this guy is a survivor or not, all I have to do is say, hey, Muselmann. And he'll turn around look at me. And if he turns around, I know he's a survivor.

And Muselmann means that when somebody is near death, he gets that certain look in his face. His body is a certain way. He's a little bit swollen around the eyes. And he has a faraway look. This we used to call Muselmann.

Elie Wiesel knows. And many survivors know. But the outside world didn't know that. To us, it has a special meaning.

Going back to this Dachau, Dachau was the most infamous camp that I ever saw. Dachau to me means-- there was a building, right after the administration building was a building, crematoriums, and the gas chambers, piles and piles of cadavers, piles and piles of bodies, just lying there like would. Sometimes just throw just any old way.

In the mornings, there used to be a chore. The Blockatleste, they used to call him, he used to have helpers to take down the people from the cubbies, sleeping in cubbies like boards because they were all dead. I'll never forget, I used to learn tailoring. I was an apprentice in my home town. And I was studying by this tailor.

When the Germans came in, this tailor used to do a lot of fur, used to make some fur coats and so on. And they told him to-- they told everybody to bring in all our furs. You have to give up the furs. Of course, a lot of people gave up the furs.

Being he was a tailor, he thought maybe he'll need a little fur to repair somebody's coat. And obviously, he must have kept some fur, some fur pieces. And they came in. They took him out in the backyard. And they shot him point blank. They blew the top of his head off.

But this looked so ghastly to me. I was crying for days. I couldn't-- I couldn't-- this was the first encounter.

I'll tell you when there was a young tailor whom I knew personally. He lived not far from my house. And we wound up in the same camp, in Herzberg. And he got sick. He was laying on his sick bed, sick bay. Well, if you go to a sick bay in a camp, it's certain death.

I said to him-- his name was Dan. I said, Dan, get out of the sick bed any way you can. Don't stay there because you know what it means.

He says, Paul, he says, I don't care anymore. I don't have the strength. I can't do it.

I said, listen here-- I dressed him. And he got out and walking around. He couldn't walk. It was impossible. He, himself, he had to go-- they took me to work. And when I came back he was-- I went to this place. And I saw him. He was dying.

I says, look, hold on because it can't be far away. The end is coming. He was impossible. It's just a personal feeling that I had a feeling for this man, you know. I nursed him. I did everything I could to keep him alive. It was impossible.

Going back-- just now, it starts to come back to me with my mother-- going back when I ran away, I ran away, I had such a ghastly feeling. I ran away, left my mother there. Maybe if I would have been home I could have saved my mother. I would have showed her where, how to get through the German lines and to be saved.

And this is the reason after the war, there was some sort of a fund established for the survivors, the young survivors-- I was from the young ones-- to give them some sort of consultation. It was called at the time the blue card. And I went for sessions. And we talked it out.

But this counselor told me, he says-- she says, you wouldn't have been able to do anything. You would have been killed too. And so that put me at ease a little bit because I always had that guilt feeling. And I still have it. But I can reconcile it now.

I have the guilt feeling about my brother, why I didn't make a firm stand that he shouldn't go. If we go, we all go. And again, I think I would have been killed too at the time. But it just so happened I was the sole survivor of so many people.

And after the war, I said to myself, why did I survive? What's the meaning of this? Am I any better than my father, my mother, my brother, my sister my uncles, my aunts? What is happening here?

And when I go to services many times, and the rabbi has a sermon, I wait for him after the services. I says, Rabbi, may I have a word with you? I figure maybe I'll find some ease whatever he'll tell me.

But some rabbis say, well, did you wish people weren't true to God, that's why they suffered? And some say, son, this way. Some say that way. But I found one rabbi said, you know, he says, whatever I'll tell you, won't be acceptable to you because I can't give you an answer. We don't know God's mind. I don't think God had anything to do with it. It's man. Man did to man.

And the guy that says, I don't have the answer is a smart man. There is no answer. There is just the answer is in all of us, to God and see that this does not happen again to any nationality, not only Jews, any nationality. Yet Jews were singled out for this here thing. And there was no words.

I have to ponder and think and think and bring out any words to this Holocaust. It's-- I'm baffled. What is it? Is it the Jew was so bad to the rest of the world? Is it the rest of the world was so much better than the Jews? What is this?

The Jew is different. It's a different nation, sure it is. But it's a nation that shows the way to goodness to humanity. It's beyond me. I guess the Jew was the easy target, and that's what happened. I guess I'm finished with this.

Could I ask you a couple of questions, Paul?

Sure.

You were liberated in May of 1945 I see on your sheet here.

Yes.

And who liberated you?

Well, we were marching from Dachau to the south of Bavaria, which brought us around the Swiss Alps around there, Switzerland and Austria. And we were told we were going to be exchanged in Switzerland for Germans. And, of course, it was a hell of a march.

And finally, we got to a point-- now I know it was Mittenwald. And this place was-- we were put on a little island surrounded by water. The part was connected with land. The SS had machine guns and all their hardware. And you couldn't move anyplace.

But then came nightfall, they let loose a hail of bullets so thick that it hardly missed anybody. And it didn't take maybe 10 minutes, I would say. Maybe it was a long 10 minutes. To me then, it looked like a long 10 minutes.

Of course, when I heard this, I dropped. And a lot of people got killed, got wounded. And when it was over, it got quiet, the thing to do is to pick up your head to see you didn't see anything. So you made some noise. You threw some rock or something, and no response.

So right away, we ran to look for some food and everything. But, of course, we found there was food. And some ate, and some died from it. Just sudden eating, when hungry, you start eating, die from it. And they were gone.

So the ones that could walk yet, we had to start. We wanted to get away from this place as fast as we could. We were working on the road. And then we were stopped by Germans again. This was the Luftwaffe already, not the SS.

It seems to me the Luftwaffe was preparing to pull out of the advancing Allied armies. And they put us into a barrack. It must have been a jail because there were no windows, just a skylight and with about 10 people. I remember because they were counting. And this sergeant was reporting to the colonel that they got so many, so many prisoners. And here they are.

What to do with them? Just lock them up. We don't want them on the grounds.

We were locked up. And I said to this sergeant, you know, I got some cigarettes from the Red Cross. I got them in Dachau. The Red Cross came in to the French-- it was French there too. And they were getting cigarettes. They were getting chocolate and all kinds of things. The Jews weren't, of course, get anything.

So I had something. I sold it. I got some cigarettes. And I says to him, I got some cigarettes from the Red Cross. Just leave the door open in case you want to get out to the bathroom. Just leave it open. He says, no, no, [NON-ENGLISH]. I have an order.

He locked us up. And there was a skylight up there. The sky was so high that we had to get three men, one on top of the other, to be able to open up the skylight.

I was the smallest and the youngest. I crept on the second man. I got up there. And I opened up the skylight.

And we didn't sleep all night. My place was to be on the roof and look out, see what's happening, what they're going to do with us. We came this far we can't-- and we made a makeshift rope. If anything is not right, we go out through there.

Well, we didn't wait until anything happens. We were all on the hook already looking what's happening. But as about daylight broke, we saw that this sergeant, they're pulling out. And the sergeant goes over to the door, just unlocks the door. And he leaves. So I knew that they just-- they meant what they said. They don't want anybody on the grounds. They left.

Then we went down through the roof, not through the door. We thought maybe the doors are booby trapped. Through the roof, and we were hiding out in the haystacks, in the fields, in the Alps. And it took about a day or so, the Allies-- the Allies-- it took about a day or so, the Allied armies started to roll in.

They were rolling in. I didn't know who they were. Are they English? Are they Russian? Are they Americans?

Well-- but we selected-- we had a form selection who goes to see who it is. So we're making nuts and pulling nuts. But pulling that name meant that two have to go, not one-- two. Why two? In case one gets killed, the other one.

So me and somebody else went to this road. This road is supposed to be about two miles, three miles away from this place where we were hiding out. And when I got near, I saw it was the Americans coming in.

Well, I ran back fast. But we also saw a few, you know, inmates were killed on the fields. The SS must have been in the area, and they killed him. We cautioned everybody, be careful. There must be some SS hiding out.

So what we did we walked as far away from the haystacks as possible because they could hide out only in the haystacks so that out of range. And we all went to the road. They arrested us. The Allied patrol arrested us. We got to go to headquarters.

They took us to headquarters. Who are you? We said we were concentration camp. And this-- I think he was a lieutenant-- this lieutenant, I saw he was speaking German with a Jewish accent. I says, [NON-ENGLISH]. And he understood because he was of European stock.

He said, [NON-ENGLISH]. I said, yes. We hugged us-- he hugged us together, like this in a bear hug. And we were dancing around. You're finally liberated. We heard all about you. And you must come for services and so on and so forth.

I said, first, you have to help me go and get these people who are injured. They're laying in the fields. And we must help them.

So he got together a whole bunch of Red Cross wagons. And we got them into hospitals. Some of them died. Some of them lived.

And we really-- he took out-- maybe you want to eat. He took out a salami, kosher the Pesach. The first time I saw this in how many years? In six, seven years. I didn't see anything like this before.

And, of course, we couldn't eat this stuff because our stomachs were not for that. We were taken to Garmisch-Partenkirchen in the hospital. And we were all looked over. Lucky enough, I was pretty healthy and just needed some nourishment.

And I stayed in this place for, oh, about two months. And then, of course, I started roaming around Germany to see in all the camps, the DP camps, to see if anybody was alive from my family. Well, I didn't find anybody. But I found a lot of [NON-ENGLISH] in Bergen-Belsen.

And I started being in touch with people again. But we didn't talk about these experiences because we knew all about it. We didn't have to talk to each other about it. Whereas now, we live it again. We talk about it. And it seems after so

many years, it doesn't hurt as much when you talk about it, except the gory details like I just gave you a few.

But now, in 1946, I came to the United States. And I was amazed at the freedom that this country accorded us. Of course, the people I felt were a little nosy. They didn't let us live, asked us what happened? How did it happen? The little details. And I didn't like that.

And they said, don't talk about it. Don't talk about it. Enough is enough, enough, enough, you know. They sort of didn't want to hear it. And people still don't want to hear it.

But now I feel is the time that they have to listen to it. Everybody has to listen to it. We're stronger now.

And I feel it was a generation, well, of heroes really because if you look back and see how we treated the Korean War, the prisoners came home, we quite didn't know what to do with them. And the psychiatrist said, well, you just let them slip into society slowly, you know. The Vietnam prisoners, slowly, they had a home to come back to. Everything was the way it was when they left.

We had nothing to come back to. We had to establish a new life, a language I have never known, a new customs, everything new. And this was very, very difficult. And this is the reason I say this generation that came out of the concentration camp did pretty well. They have a lot of learned people, sons, daughters, and they themselves. And I feel we did pretty well.

Paul, your wife is here with you. You married here in this country I take it.

Mm, hmm.

Do you have children?

Two children, yes.

Have you discussed these kinds of things with them?

Very little.

Very little. Do they ask you questions about those days?

They did not. I felt that it's not really-- they shouldn't, at the time, that they don't have to know at such a young tender age.

Certainly not the gory details, maybe but--

Yeah, but they knew they were different because they didn't have grandparents. My parents weren't around. They just had her grandparents.

The philosophy though of not forgetting and that you're opening up now and we're in a process of history that what you're telling us is going to be recorded. And it's going to hopefully influence people after you and I are gone.

I hope so.

That this did in fact happen. This is what people went through and so forth. Now I was just interested in terms of your own family, if they recognize that as well. I imagine they must--

Yes--

--having listened to you for the last hour almost and recognizing the kind of person you are.

Well, my daughter, the younger one, is more in tune to it than the younger one, I would say. The older one asked me, Dad, I can't be there now, but I'd like to be there-- she's pregnant, you know-- right now, just bring me back some literature, whatever you can get. And so I'm recording these speeches and events.

And you're going to be furnished with a copy of this interview too.

Oh, that would-- well, I wouldn't have to go through this--

Trauma again.

No. And, well, I don't know if it's a trauma or it should be talked about it. And maybe it helps. The only way to face fear is face it I guess. I don't know. I mean this takes a lot of courage to come and say, well, look, I want to talk about it.

It does. You're stirring up a lot of old things and a lot of painful memories.

Yeah.

But, you know, this is your interview, but I shouldn't be saying this. But no one can tell you, don't feel guilty, do feel guilty. That's something that you have to come to grips with. I really don't think you should. You did whatever a person can do.

But, you know, you're not alone with this feeling. And here I was born in this country. And while you were going through all of this, I was in the service. And all that's true. But still in all, in my generation also feels a certain guilt that physically we weren't by your side when you needed us. And so you're not alone in more ways than one.

Well, my daughter, you know, comes her birthday, she usually asks me, what do you want? She buys me a watch, a chain, a gold chain. She'll buy me something, a shirt. I mean, she says, you know, Dad, it's meaningless. What you really want? I says, I'm missing five years, six years of my life. I said, if you can fill me in the news of the day, what's happened in the meantime. This is really what I want to see, how people reacted, why, so to speak, 6 million burned, you know.

And so she got me a book called First Page of The New York Times for the few years, you know. It really helps to see. And when I look around-- not that I blame anybody for our tragedy, our enormous tragedy. This is just I was born at a time like this. And that's it. I was unlucky.

And I looked through the pages. And I see that the union where-- my union now, the ILGWU, the richest union in the world stop the lunch hour to protest. They couldn't even make a stoppage for a day or so, just lunch hour. And they made a rally. And that was it.

The [NON-ENGLISH] did nothing, also about the same, had a little rally. Dr. Stephen Wise, the great Stephen Wise, was very close to Roosevelt. He didn't do much. Nahum Goldman, the big Zionist, the world big Zionist, the ambassador of the Jews, he says, well, nobody wanted to take the Jews. And nobody could-- this was radical at that time to tell you have to take Jews.

And there was one young man who got up and spoke. And they wanted-- he says they should deport him. Nahum Goldman said they should deport him. He's making trouble for the Jews here because he stood up and he said, you have to do something to stop the slaughter in Germany. And so they went to the court. And he was the radical.

We're at the end of the tape, Paul.