

Charles Lipshitz in Washington, DC. Well, you can start talking any time you want. And you can start to tell where you were born. If you hold that up, you can tell where you lived before. Or you have to hold it closer.

Is it on now?

Yeah, it's on. Any time you--

My name is Charles Lipshitz. I'm 4536 West Madison, Skokie, Illinois. I was born Łódź, Poland. As we approach the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Washington, my thoughts are full of memories-- specifically, in 1942 in the ghetto Łódź, Poland.

Our family was still together. It was the Friday prior to the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah. My father was torn from us and met a brutal death with thousands of helpless men, women, and children at the hands of the SS Nazi murderers. This sight is forever ingrained in my mind of how the German SS butchers literally threw little children from second, third, fourth-floor windows in order to expedite the selection and fill their quotas.

I was raised in a family, in a beautiful Orthodox family. My father was a big scholar. And then in 1939, I cannot forget, it was on a Friday when the Nazis came in to Łódź. The first thing they did when they came in, they took Jews from the street, and they cut their beards. And we start hearing, verfluchte Juden.

We right away seeing what a hurricane came to us Polish Jewry. Of course, after a few months of running around from one place to the other place, we didn't know what to do, where to run, we finally were closed up in the Łódź ghetto. In the Łódź ghetto, we all starved for hunger. But we still thought that there is a chance if they're only going to let us stay together, then we might still survive.

I was then 11 years old. Then in 1944, the remaining members of my family traveled in cattle cars to Auschwitz. Upon descending from the trains at Auschwitz, my mother and sister were separated from my brother and me, never to be seen by us again.

The sentence of hard labor, meager diet, and inhumane treatment in each and every camp were alternated by trips in open trains from one camp to the next during the cold winter months from Auschwitz to Althammer. In Althammer, I can remember it like I would see it with my own eyes.

Every morning, the SS Lagerführer, as we called him, he went out and he took one-- of course, we always said, lest we call them a poor man or whoever they called them, they chased him out over the wires and shot him in order to make a report that he ran away from the camp. And that was day in and day out. And of course, the few remaining ones had to go through with hard labor.

I happened to be in that camp one of the lucky ones. I worked in the kitchen. And I can remember inmates came in, they caught a few potatoes, and I looked at the side. It wasn't my business that they could help themselves.

But of course, one day, my brother was working in the camp. One inmate came in. And I told him, take a few potatoes, and put some coal on top of it, and take it in, and give it to my brother. And he went through the camp, an SS man caught him, and he asked him, bring that over here. And after he threw the potatoes-- I mean, the coal, he found potatoes.

He said, who gave it to you? Well, he didn't want to tell him. He didn't want to give in me. Of course, they brought him in in the kitchen. And they-- can you stop? And they hit him with a belt a few times.

Of course, after about 25 times, he finally said that I gave it to him. Well, I was the one now that I got hit quite a few times. And I was scared to death. But somehow, I overcame that. And I still worked there until we finally, one morning, got together. And that was in 1944 that we left that camp and we traveled in cattle. Look, stop it a minute. OK?

Right, we're rolling.

And then from Althammer on foot to Gleiwitz. From Gleiwitz, we traveled in freight cars, 150 people to a car. We traveled almost three weeks on a diet of snow through Europe. Finally, we arrived in Dora Nordhausen. In Nordhausen was a camp where we worked underground. They made there the V1 and V2, the weapons-- very, very hard labor.

We stayed there about three months. And then we were put on cattle cars again. And we were going to Bergen-Belsen. In Bergen-Belsen, from the train cars, we were walking. A lot of people were tired. Of course, if they couldn't walk, they shot them on the way and they let them lay there. Then in April 15, 1945, we were liberated by the English forces.

A description of each camp condition would fill a book of hundreds of pages. From a big family of over 200, consisting of my brothers, and father's siblings, and their families, I, my brother, and one cousin alone survived. No matter how strong a person is, it is unimaginable to be able to see with one's own eyes, as I did, how the Germans systematically and brutally annihilated our beautiful families in Europe, as the whole world stood by silently.

I was one of the few lucky ones to survive that hell. I have always felt it my duty to retell and retell what Germany did to European Jewry. At the same time, I consider it a tribute to the Jewish nation that we survivors of those atrocities have built new, beautiful families dedicated to Judaism and also have witnessed the greatest miracle-- the establishment and success of the state of Israel.

As for me personally, I was extremely lucky. After I was allowed to settle in the USA, for which I am grateful to the American government, I met my wonderful wife, Renee, who also survived Auschwitz and lost her mother there and her father in Buchenwald. Together, we raised a son and a daughter, both married with children of their own, our beautiful grandchildren.

I'm very proud to write these last few sentences because I consider it a victory for [? B'nei ?] Yisrael and a defeat for our enemies. I hope and pray that Israel will be strong and determined to withstand any pressure, internally and externally, and remain a Jewish state with its values and traditions not tarnished for generations and generations to come.

And I-- and my brother looked through the window. He was plenty worried. And he asked-- and he hollered, [YIDDISH]. So I hollered, [YIDDISH]. But what happened? The people in the camp were so wild-- and I'm not blaming them-- when they see me-- there was no food in the camp-- they seen me carrying, they grabbed all the food away from me. Not only that, they was so wild, they took everything off from me. They thought I got food on me. They left me naked. I didn't have-- I don't blame them a thing. I can understand it. I was already not hungry. I ate a lot. But my brother, nebach, I didn't have nothing to give him.

You couldn't--

I couldn't--

--to your own brother.

--give him, my own brother. I was so ashamed. While I was in the camp, I could do everything because I was working. I worked in the kitchen. I could give him a piece of bread. Here, I'm already free. And here, everybody grabbed my food away. But I told him, [YIDDISH], I'm going again tomorrow through the sewer. I knew where that sewer is.

And sure enough, he said, I'm going with you. I said, no, you're not going with me. Because he was very weak. I said, you're not going with me. I went by myself. And I already brought back food through another way. And we had food. I also had a cousin there, a different-- from my mother's side. And we somehow settle later. And we went to a little town in Hanover. And we tried to rebuild our families. We tried to.

How many years did you live in Hanover?

In Hanover, I lived for around-- from 19-- we were liberated in 1945. I lived till 1950 in Hanover, until I came to this country in 1950, in January 30, 1950. I came--

Your brother went to Hanover with you?

Yeah, we always went together. And we are together. Yeah, we are together now. Yeah, we-- my brother lives not far away from me. He lives in Lincolnwood. He is married too.

Have you found other relatives after the war?

We found some relatives, just one cousin from my close family. Just one cousin was left. And we have some far, far from-- farther family, farther cousins from the second and third side in Israel, a few. But when we come to Israel, they make us feel like brothers.

How come, if you were from Poland, that when you went-- after you were liberated you went to Germany, and the Germans were your enemies. Why did you go to Germany?

Well, we didn't go. We were liberated Germany.

Yeah, but you didn't go back to Poland. You stayed with the Germans.

No. I couldn't go back to Poland. Because Poland was a land soaked with Jewish blood. We couldn't. Number one, it's unfortunate. To begin with, the Germans-- I don't think that the Germans, the way they planned-- you got to imagine. One thing, one point I'd like to make here-- number one, when we talk about the Holocaust-- and I'm very upset that our leaders in the world, any little thing or any misfortune what it happens today, they try to compare it to the Holocaust.

It's unbelievable that they don't realize, here was a war machine operating in Germany. They had to fight fronts from the east, the Russians, from the west, the whole world. And in that war machine, they had a special department with thousands and thousands of people designated to that department and for one simple reason-- to wipe out Jewry from Europe.

How could you compare anything with something like that? It's misleading to the world. And we survivors have to make sure and stand on guard not to let that happen.

And then another thing I'm upset, too-- when we see now how many people this liberal government of the United States lets into this country. And we are not against it. Anybody who wants freedom should get into this country. But we newcomers-- if the government looks back on us, we came here penniless in 1950.

Now, we are, Baruch Hashem, thank god, all good obeying citizen. We paying taxes. We're an asset to the American community. It's true. We are thankful for the-- to the American government and the American people. But imagine if the American government would be more responsive in those days and they would let in more of our Jews. How many more good citizens would they have today? And that is hurting us. Our hearts is aching.

And I want to go back now about Poland, what you asked me-- why I didn't go back. Now, that particular war machine, what I was talking about, they planned where is going to be for them the most favorable place and where is not going to be resistance from that occupied place and its people to put the crematoriums. And I'm sure that the place was Poland because we know better, we Polish Jews.

It's unfortunate that we have to say the truth. We cannot change history, even so we have some Polish people today who are our friends. And we need friends today, anybody. But the fact is that pre-World War Poland was very antisemitic. I don't know if they would go back that far. But they did not help how they could help more.

It's true, there are some Poles, who we are very proud that they were a few Poles who did hide some Jews.

And we are in debt this to them. We are very thankful to them. But the majority of the Polish population was feeling, if Hitler is bad, at least he will get rid for us the Jews.

Well, in Poland, at that time, there was a large concentration of Jews, more than in other parts of Europe, right?

Yes, that's right.

Poland had many--

Poland had three million Jews. And to wipe out three million Jews, the Germans have to plan. And they planned it that in Poland-- because after all, the most were three million of Polish Jews. And that's why they planned that from the Poles, they will get a lot of help. At least if they won't get no help, they won't get no resistance. And they didn't get no resistance.

One other point I want to bring up-- while we are here for the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, I think we should make a point. While the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is a symbol of Jewish resistance, there were a lot of Jewish resistance around Eastern Europe in all kinds of communities. There was a lot of resistance. But the world has to understand that the odd were maybe 10,000 to 1. How could you resist a machine who was going to Stalingrad so fast, and fighting, and not a army-- they were almost in England.

They took over countries, right.

They took over countries. In seven days, they took over Poland. And here, we didn't get no help from nobody. Still, there was resistance. But how-- they broke your soul. They broke your mind.

First, they told you-- they were systematically. First, they told you, we will get you to work. You work for us. Well, we figured, work, what is-- we can work. I mean it's not so gefערlech to work. But then after we work, no eat. Then they broke us. Then they make us weak. And then, of course, they killed us.

Before the war in Poland, what kind of-- I know you were young, but do you remember what your father did and what kind of lives you all had then? I mean, were they professional or what?

I remember. My father was-- I was raised in a strictly Orthodox house. Of course, my father was a businessman. We were strictly Orthodox. At the same time, we were not fanatics. My father was a very businesslike man. He went every morning to the store. He was selling yard goods.

He was working for one of my cousins. They had a very good relationship. My father's life was working from 8:00 in the morning till 9 o'clock at night every day. He was a devoted employee. And from-- and 9 o'clock, he came home, ate supper. And of course, you could see at the table about five or six Gemaras, and learning Talmud until, of course, 2:00, 3 o'clock every day. My father was a big scholar.

I found now many scripts in the Tel Aviv University from my father before the war, who he was written from the greatest rabbis in Israel in those days. And they wrote him back. I happen to have those manuscripts with me. In fact, we have them. And it's a treasure to me to see some of the greatest in Israel writing articles. They considered my father one of the greatest Talmudic scholars in those times.

You were Orthodox, but not Hasidic, right?

Well, we were Hasidic. But we didn't believe-- my father never believed in [NON-ENGLISH]. He believed in strictly Talmudic-- to be a Talmud Chacham, that he had the highest respect-- knowledge, knowledge.

Yeah. But he went to work.

He went to-- he made a living. He was working. And of course, he believed in Torah va'avodah-- work and Torah.

Before the war, when you lived in Poland, did you live only among Jews? Or did you live among other people where you lived before, when your father was working?

Well, you see, I was a young kid. I remember, where we moved-- I was very young when we moved. And the place we moved-- of course, we lived-- don't forget, there were three million Jews. And we had to have a shtiebel, like we called it. There wasn't a synagogue. We davened in a shtiebel, a Hasidic shtiebel. So it has to be-- had to be walking-- of course, in those days, there was one close. So we were mostly-- I would say, we were close with Jews mostly.

I don't know the map of Poland that well. Where in Poland was your city?

Lódz.

Yeah. Where is it near, what other?

Well, we were about 110 kilometer from Warsaw.

North or south?

I don't know.

Oh, you don't know either?

I don't know. I was a young kid. I really don't know too much about Poland. And unfortunately, I don't want to know too much about Poland. Poland is not close to my heart. That's why I could never go back there.

Have you been back to Hanover or back to Europe?

I don't go back to Europe, either. I was once back because I had to go back. But of course, I made it. I went to Israel. So on the way to Israel, I made a stopover in Hanover. Otherwise, I have no interest to go back to Germany or to Poland. To Israel, we love to go back, but not to Poland.

Do you have any other things that you'd like to talk about?

I don't know what else.

Well, do you believe that-- one reason you survived, I guess, was that you were strong, you were young. And the other reason, do you think, because you had the hope with being with your brother, if you had family here?

Well, I can only tell you this. There was nobody-- I don't think any of our survivors will say that he survived because he is stronger or he is smarter. It was a matter of fate. We don't know what we did. We really don't know what we did. Somehow, I feel, some of us had to survive.

Because there is-- no matter how our enemies will try to destroy us, we will-- I feel how bigger the korban and the stronger the few what are survive will come back. And we showed it here with our determination. We witnessed the biggest miracle in our times-- the establishment of the state of Israel.

After all, what would our fathers or great father-- or grandfathers give for a dream like that? They said for 2,000 year, we kept saying, [HEBREW]. We finally have Yerushalayim, a whole city, the capital of Israel. So this alone is a proof to our enemies, no matter how they going to try to destroy us-- and they really did destroy this time, was the greatest korban in our time.

They destroyed our communities, what a striving community it was in Europe. But our fate shows us that we witnesses have to be left. Those-- it was a matter of fate. We survived. I am one of them.

I consider it a zkhush that I did survive. And now, I survive with a duty to tell and retell to the world and see that it's never going to happen again. I am-- I'm especially thankful to the children of the Holocaust survivors, who are taking an interest.

Did you tell your children from when they were young where you had been and what had happened to you? Did you tell them your story?

My children-- I can remember when my son was six years old. And he came from school. Well, of course, I would like to give this credit to my wife. Because when I came home, she told me that. When he was six years old, and he came home from school, and he asked, Mommy, where are my grandparents?

My wife sat down with him and explained him what happened to his grandparents when he was six years old. We tried to raise-- and of course, later, my daughter-- we tried to raise our children with the knowledge what happened to their grandparents. And as they grew older, they knew what happened.

And we can say that we are really proud of our children. Like yesterday, my daughter was with me here. And she was sitting with me on the stage yesterday. And she heard all those speeches. And for me, one of the speeches was the rabbi from Netanya, was talking about when he started in Yiddish.

And she told me, an American-born child-- I call her a child-- a young lady, a mother of two-- when she told me, Dad, when he started talking Yiddish, I wish he would continue in Yiddish because he had a lot more feelings. That to me was the biggest pleasure I had, that I raised a daughter that she has understanding, and she will keep on telling.

In fact, I have also a son. And of course, he couldn't join us here. But he has a lot of feelings too. And he has understanding. And he knows what we went through. And I know my two children will continue to keep that pledge to make the world known what happened. And they raised their children that they should know. And I hope that they will let the world know and make sure that it never happens again.

You never lost your faith in Judaism. You had been raised religious. But during these times when you were in the ghetto and so forth, did other people not pray? Did you pray during that time?

During the camp, no. In fact, I will tell you something. After I went out from the camp, we were wild. And I was not-- and I didn't understand even what it means being religious. How this-- what happened to us-- what means being religious? I was a young kid.

When-- after the war, I was only about 17 or 18 years old. But of course, after a few years, when I met my wife, and we were talking about-- and I still continued. We were Jews. We knew that we will continue to be proud Jews. But when it came to raise our children, I'll be very frank, I wasn't considering so much being religious.

But I considered one thing-- I live in America. And in order to continue the way I was brought up in Yiddishkeit, to continue, I have to raise my children in a Jewish atmosphere. And the only way to raise children in a Jewish atmosphere in the United States is to send them to day school. So me and my wife decided that we are going to send our children to day school.

And I want to thank my-- I want to thank the Almighty for giving me that wisdom that I send my children to day school. Because they brought in-- as much as I had with my wife, as much me and my wife had feelings for Yiddishkeit, they really-- my children, my lovely children, which I'm very proud of them-- Leon and Debbie-- they brought Yiddishkeit into my house. And we are very proud that they raised their children. And my two grandchildren are starting-- im yirtzeh Hashem-- this season also the day school, the same day school where my son went.

Now, your children live in the city that you--

We all live not far away from each other, yeah. We all live not far away from each other. And if this is-- if it means anything, this is a message to the new generation.

As much as you pledge to continue our legacy, it's very important to raise the children. With seeing so much intermarriage, what's going on, it's very, very important to raise the children in a Jewish atmosphere. And I know how some of the non-religious parents are afraid. I went through the same thing.

And now, my own friends, when they have the children-- and it hurts me just as this hurt them. They said, what did I do wrong? But it's too late. So I want to give this message to the new generation. Guard your children. Raise them in a-- send them to a day school. Don't be afraid that they will inconvenience you, that they'll bring a little Yiddishkeit into your house.

I went through the same thing. I inconvenienced myself plenty times. But believe me, the dividend is 20-- it's 100 times more the pleasure you get out when you see these children growing up in a Jewish atmosphere and you know that you-- that that legacy, that pledge, what you said that you continue, that you continued it and feel that your children were raised as Jews, and they continued. And the only way to do that is to send them to a day school. That's very, very important.

Would you like to tell us about your mother?

Well, you know how it was in Europe. The father was the bread-- when the war came, my mother was raising the kids, like in the house. She was a good mother and a good wife-- religious-- everybody-- like everybody, every wife was religious. And unfortunately, we lost her. We will always remember, like we remember both of our parents. Rebuffed by mother in 1944, when we were separated. I was still a young kid. All I can remember is the few precious years I was together with my mother.

When you were separated, did people tell you afterwards they had seen your mother or sister? Or you just--

We had one regard from somebody after the camp, that they seen my sister in a camp, that she was very broken down. But we never heard from them again-- never seen them or never heard from them again.

My sister, I have to say, she actually gave her life to save-- I remember, when they took my father out and my mother, she was-- we were all upset-- me, my brother, and my sister. But she just couldn't stand-- like when I said in my previous statement, she gave-- she risked her own life. You were not supposed to go out on the street. You were shot at sight. But those who had a--

Armband.

--an armband were allowed. So she somehow made a forced armband. And she ran around like crazy all over town. At least she brought-- her father, our father, she couldn't take out anymore. She couldn't find him. But she brought my mother out still. So we were still lucky. We were two years still together with my mother in the Łódź ghetto.

Those were the two years-- from this ghetto in 1942 until we were shipped to Auschwitz in 1944. But she was, really, very devoted to the family, very devoted. Even during the ghetto, I remember, if she could get a little extra food here and there, scraping up, she brought it home, we cooked a meal. That was for the whole family, like a whole meal or something.

Were your relatives in that same ghetto or just your close family, cousins?

Just we all. We didn't have no relatives in the ghetto no more. We were left from a very big family. We were just the four of us. The family was all scattered. We had war. My grandfather and my grandmother were shot with all brothers of my father in Piatków because we had some family in Piatków. And they were all shot. One day, they were taken in in the synagogue. We were-- we heard their regard, and they were all shot there. That's all we heard about the family in Piatków.

About the end, anyway. You don't-- anything else that--