

So ahead. Full name-- could you give me your full name and spell your name?

My name? My name is Sam Weinstock. I was born in Poland in 1924 in the city of Sosnowiec, which is located in Upper Silesia in Poland.

OK. What part of your experiences would you like to talk about? What part of your experiences would you like to talk about?

Well, I would like to talk about-- I would like to talk about from mine early years in Poland. And I want to say this about there, in Poland, as I remember, we had also prosecution because we were Jews. It was not pleasant even to walk in the street in Poland, like in a Christian holiday in a Easter time or around Christmastime. It was impossible certain times in those holidays even to attend school.

What happened that made it hard to attend school?

Pardon me?

Why was it hard to attend school?

Because we couldn't walk in the street because the Poles, they would throw eggs at us, and called us names, and sometimes even assault.

Should be the last time we're disturbed. What was the school like that you attended? The school that you attended, what was it like? Was it an all-Jewish school?

It was a religious school more, like had religious school. It was not a public school that I attended.

Only Jewish children attended?

Yeah. But over in that school, they taught us was about the Polish history and to read and write Polish. Yeah. It was it all.

Did you have other children in your family beside you?

Oh, yeah. We was-- I come from a family we had four brothers and four sisters.

Do they live in the United States now?

And I have one brother now that is left. And everybody else got killed. How, I do not know. I met people right after the war that came from my hometown. And they were telling me that my sister had seven children. And the way he told me, that they were throwing down from the fifth floor window. They were about from 12 years to six months or-- that was in the war.

But I was-- when the war broke out, that was on a Friday, on September the 1st in 1939. And then about three days later, one of my two brothers, when the Germans marched into our town, one of my two brothers were taken. And one brother got shot. And my other brother, he was digging a grave for himself. But then some German officer, he changed his mind in the last minute because he thought that he may be able to use him yet for a while. And that is the brother that is alive today. He is living today in Israel.

Oh, in Israel?

Yeah. And November the 18th in 1940, I was grabbed on the street. And I was taken in to-- that was in 1940 that I-- and in November the 18th, 1940 that I came into the concentration camp to Germany.

How did it happen that you were taken? You just were grabbed on the street?

Yeah, just taken up on the street and brought in that way to a school. And there was a lot of people there. And we were shipped off to the concentration camp. And then I remember my first job was we were working in the woods. We were chopping trees. They started to build there the Autobahn. And I've been in the camp since up to 1945, April the 11th.

How did you manage that once you'd been discharged?

That's what a lot of people ask me. Sometimes, I feel guilty.

I'm sure. That's very common.

I was a young boy. I was about 15 years old.

All alone? All alone? You were all alone, no friends? You had no one with you that you knew?

All alone, yeah. All alone in there.

Did you make friends? Did you find any one person that you were with for a long time, one friend? I didn't find anybody here that I-- I found one person that I was liberated with.

No, I mean, when you were in the camp, was there a special person when you were in the camp that you were friends with--

Yeah, yeah.

--and helped each other?

Yeah. I got very-- you see, what-- I had no education before. And then I was in the camp, I was in the same room with people who-- like professors, lawyers, and doctors. And I got friendly with them. And when I was a young man, I did certain jobs for the Germans. And I had a little more food. And I shared with them. And I got very friendly with them. And they educated me a little bit.

They taught you right there?

Yeah. They gave me courses and a education, yeah.

What kind of things did they teach you?

Oh, they taught me everything-- about history, and about music, and about everything that I know today. I learned from those people.

That was wonderful of them. What kinds of jobs could you do that you'd get extra food? Were there certain things you could do?

Like I shined shoes for them, for the Germans. And I did things that a young boy does-- shine shoes and I swept the rooms. I cleaned their clothes. That was, of course, in mine off time, when I came home from work, when I came back, I called it home. When I came back to the barracks from work, I did put on those jobs. And they gave me a piece of bread or so.

Well, how was your health at that time? So because you got extra food, did you stay healthy most of the time?

Well, I tell you what it is. According mine opinion is this, that because I did not come from rich home, I came from a

poor home before, so I was used a little bit to those problems. So it didn't bother me too much. And then the contrary, like some people came from Holland, or from Belgium, or from France, they didn't last too long. In two or three weeks, they were not the same. Most a month or two months, the most of them, they died.

Because they couldn't take it?

Yeah. And I think that a Polish Jew, he came from persecution, and he was a little bit used to this, he could take it more.

That's interesting. That's a very interesting insight. I bet that's--

I think so. That's mine opinion. Because as you can see now, that mostly, the Polish Jews survived, mostly. People from Holland or Belgium and from all those Scandinavian countries that were taken into the camp, not-- you don't see too many of them.

That's really interesting. What was it like? How many men lived in the place you had to live in, in the barracks, in the room where you slept? How many men shared the same place?

Oh, yeah, that's right. Depends on the camp. Like in Buchenwald, there was about 40 or 50 in one room. And in the smaller camps was about 60 to 80. It was not a good situation there.

Were you in many camps or just one?

Oh, I was in 13 camps.

That's unusual?

Yeah, because I was a young boy. And you know, and I don't know. Somehow, they didn't want to kill me. So they sent me from one camp to another.

Were you afraid every day?

Well, of course, everybody's afraid of death. But when you lived it every day, it really doesn't matter. Matter of fact, I see that every day. I see people getting hanged. And I see people being led to the-- being taken away. And I know I wouldn't see those people again.

How did that make you feel? After a while, did you just get used to it?

How did it-- how does it feel? It's like human instinct. It's like in the army. It's a bad feeling. But you always think for yourself Thank god it wasn't you. That's what it is.

What happened to your parents? Do you know?

No. I do not know. My father was lucky. He died before the war. Yes. But my mother, she died in the ghetto, but in the city that I came from, in the ghetto. And my sisters, I do not know what happened to them.

None of them? How many sisters did you have?

I had four sisters.

You don't know that end?

I don't know what happened to them. From this, from that man who told me what happened to my sister's children, he told me that my sister, the mother from the children, she got insane when she see that. And she attacked the Germans. And they shot her. That's the only thing I know about my sister. But the other sisters, I do not know what happened to

them. I tried to contact some organizations. But I never heard of them. There is no trace.

Was that a long time that you had to spend looking for everybody after the war, after it was over?

What?

Did you spend a long time looking and trying to--

Oh, yeah. Me and my brother, we were looking. We contact every agency. And there is no trace of them.

Do you get to see your brother often? Does your brother visit you?

Yeah. I go to see him every few months. And right.

There were people at the camps called kapos? They were the people who were Jewish people--

There were some people, yeah.

--who told you what to do?

And this is something that we Jews are really ashamed to talk about because it's our own people. But that was, they did was unbelievable. But I believe they did it to save themselves. That's what they thought, self-preservation. But it's really unbelievable what they did. They killed a lot of people.

I remember one case, in one of the camps that I was-- it's called Blechhammer. And Sunday, we did not work. Sunday. Sunday was the day of rest. So in that particular Sunday, they called my block to come out because they had some work to do in that Sunday. I believe it was bombs that was dropped by the Allies the night before. And the bomb did not explode.

And in that particular place in there, over there, the Germans, they used to produce gasoline from coals. That was a very important industry center for the German war machine. So in that Sunday, they called my block to come to work. And I happened to be taking a shower. And I heard that. I figured, I will not go out. I'm going to stay and take the shower.

And then about an hour and a half, I came out. And one of the kapos, he recognized me. He knew that I belonged to that block. I don't remember exactly the number. I believe it was block 27. And he says, how come you're here? I said, I took a shower. And he said, how long do you take a shower, an hour and a half? And I was called out to the Appellplatz.

And they gave me 25 lashes. So it bothered me that the 25 lashes were given to me by a Jew that came from my hometown. So I wouldn't give him the satisfaction and cry. So when I got up, he said, oh, you're not crying, huh? Well, we going to give you another 25. And then I got another 25. And then I couldn't help it no more. I have to cry because it really hurt.

I'm sure it did. I'm sure it did.

It was really something. The way we lived, we lived like animals. We behaved like animals. And there was only one time that I was afraid of death. That was in the closing of the war. And there was one German SS man. I believe he was a sergeant. And he looked everybody in their face to see if they still in good shape, if they're able to march.

And he was the judge and the jury. When he noticed somebody doesn't look so good, he put a gun to their temple and he pulled the trigger. And then he came over to me. And I said to God, I said, I've been here so many years. Give me a break. And sure enough, he didn't pull the trigger. And he walked away.

That is something, it's so unbelievable. Did you ever think, how am I living through this? How is it?

Pardon me?

Did you ever think to yourself while you were doing it, how am I living through this? How am I getting through this? Were you amazed that you could live through it?

I tell you, it's-- when I was liberated--

What was it like when you were liberated? When you were liberated, what happened? When you first knew.

When I was liberated, this is some-- I was liberated through-- I believe it was fate. That was in 1945 in April the 9th, I believe-- in April the 9th or I can't recall exactly the date. And the bombardment from the artillery was so loud that everybody could hear. And then this German, the commandant from the camp, he called us out.

Which camp was it?

That was a camp called Langenstein, Langenstein, a few kilometers from Halberstadt. That's supposed to be a camp, when you go into this camp, this is it, there's no out. And this commandant-- and he said to us, I decided that I should give you a rest. I should give you a rest a few days because you have been working too hard the last few weeks. And who thinks otherwise is an idiot.

And then about a couple hours later, there was a big commotion in the camp. Everybody there-- everybody was called out to the place where we assembled. And they gave an order, everybody goes there to the kitchen and gets a soup. And we march off. And then--

Was that unusual? Was that unusual that they told you to do that?

Yeah, yeah. And then we all walked up to the kitchen. But I believe there was not too much time. And when we came there to the kitchen for soup, they came back, the Germans, with the machine guns, everybody out. But then that was my chance. Here I was, standing with a plate and a bottle of soup. I figured, I'm going to get to it. And I went there. And I took about four plates of soup. And soon as I finished the four plates of soup, I fell down on the floor. I couldn't walk. Even if I wanted to walk, I just couldn't walk.

Why, because you were sick?

I was over.

Oh, you overate?

I overate. I was so hungry that I overate. And then this German came with a machine gun and a dog. And they both took me to work. And that German, finally, he said to me, you're lucky that I need those bullets. If not, I shoot you. And he left. And soon as he left, somehow, I managed, on my belly, I sneaked into the washroom there.

And when I went in there to the washroom, I found out that I am not there by myself. There was a few more people. And I do not recall how many days I was in this. But I recall one thing, that when I walked in in there on my belly to that washroom, I remembered I was passing by grass.

But then the second to third day, when I came back out of there, I noticed there was no more grass. The people ate up the grass because they were so hungry. And then it must have been that day, April the 11th, because we seen, there is a white flag hanging on the camp. And sure enough, I was the one who was not scared of anything.

Oh, no, huh?

So I took a couple of people with me. And I said, look, let's go. What have we got to lose? And sure enough, from the minute they walk out from the camp-- oh, yeah, before that, when I walked out from the camp, I looked at the back. And

I see there's no guard. And I started to cry that this is the first time in many years I walked without a guard.

And soon as I walked out, there was bullets shooting at us. So we fell down. And about a minute and a half later, the most beautiful sight I ever seen in my life, a tank with a White Star and soldiers just jumping out. And they're not Germans. First, we thought they're French. And surely enough, it was the American Army there.

And then I never forget the sight. I was with one man. And he had a father back there. And he came back to the father. And he said-- they were German Jews. And I never forget, he said to his father, he said, Pop, we are free. The Americans are here. And his father opened up the eyes and he died on the spot. And then the American Army came in. And there was-- I don't recall the name. There was-- he must have been-- he wasn't a general, I don't believe so. Must have been a colonel or a captain.

And I never seen a grown-up man cry like that. He cried like a baby. He cried like I never see this in my life. And he was so mad. I believe-- I couldn't understand English in then. But I believe that-- I had the impression that he said to the soldiers, shoot down every German on sight.

And then the Germans came in. And there were so many dead people laying in there. And he made the Germans take the dead people. And there was a mass grave in there because the crematorium was broken already a couple of weeks there. And they took all the bodies. And they put them in there. And there were some bodies in there. And that was already flesh was taken out from the bottom part because there-- some people-- we had Russian prisoners in that camp. And they cut the meat out and ate it. They must have been hungry or something.

That was some time. That was something.

And that was how I was liberated.

And what were you-- were you sick?

And I believe it was that time when the-- it was-- I believe it was-- I met a few soldiers that spoke Yiddish. And they were crying.

The American soldiers that spoke Yiddish?

I said, why are you crying?

He said, because our president died today. President Roosevelt died in that day.

Oh. What did you think when you were in the camp? Did you think that people knew, that the Allies knew what was going on? What did the prisoners think?

Well, I was not aware at that time about Allies, this. I didn't even know about Allies. I didn't know that word Allies at that time. But the Germans knew it. They see us go to work every day. And they see us go to work. And what bothered me is when the American Army came in, and they said to the American whatever he was, to the commandant there, they didn't know that this thing happened. They must have known. It was a big-- two or three chimneys, smoke going up. How can you not see that?

Were the people are with still religious when they were in the camps?

Religious?

Religious, yeah. Did they?

Well, no.

I heard that some people knew when it was Rosh Hashanah, they knew and it was Yom Kippur. How did you know what day it was?

We did not.

You didn't know.

We did not know. We did not know what the-- the only time that we know it was a Jewish holiday that I never forget, I was in a camp. And that is called Flossingen, I believe. And we've all work in there on the Autobahn. And all of a sudden, prisoners of war pass by. And they yelled in Hebrew, they yelled to us, chag sameach, which means a happy holiday. And they were prisoners that they were taken in the island of Crete in Greece. They were from the Palestine brigade.

And that, we knew that is Shavuot, the holiday. And then we were proud that we had Jews in the army fighting the Germans. But as far as religious, religious, we tried. We knew it was Yom Kippur because I remember, even if we didn't get food at that day, we worked-- we had to work, of course. And I remember, we fasted.

Fasted?

Yeah, we fasted because we had one man there. And he was a slaughterer. And he was a religious man. And he led services. In the middle of work, he led services. He chanted the melodies from Yom Kippur.

Did that help you? Did you like that? Did that make you feel better?

Pardon me?

Did that make you feel better when he did-- when the--

Yeah, sure, it made you feel better. But most of the people, I believe that most of the people who were in the camp, not that-- I don't blame them. I don't think they are religious at all.

Afterwards?

Sometimes, I am a little bit. But then I think of my sisters and my brothers. And I think of my sister's children. And I think of a lot of children that I seen in the camp. I seen a lot of mothers a lot of people being hanged. And I doubt myself.

Was liberated, the first thing I did is I started to look. I thought somebody is left from my family. But before I went to-- the first thing when I was liberated, I didn't go any place because the American Army from the Red Cross, they sent in doctors and nurses. And they wouldn't let me go any place because I weighed 64 pounds.

And how old were you? How old were you at that time?

21.

And you weighed 64 pounds.

And they took me into field hospital. And what bothered me is they didn't give us too much food. They gave us a little bit. They gave us one plate, which looked funny to us-- a little bit of potato, a little bit of meat, and a little bit chocolate. We could have eaten up 15 plates like that without any doubt.

Do you know why they did that?

That's the way they-- I believe that they did it for health reasons. And then I was, I believe, about two or three weeks.

And we were taken in to Halberstadt, which is not far from the camp where we were liberated. And then I did the most stupid thing I ever do in my life.

And the stupid thing is this-- they had there a lot of prisoners of war, German prisoners of war, in one place in there. And one German prisoner, he called me. And he said, please, bring me a piece of bread. I'm hungry. And I went. And I brought him a piece of bread. And my friends told me, I'm stupid. And up till today, I'm still thinking about it. Was I stupid? Or was it more humane?

You wanted to be better than they were, right?

I don't think I regret what I did. I don't think so.

How could you regret that?

And when I see today on television, the news how children are starving, people are starving, unbelievable. Unbelievable that in this day and age.

It means something different to you.

No people should be hungry. There's so much food, especially in the United States. There's so much food that we throw out. Not in my house, we don't throw out food. Not while I'm home, I don't think my family would do that.

No, huh?

They know better.

You have children?

Yeah, I have three children.

Oh, how old are they?

My son is 31. He's a PhD in biophysics. And my daughter is a special education teacher. And my baby is 20 years old. And she's going to the university.

So you are proud, right? Yeah. Do you tell them? Do they know about your experiences?

Yeah, I tell them. Oh, I keep telling them and telling them. And my wife sometimes disagrees with me, that I shouldn't talk so much because she tells me, I'm going to turn them into bigots, hate. But I do not think so. I don't think so.

So how did you get to the United States?

I had a relative, an uncle. And somehow, my brother got in touch with him. And he sent us papers.

How did you find your brother?

My brother? By coincidence. I found him in Stuttgart. That's in Germany. I found him there. No, I went someplace. And I came back. And somebody tells me, your brother's in the house. And that's how I found him. My brother went into the camp before I went into the camp, a couple months before.

But you were never at the same place?

No. The only time that I met was my brother-in-law. I met them in one of the camps that I was in. And he would have been alive today, but he was strictly very religious. And he wouldn't eat the food that they gave him there. He only eat



bread. And he died. He died.

So your-- how long did it take after liberation until you came to the United States?

Two years, two years.

Was that a hard time for you, those two years after?

Well, I wanted to get out from there.

Did you go back to your home? Did you try to go back to Poland?

No.

You didn't.

My brother went back there. And he didn't find anybody. And I wouldn't go back to Poland because I don't know. I have no love for the country. I mean, it's not a country, it's the people because I don't forget. I don't forget rocks being thrown at me and all of us call you names. And so why should I go back?

And so how did you come here, on a boat?

On a boat, yeah. I came with a boat. I came with a boat named Ernie Pyle.

Ernie Pyle?

Yeah, the SS Ernie Pyle. And I came here in 1947, November the 29th. And in November the 30th, I got myself a job.

Where did you land, in New York? Did you land in New York?

Yeah. In November the 30th, I went to the meat market there. And I looked for a job. And I got a job. And I've worked ever since. I never collected unemployment.

That's unbelievable.

And now, I'm in business for myself. I got quite a few people working for me in the meat business.

That's amazing. That's terrific. And where did you-- you met your wife when you got to New York?

Pardon me?

When you got to New York, you met your wife? Yeah, my wife, I met in New York. I've been out here.

And she was American?

Yeah.

So she was different than the girl-- she was different than the girls that you knew in Europe?

I tell you, I have-- if I would give people advice, I would tell the people from my lot, it's very hard. It's very hard. It's two different worlds, two different worlds. But I tell you the truth, that the people who-- I don't care what anybody says, the people who were in the camp, they're a little bit-- I wouldn't say mentally sick. This would be too much. They emotionally, emotionally nervous. I'm very nervous. But I calm myself down. I take it easy, you know what I mean. And thank god. I thank God for the mentality that he gave me and all of that. I know from right to wrong.

A lot of inner strength.

I used to write poetry in the camp.

Did you save it? Did you save it?

I saved a few, yeah. I saved a few. Nobody had musicians there. And they wrote music. And I wrote the words. And we used to sing it when we went to work. And if the Germans would understand what we sang, forget about it. I wouldn't be here to talk about it.

No way.

But that gave people hope, you know what I mean? It gave people a little hope. And that's the only thing. This is the secret of survival-- hope, if you have hope.

Keeping your spirits up.

What?

Keeping your spirits up.

Yeah, hope. And you say, ah, we going to outlive them no matter how. And sure enough, we did.

Do you think it could happen again?

Well, a lot of people difference of opinion. Personal, I think that this could happen again, and believe it or not, even in the United States because I think we have enough bigots in here and enough people that hate. We have enough sick people in this country, enough-- plenty of them.

And look, in a country like this, I believe in freedom. But you take the Nazi party or the Ku Klux Klan, this is not a party. This is a poisonous snake. They live by hate. Hate is their like-- some people, they take a aspirin for a headache. And they take hate. They live on hate. So maybe in this country. I don't know. The time, the economy would get a little-- a lot of people think the economy is bad now. It's not as bad. It's not as bad. God forbid that the economy should get worse.

And yet another thing maybe that what saves us in this country here, what save the Jew-- maybe I shouldn't say that. I don't mean to offend anybody in this. What saves us in this country is that we have-- if there wouldn't be any Black people and Spanish people in this country. And we would be the scapegoat.

Interesting.

I mean, I'm a realist. I express myself what I think. You know what I mean? Maybe I'm wrong. I don't know.

You're saying that every country has its persecuted group, right?

And look, that's why in Poland the economy was so bad. And in Poland, they only had the Jew. It might be getting to a political discussion.

That's OK.

I hate politics.

You hate politics, huh? You don't like American politics? Was it hard for you to get used to living in the United States?

When you moved to the United States, was it so different that it was hard to get used to?

Oh, sure. Listen, of course, it's hard to get used to. You live under oppression for so many years. And all of a sudden, you come into a place where there is freedom, you can express your opinion, you can say what you want, you can tell people the president is no good, and you're not afraid you're going to be taken into a jail or something, it's hard to get used to those things. But then when you get used to it, you don't want to live any other system no more. That's the problem. Now, god forbid, if I would go to a camp, I wouldn't be able to live for long because I'm used to good things in life.

You deserve good things in life.

But thank god, I think-- I think, in my lifetime, I don't think so. I only pray to God that my grandson doesn't have to go through--

Oh, there's a grandson.

--what I went through.

How old is your grandson?

Five years.

He asked me many a time about my number on my arm.

What do you say?

I tell him, this is my telephone number. So he says to me, no, your telephone number is not that. Your telephone number is 854-2376. And he said, you got here 178921. He knows this. You see that?

That's smart.

Five years old, a smart boy.

And you love him.

Yeah.

So you had a bountiful life here, children and grandchildren-- family, and children, and grandchildren.

Oh, yeah, thank god, I got a nice family that lives now. Only in America, that could happen.

And do you look at your children and you think, they don't know how good they have? Do you think that sometimes?

Do you have any more questions? No? Do you know about the--

This is your story and the things that you think are important to say.

Pardon me?

This is your story, so anything that you think you would like to share. Did your brother come to this gathering? Your brother, did he come?

No, no. Brother's in Israel now. And he-- he was in Jerusalem a couple of years ago, he lived there.

Did you go to Jerusalem?

No, I couldn't get away. But I had to go to this room because-- and I'm glad I did because I didn't meet anybody that I know because I don't think that there is too many people left already in mine. I don't think so. Otherwise, they would have been here. And yet a lot of people maybe don't recognize me. See? Of course, I-- you get older. I was a young boy then.

Yeah, you were young.

Yeah, I was a young boy.

And so that's one of the things that saved you that you were young and you were healthy.

A lot of people ask me, how come you got-- and it's really some question. Sometimes, I'm speechless. I don't know what to say. I mean, what can you say? I don't know. I've got a picture here from my family, my sisters. And I'm there. And on this picture, I'm the only one left. And I hate to look at that picture sometimes because I have a guilt complex. You know, I'm the only one left. Ah.

That's the way a lot of people feel.

Yeah.

But you know that's not your fault, just the way it happened.

I'm here and that's it.

That's it.

What are you going to do?

Life is strange.

And I try. I'm here. I try my utmost. I give-- I donate to a lot of charities. I never turned anybody down when they ask for-- I send money to the blinded veterans, to the disabled veterans, to the blind. I am a member of the HID, that's the Hebrew Institute of the Deaf.

I mean, all those things that has to do with helping my fellow man, I have pleasure in helping it not because the country I really-- Right now, I am involved in Jerusalem with an organization that helps poor brides. In other words, that some people have a lot of daughters, they want to marry up their daughters, and they have no money. And I'm collecting money for those people.

For the dowry?

Yeah. No, it's not dowry, no. Them dowry days are over, like people when they get married. They need pillowcases. They need sheets. And they need furniture. And they need an apartment.

You raise money for them?

I collect money in my synagogue. And every few weeks, we send them a nice couple thousand dollars.

That's nice.

You know what I mean? So it's helping somebody to bring up a family again. You know what I mean?

That's wonderful.

Hey, listen. You can't take nothing with you, right? So we've got to help people.

Sounds like you've made a very nice life for yourself. Sounds like you have a lot to be proud of.

What else should I-- told you how I got in on the camp. If I would tell you every detail of what happened in the camp, first time that it bothered me-- it still bothers me that when I seen the first person that was hanged. That was on Yom Kippur. Then we came back to the barracks from there. They told us not to walk away, to stay there. And they called out this particular man. And they hang him.

And why did they hang him? Because the day before, there was an air raid. And this man probably was looking for deads. And he got caught. They called that looting. And they hanged him. I'll never forget what he said, his last words. He said, comrades, I hope you all get home safe. That's what he said.