

The 13th, 1983, it's an interview at the American Gathering of the Jewish Holocaust Survivors. It's approximately 11:30. And the interviewee is Mr. Sol Wieder of Brooklyn, New York. Mr. Wieder, when were you born?

I was born in July-- where?

When.

Oh, July 3, 1926.

And where were you born?

In a small town called Dolha, the Carpathian district of Czechoslovakia.

How big a city was Dolha?

It was a city of approximately 5,000, population of 5,000, which consisted of approximately 125 Jewish families. And the balance was Ukrainians, Slovaks, and Hungarians. I'm going back to my childhood a little bit and would like to talk about it. I come from a reasonable well-to-do family. My father was in the leather wholesale business. And we had people working for us. We also manufactured shoes and distributed throughout the region.

I remember growing up as a child being quite comfortable, beautiful home, never hungry. Then in I believe it was 1939, the Carpathian district of Czechoslovakia was occupied by Hungary. And at that time, I believe, I was about 16 years of age.

The Jews were not affected badly when the Hungarians came in. Our region, we were primarily affected quite badly when the law started coming out, anti-Jewish laws. It started, I would say, approximately 1943, as far as I remember. And my father, at that point, being a young person, was taken to a labor force camp. It was a working battalion. And I was the oldest in my family.

At that point, my mother was home. And I had two small brothers and a younger sister. I was more or less in command, or I should say, in charge, taking care of the needs and protecting my family's interests.

And in 1943, I remember, we had a big store. And at that point, it was sealed off. It was confiscated, sort of. A lock was put on the door. And we had no access to the store. I remember, at one point, a person came to us and identify himself. He identified himself that he was allocated to take over the merchandise. However, he was going to pay us. However, at the same time, we were-- it was our responsibility to produce bills. And he will pay us based on cost.

I remember, as a child, and my mother knew nothing about the business because she was basically in the house, a housewife, and taking care of children, and so on. So at that point, the entire responsibility was left on me as a young fellow, producing these bills. I remember, at one point-- he came from a different city, by the way, with a big wagon. And he selected, I want to take this. I'm taking this and that. And I produced bills.

When it came to pay, he says, I'm paying you 50% now. And I'll owe you 50%. And there's no-- that was it. And I mean, there was no way for me to bargain with him. And he kept on reassuring us that we understand there are laws which are anti-Jewish. But I'm not going to harm you. If it weren't me, somebody else will take it over. But in any event, we can cooperate.

And well, to make a long story short, two weeks later, he showed up again. He bought more merchandise. I produced bills. And at that point, he only gave us 25% for every kroner. When I asked him, how about the previous balance, he said, look, be glad that I'm giving you 25% because in some other places, all they do is sign a receipt.

A few months later, he shows up again for whenever notice, a piece of paper in his hand, and he says that he would like to maintain business in my hometown. And he's taking over the store. And since he has a wife and also children, he

needs a place to stay.

So since we occupied a reasonable big house, and the store was basically in the front, he says, well, I understand your situation too. I'm not trying to push you out completely. But why don't you use the back two rooms? And we have to use the front. And there, again, promising that he'll be nice to us. And he has nothing to do with the law. He hasn't written the law. And the law is made. And if it weren't him, it would be somebody else, and this, and that. Gradually, gradually, he took over. And of course, he didn't pay anything anymore.

And then the ghetto started. I'll never forget a scene that took place in my hometown on the last day before taking us to the ghetto. I lived in a very Orthodox Jewish community. And the rabbi gave an order that the entire congregation should assemble in the synagogue. And I remember, at that time, they took out the Torahs.

And the cantor, who was also a shochet-- I don't know if you know what I mean by shochet-- he started crying in front of the Torah, and begging, [NON-ENGLISH], I prayed for you, and I davened here every Shabbos. And I have to leave you. I have to leave this Torah. I won't be able to pray here, to read you anymore. I remember, at that point-- and this is very deep in my memory.

Just try to visualize a congregation of men, women, a lot of old people all crying at one time when he gave that speech to the Torah. It was a very, very sad kind of scene, which is still in my mind. And we were taken to the ghetto. The ghetto was a barracks house. We were there a short while.

And we were transported, the entire family, to Auschwitz. At that time, my father was already home. They released him from the working battalion. So he, my mother, and my uncles, my two brothers, and sister, they-- we were all sent with cattle cars into Auschwitz.

We arrived at Auschwitz. We were immediately separated from my mother, and my brother, and sister. This was the last time I saw them. My father and I, since we were young-- I was very young, my father was reasonably young too-- we were sent to the other side, meaning for work. And at that point, I remember, they were assigning us numbers on our arms.

And they started asking what our professions were. And I remember having a discussion with my father about what to tell these people. So my father says, well, I'll tell them I was a shoemaker. So I kept on arguing with my father, who needs shoemakers here? You're not really a shoemaker. You know a little bit about it. Yet he didn't know what to say. And he said, he was a shoemaker, primarily working with the upper part of sewing the leather.

I vaguely remember staying in line. And I did not want to say that I know-- that I'm a businessperson or know anything about business. I saw a diesel locomotive. And I remember, at that point, telling the guy that I was a diesel-- I worked on the locomotive. And he wrote it down. And he made some kind of a star, I noticed, meaning that he's very important. We need guys like him.

At that point, we were given uniforms. My father had a beard. He was shaved. My uncle had a big beard. He was shaved. I had hair on top. I was shaved too. And I remember coming out after we were given the uniforms in the open square, whatever you want to call it. And we were there, hundreds and hundreds of people from my hometown. And I'm yelling, father. And my father is yelling, Shlomo.

And we-- I didn't recognize my own father because I always saw him only with a beard. And my uncle, he used to be a heavy-set person. All of a sudden, I didn't recognize him because suddenly, without a beard, he looked completely different. It sounded like a comedy, but in fact, it was so crazy that we started laughing at each other because we didn't recognize. Out of this tragedy, instead of crying, we were laughing.

We were sent, after that, to Germany into some kind of a factory. I don't know what kind of-- what we did, what the factory produced. But I know, they had a cement factory. I worked-- I was assigned, by the way, to a locomotive to be a helper for a locomotive. My father, since he said he was a shoe person, they sent him to work in the cement factory.

When I was assigned to the locomotive, the guy was a German, a tall, husky fellow. And he said to me, do you understand German? I told him, I do I understand a little bit because I speak Yiddish. And it's a little bit close. But I will do the best. If I don't understand, I'll ask again. He said to me in German, go ahead, load up the coal. It was a locomotive with a chimney, I remember.

And I didn't know what he was talking about. I didn't even know how do I open it. And suddenly, he realized that I am not really a locomotive helper. He got very upset and very arrogant. He started cursing, [GERMAN], swine, and this, and that. And he grabbed me to bring me back to the camp to report that I lied that I am not really a locomotive helper.

As we were walking, and really, and all, constantly cursing-- in fact, I believe he gave me one or twice kicks with his high boots-- he says to me, how old are you? I told him, I'm 19. He says to me, 19? He says, I have a son who is about your age, 19. He is someplace in the Russian front. I haven't heard from him for a while. And somehow, the connection, he felt sorry for me.

And he says to me, listen, because of my son, I'm going to forget about this. But I'm going to show you how to handle the locomotive, how to fill it with coal, and this, and that. But don't ever lie to me. And of course, I was very appreciative and came back.

This incident, I must say, in spite of the German atrocities, what they have committed, this happened to-- this was a decent German, in my opinion. Whether I was saved by coincident or because of his son, the mere fact that I-- he saved my life.

Not only did he save my life, but after a while, I was helping him in the locomotive, he even-- I had soup for lunch, empty soup or whatever soup that came prepared. He used to eat a sandwich and something else. And the first day, he used to leave a small piece. He didn't say take it, but it meant for me to take it.

After a week later, he warmed up a little bit to me. And he brought me a slice of bread. And I remember, after a while, he even stopped the locomotive in the middle of the road so that I can sneak into the fields and take some potatoes out or steal potatoes, whatever, if you want to call it that. I'm grateful. He was a decent guy.

What I want to do now is really talk as something that has been heavy on my mind, and as you probably noticed, that I'm a disabled person. Most people assume a person who is disabled has been a hero, fought in camps, or fought in ghettos. I'm no hero. I was severely wounded because of a potato.

In Bergen-Belsen, when I was there, in the last couple of weeks before the liberation, there was basically starvation. I remember, I don't know whether I'm ashamed or guilty. I don't even know-- I don't feel anymore. But I remember eating flesh from dead people. The starvation was so great and no food was coming in, no food was given, and people were dying like flies, I actually cut people's stomachs open and took their liver out, dead people.

My father was with me in Bergen-Belsen then. And I used to ask him, eat. I used to give somebody else a piece of liver or meat. It's probably swollen flesh, I don't know, in order to charcoal it. It was an exchange sort of. My father was so starved and so skinny like a skeleton, he kept on putting it close to his mouth. But he never was able to put it in his mouth. He tried, but he never did-- was able to swallow it.

I did eat. I swallowed it. There are times-- I remember the faces of these people that I used to cut off meat from. And they stare me in the face sometimes. It's not easy to live with this. These people were dead.

And I wish my father would have eaten too. Maybe he would have survived. My father, I was constantly with him. Near the camp, on the outside of the camp, near the kitchen, there were potatoes. And there were bodies near the potatoes. The Germans were watching people going for a potato and deliberately trying to aim and shoot. There was a flash at night, especially at night. There was in a camp, you have these flashlights.

Flashlights.

And they keep going around. And I figured, I can outsmart it. I will sneak in at a time when the light is not focusing on me. Well, I saw there people. Now, apparently, they did the same thing. But I figured, I'll sneak in. I'm smarter. I'm younger. I'm clever. I don't know. I guess the desire for survival or the hunger was so great that I figured I'll do that. Well, I did it. I sneaked under.

And the Germans figured that when the light isn't there, there must be some people. They just kept on shooting from the towers. Well, I caught a few bullets-- a bullet in my left hand, my right hand, my cheek. I have a scar here from a bullet passing by. I'll never forget when I came back bleeding. By the way, this happened about very close to the liberation.

When I came back bleeding, my father saw me, he started crying, saying, Shlomo, what did you do to me? What did you do to me? Well, I didn't know. There was no answer to it.

But this fact that what he told me, what did you do to me, this still was heavy on my mind. For many, many years, I needed psychiatric care to overcome that guilt because my father died two weeks later from typhus after the liberation. And for a long time, I had guilt feelings that I killed my father because if I would have not done this, maybe he would have survived.

What you were doing was helping, trying to help him survive. And you were doing the very, very best you could to help him to survive. How are you supposed to outsmart the whole German establishment?

But the fact is my father leaves me. Another scene which is very heavy on me is my uncle. He was also together with me and with my father in the camp. Before coming to Bergen-Belsen, I remember, at that point, I was in the Erlenbusch camp. And we were emptying out the camp in order to march day and night to Bergen-Belsen.

An announcement came out. I know we started thousands of people. And every day, people just dropped dead like flies. I remember, my uncle, he had no more energy to walk. And the Germans kept on saying those who cannot walk, those stay behind, trucks will follow you. And you will be picked up. Somehow, some people believed it that this is what will happen.

Yeah, there were some people who, like my uncle, who didn't trust the Germans, who figured, it's not safe. But after days and days of walking, and being weak, and I helping my father-- I was actually-- my father was leaning on me. And I had another person from my hometown who was also helping me with my father.

My uncle started begging, Shlomo, don't leave me. Help me. And at that point, I didn't know where to turn. Shall I take my father and help him? In the meantime, the Germans are yelling, fast, come on, march, move, move. And here, I don't know what to do. And my uncle is laying on the floor, pleading with me, not with my father, because he saw my father hasn't got enough energy to pick him up. Shlomo, please, help me. Don't leave me. We were so long together. Don't leave me now.

Well, you know the end. It's a question of you have to move on. And my father is there. And he can't. I'm helping him. And I'm trying to run myself. He was left. I think about it quite a lot. There's nothing I could have done for him. But yet the feeling, this begging me, don't leave me, as though as I could have done anything is not easy.

Basically, there's a lot more to my story, to my background. But these are the few things that are very, very heavy on my mind. They keep me up at night sometimes.

Very understandable. You had no alternatives. No you had no choices. You had no choices to do other than what you did do. And no one can say to you, hey, stop thinking about that. You lived through it. It's easy for somebody else who did not go through that same thing to say that to you. But standing away from the situation, and just looking at you, and hearing what you're saying, you really had no choice.

I know that. The funny thing is I know. I'm a reasonable person, basically educated in America, good position. I'm a manager of statistical operations for a large insurance company, married-- happily married, have a family of my own. I have a son and two daughters. I have a married daughter. I have three grandchildren. But yet these are certain things, in

spite of the fact that I went through what I call substantial psychiatric feedback, whatever you want to call it, still, doesn't leave you. But I guess it's something, what I call lifetime scars of the Holocaust.

I think you described it properly. It's a scar. How do you erase a scar? Scar's a scar. But you've done what you had to do. And that's you got whatever help you could. And you're dealing with it. And you deal with it the best way you know how. But it's very important for you, for your story to get into this machine. And ultimately, other people should know that story as well because no matter what we read about the Holocaust, and movies we see about it, and everything else, it isn't the same thing as hearing it from your voice, and for me to look at you and hear you say that. May I ask you a couple of questions?

Sure, sure.

Do you discuss these kinds of things with your children?

Well, I would say, for the first 15, 16 years, very little was discussed in my house. I married to an American girl, American Jewish girl. There was a silence, not sharing with them, not telling them. Yet they knew that I'm a survivor because they used to see these endless Yahrzeit candles, Yom Kippur.

And so they used to question, why do we need so many Yahrzeit candles? And at that point, my wife used-- not me, my wife used to be the explainer and tell them, well, you know, Daddy lost his daddy, and his mommy, and your grandparents. And this is a candle for each one that Daddy is lighting. And of course, the subject used to be closed.

They never probed. But I know they used to read literature, but never to-- they were not discussing it with me because they assumed that it would be painful to me. And I, on the other hand, was not discussing it with them, trying to shield them from pain.

But it is the last couple of years they started probing. My son who lives in California came home one time simply to talk to me about it, see, asking me, do I have a picture? How was your father? Was he a good man? He was a very good man.

And of course, my daughter, I personally feel they-- my big daughter, who is married and has three children, for some reason or other, she is very strong. And she is aware. She knows. We have talked a little bit about it. She came out of this quite strong.

My son, I believe, also has some scars. And my daughter, the younger one-- I think my Holocaust, my suffering must have had some impact on them because they, too, I believe, required some therapy or are still under therapy. From the kind of questions that I'm getting now and last year, I see that they, too, are suffering. I wish they weren't suffering. But I know they are suffering.

Do you feel, as time goes by, that you want to talk about this more?

Well, let's put it this way. I'm a member of B'nai B'rith. I'm on the executive board of Bright and Large. And every year, we have a Holocaust memorial meeting devoted or designated primarily to observe the Holocaust. And for many, many years, the president has asked me, Sol, you are the only or one of the maybe two survivors in our lodge. We would like to hear from you about your experience or the experience of Jews in general.

I never volunteered. I was afraid that I will not be able to cope with it. I may fall apart like I fell apart a few minutes ago. And I didn't want my lodge brothers to see me in that condition, or certainly not my family, who was going to be there.

Finally, two years ago, I did volunteer, talk in front of the lodge. I was more composed, more control of myself. I may have taken a tranquilizer before to have the courage. I did speak. But my children wanted to be there. I asked them not to because I wasn't sure that I can handle it if they are sitting there. I know it had a big impact on the lodge.

And primarily, why did I volunteer two years ago? Because as you know, a professor in Chicago came out with that book, the Holocaust never existed. And this had some impact on me sort of like, for god's sake, how can you say that? Look, you're still alive. I mean, if you're-- 30-40 years from now, when we won't be here anymore, you may be able to convince people it never existed. But for god's sake, we are still alive. How can you project lies of this nature, that it never happened, it never existed? And this-- actually, he gave us-- me and a few of my friends-- the courage to talk about it openly in public, which I'm not sure I would have done before.

I think you're rendering a very important service by making this a record. Because if it's only in your mind, if it's only something that you can live with and you're suffering with, future generations won't know about it. It'll get diffused in the process, as you indicated. Pretty soon people will start believing, perhaps, what this professor at Northwestern University is saying. So I know it's painful for you to discuss some of these things today that you have. But I think you're rendering a very important service to future generations as well as to our own. Could I ask you a couple more questions?

Sure.

When you're talking about originally-- I'm flipping back and forth a little bit. When you were in your hometown and a man came in and wanted to see the bills, he was requisitioning your inventory.

Exactly.

Was he German?

No, he was Hungarian. You remember, I mentioned before, we were occupied by the Hungarians. But he must have been some veteran of the First World War or something that he was designated. Or maybe he was a member of their party. I don't know. All I know is that he produced a paper. And he says, I am the one designated to take over.

Other than this one German locomotive man, did you ever get any rachmones from anybody, any Gentile?

No. Well, let me think for a minute. I don't-- this was the only incident. This was the only incident. I remember an incident that happened in a camp. I think it was near [NON-ENGLISH]. I'm not sure whether I'm pronouncing it correctly. We were working. And at that point, at night, we were-- whether the roads were bombed or-- I don't know what happened.

But in any event, the German soldiers or the SS people took us prisoners into a farm. We were told to sleep in the farm all over the place. I don't know what kind of a farm it was. But in any event, I remember, at night, searching for food. And I came across some sacks with corn. And I remember getting to it.

I also remember, I didn't have-- my clothing did not have pockets. But I had-- my pants had not a strap, something that to tie it up with. So I was able to fill in corn in my shirt, to keep the corn from disappearing or falling out. And I kept it very quietly at night. And I didn't want to share the information with others because otherwise, the Germans may find out. But apparently, I wasn't the only one. I wasn't that smart.

And I didn't want to share it with my father, either, because he would have been very upset because he was more or less guarding me. Hey, behave yourself because they'll kill you. They'll do this and that to you. I remember nibbling on the corn. It was very hard corn. I guess they were feeding something with it. I don't know what. When it came in the morning, we were lined up what you call a head count. The farmer must have [AUDIO OUT].

I know from the type of questions that I'm being asked and sort of pretending that it's like a left-sided question, which also leads that they are preoccupied with the subject. And sometimes, I wish they weren't, especially my son, I think, is thinking about it a lot. And he's asking a lot. But he comes home for vacation or he stops, comes once a year for a week or two.

The first thing he does is goes to my album of pictures. It's like searching, searching for what? Well, so when we talk

about searching, I have that tendency too. There isn't a book that has been published with pictures. I know they're all dead, my family. They were small. I had a big sister, who was a little bit younger, but she carried-- she helped my mother. She carried one of my brothers on her arm. So she also went on the other side.

Yet I search. And I don't know what I'm searching for. I look at pictures and maybe, I don't know what. I don't think we have an answer. I have seen them a thousand times. I have a library at home of maybe 100 books dealing with the Holocaust. I know it all. I have been there. I don't believe it. And sometimes, I dream, it's never happened. Yet it's there. I may get up at night. My wife says to me, where are you going? I can't sleep. I'm going to take one of the books.

I have other books too. I used to be a humorist writer. And so in spite of my past, I'm basically a person who likes life, enjoys life, and likes to laugh. I used to write for the [NON ENGLISH NAME] the greenhorn many, many years ago, a weekly column-- not every week, but it was in the weekly edition. Of course, you could starve for hunger.

I remember, I came to America being a disabled person, as I am. And I came-- that is very interesting, the person who brought me over to America. I was in Sweden after Bergen-Belsen. Because I was wounded, the Red Cross took me over to Sweden. And I was in a hospital. And at one time, a reporter from the Jewish Tog, it used to be the Daily Tog, came to visit the survivors. And he interviewed me. And he wrote about me.

And all of a sudden, I get a letter from America, from the Ner Israel Rabbinical Seminary in Baltimore, from my uncle Friedman, Jacob Friedman. And he tells me that I read the story about you. And are you by any chance the Shlomo that I used to eat in your house on Sabbath?

But we had a yeshiva in my hometown. There was no restaurant. So yeshiva boys ate in different places-- Monday by Mr. Schwartz and Tuesday by him. Well, he ate by us Shabbos. His father was a customer by my father. And as a result, Shabbos was the best day he ate by us. So he asked me, are you the Shlomo that I used to know?

Well, I told him-- I wrote him, yes. He sent me papers. He was instrumental for the Ner Israel Rabbinical Seminar to send me student papers to come to Baltimore. He also sent me money in spite of the fact that he was a student. I don't know how. He must have collected it from his fellow students. He's a very well-respected leader in the community in Los Angeles, Rabbi Jacob Friedman now. I'm still in communication with him. When he comes to New York, he calls me. Of course, I don't go as often to the other side.

He sent me papers. When I came to Baltimore, of course, there was a problem. It was an Orthodox yeshiva. And I was really not what you call a real yeshiva bocher. I went to cheder. And I went even to a yeshiva. But this wasn't in my heart. Even after the war, I may have become even a little cynic or sarcastic because I had a lot of questions. I had a [YIDDISH].

So I came there. And I didn't show up for morning services. I only showed up at night. So finally, the rabbis questioned, how come? It's a mitzvah. You have to daven in the minyan instead of [NON-ENGLISH]. Well, finally, I told them, look, I don't want to put on tefillin because I only have one hand. And it's a problem. And it's not easy. And I don't people to stare at me.

And at that point, I still had-- if I don't have enough Holocaust problems, memories, I also had disability hangups, inferiority complexes, and others. Well, at that point, they told me, don't worry about it. We have many yeshiva boys. And each day, a person will be assigned to you, help you. That's all I had to hear. And that was the end of it. I wouldn't go for it. In fact, I even questioned whoever wrote the laws about tefillin maybe they were not taking into consideration that someday, there may be a person with one hand.

Well, this was more or less another-- this brought on a kind of an expression, this kind, to a learned person. In fact, they may have even thought, I'm not sure, is this what we brought over? They may have. But I may have upset the rabbi. And if I did, I'm still-- I'm really, truly sorry because I love the yeshiva, the rabbi, and everything else. They did marvelous things for the community, for people they brought over, plus teaching them. It's one of the top yeshivas in America.

Well, I was sent to New York. They switched me to another yeshiva, Chsan Sofer, on the Lower East Side. And I was

there also a while. And they figured-- in the meantime, I was under the auspices of the New York Association for New Americans. They were supporting me. They were giving me every two weeks a check.

And at that point, they figured, wait a minute, this has to stop. This cannot go on for life. What will you do with yourself? We have to get you a trade. And of course, I said, fine. I'm ready to work. I don't know what, but I'm ready. So they started probing me. What did you do?

And so I told them, in my life story, there is a youngster. I was a meshorer in a choir in my hometown. In fact, I was their tenor. So they said, fine, maybe we'll make a cantor out of you. But before we want to make a cantor out of you, we'll send you to an observation to the 92nd Street Y. And we'll arrange an appointment with one of the famous cantors. And if he says that you have the material, we will invest to teach you to send you to a school where they teach you to become a cantor.

It was a Cantor Kwartin. I don't know if you heard him-- famous, famous cantor. And he sat near the piano. And he asked me, go ahead, sing Yisgadal [? Shoshana ?] style. I sang it. Shabbos style, a piece of a portion of this and a portion of that. Then he says to me, took me aside, says to me, listen, I'll do you a favor. You have a shtimmer. You have a voice. But I'm going to tell the NYANA that you are not material to be a cantor. And I'm going to do you a favor.

And I asked him, what a favor are you doing me? He says, listen, there is something in the Torah or in some place in the Jewish teachings, if a Sefer Torah is dropped, the congregation has to fast 30 days. He says, you may have the biggest voice. You may have the biggest voice, but you will come for an audition. And they'll look at you with one hand. And the first thing that will come in their mind is what happens if you drop that Sefer Torah? They don't want to fast 30 days. Stay away from it. And this was the end of my cantorial--

Career.

--career. So at that point, they sent me for about two years to a rehab facility, which dealt-- which they rehabilitate people from-- disabled people from just every walks of life or people who were severely wounded in the war. And they fitted me with an artificial hand. And they had-- this left hand, I couldn't do. I couldn't twist. I couldn't turn. I had several surgeries performed, bone grafts.

And they taught me to do general office work, typing, stenography, a little bit of everything, accounting, so that I should be an all-around, so I can adapt myself to some office procedures, a method. They, too, were instrumental in finding me the job. So it's a beautiful, fine organization. And I have been there for the past 33 years, from a mail boy, working myself up to the manager of statistical operations. Of course, I went to school on my own to improve myself. And I'm doing reasonably well.

Mr. Wieder, what company is it?

The HIP-- the Health Insurance Plan. It's one of the HMOs, the second-largest HMO in America.

That's Maryland.

You think part of your children's search, so to speak, is something that was quite common here a couple of years ago when Roots came on television-- not that that stimulated anything particularly. But isn't this something that they've been cut off from is their roots and sort of a searching for their roots? And they just never had the benefit of those kinds of things that most of us have in this country. If you never knew your grandfather, your grandmother, at least there's a grave site that you can go and look at, a tombstone or something. Do you that that--

I think it had, yes. Yes, definitely. Take, for instance, we used to celebrate Passover and family get-together. And I was always the loner, no family. I think they felt it. There was parties or you always have uncles, and nephews, and nieces, and nobody from my side.

I was going to ask you one more question. And that relates similar to this. There was a terrible intervention between



your normal pre-war life and what happened afterwards. And it was so traumatic. We've discussed that. You've discussed that here today. Do you think it might be helpful at all to just talk about life at home before the war, just concentrate on that, what the normalcy was?

I will say, if I would have done it years ago, when the kids were small--

Never too late.

--one thing, at this point, they may even be bored with what happened as a child, or how I played, and how I--

It's not only the question that you're playing. But these are all flesh and blood people. And they all formed part of the fabric of your life under an environment that they can understand. Because there was a normalcy related to that. And as my wife just indicated, I don't think it's ever too late. Of course, that's just opinion from non-professionals.

That's something to think about, yes. In fact, you know, my father, as I mentioned before, died about close to three weeks after the liberation. I remember, I was in the hospital because I was wounded. And somebody came running to the hospital. His name is [? Bill ?] Weiss. He's now in Israel. In fact, he told my wife the whole story two years ago when he was in my house. I think it was three years ago.

He came running to me and said, Shlomo, I want you to remember today's day. Today, your father died. And I remember being in the hospital laying there. But it was like a ward, maybe 100 patients with all kinds of problems, mostly wounded, bandaged up. And I was bandaged up. And my face was bandaged up from the wounds that I have received also.

And I remember sneaking out. It wasn't easy, but I remember sneaking out from that hospital, trying to look for my father. I remembered approximately what barrack he was in because after the war, after I was wounded, I was with him in the barrack, even though I was wounded, until the English soldiers felt that I belonged in a hospital.

I remember going to my barrack, and approaching the people, and said, listen, did you see a person, a [? Yakov ?] Wieder who I was told died? He says, oh, yes, we put them out. By putting out, that means, when people die, they just put them out in the front of the barrack. And a few times during the day, people with trucks used to come around and pick up the bodies and to put them in a mass grave. And one person says to me, yes. We just put him out a few hours ago. They just picked them up about a half an hour ago.

I remember going to-- there were several open graves. I remember jumping in to one grave and searching, looking for my father. I remember stepping on these people because I was-- they were laying face up or some open eyes, some closed eyes, men, women. There was a mixture. And all I was doing, going around and-- you should excuse the expression-- lifting the head up to see if it's my father, and separating bodies.

And after a while, people started saying, screaming, hey, look that meshuggeneh there. A meshuggeneh is there, messing up these bodies. I remember the English guard coming over to me and yelling, screaming, but I just kept on doing the same thing.

I remember a person, an English officer. I think he may have been-- I think he was a rabbi also because I remember-- I think I vaguely remember he had also a Magen David around. But it's not clear in my memory. He says to me, that's Yiddish, says, yes, what are you doing here? [YIDDISH]?

So I tell him how my father died. I'm looking for him. And I want to ask forgiveness. I want to [INAUDIBLE] to ask him forgiveness for the pain that I have caused him.

I remember him coming into the-- he also came into the-- jumped in, he says to me, listen, my son, what are you doing? And you won't find your father. They all look alike. They're all the same. You can't tell. He says, would you like to say Kaddish? I remember saying it. I repeated after him. In the meantime, I saw a thousand people, maybe standing, watching like a circus. I'm sure that [WEEPING]

So I remember, they put me on a stretcher, the Red Cross soldiers. And they took me back to the Red Cross camp to the hospital. And I remember that a few days later, they transported me to Sweden. It was a terrible feeling. It's very hard to describe. All I really wanted is to see him. I know there's nothing I can do.

I think that's the same thing we were talking about before. There's got to be something tangible, something that you can - if it's nothing more than a tangible memory of a person, even in, god forbid, that position, at least there's some reality to it. And I think maybe that could possibly be something that your kids are dealing with too. It's so unreal to them.

What I would do, would like to do yet in my lifetime, if I can accomplish that, I want to go back to Bergen-Belsen. I don't know what grave he is. But there are so many graves. There's about 10 mass graves. I just want to say Kaddish in there, each grave, assuming or hoping that he is in one of them.

I did cause him pain. And the pain was primarily because I didn't listen to him. He was trying to protect me. And I figured I was young. And I just didn't listen.

Is it any different than any other generation gap? Only yours, you're going through hell in the process. You're living through hell in the process. But you know, kids don't pay attention to fathers. And that's a normal, natural thing.

I know, I know.

It's a normal, natural thing. In the parlance of today, they've got to do their own thing. And so did you. And so did I when I was a kid. I didn't pay attention to my father.

Yeah, but the end result-- see, the end result, the way that I-- see, if he would have been alive, we can talk it out. But the fact is that I was cut off like with a knife. And I was left with the burden, with the guilt, with that feeling.

Easy it isn't.

So well, I do have a desire. And I have mentioned that to my kid, my kids, that I do have a desire to go once in my lifetime. I don't know when. To [INAUDIBLE].

I agree with you. I think there's a lot to be gained from that. You got to have your scream. You've got to have it out of your system.

The funny thing is that I am reacting the way I am, which I didn't anticipate, and I was hoping I won't. All year round, it doesn't

That's because you're busy.

--it doesn't affect me. And even when I go to shul for Yizkor, I don't.

Well, you're here in this environment in a gathering of Holocaust survivors. And everything comes to the forefront. And you're touching nerves, nerve endings with these memories. It's a very natural and understandable thing. And I think it's probably in the last analysis good for you too--

Yeah, probably is.

--to share it with people, we're coreligionists of yours, but we're strangers too. And it's important to get it out.

Thank you for--