

Some of you may have seen recently a television program on public television entitled "Robert Clary A5714-- a Memoir of Liberation." And it tells the story of one very eloquent spokesman who has been in our community and spoken about his experiences surviving and recovering from the atrocities of the Shoah. Our guest speaker today was featured in that documentary, because he himself is a liberator who was a sergeant major in the 87th Infantry unit of the United States Army and was the first American army officer to enter the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, in May of 1945, in the final days of the European war.

Our speaker is a member of the Community Relations Council of the Akron Jewish Community Federation and is a member of the National United States Holocaust Memorial Council. It is my pleasure to welcome to Youngstown and to this monument and to this event, Mr. James Barnett. Mr. Barnett?

[APPLAUSE]

Yom HaShoah, 40 years after. 40 years after the defeat of the Third Reich. 40 years after the martyrdom of Anne Frank, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Raoul Wallenberg, and a multitude of Hitler's last victims. 40 years after the beginning of a second life of the survivors.

My story is a memoir of a liberator. In order to get into my story and tell you how it all actually happened, you must know something about my youth. I was born June the 12th, 1925, in Barberton, Ohio. I attended Barberton High School-- one of 6 Jews in a school of 1,200 students.

I went to cheder for five years. My knuckles were beaten when I didn't daven with the right words at the right time. But I learned to daven. I didn't know what I was saying.

And I grew up as a Jew, going to Sunday school in Akron, becoming confirmed, listening to the history of the Jews in Hungary and in Poland, and what happened to the Marranos, and-- but I wasn't really a Jew. I was a kid, just growing up-- but a kid.

I ran away when I was 17 years old, and I enlisted at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I was sent from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to Fort Benning, Georgia, where I took my infantry basic training and then my advanced infantry basic training. I was 18 years old when I was sent to the 87th Infantry Division in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. My troops that I trained as a corporal in Fort Jackson were illiterates that failed out of illiterate school in Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky-- older men, couldn't read, couldn't write. We painted one shoe white and one shoe red, and we trained them to the Red Flag March and to the White Flag March. And we went overseas.

We landed-- after leaving England, we landed 11 days after D-day, June the 17th, 1944. I was 19 years old. I was a sergeant. I was a staff sergeant. I was eventually a tech sergeant. And then I became an infantry battalion sergeant major. And I was 19 years old.

I was in combat 177 consecutive days. My first initial combat was in Rouen, France. I fought through the Battle of Paris, Metz, Mourmelon, Aachen, Duren, and Cologne. I was shell-shocked in Cologne, sent back to Cherbourg for six days, and rejoined my unit.

So you know a little bit about Jim Barnett. I knew what it was to be a Jew in a big, big army. The infantry was no place for a Jewish boy. But I decided then and there that I was going to be the best soldier that that army ever had, because this is the best country in the world. And it was a good war-- if there was such a thing.

Now, I'm walking through the woods and the dirt roads of Austria. Our military government would tell us that building was a hospital. This are other major buildings that you should recognize, as you are passing through this dirt road. But we came upon a stockade. Nothing was told to us about the stockade.

We came to the corner of the dirt road, and our point, the man who went out ahead of us-- there were 62 of us in this small group that found this stockade. It was barbed wire, all the way that we could see. And right on the corner was a

big, wooden guard tower. We thought we had come upon a prison, a military prison, where they kept prisoners of war. We were not told what it was.

Carefully, we moved to the side of the road-- went very cautiously. This was May the 4th of 1945. The war, for all purposes, was almost over. The Germans were running, and we were running after them.

We came to the second guard tower-- no guard in the first, no guard in the second. As we came to the third guard tower, we began to see bodies, lying inside the barbed-wire fence, some walking, some lying. And as we got close to the gate, we had people up against the gate-- perhaps a dozen or so.

I had a German-American who spoke fluent German and told the people standing up against the gate that we were Amerikanische Soldaten. With that, please stand back. Because the only way that we could get through this big chain with a big brown lock on it was either to shoot it open or to bring a vehicle up from the rear and break it open.

They were so anxious to get to us, and we were so anxious to get to them, that they moved back, we shot open the lock, and we opened the gate. I spoke very little German and very little Yiddish. The only Yiddish I knew was that which my parents talked when they didn't want me to understand.

But I spoke it to this man. And this man said, [SPEAKING YIDDISH]. And I looked back at him, because I understood that. And I said, [SPEAKING YIDDISH]?

With that, we grabbed each other. We hugged each other. Because I had found my brother.

We talked a little bit, through the interpreter. And he said to me, come back. I'll show you Jews. As we went back and looked at these people-- so emaciated, so near death-- we went back to a building that looked like a three-car garage. And in front was a double wooden door. There was a wooden bar that came down into a steel hasp.

He told us, push, because you'll have to lift up the bar. We pushed. And he said, run back.

We pushed. We lift up the bar. The doors came open. And as the rabbi said, the bodies fell out-- bodies with no flesh, bodies with a little bit of flesh, bodies with some sinew. The stench was unbearable. And I ran-- with my newfound brother, with my arms around my newfound friend. But by the grace of God and the foresight of my grandfather, those bones could have been mine.

And he took me to the pits. And he showed me where they had, four or five days before, buried the last of them. And from dust to dust, the dirt was partly covering these bodies.

I was 19 years old. My children got this story from me when they started asking me war stories. And when my three sons were old enough to understand, I told them. I told them how great it was to be a Jew-- how, after seeing that in my youth, I could stand up tall and straight, because I was a good soldier, I was a good American, and I was going to devote my life to being a good Jew.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt did not allow our Jews to come. His token was 1,008 that came on the Haven to Oswego, New York. He refused the St. Louis. But I could do better-- this kid from Barberton, Ohio.

I became a courier for the Council of Soviet Jewry and took money on my back and onto my chest, to help my brothers so it would never happen again-- so they could come home, come home to Israel-- come home to the United States. Israel is your bastion of democracy in the Middle East. And without it, the United States-- and the Jews especially-- could not survive.

Our devotion is torn. It's torn between being an American and being a Jew. To remain silent about the Holocaust is to grant posthumous victories to Hitler. We must never remain silent-- you and your children and your children's children. My life is devoted to you-- is devoted to teach my children and my children's children and you that the Zakhor that I constantly wear and the memorial to my brothers, it is not just "remember." It is a command-- "you must remember."

You will remember, I will remember, that the Holocaust was the death sentence pronounced by the German Third Reich on Jewish blood.

All men, women, and children whose ancestry included a Jewish grandparent had to die-- from starvation, disease, forced labor, torture, fire, mutilation, electrocution, lethal injection, hanging, suffocation, and exposure, flaying, poison gas, execution. This unprecedented policy of annihilation, based on a [? mindless ?] linkage of racial and religious characteristics, became the central obsession of the Nazi dictatorship to its very last day. During the years 1941 to 1945, more than 6 million defenseless people were murdered-- were murdered as carriers of Jewish blood-- an unique civilization, permanently destroyed.

The Holocaust confronts us all with a momentous precedent. For once an event has happened, it can happen again-- not in precisely the same form but one of an infinite number of variations. Events happen because they are possible. If they were possible once, they are possible again. In that sense, the Holocaust is not unique but a warning to the future. What nation can take for granted its physical survival, in the post-Holocaust world?

I stand before you and implore you, Zakhor-- you must remember. Thank God that I am an American. Thank God that I am a Jew. And thank you for listening to me.

[APPLAUSE]

Our guest today is Mr. James Barnett of Akron, Ohio, who's visiting with us to talk about his experiences as a liberator of the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. On May 4, 1945. Mr. Barnett, who was then a sergeant major in the US armed services, led a group of men into the Mauthausen concentration camp. Jim, what did you find when you did that? What was your experience?

Well, going into the gates was probably the second or third experience. The first experience was finding it in the first place and not knowing what it was. We came upon this barbed-wire enclosure which we thought-- and were not told-- we thought was a prisoner-of-war camp, a temporary prisoner-of-war camp. Seeing that the guard towers had no guards, and no people that we could see till we came to the second guard tower with no guard, and then after the second and before the third and last, we started to see these people with the black-and-white garments on, tattered and torn, some lying, some standing, some against the fence. The fence was not electrified, and therefore they were leaning against the barbed wire-- because they couldn't have more pain.

Then we approached the entrance of the gate, which was chained and had a big brown lock on it. Through an interpreter, we told them to stand back-- that we were American soldiers, and all we wanted to do was to get in, in order to free them. They stepped back. And these people in various stages of sickness, emaciation, malnutrition stood back, and we began our conversation.

So, in other words, you just stumbled upon this camp, which you did not know was a concentration camp. For all you knew, it was a prison, when you saw it. And you didn't even--

I had no idea what it was, except we knew that there was barbed wire and a gate and it was locked. So it was some sort of a-- and it looked like a temporary-- it didn't even look like a real one. From what I understand from other liberators, Buchenwald was brick buildings and the walls were walls, and-- but Mauthausen was not.

Well, Mauthausen, I guess, was a different kind of structure altogether, then. It looked like a prisoner-of-war camp.

Barracks and more like a stockade-type army-- a brig-- a stockade-type, in an army camp.

Well, now, you went through this gate. You blew the gate open, with--

Well, we shot the lock, yeah.

--shot the lock off, right. Nothing quite as dramatic as--

And unchained the chain. And then the first man, who was in quite good condition, began talking to me in German. And I responded in Yiddish-- not very well, but in Yiddish. And he looked at me, and he said, [NON-ENGLISH]? "Are you a Jew?" And I responded-- I understood that, and I responded the same way. I said, [NON-ENGLISH]? And he said, yes, I am a Jew. [NON-ENGLISH]?

Then our interpreter took over, and he started to tell us about the-- that it was Mauthausen concentration camp, and that 120,000 people had been murdered in this camp, and that the Germans had left a day and night before and left them unattended.

120,000--

Jews.

--Jews were murdered in Mauthausen.

Right.

So Mauthausen probably did not have a long career.

Well, Mauthausen was not a big camp.

All right.

See, you take Buchenwald or Dachau or Auschwitz. They were much bigger, and they had what they call "satellite camps." They had camps where the laborers did their labor and where the people did various different things in smaller camps, attached to the major camp. The name you hear, of Dachau and Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz, were the extermination camps. Mauthausen was one of those but smaller.

All right, so now, you got into this camp. You found out there were Jews inside. I presume they found out very quickly that you were Jewish. What was the immediate reaction of Jews who had been pent up in this camp and consigned to death? They were going to die, if the Germans hadn't run. What was their reaction, meeting American an American Jewish soldier coming through the doors? What kind of response did they have to you?

Well, first of all, they couldn't even realize-- they couldn't fathom the fact that, in addition to being a master sergeant in the American army, that I also was a Jew. They just couldn't conceive that I would be there. I don't know why they couldn't conceive.

But when they did realize that I was a Jew, it was like a double shock to them, that not only was a Jew-- was an American soldier the first man in there but he was also a Jew. And that excited them. That man got, like, almost in a frenzy.

Over the fact that a Jew was liberating him, as well.

Right.

Now, I hate to step you through this piece by piece, but it's such a gruesome story that you have to tell. The man that met you at the camp found out were Jewish. What then did he show you? What did you discover on your own?

Well, the first part of it was this. We ask him where were the Germans. Because we were still-- not uptight, because the Germans had been on the run now, for some days-- many days. And we saw these people lying there. And I asked the question, are they all Jews, too? And he says, well, you really can't tell, but the majority of them are Jews, because they trucked out, when-- the week or two before, they trucked out a lot of the Hungarians, a lot of the Gypsies, a lot of the homosexuals, a lot of the other people other than Jews. And most of the people-- I would say 90% to 95% of the people

that were left were Jewish.

Most of them did not leave, because they were too ill-- too ill to leave. And the others said they stayed to take care of those that were too ill to leave. And they didn't want to leave them alone, because they were dying of malnutrition. And that night, eight died or nine died. When we got in there, there was a little over 400-- about 500 people.

The rest had been taken out who survived-- had been taken out by truck by the Germans.

Yes, the two weeks prior to-- as the war-- as we were getting closer-- and they knew we were getting closer-- they moved a lot of them out. Where they went, I don't know. Some went closer to the Russian border, and others went to displaced-person camp. And some they just took and then, as our planes were coming over, they would jump out of these trucks and hide in the woods.

But the ones who were being trucked out were not being trucked out for some benign purpose. They were being taken somewhere to be killed.

Well, they always thought that, really, they're not going to lose. It's not going to end.

Right.

But the smarter ones realized that it was close to the end, and they better do something. And the night before and the day before, even they left. That's--

That's part of what Elie Wiesel tells, in his story, that there was a march he and his father were on, I believe, and the purpose of the march was to kill them off by the march or take them somewhere to be killed, as the Allies were approaching.

Well, sure, Bob Clary moved out of a camp. And he walked for 15 days and 15 nights, and he had two pieces of bread, the whole 15 days and 15 nights. And he was on one of those camp movements, to get out of the camp that was going to be taken, to go to a camp that they thought was still safe.

So when you found the camp, you found 400 living people in various states of life, from quite sick to scrawny and ill and undernourished.

And a very few that were still able to get about--

Who took care of the ones who were there.

--who said that they stayed to take care of the ones that-- because there are certain people that were humane and just wouldn't leave until these people were taken care of.

What evidence did you find, in the camp, of a larger number of people ever having been there? What did you see?

Oh, the barracks. The part that we actually saw as we entered the camp was only a minute part. Because, from where we were, from that dirt road, going on back were just barracks and barracks and barracks-- built, as you have heard, perhaps-- they had these planked decks, where 8 to 10 men were in one little planked area. And in the morning, when they would wake up, three of them were dead. And they would just take the corpses and take them out the door and leave them out in front. And then there were only 7 in this very small area-- no covers-- usually just a wooden bunk with wooden planks to sleep upon.

And what were the death machines at the camp like, at Mauthausen?

Originally, they machine-gunned them. That was before the crematorium. They had a very small crematorium, compared to some of the concentration camps.

Most of them were killed by machine gun. And I guess they had a unit that would kill six at a time. They also had the showers, where they were gassed in the showers--

With the Zyklon B.

Right. They were told that they were-- It was a delousing unit. And they were taken in there, and-- now, this is all from what these people told us. They were taken into the shower. Instead of water coming out, gas came out.

Did you see the showers there?

We saw the showers, but thank god we didn't see anything coming out.

No, but you saw the building, though, which was supposed to be shower buildings.

Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.

And--

It was like a big gymnasium shower, except it wasn't stall type. It was just a room, with-- it looked like-- what do you call-- with a sprinkler system.

Sprinklers. All right, in the ceiling.

And then-- was an empty concrete room, with various drains, you know, which made it look like a shower, when you went in there, but water didn't come out. Gas came out.

And did you see bones in the crematorium?

No, they had cleaned it out. They stopped using it about-- oh, about two or three weeks prior to our arrival. They quit using the-- they quit using everything. And whoever died the last two, three weeks died of natural causes-- well, not--

As natural as they are under the circumstance. Right, when-- died.

Hunger, disease, starvation, and so forth.

Right. There was a lot of malaria. There was a lot of side-effect-type diseases that they got from malnutrition.

Right. Now, I heard you say elsewhere that, when you came to the camp, the unofficial guide showed you an enormous double doors, barred doors. Could you tell us that story?

Right. Back of the barracks, and before we came to the crematorium, and before we came to the showers, he told us-- well, how it all came about, he told us he was going to show us more Jews. He was being a little bit facetious, I think, because the alive ones were lying outside on the ground or walking around.

So he came to this-- it looked like a triple garage, two storey high-- in other words, double the height of a normal automobile-- with a double door in front. It was a wooden building. It had in front of it a steel hasp with a wooden bar down against it. What they had done was, they cleaned the corpses up from in front of each of the barracks. Instead of throwing them into the pit, due to the lack of manpower--

A lot of the Germans had already left, as guards for these people that were being moved. So there was a few left who were the cleanup people, and they would take these corpse--

We pushed open-- we had to push the wooden door in. And then one of us lifted up the wooden bar, out of that--

It was bursting at the hinges, literally.

Almost. Yes. And he told us-- well, we could smell the stench. The stench was unbearable. So we knew what was-- what we were-- we knew there was bodies. We didn't know exactly how we were going to get.

But anyway, we lifted up the wooden block. And he said, run back. And as we ran back, the door burst open-- the double door-- and out came corpses, in various stages of decay. Some were-- the ones-- after the first few came out, which had a little sinew, a little flesh-- some almost completely with flesh-- then, as those fell out, the ones that were deeper into it had less-- they were decayed and had less-- I don't know how long-- he never-- I never asked him.

We were-- I was 19 years old, and I was in a state of complete shock. I tried to keep my bearings, because I was the commanding noncommissioned officer of this group. And I had to keep my image.

But when I found out that these were Jews and, but by the grace of God and the foresight of my grandfather, that could have been me, I just, every once in a while, fell apart, hugging this man I had never seen before in my life. And then we would straighten ourselves up. Both of us would compose ourselves a little bit, and then we'd start talking.

And then he took us to the pits, which is the pit that was dug-- after these people were exterminated, they were thrown into this open pit, and then dirt was thrown upon them. The dirt that was removed to make the hole was then thrown back into the hole, to cover up. But even when we saw the pits, there were a leg sticking out here and an arm sticking up here. They didn't do a complete job of covering the bodies.

You mean, there were actually body parts-- limbs--

Well, they were--

--protruding from the ground.

The rest of the body had been covered by dirt, and you'd see an arm or a foot and something--

It's grotesque.

--because they just-- they either threw them in there, or they bulldozed them in there. We never did-- a lot of these questions hurt so much. It hurt me to ask them, and it hurt--

I was there a total of five hours, from the time I got in and the time I left. So now that they ask me these questions, I can't remember why I didn't-- just like, when you make a speech, you finish with the speech-- I should have said this, or I should have said that, or I should have asked--

I know that feeling too well. [LAUGHS] So in the five hours you were there, you-- you came in, you saw this warehouse filled with corpses from completely decomposed to maybe just beginning to become bloated or rigor mortis. You saw the pits, which were sloppily-- in which there were sloppy burials, mass burials. How many men came in with you? How many other soldiers?

I was a battalion sergeant major, which, total-- I don't know what the actual number of battalions. It was over 1,000. A day before, or two days before, we had a head count, and there were 800 of us at that time. That was when we left the big city. Then we moved out in various groups.

To my right flank was a group on another road. To my left flank was a group on another road. With me, in this middle road-- and then my battalion was-- some were going through woods, some were on roads-- actually with me were 62 men.

So there's you plus 62 others.

Well--

Whatever. So these 60-some people, how did they-- you were the only Jew in the group, I presume.

I was the only Jew in that group, yes.

How did these 60 people react, seeing other human beings suffering? How did they react to the fact these were Jews? Did they understand the importance of what they were discovering?

No. I don't think so. I know that many of them cried. Especially the young ones. See, at that time, most of the older soldiers had been replaced with younger soldiers.

They were teenagers, like yourself.

Yes. I, of course, had been-- I was in-- I had been in the army-- I was in combat 177 consecutive days. So I was young, but I was one of the oldest in seniority of the soldiers in that group. Some threw up. Some went back out and stood by the gate-- some by assignment, and some by choice, to stand by the gate and to protect-- because we still were running into-- earlier that day, and even later that day-- sporadic fighting from lost Germans-- not by any unified fighting, but occasional-- we'd run into two guys who didn't know what else to do, so they would shoot, because they were afraid of being seen and being shot at.

So some of the men were guarding the rear. But the question I'm asking is that-- well, maybe I should ask you. Did you understand the importance of what you had discovered?

Yes. I think I did, only because of my Jewishness.

Did you know that there was a Holocaust going on?

Oh, yes.

Did the soldiers know what the civilians knew?

By that time, we were told of the concentration camps. If you had asked me that question in Fort Benning, Georgia, or in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, it was a one-sentence answer, that there is some mistreatment of Jews going on throughout Eastern Europe and in Germany and-- not in France. But as you get into Germany, you may run into some mistreatment of Jews-- but never any blatant expression that you're going to [LAUGHS] run into to gas showers or crematoriums or any of that stuff. It was kept from us. Because it really didn't-- if we got there, we weren't going to be put into those showers. By that time, the Germans would have been out of there, if we got there.

It sounded like what you were being told was what the Roosevelt administration was saying to the American public. There is indeed some mistreatment of Jews in Europe, but that's as far as they went.

But certainly not to the extent of what we finally saw. He was trying to keep it quiet, even though he was implored by Harold Ickes, who was Secretary of interior at that time, and Stephen S. Wise and a few of the other people-- what's his name-- Morgenthau-- tried to tell him what was going on. And his people knew-- I mean, the people who were in the know knew. But he didn't want to know. He was like a horse with blinders. He just didn't want--

Well, the documentation is very good that the administration knew. Cordell Hull knew what was going on.

Of course.

Roosevelt knew what was going on. I think, too, possibly. And maybe it's as great as failing, that he did nothing really to stop it. But apparently what you're saying also is that the American troops had not been advised that, as you march



eastward, you're going to run into these killing camps. You're going to run into deprivation of humanity. You're going to run into subhuman behavior.

Well, as I tried to explain, Rabbi--

Yes.

--two days before, we were in a city. And they told us that so many kilometers this way and so many kilometers that way, we would run into a major building.

"They" being who?

Like, the military intelligence and military government-- the people who had the maps and the big map, that showed us that we were going to run into a hospital if we were in this location. We were going to run into a small village if we were in this location. But not one person told us that we were going to run into this stockade, into this-- which turned out to be Mauthausen concentration--

Do you think they didn't tell you because they didn't know-- military intelligence didn't know-- or they didn't want you to know?

They knew.

Then why would they hide it from the soldiers who are going to have to liberate it, who were going to discover it?

David, as a young soldier, I've got to tell you what I think. I mean, I was a good soldier. I was a high-ranking noncommissioned officer.

We were taught to kill, just like every other soldier was taught to kill. We were showed-- they showed us guns, and they taught us how to use the guns, and-- I forgot what they call that thing-- the--

Bayonet.

--bayonets. And we were trained, and-- but we were also told that it was a good war. And it was a good war. I mean, I don't believe Vietnam was a good war. I don't believe Korea was a good war. I don't think any war is a good war, but this one had a purpose.

You were fighting on the right side of things, as well.

Well, we thought-- and I still, to this day, believe that it was a rightful war. We were protecting our great United States from them landing on our shores and this terrible thing happening on our grounds. We did it over there. We were taught to do it well.

I believe, deep down, that the reason they didn't want us to know about the concentration camps was that that was not a decent thing. My killing a man by the name of Paul Holzappel-- which I remember, because he's the first one that I ever remember, that it was man-to-man. And he was behind a tree, and he was going to come down on me with a bayonet while I was creeping and crawling.

And a guy behind me yelled, Jimmy, to your left. And I looked up, and I shot this man. And when he landed, I rolled, the bayonet stuck in the ground and was propped against his chest. When I pushed him over, off the butt of his gun-- he just happened to land in that position-- I pushed him-- I took out his Sollbruch. They didn't wear dog tags. And his name was Paul Holzappel.

Now, I threw up, and I got sick. And it was just-- it was the first man that I knew that I had actually killed.

Going back to the concentration camps-- I believe they thought it better for us not to know that there was a mass-- against a people-- against a certain group of people, whether they were political prisoners or whether they were gypsies or whatever they may have been.

May have been destructive to morale. And--

I think so. But that's only my personal opinion. I never asked for an explanation, because, shortly thereafter, May 13, I met the Russians at the Elbe River, and the joy overcame everything, and I really and truly went in the closet for a good many years.

Well, this is something you experienced at 19. And you know, I know a lot of 19-year-olds, and I was 19, 20 years ago. So I understand something about what a 19-year-old is like. And I'm trying to imagine the 19-year-olds whom I know having the kind of sobering experience that you had. That must have changed you, in some fashion.

Well, I never was an adolescent.

You didn't have that opportunity.

From the time I ran away and enlisted, when I was 17 years old, and the time the war was over, when-- I was 20 years old, June the 12th, 1945. This happened to be May 4th, 1945, so it was a month, give or take, before my 20th birthday. So I never lived a life of-- I had graduated from high school, and then I went into the army-- almost the next day. So I never--

I grew-- I became a man, because of the soldiers that I trained with.

Necessity.

Yes.

But how did the experience of finding the camp change you as a person? What did it do to you? What is different about you now that might not be so if you had not done that?

Well, as I tried to explain, as far as Judaism is concerned I was faking it, more or less, prior to the time I was 17. I did it out of respect for my parents. I went to Hebrew school, in order to be bar mitzvahed, because my grandparents were still alive and that was expected of me. I went to Sunday school, because my mother wanted me to go to Sunday school. I was confirmed when I was a freshman in high school.

And I played at being a Jew. I was proud of it. I mean, I stood up. An incident in my life was when they asked me to be president of Hi-Y. Well, Hi-Y was a Young Men's Christian Association at the high-school level.

So I went to my rabbi, and I said, I've been honored by being asked to be president of Hi-Y in a school of 6 Jews, 1,200 students. And he says, well, it's perfectly all right with me. He says, but when they start the prayer service, you pretend you're the sergeant of arms and let the sergeant at arms come in and run the service.

But I was still honored by being thought enough of to be asked to be president of Hi-Y. So I was playing the game. I was never ashamed. I was never-- I never hid the fact that I was a Jew.

And in the army, it was difficult being a Jew. I mean, they used to call me names, but I considered the source. And as I got higher in rank, the less the names came--

Sergeant majors don't get called anything but "Sir."

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--"Sergeant." Right.

A sergeant is not called "Sir"-- sometimes "sewer," but not "Sir." [LAUGHS]

You don't call sergeant major's names, because he can make your life very unpleasant.

That's true.

Even if you're an officer.

That's true.

So, Jewishly, you were very marginal, up to this--

That is correct.

Now you see 400 living Jews and evidence of the deaths of 100-and-some-odd-thousand others. And you change.

It turned me completely around. Yet my Judaism did not become a pious Judaism. My Judaism never turned in, that I thought it was necessary that I had to be an Orthodox and I had to wear what we call a "yarmulke" or a tallis-- or even go to the synagogue or the shul or the temple on a regular basis. Because wherever I wanted to pray, I could pray.

But it did turn me into a humanist, I think, a person who devoted his life, from that point on, to humanity, whether they be Russian Jews or the Ethiopian Jews or the Moroccan Jews in 1949, or when they--

I just felt that I had an obligation, at that point, for the rest of my life, to care for-- well, I don't want to be dramatic, but I decided, at that point, that I am, yes, I am my brother's keeper.

You became ethnically very Jewish-oriented.

Absolutely.

And now you have interests, and you are interested in active in various causes for other Jews, whether Ethiopians or Russians or whatever.

Every Jew today is important to me, including the American Jew. And the American Jew is important to me, so that this will never happen again. They can't say that, because I am not known as a Jew, or that I married a non-Jewess, or I did this or I did that, that I am hiding. I'm in the closet.

They're not in the closet. I mean, if they're going to pick on a Jew, whether it be the Lubavitcher rebbe-- for the people who don't understand, the most Hasidic, the most pious, of the Jews, in their day-to-day life-- or whether they deny being a Jew at all, they're both Jews. And they can't run away from being a Jew, even if they wanted to.

Antisemites never let us run away from it, in the past. And--

Well, the revisionists said that this didn't happen at all. I wish that the revisionist in Canada, or the revisionists out West, would have been with me when I was 19 years old and saw these Jews who had been gassed and shot and--

Well, you just gave me a very nice segue to my next question, because I was going to ask you, there's an organization called the Institute for Historical Review, which I guess is located somewhere in this country. And there's a fellow in Canada who dabbles in it also, who interestingly was convicted of spreading false information recently.

He's a schoolteacher in mid Canada someplace.

Right. But in any case, this Institute denies that the Shoah took place. They say maybe 100,000 Jews, all told-- not just in one camp, but all told-- died, and--

And they died of malnutrition, and they died of disease--

Malaria--

--a normal death. They will not admit to the fact that they were actually murdered.

You were there. You saw it.

Yes.

You saw the evidence. You saw--

I saw the--

You saw the arms sticking through the earth. You saw the warehouse filled with bodies--

Right.

--and the barracks--

And they were Jews.

Right.

Because they were-- the bodies-- the clothes that some of them were wearing, of the dead people, still had the yellow star. And you just don't put one of those on--

Unless you're a Jew.

--unless you were a Jew, you would take one off maybe, but you'd never put one on, to say, [NON-ENGLISH], or here I am-- I am a Jew-- now, put me in a gas chamber and kill me, because-- I mean.

Right.

No human does that.

So when you come across the revisionists, you sound like you see red. I have a feeling that you don't respond to it in a calm fashion. You get very angry.

Well, I take personal offense.

All right.

How can they tell me, who saw it with his own eyes, who touched the bodies, who saw the men, tell me that it never happened? They've got to be out of their mind!

Or be filled with hate, themselves.

Well, bigotry is-- bigotry is still here. There are certain ones that have more bigotry than others, but bigotry is still here.

Do you think the revisionists are doing this because they are bigoted antisemites, themselves? Or are they just ignorant

fools? I mean--

Well, you can't say they're ignorant fools. I'll tell you why. The professor of Architecture at the University of Chicago-- or Northwestern, I think it was--

Yeah, let's be careful. [LAUGHS] Somewhere up there in the Chicago area, right.

Somewhere up there-- well, I know who he is. I mean, the man says it didn't happen. Well, was he there? Did he see it? Did he see that it didn't happen?

I saw that it-- I don't know if I'm getting too excited or not--

Go ahead. It's great.

--but I saw that it did happen! Now, if he could write a book and get it published, and somebody wants to publish the book, that it didn't happen, then they're just as bad as he is. But I saw it happen, and I saw the remains of it. And I'll never stand up--

And I'll stand up head to head with him, which-- I don't want to debate with anybody. But I was there. I saw it.

That's a very clear statement. I can't imagine anyone making a clearer statement than that. What is the response-- let me go back to our beginning, where we-- we didn't do the beginning yet. Now we'll do the beginning. How many liberators are there, like yourself, in this country?

Rabbi, I don't know. All I know is that, being active in these various organizations-- the Memorial Council of the Holocaust, the National Association of Holocaust Educators, and so forth-- there is a woman at Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia, who has taken it upon herself to locate as many of the liberators that she can. Now, in one sense, I was a liberator, but so were the 62 other fellows that were with me. They too were liberators.

But it would mean listing hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of names, to name them all. So what they do-- at least, she told me what they do-- is they name-- one, two, three-- the first man in, the second and third man in, the fourth man in-- like for in Buchenwald, for example. It happened to be a fellow by the name of Dr. Leon Bass.

Dr. Bass was a Black soldier, out of the Philadelphia area, who subsequently became an educator, a master, and a doctor and became a principal of a high school and retired as a principal of high school in Philadelphia. Now, he and another Black fellow and a White fellow were the first three men in Buchenwald. But I think they list-- because it's Buchenwald, because of the size of the camp-- more than just the three of them.

Now, you mentioned Leon Bass. And I met him, oh, I think, two or three years ago, because he spoke at the Holocaust conference at the Kent State Trumbull campus.

I was there, and I spoke--

You were there also.

Yes.

All right. Now I know why you look so familiar to me. That's why.

I was on the panel of liberators--

You were on the liberators panel.

--with Leon--

Apparently you are not the only liberator who's going around telling the story. So something must have happened to the liberators also that stirred them up with this need to talk about it, because this is not something that one can keep inside oneself and be silent about.

I think what's happened is, when the revisionists came out and started to say-- first with that professor in some place in Illinois, as you call it-- when they started saying it didn't happen, then we liberators, whether we be Jews, Christians, or Blacks or whatever-- Whites or Caucasian or orange-- we saw it. So we came out and started to speak about it.

It isn't something that I enjoy coming-- even with you here, today, I don't get any great, big bang or joy out of sitting here and telling you the most miserable thing that ever happened to me in my life. The war, and the shooting, and the killing, and the living in the foxholes, and the rain raining on me, and all the miseries that were normal, day-to-day miseries didn't compare one iota to the feeling when I opened that door and those bodies came. I mean, I'll never forget that if I live to be 120.

So you feel the sense of responsibility to share this, because of the malignancy of the lies which are being told about it--

Well--

--by the revisionists.

--thank God, in this country, everybody has the freedom of speech. I mean, the First Amendment is there. We have this freedom of speech.

But when they start using the freedom of speech to say that this never happened, then I too have the right to stand up and say it did happen.

There are survivors' conferences, all over the country.

Right.

There was one in Washington, not too long ago. In New York, we have--

There was one in Philadelphia last week. Philadelphia--

Philadelphia is a great Holocaust city-- excuse the expression for that way to put it. They had the first publicly paid-for monument in Philadelphia.

Anne Frank Institute is in Philadelphia. They're very, very active in Philadelphia.

And the Holocaust Educators Conference, I think, is located there.

Right.

That's where I really met Bass. I was the Philadelphia rabbi for five years-- an assistant. And Bass I knew through Philadelphia. Which is why I remembered his name when you said it.

This train was going somewhere. Let me figure out where I was going.

Well, let me tell you--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--please.

When Leon Bass walked into Buchenwald-- he mentions, and he goes back to the time when he was a soldier in a Southern state. And as a soldier in the United States uniform, he got on a bus. And at that time, in the '40s, early '40s, he was told to go to the back of the bus. And he was hurt, because here he was, an American soldier, fighting for this country, and had to go to the back of the bus and had to use the Black latrine, and had to do this and had to do that.

Then, when he got over there and liberated Buchenwald, he realized that what he had gone through was not one iota of what these people had gone through. But-- even though a few Blacks were killed, he never considered himself-- he always considered himself above and beyond-- and he was. And he's a fantastic individual.

Well, he did strike me as that kind of individual about whom one could be very proud to have met him and know that this fellow is in charge of his life and is a good and decent individual. What I'm concerned about-- I know where I was going-- there are Holocaust conferences all over the country. There are survivors' conferences all of the time.

Do the liberators ever get together? Do you ever meet with each other and talk about your experiences and find how better to preserve them and share them with the world? Anything like that?

There was one liberators' conference, which I was not able to attend. Now, everybody has priorities. When anybody asks me to do what you are asking me to do today, or what the community asked me to do today, I will not refuse, although I would have gotten a great deal of satisfaction by going to a liberators' conference and meeting other liberators and sharing my thoughts with them. But if Youngstown, Ohio, needed me to speak, and I had to go to a liberators' conference in Washington or New York, I would feel inclined to come to Youngstown to speak, to spread the word, so to speak.

The first job is to spread the word.

Right.

How have you-- this may be very personal, but how have you touched the next generation, with your sense of responsibility, to carry on the task of remembering and teaching?

I speak three times every year at Akron University, at Kent State University. I speak at other colleges and high schools, wherever I am asked to speak. But, more important, I have taught my three sons. I'm not going to the television show My Three Sons, but I happen to have three sons.

And if I can reach my three sons, like you mentioned the survivors reaching their children of survivors, their children, then I too can-- if my children have children, or if they go out and speak like I'm speaking, even if they don't have children-- to every person that I speak, I'm reaching a bigger audience than the 400 or the 800 or the 100 or even-- if you get me 5, I'll do it.

Well, bottom line is what results we get, of course. But now, in your personal case, are any of your sons active in the organized Jewish community--

Absolutely.

--and help carry on welfare causes and--

Absolutely.

--so on.

My eldest son is a chairman of the CRC, which is the Community Relations Council, in South Broward County. He's--

That's Florida.

--Florida-- he was also chairman of the Council for Soviet Jewry, in South Broward County, Florida. He is also the head of the professional division of the United Jewish Appeal, in his UJA area. He is willing to speak, and being a lawyer and being eloquent, he is willing to speak to anybody who will ask him to speak. And like they say, the apple--

What gives a father a greater pleasure than the apple not falling far from the tree? And my other sons are willing to-- are very proud. They can stand up with their shoulders back and their head high and say, I am a Jew, and my father was a liberator, and my father took me to Treblinka and Majdanek. And we've been to Russia together and Prague and to Budapest. And every Jewish child-- or every child-- would only be helped to be taught that this is the greatest country in the world, the United States of America-- if he went to any of those Eastern European countries and saw what we saw.

So you don't have to be brilliant, or you don't get an education only by going to college. You get an education by life, by living. And my children are carrying on for me. And those are my dividends.

So when I die-- I'm 59 years old. And if I go, I know that I've got a heritage. I've got somebody following me, who will stand up to the revisionists or to anybody who says that the Jews own this, the Jews do that, the Jews don't do this, the Jews are this and Jews are that-- my children will stand up straight and tall and answer that.

You've taught them a sense of responsibility.

Right.

Jim Barnett, thanks for joining us today at WKTL and for making this hour of our program very exciting, emotional, and, I think, quite informative. Come back again anytime, would you, please?

Thank you.