

The moment they allowed the Turks into Golleschau, this friend of mine-- was not friend. I mean, from Salonika, he was not my friend, but one acquaintance from Salonika-- says, why they send you here, from Buna? Because I stole one cabbage from the German kitchen. Oh my god, Nahmias, this is the worst camp of all. This is Straflager. Straflager means--

"Punishment."

--Straflater.

Isn't it, no?

--the "death camp." Straflager, "death camp." This is the worst of all the camps. Why, I don't know, they send me here. OK.

The next day, they put me in Steinbruch Drei. "Steinbruch," in German, means-- the cement mine number 3. "Stein" is "stone." Steinbruch number Drei-- number 3. And I was with this man. He was the kapo of this Steinbruch Drei.

So, the next morning, we went-- 2 o'clock in the morning, they have Aufstehen-- to get up-- 2 o'clock in the morning. It was in wintertime-- snow and cold-- 30, 40 degrees below zero.

Did you have a jacket?

One-- one jacket-- that's all.

You didn't have an overcoat?

You see, it's nothing! Nothing. So, 2 o'clock in the morning, Aufstehen-- went to clean ourselves. 2:30, they give us the piece of bread and the whatever it is. And these 40 people in the Kommando, out of the Lager-- "Heil Hitler"-- [GERMAN] We went to the coal mines, one hour and a half walking, to go from the Nazi camp to the coal-- to the cement mines. And all over you walk, it was snow.

I asked someone. They told me, only in the month of August is no snowing. 11 months of the year, there's snow. And in the snow goes troikas. You know what's troikas? Those with the-- with the dogs-- troikas.

Oh, yes, the carriages.

Yes. It's no horses. It's nothing, in this town of Golleschau. Is cement mines and nothing else.

So we went there. Believe me, Mickey, I never saw in my life such terrible job-- work-- for 14 hours, putting those dynamites in the mountains and having those big rocks of cement coming down. Take the big hammers and making pieces and filling up the wagons and coming, the [NON-ENGLISH] coming, the big machine, to take the [NON-ENGLISH] and take to the cement fabrik. And--

How long could you stay in this job? God only knows. It was on Yom Kippur. It was Yom Kippur-- I was there 19-- 1944. Yom Kippur. '45-- yes. 19-- January-- 1943, Yom Kippur. Yes. 19-- no, no, no, 1944, Yom Kippur. Because we were liberated on 19-- on January-- on April 19-- yes.

This was before 1944-- 1943. Yes. On Yom Kippur. One boy told us, today is Yom Kippur. I says, how can be Yom Kippur today? How do you know? I know. OK. I told the boys, listen, don't take the piece of bread this morning. Put in a piece of paper-- paper. Cement paper is not the paper-- and put in your shirts. And let's go.

Under the wagons will we pray, few pieces of Yom Kippur, as much as I can remember-- memorize. And that's what-- well, we had three or four hours of fasting, that's when we eat.

So we went to the cement mines, this morning. We worked very hard to fill up the first [NON-ENGLISH] wagons. And until the machine will come to pick up--

The next batch.

--and the next, we had about half an hour, three quarter of an hour, of time. So I told them come down of the mine, and stay to pray over there. So I start to pray as much as I could remember to memorize.

All of a sudden, someone went to tell to the Gestapo that the Greeks are making a sabotage. They are talking-- talking, instead of working, nor by-- the sabotage. And the SS come in and saw me reading.

You had a siddur?

No, just because we--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Just praying.

He saw me talking. But he didn't know that it was praying. He thought that I was talking to the boys. I am the one who is doing the sabotage, not letting the boys working-- start to cut-- to cut the rocks of cement.

So he came to me. He gave me a few slaps and took my number. I said to myself, if it's only the slaps he give to me and the number, I'm all right. But it was not this.

When we came back in the evening, at the camp, I heard in the loudspeaker [SPEAKING GERMAN]. I says, Jawohl Come here. Machen Sabotage?

How can you explain to them I was praying? How he will understand me? How he will believe me? How can I explain to him in German that I was praying because it's Yom Kippur? But you can say dangerous things.

I says, [SPEAKING GERMAN].

He put me my pants down. And a piece of-- a wooden stool. I went over, and he started to give to me. How many, I don't remember, because I pass out.

They put me a bag of cold water on my head, to revive me. And when I was almost at dead, they left me in one corner. So this was on Yom Kippur this time.

We had, in this camp, the worst days of my life. One morning, someone told me, you start to swole. To swole, over there, was the end of your life. It's finished.

I had a friend of mine who was a dentist. He was a dentist for the Germans. I says, Alberto, my boys told me that I have to swole.

Come on. They are crazy, your boys. You haven't got nothing! Come on-- I'll give you some potatoes.

He gave me a few potatoes. And he says, don't worry. Just be patient. You see, every day, those white airplanes? They are American airplanes. They look like aluminum planes.

They are Americans. They are coming every day. The liberation is near.

Sadi, he said, be patient. Don't lose your faith. When you want something, come to me. I'll give you a few potatoes, as

much as I can. I will do.

But don't lose your courage, because this was the end of everything. If you lose your faith and your courage, you are done. It's finished. I want you to be-- to pray for me-- pray for you, pray for me, as much as you can.

You see those planes? Their days are coming. They are very near. Those Americans will come someday-- when, we don't know. All right.

So we were there, having a very, very hard time. This was the worst days of my life. The work-- unbelievable! 14 hours in the coal mines. After, we went back to the camp, soaking wet.

They used to take us to the cement factory on front of the big ovens-- tremendous big ovens-- and to stay-- to take our jacket and our pants and to stay naked and to put the jacket and the pants on front of the fire, to get dry. They give us 5 to 10 minutes to get dry and to go back to the camps.

This was the worst days of my life, as I told you before. I never believed that such a terrible thing was done in this Gollerschau Nazi camp-- with 30, 40 degrees below zero, cold, over there.

And one good day-- it was on January the 10th, 1945-- January 1945-- one morning, they told us, get whatever you can-- whatever you can. And we are getting out of the camp right now. Because, a day before, we start to hear bombing and bombs and bombs, day and night, day and night.

The sky was full of white airplanes, aluminum airplanes, American airplanes. The sky, believe me, was like vultures-- all those planes, throwing bombs all over-- not to us. They knew, those American pilots, where we were. They never threw bombs where we were-- only in the German positions.

And they told, one day, that we should leave the camp right away-- whatever we could steal, whatever we could find, to take with us and to start walking from Gollerschau to Flossenburg. Flossenburg is a German town, border of Germany and Poland.

How long did it take you to walk?

These walking days, Mickey, I swear my good God, nobody can tell exactly how many days-- no one. It was a nightmare, day and night, walking and walking walking, five men in the line-- in the snow-- it is still snow, without wooden shoes. Anyone who fell, I'm not supposed to lift him to help him to get up. The German--

We had Germans in the left side and the right side, with the German shepherd. And one shot, here, raus out of the rank. We were walking by five.

This thing that nobody can believe-- so many days and nights, walking in the snow, seeing in your left and your right bodies and bodies and bodies. And how many bodies? Hundreds and thousands and thousands. How could you stay in your feet? How could you have the will of walking, over there-- was impossible. And looking in the sky, bombs and bombs, all over. Death by the thousands.

And this dentist, out there-- "Melo" was his name-- M-E-L-O-- telling me, Sadi, pray. "Shema Yisrael." Pray! Please! Please, pray! "Shema Yisrael!" "Shema Yisrael!"

Other-- I can't even talk anymore. I am dying. I can't talk anymore.

For food, whatever we could find in the fields. Raw potatoes-- I mean, rotten potatoes, rotten cabbage-- whatever you could find. For water, snow. Just snow-- nothing else.

10 days, 11, 12, 15, 17, 20 days, we can tell you nothing. The only we remember-- one day, we came to a city. There's a big factory-- was without roof. And inside was-- iron tables. That used to be a factory-- they let us sleep, finally, in

those iron tables full of snow.

We fell on those tables. We felt we had a good sleep-- a night of sleep, in those iron tables with snow in our backs-- no-- no-- no covers, no nothing, just snow.

And in the morning, Aufstehen, right away, because the Russians-- the Americans were coming. And they were taking us in Germany. If they left us in Poland, today it will be maybe 1 million young Jews alive-- 1 million, maybe more, not less, if the Germans had left us in Poland. But they drag us with them together in Germany, walking so many days, without food, in the wintertime in January 1945.

How strong can you be, to keep you alive? It's impossible even to recount this. People would not believe that.

Why they drag us with them? Story maybe one day will tell the world, why they drag us with them together, with the German shepherds. They went with the motorcycles, themselves. They didn't care about us. Only they-- all they care is, anyone who fell down, one shot and out-- out-- Raus, Raus, Raus-- by me, by hundred thousands.

So we went in Flossenburg. There, they put us in open cars they used to fill with stones. How you call these cars they fill with stones?

They're open cars?

Open cars they used to carry stones.

Coal? Or just stone?

Stone. Stone. They told us to get in these cars. Believe me, like-- like sardines in a box, one on top of the other, fast in the car because we couldn't walk anymore. We were dead bodies.

We find this car. We get in, and the cars start to go and go and go and go and go and-- aus and aus and aus. All of a sudden, they stop in one station-- railroad station. And the Germans-- Gestapo-- used to come in.

Where's your dead? How many dead, inside? We used to count-- four, five, six, seven-- Raus-- we should take the dead bodies out of the wagon.

And finally, we came-- it was in Mauthausen, so? Or Dachau-- I don't remember. I think it was in Dachau. Yes, in Dachau.

We arrive in Dachau. In my car, in the car I was, was a [NON-ENGLISH] with me, another Sephardic boy-- three-- and nine Ashkenazi boys. From 100, we were 9 or 10 people alive.

They took us in the camp. And with respect to you, we were dirty in our pants. We took to the showers. We don't remember what happened. Only, only we remember the beating they gave to us. We start to come to ourselves, to--

You mean, for no reason, they began to beat--

For no reason. Because they used to talk to us, and we couldn't answer because we were--

Exhausted?

--exhausted. We were three-quarters dead. And they thought that we didn't want to answer. And they start to beat us with a piece of-- piece of-- they used to have this--

The rubber?

--the rubber. I guess, from the beating, we came to our senses. We find ourselves dirty. Louses by millions, on top of our body. So they put us again in the showers, and they clean up, and they gave us clean-- clean shirts again.

And we start to be in Dachau for a period of time. I can't tell you how many days. I don't know. The only I know is, one day, they took us to the bathrooms, naked. And a German doctor came over there and start to examine each and every one of us. And one helper had a bowl with a red ink.

And the German doctor used to tell to this man, to the man next to him, Ein. They used to put here number 1. Zwei? Somebody else, Zwei, and someone else, Drei. Couldn't understand why they put these numbers in our--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--we could not understand why. But someone told us, number 1 is those who are a little bit still healthy to work in the fields. Because the Americans were throwing bombs, and all airfields were in bad shape-- to clean up the fields.

Number 2 is to work in the camp, in the barracks, to prepare whatever it is. Number 3, to the crematorium in Dachau, because they were good for nothing.

So I asked-- I thought the way to make number 3. I knew that number 3 in my forefront. So I took a piece of rock, and I took him out. And when I passed by the German, [SPEAKING GERMAN]? What you did? [GERMAN]. Oh, he gave me such punches-- my goodness, punches.

I didn't care, because the doctor was gone already. And it was no way to put me another number. They send me-- they send me in the barracks, in the camps, to work inside. The next day, they asked someone-- they will give a double portion of soup, if he was willing to go to clean the bodies of dead people. I volunteer, just for a double portion of soup.

They send us to big, big barracks over there. We find hundreds and hundreds of dead bodies.

In the barracks? In the barracks. Piled--

Men?

--men, all men. Piles of dead bodies.

Dressed?

No-- naked. All naked. So we then, with a hose, we start to clean up. Because the smell in the camp was horrible.

It's not that because that one--

No! The smell in the camp was horrible! And they gave us the double soup, to clean all those bodies. The trucks came in, after. They put the bodies into the crematorium.

I had also [NON-ENGLISH] to clean the bodies. The [NON-ENGLISH] job also I did in the camps for a few days, to take a double soup. From there, they send us in Buchenwald.

And how did you go? Did you walk, or--

No. In Buchenwald, we went by-- by-- by those trucks, in Buchenwald. And this is the days that we are completely lost. We only-- I can tell you, just in a few words-- from Buchenwald, they send us in Plattling. It's a small town in Munich, called--

How do you spell it?

--"Plattling"-- P-L-A-T-T-L-I-N-G-- "Plattling"-- in a school. They put there in school. School was empty-- no-- no-- no children-- was empty. They put us in this school, waiting to see what would happen. Because the American bombers were coming every day, day and night. They made the place just upside down.

And they took us every day to the fields, to clean up the debris. And there was, in Buchenwald-- in Plattling-- we were in this school. A German asked me to wash his clothes. It was a big bowl.

I put a fire down there. I put the clothes, and I put some potatoes inside with the clothes.

[LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS]

What did it taste like? Do you remember?

I don't remember. And we sat in the sun with my friends over there. We start to take out, a lot of big louses and to put a louse on a piece of paper, to see which louse will go faster.

That was amusement.

[LAUGHS] There, the bombing starts so bad-- American airplanes-- so terrible. We heard a Kommando, a German officer who came to the camp-- to the school, outside-- and he says, tomorrow morning-- or the same day-- I don't remember-- same day-- everybody is to get out of the school.

Mickey, I was a skeleton. I couldn't walk. I couldn't even talk. I was almost dead.

It was a Jew French doctor, taking care of the sick boys over there. I went to him and talk with him in French. I cannot walk. I cannot go with them.

What can I do? I will not be able to walk half a mile. I will drop dead. What can I do?

Says, [NON-ENGLISH], he says, my god, listen to me. You see this barrack over there? Yes. It's full of dead people-- full. Have you the courage, the guts, to go in there and to stay with the dead bodies until the German leaves? It's the only way you have to be alive. Says, Doctor, I will do it.

One boy was with me. You remember Tifon, Salomon Tifon Salomon, he says, have you the guts? Whatever you will do, Sadi, I will do the same thing like you. I want to live. I don't want to die.

So we went to this big, big hangar, a big barrack. I saw there how many? 300, 400, 500 dead bodies. Can't tell you. Believe me, things that people cannot believe, because is unbelievable.

I went in a pile of these dead-- I pushed myself inside and my friend. And we stood there, waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting. All of a sudden, we heard the German-- [TAPPING STEADILY] just like that-- coming, the Gestapo. I says, Salomon, they come. Watch yourself.

They used to come inside these barracks with a cane. In the end of the cane, a needle--

A baren?

--to punch the feet of the dead, to see if they were alive or not. I said, Salomon, when they come to you or to me, and they punch our feet, don't move. For the love of God, don't move, because we are dead-- finished.

So we did it. We did it. We succeed to don't even-- to say nothing.

You mean they did poke--

Yeah. Sure, they poke me and my friend. We didn't say nothing. And we wait over there-- can you tell me-- one hour? 10 minutes? One day? Three hours?

I can tell you nothing. The only is, we saw the place was so quiet. You couldn't hear nothing, just the "cri-cri-cri" of the-- of the-- in the-- was a river, over there-- those frogs, the frogs, in the river.

Said, Sarmon, let's get out, to see what's going on. We get out. In the door, we saw in the lager, in the big--

Camp.

--nobody. Was a cemetery-- just nobody. Salomon, it's the time now to get out from here, to see what we can do now. Let's go to the kitchen first.

Went to the kitchen. We find peels of potatoes-- peels. We start to grab the peels and to eat, just like sugar-- like-- like-- like-- [LAUGHS] like it last from reticule, just peels of potato-- raw peels of potato.

We find a place where to wash-- some water, over there. We drank water. The water was contaminated. Anyway, this water was, for me, after I was very sick.

So it was one big hole of one bomb. We went out of the school. We saw a river-- horses, going in and out of the river. God, I says, I find water, to wash myself and to drink water from the river-- dirty water.

And we stood there in the grass, for about-- nobody knows-- one hour, two hours, three hours-- I don't know. All of a sudden, the ground started to shake, like an earthquake. I said, Salomon, this is exactly what we need now-- an earthquake. This is exactly what we need, like a hole in our heads.

What's going on? We don't know. The whole earth was moving. All of a sudden, we saw tanks coming, with the American star. Oh, my, "Shema Yisrael." Oh, god, [LAUGHS] it's a miracle, Salomon. It's impossible.

This is Americans! You see the stars? These are American tanks!

We get up. We start to make like this. And one tank stopped. I saw General-- oh, my god-- the American general--

oh, my-- this general, Patton, with a baguette, conducting the tanks. One tank stopped. And he said, we-- "Shema Yisrael!"

One in the tank, the conductor, was a Jew. He came down. You say "Shema Yisrael"? Ja, ja, "Shema Yisrael!" We Jew, you--

Oh, my goodness! He took us both. And I fell in mine-- in the-- [LAUGHS]

Tank?

--the tank. And I stayed to [? have that. ?] I can't tell you. This was terrible. This soldier, Jewish soldier, took us with a tank in the hospital. They clean up us, the louse, with full, millions of louse. And they gave us some medication. I don't remember the kind of medication they gave us.

And they put me in the scale. He says, 78. In Greece, Mickey, didn't exist no pounds. It was kilos.

Kilos.

So when I heard "78"-- "soixante-dix-huit," in French-- "78"--

--I couldn't understand "78." I told a man who was next to me-- he was a French man-- I says, thank god, I was 110 kilos. I'm 78 now. Well, not too bad. I said--

You are crazy, he said! Rabbi, you're crazy! This is not kilos. This is pounds. Pounds, in Greece, was the English pound that we don't-- pounds, English pounds-- the golden--

Money.

--English pound. That's what we know. Well, what's pound? It's 2 pounds, 1 kilo. I start to make figures in my head. God Almighty-- I was 110 kilos-- 220 pounds-- to 78 pounds. I'm through. I'm finished-- a skeleton.

And I went to the man who took care of us. He told us that he will take to give us an apartment, a very nice apartment, from SS, or from a German, Nazi German, who left the town.

What was the name of this town? Do you remember?

Plattling.

Oh, That was still in Plattling.

Yes. He left this town, a German Nazi, and he left his apartment just like a palace. And this Jew-- I mean, American Jew-- give to four boys of us this apartment-- was like a palace. Everything was luxury.

They put us over there. In the evening, four American boys came with a basket. They brought us bread, cheese, butter, and fruits and chocolates, and-- who remembers-- plenty of food.

And they had a mandolin with them. They started to play mandolin music, to enjoy us. And they used to come, every evening, to bring us a basket of food and sweets and chocolates and music.

And the fourth or fifth day, I went to the bathtub with my friends. I collapsed there. I collapsed there. I remember, I collapsed. My friend went right away to the next door neighbor, who was a German doctor-- who was in concentration camps, himself. He was against the Nazi regime.

He said, Doctor, please! Bitte, bitte! My friend-- the doctor came with his wife, who was a doctress, and his two daughters were nurses. They came inside the apartment. They saw me in the bathtub.

I passed out. I was just collapsed. They took me right away-- put me in bed. And the doctor, he diagnoses that I had something terrible. He called the American doctor.

They were talking. I heard "cholera"-- "typhus"--

Which was it?

The doctor, the two doctor, were talking about me.

Yes. Which--

He has cholera--

And--

--and typhus.

Both!

Both. I could understand "cholera" and "typhus." This, I know very well what means. But I was so weak. I was so-- just-- a body, a dead body. I didn't say nothing.

The only-- I remember, the German doctor told to the American doctor, he needs transfusion. How you call these big bottles?

(WHISPERING) Glucose.

Glucose. And the German says, I can find glucose here. The American doctor says, I'll be back in one hour. He took a jeep. He went to a sanatorium-- I don't know where. And he came back with these big bottles.

When I saw this big bottle-- I never saw, in my life, in Greece, these kind of big bottles-- I thought was a injection-- I passed out, from fear. Says, my god, what is this? And the doctor explained to me-- the German doctor used to talk French-- that this was glucose to give me--

Strength.

--nutrition-- strength. All right. They start to treat me for cholera and for typhus. Two months, I was in bed. I became 72 pounds. After those American nurses-- god bless them-- if they are still alive, god bless them-- day and night. They took care of me like a prince-- like a king.

Oh, they took you to the American hospital?

No-- in this house.

Oh, in the house.

They couldn't transfer me no place because I was just dying.

Oh, so the nurses came--

Yes, the nurses. The doctor-- General Dr. Wyatt, the doctor himself-- the two daughters of the doctor, they were nurses. on me-- on me, taking care day and night, until, after a few-- two or three weeks-- they start to feed me like a baby, I remember, just like this.

Little bits.

And one day, only one nurse was watching me, one American nurse. I told, Miss, please, you, me, the mirror-- to me-- see me mirror. No. No mirror. Doctor not permit-- doctor permits no mirror. Says, please, mirror, to see my face. No.

She says no. OK. I wait for a while, until she went to the ladies room. And I get up from my bed. I grabbed her purse. I took the mirror. I saw my face.

I dropped the mirror down there. I was crazy. I just looked like a monkey. My face just like a monkey-- just a monkey.

And when the doctor come in, I says to the doctor, in French, I will not go in my country with this kind of face. I will not go. Just kill, Micky, give me a-- whatever it is. I don't want to live like this.

He said, my boy, you will not be like this. We'll take care of you-- will take a few weeks. You'll be all right. Just don't worry.

Don't worry. You'll see. You'll be all right. And thank god, I am here with you, talking to you, now. [LAUGHS]

A few days after, they took us with the American bombers. They took us back in Greece. This was the end of the Nazi camps.

Before we talk about what it was like when you went back, tell me, what do you feel about the Jewish police that you came in contact with?

The Jewish police?

The Jewish police in the camps-- the kapos.

Was he Jewish?

Was not Jewish.

There were no Jewish police, anyplace that you were?

No, the kapos were, were Polish--

In some places, they were Jews.

No, no, no, the kapo in my camp, the kapos were all Polish--

(WHISPERING) Or German.

--or German-- most of them, Polish-- in my camp. I'm talking, in my camp.

I don't what is going on in other camps.

So that you never had any contact--

No. Were Polish, they were against the German regime. They were saboteurs.

Mhm?

But they were tough. They were terrible, bad people.

The point that I'm trying--

Criminals! They were criminals!

--that, when you were in the camps, there weren't any Jews who had a little bit of power--

Not in my camp.

OK. All right. OK.

Not in my camp.

What do you--

Only-- excuse me-- I told you, in Golleschau, this Jewish man who was the foreman-- not the kapo; the foreman-- of the--

Workers.

--boys what were working in the mine, because he knew the business, the job of extracting stones and making this to unload in the [PLACE NAME]. He knew the job. They make him a foreman, not a kapo.

While you were in any of the camps, besides some of the religious services that you told us about, were there anything else that went on? Were there any educational service, any cultural-- do you remember any--

Darling, are you kidding?

[LAUGHS]

Are you kidding? Are you asking you a question that people, when they ask these kind of questions, they cannot understand what means Nazi concentration camps, without insulting nobody? When I came here in Miami Beach, in 1951, one Jewish leader here asked my wife and me, my baby, to his house for a coffee. I came here as a rabbi. He called us for a coffee in his house.

All of a sudden, he asked me, Rabbi how was the kosher food in the camps? I said, Mr. Dan-- Mr. Dan, it was glatt, glatt kosher!

[LAUGHS]

No, no, no, no, it's true! It was glatt kosher-- can't be more kosher than this. How can you have a rutabaga boiled with water-- can be more kosher than this? This is the only food we ate! Boiled rutabaga, sometimes margarine-- sometimes-- but many times with water. This is glatt kosher food. This is the question that the Jewish leader here asked me in 1951.

[? What did you say? ?]

Well, I mean a Jewish man who become rich during the black market in America.

Well, what I'm trying to get at is, when the work was all done, at the end of the day, I'm sure for the most part you went to sleep. But was there-- what did you talk about, at night, with the other prisoners?

Talk about? We didn't have the strength even to open our mouths. The moment they used to tell go to sleep, you know how many hours' sleep we had?

Few.

Four, five hours-- the most, six hours--

Mhm?

--to wake up, 2 o'clock in the morning, and in Golleschau, with 20 degrees below zero, without food, starving, and you will had the time and the will to talk to your friends, what's going on in politics?

[LAUGHS]

The only thing we had in our minds-- when America will come to war? When America will start to liberate us?

So you did talk about that.

America. That's the only talk we had-- when America will start to be to getting in and to liberate us. That's the only thing we knew, over there. Because was not news, over there. We can't-- we could get no news at all. The only news is the bombing from those white airplanes-- aluminum airplanes, the American ones. That's all we knew, over there.

But to have time to talk among us-- God, forgive me-- we-- the only thing we had in mind was how to steal a piece of cabbage, how to steal a raw potato, to feed ourselves-- is the only thing-- nothing else.

Did you know about any underground organization in any of the ghettos?

In my-- Mickey, whatever I told you today is in the camp I was-- in the camps I was. What was done in other camps, I don't know nothing, absolutely nothing. I know was underground, in other camps.

But not for this.

I don't know. But the only thing I-- I remember, in Buna, and in Auschwitz, some Jewish boy wants to escape. They caught them, with dogs, and they hanged them, in Auschwitz and in Buna-- most in Buna, I remember, most in Buna. And we had to pass by, all the prisoners, to the gate, to see--

Watch them.

--those hanged over there, and a blackout over there-- those who wants to escape. This is the end, for them. How-- first of all, those want to escape, they were Polish boy Jews. They knew the-- the--

The area.

--the out of there. We, the Greek Jews, we didn't know what means even to go outside of the camp. They will catch us at-- they will catch us, right away. But those boys, they knew how to escape. But they could not escape, because those dogs were terrible dogs.

So you didn't know anybody who escaped.

No, as far in my camp, nobody.

Rabbi, what do you think gave you the will to live through all of this?

It's a good question, Mickey. It's a good question. First and most of all, my tremendous faith in God. Second, a flame-- one thing that I can express myself, in my heart, they should tell me day and night, that I will survive-- that I will be a free man, one day. And one day I will walk without the Gestapo behind me with a machine gun. That one day I will not be pursued by the dogs-- by the German shepherds.

This is something that nobody can express-- the feeling that I knew in my heart, that I will survive. How, I don't know. Anything happened to me-- my boxing, my singing, my faith in God, my stealing-- everything was a little bit of factor to help me sustain myself to an end.

Tell me, now, when it was that you came back to Salonika and what you found there.

When we came back in Salonika, we didn't find just ruined walls-- no family, no survivors of my family, no one-- of my wife's family, just one sister. She was with her in camp-- and one sister who was in Athens. She hide herself in Athens. She was alive.

That's for my wife. For me, absolutely no one of my own mishpacha, the brother-in-laws only. Two brother-in-laws, they were with me in the camps.

This was your first wife's husbands.

My first wife brothers.

Brothers! Excuse me.

That's the only thing we came back-- two brother-in-laws and myself.

What did you do, when you came back?

What I--

--your livelihood. I went back to my father's business. Because all the synagogues in Salonika were destroyed by dynamite-- all the synagogue, without exception-- just one synagogue was left, because the Gestapo made this synagogue a warehouse-- no, the Blue Cross-- the Red Cross--

Do you remember the name?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Do you remember the name of the synagogue?

Yes-- the Synagogue of the Monasteriotes, the Jews from Monastir. The Jews from Monastir erected this synagogue. It was all the most beautiful synagogue in Salonika, made completely, bottom to top, with Italian--

Marble?

--marble-- the most beautiful. They were taken by the Red Cross for a warehouse. When I came back in Salonika, in August 1945, the community came to me and says, Rabbi, we need to open the synagogue for the holidays. Holidays would be next month, in September.

So the synagogue is in the hands of the Red Cross. So the commission-- we went to Red Cross-- we ask them the key. They gave the key to us.

We went-- opened the synagogue. It was empty inside-- empty-- no benches, no seats, no sefarim, no nothing-- no pocket, no nothing-- just a warehouse. We call the Joint Distribution Committee in Athens and told them the synagogue is-- we open up. We haven't got nothing to set the place for Yom Kippur, Rosh Ha-shana.

They send us, right away, books, taleisim, yarmulkes, sefarim, and benches. Everything we will need, they send us by train right away.

Was that the first connection you had with the Joint?

Yes, the first connection. They told us, the Joint in Athens will help us. We called by phone. They send us everything-- God bless them-- everything.

A Greek told us that the big menorah in the temple, a menorah from Switzerland-- it cost a fortune-- was taken by the Greeks to a big church. I went over there, as a rabbi, with the committee and asked the archbishop of the Greeks to give us back the menorah. They gave us back the menorah, right away.

What happened to all the sifrei Torah?

They--

That were in all the-- were they destroyed? They were all--

They were destroyed-- destroyed, everything destroyed. The only sefer Torahs, they were in the hands of those secondhand people, those who call-- how you call these people--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Flea market. One day, someone told me, in a flea market in Salonika a merchant has been--

A Greek man came to the community and told us that, in the flea market, he saw those sefer-- those holy books that we use-- the Jews-- on the synagogues. They were lying on the floor, to be sold as paper. So we went there, and we told the gentleman that this is our property, and we are willing to compensate you. He asked plenty. We give to him anything you want.

We took a taxicab and put the sefarim inside and back to the synagogue. And this was almost at two week before Rosh Hashanah. And on Yom Kippur, the mayor of the city, the archbishop of Salonika, and all the dignitaries of the government came to us on Yom Kippur night-- Kol Nidre night.

Kol Nidre night.

All the dignitaries-- generals and officers and everybody-- came to the synagogue, to be with us in the first Kol Nidre night after the Holocaust. And I sang the prayer for the government in Hebrew and in Greek. And the archbishop called me next to him and--

Blessed--

--gave me his blessings. And of course, everybody was crying, over there-- the first High Holy days that we made in Salonika.

Anything else?

How did the community reorganize-- the Jewish community?

Reorganize-- they reorganize, because they want to send all the Jewish boys in Israel. As many as they could send in Israel, they did. They sent plenty of boys in Israel.

But the trouble was that the girls who came back was the half amount of the boys. In other words, in 10 boys, five girls to come in. So was not enough for Jewish girls to get married, and they used to take goyish girls to get married.

So there was a great deal of intermarriage--

A great deal of conversions. I converted so many, myself. And from the marry age, they sent in Israel all of them right away. They could not do anything else, because there was no girls. When my present wife--

Where did you meet her? When did you--

I was in Salonika in August. She came in December. I was in the community, one night. I had a meeting over there with the board.

All of a sudden, I saw her with two girls. She took with her. In her report, she told you that she took with her two girls, two girls, to take care of them.

I saw her in the community. I says, Marie, when you're coming? And she came, told me, I think so, yesterday-- the day before. She came to the Russian zone.

I was lucky, to come to the American zone. She was not so lucky, to come with the Russians. They had a very tough time-- a very, very rough time.

So she came. And we met.

[INAUDIBLE]

One of the girls, she--

One girl who was with my wife went to the community for help, because to put down her name, that she has to be helped, to give her food and whatever it is. And she-- my wife, present wife-- went with her to the community, to help her to inscribe herself in the list of those who need help. So I saw her over there.

We were neighbors.

Yes.

We were neighbors with her family. We knew each other. And I told my present wife, listen, I don't want to tell you to get married right away. I will give you one year, 12 months, to wait for your husband.

We will get engaged. I'll give you my word-- if, in 12 months, David your husband come back, I will let you go with him. If he doesn't come back, so we'll get married.

A year went by, like just-- like it was one month. She went in France to see her brother-in-law. She came back, it was more than a year. It was only 14 months.

All of a sudden, one day, one young man came from the Russian zone-- I think so-- David. And she saw him in the community and asking about her late husband. What are you talking about? Your future-- I mean, your future husband, the rabbi, saw him. He was dead already, over there.

And that night, I went home. I saw her crying. What's the matter? Why didn't you tell me, in the beginning, that David, my late husband, was dead? I said, how-- why should I tell you this, because you will think that I want to grab you before-- because was no Jewish girls coming from the Nazi camps. All boys were coming-- no girls.

I don't want you to believe that I want to grab you. I give you one year. Now it's 16 months already. You want to wait one or two more months? She said, yes. I want to go to Paris to see my brother-in-law and to get the get. "Get" means the--

Gets the divorce.

--the divorce. All right. She went in France. And the brother-in-law did not want to give a get to her, because he wants her for himself.

Well, that's Jewish law.

But she decided-- but she decided to be married with a man from the camps, who understand our life, who know what means Nazi concentration camps. So when she came back in Salonika, we went to the rabbinat. I told them, she must have a divorce, because the man won't want to give her a divorce. It was done. And we get married on November 11 of 1947.

And when did you leave--

Two years after we came back.

The 9th.

November 9, 1947, [LAUGHS] two years after we came back from Nazi camps. Yes.

And when did you leave for America?

When what?

When did you leave, to come to America?

1951, when the beloved-- your beloved President Harry Truman of blessed memory-- God bless his soul in paradise, every moment of the day-- he gave the law, the law of the coming here without quotas. So, as displaced persons, when we heard in Salonika that a law was done in the American embassy, that all those displaced persons can come to America without quota, so we decided to come to this country-- most of all because our son was born cerebral palsy. And they told me, the only place you can send your son is Switzerland or America.

Switzerland, was no way to go in, in Switzerland. But in America-- God bless Truman-- he gave us the possibility to come in this country and to save our son. That's what we did.

We came here first in New York. We went one day in New York. From New York, they send us in Saint Paul, Minnesota, because there was a lady, Mrs. Cohen, who was responsible for us-- is the one who signed our quotas, our affidavits, that she would be, for us, responsible, that we never go to have to ask the government--

The community chose--

--for relief. We tried to find her in Saint Paul, Minnesota. We could never find her-- just to thank her, what she did for us. In Saint Paul, Minnesota, they need a rabbi-- a cantor-- not a rabbi, a cantor. So they heard from the community that a cantor came from Salonika. But there was a Sepharad cantor. And he doesn't understand [LAUGHS] what the difference was between Sepharad and Ashkenazi

And one day, we were sitting in the apartment. And all of a sudden, they knock the door. She went downstairs.

And a young man, Mr. Newman, was standing there-- a rabbi, with a beard. He came upstairs. He says, can you read sefer Torah? I says, yes. He says, you are a hazzan? Yes. Can you watch [NON-ENGLISH]? I say, why not?

Can you read for us sefer Torah? I said, yes. I opened there the book and start to read our way. Oh, my god, he says, that's very, very nice. You read [NON-ENGLISH]. It's very, very nice, but it's not our way.

So what do you want to do now? Nothing, I says. You come tomorrow to our office. We'll talk about it.

The next morning-- I couldn't speak English at all-- nothing-- a Greek man, a florist, in Saint Paul-- I call him. I says, in Greek, do me a favor-- come with me in the community, to be my interpreter. He came before me the man, who is married, me and my little baby-- was two years old, I think so-- two years old.

We went to the community. And they told me, we will send you in Cincinnati for three years, to learn the Yiddisher way how to sing. Your wife and the baby will stay here in Saint Paul. We'll take care of them. We'll give them house and-- and-- and every week money to sustain them. Says, don't worry about it.

I said to the Greek man, tell them, I lost my family once.

[INAUDIBLE]

I don't want to lose another family now. I refuse. The Greek man told me, you must be crazy-- in Greek. You must be crazy! You know what means \$15,000, in 1951? \$15,000 a year is a fortune! It's not 1983-- 1951.

\$15,000, and a house to live. They will pay your utility bills. They give you a car, a Cadillac, to drive. What do you want better than this?

I says, Mr. [GREEK]-- was his name-- I don't want to lose my second family. It's finished. I don't want it! He said, you're crazy.

But thank God-- was a-- was a reform rabbi, Rabbi Plaut in Saint Paul. Bless his heart.

Which?

He's now in MontrÃ©al-- Rabbi Plaut.

Gunther Plaut?

Eh?

Gunther Plaut.

Gunther Plaut, yes.

I know him.

Oh, what a rabbi.

We'll talk about that later.

Gunther Plaut. I was in Saint Paul. He's in Canada now, in MontrÃ©al.

In Toronto.

In Toronto, yes. I was in a Hanukkah party in Saint Paul, Minnesota. They took me over there to change my mood, because I was depressed. And a lady told me, do you speak French? Is a rabbi here you speak French? Yes.

The rabbi came to me-- Gunther Plaut, my name is Rabbi Nahmias-- in French-- nice to meet you. What's problem? I says, I can't live here because no Sephardim here.

So, you come tomorrow morning to my office. I will try. I will see what I can do. The next morning, I took a taxicab. I went to his temple.

When I saw the temple, I thought it was a church. Terrific-- what a building! What a place! I can't believe! And he was the one who called the Jewish Family Service in Saint Paul and told them, you have to ship this man where Sephardim are. And I was shipped.

And then where did you go? To Florida?

No. To Portland, Oregon.

And how long were you there?

One year.

And then?

And then I came here.

And your congregation here is--

Was no congregation, at the the time.

And what did you do, when you first came?

We start to build the congregation.

We struggled.

We struggled so bad-- so bad-- you can't believe it. Sometimes, I told my wife, let's go back in Greece.

We went to the Jewish Family Service, and we asked to back in Greece-- to go back in Greece. We asked this, as a favor, to send us back in Greece. And the man told me-- Mr. Newman-- you must be patient, my dear friend. God will be with you.

This is a land of opportunity. Don't lose this opportunity. Don't go back in Greece. Stay here. You will suffer, in the beginning, but someday you'll be someone-- someday. And you'll be all right.

He was right.

I trust him. I trust him. I went back home. I says, OK, I will stay in America. And here I am now, talking to you.

Well, that's wonderful. I'm glad we've come to an end that's pleasant, after telling us some of the things that happened.

And the only thing I say, when I come in this country, I kiss the ground, and I said, God bless America.

Rabbi, I didn't ask you-- you told me, early on, that left some things for some of the non-Jewish friends. You gave them a couple of trunks. Did you ever get it back?

Yes.

They kept it for you.

Yes. Three books-- the book of Rosh Hashanah, the book of Yom Kippur, and the book of [NON-ENGLISH]-- that means "Passover"--

Sukkot--

--and Sukkot and Shavuos-- Shavuos. These three books, they were in the trunk, that they could not understand what was these books. They gave to me back. I told the farmers, if you gave to me all the trunks full of merchandise, they won't mean nothing to me. These three books is my life. And they are still here.

Oh.

Still here.

You'll have to--

I worship with these books, still, after 30 years.

Rabbi, is there an occasion-- something that happened during the years that you didn't tell me about? Is there something that perhaps you forgot to tell me that you'd like to have you [CROSS TALK]

I told you everything, as far as I can remember.

What do you think we've learned, from all of this? Do you think that this can happen again?

Unfortunately, yes. These years burned up my heart. But unfortunately, if we don't succeed to do something, to be strong this time, to fight, this will happen again. I don't know when, but it can happen again.

We must help Israel. We must be strong. We must be very, very strong to fight, to survive, and to be alive, in Israel, in America, and all over.

Always, we will have enemies. Theodorus said, one day, in his book, whatever is not Jew is anti-Jewish. And he was right.

Was there antisemitism when you came back to Salonika, after the war?

Absolutely!

Was the same thing.

Plenty! Antisemitism still there now.

They were sorry.

No. A friend of mine went in Greece, three months ago. She and her husband wants to leave right away, back, because it was the time when Arafat was in Athens, and the Greeks were in the streets, telling, death to the Jews! Death to the Jews-- in Athens, and in Salonika.

Can you think of something positive to finish all of this with? I mean, we've shared some of the terrible things that happened.

My Darling, Mickey, I told you as far as I can remember. One thing I will tell you. Even if we had the best memory in our life, as a human being, the best memory, still no one of us of the deportees of the Holocaust can remember everything. It is impossible.

It's a nightmare, that sometimes is almost 40 years. This was 1943. 1983 it's 40 years. We went through so many troubles, so many nightmares, so many struggles, since we came in this country. And after all, we are not anymore 39 or 29 or 31. It's not a joke.

Still today, after 40 years, we-- my wife and me-- we have nightmares of Nazi camps. Sometimes I wake up in the night. I says, Marie, oy, my God, I was there all night. In a very, very bad nightmare. I was in camps. I was this and this and this and--

After 40 years, for the love of God-- it's not 40 days; it's 40 years-- still, we are haunted by nightmares. And according to a American doctor, when he told me, in 1945, in Plattling-- I was having very bad nightmares-- he told me, my boy, you will have these nightmares as long as you live. They will be with you as long as you live.

So, we have to live with these nightmares. We can do nothing--

But be strong?

--but be strong--

--as Jews--

--and thanking almighty God that we are in this blessed country. We are in America. We don't know what's going on in

Europe. Antisemitism all over. In France is one, in Greece, all over-- same lousy story-- South America, what's going in Brazil--

In Argentina--

--in Argentina-- what you going worse than this? I saw Eichmann twice, in Auschwitz. I saw Eichmann twice in Auschwitz.

What was he doing?

He came for--

Visit?

--a visit. But who could believe that this was the big butcher that were-- killed thousands and thousands-- millions, maybe?

We should be strong as long as we live. That's all. Have faith in Israel. And to be-- to never-- to never say-- to be ashamed to say "I am a Jew." This is my number in my arm. This is my honor and my dignity.

Sometime-- once a man told me, why don't you take out, with skin surgery? I says, this is my honor. This is my-- I am proud of this. I am proud.

This is my pride, to have this number here, and to say that I am a Jew. I went through the Holocaust, I am a survivor, and I thank God, and I thank this wonderful country of America.

Thank you very much, Rabbi Nahmias. This has been, Mickey Tiker, interviewing Sadi-- Rabbi Sadi Nahmias about his experiences as a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust. This interview will be included as a valuable contribution to the oral history library of the Southeastern Florida Holocaust Memorial Center. Thank you again.

You're welcome, very, very much.