

Agnes Sassoon Reel 1. Agnes, can you tell me something about your early background, your family background, and the area in which you lived.

Yes. I remember my darling parents, my father, my mother. My father was a school professor who was very unfortunate. Because in the days that he lived in Hitler time, he never could really teach properly. For a long spell of time, he was always changing jobs, and he was always looking where he is still allowed to teach for a Jew.

Later I realized that I did not know he had many friends, Gentiles, who helped him. One was Dr. Barasch and many others. Solomon Michael, in Israel he lives now, he helped, I think, for Hannah Szenes even.

But the thing is, you see, I'm not very clear of that, only what my father told me about this. Well, I remember, start to remember everything, every single thing, except I can't remember never timing and dates. It's blank for me.

So therefore when Dr. Barasch suggested-- he read my story in Hungarian novels and little bits in origin-- that I don't want to have it historical because I wouldn't be able never to live up to it. It was just a child's story.

Where exactly were you born and when?

I was born in Czechoslovakia in a small town. I don't know. It was not maybe a small town or a big village. It was on the border, not very far from the Hungarian border.

What was the town called?

[? Villach. ?] I think now it's Carpathian Ruthenia.

What year were you born? What was your--

'29. '29, 1929. But my story was very, very funny with my years, really. Because as you know, there was everything about children and grown ups. Everywhere, all through my life, as you see me, I'm not an old lady.

But sometimes I had to be older. Sometimes I had to be younger. But that was really the true time.

When I was about 5 and 1/2, I very clearly remember that in Pressburg, Bratislava was Czechoslovakia. Slovakia belonged to Czechoslovakia. My father was teaching then in a gymnasium, Hungarian gymnasium.

They called the top class teachers professor because they were higher up than teachers. There were no doctors, but they went higher up than teachers. They called them a broad professor.

Therefore, sometimes people find it strange that they called, in Israel, my father Professor [INAUDIBLE]. Because it's not like a professor with a doctorate, but it's a higher degree than an ordinary [BOTH TALKING]

Did your mother work?

My mother, no, she didn't work. But she was a great intellectual. She played the piano.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

I had a brother who was around three years older, 2 and 1/2, three years older than me who was a brilliant boy. He was shot in the Danube. He was hidden with antifascist in Rozsadomb, where that was a hill, a luxury area in Budapest. They had a bunker there. There were army people, Jews and Gentiles who did not want to obey the fascism.

Somebody went and told about this bunker. So they shot everyone, nearly, except one army officer was alive. My mother told me so later, because I didn't see them many years.

He could definitely testify that my brother was shot in the Danube with the others and was dead. He was the only one that escaped because they thought he was dead. He was a good swimmer, and he came out.

How old was your brother when this happened?

Well, when I was taken away, I was 11. He must have been about 13 and a half, .5, 13, just after his bar mitzvah.

How much longer after this happened did your parents find out? Did they know immediately?

No, after the war, they were looking for him.

Can you tell me about--

I'll tell you how it happened, why. Because they wanted to see us safe, my parents. The time from the time that I went to the German nursery school, when Hitler came to the other side of Czechoslovakia, which belonged, they called it Petrzalka, and in German, I think, Grunau. I wouldn't swear, but I think Dr. Barasch researched that for me. He was a historian and a broadcaster.

So at the moment, you're living in Czechoslovakia.

Yes.

You're at kindergarten.

I was nagging my mother because they came and told us that we wore dirndl with green aprons. My mom didn't have, and she had to make it through the night.

What was this? A form of--

Uniform.

--national costume.

--national costume, like the Germans have. As I went and I was standing, I was very small. They were children from the school. It started in Europe only at age of six you had to go to school. Up till then, it was a sort of nursery.

So the older children who went already to the school, they stood behind, and the little ones stood before. When Hitler came, I didn't know it was Hitler. We had to go across the bridge from Pressburg, which was still Czechoslovakia.

It was researched by Dr. Barasch that he really was there by the Statue of Masaryk. They picked up the third child from me, or something like that. I can remember vividly his face and his hand across.

In a Nazi salute?

In a Nazi salute with some officers by the statue. He was shouting something madly about the statue. I know the statue, after it came down, because my parents told me later. I heard even Jude, Jude. I didn't know what it meant, but it meant that all the Jewish children from those schools should be removed.

What year would this be?

That was in '38. I wouldn't very clearly remember. But my father did. He was alive. He died 11 years ago, about and my mother five years ago. So they could tell me the things which I did not know. Because otherwise, I wouldn't be able clearly to know it. After that--

You left this kindergarten, then.

--we left this kindergarten. It took some time. I don't know. And We went to this Jewish-- there were Jewish-German school in Pressburg. Because we spoke German, Czech, and Hungarian. Yeah?

My father took very much attention that we should know, as my brother was older, we all should know another language, German and English. He respected very much the British people. He told us stories how polite they are, how nice.

My heart was always near to Britain, though I never dreamed that I will be ever involved with it. It's true, I never knew that will happen. But it was in me embroidered that they're very respectful and very tolerant.

How long did you stay at the Jewish school after you--

Well, I must have off and on. I was all the time there till, maybe, age of 10, 11. I really started a bigger school, that small school there in Bratislava. But in the between, I disappeared for months when we didn't have what to eat. Then they used to send me to my grandmother, which was my mother's parents. They had a vineyard in a village, which also belongs now to Russia. I don't even know exactly how they call that village now. It was [? Nagyszolos. ?]

They sent you from Bratislava to stay with your grandmother?

My grandmother, right, because in those smaller places, they had more food. Even the gendarmes, they knew the families and whatever while they were, they had some respect to the older people, to the older families. Somehow in the vineyards, I don't know, I was hiding. That picture, actually, must come from there, which is in my first edition of the book.

Were you aware of what was happening in Germany and throughout Europe in any way?

We were aware, because I tell you why. I now recall it exactly like I did then. Maybe we were not knowing exactly what, but we know that when our parents told us to shut up or not to cry because we will be killed by the Germans or we will be taken away, we did so except when we had some terrific pain. Then they gave us some pills. All children and grown up who were troublesome, they got some. I knew it from my parents.

Were there many soldiers or SS on the streets?

Well, not in Czechoslovakia. I can't recall it. When I went back to Pressburg at the beginning, I didn't put very much attention on these things. I just knew that we are different than other people, and we have to be in this Jewish school.

Then my father couldn't teach anymore, and he had to have some other job. Struggling here and there, they sent me and my brother between the two grandparents, hiding and eating and coming sometimes for me. It was also dangerous, I think, because it was not safe, anything. Finally, finally, when I was about age of 11, they took me away. We were living a while in the Jewish area in Budapest.

You left Bratislava at this time?

Yes, by this time, we were helping for other refugees. My father used to help for other refugees, not only Jewish but Gentiles who have to come over in desperation. We had a toilet outside because it was a yellow star house. We couldn't walk out when we wanted to. There was restricted time.

But my father was very courageous. He did walk out without the star. There was a grocer in the house who was not a Jew. He was a Gentile. He was giving on points food for people, because they were some sort of ration.

Rations.

Rations, and for Jews were less. For my father, he put away all these side things. My father was a gorgeous, lovely person. He was also very democratic.

Did you have to wear a yellow star?

Yes.

Where--

I remember my mom sewing it on my coat. I had a family coming, we had a family coming over from Czechoslovakia whose parents were killed already somehow. I don't know, a young man, about 17, and a girl in my age.

We didn't have money much, because my father worked off and on and not in teaching or anything. His friends gave him some jobs sometimes, research, or I don't know what really. I do not know, and very hard, it was, to survive.

But this girl in my age, it was somehow a acquaintance family. The toilets were out. The neighbors were fascists, Hungarian Nyilas, they call it, Arrow Cross. Before, they didn't show it. But they would go and tell on us if they would see somebody go out to the toilet, a stranger.

So we'd hidden these people in our small flat, which was not our real flat, you know? My father used to take out everything after them. Many Gentiles and Jews like this came over.

He could place everyone with some underground help. There was also a French diplomat, Mr. Henri [INAUDIBLE], I think. I can't express it how, but it was Henri [INAUDIBLE]. He worked on the French embassy. I do know he did help a lot for my father to give food and things for these people who were hidden there.

How did your father get involved in doing this kind of [BOTH TALKING]

Well, you see, he was going to school with many famous people in his age, Hungarians, Gentiles, and Jews, in his age. Dr. Barasch was, for instance, one. He was much younger, 10 years at least, than my father.

That's a different story, though. So I don't want to [INAUDIBLE]. He wrote a book that Horthy did send him to Turkey for the Allies, to speak to the Allies, to give himself up. His wife has the manuscript. Maybe you could talk to her.

He found it out only after the war that they sabotaged him. Because Churchill said yes. After 30 years, he found the papers of Churchill, the reply. They sabotaged him away, and he had to come back to Horthy with empty hands. Otherwise, the Allies would have Hungary and the Germans couldn't occupy it.

You see, these sort of stories, which I knew from Dr. Barasch and my father. But Mrs. Barasch, Lola Barasch, is working, I think, still part time BBC, Hungarian broadcast, and she has these papers. That was very intriguing because I met them by chance and he recognized me from my father's picture.

You tell me you were living in a yellow star house.

Yes.

How did you come to be living in a yellow star house?

Every Jew had to live in a yellow star house.

Had you previously lived in a normal house within Budapest?

Yes, a very nice-- well, the thing was, really, I can't remember, when I was very small, that I had a Kinderfraulein as

well, a so-called nanny that was before that. Later, I remember we had a nice flat, so-called really luxury with central heating, but we had to move. We were a short while there. I think after the war, my parents got it back.

Were you surprised at the condition of the yellow star house compared to where you'd lived before?

No, I just took it how it was. My mom was a very good housewife. She made everything go far, even to people who were strangers in her house. My father didn't do it for payment, for nothing. Sometimes, he really didn't have the money even to buy the bread.

So that Gentile gentleman in the house in that road, he gave him on credit. Mind you, he was alive after the war. My father tried to reward him, though he didn't have much money, but with other things. Ay?

Were you in a school in Budapest?

Yes.

Did you go to school?

In Budapest, again, my brother was going in a proper gymnasium because he was very clever. It was numerus clausus, but with connection of my father and with his cleverness, he could get in in that school, proper school. But I couldn't because maybe I was not so-- my life-- he was older, a bit, you see?

It was all messed up. I was not ignorant, but it was not worth to fight for me for this number to get in in some, because I was only about 11, between 10 and 11 when we lived really in this yellow star house. Right? So at 11, they took me already from the school away.

That school was a school where all the Jewish children from small till larger. It was a synagogue converted also in school also in synagogue. And I heard after the war they used the Red Cross to put out the list there to look for the lost families, which I never appeared. The reason was because major charter took me out from the hospital in a private house in [NON-ENGLISH], registered. I was never properly registered, which he regretted very much.

Can you tell me now about the day you went to school and came out--

Yeah.

--and was taken by the Germans.

Well, first of all, every day we were prepared of things like that. You didn't know what can happen to you on the street when you had no curfew, even so.

Had you had experience--

I had been prepared, yes.

--an anti-Semitic incident?

Yes. Yes. It is the next door neighbor, where I saw that they are good, really. They lived always in that house, which became a yellow star house. They didn't move out somehow.

But every movement, they told on us. There was a sort of housekeeper or what in the house. How you call it? They look after the houses?

Housekeeper.

A housekeeper, trustee. Well, you didn't know whether she is bad-willed, or anti-Semitic, or not. We didn't know that. Actually, she wasn't too bad.

Because when this lady and this couple went and said something that some strangers are in our flat, she didn't take notice. She could have gone to the SS and said so.

I tell the truth, you know, good and bad. But in other hand, we didn't realize it, my parents told me, until very much later that the young son who was going to my father's school once, and if he didn't understand something, he came in, even in the yellow star, to ask him, he was a Arrow Cross, and he was a dangerous Arrow Cross. He would tell of his own mother, maybe.

Can you explain Arrow Cross?

Arrow Cross is like the fascist, the movement of the fascists, like SS in young and in big.

The Hungarian police.

The Hungarian SS. And all what I can recall and remember, before they took me away, that one day, after all, my father made some research and teaching part-time. Because his Gentile friends tried to always make him-- they knew what a great man he was and tried to make him some work and private, to show something, to make a living.

One day, their own children, which he was teaching, quite big children, they were kicking him on the street and said Jew and Jew and Jew. He was all full with blood. I just came back home, because the curfew time and all.

But I never can forget and forgive that, you see. Therefore, I always felt Czechoslovakia, though, whatever it might be now, was very democratic. Though my father was studying in Hungary, in high schools, university, teaching profession and everything, I remember Budapest. Later, I never I never could take such a liking, because I always had this memory before me, not hate, just this memory.

What did you do when you saw this happening to your father?

Well, I couldn't do nothing. Because funnily enough, in those days, children had more brains and more initiative than now. I can see intelligent educated children from good families today. They wouldn't be able to stand for it, even in age of 20 or 21.

Then a six-year-old could take in things, you know, 10 year old. That it's something that you just-- I run home and I said to my mom. I know that they had a couple of friends. But they couldn't do nothing. So you just couldn't do nothing.

Then when there were the curfews for the air raids, we used to go down to the cellar. Then the Arrow Cross and the Germans came in, a blonde German, I never forget, very tall, very good-looking. He was smiling all the time.

Everyone who just moved, he beat him there. Not in-- that was in Budapest in the cellar already. if a child wanted to cry, as I told you, they gave him a pill or her. The parents, it was very hard. We took down blankets from the flats. They raided the flats while we were down.

One day I needed to go to the loo very much. I was always somehow a natural child. I said to this smiling German, because he was so deceiving, to let me go up to get some things and to go up. They said to go. I couldn't believe it, and he let me go.

I was looking in his eyes, and he let me go. I came back with blankets and things like that. You know, incidents like that, I can remember in the beginning.

Then my mother always made a very great point, that whatever we didn't have money, or what she had, they sold slowly. They bought good shoes, good warm clothes, and thermal underwear. If we are taken somewhere, then at least

we have that. But as you know, later that was in vain. Because when they found you in good clothes, they took it away.

Can you tell us now about the morning you went to school dressed in these--

Well, I just went well-dressed, warmly dressed. When lunchtime we came out, it was a bit of commotion about it. Because we didn't know exactly what. But a few of these ones were standing before the school.

Some parents had smaller children, or they lived further than I did, not in the area. And the parents used to wait them. That was always the time when the Jews could go out, of course, because otherwise it's not allowed to wait.

There were about three, four of these trucks, I don't remember exactly how many trucks, and German soldiers, I did see it was Arrow Cross and Germans. They were working together.

A very beautiful lady, Aranka, later, I knew, she was fat, but beautiful. Some I can't tell you. It's always before me. She had beautiful, made up nails and everything, blonde hair and blue eyes with yellow stars. She came by.

When the people started to make a run for it, and they were beaten, and in the air, shots and all sorts of things. Then they were put on these trucks. They said to the children, the children should go in a separate truck because they come to school.

They will have a good time and food and everything. They believed, you see? The parents let them go, whoever waited them, because they thought it's better.

This lady Aranka, later I knew her name is Aranka, she hold my hand and she said to me, I was a little nobody. She told me, you come with me and don't go with those. Come with me on that truck because she was pushed.

That was a German couldn't understand, maybe, Hungarian. I don't know. Anyway, she pushed me on that truck. I was really quite hidden there. Because they were all grown ups pushing each other.

She told me that, look, if they ask you, you say you are very small. I was very small and very tiny, really. I didn't even look 11, you see. But she said you say you are 13 or 14, because then you can work when you get somewhere. She kept shielding me all the time.

Then we went to a camp and we were in the mud. I remember so many bad things. I don't know times or days.

Then we went to this big place where they collected all the Jews for the marches. But that was after we suffered already a couple of weeks or a week somewhere in a camp with the Arrow Crosses.

Do you know what year and approximately when in the year it was that you were taken from school?

The year, it was just a year before the war ended I think.

1944.

Yes. It was luckily late, you know?

Is it near to the end of that--

Yes, I think. Because I was about a year in the camp, 11 months or so. But that must have been well before. Because we must have been in that pre-camp and walking weeks or months, I don't know. It must have been weeks.

So you were put into the trucks and then taken--

We were taken to a camp. Because the children, I don't know. They were taken maybe straight to burn. I don't know or

what. But that was still in Hungary.

The grown ups, they were taken in a camp, in a muddy camp somewhere. There were a lot of Arrow Crosses around, and they had to go out to work. One of the Arrow Cross told me to have a run and to go back to my parents. But I didn't believe him.

Agnes Sassoon, Reel 2. Agnes, you were telling me how you'd been taken to a camp on the outskirts of Budapest.

Yes, I don't know the place. It was a terrible muddy place, as I explained before. They showed good will, some of the Arrow Cross, and he saw that I'm really a child.

But I went to work, what they had to do I don't know, take water out from puddles, things, rubbish things. They didn't need the work to have done. They just didn't know what to do with us at that time. They didn't have their orders, probably later I realized it. I didn't know.

This Aranka was with me. So it was OK, fine. He told me to have a run for it. Because when they take us to this [NON-ENGLISH], I don't know, they called it a place where it was a big great place like arena, yes, and they collected--

The sports--

--the people-- sports, yeah-- collected the people to take for marches, that I can escape, and so on. I don't know. Maybe he might have been. See, but I didn't know where I am, and I didn't know how to get home.

I had an offer later as well like that, on my march. But I didn't take it up. Because I thought myself that I'm safe until I am with this lady. I wouldn't know where to go in the mud and where I would be picked up.

I didn't trust. I didn't know whether he's serious. He was always drunk, anyway, that fellow. They always drunk. They always drunk. I don't know what they drunk, what they drunk all the time.

How were you feeling at this time? Did you think much about your parents?

I was just worried that my parents came to the same situation. Funnily enough, and I must tell you, in all sincerity, I always was worried, when I was worried, not for myself. I was worried for my brother and I was worried for my parents.

I knew how much my father can do and what a great man he is. It's true he saved my mother, because my mother was taken by the fascists. He, with a few people, as SS dressed, saved her from the group.

You found out all this after the war?

After war, yes, yeah, and he was a very brave man. But he couldn't save his own son, because he sent him to a safe place with false papers, because they falsified like mad the papers with stamps. When he was arrested later in that cellar, that belonged actually to a relative of ours.

Because the Royal Hotel belonged to the [? Korany ?] family and pastor. Mr. [? Korany, ?] he's the one of the managers of the [INAUDIBLE] Street Hotel. He is a very educated man.

The SS cellars ran in his hotel. My father was very familiar with that hotel, even with the cellars. He gave orders for the Arrow Cross to let him out, to say what? I want to catch a few Jews more.

He was beaten to death. It was dark, because it was curfew. They let him out. He collapsed in a policeman's arm.

He told the policeman that he's in a safe house, in a Spanish safe house. He has a letter to take him there. He took him there. But he couldn't save my brother because he sent him with false papers to a family, and this family was very rude



to each other.

My darling brother came home and he said, Dad, Mom, whatever will happen to me, I don't care. I'll be with you. Because I just can't stand the man bashes the woman. He'd never heard such a thing. He came home, and that was it.

Then my father and other people tried, with Gentile friends, to put him in that bunker, because he was much taller than his age. I was smaller. He was taller, you know? Unfortunately, I told you previously what happened with the bunker.

The camp you were taken to on the outskirts of Budapest, this sports stadium, how long did you stay there approximately?

I wish I would have known. Everybody asked me. I don't know. I suppose maybe a couple of weeks. I don't know.

I don't know. It might have been 10 days, a couple of weeks. They probably collected there. And then we went back to the outskirts of Budapest, where they took all the Jews to marching to [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] was the border of where they took people to Germany.

Aranka was still in a very good state. She could look after herself. I think she had a bit of money to give for these fascists there, and she could get things which she wanted a bit, right?

When we started to march, then, as I described it in the book, some days it was raining, the blankets were wet, the clothes were taken away from us, which was a good shoe, or good this, or good that. Sometimes we got a soup somewhere, either on pigsties or outside on a football place, or whatever it should be for many people, you know? I don't know how many hundreds or thousands.

On my way, again, once happened in a town, that one of the Arrow Cross, no German, an Arrow Cross told me, little girl go on. Get out of the queue. You ask someone, and they will take you somewhere to your parents' home. I didn't know where my parents were, if they were at home or not.

I, again, didn't take the chance. Because as long as I was with Aranka, I was all right, I felt. You know? I didn't know what I'd find. It was an instinct.

How often did you get food on this march?

We were very hungry. I think once a day, maybe.

What kind of food?

Well, they made some soup on the way, usually and raw bread, sort of bread things. What I can remember, when we went to [NON-ENGLISH], we had more food than later by the Germans because this peasant people, don't know, gave something probably to cook. I don't know.

They had to cook. They have an organization. They organized it among themselves, and they were cooking some soups. I don't know. Rubbish sometimes, sometimes better, it depended where.

But I can remember that even if we are hungry, it was more food than later after [NON-ENGLISH]. We had nothing then, yeah? So many people escaped during that period, grown ups. I was told after. They survived. It was really truthful. They let them go some.

This was on the march?

On the march.

From the first camp?

Yes.

To [NON-ENGLISH]?

Yes, yes, yes, but I didn't know. I just knew it later. You see, after I was a child. I was thinking, as long as I have a safety, this Aranka, this lady to hang on to, I don't know what I'd find at home, because it was all mixed up. I just felt unsecure if I go alone, you know? I was not encourage it, but I didn't want to leave her.

She got shabbier every day and shabbier and sicker and sicker and so did I, wet, and no clothes, proper. We still had some good clothes. But if someone sewed, then they just banged it out from us with a gun or what. Suddenly came, I can swear, but I can't say it for sure, that that was Mindszenty, the highest priest then in Hungary, Cardinal Mindszenty, with a high tall chair in a village when the Jews marched, and with a lot of splendor. I never will forget that figure with a sort of popish crown of his head.

What was that procession?

They brought him, carried him, and he blessed us with a cross. But when I heard after the war, he didn't do anything against it. He didn't ask. He didn't plead for us. He himself was later a prisoner by the regime, not by the fascist.

But he didn't do anything to help people, otherwise, or do something. But he showed himself up and I remember that because that was, in the dreary time, a spot of light, something to see. Then eventually, we arrived to that [NON-ENGLISH].

Whereabouts is this?

That is on the border of Germany and Hungary, where all the trains were waiting.

To take you to--

To take us, yes.

--into Germany.

Yes, Wallenberg saved there a lot of people, Baron Wallenberg. I think one day--

That's the Swedish--

Yes.

--ambassador?

I think one day our wagon was opening, because they used to take out the dead bodies. We had to sling them out and get--

On the train?

On the train, yes, from [NON-ENGLISH] to Germany. Well, I don't know. We went to Dachau very, very long time, too many deaths. I was getting a bit passive.

What were the trains like? What were the carriages like?

Well, very filthy. They opened it every day, maybe once, I don't know, maybe twice. They made us to clean out the dirt and to take the dead bodies.

Well, I didn't take any. I was realizing that I was sitting once on a dead body because we were very squashed. But it didn't affect. I was so shocked and so in a daze that I didn't react nothing.

Were you still with Aranka?

No. I lost her in [NON-ENGLISH].

How?

I were looking for-- because there were millions of other people from all sides of the world coming there. We were going together, and we were divided right, left, right, left, you know. They told us where to go, in which wagon.

I went, when I was free, you were not free. Because they pushed you with the guns and everything. But funnily enough, I had a feeling when they told me you go on the right, and I went on the left hand. I think that was how I survived.

What was the significance there?

Well, maybe one went to Auschwitz to die. The other one went the other way. I just assume it because they looked at you like a chicken, you see? If you are enough, even if you are not fat, nobody could be fat. But you have got some--

Enough to work.

- To work. If you were young and not too sick, even if you looked like a skeleton, it didn't matter, you see. Then they couldn't tell your age, so you could say anything. But you see there were many, many things which you can't imagine that, when you get used to it, you forget your past and you live for that present day. You think tomorrow will be over if you are optimistic.

If you are not optimistic, I don't think you would survive it. I think all those people who were not optimistic, who were only pessimistic and they had every reason to be pessimistic, but they did not survive it. My mother had a tendency of pessimism, and she suffered a lot more than ordinary people did, but she didn't go in a camp.

My father was an optimist. He also, somehow, didn't go in the camp. The two children, you see, he lost one, my brother. He wanted to save him with false paper, and I just was taken. They say it can't happen, but it did happen that he was, in one night, all his hair gone white, when he realize it.

With worry?

Yes.

What were these trains like? What were the carriages like?

They were bolted. They were all with clean [INAUDIBLE], I heard. There were some old people, some young people yearning, crying, some for their parents, some for their children. They were divided, you see?

Some was with a mother and the mother died and they started to scream. They didn't open the wagon. There was not such a danger to scream. But later, it was very dangerous to scream, when we went in camps. But there, then they opened it. We had to bring some water in to clean all the dust. There was no facilities.

There was no toilet facilities or sanitation?

No. But you see, in these occasions, several times it happened, that some young people disappeared. A commotion was going on. They said you come off and you take the water. They never came back.

I had always a feeling later, when I knew about Wallenberg, that one day it was open, and they wanted me to get out. I didn't dare. I didn't move. I was dazed and stunned and I just did not move.

Who wanted you to get out, the Germans?

Maybe, yes. You see, maybe because he worked with the Germans. This-- a lot of young. When I later thought of it, they didn't come back in the wagon. I didn't know who they were, because you couldn't recognize them, you see?

You think Wallenberg saved them?

I think some of them might have been saved. When they picked me and opened, and they gave some water and the cleaning, they told me I was getting out for making it a bit clean and standing by there. The German pushed me that I should go there. I didn't go.

How many, approximately, would you say was in each wagon?

If my imagination is right, which is a true imagination, but a child is different, I suppose they pushed in sometimes 60, 70 people. We were really on each other.

Were they cattle trucks?

Yeah, cattle trucks, yeah. We were really on each other.

What did you have to eat whilst you were on this train journey?

I can't recall anything, just they gave us once a piece of the soldier bread, very hard and water, maybe one or two stuff, some soups. But the soups were empty. I don't know. It was, I think-- I don't even know what it was in it. It was nothing in it, like salted water.

How long would you estimate the journey lasted?

Well, I think it lasted about two weeks. Because we were all over around until I got to this Landsberg Dachau. Because it was bombing in the time. When it was bombing, they stopped the cattle wagons.

My wagon was a good wagon, because it was not open. Some wagons were even open.

Open topped?

Yes. And then the people were frozen.

You could hear the bombing going on?

Yeah. I think one day they told us, I don't know whether it's true, that we are on the Berlin. How we got there, I don't know.

But we were by Berlin, and it was bombed several days. They hit us, some of the wagons.

On the--

[? The lines. ?] Yeah. Yeah.

So it was no difference whether they were Jews in it or what, because they just did what they have to do in the war. But all this bombing, I knew. I knew that it's the same danger for us from up until down. But I didn't know all this. I didn't realize it until after, when I was told, when I asked, when I could ask.

So after--

When I arrived to Dachau, finally, I didn't know which camp. But it was written, Dachau. And then Arbeit makes happy, you know? Work makes you happy? Arbeit macht frei, makes you free. I knew German.

Did you know of concentration camps before you were taken to one? Had you any prior knowledge?

Well, I heard this story. This is very strange. Because this Alex Petrushka, which I write about it later, he was in the first concentration camp. That was Dachau.

Dachau, when Dachau was, there was no other concentration camp first time. Only they put in people, like, mixed marriages. They didn't want to divorce or rich people that they wanted to extort money, and they wanted to.

Even from Czechoslovakia, or from Germany, if they put someone in Dachau, they have a chance, for plenty of money, to get out. But that I was told later in Pressburg and by Alex and later by my father.

So when you arrived at Dachau, you didn't know what a concentration camp was?

Dachau, I knew. Then, by that time, everybody knew. But first, when I was little, I'm going back with time. Dachau was the only concentration camp where even from Pressburg, every Jew was taken. There were millions paid for him to get him back. They did get him back.

But then later. . When even Alex confirmed that his father was taken in another camp. They started to mushroom the camps. There were hundreds and thousands then.

That's how I know from the source, because Alex is a good source. He was a half Jew and a German.

Alex was the--

Alex Petrushka, who I--

The teenage boy you met in Dachau.

That I met in Dachau, yes. But before I came into Dachau, and I got down, we got down. Who got down, who couldn't get down was just thrown away, you know what I mean?

Down out of the truck?

Yes. There was someone who recognized me. At that time, I was very, very bad looking, but not yet a complete skeleton. Someone from my mom's birthplace.

Who was already in the camp?

Who was already in the camp, recognized me. I had a little piece of bread and I thrown it to him because I knew he was a long time. I can identify that, even, because he lived in Israel after the war. He survived, and he told the story for my mother.

He remembered you?

He told for everyone this story.

What were your first impressions, then, when you got down out of the cattle wagon with everybody else?

Well, I did not know. It made me scared. But I thought, well, I can't go back. I can't go anywhere.

This man who worked, who recognized me, told me his name, I didn't know who he is because I just know that his sister is a doctor and he's somehow related, or on the same town or village. He said I shouldn't give him the bread, because I won't have any other. He was very good, actually. But I did.

Then they pushed me. They pushed me in. Then when I met, after plenty of queuing up, we got into this bars and to this.

Then where I met Alex, where I get one high heel shoe and one. I was screaming, and they beat me.

Alex came. He didn't then move. He didn't do nothing. But then he told me what to do.

So can you go through the events [BOTH TALKING]

I think then, when I got the first hysterical reaction and really started to scream, I was out of my mind. I said, what's going on? What did I do? What happened to me?

You know that sort of feeling, that I started to-- this was a feeling, that humanity came back into me. When I saw this man, gave him the bread, and he told me not, I won't have any bread. I saw this everything that is laws, laws, beating, beating, beating, pushing, beating, and people collapsed, and people die around me, just like in the wagon.

I hoped. I had a hope for the future, for the next day, every day, you know? Every day I thought, it can't be worse. It can be only better.

I didn't think that I will die. Then I thought, well, I'll do what I can. But this hysterical cry, this hysteria, it came out all the time, which I kept myself back yet.

The Germans' response was to beat you.

Beating, and in this water, and I didn't know whether it is the gas chamber or not.

Did you know of gas chambers?

Well, we didn't know really. I knew the rumors. I did not understand really, like the grown ups. But I knew it in Dachau later, because we didn't have soap to wash ourselves. They gave us a soap which was very nice and very good. It was called riff, written on it riff. R-I, I think, double F. I don't know exactly the spelling. That was from human bodies then.

How did you find that out?

Well, you see, in the camp was no secret. For me, I was a kid. Don't forget. So even if I was clever, even if I tried to do what they-- I heard what they talk. So they sometimes came through, messages, you know, and everyone buried it.

Because it was--

Yes, yes. I didn't have any soap for myself ever from that riff. But because some people who had, it was a blessing to have soap. But you see, they still buried it who could.

Because it was made from other inmates' bodies.

You also can't imagine that, for instance. When I tell you, in short, that it was the screaming, not only from me, from other people who were really killed or even shot sometimes for this. So I learned not to scream.

Then Alex, as he distributed the clothes, he tried to find me the best. But I was very tiny. it was very hard, after I did. One, he found me an evening shoe and the other was, I don't know. He tried to do his best.

He himself, he didn't have marvelous clothes, though he was there 10 years. He had a cap over his head and an alabaster face, skin. He was not like a mummy, like a dead mummy or something, you know. But a beautiful-- he didn't have a dry skin or what, because he had some food from the soldiers or what. I don't know. He taught me how to steal, what to do.

What was the living conditions like once you got through the introductory period?

We had this barracks. But we were not sure any minute in this very cold. There were some straws. It was nothing, just a bunk, no separate bunkers, like you used to see in the camp. Just all one room.

As many people they bashed in as they could. We were all shrunk, anyway, small. But still you needed space. We warmed each other, you see, no blankets, very torn some. They had some [? not, ?] and straw.

There was an oven. I remember an oven. Sometimes it was fire, sometimes. It was not a large fire. Sometimes they brought in, I don't know how it was.

Sometimes, when we got a bit of slice of bread, then they had what they cut the cheese with now, it reminds me. They cut it so slim that they can keep a slice of bread for three times. They tried over the oven to eat it just bite and bite and put it away for next day.

When Alex came in, with risk of his life sometimes, he used to put me in the kitchen. Told me that I shouldn't steal whole potato just because they will look for me everywhere. But if scraps of the skin, I will eat slowly. Because they looked and watched you. Just two or three scraps, better than nothing.

Enough that you could hide?

Yes. Not things will be. And that's what I did, for a time. Sometimes they were good to him, sometimes they were bad to him. So it was depending how I was, then, you know?

The poor fellow, well, it was so bad, I went to peasants to work out as well. I didn't have any energy anymore and nothing. But they made us appell. You know what is appell?

Roll call.

Roll call. You see, when you went once and you had, once in a blue moon, a little fire, you could go in your bunk and just think of the future or the past, or Alex, somebody had children to think of. I thought of my mother, my father, just like anyone else.

Sometimes I cried inside me. But many people cried, and many people wanted to be good to each other, you see? But it was never true that we were stripped to animal. Because even if they were jealous that the other one has a bit better, they were only in hundred, one, that he would go and say it on you, you know?

The majority.

The majority didn't. We tried to help if they screamed, start to. Like I said, when that girl was shouting, when I was shouting, when they pulled out my tooth, they wanted to shut me up, you see? We tried to help, really.

What were the sanitation arrangements like in Dachau in your barracks?

Well, every minute, every two hours, every half an hour, call out in the freeze. In the freeze, hours and hours they counted out for nothing. They just wanted to kill us, Right?

Then the toilets were closed for a number of hours. The washing rooms closed the water. If they caught you that you go

without permission, if you could get out somehow, it was not far, and they found you, they pushed you in, and they made you clean the dirt. As I say to you, as I sit here, I done it myself. So I know.

So when this doctors on that BBC interview said the story with wholeheartedly, and they said that people say that they can't imagine it, I felt very bad about it that they can't imagine that when they explained that the Germans had in their toilet this luxury that they could vomit, sorry to tell you, and if we wanted to be in hygiene and not to be reduced for inhuman, then we had to go and be pushed in in the dirt and clean it.