

Mr. Zylberszac, reel five.

When you ask me about the long-term effects, I don't know, after 40 years after the war, I still wake up in such a sweat that I'm completely soaked with perspiration and I'm scared to go back to sleep. I wake myself up. And I just don't want to go back to sleep, because I don't want to get back into the dream which I was dreaming about.

I think it's left us permanently scarred. We'll never forget. We live in a country here now, obviously which is a peaceful country. And we, most of us, have become good citizens I believe. But this will never leave us.

So the dreams are of you being back in the camp?

Permanent, all the time. Not so often now, but in the beginning it was terrible. But now, now and again, we get together. We talk about it. You fall asleep, and you talk to yourself. You say, you know, I'm living in England. This can't happen. You know?

And here, you've got the Germans marching, and everything is happening again. And you wake up completely wet. I have to get out of bed, change my pajamas, and change my vest and everything. I'm soaked to the skin. Even the stuff which I'm covered with is absolutely soaked.

Did the camps leave any long-term physical effect with you?

Well, it will always be something which is very difficult to assess. After the war, I spent five years in different sanatoriums. I was in Ashford. I was in Kennington. I was in different-- I should imagine in every hospital in the country here. I was in Leeds and in Leeds infirmary.

I was in [PLACE NAME] for a long time, for many years. We went to Cambridge for X-rays. I'm still under the London hospital, under Dr. Wheeler, which I have been for 40 years. He's still looking after me. So when you say long-term effect, what is the long-term effect?

I'm still under medical supervision after 40 years after the war. I got a list of hospital cards as long as your arm. In fact, if you want a recitation, I'm sure I can give you one-- every hospital in the country, different things, which mostly it is my chest, obviously, which was more affected than everything else. And I put it down that we had to shovel loose cement, which went into your lungs, into your nostrils.

And you could hardly breathe. Sometimes you felt like you're being suffocated, to unload train loads of loose cement.

What about your attitude towards life? Did it change your attitude towards life?

Well, it's a difficult question, really. I don't know what my attitude would have been to life had I not gone through that experience. I would say that it made me into a much more-- a person who thinks quite a lot of what is happening in the world. I'm not a frivolous person, who takes things lightly. I'm much more serious than I would have been.

What about your attitude towards the Germans as a result?

Well, let's say we will never forget what happened. But you can't hate all your life. Hate destroys yourself. I found that out in the beginning, when I was in hospital and had so much hate in my body. It takes a long time to get your hate out of your body, like a disease.

I would say now I can take it or leave it. I would like to believe that I don't hate anymore because hate destroys the person who hates. The person who you hate doesn't know you hate him. It's only you, yourself, who hate, who gets the pains and the aches and the heartaches.

Coming to the question of the camps in general, do you think that the experience that people had in the camps made

them more or less religious?

Some people more religious, some people less religious. It's difficult. It's a personal thing between you and your mind and your outlook on life. Some people felt that, because of the religion and because of their belief, that they survived. And it made them much more religious. Other people thought that there is no God at all, if he could stand there and look and see how his people suffer and put them through all those tortures.

Which category did you come into?

I would say I'm in the middle category. It's easier to believe than not to believe. I'm a traditional Jew. I brought up my children in the same way.

My father always said, and he taught me, and I learned still quite a lot since I was a child that you have to know and teach your children to know everything you possibly can. Whether they're going to keep it, whether they're going to believe in it, it's up to their own, to their selves. But you should teach them, and they should know. They should know your religion.

And they should know of the world everything you possibly could teach them. And I'm a great believer in that. I believe you should teach your children what is happening in the world, of your religion, or what happened before and your history, like everybody else who teaches their children their own history.

You've described many cruel experiences that you had at the hands of the Germans. But did any of the Germans ever carry out any act of kindness towards you?

Not to me personally, no. I've never wanted to go that close to a German, quite honestly, to find out whether he's going to carry out any kindness towards me. Because if I felt if I ever went that close to a German, that my life was very much at risk, like a beetle who would go and ask kindness from a foot which might step on it. That's how I felt towards the Germans all during the war. I tried to avoid them as much as I could.

Wherever I had a chance, I wanted to be as far away from them as I possibly could. In fact, when I was marching to work, I always tried to get in a group, to get as far away from the guard who was guarding us as we could, my brother and I, because we saw that we had that much more chance of surviving. Because for some whim in his makeup, he could just take the gun and shoot you because you weren't marching straight, or looking straight where you were marching, or doing something which he disliked. No, I would say I would like to stay away from the Germans as far as I could.

Speaking generally about the camps, can you say something about-- further about how people behave towards each other? Was everybody just struggling selfishly for himself, or did you get people who sacrificed themselves?

You see, there were several categories of people in the camps. There was people, educated people. I want you to understand that. And I want it to be on record the way I saw it. Those educated people were not physically made to carry out any physical work. They were no good to the Germans.

They didn't need people who were clever. They need people who had still some energies in their body which they could extract from it. But there was a few of those people, which they used those clever people to keep their books, to keep checks, how many people died and how many people are still alive. So they kept a few of those people going.

Now I would say that those people who were that clever and were with us in the camps, they understood what was happening. They had compassion. They were the good people. You understand what I'm saying?

Now those good people were no use to the Germans anyway. They didn't last very long. They didn't have the physical strength to survive. In the beginning, when those people were about, there was some compassion. There was some way which those people would try and help or do what they could, a good word, a kind thing. Not so much-- they couldn't give you their food because they didn't have any food themselves.

I'm going to say a very unkind thing about myself now. The people who survived were animals. They were taught to live like animals. They were taught, if they don't have any bread they're not going to survive, like a lion in a cage. If he saw a bit of bread, he would grab it. He didn't care whose bread it was, whether it was his mate's bread or whether it was his bread.

In the end, there was no compassion. Everybody tried to live another day. If you had a brother and you were close together before, you know, a close family, OK, you would look after each other. Once my brother died-- I'll tell you a little instance. In my block of flats where I lived, there were bakers. We were butchers.

There was bakers. There was cold merchants. I lived in a very big block of flats. There were 300 tenants. Every tenant had one room. It was a poor district. Now when my brother died, the baker's son, who was a very close friend of mine before the war, he survived.

When my brother died, I still had a little piece of bread. It was between me and death, that piece of bread. And you better believe it, because if you had no bread, there was no way you could survive. The German dished out, before we started from that barn where we slept, they dished out everybody a little piece of bread. And everybody cut up a tiny little bit and had a little tiny bit with a water or something. And every day and every little while, you had a tiny little bread.

Everybody wanted your little bit of bread. So what we did, we paired up in pairs. In case you fell asleep, the other one was guarding the piece of bread. Because if you had no bread, you were dead.

So I trusted this fellow. And I said to him, look, there's the two of us now. If I fall asleep, you guard the bread. If you fall asleep, I will guard the bread. At least we will try and keep alive. We still got-- you got a little piece, and I got a little piece. We'll be all right.

Because when he fell asleep, I guarded his bread. When I fell asleep, I woke up in the morning, I never saw him till today, that man-- completely disappeared. But for the grace of God that I survived because this man was between me and death.

Now this is what happened in the camps. Everybody, even your closest friend tried to survive. It was as simple as that. We became animals. They really and truly, in the end, dehumanized us. That's what they wanted to do, and they have achieved their achievement. They absolutely dehumanized us. They made us into animals, to wild beasts.

You said that you paired together with a mate. Did you have a special name for the mates with whom you paired with?

We called him [NON-ENGLISH]. He was like a partner to you. He was your [NON-ENGLISH]. And if your [NON-ENGLISH] was a crook, you were dead. Do you understand? Lots of the pairs worked out. I would say about 90% of the people who paired up worked out. It was only 10% who were rotten. They weren't rotten. They tried to save their own lives.

Did you, when you were in the camps, did you think that you'd survive?

Never. Never one minute did I thought, even at the end when the Russians came in, I still couldn't believe it in my mind that it is true, that I was alive and the war is over. It was unbelievable. Nobody could believe. I mean, we thought we would live like rats for the rest of our life and die like a rat. That's what we did.

Everybody-- I would say that the biggest thing, because I survived, was because I lived from day to day. I never worried what is going to happen in two months time, in a month's time, or two week's time, or in two day's time. I only want to survive today. I only wanted enough water for today and to keep out of the Germans eye today that he shouldn't see me and to be in a position where I should be unnoticeable, where the German authority or the kapos or the lagerfuhrers wouldn't get at you and that you had a better chance of surviving.

Once you got a beating, a real beating, you might as well just-- they might as well kill you because you could never recuperate and survive from it. And I've seen several boys for no reason he brought in. He might have-- I saw-- in Tschechowitz they killed somebody in front of the whole, of the whole camp.

Well, he did a silly thing, I think myself. He had no-- he brought some shoes from Auschwitz. They left us the shoes. Now his soles on the shoes went, you know. So they wanted to resole the shoes. So what he done, in the factory you called it [INAUDIBLE]. They thought it was sabotage. He tried to save his shoes.

He took a belt, which was running on a machine. He cut a little bit of the belt off, enough to have two soles, and he shortened the belt. And of course, if you shorten the belt, it keeps on snapping. He worked at the machine. The belt kept on snapping. And they found out that he took a bit off to make a pair of soles on his shoes. And they hung him in front of the whole camp.

How old was he?

He was about my age. At the time he must have been about 17, 16.

You said earlier on about the Łódź ghetto, about the Germans claiming that they were clearing a particular street because of murderers. But was there much crime in the ghetto?

I think there was as much crime in the ghetto, more so than in normal places. We had our thieves. Obviously everybody wanted to live. And people were pinching food. There was no monetary gains. Nobody wanted to gain prestige and have diamonds or gold or anything else. The whole-- everything which was stolen was food-- bread, potatoes, coal, and things like that.

Like I mentioned before, people who were growing their food, people would go at night and try and pinch it. And this is the sort of thievery which went on. But otherwise, I don't think there was much crime there.

But what about murder, did that occur? Did you hear of murders?

Not to my knowledge, I don't think so. You didn't have to murder the people. They died themselves. There was no-- people usually murder each other for gain of possessions. I mean, there was no gain of possessions. And we didn't go as far in the ghetto as eating human flesh.

The only time where I saw people eating human flesh was on the march from Rehmsdorf to Buchenwald, which we were together with the Russians. And the Russians were cutting off lumps of the dead people and frying it and eating it to survive.

This was from Buchenwald to Rehmsdorf?

Yeah. But I never saw any Jewish people doing that, I must say. Doesn't matter how hungry they, they never did that. The only time I ever saw it myself-- it might have been happening, but I didn't see it-- but I was together at the time with the Russian soldiers, prisoners of war. And they were treated just as bad as us, maybe worse.

And they were literally cutting off lumps of people, of the dead people, and cooking it near that forest which we were bombed. And they were eating it.

Did the camp experience make people speak of Zion much more than they had before?

Oh, yes. Yes. We all wanted just to have our own country. We never wanted things to happen to us, what happened during the war. We wanted to have a place of our own. And we didn't want anybody any more to take us to the slaughter like little sheep. And there and then, a lot of people decided that, whatever happens, they'll never let that happen again.

And I think a lot of people have become very adamant about that. And I think this helped to unite the Jewish people to

get Israel back again at any cost.

Had your family shown much interest in Zionism or any other kind of politics before the war?

Yes. My brother was-- the brother was with me in the camps, he was a Zionist. He went out on campaigns to collect money and to eventually, I suppose, go to Israel. But obviously, my father wouldn't hear of it. He was born in Poland. He had his business there. He had everything, his life there. He had his whole family there.

My father used to say, what would the Germans do to me? I haven't done them any harm. Why should they do me any harm? He was a simple person, I suppose, in his own mind. He lived under the Germans previously, and they were very good to him when they occupied Poland before. And he couldn't understand in his mind, and he couldn't reason why they should all of a sudden turn on him when he hasn't done anything to them.

Of course, this wasn't the case. There was a campaign of hate against the Jewish people, which was drilled into the Germans by Hitler and his henchmen. And it can be done to any nation at any time, if the government decides to give fire or fuel to the fire, propaganda in any direction they decide to do it. If tomorrow this government here-- Mosley gets into-- Mosley isn't here anymore, but the fascists or Tyndall, or whatever his name is, gets into power and tells the English people that the biggest disease which they suffer from is the Jews, and it's easy.

Believe me, it's easy. And I don't blame anybody. If I tell you that tomorrow we will take all the Jewish possessions and give it to you if you join me, there'll be a lot of people joining you because everybody wants something for nothing. This is how life is.

I would just like to add a few things about my family before the war, and I'd like just to be on record. Before the outbreak of war, I lived in Linowska 8 in Łódź, in Poland. I lived there with my parents and my brothers and sisters. One of my brothers, the oldest one, his name was Welwel. The youngest one was Isser, and myself. I had three sisters. One of their names was Zlato. The other one, the middle one was Rivka. The youngest one was Chana.

My oldest brother had one son, which his name was Chaim Isaac. My older sister had four sons and one daughter. It was the first son was named Yossel. Then was Welwel. Then was Mordecai. Then was Menhir.

My oldest brother had a son called Chaim Isaac. My sister, Rivka, had one son and one daughter. The son was called Isaac, who I previously told you I met in Auschwitz for the last time, which I saw him. She had a little daughter called Yercha. She was a lovely little girl. My brother-in-law's name was Szislowski, Meyer. Never saw him after the war.

My sister, Chana, was unmarried and lived with my parents, and so did my brother, Isser. I went to school with my brother, Isser, who was two years older than me. We had our own butcher shop before the war. My brother, my oldest brother had his own butcher shop before the war, and so did one of my sisters.

Apart of the aforementioned people, only one of my nieces survived, who was in Russia. There was rumors that one of my nephews survived. His name was Yossel. We wrote to the Red Cross, and they wrote us back that the last they saw of him was in Sachsenhausen. And this is the last we heard of him.