

Holocaust Survivor

Oral Histories

BERNARD KLEIN
EMERY KLEIN

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Could you tell me your names and where you are from please?

B I'm Bernard Klein. I was born in Humenné which is a small town in Eastern Slovakia, Czechoslovakia. I was born in 1929.

E I am the older brother of Bernie, Emery Klein. At home I was called Imre, I-M-R-E, and also born in Humenné in Eastern Slovakia.

Just briefly, can you tell me, were you together during the war, throughout the war?

B Not, well, we wound up together, but for a short period of time, we were separated. We were taken to a gathering point, and at that point, I stayed behind a few extra days, but then I caught on to my family, or to my father and my brother, ah, in Birkenau.

Well, so you went to Birkenau. Where were you from 1939, just the names and places until the end of the war?

B In 1939, we were naturally still living in Humenné, and through the fact that our father was economically important, which was in those days an exemption for Jews in that type of position, we stayed in Humenné until 1944, approximately May of 1944. And at that point, we were transferred through the organization that my father was assigned to, it's a farm type of an association.

E The state, pardon me, the state has taken away all the Jewish properties of farms, and they had the so-called Central Agency of Jewish, ex-Jewish farms, and...

B In the capacity of advisers, and through that, we were transferred to a place called Malé Dvorany, which was in Western Slovakia, and we stayed there until September, when in September, we were taken to Nitra to a jail. We were there a few days, and as I mentioned before, I, that's where I stayed behind, because one day I went, I volunteered to work in order to get some extra food, and when I came back, the rest of my family was taken to Sered, which was the central gathering for, prior to being loaded into a railroad cars and taken over to Poland and the major concentration camps, and after I arrived to Sered, I happen to run into people that I knew from our town who were still there, and they told me that my family left just a day or two before I got there, and through strict coincidences, a few days later, I was taken to Birkenau, and that's where I ran into my father and my brother. Of course, at that point, I have no longer, I no longer saw my mother and my sister who never made it.

Okay, Emery, from Birkenau, where did you wind up, after Birkenau?

E We were, first as Bernie mentioned, taken to Birkenau, which was the extermination camp, and from there, we were selected to go to Gleiwitz. There made, supposedly the selections by [Trietz]. Fortunately, when we arrived to Birkenau, there were a couple young fellows who were already in the camp, and who were working at the railroad station where we arrived, and they advised us that we should register as tradesmen, and we were told, eh, that we should, eh, definitely tell them that we have, as I mentioned, a trade,

and we chose to say that we are, eh, we are Schlossers, eh, eh, Schlossers,
which means, um...

B Locksmiths.

E Locksmith. Being young, as we were, we said that we are, that we are
Schlossers Helfsarbeiter, which means locksmiths trainees which, eh, eh,
helped us to, to be selected into a so-called working camp together with our
father, and we were sent to Gleiwitz, and ended up working in, eh, at least
myself and my father, working in a factory repairing railroad cars which came
back from the front, eh, from the front, damaged.

B I want to interrupt here for one second to, ah, make a correction. We did not
arrive together at Birkenau. As I mentioned, I stayed behind, and while it was
very little known about the extermination camps before we got there, of
course, ah, in the railroad car on the way to Birkenau, ah, strangely, an elderly
gentlemen seeing me, I was, ah fifteen, exactly fifteen years old, he more or
less, eh, took charge of me, and one of the advice he gave me was, eh, exactly
what I may mentioned, to, if, when we get to Birkenau, and to, whenever I am
asked my age, to say that I am nineteen, and in my case, he advised me to say
that I am a Landwirtschaftarbeiter, which means a farm, farmer, farm worker.
So, this is how I was selected to go left instead of right, meaning instead of the
gas chambers, I went into the camp and subsequently was selected to go to
Gleiwitz with my father and my brother.

E On the other hand, eh, my mother, unfortunately, did not make it, and
primarily we gather, and this is no proven fact, but, but we had a sister who at

that time was only ten years old and who obviously could not pretend that she is capable to do some trade or work, and, from what we know, the women, or the mothers, were asked, "Do you want to go with your child?" which obviously a Jewish mother said, "Yes, I want to go with my child," and this made it, eh, their destiny. Sure, they both went left rather than right, and they went to the crematorium, and never really made it even into the camp, into Birkenau.

B Now, at that point, if anybody selected right, of course, that was it. It was direct route to the gas chambers, and we know what happened there, now we know what happened there.

From Gleiwitz, when, when did you leave Gleiwitz?

B We stayed in, we got to Gleiwitz, we actually got to Birkenau in about, it was the end of September of 1944, and we stayed in Birkenau, I would estimate, about three weeks.

E Approximately, yeah.

B That's when we were finally selected to go to a labor camp, and that was Gleiwitz, and we stayed in Gleiwitz until the beginning of February when the Russians were approaching. That's when the Germans abandoned the camp, and, ah, that's when we started marching out. Once we knew that the Germans run away because of the oncoming Russian army, we started marching. We left the camp hoping that we would wind up at home, which we did, well, no, I'm sorry. I skipped a very important part. When they saw,

when the Russians were approaching, the Germans at that point made us march in towards Germany.

E What happened is that the Germans naturally seeing the front advancing didn't want to wait. They have, eh, started to, on the run and took us, made us go with them, and as we were marching, could, a majority of the people were killed during the march, because they couldn't keep up. And, as we continued with them, as, eh...

B Anybody who became tired, and it was very easy to become tired since we were undernourished and exhausted, of course, anybody not being able to keep up in the march was shot right there, and a number of people never made it to the next camp that they took us, which was Blechhammer, and we stayed there about a couple nights with the Germans, and then, from there on, they started running and left us behind. That's where they left us behind, in Blechhammer, and that's later on when we decided to, I'm capsulizing the whole thing, of course, ah, we decided to get out and start marching towards our former home.

E What happened there was, eh, when the Germans left, and, we were all hungry and, eh, everybody was trying to get into the warehouses where the food was stored, and we started to eat food which your stomachs were not able to, to, to absorb because of the several months of...

B ...starvation.

E starvation, and what was happening was that people got diarrhea and got sick, and we realized immediately, that to stay there, it would be disastrous.

- B** Also, the sanitary conditions, ah, whatever we had, broke down completely once the Germans abandoned the camp, and typhus was a very good possibility, so...
- E** We started immediately, eh, a group of us. Our father, the two of us, plus, eh, a cousin, two cousins of ours and several other people from...
- B** We had total of eleven people.
- E** Eleven people from Czechoslovakia. We started literally on foot, walking towards home and, eh, stopping naturally different nights in different villages and in different homes, eh, we have, ended up sleeping in abandoned German homes. People, Germans, who fled, worried about the, eh...
- B** Russians.
- E** Russian, oncoming Russian army, they fled their homes. In many cases, we came into a home, we still found a warm stove, because they just ran away. We made ourselves comfortable for the night and tried to find some food, and eh, which was prepared for us the next morning, continued towards, eh, the next destination, the destination was home. But, going from day to day, eh, marching and um...
- B** The very first night where we ran into one of those homes to sleep over, we actually found some of the food that was still warm, that indicated people just about left. But what happened next was the fact that during the night, I don't know if you recall the house was put on fire, and we had to run for our lives again. And, eh, we had to find another place to sleep over. I also, on the way out of the camp, the first, perhaps the first experience of what indication

maybe of Russian anti-Semitism, was when we were under oath, starting to march, we run into a Russian army was marching on and one of the trucks stopped, and we wanted to, we were hoping to get a ride from them, but they asked us who we are. When they found out that we are Jews, they refused, blaming us for working for the Germans. That was their interpretation. In fact, they said in Russian and I will probably never forget it. I don't want to say it in Russian because probably it won't mean much.

Go ahead, say it in Russian.

B Well, they say, "[In Russian]," which means "you Jews worked for the Germans" and they just drove off and left us on the road.

E As it was we were still happy to, to see them, because, eh, we felt naturally much more safe at that time knowing that at least, eh, the Germans cannot hurt us at that point. We continued in our walk towards home.

Okay, now I'm going to, we'll return to the, what happened after the war because there is considerably more traveling that you did after you reached home. Let's go back for a moment now, to Humenné before the war. What was the town like?

E Humenné was, eh, small town, having approximately six thousand habitants of which one-third, approximately 2,000 were Jewish. Humenné was considered to be a small Jewish, eh, center, sort of, and eh, having a lot of Jewish people also living the neighboring area, which did business in Humenné, coming into Humenné. It was, eh, for us, a very nice and comfortable place to live in.

B It was the, actually, the regional center, commercially as well as the regional government for all the outlying smaller towns and villages, was in Humenné. And, eh, for a small town, it was quite a, well, eh, developed area.

E Culturally, for the, for those times and for the area, we had a commercial academy in, in, in Humenné, which was an important school. Not only for the inhabitants, but for people from other cities who came to Humenné because of that. And, eh, we had...

B ...business school.

E The commercial academy, right, an important business school in that area.

Was there a Yiddish theater there?

B Not a permanent one. [Talking simultaneously]

E Not a permanent one, but groups use to come once and a while and give performances.

And what did your family do? What was your father's business?

E Our fathers had several involvements. So happens we had the unique situation where our mother and her sister, two sisters, were married to two brothers and the two brothers and sisters, not only we lived together, we had a very, very large, long house which we lived in, first were the quarters of uncle and aunt and then there were ours. Those are all the businesses where, joined they were partners and different things they did. One of the main things was we had a wholesale and retail meat market, we had a delivery service....

B ...Farm land.

E ...we had a brick manufacturing plant and although our father and uncle were gentleman farmers, we owned I don't know how many acres of land, which were worked by the people whoever were hired, rather rented the farms to work for one third of what the arrangements were and the rest of the crops were ours, which we in turn used for the cattle and so on which our parents owned.

B As my brother mentioned, the two sisters married two brothers. My uncle and aunt were childless, and therefore, they considered us as their children and, eh, we were fortunate enough to really, literally, have two sets of parents. They were always with us and, eh, of course, they loved us as their own children. And, in turn, we did the same for them.

As long as you mention your family, we have some photographs of your parents?

E Yes, we were fortunate to find some of the pictures either at home, or some of them which our family United States gave us which they received from our parents over the years. Um...from the early days, this happens to be a picture of our mother and father visiting Budapest during 1937. I don't know, can you see that? This happens to be a picture of our mother. Eh, these are pictures of, eh, Bernie and myself in a...As you can see, there, here we always...

B The year, 1934.

E 1934 - which means Bernie was 5 years old, and I was 6 years old. Our parents were fortunate and quite well-to-do, and they always wanted to make sure that our clothing is of, not only of fine quality, but we always had

uniform, uniform dress. As you can see from this picture, or for this matter, for this one, which was made in 1933, we're a year younger. Always both our, all our outfits were custom made by, and always the same, eh, Bernie and I wore the same, same clothing during all the years, all custom made for us.

B This is our sister here and this was made in 1934, she was barely a year old.

E She was a year old - just about a year old, yes.

B She was born in March and this in May, so she was 14 months old.

E She was 14 months old, right.

B This is another picture of our sister, unfortunately, this one does not have a year on it, but looks like she is about 2 years old here.

E Right, here is, oh sorry.

B Unfortunately, you don't have, we didn't, whatever pictures we were lucky enough to preserve, not the entire family is represented, but this happens to be part of the family on my mother's side and this is her mother, our grandmother.

E Who lived with us.

B She lived with us all the time until she died in 1943 of natural causes. This is our mother and this is the aunt that lived with us. These are, of course, brothers and sisters. That's the mother with six children, they were actually a total of 11 children, but this picture happens to have six. This is the aunt that lived with us. And that being referred to as the second set of parents. This uncle and this uncle were actually...this uncle...

E You are correct, they both went to the United States.

B All three of them went to the United States, but these two came back. They went to the United States in early 1900, but these two uncles came back very early, two, three years later because they found America not enough religious for them. Okay, so, and this, of course, is an aunt that also lived in Humenné. This uncle stayed in Omaha.

E Stayed and lived in Omaha.

In Omaha.

B And he died, in fact, only about 10 years ago.

E Together with another uncle of ours, Lou Sommer, who also lived in Omaha, for quite a few years and also deceased since then.

Now that uncle, what's, wait for a minute, the pictures that you have, you have something of some value from that uncle about the town.

B Well, this uncle and also another uncle who is not pictured on this family picture, came to visit Humenné because they came to visit their mother, our grandmother. Came in 1932 and in 1933. One came in 1932 and the other came in 1933 and while they were there they were making movies.

Home movies.

E Beg pardon.

Home movies.

B Home movies, yes. We, of course, were totally unaware of those movies being still available or of their existence. But, my uncle's daughter, our cousin, Bea Sommer, who still lives in Omaha, eh, a few years back, found

them, in the house and she decided to give it to us. These were seven inch reels and then, of course, they were almost 50 years then, 50 years old then.

E Old, yeah.

B So we were afraid that the films were very fragile and probably will not preserve much longer, so Emery had enough foresight to take to them a studio and had an eight track video tape made up of whatever was salvageable from those movies. And, in fact, we have it and it's a...

E To us, they are priceless, naturally.

B Today, these movies are 52, 52 years old, going back to Humenné and our family in those days.

We have some selections from that, maybe you could tell us a little bit about it.

B Sure.

While we're...Why don't we roll the film.

B This caption was made by my uncle. There's the railroad station.
Unfortunately, it's not very clear. But you can see the smoke from the train.

E This is a marketplace, which was right in front of our home. We lived on [Musklickova] Street, which was a main street, and, eh, every Monday...

B And Friday.

E and Friday, there was, eh....

B Market days.

E Market days in town when all the peasants and farmers came from the villages offering their wares. And this marketplace, which I mentioned before, took place on the main street, right in front of our home.

B These are some of the stores that you see on the main street and, of course, in the back of each store, the front was the store, and, of course, in the back of each store were the residences of the people who owned the stores.

Your family did a lot of business with non-Jews.

E With what?

Non-Jews.

E Excuse me, oh yeah, yeah. Especially in the meat business, eh, naturally, our, our, our father and uncle were buying the cattle from the farmers.

B This is our store.

E This is our store, which was the front of the house. This is the neighbor's house, right next to it there. This is our father, in the head, the head closest to the wagon. Apparently, the caption came a little bit later, but...

B No, no (talking simultaneously)

E It's still representing the marketplace.

B Yeah, it's a continuation of it. This is one of the cousins who came with the uncle to United States in 1932, the one in the white coat.

E And the one in the black, that's one of our uncles (both talking at once)

B Right, as you see, he's negotiating, they're trying to buy a chicken.

People would set up stalls in the square?

E Exactly, exactly.

B More like, eh, a table with a tent type covering, so that in case of rain they wouldn't get everything soaked.

E This is...

B That store front across that we can see is the store of our uncle.

These are peasants who would come to the market?

E Right, right.

B Yes, right. They bring chicken, eggs, vegetables...

E And the same time buying certain things which they cannot get in the villages, they did their shopping.

B On the way home, they went shopping. If I can tell...

B, E (in unison) This is the local policeman. This is our uncle...

B ...next to the policeman.

E That's Morris Sommer...

B, E (in unison) Morris Klein.

B Okay, this is the store I mentioned before. Obckodkožov means store with leather goods.

E He was another uncle of ours, Grossman. That's his house.

B The store was down, and the residence was in the back and upstairs.

E This was usually the custom, like in our case. The store was in the front and there was an office and then followed by the residence and in our case, after with several other buildings.

B Excuse me, this is our brick making factory. This is back to the marketplace. As you see, it's pretty crowded, because it was tremendously large area that Humenné was serving. And, eh, as I mentioned before, it being a regional...

E This is our truck. Herman Klein, Herman was an uncle, he was the older one, so it is under his name, this is our cousin from the United States.

- B** This is Mort----- is his name. That is his father.
- E** The father's name was Irvin Klein.
- B** It's very difficult to identify these people.
- E** All the farmers all dressed up for the holiday, for the holiday celebration. You know what holiday this was?
- B** The biggest celebration was the Easter, well, the equivalent of what they call here, the Easter parade. They would, eh, go to church early in the morning and then march out, you know, all dressed up and uh...
- E** Sing and celebrate.
- B** Carrying, sing, carrying signs...
- E** There's our aunt, with our cousin. In the background is our father. This is our uncle from Omaha, with his sister, Mrs. Grossman, followed by my father and our aunt.
- B** This is our uncle with our aunt. The uncle from America with our aunt. This is our uncle with a couple cousins. The one on the right, who is...
- E** (talking over Bernie)...Los Angeles
- B** The other one didn't survive.
- E** And, deceased.
- B,E** (in unison) This is our father with our uncle.
- E** That's our mother there, in the...
- B** ...can't see...
- E** unfortunately, it's a very poor picture.

Your grandmother in the center?

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B, E (in unison) Yeah.

B Except it's very difficult to see. That's me, ah, in 1932, or '33, I was either three or four years old there.

B, E (in unison) This is my mother.

B These are couple of...

E Us, with our cousins.

B Now here you see the grandmother in the middle, at the end, now...

E With her daughters which are around....

B This is a cousin on the end.

E That's our father in his hat, holding our sister, who was at that time, probably a few...

B She was a few months old because she was born in 1933.

E And next to them is our uncle who Bernie referred to before, our second father, we lived together and spent a lot of time with us. These are the two brothers, as again I mentioned who are...

B And that's our mother at the end, there.

E That's our mother there. That's our aunt. This is...

B This is a cousin holding our sister. That's the grandmother there with her daughters, our aunts.

E That's one of our cousins.

Which cousin is this?

E I can't even identify...

B I believe it's Eli Laundesmann. He's the one who made Aliyyah in 1938 or early 1939, I'm not too sure of the date.

B, E (in unison) That is our father

B With me.

E Bernie.

B, E (in unison) That's the two of us with our cousin.

B Now, our mother has just joined us there.

E That's right.

You have a cousin who became a famous author?

B Yeah, Ladislaw Grosman, he, ah, he survived, of course and he...

E That's our grandmother, incidentally.

B He wrote the book, Shop on the Main Street, which later was made into a film and it won the Oscar for the best foreign picture.

E Ida Kominska.

B It starred Ida Kominska. He, well, went to Israel in 1967 and, unfortunately, a couple of years ago, he died at a very young age of 61.

Livestock was your, belonged to your family?

B That was ours, yes.

E It belonged to our parents. That's us with our family.

B As you can see, when the visitors came from America, the whole family gathered and, eh, besides being together and, eh, enjoying each other, we also made trips to other towns where we had relatives.

- E** We were a very, very close knit family and, eh, it was a custom in our family every Friday night...
- B** Excuse me, this is grandmother with my mother and her sister, her mother is holding our sister.
- E** It was a custom in our family, as I mentioned, every Friday night for our family to gather in our home. That's our truck and our two maids, which, uh, worked for us. Eh, every Friday night, we had a large group, as many as 30 or more people in the home and naturally our grandmother living with us, was, uh, automatically made it, made our home the center of uh...the family. These are the people who worked for us and do some vegetable cleaning or garage and the back of the house. As I mentioned before, we had a very long, narrow house, followed by a huge garden. There's our sister. That's Bernie and myself with two of our cousins. That's three of our cousins.
- B** Incidentally, those three did not survive.
- E** The one, Bernie's at one end and that's my, that's Bernie marching.
- B** This is our cousin. This is a cousin...
- E** There's a cousin with our uncle.
- B** I went back to take another turn. No, that was Emery, this is me I didn't go back to take another turn.
- E** That's Bernie. That's myself. That's Bernie and me in a little friendly fight. That's our mother with our sister. Myself. That's our father and uncle with myself and our sister. Posing for a picture for our uncle from America.
- B** This is our second set of parents, aunt and uncle.

E We called them Rov Mama and Hermann Baczi. That's our aunt and uncle Grossman who lived across the street. That's the Grossman cousins, Susie and Martrie.

B Susan still lives in Czechoslovakia. She is one of the few that survived.

E That's Bernie and myself. As you can see, almost all the time wearing the same clothing, Bernie and myself. That's our sister. That's our father.

B This is Ladislav Grosman, the author that I mentioned before and that's his sister. This is his other sister, it's the one that still lives in Czechoslovakia.

E That's our mother with our grandmother. Our mother's name was Helen Klein.

B This was a neighbor of ours.

Of all these people we see here, neighbors and members of your family, how many of them survived the war?

B Well, besides us, very few.

E Very, very few.

B Of course, our father survived, but unfortunately, he passed away in 1970.

E There's really only, only three cousins, besides us, Heinal Sendt, who's now in Los Angeles...

B Bernie Sommer...

E Bernie Sommer...

B Ladislav Grosman.

E Ladislav Grosman, the author who meantime passed away.

B Martin, survived the war, but he's not alive anymore. And ah, Susan, who still lives in Czechoslovakia.

E Right.

B There's a total of about five, out of a family of, I would say, close to 50. The immediate aunts, uncles, and cousins, possibly more if you started counting.

E Our family, talking about aunts, uncles, and cousins are probably in the 60's and as, eh, as far as survivors, there are barely, eh, dozen survived, and unfortunately, meantime several died since then.

B Since the war. We have a couple cousins in Israel, but they really don't count.

A couple of questions about the movie, about the town. Do you remember ever experiencing any anti-Semitism in Humenné before the war?

E Before the war?

B Until 1939, until the Slovakia became autonomous, separated from the rest of the Czechoslovakia and immediately joined the Axis, okay, in other words, the Nazi rule, eh, outwardly there was very little anti-Semitism that we would be aware of. Here and there, you could hear a remark, but it was not really...

E (interrupting) Special.

B ...a vicious kind...

E No.

B It's just a, more or less an expression.

E As children, we certainly did not experience any anti-Semitism. We were going to public school with non-Jewish kids, we had friends who were non-

Jewish kids. I would say, and I'm sure you would confirm, that we as children had never, never run into any anti-Semitism before the war.

B No, that's what I was saying.

E Whereas it became quite obvious when, in 1939.

B It started rapidly with the Slovakia breaking away.

E Breaking autonomous.

Tell me how you began to experience it. What were some of the first things you remember changing in your lives in 1939?

E Well, first of all, uh...

B Well, when the first restrictions came out, we, of course, had curfews, which started with curfews. We had restrictions as to places to go to. For instance, as you happen to see on the movie, the center of town, later on, was developed into a kind of a promenade and, uh, people would go out there to walk. There were benches to sit down and relax. And soon after 1939, a sign was put up, eh, "Jews, Gypsies and Dogs--Not Allowed."

E There was a loud speaker in middle of town on which we heard various different announcements. There was, almost became as time went on, a daily occurrence with the various different restrictions against the Jews. We, for example, had a curfew. No Jews could go out the moment it, eh, it got dark. As a matter of fact, eh, our neighbors to visit us, the only way we were able to do this, we kind of made an opening in our backyard fence so they could come over in the evening and spend a social evening. But we would never dare to go out in the street. Especially we were living on a main street, which was

very much patrolled. This was in the early days and then it became, eh, more, worse and worse, eh...

B Well, it became the yellow band ...

E The yellow band,

B Yellow star.

E Yellow star, and then...

B And then it came, the, the, Jews were not allowed to own any businesses and they had to have an Aryan take over.

What happened to your father's business then?

E We had, eh, some of our employees were with us for many, many years. My dad originally had asked his oldest employee, who was with him at that time probably 25 or more years, to become the official Aryan, but still my dad retaining, our dad retaining the ownership, which worked only for a very, very short few months because then, eh, he or his family advised him that why do you need Klein to be the owner? And one day he just came and told my father that he's worried that with this type of arrangement that he would really, he wants to really be the owner and that's it. And my father can work for him but it's, that's the arrangement. And that's what happened because, obviously, our dad had no choice about it. So, this way, the store was no longer ours. When it came to the brick manufacturing factory, that automatically was taken away because it happened to be a bigger business. The state they took it over and appointed some Aryan, a non-Jewish manager and that was it. The farms,

as we mentioned to you before, there was a decree where all Jewish farms were taken away by the state, a state law...

B (interrupting) They were nationalized.

E They were nationalized. And because they needed people to run these various different Jewish farms and businesses and so on, in the case of farms they appointed so-called advisors, the Jews who owned most of the land were appointed to be the advisors. Now...

B (interrupting) Soon then they started gathering people, started transporting people to the concentration camps. And it started in Humenné in 1941 with the single girls. Then followed by single boys and then in early 1942, they started taking all those families who were economically not important for the city or the state and when these certain businesses including certain farms that were organized. They did not have enough capable, eh, people to run it, so they retained the Jews as economically important and that was the exemption for such Jewish families to stay on. That's how we managed it, I already mentioned, to stay on till 1944, other than be taken away in 1942 when the bulk of the Jewish population of Slovakia was transported to concentration camps.

Who enforced these new laws?

B After the autonomy in October of 1939, locally had a very small police you saw in the film, two policemen maybe, and maybe a few other, eh...

E But, there was the so-called Hlinka Garda.

B They formed a group...

E Which were following the Nazi rule by the book. The Hlinka Garda took over the, really, they were the local government. And they have, they were the ones who...

B (Both talking at once) They were really, only, their only assignment was really to enforce the code against the Jews. They had no other function, except to parade.

E They were wearing special uniforms with Nazi Hakenkreuz on their, on their...

B Swastika.

E On their Swastika, on their arms.

These were Slovakian fascists.

E (nodding) The Slovakian fascists.

B The local, yeah, the local fellows.

E And who were very much going along with it because it was, eh, very much beneficial for them because they were really given the various Jewish properties and some of them as it turned out, were very mean and bad people who went along with, with them, obviously. It tends to be said that there were people who were different. Who were remained friends and who tried to be as protective as they could.

Can you give me some examples?

E Fortunately, for our family, my father had very close friends who...

B Happened to be schoolmate of the man who became the chief of the Hlinka Garda in town.

E He was the chief of Hlinka Garda but basically a good person and he did things, at least the way he explained it at that time to our father, because somebody had to do it. If he wouldn't have done it, then somebody else would have, it would have been much worse. And he tried to be, protect as many people as he could. For example, in our case, our aunt, who was at that time a widow, which we referred to as our second mother who lived with us, he protected her to the very end and she really was not economically important by no means or couldn't be so stated. But, being, having a position he had, and being my father's sister, my father's sister-in-law, because she was our mother's sister, he protected her to the bitter end. As a matter of fact...

B He stuck his neck out for doing so and eh, we, after the families were taken, the town, we were, very few Jewish families were left. We were one of the fortunate ones at that point and as Emery mentioned, our aunt stayed with us through the efforts of this local chief of the Hlinka Garda. But every Thursday, after the bulk was taken, the remnant of the Jewish community was then gradually, eh, picked for additional transports. And, it became a tradition, every Thursday, they would start...

E Pick up certain people...

B Picking those people that they, at that point, decided are no longer important for them to stay.

E Which was psychologically always, it was unbearable--you never knew who is next and...

- B** Through some friendship, they were quite often we are warned in advance, because not every Thursday. It wasn't every Thursday, there weren't that many Jews left. But whenever there would be an additional, eh, gather, you know they would gather additional Jews for a transport...
- E** What they called Lapačka.
- B** Right.
- E** In Slovakia.
- B** It would be on Thursday, and every so often we would be warned because, as I indicated, and as we mentioned before, too, some of the friendships developed through the years with the townspeople, they were friendly enough to warn us.
- E** As a matter of fact, we had a very interesting experience, pardon me for interrupting. Where on one of those Thursday's, as Bernie mentions, our aunt was picked up. And, why was she picked up? Because our father's friend who was in charge of the party, was out of town. And some of the other guys from...
- B** His rival wanted to show the upper hand.
- E** Right. And he picked up, our mother was picked up--
- B** No, our aunt.
- E** Our aunt rather, and was to, would have been deported. Fortunately, he came home the same evening and, eh, I knew that he is coming home even though I was very young, but was very, very concerned about our aunt. And, so, I run to the railroad station and, eh, to my pleasant surprise, I found that another friend of our father who was also a...

B A former schoolmate.

E Former schoolmate and held a lesser rank. He advised immediately, the chief, that Irvin's sister-in-law was picked up. And, believe it or not, in order to release her, he released an entire group, which was picked up that particular day. And that's how our aunt was saved and was really, strictly thanks to him. His name was Gorgofski, correct?

B Steffen Gorgofski.

E Steffen Gorgofski.

B You see, anti-Semitism, uh, had a different type of a form from the beginning because through being in a small area and, in fact, as mentioned, both of the people that became the actual local government, were classmates of our, or grow-up with our parents, had a tough time displaying any kind of anti-Semitism even if they may have felt it. So, while some were not smart enough to hide it once they got the license in 1939, most of them, eh, were keeping a distance. They would not...

B, E (in unison) outwardly

B ...show direct anti-Semitism. Definitely not any kind of viciousness. With a rare exception here and there. So, while they enjoyed the fruits of the Nazi rule, eh, they still maintained a certain amount of outwardly friendship because, as I said, they spent years and years together with the Jewish people in the community. So, this is how it worked. Now, we as kids, we had the same experiences while we went to school, public schools. We had friends, Gentile friends, and we got along very well. But, then later on, and I, we've

already recalled, this was the particular occasion, Christmas time. They used to put on the uniforms, like the Jewish kids use to don't put it. They did it for Christmas. And they would be running...

E You mean that special dress?

B Yeah, you know the all kinds of, uh, costumes. And whenever they, we would be on the street and noticed a group of them coming, we would immediately run because if they would get a hold of us, they would really beat us up.

That's how, that's how...

E This was a change.

B That was how we started feeling the change from 1939 until later years.

E Then later we were exposed from the public schools.

B We were expelled, right.

E Expelled from the public schools, and there was a separate Jewish school organized with one or two classes crammed in, kids of all ages.

B Because a very few Jewish kids that left in town, were left in town, especially after 1941.

E You have to remember, the bulk of the Jewish people were deported at that time.

B By 1941, there were very few Jewish families left and having just a few kids and very few Jewish teachers, I wound up, I remember, when I was in the fifth grade, that I believe, we had first and the fourth grade also in the same classroom. So, however, the education as fragmented as it may have been, we had, we were, we had the education supplemented by private tutoring.

E Which was done in a quietly, and in our home.

Where did you think these people were going when they were deported? Had you heard of Auschwitz, had you heard of any...?

B No, Auschwitz and Birkenau we didn't hear of. In those days, eh, Lublin was the center where people from our town we got to know were taken and we were told that's a labor camp.

E And we believed it from the beginning.

B Right, definitely.

E As a matter of fact, there was an experience where among other members of our family our uncle, Wilmersch Klein was also taken and then one day, we had a visit from somebody who we did no know and who told our father that he came and brought a message from his brother, Wilmersch who was in this labor camp and he can arrange to free him for a sum of 50,000 crowns, which was at that time a substantial amount of money. And, eh, there was, eh, quite a, eh, traumatic day because we had no way of checking this man's credential, or really that he is in any way telling us the truth. I remember our parents and other members of the family were trying to interrogate him and trying to see if he even knows how to describe our uncle, which he somehow managed to do to the point where our father's and the rest of the family's decision was, even though the likelihood is maybe less than 50% that he is telling us the truth, cannot take a chance and eh, if there is some percentage of some slim hope that he could bring him home. So, they gave him the money. But, obviously it was a complete hoax.

B See makes, what made his story..

E More credible.

B What made his story a little credibility, was the fact that when the families were taken in 1941, from the beginning, every once and a while, we would get a postcard from our uncle saying that he is wherever in Lublin and obviously those were forced communications. All the card would say, we are fine and hope you are okay and that was it. So, he knowing where our uncle is and knowing about him, as I say, made it more or less plausible and that's why the family after a big conference decided that we have to do everything possible.

E As we learned after, naturally, most of the people were killed in very early stage but they retained certain people to help them camouflage this entire tragedy.

When they were carrying out these Aktionen, starting in 1941, you said the first group to go were the single girls, then the single boys. Did you know anyone in those groups?

B, E Oh, sure, everybody.

E I mean this was a small, relatively a small town.

How did it happen that they were rounded up, door-to-door, police?

B An announcement was made that every, all single girls from age, I don't recall the exact age, from 18 and up, I think it was, or 16 and up.

E 16 and up...

B I'm not too sure...

E Pack their suitcase...

- B** You have to register first.
- E** Right.
- B** And then they were told that they have to prepare their essentials that they can carry with them and that they will be picked up on such and such a day.
- E** But they report to, to report to a certain gathering place--
- B** Right.
- E** And from there they were loaded onto trains and they're never seen again.
- B** That was followed two or three months later by, with...
- E** Single boys.
- B** The same way. And then, this was in early 1941. And then towards the end of 1941, or early 1942, they....
- E/B** They started to take families.
- B** Everybody was registered, so nobody could escape really because whoever stayed in town was not only written he was known. In a small town you can't really, uh, just disappear. Unless some people, of course, who had any kind of a thought of, eh, trying to disappear could have moved away in those days.
- E** But, eh, the boys who came after the girls, eh, or they had sort of a forewarning and there were many young men who, who escaped, who run into the forest. Some of them joined the Partisans, including our cousins, for this matter. They were first in hiding. In fact, our cousin, I remember, the one who eventually became the author, was hiding in our home, because we had a big home and somehow we managed to hide him for a while.
- B** That's true.

E But then it was, it became dangerous. He, he, went into the forest and eventually joined the Partisans with many other young Jewish boys to fight, fight the Germans.

When you heard a rumor or a warning of an impending Aktion, what would you do then? What would you and your family do?

B As you saw in the film, we had an extensive house with the back of the house having all kinds of storage areas for the farm equipment and the hay and straw and all that. So, we would hide in one of those places, one of those storage areas and we depended on our help.

E We had servants who were living in the house.

B Very loyal--and we just had to depend on them. Andy the proved to be very trustworthy because they really, they would lock us in, bring us some food, if we had to stay. Sometimes, the longest we stayed there would be, maybe more than a couple nights. A night, a day, and the next night. And then we would get a signal that it's all clear again until one Thursday later on when there would be another Aktion.

E Obviously, the first, first rule on a day like this, was that no Jew can leave his house. Everybody must be in their home, okay. But knowing where the danger is, like Bernie mentioned, we did not sit in our living rooms, waiting for them. But instead, tried to find the most safe hiding place in our home and again, having pretty much a large home, we found a place which we felt could be the safest and having the advantage of the fact that we had people living

with, in the house, servants and so on, they were able to provide for us some help as far as sheltering us and hiding us.

Do you at all recall what sort of effect such stress had on your mother and your sister?

E Our sister was very, was very young. As a matter of fact, unfortunately she never lived to be longer than...

B 11 years old.

E Than 11 years old, because, eh...

B For that matter, we weren't much older really. Being three years older, you four, four and a half years older, doesn't make us old people at that stage of our life.

E Right, but again we are probably a little bit more aware. But, it was a stress. It was a stress on a child just as much as it was on older people.

B We were in constant fear. And at the age of 10, 11, and 12, we were engaged in politics rather than in playing games. Because, eh, as we earlier indicated, our house happened to be one of the gathering place for the family as well as the close friends...

E As well as relatives.

B And the subject was always the war.

E And the daily occurrences, unfortunately, which were happening right in our...

B Who was taken and who stayed and what's next and another rule, and another rule, and so.

E And rumors and...

- B** There was no other subject. There was just a constant fear that what's gonna happen.
- E** And then stories started to come that the people taken away are being really killed or disposed of, but never confirmed and so on. But there were constant, constant rumors and like Bernie says, fear there was no, normalcy to our lives, really.
- B** The only ray of hope we had is when we listened to the BBC. Obviously, a very top secret and heard some, later on, developments on the front that were turned against, that they were turning against Germany.
- E** Again, as Bernie said, as young as we were, there was no such thing as there was not to go into the house at 2:00 in the afternoon when there was BBC broadcasting, I recall the 2:00 time and there were several times a day. But especially 2:00. We made it for sure that we were home and put our ears to the radios.
- B** Wouldn't turn the volume up, not to...
- E** It was not allowed to listen to out of the country broadcasting. But this was, we were looking for a ray of hope in these broadcasts and the only thing what really kept us going is the hope that the Germans will lose the war and we will eventually be free again.

Now, at what point were you and your family finally moved from Humenné?

- B** Well, in 1944, as I indicated in May, ah, the decree came that Eastern Slovakia, the front was getting fairly closer so the Germans decided that Eastern Slovakia has to become...

E Judenfrei.

B What is called Judenfrei, clean of Jews. Free of Jews, but clean of Jews. And, eh, everybody was to be taken away. Through the fact that our father belonged to the Farms Associations, he was considered one of the important advisors.

E And, again, having contact, it was a matter at that time, to, to, to find somebody who was important enough, who was willing to put in a good word for him.

B In those days, bribery worked wonders wherever there was any kind of the slightest possibility, a little bribery would make it possible. So, we were transferred, as I said, to Malé Dvorany, which is a small farm area near Piešťány. Piešťány was a famous, eh...

E Resort town.

B Resort town. And it's a, people went there with, eh...

B, E Rheumatism.

B Primarily.

Alright, now you're immediate family then was still together?

B Just the five of us.

Five of you?

B Right. [Talking at the same time.]

E ...with us.

And you're transferred from Humenné, and your grandmother already died, transferred from Humenné to...

E Malé Dvorany, to a Jewish farm. The owners of that farm remained on that farm, but they were, they gave us quarters to, to, to share and to live there.

Okay, this is a good place to stop for now.

TAPE CONTINUES AFTER A OUT 15 SECONDS OF BLACK

Emery, tell me what you remember most after you were taken away from

Humenné and deported to the, or taken to the farm?

E We were at the farm, unfortunately only a very short period of time because the persecution did not stop and was not limited to Humenné. It was done all over Slovakia, and while we had a little bit of, of...

B Breathing spell...

E Brief, or breathing spell being taken there, we stayed there only a few months.

B From May to September.

E May to September to be exact. As a matter of fact, one of our cousins with her two young children who was living at that time on Aryan papers. Her husband was already, at that time, taken away, and she with her two children was able to get, eh, Aryan papers, and she was just literally going from place to place.

B Maybe we should stop here for a second to just to comment on the papers. You see, what happened is that, as I mentioned before, in a small town like Humenné, you couldn't just disappear. People had to move into other communities once we started learning that being taken is not the, exactly what we thought it is, just a labor camp 1941. So, it became a, quite a way of

getting, hiding is by buying false birth certificates and, and in Slovakia, you could actually get from churches certificates testifying that you are either a Roman Catholic or a...

E For money...

B Russian Orthodox, obviously. So people who decided to hide would buy those papers and go to other communities where they wouldn't be recognized. But just in case they would be stopped for, to, to present ID's, they would then be able to show that they were not Jews, particularly women, of course. Okay, I'm sorry.

E The experience I was just about to mention was quite a most horrifying, probably, experience at those early days. Namely, our cousin and her two very, very young kids, the kids couldn't be at that time older than maybe, one six and the other one...

B No, they were my age. The oldest was my age, and the other one, so that was about fourteen and twelve.

E Be that as it may, ah, they were staying with us for several weeks, ah, at, but at one point, she, the mother and the kids and us felt that it's becoming dangerous for her to stay on, and she decided to move on to another, to the next hiding place. And we were cautious enough not take her to the railroad station, so then we don't give any clue that she is Jewish or anything like that. She went to the railroad station with her two kids by herself, but, unfortunately, somebody must have recognized her, because as the train was to be pulled off, she was taken off the train with her two kids and thrown into

a jail, and on this particular date, they had what we had in our town every Thursday, they were, they were picking up Jews for deportation. But, here in this instance, was even worse. They gathered about 30 Jewish people, including kids, women, old and young, and they take them out to, they took them out to a forest. They made them dig a large, large hole, and they shot every one of them and buried them right there in this hole, which alas, as I say, to us, at that time, the most shocking direct experience which we experience, which we had right in front of our eyes, and happening to some members of our own family. You cannot imagine how it affected us, and we stayed on for a brief period of time, and then one day, Hitler, the Hlinka Garda representative came to our home to pick us up. Go ahead, you were going to interject something.

B No, I said that shortly after that unfortunate incident, we were picked up and ah, we were taken to Malé Dvorany, where that farm was, was between the two towns, Piešťany and Nitra. We were taken to Nitra and thrown into a jail where they were collecting people from the surrounding areas as the leftover Jews, and we spend there, a few days. While we were there, there were two incidents that we recall. One was that one day, they picked up all the men, put us into a truck and took us out into a forest, gave us shovels, and they start, let us start to dig, a, quite a large hole.

E You can well imagine what came to our mind immediately, because it was, what, a couple of months after the experience we had with our cousin. Go ahead.

What did you think, Emery?

E I was fifteen at that time, and as I was digging this hole, I remember it was raining, and SS men who were supervising this great affair, took our jackets to put on their heads to protect themselves before the rain, but rain was the least of our concern. I remember things went through my mind, being a fifteen year old kid, and knowing that I will die in the next few minutes, it just went through my short history of life and was convinced that this probably last hour of my life, and so on, as it turned out, when we were finishing up, one of the SS men made the statement, "This is not for you," which we didn't believe but to our surprise, the loaded us back into the trucks and back to the jail cell, and from there, we were next day taken on to Nitra, correct?

Bernie, do you remember what went through your mind when you were in the middle of that?

B Basically the same thing. We, we were, I remember shaking in our boots while we were digging and ah, knowing that, we were absolutely and definitely convinced that when the hole is deep enough, we will just be lined up and shot right into, in there.

Did you think about running?

E What this is done for, really, is just strictly to, to demoralize us and to scare us, because there was no purpose for the hole as it turned out.

B Well, we don't know, of course. They may have had some, ah...

E Prepared others.

B Either for some others, or perhaps they had some, ah, other political prisoners that they were trying to execute, or possibly some soldiers. We don't know.

Did you think about running away?

B There was no place to run.

E There was no way. It was impossible.

B First off, it was an unknown territory to us. It was in...

E But we were surrounded continuously.

B Yeah, we had as many SS guards on us as people who were digging. There wasn't a big group, there may have been about 20 people, all 20 men possibly.

E Maybe 30 maximum.

B If you consider Emery and me men at the age of 14 and 15. A...then that's what include maybe total we were twenty.

B But in Nitra, when we got back to the biggest surprise that we had at that point in our life, ah, we stayed home for a few more days. And during the day, every once in a while, they came to us for people to work and as a reward we would get some extra, extra, extra food. So one morning, I volunteered and as a matter of fact, I wound up bathing the dog of the jail master. And a...when I came back in the afternoon, the jail was empty. Everybody was taken to the gathering point which was Sered, not too far away from that area. Obviously, I cried bitterly. I was the only one left and the guard consoled me. He said, "Don't worry, you won't be here too long, they will take you too." Of course, he didn't know that at that point, not knowing anything else except being heartbroken for my family, I wished they would take me right there and then

so that I could join my family. That happened several days later, actually about a couple of weeks later. And in the process, since I was the only at that point left in jail they made me work in the kitchen where I happened to be befriended by the chef. And he took me under his wings and made sure that I am not over worked. It just so happens that shortly after I started working for him, it was Yom Kippur, and while he was trying to give me food, I refused. So when he asked why I explained to him that it's Yom Kippur, I explained to him, it's a holiday, we don't eat. So he immediately said if you don't eat you can't work. You gotta stop, you come when you may eat. He says, "Come and I'll give you dinner." And I went into jail. I went to sleep. I was awakened and beaten up and told to go back to the kitchen to work. So then he just told me to sit down on the side and he protected me for the rest of the day. But anyway, shortly after I was...they gathered some more people. There was a transport going to Sereb, where I arrived only to be told that my family was taken a couple days earlier to go to Poland.

Who told you?

B Ah, it so happens, I remember the fellow's name. It was Brenif. He was from here...he was made a inner block, a block policeman and he stayed on.

E He was a landsmann of ours.

B A fellow from our town, from Humenné. So he instantly recognized me. As a matter of fact, if I, the memory is not exactly the keenest on that, but I think you left a message for me with him.

E Just in case you come.

Bernard Klein
Emery Klein

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B Ya, that if I come to...

E I remember, we were very concerned, I wonder if we ever see him again. It was just an absolutely crazy situation, never knew what happens next minute. And not having Bernie with us was...

B If you can anything during those years a miracle, then it was really a miracle that when I was taken about three or four, maybe a week later, to Birkenau...

E How we...

B And went to the same places...

E ...joined up and how we survived.

B I ran into my father and my brother, as I mentioned earlier at the beginning of the interview that once we reach Birkenau, I never again... Well, once I stayed behind in Nitra, I never again saw my mother and my sister or my aunt who was with us at that time, and, ah, it was really a miracle that later on I ran into my father and my brother.

Emery, what happened when they came to take you, your parents, and your sister, and your aunt away when Bernie was doing his labor?

E Oh, you're talking in Sereď?

Right.

B No, in Nitra.

In Nitra.

E In Nitra, rather. We were just, we were in a jail cell, and we were thrown in, into cattle cars to a point where you, never mind couldn't sit down, you could hardly stand. Just jammed in to way over capacity, and taken to Birkenau.

Again, comfortless, [laughs] not something what we wanted. The fear, where are we going, what will be next, was obviously most, foremost in our mind, and we were transported into Birkenau, and I think earlier in the interview I mentioned to you as I rode there and this parting with our mother and sister who..

Could you describe it?

E ...were...

Describe the parting when the doors opened.

E When the doors opened, they ordered us and they were SS men.

B It was night, always night.

E Always nighttime, with bayonets and with, with guns, supervising, obviously the procedure, and they said men on one side and women with children on the other side right at the, right at the...[pause]...railroad station.

B At the ramp where we arrived.

E At the ramp, and then, the men were marching in...

B With floodlights all over aimed at us.

E And dogs, big dogs. And the men were marched into the camp site, and the women, obviously, we never saw anymore, and eh, and eh, we came into the building. We came in to, em, to a shower room where they...First they told, they brought us into a room, and they told us to drop our clothing in front of us, step four, four step aside...

B Actually, it was a big, big shed with cement floor and a tin roof.

E Right. Before the shower room, and this was the last time that we saw our clothing, so any idea anybody had to hide something, there it went, because, there we were, completely naked, and then the next room or the next procedure was, we were shaven from head to toe, and from there proceeded into the shower room, and in our case, fortunately, water came from the shower heads, as we learned subsequently that our mother and our sister and many other unfortunate, not only women, but men who were older and who they felt are not really, somebody who they can take advantage of their labors of, we know, and it was said enough about it that from the shower heads instead of water, gas came, but as far as we were concerned, we were showered and then taken to the next room where we were assigned at one window a pair of pants, the next window a shirt, and third window a jacket and a pair of shoes and so on. Naturally, not to size, but whoever got what and then tried to trade among ourselves to get the closest size to our, for our needs. It was interesting story to the clothing which you got, eventually we were sent into or to our barrack, and the pair of pants which I was assigned were the short, so my father, when trying to lengthen my pants, to his amazement found a gold coin.

In the cuff?

E In the cuff which he lowered. [Laughs] This gold coin which he was afraid to keep, number one, and number two wanted to make, put to use, he gave to a Jewish Blockälteste who was in charge of the, of the barrack which we were in for which he gave us every day an extra slice of bread for each of us, which

obviously, a little thing like this, as unbelievable as it may be, might have been the difference between us being here or not being here, because the nourishment we got in those days was so nominal and so little that a slice of bread or an extra bowl of soup really could make a difference between surviving or not surviving, so by, really by [laughs] sheer, sheer coincidence, this coin and the use, my Dad, our Dad made from that coin.

At what point did you find out about your mother and your sister and your aunt?

E Obviously, there were people in Birkenau who were there already for a long time who came from the 1942 transport...

B Ya, that was the amazing part, that we run into a couple of young fellows,

E From our town.

B Young boys who were taken, from our town, who were taken in 1941, yet. They happened to survive and wound up to various camps, they wound up in Birkenau. Unfortunately, the, we didn't have contact. I remember we were separated by a fence, by one of those electric wire fences between two camps, but we once were able to talk to them through the wires, and we had little other contact. We, for some reason, we never saw them again, and, ah, they, of course told us to some extent as to what's going on...

E They told us, when you see the chimneys burning, this is where, this is where...

B People are exterminated.

E People are being exterminated, and from day number one, our concern was, was our mother and our sister among us, among those which were exterminated, and again learning about the procedures from these fellows that the mothers which wanted to go with their children really ended up in the gas chamber. We knew we have, as much as we wanted to believe that our mother, at least, if not our sister, will survive, we knew that the chances really were very slim for it, because we knew how our mother felt and how close she was to us and to our sister, and we could, realistically hardly believe that she would have, say, that she will separate from our sister.

How did you regain contact with your father and Emery?

B When I arrived in Birkenau, and being coached, which we talked about earlier, to say that I am 19 years old and a Landwirtschaftarbeiter, farm worker, I was sent to the right rather than the left, and I wound up in Birkenau, and of course, a tremendous concentration of people, and, ah, next morning, we arrived during the night, and after going through the bathing and the clothing and being shaved and so on, next morning on the Appellplatz, every morning we had to go out on the Appellplatz to be counted, head count, happened to notice my father and my brother, of course, to tremendous joy under those circumstances, and the problem only was that I was assigned to a block and while there were no names at that point, and neither did we have any numbers yet tattooed on us, they all that was, all that mattered was head count.

Whenever a head count was taken, the head count had to be right or we would have trouble, so after a couple days, my father managed to find somebody

who was willing to trade me for whoever they had, and we traded places, so I wound up in the same block, and from that point on...

E We were together.

B We were together, and of course, our next problem came when they came to select. Usually the laboring, labor camp Nazis came to Birkenau to select people that they wanted to use for labor, and whenever a selection was going on, we had to line up in front of our block and uh, watch who was selected and who not, so quite often it happened that two of us would be selected, and at that point our cousin, we had one more cousin attached himself to us and wanted to stay with us. So...

E In order to have the protection of my father again, because we were kids.

B Right, so it took quite a while before we were able, he four of us, to jump or hide or, or, or manipulate so that all four of us were selected together which happened, I think sometimes toward the end of October, and we were taken to Gleiwitz 4. Gleiwitz at that point had apparently, we were not aware of the others, but we were called Gleiwitz 4, so apparently the had three other labor camps, and that's where we wound up.

E This was where the factory was to repair the railroad cars which came back from the front I mentioned earlier.

B When we arrived there, in Gleiwitz, and ah, again, an indication as how we could no possibly survive without our father, when we arrived there, we were supposed to, we were given a manual labor, of course, they were beautifying

the camp, and we were to dig some kind of a man-made lake and take the material out...

E Carry heavy, heavy woods and stones...

B ...and then logs we had to carry. It was a terrible type of job, and uh, our father always tried to watch out when we are watched and were not, but he particularly told us when we had to dig that type of a lake, he, and we had the Nazi guards in the back of us watching us, besides telling he's not watching now, take a rest, he also told us, whenever you work, I mean, don't try to take a lot of dirt on the shovel, but just a few drops. As long as your hand moves, he says, they'll think from the back that you are working, and that's the way we were able to preserve a little energy, or preserve ourself altogether, because if you wouldn't be working, the consequences would be anywhere from bad to worse, and ah, then you recall the incident that ah...

E Ya, I mean, what happened there was, even these who were left alive were tortured mentally, if not physically by, by you know, by those Appells and by the head count, and, and by, by practically no food. We were woken up for no reason at all very early in the morning to line up for a count and then left outside at that time, it was very much in October, the cold, and though we, we generated some heat for ourself by huddling together, and, and let's say 7:30, 8:00, brought us so-called breakfast was literally a bowl of warmed up soup, also not hot...

B Black water instead of coffee...

E Warmed up, ya, morning was coffee. Which was repeated at noon by warmed up so-called soup.

B There was actually a type of shortage of food in Germany. The Germans themselves didn't have very good coffee, so you can well imagine what type of coffee they would give us.

E There, they found all kinds of work for us, just again, torture us as much as possible, physically, mentally, and every day, there was a selection where, where Dr. Mengele, who was the camp doctor...

B You're going back to Birkenau.

E I'm sorry. I went back to Birkenau. Yeah, you're right. I'm back at Birkenau. That's where actually Dr. Mengele did his selections practically every, not practically, every day, and every day certain people were selected for the crematorium. But coming back to Gleiwitz, in Gleiwitz, eh, my father, ah, found out that there are some people assigned to kitchen work and Bernie being the youngest, he was made the decision taking his life literally into his hand, to approach the Camp Führer.

B Lagerführer.

E Lagerführer. To ask him to put Bernie into the kitchen. Just approaching was something unheard of for a Jew to start with, apparently [laughing] he must have shaken up so much by this request, that he, he granted it, and luckily for all of us, he assigned Bernie to become a Kartoffelschäler.

B Kartoffelschäler.

E Kartoffelschäler or potato peeler.

- B** Peeling potatoes.
- E** Whereas my father and myself were assigned to a night shift to work in the factory. So this, I know if it can give you an idea, as to the type of nourishment we got, and no rest, to work at night and during the day you stop sleeping being bothered by all kind of Appells, and here again, ah, Bernie, you can pick up from here...your part.
- B** Ya, being in the kitchen, of course there was a lot of food that the prisoners never saw and never had access to, but I was able to get some extra bread. You couldn't, you know, hot food was not, we were not able to get out, but bread and potatoes and some vegetables, I was able to either steal or get, again, strictly by coincidence, the, one of the prisoners in charge of the section where I was working in the kitchen happened to be a landsmann from Czechoslovakia. Which was the fact that I was from Czechoslovakia and he was from Czechoslovakia besides being camp brothers, we became instantly, he being much older than I was, he became, he became instantly my guardian and would give me extra food whenever he could get a hold of it. And ah, since my brother and my father were working during the night, I was working during the day, we had to make up a meeting time during the day after they would sleep so that we can see each other. And during those meetings, usually it was in the latrine, we would, I would bring out whatever food I would be able to either steal or get extra. Hide it under my jacket and then hand it over to my father. He was usually the one that I met. In fact, at one point I remember that he was sick, and he was in the clinic then. And one day

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we were caught. And all I remember is that I was told by the Nazi guards to run while he really hit my father and I was only hoping and praying that I'll see him next day and fortunately I did. And ah,...

He beat your father while you were running...

B Yes obviously, yes. I don't know why he don't...see like even when he stopped, the Lagerführer, as we mentioned, he was always waling through camp with his dog. And I remember the name's dog was Zieta, and he used to...and whenever he would, it was a sport. The dog was trained just to grab hold of a prisoner's jacket and not to bite or anything like that, but just enough to hold and scare the wits out of him.

E Scare them.

B And I remember when father stopped him. Okay, and then he says, "Now, go." And then immediately he would say tot he dog, "Zieta, fass," hold on and that's how the mental torture was going on constantly.

You were in the infirmary?

E Yes, I had the sore throat and ah, I was advised that I should go into the infirmary, and to my amazement and shock they suspected that it was diphtheria and they, they kept me there and I was convinced that this is the end. I mean having an infectious disease, [laugh] that's all you need. But because again, a strange reason, experimentation, whatever you want to...they took a, a what they did a sampling and they had to send in to the nearest town, and in the interim, I was kept in the, in this little hospital and ah, being young and eh, wanting to, to get again exercise of bread, which was the highest

reward you could get, I tried to be helpful by sweeping up and so on and, and ah, stay there. But again, my most shocking experience, I will never, never forget, eh, was to observe, eh, an incident. I should mention first that every day when the doctor came I, after a few days, I saw what was happening that he made different, different marks on the patient's chart and there was a certain mark, and the patient never woke up in the morning because he was injected with poison. The incident I was referring to, which I will never forget, that my neighbor was lying next to me. Must have been a man in his probably in the fifties, and he got his mark and I knew that in the morning he won't wake up, which was the case, but the more shocking thing was for me, which was the case, but the more shocking thing was for me to see how people were dehumanized by all this. When his son came to see his father the next morning, and he was told his father is dead, the first question was, where is his bread ration, and they made animals out of people, in that people were so hungry for a piece of bread, that was his number one concern, and the second was to reach in his father's mouth to see if he can pull out the gold tooth so he can sell it for another slice of bread, but this is what, what was, what was done to people...

You survived the infirmary.

E We survived, yes.

You, you were not kept in the infirmary?

E Oh ya, I was released to, again, you know it was to, to my amazement, the, the, the report came back, it was negative, and they let me out.

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- B** You know, there were such extremes that it's difficult to, never mind to explain, but...
- E** No rhyme or reason to some of these things...
- B** Because, if you stop and think, the type of work that Emery did, or that I did was certainly not important to keep, if you were sick, and with all this extermination going on, why bother having a clinic.
- E** Or why bother with somebody who was even suspicious of diphtheria.
- B** Not only that, but...
- E** When you were killing healthy people all along.
- B** Right, you know, it's beyond comprehension, but I mentioned to you that I was beaten up on Yom Kippur in a Nitra jail, I just happened to recall now, that when I was slapped, when my face was slapped, my glasses broke, and fortunately the front frame stayed intact with the lenses, so I made myself wire handles. When I got to Birkenau, no into Gleiwitz, I'm sorry, I was sent to the clinic, and I got a new frame. So absolutely bewildering why they would, eh, care about me having glasses altogether, never mind having them in good shape.
- E** I suppose somewhere was for picture taking and for sending in and keeping the world under false...under the false.....Right [both talking]
- B** I don't recall ever seeing anybody ever visiting or caring about this as to what's happening to us and what isn't happening to us. It's just, ah, I don't know, as I say, it's very difficult to understand.

Do you recall any incidents, specific incidents, while you were in Gleiwitz where you or your father, um, had a, a dangerous close call, closer than normal say.

E I had in Gleiwitz an experience before we were assigned to, to work in the factory. We were doing different work. We were carrying some things into a cellar, and in the cellar there were potatoes. Naturally, anything resembling food was of such value that I didn't hesitate to fill my pockets with potatoes. This was enough reason to be shot. Fortunately, as I was walking out, and again, these things do not forget, a metal staircase, I was slapped so hard that I was quite like a ping-pong ball between the two walls, and again, why didn't shoot me or didn't' send, didn't send me back to crematory, I don't know, but, eh, this was one of another lucky breaks I got, painful, but still lucky that I remained, remained alive.

B No, by the same token, the incident I mentioned when I, when we were caught, me handing the bread, the stolen bread to my father was cause enough for both of us, to be shot, so it was a matter of the individual's whim that happened to catch you. If he was one of those that, eh, trigger happy, and wanted to kill you, he could have done that right on the spot. There was no trial or jury necessary. Then again, if it was the kind, kind of individual who felt like a slap in the face or a kick in the behind is enough, that was the punishment. They all knew very well that our constant punishment and harassment is, ah, perhaps it's more punishment to stay on and suffer than to ah, be put out by a bullet. Who knows the philosophy of those guys. It will probably never be figured out, and ah, this is the way we went, from day to

day. We really did not have any assurance or any kind of an inkling what will happen next day. It was just a matter of surviving from hour to hour, more or less.

E In those days, eh, I recall again when the bombers were above us, the Americans or the Allies, we were not concerned that we would be hit by the bombs. The Nazis were immediately taking shelter. Our hope and pray was that there would be bombing, and, or hope and pray naturally was that one day, soon enough before we are dead, that the Germans will lose the war.

This is the only really...

B We were hoping to see the camp leveled regardless whether we were in it or not.

E Oh, we were never afraid of, of something which, eh, could hurt the Nazis just as much as us, and we were praying for the bombers to bomb, but, eh...

B As I mentioned that the, most anything and everything while we were prisoners in camp was the individual whim of the Nazis, but by the same token, after I finished my duty in the kitchen, I don't know how it came about, but I was transferred to the same factory as my father and Emery were working, but surprisingly, which is another shocking surprise, they decided, most of us in the kitchen were transferred there, and we were mostly young kids, fifteen year old. They decided to start a tool making class right in the factory, and there was about twelve of us I recall that they gave us a piece of steel, and they, in fact, the first thing we were working on is to shape a

hammer out of an raw piece of steel. Don't ask me why, because I don't know.

Who taught you? Was it...

B The German, ah, ah, workers, or they decided to start teaching the young Jewish prisoners how to become tool makers while every day we went, and we went into, like into our classroom, there in a separate section.

So you were supervised by, by civilians. German civilians.

B No, we were supervised, the over, we were taught by civilians workers, but we were supervised by the Wehrmacht, and that's where I had the kindest experience, and it ah, it's worth mentioning, ah, it was an elderly man, and one day, he, he was always walking around us and never, never punished us, never said, never had a harsh word to say. He was standing there and doing his duty, looking at us. But one day, he suddenly looks around and very secretly hands us a bag and, ah, he told us in German that his wife is sending these to us. We opened the bag, and we had cookies. He brought us cookies which was, a real treat in those days.

E Again, it should be mentioned that there were, unfortunately the majority was bad, but there were some good Germans in the factory where I was working the night shift, being not even sixteen, and certainly not being a tool maker, and I was given a soldering, soldering iron to, to fix railroad cars [laughing], which I knew nothing about. Again, through the intervention of my father who talked to my German foreman, was a civilian who in charge of that particular work, and he pleaded with him to try, eh, protect his son as much as

possible, and he promised him, I remember, that after, if the war will be over, that he has all kind of property at home, and he will be glad to reward him with anything. This man wants to, just to save his son. But they guy, obviously, was a, was a good person, because, if he wouldn't be, he would have reported my father by even talking to him, or trying to interfere, or he could have very easily gotten rid of me, because I was really not productive to the point that I should have been, being a kid, and certainly not knowledgeable in the work which I was asked to do. [Sigh] There are many ifs, questions which cannot be answered. Some of the things which Bernie described, thinking about it, the only logic you could put to it is, that they did it for, for, to, to, to hide the, the, the mean, the horrible things they were doing for purposes of publication like Bernie mentioned, again for the Red Cross, and so on, because in those days, they were trying to hide very much what they were doing, obviously, and maybe by little things, eh, a little school or what have you, a hospital, which I'm sure... they.

B Well, I don't, scientific research they did to, to do certain things, but for instance, every morning, we, there was a band playing while we were marching to work and a band was welcoming us coming back to camp. Of course, maybe that was in line with a sign that said "Arbeit mach das Leben zu" or "Leben frei" okay, which means work makes your...

E Life sweet.

B ...life sweet and free. So perhaps, that's the kind of philosophy they were applying.

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Do you remember what, ah, you thought in light of all this? You said you, it was an hour to hour situation. Do you remember if you thought about that in those terms?

B Just a very “don’t give a damn” attitude probably, anymore, because we...

E And a very, very nominal hope that...

B In fact, I recall an incident, ah, that, ah, that was still in Birkenau, just talking about hope. One of the fellow prisoners was with us, a religious man, from Humenné, Fried, and as soon as he got his ration, we used to separate it, because that was to last all day, so most everybody took a little bit and saved the rest for a little later, to eat later. He usually used to eat, his ate his one immediately. He says, “I’m not gonna save it, because maybe by this afternoon the Moshiach [Messiah] will come,” and we remember, we used to laugh, you know. There is a man who believes that the Moshiach will come, that we will ever get out of there, but as we knew, that this is, who knows? Totally uncertain, and, ah, moment to moment, any, for any reason, or for no reason whatsoever, we can be dead. So, I guess we were just pathetic and [pause]....stopped thinking probably. I, it’s hard for me to say, especially being as young as we were, and, ah, after all these years, I can only assume that we just didn’t think. We just went on, and, ah, we survived.

Under what circumstances did you leave Gleiwitz? The Russians were coming.

B Right.

E Right. We described, I think on this for you before, that they started...The, the front was advancing, so the Germans started to march, and they took us with

them, and again, very few of us survived that march, because it was, eh, walking many, many miles a day without any food or nourishment being as weak, physically, as most of us were.

It was your father, cousin and two of you.

E Right. Then, then another cousin joined us.

B Well, he didn't join us, literally. My father literally saved him on his own back.

E It's true.

B He, it so happens that when the evacuation of Gleiwitz started, when they lined us up for marching, another cousin of ours who we found there, in Gleiwitz, was in the clinic, and I guess my father knew that if we leave him behind in the clinic, he'll never make it anyplace, so my father went into the clinic, took him, and our cousin couldn't walk. He had something wrong with his foot. I don't recall exactly what, and my father really and literally carried him all, all through the march to save his live.

E And then, he ended up walking with us home, which walk we described to you before.

Do you remember any other incidents on the death march either that your father may have helped you out or seeing people shot along the side?

E Oh, people were shot every hour, every, all the time, and at night, we were again crowded into a room where was definitely no sleeping facilities or anything like this, and there were so many people pushed into a room that there was barely room to, to stand or lean against each other, and next day

continue. But fortunately, the pressure which the Russians put on was so great that they, that the Germans fled at one given point which was in, eh, in Blechhammer?

B Yeah.

E They left us one morning. We found, we came out that they are, we didn't believe it, that the Germans are gone.

B Well, we knew it. The army, the bulk of the guards left. The only one that was left for another day or so, were the under fence, they had every 100 feet or so, there was, ah...

E Lookouts.

B Lookout. And those were the ones that were stay hanging on and in fact, they were shooting into the camp but, ah, during the night they disappeared too. So we were actually left alone.

Were these SS men, or were they Wehrmacht?

E This was mostly SS.

B I don't know, SS yeah, young soldiers.

E And I think to describe to you what happened after when everybody started to run toward the warehouses and tried to, to, to get the food which they didn't see.

B Chaos broke out of course, first. I can't even say that it was jubilation we were being freed, because I don't think we could...

E Comprehend it even.

- B** That what is happening. All we knew is that the Germans left and ah, we broke into the warehouse and ah, I don't know if you mentioned the incident where you almost got killed, ah, trying...he was one of the....Heros [laughing].
- E** Heros, running into the warehouse trying to bring out some food and everybody started grabbing from him and he wound up on the bottom of a big piling. He could have been, he could have suffocated from the mass of people lying on top of him, trying to grab the food that he grabbed. I ended up with empty pockets and empty hands because people were so hungry for the food...And as I mentioned before, what, what they did with people, is completely dehumanizing them, dehumanizing them by all this.
- B** Well...To weakness also. People had no energy to do anything. The sanitary conditions broke down completely. And that's what make us decide to...
- E** To leave immediately.
- B** About two or three days later after the...we felt that the Germans are totally gone. That we are going to leave. We, I think my father was instrumental in organizing about 10 or 11 of us into a small group and say, "Let's go." We had no idea, no maps, no compass. We had no idea where we, are. But for some reason we just, I don't know how, we figured out the direction that we should going.
- E** And we did.

- B** Actually we mentioned to you, Bernie mentioned to you, the, or, or the encounter with first Russians. But eventually, eh, in Poland we run into or came across a Czechoslovakian army.
- E** That was close to the Czechoslovakian border.
- B** Border. And we ended up coming home on a Czechoslovakian army truck. Which had gained through luck, we run into a Jewish boy who was an officer in the Czechoslovakian army and who assigned a truck for us to take us back home to Humenné. And this was quite an experience coming back and, an...
- E** It was February 8, 1945. I recall the day. And we went immediately...we slept over at a cousin's of ours the first night who was home. She was a pharmacist.
- B** She was in hiding.
- E** She was in hiding in the forest so she came home. She was already home because Humenné, at that time was already liberated. The war was still on. But Humenné was liberated by the Russians, so she was home. And next morning, we went to examine our home and we found that there some poor servants were still living in the house and a...
- B** They deserved the house...
- E** And we immediately moved back into our home and ah,
- Were they pleased to see you?**
- E** Yes, yes. I would have to say that they were.
- B** Yeah, at that point, I'm sure they were because, ah...
- E** And we were such novelty in town. We were the first to, first returnees.

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- B** We may have been the very first ones to return from actually Birkenau, Auschwitz, from those types of concentration camps.
- E** We certainly were the first ones in that part of the country...
- B** Because it was early February it was, as a matter of fact, most people in Humenné that survived the war were not back home, it was only a handful of young people who were in the woods with the Partisans...
- E** Jewish people.
- B** Jewish, yeah, that's what I'm talking, the Jewish people. There were very few young ones, maybe a dozen that were at that point back home. So we definitely were, if not the first, one of the very first families to come back from Auschwitz, or from Birkenau. And naturally, the stories were endless in those days.

Did you expect to find your mother?

- E** There was always, always a secret hope.
- B** Secret hope constantly.
- E** Always. For a long period of time.
- B** The fact that she did not survive, nor did our sister and many of the other families was slowly sinking in of course.

How did your father react when you got home? What did he do?

- E** He, again being very practical minded guy, he knew or realized we have to start a new life. And stop waiting that, for any miracles or Manna to fall, he immediately started to trade. Realizing that there is, eh, great shortages of food in our part of town, whereas there were certain things available

elsewhere. He bought a little truck and went and bought certain produce and food which was not available in Humenné, and brought it home and opened a little, ah,...I can't even say store, because it was in our home, in a room where we were selling these things from the almost, from the second week when we came back. And eventually we got in, back to...to...to business in a more normal organized way.

We have some photographs of how...

- E** Yeah,...this house...this house is...
- B** Well, this is first of all, our father. And this is taken...sometime after the war.
- E** This is a picture...in either 1945 or '46.
- B** No, I don't think it's '45. I'd say it was a little later.
- E** Maybe later because he already, his back is colored and gained some weight back. This is a picture of three of us which was taken in 19...it says here exactly, 1st of January 1946. This is another picture of the three of us in winter, in the same, same date. Uh, we became very quickly active in, ah, Bernie and myself in the..
- B** Zionist organization.
- E** The Zionist organization which, ah...
- B** Well, actually we belonged to it before. As kids, uh..
- E** As kids because we belonged to the Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsa'ir at that time. And after the war, we being one of the few people back, we were approached to join. As it turned out that Bernie and myself, we became so called the leaders

of the movement in, in Humenné. This picture happens to be one of the camp picture of Moshavah, to which we went practically every summer. And, ah...

B This was a national gathering.

E Right.

Where was this?

B This was in either Drienova, unfortunately it's not inscribed, or in Dombrád either in 1946 or 1947. We went, all the young people that belonged to the Zionist organization, particularly the Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsa'ir would have yearly, annual camping summers and this is where we went and ah... We're getting further indoctrinated about making Aliyah.

E This was really the reason why we insisted ah, our father who meantime remarried, that we should go to Israel. His aim was to go to United States to join his sister.

E We had other relatives in the United States.

B His sister, our aunt, lived in Detroit from early 1930's.

E Mrs. Friedenburg.

B 1920's, I believe she came over here.

E While we also had other, our uncles were still alive in Omaha. And had other relatives but we were quite determined to go to Israel.

When did you go?

B I was the first one to leave and ah, I went in February of 1949. In those days, that was a group of us young people leaving Humenné, together with people from other parts of the country. And we went at that time with the idea that

we are going straight into the Haganah, because the War of Independence was still going on. As a matter of fact when we arrived, and of course I left early in 1949 with the full assurance that my father and Emery and the rest of the family will follow, ah, when we arrived in Israel we were taken to Beér Ya'agov, which was one of the holding camps from where people were either assigned to residences or the army. And we were told that the army representatives will soon come to take care of us. But instead, next day they came and they said that forget it, we don't need you because we just signed a cease fire. I recall in the triangle, the [meshoolash], that they were still fighting. The early 1949, but it was, the cease fire was signed then, so they didn't need anybody else in the army. So I wound up in Farata, where we had a cousin, I earlier referred to him as he was the first one of the family to make Aliyah.

E Eli Landesman.

B Eli Landesman. So, I went to visit him and ah, next to Farata, where he lived, there was another village that was abandoned. Arabs were on their way when the 1948 war broke out and I occupied by the Muchta's house. Muchta is the a...

E Mayor.

B Mayor, right. Which was a stone, two or three room, little building and ah, I occupied it. There was no water, but I started a farm they by carrying, hand carrying water from my cousin's house which was about ah, I would say about a half a mile distance.

- E** Uphill yet, too.
- B** Uphill, right. However, we did it very happily and gladly knowing that we are free, and that ah, in those days we thought this is Israel. And ah, then finally I got, beg your pardon?
- E** We came out a few months later.
- B** Yeah, finally three months later, in June, the rest of the family came out and we all started farming. We were told that, ah, corn doesn't need water [Emery laughing] so we planted a lot of corn [Bernie and Emery laughing]. He's laughing. Today we can laugh about it.
- E** I remember I was the businessman of the family. I was given the assignment to take the corn to Haifa to sell. What an experience this was. I arrived to Haifa to find out there is an abundance of corn, [laughing]. There's no customers and I had to give away the corn, I remember very cheap, just not to bring it back. But, uh, this was one of the many, many experiences which in those days in Israel, I had experienced.
- B** In may days when I arrived, I had one other advice. I was told there was a shortage of meat. So I was told that raising chicken is a good way of getting yourself busy and besides being possibly profitable, you'll never have a shortage of meat. So my cousin advised me to buy, I remember, an incubator.
- E** He wrote us.
- B** Yeah. And, ah...four hundred one day old chicken. Which I did and through a mysterious disease, two hundred died the first night. [Emery laughing]. So my enterprise was reduced by 50%.

E But he wrote this to us, we were still home, so my dad went and bought the most modern incubator, which in Czechoslovakia those they produced, but between buying and us leaving, and eh, the creed came out that we could not take anything except our personal belongings, but there was still a way to get it out through somebody who was, eh, registered with Haganah, and again I don't think we have the time to go into all this details, but in those days, ah, the Russia and Iron countries, eh...

B Iron countries.

E Iron countries where still very much supportive of Israel because they were fighting the British and ah, again, this we all know, eh, those days the Czechoslovakian army and Czechoslovakian ammunitions where quite instrumental to win the War of Independence. And as a matter of fact, people who were, young people who were registered do go to Haganah, joined the Haganah, the Israeli defense forces were allowed to take certain things which other people weren't. So my father having bought this modern, so called modern incubator, gave it to this young man from the Haganah with the understanding there would be a 50/50 deal when we come out from Israel. In Israel, we would purchase his 50% and we continued Bernie's enterprises, this big incubator which turned out to be not really so up-to-date or modern as compared to the American incubators which already had. But, ah, we tried to manage in Israel with, eh, several different things which ah, unfortunately, didn't work out.

B Despite all the hardships, despite all the hardships and difficulties, I say. We, as I say, we were willing to start our lives there, but it turned out to be an extremely difficult climate and way of life for our father. And finally after a lot of consultation and urging from his sister here from the United States, ah, we agreed that we will leave Israel.

E Actually we had made...

B We thought we were leaving it temporarily, Emery and I. We were still very...

E Actually...

B ...narrow minded.

E Actually...actually we had made an agreement back at home with my, with our father that even though it was not his desire to go to Israel, we will all go to Israel, and give it the best try in the hope that we'll stay there. But the second part of the agreement was if this cannot materialize that we will all agree, as a family, to go to the United States. And as Bernie mentioned, even though our desire, in spite of the hardship, was to remain in Israel, but with keeping our promise to our father, we said we will go then, all to the United States. And that is how we ended up in Detroit.

This is another good place to stop.

B Okay.

END OF PART ONE

BEGINNING OF PART TWO

Okay, when you left Israel, your father, his new wife..

Bernard Klein
Emery Klein

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E Right.

..who he married in Czechoslovakia, and the two of you came directly to the United States?

E No, correction, I did say to Detroit, but really, or, eh, we while we were aiming to come to United States, we couldn't get the visa because we had to wait for the quota and ended up coming to Montreal, Canada.

B From Israel we went to Rome where we were supposed to get our visa.

E Canadian visa.

B Our Canadian visa, because the American visa was long in coming due to the quota. In those days, the event of the quota was still intact, and it wasn't discounted for the tremendous number of people of Czechoslovakian origin who would not be able to use the quota. It was later on adjusted to that fact. So we spent in Rome seven months waiting for our Canadian visa, which was a little difficult for us.

E Namely, the Canadian, eh, Counsel was an anti-Semite, and he would just not issue any visas to anybody from Israel.

B He was trying to find all kind of excuses not to issue the visa. That's why we spent seven months in Rome.

E And they really did not issue it until around...

E Mrs. Friedenburg, here in Detroit, found a very high contact, which literally sent...

B In Canada.

E ...sent a telegram, which I happened to see with my own eyes because I got friendly with the clerk at the Consulate, issue visa to the Klein family without any questions. And that's how we finally got the Canadian visa and we came to Montreal.

Had you thought about staying in Montreal?

B Oh, yeah, definitely, we settled in Montreal.

E We settled there.

B In fact, we found it to be quite pleasant because we ran into a number of friends from, back from home and ah, quite a few young people that we were associating with and ah, we started making a new life there. However, our aunt in Detroit was continuously persisting that now that you are close after all these years, I really would want you to live right next to me. And she kept working at it until finally our father was able to get a visa and he agreed to move to Detroit with the understanding that I, in the meantime, married in Montreal. I married my wife, Agnes is a, is also from Humenné, and I had known her since she was born practically and we went through our childhood years as friends. Our families were friends.

E And you were her Man'heegah, after the war.

B In the Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsa'ir, that's right, I was her leader. Be it as it may, when we came to Montreal, she was already there with her family. So that's why I mentioned there were quite a few, quite a few pleasant things to ah, be, to have in Montreal. And ah, our father decided to move, agreed to Detroit, providing the two of us agreed that we'll follow him. And ah, he left, as a

matter of fact, and we were going on with our lives, particularly, Emery single and not too many obligations, until one day, I don't exactly recall whether it may have been a year later after our father moved, we got a telephone call, it was just a plain ultimatum. Either you coming her or I'm going back. So, I consented that we'll move after discussing it with my wife. That, we had not children as yet.

E I was allowed to stay another two months because...

B Emery dragged it on. We came finally in November of 1956. Agnes and I move to Detroit and then as Emery says, three months later he followed.

E I came, even though I didn't really want to leave Montreal, because I found it to be my new home which I was very much at home and a lot of friends. And a lot of opportunities but being as close family as we were, going through what we did, going through,...[clears his throat]...obviously we consented, I consented also to come here and I'm very happy I did. As history, no? tells the rest.

Do you think that your father was a result, a clear result of the experiences in having lost a family that he wanted you all together?

B No, ever since we can go back, it was always family and nothing else. First family,...so... He wouldn't stay, he wouldn't come, he wouldn't have come.

Let me, um, let's talk a little about your feelings now about the...

E Now, if I may stop you for a minute, as long as we have the pictures, here, so...

Oh, you have your families.

Bernard Klein
Emery Klein

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B Ya, right. To bring a little bit up to date. As a mentioned, I married in Montreal but moved here and the our son, Ronnie was born in 1958, and our daughter, Susan, was born in 1963, and from all of the pictures there, you'll see she is graduating Cranbrook High School. Ronnie, in the meantime, graduated Law School, and he now lives in Chicago, and here we are, and this is my wife, Agnes and that makes up the family.

Are there other pictures?

E The other pictures...this is a picture of my family. I was lucky to find the very fine young lady and a native of Detroit, Diane Yurich, who is now Diane Klein, and I am fortunate to have two fine kids. My son, Jeff, who is now 15, and my daughter, Barbie, who is 14. This happens to be a picture which was taken in, I think 1980, when I was sharing Bar-Ilan dinner, these are the pictures of my son, Jeff, and my daughter, Barbie, their school pictures.

I want to, I'd like to come back to talk about them in just a moment, but, what were and are some of your, ah, feelings about the years from 1940, say, to 1945?

B Well, it's a reality that we cannot forget. It's where, for a while, it was, ah, quite difficult to talk about it. From the beginning, we used to be asked all kinds of questions, but I could see that some of it just went above the heads of the people who asked, and it was, I reached a point where I just stopped talking about it when my kids were growing up, my son, in particular became very engulfed through watching television, the Nazi war movies. He became interested in to my past and to some extent, I, in fact, I remember we used to take weekend trips, go out of town for short trips, and we used to spend the

time driving back and forth answering his questions as to my, our war years. But, subsequently, we have not talked too much about it, and it became just too difficult. In fact, until this interview, I wasn't sure that I will be able to really go and talk about it. It's not because we want to forget or because we did forget. It's just something that, ah, is, ah, a very, very sad part of our lives.

Have you discussed it with your wife who also went through it?

B Yeah, sure.

Emery, what about you? Have you told your children about...

E My children are a little younger, yet, and whenever the occasion arises or opportunity is there, I, I tell them by bits and pieces, and I'm sure that they will want to know much more about it as they become a little bit more, the become a little more mature and older. I have no qualms or reluctance to talk about it. I feel it's important that people [crying] [sigh] for people to know and learn [clears throat] what can happen, and ah, maybe that's why, ah, I'm trying with my everyday life and everything I do to make sure it's my involvement directly or indirectly to make sure that our kids have a more secure future, that there cannot be a repetition of this horrible tragedy [crying].

Had either of you ever discussed it with your father after you came to the United States?

B Well, we obviously talked about it, but, ah, I can't recall any, any specific discussion. It was specially during the earlier after we were liberated, it was a subject. It wasn't even today, we, we even joke about it, that whenever we

need some of the old friends, okay, sooner or later the discussion goes back to 1940, 1941. We always wind up talking about the war years, about our suffering, and the difference between our lives then and now, and most everybody winds up being grateful for having the opportunity to survive to begin with, and having the opportunity to come to a free country like the United States, and be able to raise a new family, and go on, and as Emery said, hoping that whatever we can contribute to making sure that it will never happen again.

Do you have anything you want to add? Other remarks?

B It's amazing, break down at the end. [crying]

E No, we are just very thankful for being able to be here and tell the story [crying], which really, we just very fortunate, and like Bernie says, that after all this to come out, not only physically, but mentally, okay, and, and lead a normal life [trying to control crying] and being fortunate, both having very fine families and lucky for both of us, our families are very, very close, and again, like our father was, we are not only brothers, we also partners in business and are glad to be here [crying].

All right, we'll stop at that. Thank you for the time, the movie and pictures.