

Can I talk now?

No.

Let me return to an earlier question about speaking when you got to the United States. Did anyone ask you questions?

Yes. Yes. I remember when I worked in the shop, in a shop before I got into the real estate business, the people asked me where I was from, and the workers. And I told them that I was from Romania, from Transylvania, Hungary, and that I was in a concentration camp, when my family was murdered.

So casually, people used to ask me that. I mean, when I lived in Dexter Avenue, when I came to the Jewish neighborhood, all the other people used to say, where are you from? What happened? So I used to tell them that, yes, I was in Auschwitz and other camps, and casual conversation lasting a minute or two, but not at depth. And definitely, I always kept it away from my family.

But we didn't talk too much about it. We usually answered the questions we were asked and let it go at that.

So this was your decision, not--

Yes, it was. Yeah. We just-- I think somehow-- it's hard to explain psychologically-- it was such a terrible period of our history that maybe we wanted to perhaps forget it. I'm not sure. It was too horrible to think about or talk about.

Did you think about it?

Oh, yes. There's no question about that. I believe that, speaking for myself and probably for every survivor, the Holocaust is with me day and night. I still have my recurring nightmares about the Holocaust, and about the camps.

And whenever you have, to give you an example, a simcha, my children's bar mitzvahs. I mean, they were happy occasions. But at my table, at the family table, there was no one except me, my wife, and my children, while other bar mitzvahs have got dozens of relatives. So even at a happy occasion it was right there. Where are my parents? The kids don't have any grandparents there.

Did they ever ask you what are-- about their grandparents?

Yeah, yeah, the kids did ask me. As they got a little older, 9, 10, 11, they asked what happened to our grandparents. And I tell them that they died in the concentration camps.

But again, I was so worried not to give them any emotional problems, no trauma about our experiences. So I would say that in everything I do in my life, in my daily life, my behavior, my business or every place else, I always--

To give you an example which might be silly, but they used to call us, the German antisemites all the time, that the Jews did all kinds of bad things, and you did this and that, and robbed us-- like antisemites talk here. In my business dealings, when I have non-Jews sitting across the table, I want to make sure this person never has any reason to say anything bad about a Jew, because I know what they've done to us, even so they were lies. I just want to make sure that-- in other words, I'm looking for good feelings towards the Jews. I'm still working towards I want to make sure that the non-Jewish population feels good, that God forbid no Holocaust would ever happen again.

Are there certain times or places or moments during the day-- you said every day-- that memories, certain memories come back?

Well, I would say that in my lifetime, either I talk to my brother in Israel on the telephone or I write to him, or since I've been visiting Israel quite regularly, and my children go there, it seems to me that an interval, when I read the Jerusalem Post every week, or other Jewish publications, organizations that I belong to. I'm involved very much with Israel. So it

looks like it's a daily-- I would say that my life is sort of occupied somehow with Jewish survival. Every word I read about Israel, it's always in my mind that God forbid, can anything happen there, to have another Holocaust.

Does that bring specific memories back? I mean--

Well, of course it does. I believe many times in my daily life, thanks God, I think that I've been fairly successful. I build a building or a project, I say to myself, good Lord, is this the right thing to do? I never seem to have any cash reserves. God forbid there be a day that my children or grandchildren will have to leave everything behind like the Jews in Europe did. I mean, these things are always in my mind.

I mean, like I said, in a good-- when I do good things and successful things, it's still brings up to me, God, is that ever possible that some Hitler will arise, and my grandchildren will have to leave all this behind and run for their lives.

Why didn't I buy a condo? Many times I sort of blame myself-- and maybe it's not too late-- why didn't I buy a condo in Israel in 1962 when I went to see my brother, when I could have bought it for 30,000. Now it costs 300,000.

Is it possible that, God forbid, someday I'll have to run? Yeah, I think it's with me practically every day. I'm a product of the Holocaust.

Do you remember what went through your mind when your children were born?

Oh, extremely happy. Extremely happy. For me, to get married was most important thing is to have a family. I knew that I was a--

Well, I didn't even know at the beginning that my brother was alive. I didn't find out that my brother was alive until both of my oldest sons were born. So I knew it was my-- I was only one left, and it was my duty to hope. I wanted to have a family, for the Kahan family not to be extinct, to continue.

You found out your brother was alive--

A few years after. I didn't go back to my hometown. And I didn't-- let me see now. Is that correct? No, I'm sorry.

I found out in the displaced person camp before I left Germany from someone who went back to my hometown that my brother was alive. He had two daughters. He had no sons. And I figured it was my duty-- when I went to say it was my duty to continue the Kahan family, because my brother had two daughters. I'm sorry about that.

So when did you contact him?

As soon as I found out in Germany, the displaced person camp. They didn't know his address. The person who told me my brother was alive didn't know his address. I wrote to the city hall. And I did not receive. It was communistly ruled.

And I did not get a letter from my brother till I was in Minneapolis, Minnesota, when someone, a person from my hometown in Israel, knew that I was in the United States. He put an ad in the paper. And I read it in the news, on the Detroit Press, that a gentleman by the name of Beila Berliner is looking for David Kahan in the Detroit area.

I answered that ad. I wrote to him immediately. And he wrote back to me, and he told me that my brother is alive and well, and where he lived. And he gave me his address. And I wrote to him.

That was in 1950, or 1950, when I-- I knew he was alive, and that he had two girls. But he never got my letter from Germany before until I wrote him a letter from-- till this Israeli neighbor found me. I wrote a letter and my brother answered.

And when did you see him?

Oh, I had seen him the last time in 1942.

And what was the next time you saw him?

Oh, in '62.

What kind of reunion was that?

Oh very, very beautiful. Very traumatic. I just-- it was nice.

I had another friend of mine from Detroit, Martin Davis, who came with me to visit his brother. And I remember he saw my brother and I hugging each other. He started to cry because he didn't have nobody.

It was my only person left from the Holocaust. As far as I know still, from Sighet, that area, they all were wiped out. I still don't know any Kahan from my father's extended family, or my mother's that are alive.

Of course, I was very happy to see him. He was happy to see me. And it was a very traumatic, happy occasion.

I visit him every two years. I've been to Israel 11 times. And he's been here a couple of times. He came to my son's bar mitzvah and one of my son's wedding.

And those you said were sort of bittersweet occasions.

Of course. Of course. He's more emotional than I am. And he's religious. And he constantly talks about our parents and about our life at home. Yes, yes.

I'm afraid that hardly-- when I was there in May, visiting my brother, Friday night, we sing the same the same shirot, it's called in Hebrew, before we eat, as we did it at home. You remember when you sang with dad the same-- each different areas have got different ways of singing or saying the prayer.

So my father had it, I think, the Vizhnitzer. He was a Vizhnitzer Hasid. So we sang the same thing, the songs, before dinner Friday night. So immediately we talked about our parents.

So it always brings it back somehow. I look at my children all the time. And they look like my mother. And it's there. It's there all the time. When something is good or bad, the Holocaust is embodied in my brain.

And it's not always good, either, because I'm fortunately, I'm trying to keep even keel and control myself. I love my sons an awful lot. I hug them. They work with me a lot.

But then my-- I get excited easily, and not as patient that I should be. It always reminds me of my experiences.

Now last April, the town of Seeshaupt unveiled a mahnmal, a memorial to the Jews on the train. And you went back at their invitation--

Yes.

--along with some 20 other survivors. How did that feel going back, living in a German home.

It's a very good and very difficult question. When I received a letter from the Holocaust Memorial building in Washington, that in Germany, this little town where I was liberated from the death train in Seeshaupt were looking for survivors that they want to invite to the anniversary of 50 years of liberation, and putting up a memorial, I was bewildered.

Immediately, yes, I want to go there. Yes, I don't want to go there. Why should I go? How can I go? How can I look at

that place again after so many have died in the train?

But after I calmed down, somehow I felt that, yes, I think I'd like to go there. I'd like to be there. Somehow, something inside me, after the immediate bewilderment or surprise was over, I said, I want to see some of the survivors.

I want to take a last look of the place where I was actually reborn, because I wouldn't have lasted much longer. I mean, in the camps, I was already skin and bone. From before they even took us on the train, the starvation on the train. So I think I was at the end.

So I was really reborn then that day. So when I thought about it, I thought that, yes, I'd like to go back. And my wife, I never wanted to go back to Germany to visit. Even so, I did go back once to visit the camps. My wife wanted to go to Germany. And I always said, I'm not interested.

So I thought this time she could come she could come along. And it was another reason that I went along. So I went back, yes, to Seeshaupt. It was very traumatic.

And MÃ¼hlhof.

And MÃ¼hlhof, yes. They took us. Yeah. They took us to MÃ¼hlhof, to our concentration camp where we worked, yes.

To the Hauptbaustelle.

To the Hauptbaustelle. That's it. Was it brought back a lot of memories. Yeah, we took pictures there. There was, of course, new doctor were there with us, and so was Alex Hermann, and the 20 survivors of the death train. It was a very interesting-- we seem to be happy to be together. It reminded us of many things, but we were all glad to be there.

The German people that we stayed with was a younger generation of Germans. They were really helpful. They invited us to-- we stayed in a family of a German-- the home of a German family, the Muellers. They went out of their way to be kind to us. They almost seemed like they were trying to atone for their parents sin.

And those four days were very traumatic, interesting, exciting. I wish I would have-- I wish I would have a better education or be somewhat of a poet to put it into more words. Perhaps you can ask me more questions in more detail.

Well, did you feel somehow you were betraying people?

Yes, I did. Yes. I said to myself, how can you drink champagne? We were invited two or three times to, some of the other hosts that they were called for the survivors, where you were there, and Alex Hermann were there, and we were drinking and talking and having a good time. And constantly, while we were going home, what am I exactly doing? Is this right?

One side of me says, well, these people haven't done nothing. It was their parents and grandparents who murdered 6 million innocent Jews. I can't possibly blame them for what happened during the Holocaust.

On the other hand, I felt that Germany was spoiled with Jewish blood, or spilled the Jewish blood, not spoiled, and then I have no business being there, and particularly having a good time. I'm afraid that it was a pleasant visit.

And I'm still-- I invited our host to visit us in our home. And when I came back I was wondering whether they will come or not, whether it would be better if they don't come. I really don't-- it was a-- I don't know the right word.

It was an interesting, exciting to see the survivors. We went back to the Hauptbaustelle to our camp. We took our pictures, which I'll treasure forever.

And my thoughts are still wondering whether I did the right thing or not. I don't have the right answers, why I did it,

why did I want to go. It's difficult.

Before we finish, is there anything in particular that you want to add?

Well, I believe that I mentioned that earlier, about my feelings about the rest of the Christian world. I lived in this wonderful, wonderful United States. I never missed saying that, because I love it so dearly. It's given me new-- a new home, a new hope.

I got married in 1953. I have three wonderful sons. Names are Douglas, Jeffrey, and Michael. I've been fairly successful in the real estate business. I built a new life here.

Your wife's name?

My wife's name is Terry. I'm sorry. And I am fairly happy. I just hope I live long enough that I have-- I only have one granddaughter. I'd like to have a few more grandchildren.

I'm always hoping that this tape, and the times that I spoke to schools, that perhaps, if just anything will be remembered by, is that the world will remember, and those that do listen to me or to other survivors will try to make sure that no Holocaust will ever happen in the history of mankind again, to any religion or any nation or any people, that you have to speak up when you see injustice done. When you see it, you can't be quiet.

That's what happened in Europe, where even the good Christians or the gentiles who didn't agree with Hitler, or with the Arrow Cross, or the Romanian Iron Guard, but they didn't speak out. And that's why the tragedy was so magnified, and it was so horrible.

For the people to remember that what we're saying is true. Maybe somebody will listen to this tape 50 years from now, and they'll say that human beings could not do such things. And true, it happened. I was there, and hundreds of thousands of others.

And I simply hope that by listening to us, that there'll be a better world of brotherhood, of tolerance, no prejudice, no bigotry, where all religions can live together. And I'm hoping that Israel will survive and prosper. That's going to be a strong thing for the Jewish people, for the survivors. I think that's about it.

OK. Thank you, David.

Thank you very much.