

You can go ahead. Why don't you just state your grandmother's name and the date of birth and place of birth, if you can remember that.

My grandmother's name was Etta Moscovitz.

E-T-T-A?

Yes.

Moscovitz, can you spell that for me?

Let me write it.

OK. You can write it on the back of here.

I think I [INAUDIBLE].

Oh, right. Here.

[INAUDIBLE]. Oh, I'm sorry.

That's OK. No problem.

[INAUDIBLE] my pen [INAUDIBLE].

Do you remember where she was born?

She was born in Volosyanka.

And do you remember how old she was?

She was about 80.

She was 80 years old?

Yes.

And that was-- she was 80, do you remember when?

When they got her-- when they took her to Auschwitz.

In 1942?

Between '42 and '43. I'm not-- I think it's been documented when these people have been taken to Auschwitz from where I come from.

Let's see, so she grew up in Volosyanka .

Volosyanka . And she lived there. You see, Jews lived there for years.

Now she was married to your grandfather, you were telling me about this.

Right. But you know--

Can you tell me his name?

His name was Sander. A matter of fact, my grandchild is named after him. They call him short, Seth.

Set?

Seth, but--

S-E-T?

Yes. T-H-- Seth, S-E-T-H. But at home, they used to call him Sander Moscowitz.

And you said that you're--

He--

--oh, go ahead.

He was 86. That I know for sure, he was 86 because he would cry. And oy what happened to him, poor guy.

Now you said that your grandfather was a very religious man. Was your grandmother also-- she was very religious?

Sort of. But women didn't show it. Women didn't worship as much as men did. He was terribly upset with God that he didn't die. He had no fear of death. He had no fear of death because he was so religious. He felt he goes to-- so he was upset with-- I remember in the ghetto, when they took him-- they took him to the square. But more all the people that had beards-- he had a long beard, not just a small beard, but a long beard. He never cut his beard because of religion. So they got this old man on the square. And they were cutting the beard with scissors. And they were beating on him.

So he was bloody. And my mother was the daughter. So my mother finally got to him-- you couldn't go to rescue him because you would get shot. You wouldn't get beaten up. But you would get shot. So she couldn't go rescue. But then when they were finished beating him up and cutting his beard, they brought him home. And he was just crying terribly. And we thought that he was crying because he was full of pain. His face was bloated and black.

And after a few days, the man just couldn't stop crying. So we told them we understand. He must be in terrible pain from the blows that he got over the head. And he says, no, he really is not in-- he doesn't cry out of pain. But he is not him. He felt so humiliated. So my mother took a scarf. And she put it on his face and tied it on the top. And put his hat on-- a black hat. And somehow that made him feel better and stop crying. So that's how he went to Auschwitz a few days later.

That was right before he went to Auschwitz?

Just before. I just don't understand. I don't understand why they needed to do this him. They knew that he would wind up in Auschwitz. What happened was they kept us in a ghetto until they accumulated enough Jews to put in a transport because the trains were many long.

Do you remember what your father did-- or your grandfather did for a living, what he had worked at before?

Yeah. They had us a store with-- they had a store. They were selling flour there and sugar-- it wasn't a big store.

Like a grocery store sort of?

A small grocery store, yeah. Small-- it wasn't a giant.

And both your grandmother and your grandfather worked there?

Worked there, yeah.

And that was in the town?

Yes.

Do you know when they got married?

No.

And how many children did they have?

Oh, they had 10 boys and 2 girls. And the 2 girls, while I was growing-- when they were still about-- I have pictures of about six 6. And 1 was in the United States. And a few of them died. But they had a lot of children. I have pictures. My mother was the daughter. And then I had an aunt.

Your mother in that family, was she one of the older ones or one of the younger?

In between.

In between, the middle?

Yeah.

Do you remember-- this is probably difficult for you to remember. But do you remember them talking about-- or even your parents talking about when the Germans came to power-- when the Nazis came to power in Germany in the '30s?

Yes.

Do you remember, were they frightened at all? Or were they were they apprehensive?

Very. But I'll tell you, as I talk in the tapes-- you'll see the tape-- we knew somehow-- the Jews have suffered through the last 2000 years, if you know-- I'm sure you know history. But this has never happened before to no group of people. So as much as we were frightened and scared, but we didn't fear actual death and destruction, the kind that has happened. We felt, they're going to take the manpower. And they're going to work them. Or they're going to do things like that. But to take small little kids, and gas them, we did not expect it.

But your parents were scared when the Nazi's--

Yes.

--came to power? They were frightened of death?

Yeah, because what he was saying. He was actually saying what he was going to do. But I think human nature has a way of protecting themselves. They don't want to think of the words.

You said something about what he was actually saying when Hitler proclaimed these kind of things in speeches. Were their radios and that kind of thing in your town, not many?

When we were at the Czech. Then when the Hungarians came in, there was no radio. We had to hand it in, the radios. And the newspaper, it just wasn't-- the news was not available anymore. But there were some people that had hid a radio. And they would come with some news. But people wouldn't even believe such things. You know what I mean? If

the person that had the radio, and they would come, and they said-- they surrounded some Jews and threw them down the balcony or killed them for no reason, it was a little bit difficult to--

To believe?

--to believe in the beginning. But then again and again and again and again, they cleaned out the town. Then they started cleaning the towns. Then we already understood.

Did Germans, refugees from Germany, German Jews, or Polish Jews come into Czechoslovakia? Do you remember seeing any?

No. They didn't. But of course, I don't think that has anything to do with my life. But when the Germans occupied Poland, and we lived near the Polish border at that time, that was-- so the Polish soldiers were going through our town. I [INAUDIBLE].

They came through your town?

Yeah. When they had the war, maybe within a week or 10 days, they occupied Poland. I don't know, maybe two weeks.

Very short time. Yeah.

Yeah. So I remember that.

When did the Hungarians come in and occupy?

'39.

Do you remember, especially-- you told me about the cutting off of the beard of your grandfather and things like that. Do you remember any other instances of antisemitism directed against either your parents or your grandparents or anything like that before?

It was sort of quiet while the Czechs. It was sort of-- we had a democracy. So we were allowed to go to school. Matter of fact, I had an uncle that was a Czech officer. And he was a college graduate because they allowed the Jews to go to school. But when the Hungarians came in in '39, that was already-- the schools were closed for the Jewish kids. And the synagogues were closed.

But I remember we had a teacher-- we were so many children, we had a teacher in the house that was teaching us. They called it a cheder. So they were--

Did your grandparents live very far from you?

No, very close. That was my happiness.

But you didn't live in the same house or anything?

No. But I had very good grandparents. We were also seven kids. So I had loving parents. But I was the sixth child. So I wasn't getting that much attention because there was no time. They loved me. So my grandmother would give me all the attention. She would talk to me. And I remember she was a big comfort to me.

Do you remember what kind of things you talked about?

The fear. Even as little as I was, I remember she feared. She worried when the war will be over and what will happen to us. That's what it comes-- that's what I remember the most.

You remember talking to her right after-- in late '30s?

Yeah. When the Hungarians came in, we already felt that we weren't-- the Jewish young guys were taken to a work camp. They weren't soldiers anymore. Where the Czechs, they did take the Jews to be soldiers. By the Czechs, we were treated like first-class citizens-- not first-- we didn't feel it so bad. We didn't feel it so bad. It's the Hungarians-- when the Germans came, that was already murdered. It was already completely disaster.

Do you remember-- can you describe to me your grandparents' house?

Yes.

Do you remember it and where--

It was a stone house.

--it was situated in the town?

They had a stone house. And they had they had lots of cows and horses and goats. And it was like a family in a smaller town. It was like a normal family-- a big family. And on Saturday, nobody worked. So we would get together. And we would have meals together.

At their house?

At their house.

At your grandparents' house?

Yes. And I'll tell you, me as a child, I thought I was a happy child because everybody-- my uncles loved me. And I was a child. And to me, it looked like it was a happy situation. While I was--

Sure. Was the store that they owned separate from the house, or was it--

No.

It was in the house together?

It was sort of-- here were the living quarters. And there was a long room. And they kept [INAUDIBLE].

That's where the store was?

That's where the store was, yeah.

Can you tell me a little bit about how things changed when the Hungarians came in, especially for your grandparents, how it changed their lives?

You see-- I'll start with my grandparents. That's why it's better when you ask me because I go in from one to another. When the Hungarians came in, the Jews no longer could have stores even. The Jews no longer could do things because when you had a store, you needed a permit. So you couldn't-- they took it away from you. So they had to close the store. And you say, but did they leave? But they had some piece of grounds. And they had these cows that gave milk. And they made the butter and potatoes-- they put potatoes in the-- they had potatoes. It wasn't a wonderful life. And they didn't live in a house like I'm living. They had two rooms.

But they could still survive?

They would survive. To give you an example, my parents-- but the Czechs, they had a backyard store. It was a shoe store. It was--

And this is what your parents had?

My parents had. And they made a living out of that. But as soon as the Hungarians came in, it was taken away from them.

Took the store away? Yeah.

Yeah. I'm just show you because I have--

Sure. Were there restrictions? I know that when the Germans came in to many towns, they put restrictions on what the Jews-- when they could be outside, where they could shop, that kind of-- did the Hungarians do the same thing?

No. We didn't have to wear a yellow star by the Hungarians. Jewish--

I remember in Poland, I've spoken with people, they say, you couldn't walk on the sidewalk. You had to walk in the street. You couldn't do certain things or go in parks or whatever.

When the Germans came?

Yeah.

But you see, when the Hungarians came, they restricted us to a certain extent, that we tried now be invisible. Who went to the park? You wouldn't do that. You wouldn't-- when they wanted to worship, it was a secret. It was in somebody's room. And then you watched. You shouldn't be seen going in there too many times. Then they didn't worship every day anymore. If they could get to it on Saturday, they would be glad to do it. These old religious people because they were afraid of God--

So your grandparents then would worship-- they couldn't worship every day, or they would do it--

He would do it by himself--

By himself, yeah.

--but not anymore in a group.

So they closed the synagogue?

Oh, yeah.

Do you remember anything else under the Hungarians that your grandparents may have had to do? Or were they forced to give up some of their property or any of their livestock or that kind of thing?

Because it was a war, so they were taking it from the non-Jews too, actually.

So they were taking it from everybody at this point?

They were taking it from everybody because the war was going on, and there wasn't enough food. So it wasn't that people lived by laws. There was no law. Any hooligan, if he beat up a Jew, he wasn't persecuted. There was no place to go to complain. There was a place. We did have police. But you couldn't go and complain, somebody beat me up, because you would get more.

Did that happen often? Do you remember people getting beat up and--

Sure. Children-- it was very funny. It was very funny because by the Czechs, when we went to school, we went to school with our neighbors. And who were our neighbors? The non-Jews. And I always thought-- I walk to school with this non-Jewish child. And I really thought, oh, it wasn't-- I always thought it was my friend. As a child, you played with this kid. This is my friend that I play with. But as soon as the government has changed, and gave the red light to vandalism, maybe the people were scared or something. I don't know. So I immediately lost my friend, my playmate. They didn't want to have anything to do with me. I'm just telling you from my point of view, the way I was a child, that bothered me. My father bothered because he didn't have to give us a piece of bread. But--

Did your grandparents ever-- did they ever tell you things like you're saying to try to be invisible? Did they say things like that to you, to not go out in the street at certain times or anything like that?

A child is-- now looking back on it, if there was a wedding-- let's say there was a non-Jewish wedding. By the Czechs, we would go and watch a wedding to a [INAUDIBLE] to me-- I'm talking about I'd like to go and watch a wedding. And so I went. And I watched a wedding. And I came back. I was let free by the Czechs. But when the Hungarians came, my mother wouldn't let me go there anymore. I'm just giving you a small example. She wouldn't let me go because everybody in town knew that I was Jewish. And therefore I was out there [? the ?] [? target. ?] So let's say even there were 10 good non-Jews, but you would always find one that would want to get me over the head, you know what I'm saying?

Let's see, so--

I just gave you an example. Let's say-- lots of examples.

Sure, go ahead.

But I don't want to take too [INAUDIBLE].

No, go ahead.

This was just a child's [INAUDIBLE] especially maybe because I was a little girl, I liked to look at a bride or something. But many things-- at night, definitely you wouldn't go out. Oh, definitely you wouldn't go out. If we needed-- if we went to a store, they would sell us. They would sell us so we had the money. They would. But we're still talking about the Hungarians now or the Germans?

The Hungarians, yeah.

I wouldn't be allowed-- the children weren't allowed no more to go to the store. Sometimes my uncle would give me \$0.25. And I would go and buy an ice cream. I no longer-- they wouldn't allow me to go by myself. They brought it into the house. But at that time, there was no money to-- so at that time, if my mother could get some different things to survive, but they wouldn't let us go out to-- my brother would go and get it for us. And then they also took him away to-- I had an older brother than this.

Oh, than in this photo?

Yeah, I had an older brother. But then they took him away to work.

What was his name, [? your older-- ?]

His name was Larry. My son is named after him. We called him Leibel. But my son is named after him. His name was Larry.

Can you tell me a little bit about when the Germans came, what year it was and what happened, how life changed at that

point?

When the Germans came, they right away said that the Jews cannot-- they could only go out let's say a couple hours a day, not only at night, a couple hours a day. And if you found a Jew on the street, wanting to buy something, you could be shot for that. Or you could be taken away to this concentration camp, which eventually wound up in Auschwitz. And the Jews had to wear the Jewish stars, even children. And then the non-Jews were not allow the cell to Jews or aid them in any way.

You see, they gave-- when the Germans came already, I'll tell you I don't blame the non-- at that time, when I read now-- not I read, but I know that there were some very righteous non-Jews that really what they did, I don't know if I will do it today that I have the children and grandchildren, because when they aide a Jew, they would be taken away to a concentration camp.

If they were caught, yeah.

Yeah. So the punishment was so tremendous of aiding a Jew, that he himself wasn't safe. I'm talking the non-Jew wasn't safe. That was by the Germans.

Do you remember when the Germans came to the town?

I think it was between '42 or '43. But I am not sure exactly.

I can look it up, the exact date.

Yeah, you can-- because you have the town. And I'm sure--

Now you said that you were-- and you told me the story about your grandfather having his beard cut and everything before they were deported.

Yeah. That was after they took us away from home into a ghetto. That wasn't while we were home. But when the Germans came though, they worked so fast. They worked so fast. Within weeks, they took us to a ghetto. And they put us into the gas [INAUDIBLE]

So you were taking away the ghetto within a few weeks of them coming into town?

Yes, within weeks. It wasn't months.

Now, and this-- and they took every Jew in the town? Whoever was Jewish in the town, they took to this ghetto?

Yes. Now you see, it's true-- I always had this color. Now I have to put a little bit of color [INAUDIBLE] because I'm white. But I always was this color. So when I talk, many people ask me, you don't look Jewish. I said, how is a Jew supposed to look? So what happened was the non-Jews handed over to the Germans, you know what I'm saying?

They pointed you out. Yeah.

Yeah. Even we had to have a star of David on the house too. But let's say they didn't know that my parents had seven kids, but the non-Jews-- so there was no place to hide. And they were afraid to hide us because if they're going to find us, then they all go where we are. So it was a no-win situation there.

Can you tell me the name of the town that the ghetto was in?

Uzhhorod. It was a bigger town-- it was a city. I would call that a city already.

How far away from your town was it?



I'm not sure.

Not very far or a long way?

No. It was maybe an hour ride with a train. It wasn't [INAUDIBLE].

So they put you on trains? Was there a train station in your town?

Yes, there was a train station in our town.

And so did you all go together in your family, your grandparents and your--

My grandparents and my-- the stronger uncles were taken away--

To work?

--to work. My brother Larry was taken away to work. My brother Saul was taken away to work. But the rest of them, the smaller children-- and that's another thing. They planned it so. By the time they came to take us to the gas chambers, there wasn't enough strong manpower. They left the old people, the little kids, the women, the older-- they planned it so just in case that we--

There wouldn't be any resistance.

To rebel. And another thing that they asked me many times, how come you didn't fight back? Jews were such law-abiding citizens, that not only that that, but if somebody would have found-- it was against the law to have a gun in the house. So Jews just didn't keep guns in the house. I spoke in front of Navy officers. And that was their first question--

Why didn't you do yeah.

I understood what they were saying. It's just that I don't know if I could have given them a sufficient enough answer of the situation that was there. When you don't have a gun, and you don't have the manpower anymore, how can you fight? And then nobody really knew that you're going to a gas chamber. It was a big secret.

Oftentimes the Germans would tell you that you're going to work or something like that.

Relocated. They said they need manpower to work. But I'll tell you, the way they dealt, we should have known something is horribly wrong. The way they dealt with a human being, if they wanted to make us work, you don't go and beat someone to death or beat someone half dead. We weren't dealt like we were human.

Can you describe to me a little bit what you remember of the ghetto in Uzhhorod?

Also again, they didn't keep us long in the ghetto either because it was-- I think they knew when we were there that the war or whatever-- now looking back on it, they didn't keep us long in the ghetto either. But the living quarters, the ghetto was a brick factory. They emptied out a brick factory. It was big. And there were no beds or kitchens in a brick factory. So we brought some blankets with us. We carried certain things. And they gave us a little place there in the ghetto, where we stayed, where we had our little place on the floor.

And then they gave us rations, soup, in the morning, coffee, and at night, soup. And of course, the living quarters were horrible because there was no place to wash. And the kids, there were no bathrooms. So it was a horrible situation. And the worst of all, we didn't know what will happen next. All we saw is that every day they brought in more Jews. And we just didn't know what were they going to do with us.

How long did you stay there, do you remember? Not very long?

Probably months. Just maybe a month or two the most maybe. From what I remember, it wasn't-- the Polish Jews were in ghettos for years. But this wasn't a work ghetto. The Polish Jews were in a work ghetto. This was not a work ghetto.

This was more like maybe a transit point or something?

The transit, yeah. They got us together. And they shipped us to Auschwitz because at that time already, they had a capacity. Even the Polish Jews, they didn't probably from what-- they didn't have the capacity of destroying that many. So they had to kill them by bullets. So it was different. But with us, they could gas thousands of them.

So let's see, you were there for about a month, maybe two months--

I would say months.

--somewhere in there?

Yeah.

And would this be in '43 or still in '42 or a right around the-- wintertime?

Right around-- it's middle, between '42, '43-- '43 maybe. Let's say '43 already.

And then you were deported to Auschwitz in a train, right?

Yes, in a cattle car train. And then I'll tell you, when I think back of that ride, they put so many people into that cattle car, we had no bathrooms. Small kids, sick people, they just packed us in there. If they would have taken us to work someplace, they wouldn't have done to us what they--

What they did.

--did. Just even the transport, that in itself should have said something to us. But we couldn't imagine-- we couldn't imagine that they're going to-- that we're going to the gas chamber. We couldn't imagine that.

So your grandparents were still with you. Were they in the car with you--

With us.

--when you were there?

Yes.

Can you tell me what happened when the train came to Auschwitz?

It stopped. And the smell-- you're probably going to see-- I think I do because I tell--

A little bit, yeah, in the tape.

I tell the day in Auschwitz, one day in Auschwitz, I think I tell. But if you want me to, I'll [INAUDIBLE].

Go ahead, yeah.

I should tell it again?

Mm-hmm.

Because I want to tell you new stuff, not repeating myself. When we stopped in Auschwitz, they didn't open up the door. We didn't know where we were. We just saw a big sign that said-- a round sign. It was like this. And it says, the Arbeit macht das Leben sÃ¼Ã. And that means, in English, work makes life sweet. But still, the smell was terrible. The smell was terrible. And there was a big fire. A big building or something was on fire. You could see. And far in from the tracks.

But they didn't open up the wagons until it got completely dark. It was dark, dark. All of a sudden, floodlights came on the train. And we saw these SS there on the platform and dogs. And they opened up the doors. And they started screaming, [NON-ENGLISH]. Fast. Everything should go fast. [NON-ENGLISH]. And from that trip, a lot of people died because they threw in sick people and old people. And so whoever could run out from this train, they were going out. If not, you got beaten up. As people were going, they were beaten. So they rushed, so that they shouldn't get beaten.

But a lot of them that stayed there, they just carried them out and put them on the truck. There was a truck, a big open truck, was right there, not far from the platform. And everybody tried taking out the few things that they had with them. Not that it was anything, but everybody is trying to survive. So they think they'll be needing it. And then there was a ditch. And they were yelling at people, they should throw away this luggage.

Their belongings.

People didn't want to part with it. One was screaming, I don't have the name on it. They were worrying that they'll never find their luggage because they don't have the name on it. And so that was a commotion. So they were hitting on the people. When they got beaten up, they threw away those few little things that they had there. But with my grandfather, he didn't want it. And he was getting beaten up. But he wouldn't part with it. And so you know what they did to him. Shall I repeat? Should I say it?

You can. Yeah, go ahead.

The tape is on?

Mm-hmm.

So he didn't want to part with these Ten Commandments, with this Torah. So they were beating on him. We were pleading with him, throw it away. Throw it away. He didn't want to do it. And so they beat him. They kicked him. And then he no longer could get up. I was there. And then they were beating on us to go to the right, to the left, and what I remember seeing is they just took my grandfather, and they threw him on the truck because he couldn't get up anymore. And the Torah, the Ten Commandments, were in the ditch. And me and my sister, they put us to the right with my mother. And my mother held on to my brother. She wouldn't let go of him.

Now this was your youngest brother?

That was my youngest brother because he was six years younger than I was. And so she wouldn't let go of him. So they started beating on my brother. So she let go. But she didn't know that they're going to put them to the left--

The other side.

--that they're going to put them on the other side. And my brother's already screamed and cried. There were other cries from other children. But she must have recognized his cry. So she looked back, and he was trying to go to my mother. So they were hitting on him. And so my mother ran to him from the right to the left. And they wouldn't let her go to the left. So they were beating on my mother. She fell. And she was crawling and pleading with this SS, please let me go to my kid. Please, let me go to my kid.

So finally after she was on the floor and pleading with him, and I don't know, he-- change of heart. He kicked her. And she went to the left. He kicked, and she moved to the left. She ran to my brother. And she got a hold of him. And my

brother cried anyway because he saw my mother so beaten up. And then they walked off.

I'll tell you the truth. I'll tell you the truth, when I think of sometimes in good moments, I said, I bet my mother would survive. But right after the war, I knew she would have not survived anyway. So I think to myself, maybe a good thing that happened. There were so many kids, they went to their deaths so frightened, so scared because they didn't have their parents with them. Now the little infants, they didn't know. But the 4, 5, 6-year-old child, it was dark. It was dark.

And the beating-- they were hitting on children. You would think they would leave children alone, if the child let's say didn't obey what they said. If they wanted to go here or there, they were hitting on kids like they hit on adults. And why they needed to do that, I don't understand, why they needed to hit on kids. And so I say to myself, maybe she was a comfort to another child there. I'm sure. She had seven kids.

When--

So that's how my mother left. [? And ?] [? I ?] [? thought ?] [? that-- ?]

So when they split you to the right, people went who ended up at least at that point surviving? And the people who were on the left went to the gas chamber?

They went to the gas chamber right away.

Did your grandmother also go to the left? Or was she--

Yes.

She went to the left also?

Oh, yes. The parting was difficult. Times were terrible. But we were together. And if you try to separate families, it's just-- I can't tell you how painful the price they had to pay while they were separating them. Beside a physical pain, the emotional pain was horrible.

Do you remember-- you said that you and your sister were on the right. Did your father also go to the right? Was he on the right?

The men were separated separately.

So it was men and then women and then divided again between left and right?

[INAUDIBLE] left and right. So that was the end.

So that was the last time you saw your father?

When they opened up the trains. It was so chaotic. They let the dogs bite-- jump on you. You're scared. I can't tell you. It was like hell on earth.

Why don't I ask you some questions about your parents before the war and a couple of things about their parents and things like that? Could you just tell me their names and-- the same thing for your grandmother-- when they were born and where they were born, that kind of thing, if you remember?

My mother's name was Rose. Her maiden name was Moscowitz. But then as she was married to my father, was Lebowitz.

Do you remember when she was born?

No.

When her birthday was?

On this picture, she doesn't look so young. But they put her with us together. So she was maybe in the late 30s, early 40s.

When you were taken away?

When we were taken to Auschwitz.

And she was [AUDIO OUT] your mother was born in Volosyanka ?

Yes.

But your father was born somewhere else?

[PLACENAME]. Another town.

You spelled that for me. Can you give me your father's name?

Martin.

Martin Lebowitz

Yeah.

Do you remember how old he was or his birthday? Do you remember his birthday?

I know that he was six years older than my mother. But I don't know exactly the dates. He must have been in the late--

Mid-40s, maybe?

Mid-40s, yes.

Do you remember when they got married? You don't remember? And let's see, you said, you had-- there were seven kids in all.

Seven kids.

Do you remember how many-- there were how many girls?

Three brothers and four girls, including me. There were three sisters. But I was the fourth girl. So four girls--

And three brothers.

--and three boys. Can you give me their names--

Yes.

--the four girls, and then including yourself, so you have Helen and--

Shall I give you from the oldest down?

Sure.

Larry--

Is for the boys?

We called him Laib. Shall I call them what we called them?

Sure. tell me what you-- you can give me both. You can give me his real given name and then--

We call them Laib. And then I named my son after him, is Larry.

So Laib would be L-A-I-B?

B.

And he was the oldest of the boys?

He was the oldest. No actually, wait a minute, I had a sister. She was the oldest. But she came to the United States. So she didn't go through the concentration camps.

So she came before the war?

Before, in '39, would you believe it, just before the whole disaster.

And what was her name?

Her name was here, we called her [? Liya ?]. But Francis-- they called one of the--

Francis?

--United States, Francis.

So you were in contact with her after you got here?

It's another story. That's why it's good that you ask me questions because I can sit here a half an hour telling you how we got in contact. And then it was Laib. And then was-- I had a sister. Her name-- [INAUDIBLE] my god. Her name was Sura.

Sura, S-U-R-A?

Yes. And she had a child. And it was at night. So she just walked away with the child. Some children were torn-- mothers were torn away. And probably--

You mean when you came to Auschwitz?

Yes. And probably she was the lucky one. She just walked off with a kid [INAUDIBLE].

And she had the kid with her?

She had the kid with her. And then my brother-- this is my brother. His name was Saul.

Did he have a nickname, or did you call him just Saul?

No, his name is [? Schloyme ?], actually, we called him in Jewish.

Oh, so you called him-- OK.

And then this is my sister that I live through my life during the war. Her name is Sylvia. And we called her Zeisl.

Zeisl, how would you spell that?

Spell it, Zeisl.

I would Z-E-I-S-L.

Yeah. In Jewish, we would call each other these names. And right now, her name is Sylvia. And then it's me.

So it was Helen, Sura, and Sylvia, and then the oldest was Francis?

Yes.

And then you had-- oh, we've got Larry and Saul. And what was your other brother's name?

Ephraim.

Now you said that your parents had a shoe--

[? Batya ?] store.

It was a store?

Yes. It was like a franchise. There were lots of places. That was only by the Czechs. And then the Jews weren't allowed to have no franchise.

Did he repair shoes? Or did they just sell them? Or--

They just sold them. There was a factory that supplied these [? batya ?] stores. Like Hahn's, you know?

Yeah, sure.

But it wasn't that big of-- everything was smaller there.

I didn't ask you this before. Were there Jewish youth groups or community groups in the town? Or was it just people saw each other at the synagogue and that kind of thing?

In the synagogue. And then we had to make our own schools. So we saw each other in the schools.

Did you all and your brothers and sisters go to private Jewish schools, or did you go to public schools?

A Czech. With the Czechs, we went to public school.

But under the Hungarians, you went to--

To private because we weren't allowed no more to go to school. And the schools were held at home. It wasn't a private building. It wasn't a building where the kids could go to. It was in different homes.

Your father was-- you said he was about in his mid-40s in 1940. Was he involved in World War I or anything? Was he a

veteran? Do you remember?

Yes. Believe it or not, that's why he didn't understand.

He didn't understand why the Germans are treating people the way they did?

He kept on saying that he-- he fought for the Hungarians, actually.

The Austrian-Hungarians.

The Austrian-Hungarians. That's why he thought he was safe.

He thought the Germans were--

Yeah, that they'll recognize that even though he is a Jew, but he served--

He fought on their side.

--this country. Yeah, he served for the country he lived in. Matter of fact, he was wounded right here. A bullet went through his leg.

So he fought against the Russians, do you remember?

And actually, I was a little kid. So I don't really remember. But I know that he was in a war. And--

Did he use to tell stories to your brothers and sisters and you about the war and things like that?

Yes, he did.

And he believed that the Germans were just-- they couldn't do the things that maybe people were saying? Did he believe that the Germans were--

We believed maybe it'll happen to one, to two, maybe a German that is that a-- a German that isn't educated. We didn't think it would be an organized situation. You see what I'm saying?

Mm-hmm.

How can a country or whatever organize to eliminate a people? We thought it would be one person that will vandalize us or--

Were your parents fairly well educated?

They were educated--

Did they go to a good school?

--in Jewish, very much so. I'm Jewish, but I'm not that religious. I have difficulties today. I have difficulties today. I'm afraid to think that there is nothing because it can't be worse. But I don't think I'm as religious as my people. My parents, my grandparents definitely believed. They would definitely believe. To them, a sin was maybe doubting God.

Did your parents, do you remember if they went to public schools? Or did they go to Jewish schools?

I don't know. But I know they were well educated [INAUDIBLE] Jewish. They recalled things from the Bible. Maybe that was their way of educating us to be human beings. I'm not sure why they did that. But if there was any correction in



our behavior-- kids act up sometimes. So they would quote us from the Bible, what is right and what is wrong, and the Bible says this, and the Bible says that.

Now you said when the Hungarians came in, that they seized the shoe store. They seized the store. And seized things. Did your parents-- can you tell me a little bit about your house--

Yes.

--and where you grew up and maybe how much land you had, where it was, it was a wooded area or--

No. We had a house. And we had also--

Was it also a stone house like your grandparents?

No. It was a stucco house. Boy, if I would go back there, I bet I would recognize it because I remember it so vividly.

Have you been back?

No. I went back to see my brother in Russia because he was-- I was there in Belgium when-- so the English--

When they liberated you?

Liberated me. And the Russians, when my brother was liberated, he was liberated under the Russians. So then he could no longer leave.

Does he still live in Czechoslovakia?

No, we brought him over here in-- he was in Russia for many years. But then we brought him over here. And he died--

Just not long ago?

--about three years ago.

So let's see, you said you had a stucco house.

Yes. And we had cows and sheep. And we had a different house for the animals.

Like a barn?

Like a barn, yeah. And we had some-- we had a house. Under the Czechs, the reason why my grandparents had more cows and all kinds of animals, because they had land. We were allowed to own land. But the Czechs--

Under the Czechs.

But the Hungarians came, nothing was ours, you know what I'm saying?

Mm-hmm.

They took it away.

Did you all have chores to do, like to milk the cows or--

Yeah.

What did you do, do you remember?

I used to like to play with the little calves. They were my favorite. [LAUGHS] Oh, I loved them.

Did you all have pets, like a dog or a cat?

A dog, yeah. The kids loved it. There are so many children. So that was our life, to--

Did you live right in the town? Or did you live on the outside of the town or--

No, in the town.

In the town?

Yes.

Now you said that your grandparents had-- their store was connected to the house.

Yes.

Was that also the same way in the shoe store, or no?

No.

That was a different building?

The shoe store was in a different building because it was a franchise, sort of.

Did many people in the town speak German? Did they know German or no, just Czech?

Yiddish.

Yiddish?

Czech and Yiddish.

Czech and Yiddish?

Yeah, from what I remember because most of my life-- life in Europe, I was under Czech. On the Hungarian side, it was only maybe three or four years or so. And then I didn't see much of the outside world. So to me, the Czech life was more so--

Do you remember what your parents might have said about-- or remember anything they may have thought about the Hungarians when they came in? Were they frightened at all? Or were they apprehensive? Were--

They were apprehensive that we weren't allowed-- no we weren't first class-- we were a second-class citizen. We were limited. We were even limited to worship. That doesn't hurt anyone. But what can a person do with worshipping God? We pray for better times. And then we were just preoccupied on how to survive, how to feed all these mouths and how to-- that was our preoccupation-- and our safety.

When the Hungarians seized your store, what did your parents do to try to make a living then?

It was really very difficult. We had to live-- again, like my grandparents, we had a little place near the house that we planted carrots and potatoes and just barely-- and then we had our cows. So we had our cows for milk. And people, they

lived mostly on potatoes and milk and bread. Or bread was already a big thing. And we had poultry. We had--

Chickens and things?

Chickens and wild goose, I remember.

But they couldn't have-- your father couldn't have a job after the Hungarians came?

Oh, no.

Not in a regular job sense, like working [INAUDIBLE].

No. He had odd jobs here and there. I think my father was more educated. I think he had-- because he-- I think my mother was less educated. But she was educated in the Torah. She was educated in Jewish-- She went to a cheder. But I think that my father did go to some school because I think he was an officer in school and worked--

In the army?

In the army, yeah.

Did you all have a radio at home?

We had, but the Hungarians-- you had to hand them in.

They took it [INAUDIBLE]?

You had to hand them in.

Oh, so you had to bring them in?

And we were scared. We were scared that they'll find us. Where can you--

Did your parents also read a newspaper in the town before the war? Or also before the Hungarians came in?

Yes, there was a newspaper, but not after the Hungarians. There was no--

Was the newspaper from the town? Or was it from a large town elsewhere?

It was brought in from the larger town, like the New York Times. You will find a New York Times in Washington. There was no place where they made it.

So your parents knew about things that were going on let's say Germany or Poland or that kind of--

More or less. Then Hitler-- if you knew that-- when the German-- what was his name? When Hitler became the--

The leader?

Got to power-- the leader.

1933? Yeah.

We knew when Hitler got to power.

Was there ever any-- when the Hungarians came in, was there ever any discussion in your family about maybe possibly

leaving at all? There was, yeah?

We wanted to come to the United States because I had my sister here. But we couldn't no longer. Now, where could we have gone? In Hungarian-- we were surrounded. In the Hungarian, the Jews were treated like we were treated. In Romania, Jews were treated like we were treated. If you see Czechoslovakia being in the middle--

No place to go.

No place to go-- was no place to go.

Now let's see, you-- we talked about your father and your mother and what happened to them once they went to Auschwitz. And they were with you the whole time. We talked about you going to the ghetto in Uzhhorod and then on to Auschwitz. So I basically know their stories. You've told me that. And your father, you said you were split, so the last time you saw your father was when you came off the train. But you don't know what happened to him at all.

But my brother told us when he came that he met up with the man-- that was with my older brother-- and my older--

Now this is Saul, your brother you were talking about?

And now I'm going to talk about Larry-- that he actually survived all this time. But when they were taking them back-- as the Russian [INAUDIBLE].

After the war, you mean?

No, that was almost the end of the war. He died of starvation in a train because they were taking them away. You see, what they were doing is they were picking-- you have these grenades on the floor on the-- let's say when the Russians retreated, when the Germans saw-- before the Germans would make any step, they send out these Jewish boys to the mine field.

So they would blown up--

So they would pick up--

--so they'd know where the mines.

So that's what happened. He survived that.

He went through-- he was actually in one of those, your father was?

No, my brother.

Your brother.

But what happened was he died of starvation because when they had to retreat, they were retreating and taking these-- whoever was left-- a handful. And they weren't given them to eat or anything or sleep. So he just-- that's what somebody told my--

Told Saul--

Saul.

--about Larry?

About Larry. But could he have survived maybe the starvation, he would be alive because he survived--

He got through the camps.

[INAUDIBLE] yes. But I wasn't there.

Sure. I understand. But the last time you saw-- the last time you heard anything about your father was when you got off the train?

That was it. Let's see, why don't you tell me about-- we can start with Saul since he survived. Do you remember-- it's Saul Lebowitz is his name. Do you remember his birthday?

I should. I think he was born in '23.

So he was about five years older than you were?

Yes.

Do you remember what month and day he was born? Do you remember when you used to celebrate his birthday?

I don't know exactly. I don't want to tell you what I don't [INAUDIBLE].

Do you remember if it was in the fall or the spring?

I can find out.

Yeah. If you have a record of it somewhere, you can call me and tell me.

I'll do that.

So basically, is there-- did your brother go to public school under the Czechs?

Under the Czechs, yes.

Under the Czechs, he did?

Yes.

Is there anything special about your brother's childhood that was maybe different from yours, that you remember, that stands out in your mind?

He had more responsibilities than I did.

What kind of things?

Let me tell you.

He helped my father with small little jobs. Let's say--

Go ahead.

--a non-Jew, it was forbidden for a non-Jew to have-- but the Hungarians, they were allowed. But the Hungarians, they-- the Jews couldn't own anything. But the Jews were allowed to work for the non-Jews, sort of. So he used to--

And this is under the Hungarians?

That, we're talking now about the Hungarians. So he would go and help my father too.

Oh, so you did-- you mentioned something about after the Hungarians came, your father worked to try to help--

Little jobs.

--support-- did odd jobs or something?

Yes.

And so your brother helped him with that?

Right.

Did he also have more responsibility on the farm? Did he deal with the cows or the sheep?

I'll tell you, under the Czechs, we had a bigger farm. But under Hungarians, we no longer had the farm. Except they let us have a few cows and a few chickens. But as I said, even under the Hungarians, they were taking it from the non-Jews too. But the non-Jews could-- the ground still belonged to them. You see what I'm saying? They took the livestock.

Right.

But they could own the ground. But we no longer owned the ground.

Had your brother completed school? Had he finished the public school before the war started, or before 1939 when the Hungarians came in?

You know what, we probably can figure that out.

How long did people go to school? When did they start school?

Went to high school.

He did go to high school?

My oldest brother finished high school.

Larry did?

Larry did. I don't know if he fully did finish because--

Do you remember what age they would have finished high school?

We started at 6.

At 6?

Yeah.

And how many grades were there, do you remember?

Like here.

So it'd be about to 12th?

Yes, it was like here.

So let's see in 1939, Saul would have been about 16. So he would have been close.

Yeah.

So I guess he never had a real job before the Hungarians came?

No.

Saul, it is that I'm talking about now.

No. He just helped my father.

Was he involved in any activities in the town, like sporting club or something?

There wasn't such a thing.

There wasn't any clubs?

No.

What did he do for amusement, do you remember? What did he like to do? Did he like to fish? Or did he like to--

It is so difficult to explain a child's life there and a child's life here. When I see my grandchildren, may God keep them well. It's just like children were just not children. Children were like old people. What they worried about is how to survive, how to see the sadness. Let me say this, by the Czechs, it wasn't so visible. But as soon as the Hungarians came in, the children were no longer children.

They had to grow up fast?

They grew up fast.

Did he like to-- did he have any hobbies when he was younger?

He liked reading.

He liked to read?

Oh, he loved reading. He loved reading any book that-- books weren't as scarce as they are here. And I know that-- a Torah is a holy thing. But you wouldn't believe that to us, a book but the holy thing, any book that you got hold of. I remember we had a breakfront. What do you think was in that breakfront? A book that we got a hold of. Everybody read it. And you read it. And we used to dust the books. The dust should fall off it. That's how scarce a book was.

So I tell you, when I came here to this country, and I had my children, I kept on telling them how privileged. My children knew when they go to school, they're privileged to be able to go to school. They're privileged to have an access of books that they could have.

To use.

To us, books for like jewels or some-- yeah, that is a good word, like jewels.

So he liked to read a lot?

Oh, we all-- in that respect, because there wasn't that much that kids could do. So what do you get-- so when you read a book, your mind was preoccupied-- your mind was occupied.

You'd get away from--

From your sadness, from your--

Before the war, before the Hungarians came, did you all like to do things in the outdoors, play a lot, or did you go fishing?

We played like kids play. We hopscotched, I remember. And I played with my non-Jewish children, hopscotch, I remember.

Did your brother have some-- did he have a lot of non-Jewish friends? Or did he have mostly Jewish friends?

When we went to school by the Czechs, we had non-Jewish-- we thought they were our friends. Like kids, we don't think which synagogue or which house of worship you go. Kids don't think like that. So who cares?

When you were deported to the ghetto, was your-- you said something about your brother being taken away from work.

That was--

Before the ghetto?

--before the ghetto.

Can you tell me a little bit about that, what he was doing, if you remember?

That was another thing to note. My mother, they took them away. And we didn't get mail from them. The mail wasn't coming. So I remember in the beginning, the mail would come. In very beginning, we would get a postcard from them. We didn't have much. So my mother used to bake cookies and send them little packages of cookies.

Now this was under the Hungarians, that you said the mail was not coming?

Right. But occasionally we did get at the beginning. So then the mail stopped. So oh, I remember how she carried on. She felt that they are not alive anymore because we weren't getting mail. So my mother was preoccupied with that, that they took away her sons, and that they are not alive. And there was no way to find out where they were.

So both Larry and Saul were taken away to work?

Yes.

Was your father also taken away, or no?

He was taken away to work in town. But he could sleep at home.

Oh, I see.

See what I mean?

Mm-hmm.



But the boys left. And we didn't see them again.

So they were in the work camps. And when you were deported, they didn't come with you?

Not the boys.

They stayed in the camps or whatever?

Or wherever they were.

Did you know because of a little bit of mail that came, where they were?

Golly, I don't know. That was just in the beginning. I'm just as a child, I remember my mother was excited baking cookies to send it to them. And then she was sad because she no longer could send them cookies. And being that they don't write, they're not alive anymore. So she was mourning. I remember her crying over that, that her boys are probably not alive anymore because we didn't get the mail.

When were they taken away to go to the work camps, do you remember?

That was after the Hungarians came.

So it would've still been in 1939?

Maybe a little while later.

Maybe in 1940 or something?

Something like it, yes. I was a little kid. So I don't remember the exact times.

And you said that Saul survived. Did he tell you where he had gone, what happened to him?

Yes. He worked in different places under the Germans. Then the Germans took over these--

Camps?

--Jewish-- yes. Was he in Hungary still-- or I mean in Czechoslovakia still?

No. He was in Poland and in Russia and all over the place.

Was he also in any concentration camps?

He wasn't in Auschwitz. He was only in the work camps. And they got liberated by the Russians marching.

Do you know where they were marching? Does he-- do you remember? Did he tell you? Was it a death march or--

Sort of, yeah. They were marching them. And then one night, the Russians just showed up.

Appeared?

Yes.

So this was in 1944 maybe, or 1945? That dates, I've [? got ?] [? a problem. ?] Let me tell you how he survived. What happened was when the Germans were marching these guys, at one time, they rested up someplace at a place. I don't know-- what is it, a farm?

But it's a rest stop--

He called it--

--or something?

Yeah, he called it let's say a farm. So he sneaked away and went in under the hay. He covered himself up with hay until the next day. The Germans left with the group. But he had a problem. When the Russians came, he had a problem to explain himself. Where is he coming?

Where he'd been.

Where has he been? So I tell you when he was telling these stories, I myself couldn't believe what this guy had to go through just even after the war, how the Russians kept them locked up. But then he was telling the story, that this was-- so finally they caught up with the group. So they knew that he must be telling the truth because he knew about the group. And it was lucky that they--

They found the people.

--caught up with them a short time later. So they told them to let them go because, who knows, they would have thought he's a spy. And they could have killed them. So that was the lucky part. So even if you wanted to survive, you could have gotten killed after the war for different reasons.

So he survived. And then he was kept in Russia after the war?

Yes.

Do you know where in Russia he was?

The last place he lived was Uzhhorod.

Oh, so that's in the part of Czechoslovakia that turned in to the Ukraine?

To the Ukraine and the Russians occupied.

So he lived there, and then he came to the US?

Yeah, I can call you up and tell you exactly when he came because we brought him out. Oh, and did we have a time also.

Was this in the '70s or the '80s?

'70s.

It was '70s?

I think it was the '70s when we brought him out. I'll tell you exact dates because we have the papers. Then I can give you the exact.

That's good. Why don't you tell me the name of your sister, who was-- wait a minute-- Sura?

She--

Or is that Sylvia?

Sylvia. This is Sylvia.

Sylvia's in the picture.

Sura never went to that accidentally. You see, when we came to-- what the Germans did in the beginning, they just gassed everybody that came to Auschwitz. But when we came, at that time, the German munitions factory already said, don't kill them all out. Send me the manpower.

We need to use them for labor.

And that's where I worked, in the munition factory. So that's how I survived. But my sister, they probably would have grabbed the kid out of her hand. But she was short and skinny, sort of. So they weren't paying much attention to her. So she got away, walk into the gas chamber with her child. It was like-- a freak accident. Probably would have been worse for her if they would have taken the kids out of her because her kid was really small. Who knows what was worse?

Do you remember when Sylvia was born, what year she was born?

Yeah, 1925.

1925?

Yeah.

Do you remember her birthday?

In February, the 10th.

February the 10th?

Yes.

She was closer in age to you?

Yes, I was born in--

A little older.

--'28, yeah.

And let's see, she was also a public school there, under the Czechs?

Yes. But she didn't finish. But you'd be surprised that we tried so hard to study even in our little private cheders, what we call. And that was all that was our outlet. You were asking me whether we had-- this was our outlet, to get a pencil and paper and write our number work. I used to love number work. I loved it. Actually, I loved that. A piece of paper was difficult. So it was difficult all around.

My kids grew up, that they were privileged they had enough paper and pencil. [LAUGHS] I didn't tell them the rest of the horror stories. But I was just like-- which is, I really still feel that a child that has the privilege of an education and doesn't take-- that doesn't say, like my daughter went to-- my first daughter went to college, I said to her, you're privileged to be able to go to college. And I really think she was there, and she felt that something terrific is happening to her. I really think she felt like that.

Do you remember-- you said that because your brother was older, that he had some more responsibility in your family. Did your sister also, since she was a little bit older than you?

Yes. We would go and wash floors for other people and clean because there were a few doctors there.

Now was this under the Hungarians? Or was this under the Czechs?

No not the Czechs, but I'm telling-- the Hungarians. Matter of fact, shall I tell you, I remember even me, I used to go in and help out. And we were glad because what happened was when I went to help out to do these chores, somebody gave me a slice of bread. And it was-- I also felt good that they asked you to come. Actually you felt good that they asked you to come in to their house to help them out with these chores.

It was probably nice to be away from the house sometimes too.

I can't say it was nice because I had to wash the bathrooms. I had to wash the clothes. And I was a little kid. I wasn't that old, maybe about 12, 13 years old, and I was doing that. But it was OK because that's how we were surviving. You know what I'm saying?

Sure.

And they weren't beating on us.

Did you play with your-- you and your sister, since you were closer, did you play a lot together?

Yes, we fought a lot.

You fought a lot?

And we played a lot. Yes. But we were very close. Matter of fact, I think you're going to hear in the tape that probably if not for her, I probably would have not survived. I'll tell you why, because I'm not that strong willed. And I would have-- oh, I know many times I was-- I just didn't want to-- when I was in the munitions factory, I was tired. And I was hungry. And I was half dead. So I didn't want to get up in the morning. And these people that they didn't get up in the morning, they were left in the barracks, where we were, you never saw them again. They probably-- we just never-- nobody asked. We never saw him again. They probably just did away with them.

So I would want to do that. And she would lift me up. And she shook me in the morning. And she dragged me out. But it was cold. You see, where we were in Germany, it was very cold. And here, we had these wooden shoes and one dress. So she would drag me out to stay there for an hour. And she would encourage me. She would give me half a slice of her half slice of bread, so that I should just go on. She would do a lot of work for me, that I could not work so hard.

But I remember in the end, she said, you're not going to leave me here alone. She would get angry at me. She would get angry at me because I said, I want to die. To her, it was a threat. To me, it was real. I couldn't go-- mentally, you see, when your body gives up, you still try mentally. With me, I think my mental stage gave up. And there is, I don't care. So if not for her, I probably wouldn't be sitting here and talking.

On the tape, do you talk about her quite a bit and where you went? Did you always stay together through the camps?

Yes. That was--

And she also survived?

Yes. In the end-- I don't know if I put that on the tape. When they brought us Bergen-Belsen, she was the first one to get sick because when we got to Bergen-Belsen, was already in the end of the war, sort of-- so there were so many dead people there that they couldn't bury any more. And so when they threw us out, civilians brought us to Bergen-Belsen.

The SS ran away.

And so civilians came. And they put us on a truck. And they took us to Bergen-Belsen-- whatever was left. There was very few left. But still they took us there. And they threw us in there to a barrack, where there were-- people have their dirt. And some of them were so delirious from the Auschwitz-- the lice were so big that you would actually see them crawl. So she got--