

So then within a couple of weeks, and particularly in-- most of the Hungarian Jews who survived were Jews from Budapest and the provinces. The deportation of Jews was much, much-- it was really very, very extensive. And most of the people in the provinces didn't survive.

And this was in the province of Miskolc. So very quickly, the school was seized by the local fascists and the Germans. And most of the kids from that school were sent directly to Auschwitz and killed, including that boy whose father I talked to. And of course, when that happened, suddenly my mother had-- become from-- turned from a crazy woman into a great sage who had the foresight to make the right decision.

Then what-- so that was-- that phase finished. Then later on, I guess in beginning spring or maybe mid-spring of 1944, I remember I was at a soccer game, watching a soccer game with a couple of friends of mine, when the sister of one of these friends came and told us that we better go home, that they're going to be taking the Jews again.

And I got home, and my parents had already heard about that, too. But it was not an official announcement. By this time, the grapevine was pretty good, so that story-- a story like that got out before they intended it to get out.

And so then the question became is what are we going to do and where are we going to hide? And my parents, I do remember that fairly clearly, talking and trying to think of all the possible alternatives, and deciding finally to approach the president of the Chamber of Commerce who had been so much farther-- my father's behalf earlier. And so they approached him about whether we could hide out on his property.

And he said, OK. And in fact, he had a one or two other families that he had already arranged to hide. Now, where did the hide us? In the pigsty-- literally, in a pigsty, and on the ground. And so we stayed there with rats all over the place, and we stayed there for two or three days and nights.

And by that time, the-- my parents were getting word from this man that he was getting nervous about this whole business, and he wasn't sure how long he could keep us. And then the next day, he told us a new development had taken place. The whole thing has been called off and everybody can come out, and that a deal had been struck with the Jewish leadership that instead of the Jews being deported, that the Jews from that section of Slovakia, Eastern Slovakia, would be required to move to the west.

So for a while, there's a question, do you believe him? Do you trust him? Because trickery had been-- or do you-- or do you trust the announcement? Was it that set up so that people would come out of hiding? And then they would catch them all.

But they decided to come out, and most people decided to come out, and turned out to be true. And this was an instance where some of the top Jewish leadership did negotiate about the situation. And the reason they decided at that point to try and deport the Jews from that area was because the Russian front was approaching.

And so the unreliable Jews had to be gotten rid of. And also, this was a time when the transports from Hungary were going through Slovakia to Auschwitz. So it seemed like a convenient time to hook up a few cars to those trains.

But the deal was made, and it was true, and everybody had to move to western part of Slovakia, except people who had certain exemptions, even then, like doctors and dentists, pharmacists. They could remain and be exempt. I say-- I mention that because in fact what happened was that later on, those exemptions were no longer valid, and most of those people really did not survive because they were so isolated and really hadn't learned-- they had been exempt all the way through and they hadn't learned the art of survival.

So our family moved to a town in western Slovakia, which is called Nitra. And the reason they chose that was because that's where my father's Gentile partner came from. That's where his family still live, and he wanted to go back there. So not only us then, but the part-- and in fact, all the apprentices move together with the shop, because the training still depended on continuing their apprenticeship.

And so we all moved to Nitra. And after a while, we got a place to live. And this will be-- this is an important part of the story. My parents found a place to live, but in this kind of a complex, sort of a little housing complex, that had a-- was walled off from the street with a gate through the wall.

Inside, there was a couple of yards. And on one end of the yard there was a detached very small house, which is where we lived. Across from the yard was a larger house, one section of which there was a big room where the four apprentices that came with my father lived.

Adjoining them was where a railway conductor's and his family live. And the apprentices arranged for board by this railway conductor's wife. And around the corner and then the other side of this railway conductor's family was a machine tool shop. And this was all within one enclosed complex.

Now, the whole place was owned by a woman whose husband had been a Communist during the first Czechoslovakian Republic. And he was afraid of persecution for being a Communist. So when they built this house, they specifically built it with a hiding place that might be used potentially by him.

The hiding place was a space that within the structure of the house that you could get into from the apprentice's room. There was a kind of a closet that was set into the wall, really, more like a armoire or something like that, set into the wall. And you open it up and it seemed to end where it ended in the back. But actually, it was a false door that if you pushed it aside, you got into this space, which was the hiding space.

Now, in terms of size, it-- I suppose I should use feet, maybe you can translate it. It was about as wide as from here to maybe the other side of your chair that you're sitting on. That's as wide as it was.

In terms of length, it was, say, from this wall down to about the end of the rug there. So it was a relatively small space. It had no access to the outside. The walls were damp with moisture.

At any rate-- but when my parents got this place, this woman who rented it out and have owned it, who didn't live there, told them about this hiding place. And apparently, that railway conductor's family and his family also knew about this hiding place. So then what happened was this-- after we'd lived there for a little while, somebody came and told my parents that they had heard one of the big shots in the local fascist guard, obviously drunk, he started yelling and screaming in the marketplace about how the day will soon come when he will come to our-- this whole complex and get all of the Jews and communists out.

And when my parents heard this story, they immediately realized they had to do something about this. Like you could not afford to have an important person like that out gunning for you. So my father went to see him with his partner and put the idea of somehow buying his goodwill, so gifts or bribe.

And the man wouldn't hear anything of it. And apparently, what was clear was that he had some grudge against the woman who owned this place, that he had-- he felt she had cheated him out some years before or something, and he was still holding a bitter grudge against her. So when my father's partner came back, my mother, who was sort of canny in these ways said to my father that he ought to go back by himself, that the reason the man didn't take a bribe was that he didn't want a witness there.

And so my father did go back. And my father was very charming and engaging, and by-- and listened to his complaints about this woman. And said, yes, you're absolutely right. And then offered him a couple of rings.

And by the time my father left, he was as friendly as he could be towards my father. Now, that's supposed to be important because he appears again in the scene. The other thing that's important is this. And here again, my father-- my mother was really very determined survivor.

And what happened was when we moved to western Slovakia, of course, all Jews who had moved over there were required to register. And there would be a very severe penalty for those failing to register. Now, my parents had learned already from the previous experience that certainly the police followed the registration list, and then they went to pick

up the Jews.

So my mother was determined that we were not going to register, period. But there was such a pressure from everybody to go along, not to cause trouble, that one day there was this area where a lot of-- there was a Jewish soup kitchen and school, and so on. And that's where the registration took place.

There was-- one day my mother saw my father in line to register, and she made a big stink. And he finally stepped out of the line and we didn't register. Which probably also helped, because what happened was that-- again, this is part of history.

There was this-- the Slovak resistance suddenly erupted, and the Germans marched and came in and took a much more direct role in the governing of the country. And also came to fight off the resistance, because suddenly, the resistance was-- had taken over a fairly big chunk of territory, but not the town where we were. And-- so but people knew things were going to get bad.

Now, the first day that my sister and I were supposed to start up in school, September of 1944, we were late for school. Suddenly, my father comes back, having already left to go to work, and in a panic. He'd apparently stopped off at the barber.

Barber started lathering his face and then told him about the Jews-- they're taking the Jews. And my father said, take the soap, lather up. He came right back.

But, hey, if we hadn't heard about this police big shot being after us, he would have been there at 6:00 that morning to get us and-- if my father hadn't succeeded in winning him over. And if we had registered, they probably would have been there fairly early, too. In fact, they never came to pick us up officially, because we were not on the registration list.

So-- but when we-- my father come back, what to do, where to go. And for some reason, I guess my parents really didn't quite trust-- although, this railway conductor not long before I told my father, Henry, don't worry, tribal council will hide you. They, I guess, didn't trust it because their decision was that we would go to the house of my father's partner's parents.

And they had a house on the other side of town, on the outskirts, with some orchards and so on. So again, we broke up into three groups. My sister and I and my father along and my mother along to make the journey across the town. And I do remember that because everywhere you saw police cars and they were picking up Jews everywhere.

One time, it seemed to me, at least, like the policemen in the car looked at us for a while before he decided to go on. We finally all got there, and they put us-- these people agreed to hide us, and they put us in an open kind of shed in their orchard. And that night was miserable. It was cold, and we kept hearing noise of people going-- obviously, being in the woods and coming closer and closer and branches crackling.

Finally, totally panicked by it, made them-- these people take us inside. We heard later on that there had been thieves in the orchard all night, and that's what we were hearing. We stayed there for a couple of days-- two or three days.

And then these people said, we can't keep you anymore. We're afraid of what will happen to us. We've got an idea for you-- place to hide. We know of this place. They're in an attic. There are 24 people. I'm sure they'll take you, too.

And here again, my parents, particularly my mother's response is, I'm not going there. If you know about this place and you have no business knowing about that hiding place, that place isn't going to be good for very long at all. And in fact, it wasn't.

Within a week or two it was raided and everybody-- so then my parents said, can we stay for-- until dark? No, you have to leave right away. And so we had to make-- we made the trek back to our place, again, in the three groups, and again, still police all over the place.

We got back, and at that point, this was a Saturday afternoon, and my parents did approach the railway conductor and said, look, we want to hide out in this hiding place. And he his family had to be involved because we had to be fed, aside from the fact that we knew about the place. And so he said, no way.

And there was pleading back and forth, but he was adamant-- no way. And then at some point, he goes off for a walk with his seven-year-old daughter. And this was one time where I really did feel everything was lost and my parents just had no idea what they were doing.

And we're waiting at any time for a knock to come on the gate, and that was it. At some point, we hear a knock on the door, which is the gate hadn't opened and we pretty sure it wasn't the police, and it was one of the apprentices. And he told us, why don't you come into that hiding place? We'll hide you.

So of course, we went. Then it became a matter as the other apprentices made their appearance of testing each one of them out to see how they felt. They all agreed. Of course, they were all offered generous weekly subsidies while they were there. I mean, like making about four times as much as they were at their job.

Then the question was to approach the railway conductors real nice about it while he was out on his walk. Because without her being in on it, there was no way that-- that wasn't going to work, either. And she was offered a generous compensation for it, probably more-- much more money than her husband was making with the railway.

And again, this was important. My father had the shop all this time and able to make the money. And I think he was-- they were smart to offer the money in installments, because at the same time, there were some people who asked people to hide them for all the money they had. The people took the money and called the police.

Right. Right.

Yeah. So then-- but-- and partly, they agreed, I think. I mean, probably they did feel for us and so on, and there was certainly some charitable feeling involved. But also at that point, there was still the sense that maybe it'll be all over, that the partisans might actually win, and the whole thing would be over after a couple of weeks.

So we were there, we were in that hiding place without ever budging from that place for two full months. We were mostly all lying down to be able to fit in to that place. The woman would bring us the food in the laundry basket and so on that-- and of course, it wasn't kosher food.

It was pretty good that first day, and it was OK to eat it because you have to. And then in terms of our elimination functions, we had the chamber pot and used that all day. And then in the evening, one of the apprentices would get rid of the waste.

And so they stayed for two full months. We didn't budge out of there. And then I became sick with fever and-- with high fever, and my parents started worrying about that. And I remember that very well, because there was a lot of anxiety.

And I remember sweating like a pig at some point and thinking that was-- that meant I was really going to die. I didn't know that meant my fever was breaking. And it was after they had sent one of the apprentices out to get some kind of anti-fever medication. But the fear was, if you call any doctor, you couldn't be sure he would turn you in.

Now, the fact that after all-- after that, my parents decided that it was not very healthy to just stay in that place. So we moved over into the apprentice's room. And a couple of them, I guess, moved somewhere else in the complex.

A couple of them were staying with us in that room with the idea that if necessary in time of crisis, we could run into the hiding place. And for the next period of time-- and now, this was after-- this-- I mean, the total time we were in that hiding was nine months. But during-- there was a period of time there where we would then, particularly if the railway conductor and the fact that he was away most of the time, because he made it possible to maintain this arrangement.

I see.

But we kept hearing stories from the apprentices about how this hiding place was exposed. These people were taken. Those people were taken. And one never-- every day that could happen with us.

At some point, one of the boys-- in fact, the boy who asked us to come in, there were stories coming up that pretty soon the Germans were going to conscript able-bodied Gentile Slovaks for labor in Germany to help with the war effort. And he certainly didn't want that. So he wanted to be able to use the hiding place for himself, if necessary.

So he asked us to leave. And at that point, my parents said to him, OK, George, we'll go, but you know very well they're going to catch us very quickly. And I'm sure they'll ask us, where were you? And we'll tell them.

I mean, aside of course, from the possible punishment for hiding, which really never-- there was always threatened, but I never heard of anybody who really got shot or anything like that for hiding Jews. But the hiding place was no good. If the officials knew, it wouldn't be any good for him, so there was no reason for him then to pay off and his asking.

That in itself-- and for a while then, occasionally at night, we would actually go out in the yard for a walk. And I remember the first time the fresh air. I hadn't seen for months.

But then one day, the German army moved into that complex. They took over the place where we had lived. And there was a leather shop they made there. They took over the machine tool shop, and had some other kind of shop. And the whole yard was patrolled by a German sentry all the time.

So there was no way, obviously, we could ever go out of that room. And that room had a kind of a porch between itself and the yard, but you could see through the windows. You could--

There-- was there any light? That's what I was going to ask.

Very little light in that room, because what you had was certainly no light in the hiding place at all other than from a candle, and no electric light. And then there was room which was relatively dark, because there was, in fact, a porch-- not a screen porch, it was a glass enclosed porch beyond that. And there was a little window between the room and the glass enclosed porch, as well as, I think, some glass on the door that let-- but you could see through the window. You could see the German sentry out there.

And one time in the evening, one of the apprentices was on his way from the other conductor's house from his meal back to the place, and the German sentry said, halt. And he got panicked and kept running towards the room where we were. Finally, stopped at the door step. But he could have walked right in.

So then what happened was that-- then the next crisis was the woman who owned the place suddenly showed up and she found out we were there. And she said that she had to sell the place. That she had accumulated big debts, and the only way she could get out of it was that she had to sell the place. And in fact, she did. And the new owners were supposed to take over 1st of April of 1945.

So-- but then around November of '44, December, we began to hear the artillery, the Russian artillery. But really, the front stalled for the winter about 35 miles, 40 miles from where we were. And then one day, there were sirens and planes all over the place, and a big bombing attack took place.

Before that, there had been air raids of American flying fortresses that kept flying over to Viennese Neustadt to bomb the armaments factories there. And we've gotten used to the fact that nothing ever happened there. But this time was different-- low flying planes and suddenly we were being bombed.

And there was no basement we could go to, and windows were all broken. And-- but that was the start of the Russian offense that-- where the front had been stalled for all of that time. And then the question was-- and at that point, this is what happened.

We can no longer hide from the railway conductor that we were-- and of course, with the war about to be over, he had no more objection to our being there because-- one of the things, the propaganda, German propaganda was very-- would have you believe that when they came in, whatever Jews were left would become kings.

And anybody who had anything to do against them would be severely punished. And I guess it was to keep the motivation on their side, because a lot of people were in some way implicated, even though, I think, people had taken over Jewish property and so on and so forth. So-- but by that point, everybody was looking to have a good deed on their side.

So we were-- so at some point, particularly after the second night when the front started, it was shelling all night. Big flares of light and big explosion, and there was nowhere to hide. So at some point, my parents decided to go.

And the other people, the railway conductor and the other apprentices went to the railway conductor's new house, which had a basement, which is about a mile or so away. And at some point, we decided to join them. But when we got there, then we started hearing stories that the Germans were going to come by and collect men, again, for work. But they would have found us there. There was-- that's no hiding place.

So my parents decided we had to go back to the original place. And that-- by that point, one of the apprentices became the one that my parents really became very much to trust and rely upon. And he said, wherever you go, I will go with you.

And he came back with us and was taking some chance because there was a curfew, and just any patrol that stopped us could have shot us just for having a curfew violation. Anyway-- but then after another couple of days because of the heavy shelling and so on, and total lack of protection there, we decided to go back again to the other place. And then for the next two days, there was bombing and shelling and so on. And finally, there was silence one morning.

And looked out and there were the Russian soldier. And a little-- and the liberation of that took place on March 31. I remember the April 1--

Yeah.

--deadline? Just as a little postscript, sort of presaging things to come, when we were liberated that day and came out into the open, my parents felt what if there is a counterattack and we were not-- and Germans temporarily retake this place? So they wanted to find some way of moving further back behind the lines. Having believed all of this German propaganda about how when the Russians came in, they were so wonderful to the Jews, my father set out to the Russian headquarters to find out if it's possible to be transported back further behind the line.

He runs into a couple of Russian soldiers and asks, where is the headquarters? And they ask him, who are you? Why are you asking? And my father says, well, I'm Jewish, expecting then to be treated royally.

And that one of the soldiers, they were both pretty drunk, points his automatic gun at him and said, you're Jewish? I'm going to kill you. And could easily have done that on the first day after the-- yeah.

Oh, God.

And his buddy said, ah, let him go. My father no longer looked for the headquarters but came back. We kept our fingers crossed, and of course, there was no counteroffensive because this was really the beginning of the final very quick retreat and defeat of the others.

It's a wild story.

Yeah, that is a wild story.

Are there you do have a couple of pictures of relatives. Are there any relatives that you'd like to talk about that we could

possibly include in our project, do you think?

Well, there's only-- I mean, none of them-- as I said, there's only one survivor.

Right. I mean, of the ones who perished. Would you know enough about any of them to discuss?

Well, I can say little things about them. The one cousin who did survive, his parents and sister were-- both died. And I do remember his parents. His father was very, very good person.

They had a pastry shop that I used to go to and finagle little dips of pastry. And my aunt used to make ice cream every morning the old fashioned way. And it was-- as I remember it to be the most delicious ice cream that I had ever-- that I had ever had.

My cousin, their daughter, who was that point about 17 or 18, who I mentioned before who had hid out during that, she was very much wanted to survive but tried very hard not to be taken. But I don't remember the exact circumstances, but she did get taken. These relatives I mentioned before the-- my mother's younger sister, whose wedding picture you saw, she was a very pretty woman.

And their daughter I mentioned, who was very, very cute. And I at one point, she and I played a fair amount together. And she kept talking about how she wanted to marry me, like girls of that age would.

What was her name?

Eva, called her Evicka. And of course, she's-- those were the relatives that I was closest to their age.

Certainly tragic.

Yeah.

Are there any of the incidents or episodes, images stand out in your mind from this period that you didn't discuss that you might want to include as part of the interview?

I can't think of any right--

Also, did you want to discuss a little bit about what happened to your family after the war?

Yeah, I'll be glad to. I mean, the thing that-- I mean, as soon as the war was over, of course, my parents once again wanted to come to America and so that-- as soon as possible. We obtained an affidavit, again, from-- through my father's brother who was living in Minneapolis. And things were very difficult there after the war.

Very few Jews were left, but antisemitism was still very, very strong. And there was little question in the minds of my family, anyway, that we wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. But again, because of there still being that discriminatory at that time, immigration law in the US against Slovak Eastern European country, we had to wait a long time.

By this time, I had begun going to a gymnasium in the public state gymnasium where I was one of two Jewish boys out of about 40 Jews-- 40 regular student. And our main teacher was clearly very antisemitic. And she would take-- she you would have, essentially, this other Jewish boy and me take turns by being the scapegoat.

And then that was to some extent true with some of the boys. I had one friend who like I'd befriended, and-- a boy. And when we had an argument, like boys will have, what he had to say to me was that I always thought you were a different Jew, but I guess you're like all the rest. And this was after all of this had happened.

Did they have any knowledge or sense of what--

Yeah, I think they did. And one could occasionally hear from someone, they didn't finish the job. And my father began a jewelry shop, again, and actually that was quite successful for the next two or three years. Now, then we were still there when the communist coup d'etat took place in February of 1948.

And certainly, there was a lot of things-- I did become, I must say also, quite active in the Zionist organization there. The-- and by that, it was Bnei Akiva that I belonged to. And attitude had changed towards Zionism because of the experience of the war.

Although, when we finally left, I, having been a fervent Zionist at that point, really felt it was a betrayal to come to America, rather than go to Palestine. My father didn't think Palestine would survive, or the Jewish community there in Palestine wouldn't survive. Anyway, after about-- within a month or two after the Communist took over, our number came up.

And I don't know whether there was a quota had become accelerated because of the Communist takeover, and this was a few months before they clamped down on legal immigration from Czechoslovakia. So during that, there was that window of opportunity and we essentially left legally from Czechoslovakia, I think, in about April '48.

And the other thing, I mean, the post-war years, I mean, I remember for some there was-- after you survive yourself, there was people kept clinging to the hope that their relatives would one day come back. And for many years, particularly around holidays, there would be a lot of remembering and weeping about all the loss.

Well, if there's anything else that you'd like to add, I want to thank you very much.

You're welcome.