What is DP camp?

Pardon me?

Tell me about DP camps.

Yes. After we were brought by the British military two to Lubeck, which is in northern Germany, I found my ways within a few days to a displaced person camp run by the British in a town called Neustadt. It was located in the former German submarine school, and there were many people. Jews were in the small minority. There were people there from-- there were Frenchmen. There were Italian soldiers who were interned by the Germans, somehow, after Italy changed sides and declared war on Germany in 1943. There were some Yugoslav former prisoners of war. There were Poles, Ukrainians, as well as Latvians, and Lithuanians, and Estonians.

Within a matter of days-- no, within a matter of weeks, various people left, went home. It was made possible for the Frenchmen to go back to France, and the Italian soldiers, somehow, were able to move back to Italy. And the Yugoslavs left. The Poles and the Czechs-- the majority of the Poles and almost all the Czechs went back east, home.

And after a matter of six weeks or so, the people that were left in camp were Jews, a few Jews, a few Poles who-- and Ukrainians-- for whatever personal reasons, did not want to go back. And the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian families of people who escaped from the advancing Russians, people who, in large part, I believe, were cooperating with the Germans. And of course, as I got to know some of them, some of them did serve in the German military in Estonian divisions or Latvian divisions.

Life in the DP was really a waste of time. There was nothing much done there. We were, of course, provided for by various charitable organizations and the sponsorship of the United Nations. UNRRA was the organization that really was responsible for it. The British managed it. But it was not a meaningful, or useful, or purposeful time. It was just kind of time of waiting.

For those who were willing and able to go home, it was a time of transition of weeks or days until they could get on the train to go back to Czechoslovakia. So after a relatively short time, it was not only a wasted time of waiting but for the Jewish people in that particular camp and generally in camps in the English zone was a time of waiting in a relatively hostile environment.

The Poles-- I don't want to single them out, but the Poles who were there still had certain anti-Semitic attitudes. And I remember an occasion where a group of Polish performers came to perform to entertain the DP people, and the comedy included various anti-Jewish jokes. The Latvians and Lithuanians who were mostly kind of in charge to administer the camps were obviously people who cooperated with the Germans.

So it was not a time of healing. It was not a meaningful time. It was a time of waiting. Some of the young Jewish people managed to get into a situation where they could smuggle themselves into Palestine. It was illegal at that time because Israel was not yet free. Others were just waiting. I had made contact with my relatives in America. I knew they were sponsoring my coming to the United States. I accepted that as my future, and I was just waiting.

Towards the end of 1945, both because I felt that living in the American zone would make it easy for me to immigrate the United States and because of the really unpleasant frictions that existed in that camp where the majority of the people were not sympathetic to us, I moved on to the Americans zone and to a DP camp in the American zone.

The situation was different there. By whatever circumstances, the Jews were in separate camps which were Jewish displaced persons camps. It was still a time of waste. It was still a time of waiting, but at least there was an opportunity for us to nurture each other, to somehow help each other in healing to give us a sense of importance and value. But that was displaced person camp. There was nothing dramatic about it. There was nothing really helpful. It was just a time of waiting and maybe getting well.

And maybe some of us managed to go to school. I was too young to really try to go to university, and I was too old in terms of my own experiences to start going to high school, even if there was an opportunity to do that. So it was a time of waste, a time of waiting. And in October 1947, some two years and four months after liberation, my papers came through, and I came to United States, where I started a new life.

Can you-- overcrowded or was--

Most of the--

Let's-- cut for this point.

Yeah.

You want to talk about DP camps?

Yeah.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Marker five.

Wait. New slate.

Clearly, there was a difference in how the DP camps looked and operated in the first few months after the war when so many people were sick, and dying, and needed medical attention, and so on. But within three or four months after the war, things settled into some routine. They all were pretty much the same virtually all the camps were established in former military facilities of the German army, navy, army, and military. We were housed in former military barracks, and our barracks in Germany-- and not barracks made out of wood, but they were stone buildings where soldiers lived before.

So the living conditions were quite austere, usually a number of people to a room, but given our background as prisoners in concentration camp, this was still much better. Food was distributed in kitchens. In some places, later, for families it was possible to, rather than get in line to get your food in the kitchen, to get some supplies, so people who had the need to and the ability could cook their own food.

It was really somewhat of a regimented life, which, to those of us that came out of the camp, looked like a wonderful time of vacation and recovery, I think, to us today, with our background, would look very restrictive and kind of a shabby existence. But that's what it was. We were free to walk around, and we were free to communicate. And we are free to involve ourselves in whatever civil and civic things were organized in the camp.

But again, I need to repeat that it was time of waiting, waiting to go to Israel, or waiting to go to America, waiting to find the means to live outside. It was also a time of growing up. I was 18, and my hair grew. And I realized that I was a man, and I think I must have fallen in love once or twice, as teenagers are apt to do. But when people ask me to talk about DP camps and I try to think of them, I see a picture in black and white, not a picture in color.

Did Ben-Gurion come to where you were then?

No. Ben-Gurion did come to-- I know now, but where I was, in the camp in Deggendorf, which is in Bavaria, I just don't remember anything important happening, except a time of waiting. I needed, for example, dental work, I remember, in those days. There were no dental facilities. I had to wait until I came to America to do whatever dental work that I needed to do. And I did not see anything exciting. I did not see anything great.

Yes, there were people under Israeli sponsorship who tried to organize young people and arrange for them to smuggle themselves through the borders to go to Palestine, but for those of us who decided, for one reason or another, to wait

until our American papers came through, it was a time of waiting.

Thank you. Now we need to be quiet and the record room tone.

Seven marker, six.

You have spoken of your loneliness and your envy of a normal life, your losses. Can you talk to me about that?

You're talking about in the DP camp?

Yeah, or even just after liberation.

Yes, yes. Well, yes, of course, I do remember, still in Neustadt the fall of 1945, walking through-- we are free to, of course, go to town, but it was a curfew. We had to be in the DP camp at certain hour because the British locked the gates. But I remember walking through town, and I was 17, not quite 18. My hair was growing, and my teeth were broken.

And I saw young German teenagers-- the fact that they were German was unimportant-- going to school, young boys and young girls with schoolbooks, and backpacks, laughing and giggling as teenagers ought to do. And I remember that very great pain and very great sadness because I was convinced that that will never be part of my experience, and I remember that envy that I could no longer be one of those young people that could laugh and giggle and not be really, somehow, suppressed by memory and experience. And that was a very painful experience for a young man to know that the normal things that were available to others were denied to me.

And so, yes, there were such times, and there was that sadness. And those feelings of insufficiency, those feelings of somehow being second-rate that were somehow planted in me in the war years did not disappear the minute somebody said to me, you are free, and they were with me for a long time. I would not be at all surprised that some of those things that happened and some of those experiences influence me to this day.

But in those days, I was especially sensitive. And I was especially envious, and I was especially sad that I was alone, and lonely, and without any value in my eyes. And seeing those young people laughing, and smiling, and giggling, and going to school-- people my age-- kind of underlined that.

What about religious ceremonies? Do you remember--

Yes, I remember there were religious-- of course. In the English DP camps, there was very little of it. The DP camp in Neustadt was dominated by the majority who was Christian. In the DP camp in Germany-- I'm sorry, in southern Germany where they were primarily a Jewish camp, Jewish ceremonies, Jewish religious practices were organized for holidays or for Saturday.

I was too devastated by what I saw, by seeing the thousands of dead and knowing of millions of dead to be sufficiently forgiving to really participate in religious ceremony. I was not making judgment about God, but I was also not making-- I was also unable, really, to feel honest about myself and, at the same time, participate to any great extent in religious ceremonies.

I'm Jewish. I'm glad to be Jewish. I am glad that my children are Jewish. But in those days and to some extent even today, I have not made peace with the fact that it was possible for me to survive and others who were more worthy did not. And so I did not. I did not embrace-- I embrace Judaism. I embrace the idea of free Israel. I did not embrace the religious practices that were available to me.

Let's cut.

That's it?

Yeah.

I'll go back--