

-TITLE-BELA VIDOR
-I_DATE-
-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-
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-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
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-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
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00:00:00 Intro

Q" When and where were you born?

A: I was born in Hungary, in 1940

00:00:30 I was born in a small town that changed hands and names several times during the war. It was sometimes in Hungarian, sometimes German and sometimes Rumanian.

00:01:00 My father was born in Rumania, and the Hungarian authorities said she should go back there to have me. I had a Rumanian birth certificate, but I'm actually Hungarian.

00:01:30 They just happened to be there during the war. My father was a Zionist organizer before the war. My father was an artist. He went to Budapest University, received an art degree.

00:02:00 He had a background in lighting. They planned to come to Palestine before the war. My mother is a farm girl. They met in the Zionist movement.

00:02:30 I don't have any memories of that town because soon after I was born I was taken back to Hungary. At the age of two I was taken to Budapest because the war was on and that was their way of hiding me from the Holocaust.

00:03:00 My mother and I were taken to a camp, but she escaped and took me to Budapest. Before that we were taken to protective housing, like in the Wallenberg story. It was protected by the Swiss government.

00:03:30 It didn't last too long because the Nazis didn't always acknowledge the sanctuary, and I was taken to my grand-mother in Budapest, in a large apartment building. With a large store, and that was where my grandmother's sister worked, and she had a one room apartment in the pent-house.

00:04:00 It was well-hidden from view. And that's where I spent 3 to four years of my life. I remember going out once for a boat ride on the Danube. Other than that, I remember watching the airplanes go by.

00:04:00 Then we had to run down to the air raid shelter, which had cooking facilities, And there we had to wait for the air raid to be over. I had one little friend in that building, named Peter.

00:04:30 During this time, my parents were in various labor camps. The Hungarian fascists took my father. I don't know the details. They handed these people over to the Germans, as far as I know.

00:05:00 To produce whatever was necessary for the war. My mother also was in a labor camp, I think they were patching clothing for the army. My mother didn't talk much about it.

00:05:30 In Jan. or Feb. of 1946, I think it was, when the Russians had entered Budapest, my parents had decided to leave Hungary for Palestine. My father didn't get back until late 1946, escaping

00:06:00 with some other people. I understand that eventually the labor camp was demolished or given up. My parents were reunited in a town in Hungary, where they started making plans to go to Palestine.

00:06:30 The first time they failed; the second time they made it. We left Hungary in 1946 and didn't make it to Israel until 1948, After Independence. We were taken to Cyprus by the British.

00:07:00 In 1946, the Zionist organizers had organized a tour to go from Hungary to Frankfurt by train. There was no stop there; they had to pull the emergency cord. We were taken off real quick and taken to some emergency camp.

00:07:30 We were there 30 or 40 days waiting for another truck convoy to take us to Bavaria. Later I found out that my doctor at Kaiser was a doctor at the camp when it was for soldiers.

00:08:00 It was populated mainly by Hungarian soldiers. When the camp was demolished, it was purchased by the United Jewish Appeal. We were there about a year and a half, waiting to go to Israel. My sister was born there went to Ceder there.

00:08:30 We went through one winter there. My sister was a year and a half when we left. We went from Germany to France; it was very cold and my father got sick.

00:09:00 We waited a month or so in some large buildings, near the beach. The ship was supposed to arrive at night. We got dressed up but it didn't arrive. I think the third night it came.

00:09:30 We went out to the ship in rubber rafts. It turned out it wasn't really a ship, it was a pushing vessel. It had no rooms.

00:10:00 It just had mats and mattresses. We were pulled to the ship. There were about 300 on board. We were at sea for about two months. We ended up in Cyprus. Before that, were in a big storm and pulled in to a small island to make repairs.

00:10:30 We had to get rid of the huge wood-burning stove to drop weight. Finally we got under way there and there was a British Piper above us.

00:11:00 The next morning we were sandwiched between two destroyers. We were transferred to a destroyer. Some people fell in the water from the shock of the two bats banging together.

00:11:30 Some expressed their feelings by tracking down their pants and turning to the British. One was crushed between the ships. And then we were taken to Cyprus. We were there about 2 1/2 months.

00:12:00 Actually longer. We were having all kinds of protests - hunger strikes. We were trained. We were trained for possible military action. This was illegal I found out later but the British overlooked it.

00:12:30 They were teaching us to climb the ropes. Interesting life in the camp. We lived in tents. Everybody had a little business going. We made a life for ourselves.

00:13:00 It shows a great power of survival. I had only two friends I knew to be survivors. It wasn't an issue between the children.

00:13:30 Most of the people I was involved with in Israel were long time residents.

Q: Did your parents every talk about their experience during the war?

00:14:00 Some, not too much, my mother even less. I can only tell you about my own experiences. Before I went to my grandmother's, in a large building where my aunt lived, my mother used to leave me to go out and get food.

00:14:30 There was a knock on the door and two Russian soldiers were there. First thing they did, they ransacked the house. They were looking for anything.

00:15:00 My mother and I were sleeping in a bed with the big old fashioned covers they used to have in Europe. There was a big wardrobe and another large bed.

00:15:30 And there was a piano where my mother hid the food. They couldn't find it; they didn't see me. One soldier drank a bottle of cologne. My mother pushed me down in the bed and told me not to say a word.

00:16:00 They didn't see me. One soldier climbed on top of my mother. I didn't know then what was happening. He climbed off, held the gun and the other one climbed on.

00:16:30 My mother was surprised that I could remember that. She was very proud of the fact that they couldn't find the food. After that, I went to my grandmother's. The name of the store (in translation) was "The Fashion Market."

00:17:00 It had a Jewish owner who left at the start of the war, and some of the financial responsibilities were left to my great aunt. My mother would come by sometimes. We had no food. Devised an interesting way of catching pigeons.

00:17:30 They threaded corn and when the pigeon ate it, it was like with fish. The pigeon got eaten as a result. In 1946, my parents were united and for the first time went to kindergarten,

00:18:00 I remember hearing the store owners talking about us, those Jews. We lived in a house - I don't know how my parents were able to find a place.

00:18:30 Or to pay the rent. I came to this country March 3, 1961. My mother was here three years prior. She wanted me to come with her, but I didn't want to leave Israel, that was my homeland.

00:19:00 I was learning a skill. I didn't want to go without a marketable skill. And besides, the man she married, didn't know me, and might not want me. Lo and behold two months after I arrived, he told me

00:19:30 Why don't you move out. I did. I became a dental laboratory technician. My father, since the war was in and out of mental institutions and he stays in a home for people who are not quite balanced.

00:20:00 They have found a medication that keeps him on an even keel. He works a lot - he does art work. He's 74, he's probably happier than he ever was before.

00:20:30 I have a dental laboratory at home. I've done that for ten years now. I've done this work for 32 years now. I started learning this trade in Israel.

00:21:00 Fascinating profession in many ways. I'll tell you a little more about the ship trip. We were able to look down to the bottom of the ship and there where mattresses all over.

00:21:30 I was on an upper level. We were bobbing around and I threw up and people were upset. We were under very crowded conditions. There was a lot of tension fights and arguments. I think a child was born in that vessel.

00:22:00 When the British took us to Cyprus they provide milk for the children. We were treated nicely by the British. All the cooking was done on deck. We had to stand in line with pots.

00:22:30 There was no dining room; no place to sit and eat. There were no showers. Everybody smelled. I remember once a couple had a fight because there was no privacy.

00:23:00 There were fights between strangers. It was a miracle that people survived under those conditions.

00:23:00 Every time we saw something on the horizon we thought we had arrived. But no. One time someone said there was land and everyone came up on deck and there was yelling and screaming.

00:23:30 By the time we got close it was more like a rock than an island. We were taken to Israel by one of the first Israeli ship companies Zim.

00:24:00 We were taken to Haifa. We were let go a little early because families with children were allowed. So we were among the first - we arrived in Haifa in May or June.

00:24:30 We were immediately taken to a disembarking building and we had an apartment assigned to us. They were all concrete and brick buildings. It was a beautiful building.

00:25:00 We lived there six or eight months. A friend of mine and I explored the empty building next door. We climbed in and there were beautiful apartments like condos.

00:25:30 They were well-furnished - upper middle class. All of a sudden there was a police man. That was a building locked up by the an organization created by the Israel government to collect and protect rent from Arab housing.

00:26:00 It was waiting for the Arab owners to return. It was not used. . Then my father became a photographer for the Navy in Israel.

00:26:30 Then he lost his job and he became an independent artist. There was a great need for decorative art. But my father never made it. He was too slow. Then he became a photographer.

00:27:00 We exchanged apartments. The taxes were most burdensome. The apartments were shared with other people. We switched apartments with someone who had a job in Jaffe.

00:27:30 There were other people living in the apartment, but under the law, they couldn't be moved out. So they stayed and we broke a door through to the street.

00:28:00 We made our living room into a kitchen, and we had a bathroom but no shower. That was difficult. It took the Israeli government many years to build adequate housing.
.END.