This is the Holocaust Oral History Project interview of Maurice Blane taking place on April 14, 1993. This is a continuation of the interview from April 1, 1993. My name is Sylvia Prozan and assisting in interview is Richard Kirshman. Maurice, I'd like to take you back to the years you spent in Dijon when you were working for a baker.

Correct.

What do you remember about Dijon? What did it look like?

The first thing I would say, we had left an area near the German border, and it was September, 1939. And in normal circumstances, we knew that artillery from Germany could hit the place you were living. So the government evacuated all civilians from that area. Also, the Maginot Line was nearby where a lot of concentration of troops went into the Maginot Line which was some kind of a defense against the Germans, and so we left.

My father, mother, my oldest brother's wife, and she was pregnant at the time. And in January, 1940, my sister-in-law or my brother's wife gave birth to a girl, and we reached Dijon I would say sometime in September, 1939. Like I said, I had had three years of apprenticeship in a bakery. Therefore, I was not at a loss to find work.

Basically, I went to work in a bakery where the son of the owner was a pastry man. He would make pastry, and he was strictly a bread baker, which made breads fresh for the morning. So he started at 2:00 in the morning, and I would go in at 6:00 and make not the fancy fancy but mainly like pound cake to put in packages for the soldiers that were drafted for the war. And again, you had to remember the war was declared in August '39, but nothing really happened till about May 10, 1940.

That was the day that the German pushed through Holland, Belgium, and France and came around to the back door into the Maginot Line. And so we had a period between August in 1939 and May of 1940 where we had pretty much a normal life. There was a curfew. You had to lights out at a certain time at night, so the planes that would have reconnaissance over France wouldn't see lights, and that's where I really-- how would I say-- I was becoming a person, a man, in the sense that I was working.

My father couldn't work. My brother was drafted for a short time because he had heart beat irregular. They let him go, but for the time, I was like the bread earner of everybody at the age of 17. And I made friends here. You know, guys that used to come to the bakery, deliver milk, and all the stuff we needed. And I had a little social life because prior to this, you work seven days a week for three years. I had half a day to go home with a bus that took about a half hour to bring my dirty clothes to have them washed.

So you see, it gets to where you get a little more freedom, a little more leisure time, and it looks good. Unfortunately, May 10, when the Germans started their attack to a greater extent, we again were evacuated from Dijon, and that's not everybody. Just the people that were from Alsace-Lorraine. They had in the South of France, places set aside for all these refugees. We were like refugees.

So we left. But again, we never reached that place due to the fact that lines were hit by bombs, and we landed in the Southwest of France about 100 kilometers North of Bordeaux. And so that was near a place called La Rochelle, Rochefort where they make the roquefort cheese. That's where it came, and Cognac was one of the town which I recall. It was called Cognac. And so what happened, I'm there with my father, mother, my sister, the youngest brother, and me.

And again, I was the one that was in charge of everybody. I dwell a little bit on this because it's very interesting how when you're young-- I forget to mention, the month in Dijon where I was too young to be drafted into the war, I went to get what is called military preparation. In other words, you take some courses in Morse code. You learn how to handle a rifle, and so I went to get this training because I knew at 18 I'd be drafted, and at least with that training, I might get a higher grade than just a regular soldier in the French army. And I did this as a spare after work.

So what happened when the Germans made an attack, we went down that way, and you got to realize when you're at that age, the Germans are the enemy. It's like in every country you think about the Germans, regardless of the Nazi. This was a normal thing with France and Germany. All of a sudden, I find myself in a small town north of Bordeaux, and we are told the Germans are going down from Paris all the way to the Spanish border, and there'll be about 10 miles on a main highway where we were.

So young guy and I, we went on our bicycle, and we figured we'd go see the Germans. What you're going to be worrying about? You're not in military clothes. You're a civilian. So the first thing that occurred, there's a little plane coming. It was a German reconnaissance in front of the troops going down that was there, and they start to shoot with a machine gun. So we hid in the sides in the bushes. We weren't seen, and all of a sudden, you see the first German with their motorized-- in their motorcycles with the green-- it looked like bigger than life to me.

We saw these guys go down. That's the first Germans I saw, and the sad part, I'd call, where the headlights were, there was casks. Military casks, English, French, that they had taken from prisoners or people that got killed. That was hanging in front of their big trucks, and that sticks in my mind. And this is just about 1940. I had never seen the Germans before.

So we went back to the place where we're staying, and it turns out Petain had armistice. On May the 25th, there was no more fighting. Everything stopped on May 25, and so we went back to Dijon, because Dijon was where my sister-in-law had some family. And I had already, and my folks felt, we had made some acquaintances. We were not completely strangers there.

Anywhere else, we'd have to start from scratch, who are we going to meet, what was going to be what. So we went back, and sure enough, at that particular time, I was very close to a fellow my age, and he was born near Dijon, and he wasn't Jewish. And his name was Paul-- is Paul. He's still alive, and my whole life from that time on has been the only person over all these years I've been close and still in contact.

Now, the reason I have to go now to what happened after the war ended in armistice like, the war didn't ended, but the French troops were finished. So you had to register in City Hall because everybody has an identity card. Here, we have a driver's license instead of that. but in France, you get an identity card with a picture, and also it says what profession, even the religion at that time. So naturally, whoever had this, we had to go as Jews to the City Hall to get ration cards. We had to go to City Hall, and everybody got a yellow Jewish star. A yellow band with a Jewish star to be known that you're Jewish. I didn't go.

I have to explain. Some people submit to anything you tell them. I at that time was young. I really didn't figure what can they do to me if they catch me that they wouldn't do if I went for rationing, and that's another way how it saved me all the trouble because they had no record of me because I didn't register. So by that time, I worked in different bakeries. We made what's called [INAUDIBLE]. I mentioned that before, and the French people never had any problem. I was a French born. Nobody asked me what I was, no anything.

To tell you the truth, my best friend at that time didn't know anything that I was Jewish. So what happened, all of a sudden, they come and pick up my father in February, 1942. You got to realize, I'm talking about 1940, and all of a sudden I jump to '42. That year '41, the Germans didn't do anything. Maybe they were doing it in Paris or other big towns, but where we were in Dijon, nothing had been decided to take Jews away from their home. It reassures you maybe they're not that bad, OK, and that's how my folks looked at it.

They could have very easily gone to the Swiss border. It's about two hours by car, two and a half hours by car, into the woods going to Switzerland. At that time, we didn't know that there was extermination camps, that people that were a certain age were gassed. We didn't know this. Maybe the people in Germany knew, but the communication weren't as they are now. There was no news per se. There was no TV, no radio. We didn't know period. So finally, I decide-- well, they took my father. I had already gone to work.

The neighbors came to the factory and said, you better not go home. They're going to come and pick you up too. So through the underground, they put me on a train. I got to a place at the border which one part was occupied. The other part was not occupied, and I find myself on free zone, French zone. But the problem is, I was born in 1922. This is 1942, draft age. So the Vichy government that collaborated with the Germans had youth camps and green uniform which resembled a German uniform. So I didn't want to do this, but I was given some advice by some military people.

What you call here recruiting groups. They were recruiting people. France had a right to have 100,000 men under uniform and it was called Armistice Army. There must have been about 300,000, because there was a lot of Alsatian from Lorraine that escaped not to be put in the German army that escaped and enlisted in the French army.

So they told you, if you enlist, you have six months of training and then you're going to be sent to the colonies. And the colonies in France was Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Indochina, a lot of places.

So I had figured I'd go after my training to Algeria or Morocco, wherever I was going to be able to go, and then go to Gibraltar where the English forces joined to go in England. Never happened. My destiny wasn't that way.

I might have been dead going into the army this way. And so I was in the army. And as things happen beyond your control, those American troops land in Morocco before I was able to-- I had already my training. I had a month of rest. I had a month furlough.

And I hadn't gone back to Dijon, because in July, I heard that they took my mother. My sister sent a postcard to me and everything. So what I do, I can't go to Africa, because the Americans are there. And the Germans pushed all the way down to the Mediterranean and sent everybody home.

There was no more troops. I had a three year enlistment. And I was in the army maybe eight or nine month. So my friend Paul had joined me-- and I had mentioned this before-- and we both went back to Dijon. He had his folks there. His folks were very nice with our folks. And we were friendly.

Now my mother and father was gone. I go back to Dijon. My sister is there with my little brother. And my sister had married at 16 and a half. And so I come back in end of '42.

And in early '43, we get from the Vichy government a paper saying, we know you're enlisted for three years. You have to finish your enlistment working in Germany in the factories.

So my friend and I, we were kidding, you know. We were going to ask you because I'm a baker to work on a farm, which that was like a joke. You couldn't go where you wanted. You had no choice where were they going to send you.

But it occurred to me, being born in Lorraine, they don't know I'm a Jew. And I'm not in any way they're going to find. They put me in a German army. Put me in the Russian front.

If they find out I'm a Jew, I'm going to camp. So I didn't report to Germany, but I went to see the fellow that was instructed on the military preparation in 1939. He was some kind of official in City Hall or it's called a prefecture.

I told him exactly my situation. And he advised me that he can requisition me to work in a restaurant by the railroad station where it was a turning point when German soldiers went on the African front. They came back to there to go back to Germany and back and forth.

But they always had to stop in Dijon. And they had only one place to eat, because they had no money. So they ate in that place. So I worked there and I served the food, which was called in German eintopf, one dish.

They only had-- it's wartime-- a cabbage and potato with was some kind of beans and so forth. And they used to have to give me a ticket to be able to serve it. So all they had asked me every day to report to them how many tickets or how many meals I served.

I did this. That went on for quite a few months. And also what it did, we ate better than the Germans in the kitchen. We had the food. It was free. We had wine. Now the reason I mention wine, in France, you can get-- that ordinary wine is about 7% alcohol.

Now if you work in a warm kitchen and we worked from eight o'clock in the morning till about 2:00 PM, then we went home and came back about 4:00 PM until eight o'clock at night. And every time we ate, we had a bottle of wine on the table.

There was no beer, no soda, but this wine that had no label. It was from a big barrel. They fill it up. And the bottle held about 3/4 of a litter. And every meal, I had a bottle of wine three meals a day.

And I guarantee you, I was stronger than an ox after when they caught me. How did they catch me? And that had to be-- I went to work there in February of 1943. And I felt pretty good, because here I was in the middle of the nest of the Germans, a Jew, and they never knew anything.

But, I guess, to this day, I don't know exactly how it happened. Either because they're meticulous and they saw in their papers my father and mother was taken in a camp, the same name, Blankenberg. And that's how they got me.

Or its somebody-- because you remember at that time, I mentioned to you I had a girlfriend. And somebody maybe being jealous or something. I even had a card from the kommandatur German kommandatur where there was a curfew that said nine o'clock, because I had this particular job.

If they stopped me at night after nine o'clock, they would look at the card and let me go. This is very important why I mention this too. Because, although, it has nothing to do with the camp, it's my life of things of how close you can come to being in very deep trouble.

One evening after 10 o'clock, I took my girlfriend back home. And as I was walking towards the place where I lived, there was a big gate. In front of the gate, and it was pitch black, there were some German military police with a flashlight in my eyes and they asked me for my papers.

And they took me from there. They took me to what we call a kommandatur which was a place where the soldiers had their black police office. And sure enough, they called where I worked to find out if this is correct. Sure.

They had me there and they let me go. But to be nasty, they took my shoes, kept my shoes, and had me go back to my house where I lived. I didn't have a house. I had a little apartment in the hallway. And I've gone back since and when I look at that hallway, I see myself in front of that door with my shoes gone and have in my stocking.

I'm walking maybe a half a mile from the place where I was taken back to the house where I. Lived now that was already to show you the attitude. It didn't have to be Nazis. It was German military that had stopped me in the middle of the night

I was with good paper and everything. For spite, they took my shoes away. In those days, I had no three, four pair of shoes. I had one pair of shoes and I had some sandals or something. So I had to go with sandals for a few days until I got myself a pair of shoes.

Anyway, to get further after this, in September or early October-- that date I don't have exactly in my mind-- of 1943, they come at nine o'clock in the morning into the kitchen where I'm at. And they say, you come with us.

And I am taken out of that kitchen in the clothes I had. I guess, I changed. I had white cook's uniform, but I changed. They let me change into my regular street clothes. And they take me to that place where it was a Nazi Gestapo.

And I heard guys that were not really crying, but they're being hit. And you hear-- the French is [NON-ENGLISH]. They were making noises like they were hurting. Not screaming, but simply they were getting hurt, because they were under-- it wasn't Jews. It was basically the underground people that had maybe some sabotage or whatever.

Anyway, I get to the office and the guy's behind the desk. And I'm standing there and he says, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]? Whatever he was going to say. That means, are you Jewish? It didn't take me long to say, yes, because I really thought if I say no, they're going to start beating me because I lied.

They knew. When they got me there, they knew. So when I said yes, they didn't do anything to me. They took me from there, military car took me to jail in Dijon, which was so full, there was no room. They put us in a place that was a workshop.

And from there, we stayed from October till the end of November, which is quite a bit of time. But it was nothing to be too worried about. I figured wherever I'm going to go, I'll have to work. I'm not worried.

Never knowing about-- they took my folks, but I still didn't know what happened to them. Meanwhile, my sister was pregnant. And she was to give birth to a girl in October prior to me leaving Dijon.

So here I was going to a camp. I knew she was pregnant, but I never knew she had a boy or a girl. And all the time I was gone, I said, if I don't come back, I never would know what kind of a child she had.

So we were taken to Paris, Drancy. There was a camp where everybody got together. And there was a Red Cross, but we knew right away something was fishy.

We are given a piece of paper. We had to give everything we had in valuables. And on that paper, it said, you would at your destination, you would be reimbursed in zloties. Now zloties is Polish money.

Now here the German are taking you. So we figured, we're not going to Holland or Denmark. We go going to Poland. That's the way I looked at it. And at that time, I didn't have too close friends, except one guy who was taken with me. And he was in Dijon and we went together into the camp in Drancy.

So it's always good to have someone that went through an experience with you become friendly with strange people you don't know. And on December the 7th, 1943, we are going on this train that goes to Germany, December 7th, 1943.

And they prepare you. They are very well arranging things. They know what they're doing. They figure there's always going to be some guy in the stretch to go to Germany between Paris and border and is going to try to escape.

So they put in every compartment, which was 40 people or six horses. It was World War I, they transport troops in these wagons, train cars.

So they had selected a kapo with children, two kapos. And in each one of them, they said, if anybody tries to escape, we'll shoot you. So naturally, this guy still doesn't know that when he gets there, the children and the wife are going to be gone within 24 hours.

So they were very nervous. And here we go. We leave. And as we go east through Germany, we passed and slowed down even the town where I was born. I saw the town. There was a viaduct between the two towns.

And I knew this, as a kid, the place. But we couldn't do anything. We more or less were like sheep already. We didn't realize what we're doing and where are you going to go. We reached a point in '43, let's hope it's not going to be that bad. And that's the way we got into Germany.

Now we're looking at December the 10th, 1943. All of a sudden, we see snow. There was no snow when we left. We see snow. And we passed and we could see a place called Hindenburg, which was the last German town before you got into Auschwitz.

I still didn't know what Auschwitz was at that time. I'd never heard of Auschwitz. Maybe a little bit was discussed at that last camp, because there were a lot of Jewish people and it was most nothing but Jewish people there.

And some of them had already some experience. Maybe something was said, but it didn't click in my mind what was Auschwitz. A work camp? I didn't know. The reaction really became something special once they opened the wagon and the German soldiers started screaming at you to get out.

Remember, there were people for three days and three nights cooped up in this particular compartment. So the older people had a hard time getting out, the kids the same thing. So here we are all out and they start to holler.

You have to understand, because I was born in Lorraine and I had German training in school, I understood German. So they were saying, put all the able working people on one side and-- not the women. Women, older people, and children on the other side.

The whole train consisted about 1,100 people. 24 hours later, there was a little bit over 300. I don't have the exact figure. They were taken from there to a workplace called Buna Monowitz.

Now among those that went with me were some guys that had been with their wives and children. Once the reality of the calamity hit them, they were not human anymore. In a sense, they lost the will to live. What for? My wife, my kids are gone.

And I'm not saying it happened within an hour or two. That took about a day. As soon as you got into the barrack-- no, not before we got in the barrack, we here with our clothes, with shoes, and it's snowing.

In front of a barrack, a young military guy-- he couldn't have been more than in his 20s-- with a whip. And he starts screaming and whipping us. Take all your clothes off and hold your shoes and your belt in your hand.

It's snowing, so people didn't react too fast and he started to whip. Then you wake up and you do it. As we go in this particular barrack, it's just like in the army. There's some veterans, Jewish guys that are there from Poland or someplace.

And they start talking to Jewish, where are you from? How old are you? Stuff like this, what's your name? And the first thing we have to do is they clip every bit of our hair of our body. And we have to go into a shower.

And before going to shower, they put some kind of-- it had the smell of petroleum, disinfectant. They were always very afraid of typhus with lice. The Germans were afraid.

So they do this. We go into a hot shower. Hot-- I don't know how hot it was. I don't remember. But what I do recall, with our shoes in our hand and our belt, we are thrown out in the snow. No towel.

Now, again, I couldn't see my face if I was affected by all of this. But I could see the other people's faces. And they were dehumanized. They had their eyes that were cold.

There's a shine in an eye when you are either sad or even if you're very happy. You have an expression. And these people became expressionless. I couldn't recognize the people. It's like in a different world.

Again, I was still with this one friend from Dijon and we're together. We get to the work camp and we go into our barrack. And they start with a needle to write. So the whole convoy that was put in there was in a series of 167,400 and something.

So mine is 167,462. That's my number. And after they did this and we were in this barrack, and, again, I don't know how long it took, but we were assigned to go to work.

And this fellow that was from Dijon, he was with me. We were stuck together and we were going to work. I lost track of him maybe three or four months later when I had-- every week, we had to clip the hair under there all over.

And I had been nicked. And we had no soap to wash. Must have been dirty or something. I got an abscess. And I had to shovel outside and dig holes. I couldn't lift my arm. And I knew if I couldn't work, I'd go in the ovens.

So finally, the friends that were in the barrack with me, they helped me make the beds. If you didn't make your bed properly, the kapo, the head of the barrack, would call you up front and give you on your behind a couple of rubber hoses because your bed wasn't done properly.

And you have to remember these kapos were maybe 10% Jews and the rest was all criminals, German citizen, or conscientious objectors, or whatever. And finally, I went to-- I couldn't anymore, so I went and I had one of the greatest surgeon from Berlin that operated on this.

In other words, he gave me the night before some black stuff to put on to ripen it. The next day, I sat in the office and I heard all the [GERMAN] in Germany was an infirmary. Kranken building or something that this. [GERMAN] under the [GERMAN].

And a lot of these guys, they were called muselmann. Muselmann is when there is nothing but skin and bones on you. There's nothing. You don't look like a human. And muselmann from French means, you know you're Muslim. But it has no connection.

The German have that word, muselmann in German, which means you're not human. You're nothing but skin and bones. And they wouldn't let you live too long after that. They weren't going to feed you if you couldn't work.

Anyway, I was lucky enough. The guy says to me in German, eins zvei drei. And I did this and he cut. And when he got everything out, he gave me what we call toilet paper to put around.

And out I went. I was glad to leave there, because I hated to stay there. So I was fortunate that this guy was a Jew that operated and didn't want to me to be taken to the ovens, because I couldn't have worked.

So he sent me back into the barrack. And I always, since that time. I remember the things that you see about a bully, a guy that is mean. He's mean to show off to because of his behavior.

But if you take him aside and you show him that you're not afraid of him or if you react kind of nice, he'll become a little nicer. Not going to become an angel, but he'll react a little nicer.

So when kind of backed and had been very mean with his hose and he was always mean when everybody came back in the barrack. But it was maybe two guys with me that were sick.

And the whole day, he couldn't do very much with us. So he got a little nicer and he said, OK, don't worry, I'll take care of you. When you're really ready to go back to work, you wouldn't work outside. I'll put you with a group to work inside the factory.

This is March of 1944. And outside, we had what you had to get together before going to work at 6:00 AM outside. And they would count every day. And you sometimes had to stand an hour our.

And when your nose starts to drip, it becomes ice. It's that cold. So to keep warm, we would shake hands with a guy next in the line and do this or take us and lift each other just so that it doesn't get stiff from the cold.

So when I got into work inside, I figured now it's a little bit better. But I had no idea what the future's going to be. We had no news basically. And then, as I worked inside, I had to carry the tool of a German, a civilian, that had been in the army and discharge because he was in a artillery bombardment. And he got shell shocked.

So they discharged him. He was a Prussian. Schultz, his name was Schultz. Again, you see, maybe it's my luck that my behavior or my looks give a feeling that I'm not such a bad guy.

This guy, out of the blue sky, had me take this toolkit, which I took every day up to where we were working up in the-- higher up. We're insulating these pipes with a steel wall. And he had the metal to put together and I put the steel wall on there.

He brought his toolkit and I find about six or seven boiled potatoes when I'm hidden upstairs, because he was afraid if somebody sees me, he would be in trouble.

And what I found out is that he had been in the army in occupation in France and some farmers invited him to the house and gave him a dinner. They gave him wine and they had a good dinner. That stuck in his mind.

And my philosophy has been since then, if you do it a good turn to someone, regardless who he is, eventually, if not him, somebody else is going to repay you with some nice things that will please you.

When this guy did this to me, I didn't expect it, number one. Number two, it sure helped me, because we were eating nothing but liquid soup and bread that was dark, sawdust, whatever.

Well, anyway, we got so that the hunger persisted enough that you feel hunger, but you never stopped feeling hungry. Or good thing there was water. We drink water just wherever there was water. Sometimes we ate snow, just because the body was liquid.

Now I'm going to jump from there where the guy helped me to where, all of a sudden, you hear bombardment. The Russians were moving towards Germany. And all of a sudden, they're in Krakow and you hear artillery.

About that time, most of the able German Nazis were gone. I'm talking about January of 1945. And they decide to evacuate this camp towards inner Germany.

And I had mentioned once, we were 300 when we got there. One year later, December 10th, 1944, December 10th, 1944, we were 12 guys left around us. Maybe the some were still alive someplace else.

We got together from 167, the guys from that convoy. So what happened when they decide we're going to evacuate, we left at camp with-- one place they had food for the guys that were known Jews, those kapos, and the head guys that worked.

So we dug up some cans of-- it's like corned beef. It came from Argentina. Bully beef it was called. And it's very good. And we ate this and we had the cans. And we reached-- we walked out of that camp in the middle of the night.

There's no light. And we're walking like army, six or eight across, and a German on each side. And I'm on this end. There's another guy next to me. And then I see the German and I looked at the guy. He must have been over 60 years of age.

It wasn't a home guard, the last people they could still grab to be in service. They were going to escort us out of there. But this guy had a sack full of stuff. They couldn't even carry. They walked one mile and they couldn't carry it.

So rather than drop it, they said to the guy, you carry it for me. So I carried it. In the dark, this guy never saw-- he passed it down. And we emptied that sack with whatever that was edible stuff. We ate it and we threw it away.

Where was he looking to find who the guilty is? We all looked like this. We all had the same thing. They couldn't recognize anything. That's the experience we went through.

All of a sudden, we get to a station. And from there, we're supposed to take a wagon and leave. And there's some barracks. And it's a middle of night and it's snowing in January of 1945 already.

I would say the people that went out, 2/3 didn't make it from that January '45 that were with us. Because the worst was coming now. We had to take this train. And by that time, we were three buddies together.

I couldn't remember their faces, their name, nothing. All I know is there were barracks and we couldn't get in. We tried to go through the window and all of a sudden, there's a fist that came out and hit you in the face.

Because remember, it's just the moon was a little lighting up the-- you get used to the dark, although, there's no light. So we couldn't. But we saw there was some kind of a mound and we could shelter ourselves away from the wind.

So the three of us, we huddled together on the snow behind the thing and we slept. When we got up-- when it got daytime, we got up, the snow underneath was melted and it was coal.

It was a mound of coal to put for the engine of the trains. They were coal-driven. And that's something that sticks in my mind that you can go through so many things and you're not even realize how bad it was.

We go up on these wagons. Not the same as in France, which were covered and had doors that open like this. This opened that just, but it had no roof. It was about the height, about 6 foot, a little over six foot. Because I could see, stretching out.

But if I wanted to do something, like I did, I had to go on the shoulder of my friend. Sure enough, he really-- no food, no water. And we had gone from Auschwitz down south to Czechoslovakia, Austria.

And there are some camps, but nobody wants to give us the permission to disembark, because there's no place and no food. So we continue and we go further up north. And we go to Mauthausen. We can't get out.

By that time, it's not the hunger anymore. It's the thirst. Your body requires water. And I have to explain, we got 75, roughly. I can't tell you exactly. I didn't count them. But it looked like about 75 guys in a plane.

And every night, fortunately for me, the three of us, we had our back against the wall of the compartment. And so we were more or less protected. The others, the weak ones that fell down from tiredness, other guys fell on top of them and slept.

And the bottom ones were dead. The next morning, they were dead from lack of air or because they were just that bad off. And we were thrown, as the train was moving, we were throwing all these bodies overboard.

We arrived, we were less than 40 from the 75. I mentioned this before. It took from a Sunday to a Sunday, one week, no food. But remember I said I had this can and a string. We hooked up a string.

And I used to go up on the shoulder of my buddy. And at the train-- see some places, military or civilian trains had priority. So we had to stay on the side. And so there was snow, I used to go fishing with this and pick up snow. And we ate that snow like whipped cream, because the liquid was necessary.

And among this particular situation and we go through all these different towns, and it it's getting to the end of January. It took a week, so it must have been towards the end of January.

At one time, I'm going fishing. The train was stopped, but I didn't throw it far enough. And when I went, I said to myself-- the thought took less than two seconds-- I'm not going to get greedy. I'll lift it.

And as I lift it, here, it was about by that table, there's a gun at my head. In the snow, I didn't hear his boots. I didn't even hear him approaching, because I was so concentrating to get this. When I saw this, I dropped the coat and I went like this. He shot and he missed me.

So you see, you get to a point to say, all these things, you could have been dead and your life is ended. Somehow, there was a reason for me to be able to go through this.

And we reach now 1945. And we get out to the camp and we get to a camp. And it was called Dora. Dora had very few Jews. Mainly Russian and French underground people, communists from France were in that camp.

Mechanics that we could work on the machine tools, lathe, to make parts of the V1 rocket. Now I don't know where we are. It looked like in Tyrol with pine trees. And all the barracks were underneath the pine trees.

All of the prisoners were in barracks among the pine trees. Like if you go up to Tahoe. you see some homes among the trees. That's what it looked like, except it wasn't Tahoe.

And here I am walking with these guys. And we're so weak. A week, we had not water. One thing I have to come back for a second, by the fourth or fifth day-- I don't recall exactly one day-- there were so many bodies in different wagons, they stopped us.

And there was Red Cross on the side feeding German soldiers. And on this side, there was like a passageway and a ravine. So they wanted guys, able bodies, to come out with the dead bodies and throw them in that ravine.

Because we used to keep the dead bodies. Sure enough, I figured, my legs-- I'm going to get out. That six foot thing, I couldn't lift me to go out. I couldn't lift myself. I was so weak.

So I watched. And here I see these two guys, one on each side on the arm. And like a cart, he takes the two legs and throw them in. When they were all in, everybody was there with machine gun and thrown in the hole.

Even the one that survived, everything to that point, because they weren't try to do what I tried to do to, get my legs. But you can't think that is the thing that the Germans were going to do.

That's less mouth to feed. They didn't know what to do with us. The war technically was empty, finished for them. The Russians were going into Berlin practically at that time. They were that close to Berlin.

And we were south in that camp. And straight up, you would go to the camp called Ravensbruck. And from east, you were west of Berlin already by that time.

So what happened, I would get to that camp and I'm here. Now I thought when I ate that snow, whatever dirt there was, that I was having a fever and I heard French voices. Turns out, there was really French guys in the barracks that I could hear talking French.

So we already had gotten where there was no more soldiers guarding us. We just walked. We're supposed to go to a shower. Next to it, they told us there's a movie place they had for the Germans. And next to the movie, there's a bathhouse. You go up there.

So we walk and I heard this. And this guy says, don't go up there. You never come out from there. They exterminate with gas, everybody that goes in there. So fortunately, this guy was like a kapo. And he got the three of us into the barrack, gave us new clothes, and we stayed in there. And we started to work like we've been there all the time.

There was no control anymore. It's not like in Auschwitz, every single day there was count. And if they made a mistake of one or two, they recounted. So sometimes you're one hour outside in the snow.

In this case, we were fortunate that they didn't count. And here I was. We had three shifts during the time. January till May we were there. They had the factory making that rocket bomb inside a tunnel, an underground tunnel that was like a horseshoe.

And where the entrance was, they had a big green net with fakse rubber trees that closed it. And so if there was planes from the allies looking for where it was troops, they couldn't see it. The barracks were in the trees. Now technology is so much different.

Anyway, we went to work. And what can I do? I'm not a mechanic. So the French guy that was the head of the guy, he says to me, when I get there, there are some guys working on this machine tools, lathe. It turns and it has a different valve and they make a-- so I used to take a rag and go around from one machine to the other and rubbing.

And I got so bored, I was reading. Because just like we read a license plate, what state they are, I would see Scott's, machine from Milan or from England. They had machines from all over Europe and the United States.

So that's how it went until, in April, the Germans come into that underground tunnel, which was a horseshoe. The railroad line would go around. They would come in here, load that metallic V1 without the ammunition, and come out someplace else, and go to get loaded with whatever had to be loaded.

So the Germans come in and we hear a whole hullabaloo. And we're supposed to quit our job and come in front of a parade board. There was a board. There was a German that had a big thing and he was talking and talking. And all I could hear is, sabotage, sabotage.

And it was 50 Russians they were going to hang for sabotage. But hanging is one thing. They weren't really hanging them. There was cranes and they put a big board like this and put fours cords, four bodies to hang. And then they lift the crane. And that's how the guys would be strangled, not hung, strangled.

And as soon as they did this, they still spoke of a different thing about sabotage. And then we're supposed to pass in front of those bodies hanging, 50 of them. And with a rubber hose, we're supposed to-- and they say, this is sabotage.

And we ran by and this was the entrance, about 200 feet to the entrance. And must have been about 200 guys. We ran across. If you can run pretty good, you didn't get hit at all.

Now the bad part of it is they say, everybody back to work. The first 50 stay here. I'm among the first 50. The first thing goes in my mind, we're the next 50 to be hung. It wasn't that. They needed people to unhook the bodies to put them on trucks.

Now remember, by that time, all the things I went through, you're not human. The body was warm. I'm holding the cord to unhook the guy. And the only thing that I could remember was like in France, if you hangman's noose, brings you luck.

I was wishing myself luck with that hangman's noose. Although, that people was dead in front of me and the misery was so great, all I was thinking is, that's going to bring me luck. Now it just shows you how you're dehumanized by the effect of what these people were doing to me.

Sure enough, we had to put them in a truck. And we had no problem. We went back. And that lasted maybe a week or two. And all of a sudden, thousands of allied planes came over and they dropped bombs. Never where we were. They never could see us.

They dropped in the towns around. And all of a sudden, there's no more German Nazis. Home guard again and one half goes to the valley. We go through the hills where I was. And the ones to the valley, parachutists saved them early April.

We went the other way. And it must have been about the 15th of April that, all of a sudden, there's no Germans around us. The three of us in the pine trees and we see some Germans, but in their long johns, no uniform.

And I see tanks. The first thing I saw was tanks with stars. I thought-- but it was Russian tanks. So the first guy with the Russian tank, we're looking at them like this. And he comes down, he looks at us, and he says something like if we wanted to smoke.

He took a pack of Russians cigarettes with a filter like this. He gave us cigarettes. And he took a piece of paper, newspaper, with some tobacco. And you rolled himself a cigarette with some newspaper. And he wanted something stronger.

OK, so here we are, more or less, free. We see a farm. The three of us go towards the farmer. And this farmer says can we get something to eat? And it was like a barn with potatoes, pile of potatoes. And hanging was smoked ham.

You know what it does to guys like us. We're hungry. We took that ham. We built a fire outside. We roasted the potatoes in the cinders. And we ate that like this. This is too rich. Your intestines were-- we got so sick.

For two days, we were laying on the ground. We didn't know what to do with ourselves. Diarrhea, everything you can imagine. So after that-- again, you see, as I'm talking, it comes back to me.

Before there was no more Germans and we went on the road and we got the Russian that saved us, two, three days before, we're leaving this camp. And again, I was always foraging to see where we can find some food.

I see this barrack. The windows open and they were inwards, two. And it's like a chalet, a wooden chalet. That's where the Germans had their food stock.

So I see a German about, I would say, 40, 50 feet in front of me and I make the sign, I'm hungry. And I see he's going and he takes this and he takes this. And I say, gee, the guy's going to give me something.

What I didn't know is that he had a buddy of his that was on the side and he must have said something to him. And he comes around the barrack. He has a stool, a leg of a milking stool. It's around thing about this size, I would say.

And I see him coming with that stool thing. And I see this guy coming and I'm looking and I say, hunger is so great. I figured, I don't care if he's going to hit me, but at least I'm getting some food.

What he did this guy on the inside-- it shows you the mentality-- as he come closer-- and I was watching this-- he closes the window and he catches my sleeve and my coat, which was a Sing Sing type clothes.

He caught me and I'm stuck. And there's the guy coming. He hit me on the head. But I was strong enough to rip this off and run away. The first impression I had, I have lice or something, because the blood. I didn't realize I had blood.

But the blood was trickling very lightly. Didn't even come down. And so when I rejoined the other people and we went back where we got the farmer, what I did get, he opened my skull, as you can see here.

Yes.

But it did not bother me, except we must have ate a lot of stuff that didn't go with our stomach and we drank water that wasn't too clean. I got edema. My forehead swell up and it was puffed. And you could feel. It was kind of funny.

And we reached the camp of Ravensbruck. That's where I saw the first time, women-- I wouldn't be far off if I said their legs were about this size. The bone, what we call, is that the tibia? That's it.

And I couldn't distinguish if it was a woman or not, because no hair. The body was Muslim man like the men. But we were told that's a women's camp there. The women were there.

Sure enough, it didn't take too long. The Red Cross came around and they gave us international Red Cross packages mostly from America. Lucky Strike cigarettes, there was a milk powder, there was sugar, there was rice.

Sure enough, I'm a cook, I decide to make rice pudding right away. First thing, I got to have rice pudding. And we get into a backyard some place and we make some fire. And as I'm making a rice pudding, somebody stole my package, an inmate, somebody else that's very hungry or very greedy.

So I cried. I swear to God, I cried like a baby. Because here I was and I saw the American food that was in there, I had never seen in my life. And it was a Red Cross thing.

But there's another sense that afterwards it came back to me that at least 50% of the people that ate the stuff from this package died of diarrhea. Because the intestines weren't lined.

So what happens-- now I'm giving you statistics. They're not official statistics. That's what, at the time, they told me that half of the guys that got these packages died from diarrhea.

So I had no more package, but there wasn't more Germans around us. And here we are, the three guys, in a kaserne, which is a depot. That kaserne was called Adolf Hitler. I'll never forget.

And here we are with people from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia. And we're relaxing. And all of a sudden, I hear somebody in the hallway hollering, everybody from the west have to leave. The trucks are taking you back home.

All the rest of them would go east to the countries where they were taken from. Sure enough, we were taken. American GIs with the trucks and we got in. There up we went to-- we were north Dutch border.

From there, we took a train. I sold my first white bread in Holland. We went to Belgium. It didn't take too long. And we got into France and I got what they call deuxieme bureau which is like the CIA that checks you out if you're really a prisoner or you're a guy that enlisted with the Nazis and so forth.

And we got, I guess, at that time 200 francs. And they gave us some khaki clothes, not uniform, like a jacket and pants with khaki and a shirt. And so we are in Lille, which I had worked during the war for a while. So I know the town.

And the first thing I bought was a kilo of cherries. We're looking at now May, May of 1950. The war is over. I'm in France, back in France. What happened to my sister and the rest, I had no idea.

I knew about my folks. That I knew. And we go to Dijon and I see-- first people I go to see is my friend Paul's folks that had a dairy grocery. And I go in the back door and they see me and they say-- the mother says, my God, I never thought I'd see you again.

And she puts me at the table. And this is the entrance to the kitchen. [INAUDIBLE] and I had a newspaper and I had it like this. When somebody came, I put it down. They all went like this.

But I got the whole family that saw me. And then I found out what happened. My sister was in Germany with her daughter. I found out she had a daughter. And she was in the army, French army, as a translator and a postal censure for the French government.

Her husband was in the army too. And I found out my little brother, which we call Coco that was born in 1933, was taken in '44-- he was 11-- and didn't come back.

How I found out some news about him is my friend and I went to the different organization that took care of these people that came back. And I was told there was a young guy that was 14 that was in the hospital.

He came back and he was with my mother. So I went to see him and he told me, yes, we went to Buna Monowitz That's where I was. My youngest brother was in that camp. There must have been maybe 100 barracks. I could have been very close. I don't remember exactly. Except I never saw him.

And so I found out what happened with the whole family. And first thing that happened, the government gave me a card with a picture that I was deported. And I had some privileges, which, at this time, were very little.

Because everybody in France was still rationed. 1945, '46, they still had rations in France. The situation wasn't overnight back to normal. And little by little, my destiny was not to stay there.

I had met some people in Paris. I went back to Paris and I found out that there's this lady. Her son works in the Belgian Congo and he has a company, which we know here now is a tire company, the French tires. Not Goodrich, it's the--

Michelin.

Michelin. Had a factory in Brazzaville in Belgian Congo. This lady was Belgian and her husband was an engineer-- her son. And he came back to France and he talked to me. And he said, look, there's 10,000 white. If you want to come to work for us there, you get two months vacation. Every two years, you get two months.

And I was all set to go. And at the last minute, I said, Africa doesn't appeal to me. And the French government send me to recuperate, because I had lost weight and everything, to a resort place near Vichy in the center of France.

And there was a hotel with people from all over. There were Hungarian Jews. There was Polish Jews that were transient. They were going to go either to Israel, or the United States, or Canada, or whatever.

And again, my way of doing things, sometimes, you always think what can you do to help. So I wasn't going to go to work. I was still a little weak. But I knew how to make eclairs.

And so I went in the kitchen, I asked the people, do you have some eggs? They have. And I made dessert for the whole bunch of people. There must have been about 80 people, I guess.

So I made eclairs. And everybody ate eclairs. And that was right after the war. And I was a buddy. Everybody was my friend. And naturally, you're in your 20s. There's some young girls. You get friendly with them.

And there was a fellow from Poland, Mandy Black. And he was very active. He had lost his family, everybody. And he was going to New York. And he more or less said to me, why don't you come with us?

And that's how I remember that in 1936, I had my mother's sister that sent us tickets to leave. And I remember the name, Packard, Williams Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

And I sent a French letter to my aunt. I didn't speak French. And sure enough, we had a connection and she made me papers. And I got to New York in 1947. March the 4th, 1947 I got to New York. And I kissed the rest of the world goodbye.

My friend Paul that I met in '39 took me with his car to the Le Havre to take me to the United States. And I remember his scar on that pier. And I was leaving.

Now when I got the United States in 1993, I'm still friend with that same Paul from 1939. My first wife, my son has gone to see him. We are closer than brothers.

But born in 1922, both of us. He's become very, very-- he doesn't move. He's been here three times. One on his own with his family to visit me. The second time he came, because he enjoyed so much the first time. We made friends.

And the third time he came when I lost my wife in '83. The next day, he was on a plane to come here. That shows you, you don't have to look far to have people that can help you or try to make you feel better.

Although, I'd say, all these years, I had never had-- except this year, I feel kind of the fellow has gotten to a point where he is not the self-assured man that he used to be. The age has taken him to a point.

He retired when he was 60. And now he's 70 going on 71. In April this month, he's going to be 71. He was supposed to come when the Gulf War was going on. He gave me an excuse towards the war over there, I can't come.

The last year, I went to see him. He said, next year, I'm coming. He's not coming. He doesn't want to tell me, I don't want to come. But I realized you can be friendly all these years, but somehow, along the line, your thoughts change from the time you were 17, 1920. In the army, we were together, everything.

So at this particular point, I reached the United States. Everything that was my life in Europe was erased. I didn't want to get in touch with no one. And I made a new life here.

This Mandy Black that had been so influential in bringing me, he had lost his whole family. But he found in New York a lady that was widowed. And she was in school with him in Poland when they were kids.

And they still were in their 40s or late 30s at that time. So they got married and I went to his wedding. And this lady had a very good friend that was my wife's cousin. And that's how I met my wife when they get married.

And at that time, I spoke very little English. And I took my wife to a movie in New York, a French movie. And my wife had taken some French in school. And remember, I was, at that time in '47, when I met her, I can even tell you the day we met. June the 7th, 1947. We get married July the 3rd, 1948.

What was her name?

Sarah. Her maiden name was Rabinovitch. Although, as I said before, I wasn't really that close to Jewish religion. Because I was intermingling with my job, with my friends, I knew my Jewishness, but I wasn't the main purpose.

Although, there are some people that were in camp, came back, and became very religious, went to Israel. My case was different. Not that I would say it's better or worse. That's my way.

But I could see that I always looked for getting closer to the religion. Because my wife had lost her parents. They had high blood pressure and they died young. She lived with her grandmother in New York.

And so we get married. And I lived with her in the apartment with another cousin. I was working at that time at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York. She worked as a secretary treasurer in a fur company on 7th Avenue in New York.

The owner was [? Schuter, ?] Mr. [? Schuter. ?] And he helped us get money to go in business. In 1952, I opened my first bakery. That was my ambition, to be my own boss. I always worked very hard.

If I worked for a salary, like at the Waldorf, there was three or four guys making the same salary as me and they never did a day's work. They took to the numbers racket.

They paid off the head guy in the bakery so he should let them do this. So they were getting paid and they didn't work. There was 2,000 employees. They go with the number racket, which, at that time, I remember was $0.25.

You'd give them three numbers. And if the numbers come in, you'd get $250. And remember, I'm talking about 1949. That's a lot of money. I won once. For $0.25, I played my house number, 254. and it came in. These are things among so many other things that can happen in a lifetime.

You mentioned that 1944 was an important year. Is there anything you want to tell us about that?

Yeah, '44 is that you have a single complete 365 days in hell. See, when you go to the camp and it's already December, well, part of that year, I had freedom of living in Dijon, I was in jail.

But never realized till December the 10th when we got there. Now somehow, by '44, we had an inkling that the Germans weren't going to win the war. We had a feeling what happened in Stalingrad. We had some way to find out.

Well, the Germans either had newspapers or they had a magazine called Der Spiegel. And some German Jews that were in this camp, they were able to, once in a while, get one.

And I recall vividly two German Jews sitting on the side of a barrack. They're looking at the picture. They showed pictures of the German troops in Russia. And they were looking at this. And just say, the Germans are getting a licking.

Now not the German. Our troops. Our troops are getting a licking. Now I know they were Jewish, because they had a star. But, you see, that goes back to assimilation. When you have generation, some of the parents of these kids could have been decorated from World War I in the German army.

So they were assimilated. And when they spoke of the German army, they would say, our soldiers were getting beat in

Russia. And it was different articles we heard. And we had also found out V-J Day in '44, June the 6th, that they landed in France.

We knew that. Well, how do we know? Because, as you can understand, we were put in a tunnel or in an isolated cell. There was Polish people around. And that connected with me, but other people around news from the outside world.

And that's how we found out through intermediaries that spoke Polish or spoke German. That's how we found out. So I knew we were close to-- the Germans were close to lose the war. But our destiny, what is going to happen to us, are they going to eliminate us or whatever?

And also, there was, at times, where I said to you, we're standing in line for hours in the morning for appell. Appell was they count every single body in that camp. And there was 200 barracks that hold about 250 people.

That means about 50,000 people that were in that camp working. And actually, some didn't work. They stayed there, do some work assigned by the Germans. I always tried to go in the kitchen, because it was warm by the oven or I would have more food.

But I never got to do this. I worked outside and then up with this guy. And also, in the year '44, as I said, in the year we got to that camp in Dora where I heard French, in Auschwitz, as we went out at the barbed wire into the IG Farben Industry's factory, there was English military prisoners.

There were civilians. And I heard some French. So sure, you didn't have the Nazi there hitting you if you stopped to talk. You were in an open area of work. IG Farben Industry was making synthetic gasoline out of coal.

And some civilians either went willingly to earn a living. Some were drafted and taken, although, they didn't want to. And so when I hear these people, there was a father and son. And the first thing that went into my mind, would you please get in touch in Dijon with my girlfriend? Her name is so and so that's the address.

These people, as the months went by, never said a word to me. But when I came back after the war, I have in my possession in my bag, I have postcard that they send to the mother of my girlfriend at that address and the name of these guys that were in Auschwitz.

And the postcard is open, because there was a censorship. You couldn't send a closed-in letter. Only postcard. And there's Hitler's stamp. But it's not a stamp, it's like the postcard where you don't stick a stamp. It's in with the postcard. It's like imprinted.

And he writes in French and he says, dear [INAUDIBLE] or dear madam [INAUDIBLE]. He wasn't very educated. But whatever he wrote, he said, Maurice was very glad for the food you send him and so forth.

They sent several packages. I never knew about it. And one of the packages, he said, next time you send a package, send me a list of what you put in the package.

Because what used to happen, the robber was robbed by the German. So he would get less. And you could see there was something missing. So it shows you, when they stopped, not sending anymore, when he said, Maurice needs some shoes and a watch, they knew I would never ask for a watch.

Food, maybe, and shoes, maybe. When they found out a watch, first of all, you couldn't send packages. But a pair of shoes whatever, the big thing. And naturally, the censor would open. So they stopped sending, but they gave me after the war.

You see, my whole life depended on this girl that was my girlfriend. I put my hopes on her that I'd come back and she'll be there waiting for me. Turns out, she got married. When I was back she was married and away.

So I only spoke to her mother. And her mother said to me that-- she gave me the postcard. And more or less, that's why

1944 was an odd situation where you get-- and during all that problem and it's a full year of so many things happening, the cold, as I said.

And in the summer, it used to be so damp, and wet, and muggy, mosquitoes. The area by pollen is swamps. All around was swamps. So there were guys in daylight at 6:00 AM in the morning with daylight would faint from the sun.

A couple of times there were people trying to escape. When they caught them and where we were all the people in the line for the appell, they would hang them. And we had to march like military battalions in front of them.

And some of these guys would faint, because they were too weak. So we always had 10 or 20 of these guys that fainted and some of them died. So you see, the elements were against you, besides being weak and not having food.

And you had to, more or less, to survive have a mental picture why you want to come back. There is no saying for other people that had lost their families why they were going to survive or what they're looking for.

But I believe that if you are into such a stressing position, you have to mentally give yourself a boost. You're hungry. Everything is dark. But you have to have some kind of hope for the future.

The end of the world wasn't going to come if we die. If we die, we die. There's only one body. But at that time, I wasn't thinking that way. That's what I'm saying now. All I was thinking is I wanted to survive to rejoin my girlfriend.

So that was my goal. And, as I said, as the year wore on, the Germans were getting beat. And they took-- most of the SS, they were mean in that camp. They took them to the front in Russia. So we got lesser Germans that were less bestial, less heinous, so to speak.

Was the winter worse than the summer?

Yes. First of all, I would say, summer, if you're halfway yet in good shape, the sunshine has never hurt as much as ice and snow below zero. And that's what we used to have where you would go to work in a factory where you would-- because you had shoes made out of wooden soles and material like up to your ankle that was-- and no socks.

So just sometimes by having to walk in this and in the cold, you would get sores. And there was nothing there to go to an infirmary to get something for it. So if your body was still immune to all that stuff, it would heal.

Again, as I said, it's very difficult to pinpoint now how come I got sores, I got things that were so bad, why in the world was I able to survive this?

Because, as I said, a year later, which was December, '44, when we got together, we were so few from the same convoy that it makes you think what happened to them. You don't really know what happened to them.

I'll give you an example. This reminds me as I'm saying what happened to them. One at a time in that year '44, you get an officer, a German officer, come into the barracks. And you had a barrack rectangular and there were three rows of beds three high.

So everybody that was in that barrack had to undress completely, and come from the left side in front of that German, and go into the aisle number one. And so he could see you from the front and from the back how skinny you were.

And when you show somebody that was so skinny that he realized they weren't able to go to work, he did like this. And there was a guy from the camp, a kapo, that would write the number, not the name. We had all numbers.

And as we go by, there was one fellow that I had in Paris met leaving Paris with his nephew. Not his son, his nephew. Both of them had a hair salon, a barber and women's salon, in Paris.

The son was about my-- the nephew was my age. And the uncle was already older. I wouldn't know exactly his age. And they put him to-- but I remember he was always, when he was walking, he was talking, and talking, and talking before this.

So I relate to this guy, because he was talking and giving hope to the guys not to give up, not to give up. Finally, he's taken to be going to the ovens. And his nephew stayed with us.

And as the war got on and I got back to Paris, who do I meet? The uncle. But the nephew didn't come back. What happened to uncle? They took him to the place where they were going to put him in the oven.

And he had the gift of gab. He started to talk to the Germans and said, I had in Paris, big coiffure, I make cut hair. So the German had no barber, they decided they're going to keep him. And he's going to be their private barber.

And they gave him food and he survived. The nephew, we never found out what happened to him. That shows you how destiny is. He was destined to go to the oven, but he gabbed to a group. Maybe they weren't even Nazis. The group that were guards in the main camp, because we were about eight miles away from the ovens.

Once in a while, we could see the smoke where they burned the bodies. Because as many convoys in '44 that showed up, among the ones that showed up in the year '44 was from Hungary, groups of people that were built like oxes. They were farmers, Jewish farmers, in Hungary.

And they had them walk from Hungary to Auschwitz. They walked. They had no way of transporting the people. And they experienced, they went through, they told us.

In the same period, they took some Sephardic Jews from the Isle of Cyprus. There were little guys, skinny guys, very skinny and tan. The other ones were rugged farmers.

But the ones that survived were the guys from Cyprus. The body was already not too fat and they had ways of surviving. In Cyprus, some of these guys that died wasn't big meals. They usually eat less-- on an island like Cyprus, it's a different type of food.

The farmer in Hungary, he had a farm, he had his own vegetable and everything. So they were big guys and strong guys. But somehow, once you get into that hell, everything changes.

And they got there in the summer when I told you that was it was very humid. These are little things, as I'm talking, I remember. Because you get to know people from Hungary.

I might repeat the thing that stuck. And I repeat this so often when people talk to me where I was in this particular barrack and I was in the middle. There was a Russian soldier above and a Greek guy in the bottom. Now I don't speak Greek and I don't speak Russian.

But by nature, you have to communicate somehow. I found out that this guy was a professor in Salonika in Greece and he spoke French, Spanish, actually, Greek, and he was Sephardic Jew, so he spoke Ladino Spanish, which, at that time, I didn't know. Since I'm here, I know that's the Spanish from the people from the Inquisition that left.

And I can see his face more than anybody else, because he had a pointy nose, tan, and very sad face, very sad face. And the Russian reminded me of these farmers from Hungary.

He had a rounder face. He wasn't fat anymore. But the physiognomy of his fixtures were round. And this guy was a soldier with a Russian brigade and was in Spain during the Civil War. So he learned Spanish.

There I came in with my bakery experience, telling to the Spanish guy in French how to make rum baba, how to make cakes. He would tell this to the Russian in Spanish, he repeated them. And one thing, it kept us going.

Although, we had no food, I'm talking about food and you're thinking how about that food, although, you have nothing to put in your mouth. It makes the time go by. And the same time, one of the answer that stuck in my mind is that Russians saying to the Spanish guy, after the war, he wants to come to Paris to work for me, the Russian.

And that stuck in my mind, because this group of three that we were there, we got along fine. And as it went on and the Germans took the guys that weren't able to work, things changed, especially towards the end of December of '44 when you knew that the Russians were moving closer to Germany.

And the Americans had landed in June, '44. So there was a year of hope and despair at the same time. Can you survive? There's hope. But can you survive? Is there a way? What's going to help you?

And as I said, after we left this camp, I went through this thing you with the -- Now when this happened to me, I was shook up about 10, 15 minutes. I was shaking.

Now the war is over in Germany. And I'm walking in the street. After Ravensbruck, I lost my package. Before the American troops took us, one incident occurred.

We met military prisoners, French. They had a pushcart with four wheels and all their belongings were in there. When they saw us-- I forgot who was with me, some other guys with me-- they gave us military coats, so the Germans wouldn't see us [INAUDIBLE].

And he gave me a coat and a French beret. And I'm walking with these guys in some town. And I remember that pushcart was here, I'm on this side. There's a guy, a military German, coming up.

And you could see he's wobbling. He must have been drunk. He sees me with a military thing, grabs me by the throat and has a gun in his hand. He says Jude. And he says some other things, but I didn't pay attention to what he said.

I started to speak in French, loud, so the people around, civilian, as well as my buddies, the French guy, could hear me. So this French guys came towards the guys and said in French they said, laissez tranquil, leave him alone. He's with us.

And he let go. That's another experience which happened after my package was stolen and we are not anymore in the hand of the Germans. You still have that risk element, because, after all, you're still in the condition of a prisoner.

You look like-- and you must have recognized in me something that is Jewish, although, I had military uniform on. And I guess, this was about my last big problem of the war. After this, it was smooth sailing towards France.

How did you know about D-day?

Well, the first thing, as I said, in those woods where we saw the Germans in underwear, because the Russian when they captured these guys, they took their uniforms away and hit them around a few times and let them go. They were loose. We, at that time, had seen the Russians. And you talked about armistice? The question-- I'm sorry.

Actually, I was asking about when the American troops landed in France in June of '44. Why don't you finish what you're saying now?

Yeah, I thought you asked me how I knew that there was no more fighting. There was no more fighting. We found out when we were May the 8th. It must've been May the 5th that we met with these Russians that gave us cigarettes in the tank.

And somehow, among the people that were prisoners in there, some of them were speaking Russian. They gave us the news that the war is going to end soon. May 8th was armistice, was end of the war.

And we found out this way. We didn't find out by big proclamations, by word of mouth of other people. D-day, which was June the 6th, 1944, that also we found out in the camp.

As I said, you're in a camp. There's, I guess, 50,000 people. And among these 50,000, there are Poles. There's German citizens, German soldiers that started already to think, well, we don't want to say it openly, but maybe we already finished. We're not going to win the war.

They got along very well with some German Jews citizens that were from Germany. And they gave them the news that the American forces landed in-- what was that-- St. Lo in France in Normandy.

That's how we found out. But all it made us feel, sure, they learned. It's better than it was last year. It's better than it was even yesterday. They're already on the continent. Because, remember, they had a fortress the Germans built.

But somehow, it was a large effort to land where they landed. And again, after the war, as I found out, there was different situations that these things, you don't know in the camp. Only thing you know is there's hope.

And hope is the greatest thing for your future to think of that, the ones that can save you are approaching, are near. We even knew that the Russians were closer than the people in Normandy, because we were eastern part of Germany closed.

We were in Poland really. Silesia is in Poland. By the way, Krakow and that area was always Polish. At this moment, it's-- what we call-- Auschwitz is under Polish rule. It always was Polish.

Prior of the war, I think, in '38, there was a treaty that Danzig, that became German. But it was a Polish port. The President of Poland worked in that on the shipyards in Danzig. And all of these I find out after the war. You learn.

What was your daily ration of food in the camp?

I tell you what we had. We had in the morning a square what we look at right now they have in some of the places you buy bread in the supermarket. It looks like-- it's called black bread, a square. And you can mix a lot of stuff.

It was that size. A square this size and square. You know what square muenster cheese looks like? Well, that was the bread that size, this size, and this square. We got that in the morning.

Now don't ask me what we had with this. I don't remember. Then when we went to work, we worked the whole day, and we came back in the afternoon at three or four o'clock, we had a kitchen that had big steam cookers that cooked cabbage, potatoes, no meat, vegetable, basically, to such a degree and everything turned to water.

You could drink it like liquid, the soup that you would get. The one thing that I did at one time in the camp to get a little more food, I volunteered to go get that soup in the kitchen.

And as I said, there's 250 people. We had three or four of these big containers that were like servers. The soup was inside and you had to cover it. And you had a ladle and everybody got a ladle of soup.

Now when you ladle out of a round ladle into a square pot, the edges, there's two or three quarts of liquid that stays in there. And that is for the people that clean up those pots to bring them back in the kitchen. So I did this to get a little extra food.

You could never do it for a long period of time, because they rotated the people all the time to somebody. But what I remember, when that was cold, it was like jello. It got thick from the cold. And that soup was so cooked in that same cooker that it was something solid you ate after.

As you ate it, it was all liquid. The potato or the cabbage was completely diluted to the point that it was like soup. So if you let it stay for a while, but you were so hungry, you ate like a hungry human being.

But that's what we get. That was our ration for the day, morning and night. At lunch, nothing. We work at the factory. But basically, if I recall, after the war, we were talking about there was about 250 to 300 calories per day that we had been told when we came back the food we got in the camp was between 250 to 300 calories a day.

Now an average diet of a human being is about 2000 calories, if I'm not mistaken. So that gives you an idea how much we got. Just enough to sustain life, to keep you in constant hunger.

You cannot eat that soup and say you're not hungry anymore. The worst part I seen in the beginning, especially, that some guy that was smoking could not-- they needed a cigarette.

And somehow, there were some guys that had cigarettes, not among our people, but there are some people that worked in the kitchen, let's say. There were some Germans. And they traded, swapped.

And they gave up their bread in the morning to have a cigarette. It was that bad. Another incident that comes back to me in the food line is the factory that we were in had been built between fields, farmer's fields, where they were growing beets, sugar beets.

And if this farmer had to bring back to their farm the beets from the field on this side, they went through the factory. Four guys per horsedrawn carriage full of beets.

Now you see us in that camp, being hungry, not having anything solid to eat, we attacked him. But we couldn't just-- how do you attack him? A strategy, we had six guys together. And whatever we get, we shared.

So two guys would come from this side. The farm with their pitch forks would run over this side, so the two other ones came on the other side. If they switched, we were six. Two by two by two.

And we used to get two or three or maybe sometimes more of these big sugar beets. And so we ate this. But I can recall it was yesterday, we had tools. We had wooden spoons, first of all, to eat.

And somehow, it's just like in the prisons now, all of a sudden you see guys with knives. Where they can get a knife? You find a piece of meat on the factory and you sharpen it with a stone and you have a knife.

So we used to eat this raw. And the teeth are OK. The gums bleed, because you have no solid food for so long. So the gums were bleeding, but you had something solid to eat.

That's one of the things that happened in '44, especially, I think, that had to be around August, September when they were harvesting the things. They had to go through the factory. There was no Germans around us, but these farmers, if they let us do, we would grab the whole--

What did it taste like?

What did it taste like? Very good, very good. It was a little sweet and it was raw, just like if you eat-- you know that you make soup with? In French it's navet. It's got a little violent circle and it's about this big.

It's not a beet. It's used to make soup here. You make chicken soup or you make beef bouillon. And you get that vegetable. I see it every day. When I look at it, it tastes that way. And it is not radish, but it's got it's white and porous inside it. Not turnips. It's in the turnip family.

Rutabaga?

Rutabaga we had during the war in France instead of potatoes. Rutabaga, we had that. No, this is a navet, N-A-V-E-T, in France. I forget what it's called. Not-- maybe it's turnips. Turnips, that's it. It's turnips. The turnips, that's what it tasted like.

Except it was more yellow inside. And it was really sugar beets. I don't know if they use it for them to eat or to feed the animals. I don't know. That I don't know what the farmers did with them.

But they were pretty big. It was more like a pineapple here, that size, like a whole pineapple. And so we had. And then I'd call some of the guys that cut the pieces off. That's what they used to trade for cigarettes, the ones that were smoking.

I smoked, but so little that it didn't bother me a bit. I never had any cigarettes when I was there. My smoking started in more or less while I was in the army, because they gave you free cigarettes, five packs of cigarettes every two weeks.

So you get used to it. Everybody smokes and that's the way you get addicted to smoking. But I smoked in this country. And that's an experience [INAUDIBLE] in France, you smoke Gauloises. Gauloises is a very dark Turkish tobacco, strong. So I didn't smoke.

Another thing, in the bakery, I never smoked. So I could smoke after work. In the morning, I never lit a cigarette in my life. I couldn't. It's just not in me.

So when in New York, when I came and I didn't speak English, all of a sudden, I go into a tobacco store on Broadway. And I say, just a [INAUDIBLE]. And the guy says, what? So I look and the next pack next to it was a camel. So I said, camel.

For 30 years, I smoked Camels. That's the experience. But again, I was an owner of a bakery. I couldn't smoke when I was working. I smoked when I watched a ball game or something like this. And I gave up smoking about 1970.

Getting back to the sugar beets, how many times did you do this? Was it once?

No, I would say a dozen times during the year of '44. Because we never knew when they were coming. But there was not too many roads. There effectively was buildings all over and there's a main road.

And all of a sudden, you see this horse-drawn wagon, four wheels. And it was kind of long and it wasn't solid. It was like wood separated where just large enough that the beets wouldn't fall out. And they were piled high.

And there were six guys around this thing. The guy that was with the horse on top and six guys around. And so we had to outmaneuver these guys. more or less some guys got hit.

I don't think they had tried to kill the guy. But they didn't want to give up their stuff. They worked for this. It's theirs. We really tried to rob them to survive. And it was not Germans, it was Poles.

Did they say anything to you?

No, they were cursing us. That's all I can say. They were screaming bloody murder, because-- well, I didn't understand what they said. But you can see when a person isn't happy. They weren't too happy, because that's their livelihood. They needed this.

Was this on the way home from work?

While we were at work. While we were at work. While we were at work. See, that's the period of time where you could go out. Because you weren't around Nazi military troops when you're in that factory. You were among many working people of all kinds, except we had these stripes.

And so if you come out from one place, you had to go to the bathroom or something, and you could see this, we would call some of the buddies and we went. The whole transaction took maybe less than five minutes.

The time to run towards it, the guy come on one side, then some on the other side, and the one from the back, and we grabbed them. And I said, we. Not me in particular. I don't remember, but it happened a good, I guess, anywhere from six to eight times. I'm not too sure now. But I do recall that was some extra food but we were able to get.

So you would have to take it back with you when you went to work?

Yeah, well, you have to realize before we got into where we were working, we had already split up. If we got two or three of them, we're six, we split it all in quarters. And we put it in the pocket. Each one had two quarters, let's say, of the beets.

It's just like if you cut a pineapple in six. See, that piece you can put in your pocket so nobody knew what you had. And it wasn't wet. It was something dry and it wasn't too clean. We didn't care either. We were hungry.

And that's how we got back. And then we got into the camp where we had bowls. It's not wooden bowls. It was metal, but it was white outside. Inside was coated. It wasn't coated. Enamel, outside was like enamel white.

And that they must have gotten the Germans back from military. And it was large enough that you could put about two quarts of liquid in there. And when they give you a ladle, you had a wooden spoon and that's your tool to eat, the wooden spoon. That was the whole tool you had to eat.

And like I said, we all had fabricated a knife for this. There was no really other food that we could get that I can think. As I said, there was a period of time last time when I talked about early months we were in a camp, there was this French captain from the French Air Force that spoke English.

And so what he did, he [? showed ?] his English military prisoners that had Red Cross packages from it was called a Queen's Red Cross package, Queen of England. And so he got some food from them. Naturally, he wasn't getting that much.

Although, unfortunately, this guy got pneumonia. He didn't last more than three or four months. And he, more or less, tried to support morale, because he was a captain in the army. And he tried to keep us on discipline like if you were in the army that you have to take it.

And as I said, my bone of contention has been my upbringing with apprenticeship, which was very tough, and the army helped me too to have my body and my mind set to survive, wanting to survive.

And that has helped. But I would say that's about the only source of food we had. And it sounds odd now that I talk about it, how we survived with that little food. And going to work, I tell you, we couldn't be very productive working. That's for sure. We just went through the motions of working.

What were working?

In the beginning, I had to work outside before they operated on my arm here. And we dug holes. We were going to make large enough holes to put a vat of-- to when they make that gasoline out of coal, a big vat would hold that gasoline.

And what we used to do, we had to go to work and the ground was frozen. So just to keep warm, we dug with a pick and we dug and we dug about three or four hours like this. But not straight, you had to stop. We weren't very strong.

Anyway, we were able to make a hole. Not very deep, I would say about two or three feet deep. And the thing was going to be about the size of this room, the vat that they're going to put in.

But the problem what they had, first of all, it took us until noon to get about two or three feet deep. And the ground was frozen. When the sun came out and it thawed, it just would collapse, whatever we were doing.

So it was very counterproductive what we were doing. We never finished, in the period of time I was there, a hole large enough to put that tank of gasoline in the ground.

And like I said, after I got this arm, the kapo in the barrack got me to work with this German by the name of Schultz where I worked inside. And then we produced better, because you are away from the chill of the street and you're above where there's steam in the pipes. It keeps you warm.

And then, again, I got some potatoes. Remember, the guy would pick them during the tonight and boil them during the night. And nobody saw. And bring them in his toolbox.

I would say brought him to me about 10 times. And as we got closer, he would tell me, we practically are going to lose the war. We are not going to be able to win the war.

But we'll be better off than you, meaning the French people. We will always profit after the war of the Russian, American that eventually are going to fight each other. That's what he used to tell me, that German. He was a tall man, very direct.

And when you talk about a German Prussian, it's a person that comes from an area where they are very disciplined Germans. Because you've got different sections in Germany. Some of them are very much like the French at the border, like the section above where I was born.

You go into Germany, these people used to be, before the war, going both ends. The French would go into Germany or Luxembourg. That's where I was born. But this fellow, I really never would have guessed this guy would do this for me.

But I gave you the reason why he did it. And then you can see that even in the worst of the worst, you can always find somebody that would help you. So you can never condemn a whole race of being bad or always being good. There's always rotten apples in the best of us.

What was the nature of your work inside? What did you do?

Basically, they had pipes where steam went through to different parts of the factory. Because that factory was huge. There was maybe, I would say, at least 15 building big enough-- in Sunnyvale, there is this dirigible hangar. About that size, it was about a dozen factories that high.

And so we used to have to insulate these pipes. This fellow was-- I don't know if he was a plumber, but his job was with the tin, to shape and with a machine, to put it together. And it was hollow inside.

I used to have to take a big bag of steel wool, which would really pick-- not pick-- itch, because steel wool itches. It just makes you itch. And I had to put this in between that pipe that was steam and the shell to cover that pipe. It's really to insulate the pipes. That's what we had to do.

And there I think I was more productive at work, because the environment, the guy was halfway decent with me. So after they had a whistle blow at a certain time, I couldn't even remember until what time we worked.

But I know we had to be outside the barrack at six o'clock in the morning. And when we got up, we went to-- it was like watersheds that was long, like in the army, with water pipes and your wash yourself.

And there's no soap and you had no hair on your head. And if it's dirty or something, we always took some sand and rubbed the sand on the head to act like soap. Then we rinsed it off and we had showers. And the latrines were outside like this. You had wooden latrines.

But the one thing I never could figure out how little you had to go to the bathroom. Because you had nothing in the body to have to go to the bathroom. So I would say, if you didn't have to go to the bathroom for two weeks, it was nothing extraordinary.

Now you think, two weeks you didn't go to a bathroom, you've got to be sick. But you had nothing going in the body really that you had to go. So it's different, life in this sense.

Did you notice that after the people arrived from Hungary there was a tremendous increase in the amount of-- was there smoke coming up every day that you noticed?

No, I couldn't see this, because, as I said, it was about eight or 10 miles away. And after a while, you're working in a factory where there is all these pipes or chimneys with smoke that when you get so hardened, you don't pay attention.

I wasn't even paying attention. All I knew was where I was and where they had-- and again, I wouldn't have known if nobody had told me. I was told, that's where they burn the bodies.

The experience I got after we left that camp, we joined in that group where we slept in that pile of coal. A guy from Holland who was Jewish that worked in that Auschwitz place where he had to put the bodies in the oven.

And he told me this stories on that train for a week without food. He was telling me that there was a lot of people that had-- his basic job was when they came on these trains and some people had suitcases with clothes and some had false lined with gold from Antwerp, some Belgian guys.

And what they figured, it's a good barter thing to keep. And some of the people figured with gold or whatever money they had, they could buy it themselves food or whatever. Turns out some of them went to the ovens directly.

And he had to dispose of the suitcases to the Germans bags where they put luggage here, shoes here. They were very methodical. And he was telling me that he has buried diamonds that some Jews that worked in Antwerp in the Diamond District.

He buried it there and he says, every so often, the guys that did that work were relieved and they were burned. Because he was at the end, the last one that did job. The Germans that were in charge of this were gone. They want to save their own skin.

He told me more than I ever would have known of what had occurred by the ovens. Because we realized why we were there. We were there, they want to exploit us to the fullest, as much as we can work. They needed our work.

So we were not on the danger to be put in the oven, except when a German officer came and he decide who stays and who goes, because they're too skinny. And I was fortunate enough when we paraded in front of him, I'm thick-boned so that it never looked as bad as other people.

And as I said, the will to live showed in my body. Although, it's physical and mental. The way you walk, if you, how are we say in Jewish, schlep yourself, you're not going to live long.

So I used to always try to be straight. Although, I'll tell you one thing. See here? I have a stomach now. I could put my fist right underneath here in this spot. There was a hole as big as my fist. Empty, because we had very little food.

But again, it comes down to being thick-boned and you could walk properly in front of them. So I never was-- although, he could have an idea, oh, this guy's no good, he's not going to be able to work, and put me on the side. So that's another way I survived.