

Talk about black humor.

Yeah. People, I think, the tendency is for people who have survived traumatic, very difficult, situations may develop this type of humor where they look back in some sort of way, in a way which we'll see also the irony, the humorous aspects of tragedy. And I think that certainly is not something necessarily limited to Jews but limited to people who have gone through hell and survived it and look at it back and see some of the [SNEEZES] humorous things which certainly have escaped them while they are suffering through that.

But after the fact, I think, one can develop-- and that has something to do with some sort of a detachment and some sort of a distance from the actual suffering. I mean, you do that, also, when you go through a bad marriage. You know, when you go through a bad marriage, my god, you know, you think you're just going to suffocate, and it's a killer.

And once you get through that, and you look back at these sort of things, you just see some of the humor-- black humor-- in these dreadful situations and the comedy, human comedy, in the sort of things which were a killer at that time. But you're out of it now, and you see it from a distance, from a different perspective.

Also, the ridiculous comes forth. And that is, I think, an art which needs to be developed by people who are indeed, in the real sense of the word, survivors. Because if they're don't, they're not survivors. The chances are they may commit suicide.

It is a real art of, in the best sense of the word, defending themselves.

That's right. That's right. Because, you see, some of us, and many of us-- and more will, in the future, the chances are-- live lives where life is just nothing else but a struggle and defending oneself from aggressive forces of others or situations. And it's a dreadful thing. And if you can't find some sense of humor in the whole thing, you bury yourself.

I'm thinking now of how you ended your writings, in which you said you felt that you had been-- I'm not saying the exact words-- robbed of a certain capacity of happiness.

[SIGHS]

All right. I think that's a very important and profound, stimulating question, in a way, stimulating a lot of responses and a lot of thoughts and feelings, to be sure. Depending on the age of a person who survived and on the family situation, in terms of the loss of family, there is virtually anything which you can somehow overcome and transcend emotionally, psychologically.

But one thing I have not is the loss of an extended family which functioned well. That is something which I have not been able to come to terms with. Now, those people lucky enough who have found some sort of a substitute family by virtue of having created it themselves, for themselves, are in a very different position.

But those of us who really had been spoiled, as far as extended family and immediate family, close family members concerned, and have not found anything which would come close in terms of family relations which they may have created for themselves afterwards will find that this is the most difficult and tragic predicament and cannot easily, if at all, be overcome. And that is something which I still suffer from.

Because the loss was too great. And what I got afterwards was not enough to compensate the loss. And I would say that's the tragedy of my life. And very frequently, I reflect on that and still decry the loss and what I don't have and what I used to have, this sort of thing.

Now, if people, for example, didn't have anything which provides a meaningful and satisfying frame of reference to which they could refer or associate with later on in life, then they've got a different situation. But if you've had something which I consider to be, at least to me, a next-to-ideal situation, then I think the loss is more profound. And especially if you're not lucky to have encountered people who would have filled that gap, you are in a bad situation.

So some losses are just never gotten over.

No, no. To me, that is the, perhaps, most serious of it all, particularly when you were young and when you were not ready to lose that family emotional cycle emotionally, when indeed you were not in a position where, under normal circumstances, developmental circumstances, your umbilical cord is cut and when you're not ready for it. I certainly wasn't ready. And for years, I woke up at night. I wept because of the losses, primarily because the loss of my mother, who was the closest thing I've ever had in my life. And I never could come to terms with that. It's still something which is churning in me all the time-- all the time.

I think it's one of the problems of my generation-- that is to say, generation of survivors. The ones who were older, perhaps, may have been slightly different, although there was no systematic study on that at all. I mean, so little has been done-- a lot of talk and a lot of horror stories. And it's understandable, and people need to get it out of their system. But so little interpretation, so little interpretation.

And if you look at all the things which you are generating in your project and to what extent it's going to be interpreted, who is going to interpret it, it seems to me that how fruitful is it, really, if it is not interpreted? Because people are getting saturated with horror stories and somehow calloused. And so where does it get us?

And I don't think it does get us very far, just listening to this dreadfulness, ghastliness, if we don't have a key to understanding and overcoming and preventing. And that, to me, is what really motivated me after I was no longer in a position to continue my medical studies back in Prague, when I just was able to do that and starting it.

I said, well, the next best thing is, when I was in Australia and then in the United States and, well, I don't know, in Germany and all that, I said, the next best thing is to study a discipline in the social sciences which will enable me to better understand what happened and how it happens and what can be done to prevent it. Because if I don't do it, I have wasted my life. What have I learned?

And so many people just simply get lost and get suffocated or drown in their suffering without really getting out of it to see what can be learned. And that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. And that is why I felt obligated-- and I mean obligated, particularly towards those who have not survived. And people who would have indeed closed that gap which has been created by the loss of family-- my cousin, my friends, people who were, in their way, geniuses, musicians, artists, people of my generation, slightly older-- who would have been ideal companions and friends.

And that's what I said, with a great deal of trepidation, and that's my reflected opinion, that the best of us have died, have not survived, and that we are the ones who survived are not the best material of that particular group of people who went through hell. I was very fortunate, particularly in Theresienstadt but even in Auschwitz, but primarily in Theresienstadt, to meet with people who were extraordinary in so many ways-- talented, gifted, in music, intellectually, scientists, human beings with tremendous humanity. Not a single one-- not a single one-- has survived. None of my friends whom I've been closest to, not a single one has survived.

So besides the enormous loss of your mother, the mass of the loss of so many people you cared for has been too much.

Right-- overwhelmed me. And then, of course, you look at those people who you have put on the pedestal, rightly or wrongly-- I don't think wrongly, but I think rightly. Because really, with some sort of distance, I don't think I project some sort of things because I still have some of their products-- poems, writings, thoughts still available, and music.

And if you just look at it all and see who of these people created all this under those unbelievable circumstances have survived, you don't find any, hardly any. I haven't. Not in my environment, I haven't. I'm sure there may be some. But none in my environment.

And that makes it very difficult now. And there is no substitute for that. So I mean, there are so many things which can be mended. And this is precisely something which I think is very important for me because I haven't come up with an answer.

I haven't seen how these sort of thing-- yet if you're lucky, if you really meet people, who would be on a similar level of humanity and sophistication, if you will, human accomplishment, whatever-- talent-- then I think you are in a very fortunate position. But I have not come across anything which would come close, actually. And I feel deprived. And I feel very lonely because of that.

Yes. Do you think, saying that, if you would meet someone like that, the mere fact that you have been through your experiences in the camps has made such a dent in your life that true intimacy might not be possible, anyway?

I don't know. It's a very complex-- very complex-- problem. And I would say that in this regard, I am not that pessimistic. I think it is possible. But the chances which may come along your way are remote, that you would find people.

There's no question that you can. And I think you can relate, and you can express, even though you may find people who may have had a very different type of experience, certainly very different from the one which one had when one survived the camps. I still think you can develop relationships which will be meaningful and profound and deep.

But to find people who will fit this sort of requirement or, if you will, this sort of situation, no, hope are remote, unless you're lucky, and you just stumble across it, and you'll see people here or there. But in my life, there is some few, yeah. And either they are not accessible or they are different life situation. You just, simply, there is not enough of what you need to heal for such an encounter and all that. So some just pass you by, so to speak. It's very difficult. It's a question of tremendous fortune and luck.

As you said, some of these elements were talked about, might have been studied and haven't. But what thoughts do you have about not only you, in particular, but anyone who went through that experience and how your own psyche and emotions were eroded or you had to be so guarded that it affects you ever after?

Well, I don't know whether one can come out with any sort of generalization. I think that's pretty much-- I guess the response would be, from case to case, different, probably. But obviously, people who have been hurt a great deal, in, particularly, the most sensitive areas, we all want to prevent any sort of hurt to recur and, therefore, will be guarded. That's, most likely, the tendency.

And what I've found out, that, in very many situations, people who may have had a glimpse of the way you function and discovered your sensitivities, instead of really being sympathetic or empathetic, may actually use it to lash out and hurt you. Because they know that you are vulnerable, rather than and hey, you know, I'm going to be loving, or I'm going to be supportive, or I'm going to be this and that, which will compensate for that.

Most of the people are either so callous that they don't give a damn, one, or, two, they will exploit that situation and turn it against you when it suits them. The cruelty, the amount of cruelty, I've experienced in people where you disclosed yourself, just opened up, and how they took advantage of these things and just to really stab you in the areas which still have not healed, which still are bleeding, is just enormous.

And I've got problems with that, problems with that, understand that people can be, actually, so cruel-- understanding that you're vulnerable in these areas. And that has happened, yes. And that, of course, teaches you a few lessons. And you know, I'm in no position to expose myself to this sort of continuous hurt, you know? And I've had my share.

Therefore, I won't expose myself. But that's a tremendous problem. Because if you don't expose yourself-- and that's something which I wrote, I don't know, kind of thought in all of my writings is to be related. And if you're not willing to relate, you won't be.

And that's all about it. And so, therefore, you just can't avoid it. Because if you avoid it, you're not going to relate. You're just going to never have an intimate relationship and, therefore, not be satisfied in those areas which we need to be satisfied most, emotionally and psychologically, sexually, whatever.

And so, therefore, it's a self-defeating sort of situation. And we have to open up and take the risk. And that's what I have to do, except I'm a little bit, hopefully, more prudent because you learn to whom you will expose yourself and to whom not.

But that's not very easy. Because people in different situations behave differently and are, in so many ways, unpredictable. So it's very difficult to assess the situation accurately and say, hey, you know, I'm going to open up to this person. And I've opened up to the wrong people very frequently. I say, hey, you know, what have I learned in terms of human knowledge, in terms of assessing people correctly?

And god, you know, and mistakes I've made is just inexcusable, almost. And so there, you become very cautious, yes. And that is something, perhaps, which I think is very important to discuss. Because I don't think many people you interview will come and talk about these things, will go into this sort of depth.

Because so many people who are survivors survived, but they are walking in the mist. They have not walked out of the mist and still in a fog-- fogged in. And their level of consciousness is minimal.

These are very difficult subjects to talk about.

That's right. But I think it has to be. It has to be. Because otherwise, as I said before, if we can't learn from this, you know, forget it. So that's that. If we can't learn from that, what will we learn from? And most of the people I know just simply don't see.

They don't even understand what we are trying to do, some of us, let's say, in the Center and all that. They're just totally blind, just not the slightest inkling. They're into it and all the talk-- blah, blah, blah, all that, and all this whole thing, but absolutely not understood what it's all about. And that's very discouraging, at times-- very discouraging.

It sounds to me that, despite that, there was optimism in you. You believed that one can learn, one can analyze, and one can apply.

Yeah. Because that's talking about meaning and Victor Frankl and all this and that if you don't find meaning in life, forget it because it's hopeless. And many people can't. And it's difficult to find meaning. I'm not trying to oversimplify that, at all.

No, it's a struggle.

Oh, it's a terrible struggle. And it's not something which you have once you have found it. It's something which you have to rediscover and work on all the time, just like you have to with human relationships. You just can't, I have it and then let it go and move. No. I mean, you have to work at it every day. And if you don't, it's going to fall apart.

So there's no absolute meaning.

No, no, absolutely not. Because absolute meaning is Hitler. That's absolute meaning. And some bloody chauvinist Jews-- fascists-- or any sort of doctrinaire ideologues, absolutist ideologues. And no way. So, I mean, we learn. And if we just don't remain open and change perspectives as we continue to learn, I mean, we are doomed to be rigid and insensitive.

Now, also, in terms of problems, in terms of human relations and encounters, some few months ago, I've had an interview with one of the local papers. And a fairly sensitive interview with an older lady and all that-- fairly sensitive and relatively sophisticated. And some of the characteristics which she described as an individual and all that, said conclusions that I have no aptitude for small talk.

Now, that was very important. And some people who know me picked it up. Because if you remain on the level of small talk, you're not going to be able to explore any depth, meaning, all the things we discussed. Because that's not accessible. It's not in it. And because you're surrounded by people who lose themselves in meaningless talk, it's very difficult to find a partner with whom you can really talk things and discuss them in depth.

And that's, again, one of my problems. Because I don't find these people very easily. They're just very few in between. And therefore, if you don't have anything in common and if these people view life, or go through life, in this sort of haphazard, fogged-in, superficial fashion, there's not much left in terms of human relationships. And I think that's one of the things which are very important in human relationships in general terms.

Because people may develop in different ways. And if, somehow, they don't keep up pace together, they will fall behind each other to the extent that they become estranged from each other and have found out that they will be left empty-handed and dissatisfied simply because they no longer satisfy each other's needs. Because needs have changed.

This is true.

Well, and that's the tragedy. So I mean, it's one thing which I see in this society, that it's very easy to be friendly and all that on a superficial level. But once it gets into the nitty-gritty, then people get scared and shy away from it and are unable to really explore it any further. And then that threatens the hell out of them.

And then, now you are left with nothing, with just yourself. And that's something which I am in a process of learning. I haven't learned at all. But learn to live by yourself and satisfy your own needs, as well as you can, which is a dreadful predicament.

Yes because the loneliness--

That's right.

--is there, too.

That's right. Because you can see, hey, doesn't get me any place. So you may be surrounded by people but feel a profound loneliness.

So you struggle on, day by day.

Yeah, I think you can say that, mm-hmm, very much so. So that's why I can empathize with just-- I've had, still, something I'm pondering about. We've had one of our last encounters in terms of our Center activity. It was a lecture by Bruno Bettelheim.

And I had a occasion to talk to him. And he pretty much expressed similar things from his point of view, this unbelievable loneliness, where he had a family, a wife whom he was close to, but his children totally removed, far removed, nothing very much in common, and this dreadful loneliness, and his physical condition and all that, and no one to talk to, and going around to give tremendous, fantastic lectures but not being able to heal himself, in a way, by virtue of the fact that he didn't have anyone to help him very much.

And some of the things he told me, you know, it's just really terrible. You wouldn't believe, the fact that, in spite of as well-known as he was, he was a very lonely person, deserted. And then all the physical problems he had because of old age and deterioration and all, which then put in a position where he felt he couldn't get out of it with all his knowledge and all that.

But to commit suicide is just terrible thing. But I have great understanding for it. Because I think about some of these things except I don't particularly feel that I can do it. Because all of the things which I'm trying to develop and stand for would be destroyed. Because I would set a precedent which would eradicate all the things which I'm trying to constructively build up.

So it's not a solution. So I suffer and say people afraid of death. As a matter of fact, I'm not so sure that they should be or they need to be because there are worse things than death, maybe-- maybe.

Had you thought often of suicide?

Well, I mean, I certainly toyed with the idea, absolutely.

But you hang on. You feel it would deny everything that you have worked for.

That's right. That's exactly right. And that may-- I wouldn't say how I'll feel tomorrow. But no, I don't particularly think it's a constructive solution, you see. I don't. But I have understanding for it, and I would never condemn anyone who do it, particularly in a justified situation.

I think there are certain limits, you know, why you do it and all that. But I mean, this is just up to the individual difference, you see. I mean, you just can't-- but I certainly have understanding for it. I just really do relate to that as some sort of a solution.

But I don't condone it, and I don't think this is a constructive alternative. And that's why I feel it's a tragedy in terms of Bruno Bettelheim. It's a tragedy that a person who was a significant other to so many, a role model to so many people, finds himself in a situation where this is the only solution, apparently, to him, though, it's the only solution. Otherwise, he would have probably not done it.

So then, there's the question of how, not only to live, on the one hand, a hair above desperation but how to live a life that has some riches in it.

Right. You know, the riches, I think, more and more, I think, particularly in our situation, where this reality has changed very much from reality, let's say, 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago. If you don't find the riches yourself, the chances are not many people will help you to find them.

And that's a terrible thing, you know. It makes you a very isolated sort of individual. There's no question about the riches. But I think people have become less and less able to find them and help each other to find them. They make it more difficult for each other, if anything.

How so?

Put such big roadblocks in your way to find them. And that's terrible. Because I think we live in a much worse world than the one which I experienced when I was a child, in terms of precisely this sort of thing, how people support each other and satisfy each other's needs and develop this sort of concern for each other and the compassion and the affection. And I don't see it very much in this world-- less and less in this nightmarish technology in which we spend more time and concern-- I see that with my son-- with things, with things, rather than with human beings.

How did you begin to put your life back together again in Prague after the war? There, I'm sure you must have been devastated with the loss of your mother and compounded with the correct with your father, after that good relationship, your own health problems.

Well, what my priority at that particular time was just to catch up in my education and what I missed. That was, to me, very important. That was a priority, a long stretch and priority. And so I concentrated on that against all the various odds.

Because I had to work. There was no money left, nothing there. And I had to work. And I worked for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation, which was the Czech part of it. And that was a very good job and all that. Simultaneously, I just wanted to catch up so that I could finish my, whatever, gymnasium and all that. And I had to do that during the night.

And since we were fed, and I, at the time, I had tuberculosis. I had lots of handicaps, and psychologically and of emotional nature, whatever. But I willed it. I said, that's a very important thing which I need to accomplish in order to function and in order to be useful and be creative in some way or another.

And instead of, in spite of, the fact that my father dissuaded me and all that-- what I've said already and said you should do something else, and you're not intelligent enough, and all that and that-- I just decided that I wanted to pursue that. And I've done it and then got active very much into the political life-- very, very active and certainly I would call it not just someone who sits back, but I was an activist by, certainly, the real sense of the definition.

And then the communist situation came, the threat. And I tried to oppose it and do everything else, was arrested, and was, for a few days, in jail and beat up by communist officials. And then just had just a hell of a time.

But things I responded to just took up a shape, you know. And that was something concrete I could respond to and work with, or work against. And so that's what I did. Then, finally, I decided that I'm not going to go through hell again, and one totalitarian regime was enough. And I could not prevail.

So I talked to one people about this sort of predicament. And this one happened to be also a person I knew before the war and also was in Dachau. And he was then archbishop of Prague, called Josef Beran whom I respected very much because of his humanity, not necessarily because of his Catholicism or whatever.

He was a mensch, you know, and a very, very important one, role model. He behaved-- he stood up to the Nazis, stood up to the communists. And he was just a very unusual human being, precisely the type of human being you want to encounter you have a need for.

So I went to his palace there, archbishop in Prague, and said, here I am, brother. You know, brother-- we are brothers because we all called ourselves brothers-- survivors, inmates, former inmates or brothers. Well, I said, brother Joseph or Baron, whatever I said, I'm here just to discuss something very important.

I don't want to skip the country because of some sort of cowardice and all that, but I think there's nothing I can change here. I know there's only going to suffer, and I don't want to go through the whole thing, I said. And he said, no, leave. Go with my blessing. Want to leave? OK.

And then he gave me an address and safekeeping, and addresses in Italy because I was going by Italy and all that, which was exceedingly helpful. I mean, I had tremendous support from a mixed marriage situation where wife was a Czech, and he was Italian. And he happened to be a colonel in the Italian military. What do you call it? The Special Guard.

And so they really were exceedingly supportive. They housed me, and they helped me and helped me to get the boat which I was to catch because that was paid from the United States, a trip to Australia.

But what was that arrangement?

Oh, well, these were distant relatives who happened to be-- well, distant, not so distant actually, not distant, really, cousins, second cousins. And they were-- the Jewish name was Petschek actually, the Petschek who supported Hilberg's study, for all practical purposes. They were all related to one clan.

And so this [INAUDIBLE] Petschek was born pauper and was a cousin of my mother's. And they're the richest people in Czechoslovakia, or one of the richest, if not the richest. And so they left in time, of course, as most of the rich people did. Because they had different opportunities and information and all that. And many of these people were very close in terms of network and family relations.

So they left in time, before that, and with, obviously, a great deal of loss but still enough to live terrific lives here. So we approached them, and they paid \$1,000 first class cabin fair from Geneva to Australia. And I didn't have a handkerchief, but I had a first class ticket.

Did you have to go to Australia, or you didn't care where you went?

Well, no, you see, first of all, my first choice was, of course, the United States. But I mean, it was a very long waiting

time because of the quotas. And the Czech quota that was not very high at that particular time. And so I couldn't. I couldn't get a visa.

So I had relatives, close relatives-- my mother's sister and my cousin, first cousin-- lived in Australia and got there via England because they left after the Anschluss of Austria. Because they were Austrians. And so I met them.

And prior to that, I had a great, great uncle who was a black sheep. And he started a family there in Melbourne because he had some sort of-- he was a womanizer, did some things which the family didn't, apparently, approve of, morally and otherwise. So they shipped him to Australia, which is the best thing they could have done to him, you know.

[LAUGHS]

And he instead of just starting a dreadful family back up there in Prague, which was doomed, you know, little did they know. And so they just punished him, which happened to be the best thing they could have done for him, just to really reward him. And so the punishment turned out to be a reward. And he married a Scottish lady and started the first biscuit factory in Melbourne--

[LAUGHTER]

--and had a ball, see? And so these people are there. And so that was the logical place to go, and I just did, which was a good thing. And I've learned a lot. Maybe I should have stayed there.

Did you have any other emotional support, or people support, back in Prague besides-- this archbishop helped you out. But who was your sustenance?

Oh, yeah. Well, I had some people whom I knew since childhood, and some of the people who were some sort of mentors. And so I had some people then, yeah. I had some people there who were very supportive but very cautious, you know.

And they themselves were under pressure because some of them were partially German and had to leave, got kicked out, and had to leave Czechoslovakia because of that. And some other people were very provincial in some of their perspectives but very, very good people, too. And some other people were just playmates of mine, childhood playmates, and then had developed in different directions, which may or may not have much in common.

Then, of course, politics entered the picture. And many of the people then became communists, which, from the very beginning, I could see that's the lesson I've learned from Dachau, from this poor fellow who was beaten, beaten to death. So I said, hey, what do they have there? And he told me about-- he was the first to really expose me to the realities-- I mean, not expose me, just simply explain the realities to me as they existed in the Soviet Union.

And so that, to me, was very clear from the very beginning that this was another type of absolutist ideology with consequences which were exceedingly similar to those I had just survived. So I fought it teeth and nose and just risked my life and did a lot of things which other people wouldn't have. But at that point, I felt that, by virtue of being a survivor, I have tremendous obligations. And I just simply cannot permit myself to make similar mistakes, existentially and politically, than those my parents may have made.

And also, my parents actually were not to blame. Because I was to be shipped to England. And I've mentioned that already in the previous interview. So they really tried to be very responsible and saw the writing on the wall. But somehow, it was limited to me rather than the entire clan. And they had enough money, but they just, simply, some of them didn't want to part with some of the real estate and some of the things which were home and all this and that.

Because they said, we haven't done anything. We are guilty of nothing. How much can really happen? And there is not that much which can happen to us because we haven't done anything. We are innocent. And that was a dreadful mistake but understandable. Many people don't understand that.

Because if I don't feel any guilt and I haven't done anything and my resources are possibly limited and in the other

countries, they're not going to receive me with open arms-- in other words, the future is very insecure, although very many friends, very close friends and relatives, left. But they didn't. And my parents didn't. Because that was a step they were not prepared to take.

But they prepared me to do it. But then, fate, as it would, had it that they closed the borders.

Did your father consider leaving when the communists came in, as you did?

Oh, yes, of course. But he was more willing to adjust. But he didn't have any illusions. But I mean, he was more willing. Because he was very successful after the war in terms of his profession. And he was very successful when I hadn't gone to Australia all that. He was very successful in what he was doing, professionally speaking, and always somehow landed on his feet, so to speak.

But I couldn't. He was more willing to play the game. But I was not willing to play the game. Because I understood a little bit more than he did, maybe, the consequences. And I am a different person, a different personality-- characteristics, disposition, whatever.

And so I was not willing to do that, not to compromise. So I got myself into very bad situations. And the only way, short of being shipped to another camp or slave labor camp, communist van, was to get out, which I did.

How did you manage that? Did you get false papers?

That's right, that's right. That's right.

You got false papers.

Yeah. How did you go, by train?

By train, yeah.

And when did you leave?

In February 1949.

You had a false identity?

Well, an identity which was kind of shady and enabled me to get out with impunity, you know, at that time and lots of dealing and wheeling and all that. But I learned that. That's something which I still do. I just practiced.

I still practice it, dealing and wheeling. I still do things, even those which are not necessarily viewed as dreadfully immoral because somehow, I feel I need to maintain some degrees of skills in case I should need them. I'm crazy, you know, about--

Do you mean telling a pretended story in an anxiety-producing situation?

Well, not necessarily. No, no, not at all. But, for example, just to get into situations where I will benefit without me being seen or caught or something, where I just-- I might be with a bunch of generals, or just a group of people, who kiss each other and hand each other things. And I'll be kissing them, and they don't know me from Adam. Or just simply be the recipient of some sort of benefits without really necessarily having worked for it simply because I get myself in a situation where I'll get it.

Like being in line at a movie theater.

Oh, yeah, for example, I can get into any movie, virtually-- almost any movie-- without paying. They won't see me.

They don't see you, even when a ticket is expected?

Oh, yeah, sure. And that's not only-- I'm getting a charge out of it, too. I get a charge out of it. And also, it just keeps me on my toes because I really feel I need to. Get into certain situations other people don't from where you can benefit, in one way or another, maybe material or psychologically or whatever-- emotionally. And so I practiced that. Because still, it's part of the survival, a skill which I learned in the camp.

And also, it's in your repertoire in case the need arises again.

That's right. Absolutely. For example, I wouldn't have a passport so that I skip the country tomorrow or something of that nature.

You wouldn't have a passport?

Yeah. I would have a valid passport or things. Some things, I just put things in a suitcase-- preferably, have already a packed suitcase, which I don't-- but I mean, this is you know -- so that -- In other words, just like when we got the soup and the soup bowl, if you luck has it-- and even Auschwitz-Birkenau, it happened once or twice that we had pea soup with meat in it. So I don't want to be the first. Because then, I get the water. So I wait and let other people go. Woo. So just organize it and say, hey, you know.

And they learned that skill, also?

Hmm?

Haven't they learned that skill, also?

Who?

The others, waiting in line, to wait till--

No, they haven't, you see. And that's the interesting thing. Because that's what life is all about, that some people have never learned these skills and that they haven't taken advantage of the ignorance. You don't get rich by working hard, not that I'm rich. But I could do things which are crooked, but I wouldn't do it. So I'm an underpaid professor, which is not to say that I'm not open to making a fast buck.

[LAUGHTER]

And that's what I'm doing, for example. This is something which is important, also professionally. Now, I have some sort of recognition back in Germany and all that. So this is about the third or fourth year I'm going to Europe, and the Germans pay for it. Because I'm doing the Nazi stuff, you know, which is terrific because I think it's great.

I do, too.

And this time, I just had the first time. This summer, I was there just for one day, actually, working-- well, I prepared for it much longer, of course, and all that. But this broadcast, which I consider to be very important, Table Talk, a dialogue, for the first time in public, with former members of the SS, some of whom were perpetrators-- at least one of them. And so that never has been done. So I say, hey let's get into it and telling them what is the SS and all this and stimulate the discussion and the response.

And I consider that to be exceedingly important. Because it is historic because no one has done it before. It's the first time. And I've got tapes and all that. And we'll see what will come of it. But, I mean, apparently it has been sufficiently successful that it's being repeated. And it's already the third time. They are paying.

And I'm doing things which I consider to be very important. They may not be necessarily discovered now, but in the future they will be, for sure, sooner or later. And I'm getting paid for it. I think that's good.

Yes. It's not happiness, but it's satisfaction.

Well, yes. Happiness? Happiness, no because there's nothing to do with happiness. But satisfaction, absolutely. Because I'm attaining some of the goals I've set for myself and leaving something for posterity. And that's exactly what gives me - talking about meaning and talking about Victor Frankl and all this sort of things, his notions and his thought processes - and to me that's very important that I leave a trail.

What do I leave when I'll kick the bucket? And to me, it's important that I leave something which may be useful to posterity. And that's the only thing which really keeps me going. Because I don't have that much in life in terms of satisfaction.

Yes, you were saying.

Because no one gives a damn, very much-- very few. So I mean, that's what I'm doing. I have to create my own resources. And they are meager, to be sure. But I mean, at least I can say, well, my life, by virtue of the fact that I've survived, at times I say, hey, some people make such a big thing out of being a survivor.

I even don't know if that is such a lucky thing to do, to be in this situation. I'm not at all convinced of that. And it probably would have been much easier not to survive. But since I am, I just try to feel that I have not wasted my life. And I derive some satisfaction out of that.

And rightfully so. In fact, it's getting kind of late, but I would like to, in the next session, elaborate a lot more on what your life's work has been, right?

Mm-hmm.

So I'd like to stop now so that I can give Carol a chance to ask some questions.

I don't think she's prepared very well this time because she's got--

Well, [INAUDIBLE] just the session.

--her own Magen David to carry-- you know, the Jewish star to carry. I can't say cross because she's Jewish--

Yeah, mine is heavier than yours. [LAUGHS]

--for reasons which, I think to some extent, escape her, but we won't go into that.

[LAUGHS]

Whatever. But anyway, what do you think--

What was the last thing you said? What escapes me?

Why you're Jewish.

Why I'm Jewish. Well, we're not here to videotape my life story. Because I could explain some things.

Well, it's never too late.

I'm Jewish because of the Holocaust. But that's another subject.

Do you have any questions that you would like to ask at this point?

Yes. In a way, it means going back into some material, so I don't know how well it'll flow.

Well, go ahead.

And I'm kind of concerned about that.

Don't worry. Just go ahead.

OK. Back when he was talking about his losses and the pain of having lost his family and what he ends up with in his life as a consequence, I wanted to talk about the fact that those of us who know you and those of us who have been around you for some time in the Holocaust Center and in the lecture series were very painfully impacted by your story and your life and these things that have happened to you.

And it brings up the concept that not only was this very hard for you and your life but then, it also has a deep impact on anyone who is involved with you in your life in any close way, whether it's a student of yours, whether it's someone who's in a relationship with you, whether it's your child-- whatever-- that there's this rippling impact that happens for anyone who has close contact with someone who's been through that trauma. And some of us feel that we are willing to take on this pain because the wisdom and the insight that we get from it are worthwhile as a part of the bargain.

But I have a lot of anxiety about the future in terms of our having to carry on, in a sense, this history and this painful aspect of human nature. And I feel that, in studying this, I've turned to people like you for wisdom and for some strength of character that you've developed, having gone through this and having reflected on it and having studied it-- really, spent your whole life on it, in a sense.

But I have a real anxiety of not knowing how we, the next generation, are going to carry it on. Because each of us who is willing to be involved with the Holocaust or willing to be involved with one of the survivors is taking on some small aspects of it, even the video-taper, the interviewer, I and the work that I do. But I feel that it's so inadequate and that, in fact, if you feel that the lessons of that time have not been learned and the lessons are not really integrated into our culture, into our society's values, I don't know how we're going to do it.

And I'm still looking to you. I'm still looking back, in a way, even though I'm an adult, even though I'm becoming an educator, even though I know so much about the Holocaust now. And I'm learning more about it all the time, just from being around you. I don't know how to carry the meaning of it forward. And I have a real fear that when you are gone and your generation is gone, I don't know how to continue.

Well, you see, we can do only the next best thing. And that's what we are doing right now. And that's why I have a great deal of respect and am very supportive of projects of this nature. That's why we do what we do in the Center. And if we can videotape these things and do it, which will make available those things which we are discussing here from different perspectives, different points of view, different survivors and all that, this is an idea which will have some degree of permanence.

You never can actually relate sufficiently in the type of depth which reflects experience of that person who is the discussant or the person who relates that. That cannot be done. So short of that experience, I think we do all we can in order to preserve the notions of those who are survivors, and perhaps a bit verbal.

And I've reflected on it, although I am not dreadfully optimistic how many survivors have actually reflected in depth about what actually happened to them, other than dwelling-- understandably so-- on their suffering. And I like to transcend that, as I said before.

And that's exactly what is quite realistically possible for you to continue or for anyone who wants to carry the ball and hand it, so to speak, or throw it, to the next generation. And that's the best you can do. We only can do that much, short

of having that experience yourself. Hey, who wants that experience? I can do without it.

I'm not advocating for having it.

That's right. I mean, it's terrible. I don't want it. But I have to live with it. Now, also, I think, we should not become obsessed with the Holocaust. That's the danger. And that is also one of the reasons why my wife has left me, in a way, is because she had her fill, in a way. And that's one of many, many things.

But I mean, it's still-- and particularly if you don't relate to these sort of things and all that. Because I don't think we should become obsessed, and I think we should have some other things which we are interested in. And I'm doing it because I'm an educator. But I don't intend to stay within this sort of field and really concentrate and just think about the Holocaust.

I think it's deadly. I don't think it's healthy. I don't think it should be done. I think we should have enough other things which we do, and that's why I'm telling you so many things. Let's do something, do things which will provide some sort of change and all this and all the other.

But because of my role as educator and because the unfortunate incident that I'm where I am and feel obligated to that, and so few people can take it and carry the ball and do what I think I can do, I still am in a position where I have to do it. But I don't intend to do it forever. You know, I may die in the process forward. I don't know. But that's not intended.

But I still have this deep sense that so many people don't understand--

Of course not.

--the deeper lessons.

Absolutely. Absolutely. And that's for you and other people interested to make that work on it. Because we are not going to work it out. We just show perhaps some direction, in terms of which direction to pursue. But I don't think we'll leave with these really profound solutions. I don't think so.

But I think, yeah, we're working on it. And other people will take it up and work on it some more, without necessarily having experienced anything which would be as traumatic. And I think that's what we need to do. And that's what you can do, and other people, which is being done right now, whether it's just with the help of a camera, just doing that.

Because, obviously, if they would not relate to this thing and understand the importance of that and have enough optimism to say that it will make a difference, they wouldn't be here. And that, to me, is absolutely-- I mean, that's why I'm doing what I-- because I don't particularly enjoy dwelling on this type of past, for sure.

Isn't that sort of the way history is analyzed, in general, though? I mean, we look back at ancient Rome or at the Spanish Inquisition, and I think historical distance gives us that perspective. The further away we are from the event, the more dispassionate we can be about it.

I think some of us are still too close, and that's why maybe they cannot analyze. All they can do is recite. This is what happened to me. They give that to the next generation, and they sift through it, and they pass what they've distilled down to the next generation.

Maybe they're the ones who are going to figure it out, find out the lessons, the core of it all. I certainly don't think that the Caesars had the historical distance to understand what they were doing to Rome any more than we necessarily know what we're doing to the Earth.

I think that's a very important point. And the difference is that we have a different means to process history. And they didn't have that. We have that. And to make videotapes of people still alive, for reasons which may escape them, it's a very important contribution. Because the old Romans or the Greeks didn't have it. Because if they had, we may have

learned more from them, the chances are. It's a possibility, isn't it? All right.

So I mean, that's what we are doing. Now, who is going to view the material and put it together and what have you is another thing. To what extent it may get buried someplace and forgotten is another thing. It just depends on the awareness of those people who will stay behind.

And there, I don't have a great deal of optimism because I think people have become more ignorant by the day. Well, they are becoming more ignorant by the day. So depends what they will do. But I only can do what I can, or we can do what we can do. And if we do that to the best of our ability, we can die peacefully, so to speak.

I think, too, that there are people involved in this program, for example, who are historians, who are doing it for the historical value as much as they're doing it for--

But the historical value is valueless if it is not interpreted and if we don't learn our lesson from it.

They're the ones who are going to interpret. And I think there are always people who are fascinated by history. And maybe--

But that's not enough. To be fascinated by history is simply not enough.

But in any case, I say I thank you for taking the hours and the psychic, intellectual, and emotional energy to come and do this. You I mean, to some degree we can predict, perhaps, who will use the material and who will interpret it. But I think that it will go forward in the education, as you've been talking, just as you've been doing, just as you've been doing and that it's a extremely draining but very, very valuable thing that you're doing.

Well, it's important, for example, since we're talking about it, these sort of get togethers which I missed because I was in Europe because you've had this--

Survivor reception?

Reception and all that. I think that's very important. It just depends who is going to really get the kind of recognition and how these people will mix, who will be who and all that. And sometimes, the wrong people come on top, you see. And that's something which we really ought to avoid if we can.

But the more conscious we are of some of the ramifications and some of the details, the better position we are to avoid that. But I have to work with people who I would prefer not to work with, you see. And simply because I'm in that position, it's really difficult to say, I won't work with you.

Yeah, their understanding is so minimal--

That's right.

--of such a huge subject.

Exactly that. And also, of there are survivors, it's just unbelievable how myopic they are. They just haven't learned their lesson at all. And they talk about, lecture and talk about it and just haven't learned a thing, other than trying to be in limelight and enjoy the fact of being limelight and reap some reward from it or whatever.

Some odd kind of status. The status of the victim.

Clues to explain ourselves.

Well, we're trying. I'm still trying to get over the idea that such a profound trauma in recent history on humanity, on society, ought to have as its balance some kind of profound behavioral and consciousness transformation that would be

the commensurate natural balance to that. And I think that I'm so idealistic and naive in this sense. Because I don't know.

That would be fair.

Yeah, that would be fair. And life is not fair.

Well, but you see, I don't know exactly whether I would call it naive. Because I still expect it. And I'm disappointed when people who are survivors behave, in a way, as if they had not learned a thing. And that, to me, is a terrible disappointment.

Some kind of [INAUDIBLE].

So maybe I'm very hard on them and all that. But I think, what the hell have you gotten out of all this yourself before you just espouse some sort of things or talk to other people and try to tell them about what you have experienced. And yes, I'm getting very impatient and rather intolerant.

But yes, I still think we can expect it. Because if we can't expect it from these situations, what do we have to go through before we wake up? And that, to me, is one of the crucial questions. What sort of suffering do I have to go through or survive before I wake up and start reflecting on it and behave in a fashion which will reflect some degree of understanding, which would make a change?

That is probably the all-time question. Perhaps we should end there and start with that question again next time.

OK, yeah.