

Anytime, Sandra.

I'm Sandra Bendayan. And I'm here interviewing Paul Benko for the Oral History Project in San Francisco. Today is March the 21st. And this is Interview, Part 2. And I'm here with the second, Denise Leiteel. And we left off with the year 1943, your mother has been jailed, and just about at the point where she is released from jail.

My mother was released from jail just early in the new year. We went to the station. By we, I mean my Aunt Irma, and my Uncle Eugene, and myself, we and some other friends.

And it was an incredibly joyous occasion. Because I had not seen my mother since my birthday. And she had been arrested on my birthday. And this is January 1943 that we're talking about.

No, actually, that's a correction. That's wrong. In 1943, I was 14 years old. And this happened when I was 12. This happened when I was 12. So it was the year before my bar mitzvah.

Anyhow, she arrived. And we were overjoyed. And we had saved food various ways to greet her and to make a party for her when she arrived. And she was very thin and very good spirits then that she was released.

And I was never told by her what happened. But I know that she had been beaten severely. And my aunt told me that inadvertently.

But at least she was released. And things during the war were going very badly at that time. A great shortage of food, increasing repression by the authorities, Jews could hold fewer and fewer jobs, could do fewer things. The Jewish community, as I think I mentioned before, organized in the sense of helping each other.

A lot of people were thrown out of work. They tried to find other sources of income, other jobs, other kinds of businesses, which is very, very difficult in wartime. And the community literally taxed itself. The community has no tax collection power, though.

So what came in was really generous. Because everybody felt the squeeze due to the inflation during the war, and so on. And I know my father was involved with the Jewish community, and involved with the tax planning, and how much people should give, and so on. Although he wasn't much involved before the war, he did participate in this.

And there was also a great many rumors flying around about what was happening to our relatives. We had relatives in Czechoslovakia. We had relatives in Vienna. We had relatives in Budapest on my father's side of the family, mostly.

My mother's side of the family was mostly in Transylvania. I mentioned that Transylvania was divided into the northern part, what belonged to Hungary, and the Southern part was retained by Romania. We lived just a few miles from the border. And my uncle lived on the other side.

And occasionally, we got smuggled letters. There was no way of writing directly, certainly not about things that mattered to the family. I'm not sure if I talked about my mother's smuggling attempt.

It doesn't matter.

OK.

If it's in there.

During this period of time, everybody was trying to guess whether it would be better for Jews to be on the Hungarian side or on the Romanian side. And the general consensus of opinion was that the Hungarians were more civilized, that they would probably be less savage than the Romanians who were considered, quote, less civilized. And ironically, everybody was wrong.

The facts were that the degree of organized repression was much greater on the Hungarian side than on the Romanian side. And the anti-Jewish laws were much more extensive. The enforcement was much more thorough.

The Romanians, whatever else happened since, were a rather easygoing lot. They were a place where things were very corrupt, but virtually nothing was impossible, including getting people out of the country. You know that even under the horrible Ceausescu regime, they sold people out, but they didn't kill people.

The Hungarians didn't sell them. They killed them. And that's what happened.

So my mother, whose older brother lived in a town called [PLACE NAME] which is near a town called Turda in Romania. That's where they were born and raised. Well, he remained there to operate what had been the family store. And at one time, they had a mill. He still lived there with his wife and two daughters.

And my mother made arrangements for a guy to guide the family across the border. There were people who were being smuggled back and forth. It's not an unusual event in Europe for people to be smuggled.

And then there are always the Gypsies. The Gypsies crossed European borders without the benefit of passports, or visas, or other documentation for centuries. Well, this man was not a gypsy, but it turned out that this man was an informer.

And so my mother was arrested and accused. And she was fined. And all she was really trying to do was rescue her brother. And I didn't know anything about it.

Let me say that as the war starts, people begin to be very wary in police states about how much information you give to other people. Because if they are arrested, they all know they're going to be tortured sooner or later-- and they're all going to be. And so there's a limited amount of information given, because you can't give them information that you don't have.

So I really didn't even know that my mother had been arrested. I was living with my father at the time. I think I told you that when the Hungarians started, I moved to my father's.

And then I went to school one day, and one of my classmates taunted me that my mother was a felon. And we got in the usual fight. And we got in front of the principal and all that, as you might expect.

And then I thought that he was lying and he was just baiting me. And it turned out that it was true. She was not convicted as a felon. It was some misdemeanor. She paid a fine.

But we were terrified. Because during wartime, any minor offense could lead to incarceration, and so on.

What was the charge that she was charged with?

Smuggling, smuggling. And I think the lawyer managed to convince him that they were smuggling some goods and not this, of course. But there weren't goods involved.

And I sort of came at my mother very, very righteously, as 12-year-olds are apt to be. And then she told me. And I must say, I was very ashamed that I did that.

Our life during these years, as I mentioned, became increasingly restricted. At this time, I was going to a Catholic school run by the Piarist order. I think I mentioned it in the other tape.

And half the faculty was pro-Nazi. Younger priests were pro-Nazi, and the older priests tend to be anti-Nazi. And the principal was definitely anti-Nazi.

And 1943 was our worst year in the sense that we went for a year without meat, from Pesach to Pesach. I remember my

grandmother saved this breast of a duck. I mean, it hung dried in the corner, wrapped in something.

And she used to make these fake meats and fake things and pat it on. It was kind of a fake hamburger mounted on the breast of this duck, which got served and reserved and reserved. And all the coffee was always used many times.

And part of the reason we survived was because my father was wise enough to buy cigarettes. Because he had gone through the First World War. And after the First World War, when all the currencies blew up, you could go out in the countryside with cigarettes, buy all that you wanted.

And as I said, 1943 was the worst. By end of 1943, by early 1944, every aspect of the war made its mark on us. There were bombings. There were constant overflights.

The supplies to the partisans in Yugoslavia, flights went through Romania. There were, sometimes, just single or a couple of planes going through. And I don't know whether they were reconnaissance missions or whatever, and then bombings started seriously.

They bombed the railway station. And they bombed other industrial sites. And the bombing, by and large, was confined to the industrial district. It was not in the populated districts.

And we listened to the radio in Europe. Most Americans don't know. But they used to announce the bombing runs in advance.

They used to say, if you can, leave the following towns. They're on the scorecard. And then we used to say, well, how can you leave?

But some people could leave. We couldn't leave. But it was announced.

How could these people leave? Did they have relatives?

Yeah, if they went to the countryside to relatives. And you know, European visits to relatives are not specific affairs. People come and stay a while, and they move on. And it's very much more of an easygoing life. And in country homes, especially, if it's more like a compound rather than one little house, it's not unusual for people to come, and so on.

Some people had hard times in the '30s. Another family would move in. And they'd be around a while. It didn't happen to us, but it happened a lot of people that I knew. So it wasn't so unusual for them to go.

The difficulty was to get a permit to leave. Now if you were not Jewish, it wasn't a problem. If you were Jewish, that was another problem. Then you had to find a friendly policeman who would recommend you.

Or what really this boils down to is you find the guy who accepts the bribe. And there's always a guy who accepts the bribe. Eastern Europeans take very cynical views of government because most of the government that they're exposed to is totally, utterly corrupt.

Everything goes by bribes. It goes by family relationships. It goes by influence. There are no such things as hard and fast rules. They do have lawyers. But the lawyer's power depends not only on the lawyer's skill, but the lawyer's connections.

So it's a very, very different aspect of government that you see. If you have a store, you'll need a permit for every time you turn around. And the permit may or may not be granted. And they are very, very arbitrary.

And the store can be closed because you didn't sweep your front porch a couple of times. Every storekeeper is responsible for cleaning in front of their stores. There is no street sweeping, per se, of the whole sidewalk.

And if they don't, then the policeman can issue a ticket or the policeman can close it. Now you have to appeal and go to

court to get that closing off. So it's a situation that's fraught with-- it's an invitation to bribery and corruption.

Is this one of the differences between Hungary and Romania?

No, they both do it. The Romanians do it openly. The Hungarians do it hiddenly.

Mhm. Well, you were saying how the Romanians were [CROSS TALK]

But the Romanians--

[INAUDIBLE].

Yeah, the Romanians, in all of my experience, they made life possible. Even if there was an impossible rule, they made life possible. The Hungarians would pass an impossible rule. And even if it tripped them, and worked against them, they would enforce it.

They were idiotic rules. For example, under the Nazis, you weren't supposed to use certain medicines. And a good doctor, and they would audit the prescriptions, would prescribe chamomile tea for infections, and all this.

Well, you know chamomile tea is wonderful to put you to sleep, make you feel better, and all this. But if you have a serious infection, and you expect on chamomile tea, you better take up residence in a good hospital where they can give you emergency care fast.

So what the physicians would do is write out a prescription for two things, one, a prescription for the real drug which you would take to a pharmacy that they dealt with confidentially, and another prescription, a front pharmacy, which dealt in these fake Nazi drugs. And so that there was a record that he visited, he treated, he wrote a prescription, and that fulfilled them. But the real thing went on through the other drugstore.

And this kind of subterfuge went on at every level, people were given a certain amount of ration of food. But they couldn't possibly live on the ration of food. And so the black market was in existence.

I mean, I was utterly surprised when I came to New York in 1945 and they were just the last ends. I guess rationing really went out. But there was some few restrictions. And people described their hardships over here, and it was amusing to see what they called a hardship. I mean, their ration of butter was 10 times ours and their ration of meat were ridiculously high. And as you know, it was--

Do you remember what your rations were?

Oh, no, I don't remember now. But I remember at one time that we got a chunk of butter that's equivalent to about an 1/8 of a pound for two weeks. But most of the time, the butter wasn't there.

The failure of the rationing system is that the moment they gave you the ration, the commodity disappeared. And if you ever read *The Good Soldier Svejk*, there is a wonderful story in *Good Soldier Svejk* where they arrive at an Italian train station where they were told they were going to receive a ration of Swiss cheese. And instead of it, they got a propaganda booklet.

[LAUGHTER]

Well, that's about it. And that characterizes the distribution system. The whole wartime distribution system existed mainly by people knowing each other and long established relationships and not by any proper governmental organization.

Well, in the beginning of the war, we all bought as much food as we possibly can, canned food of various kinds and dried food. And we couldn't have lived on the rations, ever. There was still a lot of food left when we were deported.

Well, in the spring of 1944, I was now in the fifth year of gymnasium. And I was going to the Catholic school. The process which I described of things getting rougher on Jews increases.

There are anti-Jewish movies, for example. There is a famous movie called Jude Suss, which was a German anti-Jewish propaganda movie. And many others are going on.

I was never quite fully accepted by my playmates in the Catholic school. Because I did come in, unusually, in the middle of the fall when I first went there. And you know, half the teachers were very nice. And the other half were very, very rough and very discriminatory.

But it's not quite as obvious as it might seem. Because the classrooms in Europe are so rigidly run, there is relatively little time for kids to interact. They have the break between classes. And the morning break between, let's say, 10 and 10:15 and so.

And then school is over at 1 o'clock, and then you go home, at latest, at 2 o'clock. Then you eat lunch at home. So there wasn't a great deal of interaction in school except incidental to-- there was no free time and the formality of the classroom is such.

But around Christmastime, I remember the Christmas of 1943. I was very touched because there was a class Christmas party in school. It's the first party, I think, that we had. The previous Christmas we didn't have a party.

And it was the only time at that Christmas party that I felt I was a member of the class. And everybody was friendly and very pleasant. And there wasn't this exclusion in any way.

But after Christmas, things went back to the previous way. There were pick up soccer games, for example, in the neighborhood with kids that I had played with for years. And I wasn't invited anymore. And there was a shunning on the streets or if we'd meet in a store. We were all distanced.

And this was also-- wearing yellow armbands or star started in '42, actually. First we had to wear a yellow armband on Saturdays. And during the military training period-- and kids go to school six days a week there, not five. And so on Saturday was the pre-military training. And so other kids went on pre-military training.

We who were regarded politically unreliable, they didn't call us that, but then they had some other term for us, that we were supposed to do useful work like sweeping the hallways and such. But we weren't supposed to be in the classroom. Because they were warm and the hallways were cold. So we were out there. And then, on break, we would go into the classrooms.

But we had to wear the yellow armbands. And wearing the yellow armbands immediately set you aside, even with people who knew you all the time. And that experiment that was done at Stanford, really, this was the beginning of that. It does work.

So later on the yellow armband during the day was replaced with the yellow star for everybody. And then came the restricted hours. And then you couldn't go to certain places.

And mostly, the restrictions on the hours made it very difficult to get food. Because all food sources involve food lines, and you couldn't be caught out. And previously what we would do is go at night to people. Like, my father knew a baker. In fact, he owned part of a bakery.

And then we would go to this baker, and we could get some extra bread. And I would wear a big raincoat and have straps under the raincoat. And I would go with the maid.

But the maid wouldn't carry the bread, because then they would see, and they'd ask her, do you have the tickets for that bread, and so on. But they probably wouldn't examine me. So at first I went and later on, we had no maid. I went by

myself.

And these are large loaves of bread. They're 10, 15 pounds loaves of breads. And we just made straps. And they held it under my big rubber raincoat and smuggled it in.

Well, if you have a curfew of 7:00, you can't do that. So we'd go by back roads sometimes and still get it.

How did this fit in with the ration system, though?

It didn't. This is bread that was unrationed. In other words, what bakers do is that they have an allotment based on the number of coupons they collect. Then they go to Gypsies, and they buy the Gypsies' coupons. Because Gypsies not only can't read the coupons, but they don't deal with the coupons.

So they get extra flour. And then they skim some off the [INAUDIBLE]. So they-- in all black markets that happens. What people do is they skim. And with that skim, they bake bread.

And that bread is 10 times the price, or 100 times the price of the other bread. And you pay the price, and you get the bread. It's very difficult. And part of it was that the Jewish community collected money so poor Jews could also get bread.

Were you getting official ration cards at that time at all?

Yes. No, we didn't get ration cards. We got ration sheets by commodity. That was one of the other stupid things. Then you'd have one for potatoes, and one for bread, and one for this, and one for meat, and for that.

And they would say, oh, this is good for so many things. But everybody knew that unless you knew the butcher, you would only smell meat. You wouldn't get any meat.

And there were also a great many problems. Because some people would only get kosher meat. So how can you get kosher meat when the kosher meat was very restricted? So there were a great many difficulties.

There were a great many difficulties with the Jewish hospital running. There was a Jewish hospital in my hometown. And the Jewish hospital was built because of the questionable care in the other hospital.

And there were a lot of non-Jews who preferred to go to the Jewish hospital. Because they knew that one was watched. But under the anti-Jewish laws, they couldn't. That was one of the interesting things, is that people complain that they couldn't go to where they wanted to. But the political repression was such that they didn't respond to that.

As I mentioned, 1944, also I should tell you that we had a radio. It was a Philips radio which my father bought at the beginning of the war, which was the best radio of its kind. And it had a very advanced design.

I mean, we listened to Yokohama Symphony all the time on the shortwave. Every Sunday, I remember, they used to have a concert. And we could listen to other stations. We certainly heard the British Broadcasting System, the British and the Voice of America broadcasts, through the British stations.

So we got updates on what was happening in the war. The headlines would say one thing and we knew what was coming through there. And we would listen and, you know, huddle in a room and put pillows around the radio so people couldn't hear.

They unfortunately had a very recognizable call signal. It was the opening of the Fifth Symphony, that da da da dum. And that goes through walls, like, man.

You know, somebody who's a little security sensitive ought to have told them to use "Over The Rainbow" or something for a theme song. But we did hear.

And I don't know if I told you about that incident. I had a German teacher at this Catholic school. And he couldn't find the wavelength of the station.

So he sent me to his room to get something. And he said, by the way, he says, I've been trying to listen to Radio London. He says, where do you get it now? Sometimes they would move the wavelength because they jammed too much. And where do you get it?

I said, I don't know anything about Radio London. And he says, I know you don't know anything about Radio London. I have a book in my room. My radio is on. And you go bring me my book. And if I should find Radio London after you're gone, I won't be mad.

[LAUGHTER]

So I went to his room. And I put it on the station. And I went away. And that way there are no witnesses that I know where Radio London is.

Well, as I said, the spring of 1944, things were getting bad. We knew that Stalingrad had not fallen and that the German army around Stalingrad. We knew that by then.

And we also knew that the Russians were counterattacking. We knew from the paper we got. It's called the Schweizer Illustrierte and it was very crudely censored. I don't know if I mentioned this before?

You said something. But tell me anyway. Tell more.

Really, the censorship is enormously thorough in terms of items. But it's very clumsy. So, for example, they claim they sunk-- the Royal Oak was a famous warship, a British warship. And they sunk it three times.

[LAUGHTER]

So the coordination in the propaganda divisions wasn't too good. So we knew by then that somebody was lying. And there used to be a joke about in the war in Africa, which says what's the difference between a clock and Rommel. A clock goes forward and says tick tock, and Rommel goes backward and it says tock tick.

[LAUGHTER]

This is sort of the humor, the gallows, that was coming out. But we could still listen to the radio and hear what was going on. And we knew things were going badly on the Russian front.

Rostov was another place where the Russians, or the Germans, were stopped. We noticed that the German commanders were replaced. And we were smart enough to know that it wasn't old age that you replace commanders for. And they always praise them. But nevertheless, they were removed.

The rationing increased. The number of German wounded in town increased. The Germans had often kept their wounded in occupied countries, rather than bringing them back to Germany to break the morale.

Of course, it broke the morale of the Hungarians, seeing-- and then there was a teaching hospital in my hometown that's surrounded by a high, iron picket fence, which is traditional, high, kind of fence since the Austro-Hungarians. And they put sheets around this fence so you couldn't see in through this fence and all.

And naturally, as kids are apt to do, if there's a fence and it's got posts on it, first thing you cover something up, the kids climb up and take a look. And that's when we knew. We looked in and that's the first time we saw people without arms or legs. And then we realized that this was a quadruple amputee hospital.

And in '44, my father was getting very worried. Because there was literally less and less for him to do. The factory designated him as an economically important Jew. The Germans had a description called [GERMAN]. And the Hungarians followed the same script.

And he had been involved in mostly buying supplies overseas. He was involved in import and export aspects of the factory before the war. And he had to buy not only leather, this was a shoe and leather factory, he not only had to buy shoe and leather, but the materials for tanning.

Now the leather tanning materials that came in the '30s from Argentina, there is a tree called the quebracho tree whose bark is very rich in tannins, and that's what they use for making it. And then the other kind of tanning, which is with chromium, is another kind. But it's not usable for all purposes. It's a quebracho that you need.

So the Germans found a brush in North Africa that was supposed to replace this quebracho, which none of it could get in Europe because of the Allied blockade. So my father came home one day and announced that he had concluded his most significant business deal in an entire lifetime. I mean, before he had bought maybe a shipload of something or other.

But this was an entire convoy of small boats, but nevertheless, in terms of amount, it was a huge amount of money. And this was going to come from North Africa to Southern Italy. And he said laughingly, and I won't see a drop of it.

I said, what do you mean? He says, oh, he says, I am sure. He didn't tell me why. But he was absolutely sure that after concluding this deal, they're going to let them sail all the way to Italy because they'll use up their fuel, and then they'll bomb it in the Italian harbor. And that's exactly what happened.

Well, before that, the chief engineer of the factory had been sent to the Russian front for picking mines. The chief engineer of the factory was Jewish. And they used to pick up people in random raids and pick them up and ship them off to pick mines in front of troops.

But he was captured by the Russians early. And we suspect that that's why when the Allied raids came, they didn't bomb any empty warehouses. They only bombed the full ones. And they didn't bomb the unused parts of the factory. They only bombed the used parts of the factory.

So they were informed. And I don't know whether by these people, to look out, what to look out for. I don't know whether it was serendipity or not.

But they waited. And the Allies waited. And the boats came from Africa, went to Italy, Southern Italy, and they bombed the ships in the harbor. And of course, when the ship sank, the shrub could not be recovered because the seawater leached out all the materials that are used for tanning.

And in the spring of 1944, the factory had a big celebration for, quote, "old time employees." Unquote. And one of those people honored was my father. And we went to this big celebration. And there were marches and speeches and all that.

And about, oh, maybe three weeks later. He came home ashen-faced that day and said, I don't have my job anymore. So I think that he was protected by one of the people in effect who was now running the factory on behalf of the government. And I think the pressure came on the guy, didn't want to protect him anymore, or couldn't take the chance. And so said we're going to be deported.

Was that automatic that one was deported?

I should tell you that in the summer of 1944, early spring of 1944, the population of Cluj was herded-- not in early spring, in the early summer, very early summer-- well, May, end of April, May-- they herded the population of Cluj into the brick factory. There is a brick factory in Cluj. And a brick factory has a lot of sheds where bricks are allowed to dry.

So these are open sheds. And they're open on four sides. All they have is a cover on top. And this was a huge yard.



But Jews got notices that whatever you can carry, you can carry. And that was literally enforced. That is you could not carry somebody else's. A child had to carry its own. An old woman had to carry her own. And in some cases, they had to walk a long distance just to get to the truck, or bus, or-- not carriage, but one of these wagons to carry their stuff.

And it was unspeakable cruelty. And nobody protested. Nobody raised a finger, no policeman, no man, woman, or child.

As soon as those announcements came, people started appearing at our door and say, why don't give me your books that are in your library? You won't have any use for it.

What were the punishments for not carrying your own wares, or breaking those rules?

They just take it away. They just literally take it away and throw it away, right on the spot. So if you picked up somebody else's, they'd say give it back.

And we went later. And the only thing that my father could arrange that a guy in a horse-driven carriage came. It was one of these open things. So my grandmother carried it only from our door to the carriage and to us going down. And she carried her things.

When my father got fired, he had a nervous breakdown. He couldn't function. And so I started organizing the house.

And we had certain kinds of warm clothing, and we had certain boots. We had boots with hob nails on it. Because it saves wearing on the sole. And we had good, warm clothing.

And I even got my-- my father's father was once in the Austro-Hungarian navy. And he had a sailor's knife, but a small version of a sailor's knife. It's called a britola. And I carried that knife with me. And it was wonderful. Because eventually, I sold it for two loaves of bread.

I tried to figure out what is it that you carry. And people do become irrational under these. You know, my grandmother wanted to carry all her pictures. Well, there's no point in taking pictures.

And she wanted to carry the linen she had embroidered as a young woman. [CRYING] And instead, we needed blankets. And we needed clothes that would last.

And choose the best shoes and scuff them up so they won't look new. We always did that during the war. Because if German soldiers walked by and saw a new pair of shoes, they'd say I want that. And that would be it.

So the whole burden is on you in the household?

Yeah. And I essentially organized that. There were some people who helped us, who brought food to the house.

They didn't say anything. They just came. We opened the door. They'd hand something in our hands. And they would go away. One of them was my father's girlfriend, one of them was a woman who had worked for him when he was head of the correspondence section, and one other old lady who was a family friend.

They came. The bell would ring. We would open the door. They would just hand it to us and run away.

The shocking thing was that neighbors and people that we knew, whose weddings and funerals we were at, and whom we thought of as friends, and we would have Sunday afternoon get-togethers would come and say, hey, why don't you give me your desk? You'll never need that credenza. I like those books. And how about that painting?

And I couldn't believe. None of them ever said, oh, there wasn't a compassionate word on their lips. They all turned the other way.

We lived in an apartment house that's L-shaped. And we lived on the second floor in the corner apartment, where the small and long legs of the L meet. And there was a walkway both ways.

And people used to be in this courtyard. And there was a garden behind this. And there'd usually be people out there.

And the police came. And every door was closed. Every window was shuttered. Every curtain was down.

And there was a local policeman and a gendarme, Hungarian gendarme. And they took us to the house of detention. By this time, by the time we were arrested, most-- not most, but all of the people in the brick factory had already been sent. So this was after they had left that we were arrested and sent.

Did you know about where they were going and what the conditions were, the ones in the brick factory? What had you known?

Oh, we heard rumors about concentration camps before. We knew. We had some relatives from Czechoslovakia who were sent to Theresienstadt.

For a period of time, we went every day to the train station. Because we had heard that there were trainloads of Jews who were trying to get out of Czechoslovakia and Poland. And we didn't know when they would come.

So we would stay there day after day, 24 hour day. There were shifts, people in shifts would wait by. And if the train arrived, we'd look around. And if there were refugee Jews in it, they got the food and bedding. Because some of them ran, literally caught the train with the clothes on their back.

But we never found our relatives. We had one communication that they were coming through. And we went for about two or three weeks.

Were you harassed by government officials for going to the train station?

No. They just looked askance. But they didn't interfere too much. They just said, well, why do you want to do that, and that sort of thing. But then they'd go away. They didn't make a big issue out of it.

But we knew, we had heard about the concentration camps. We had heard rumors about gassing. We wouldn't believe it. We didn't want to believe it.

We had heard about pogroms. There was a pogrom in Romania a couple of years before when the Iron Guard, which was the Romanian Nazi party, took over. There were pogroms in Romania.

And these were described by Shirer in his book, by the way. And they ran amok. And they hung Jews on meat hooks in the slaughterhouse in Bucharest. But after that, things subsided.

We did not get a sense, though, that anybody was concerned in our area with what happened to us. And in a way, I think it's because of that that at the end of the war, I wasn't homesick. And I lost that, the sense of homesickness, until years later.

I lived in Berkeley. And then I enlisted in the Army. And when I was in the army, the army was bussing us across the Bay Bridge. And I looked over. And I discovered that I was homesick.

And I can't say that I was-- I was homesick for friends. I was homesick for the feeling of a sense of belonging. But I was not homesick for my hometown.

Mhm. I can see why.

Well, we went to this house of detention. And there was there a number of families. There was a very polyglot lot. One

was a chemical engineer from the factory where my father worked. His name was Grunwald.

And his daughter's name was Betty. And she was my first girlfriend. And in the house of detention, men and women were separated.

This house of detention is like a county jail where they hold people before trial. And we flooded their facilities. There were maybe 20 families altogether.

And among these was one guy who was a waiter, who was not married. And he had been a waiter. And he had been a boxer. And he had done various things in his life, which is very atypical to the other kind of life that we had.

And this guy was the great organizer. He knew how to deal with jail keepers. He knew how you traded.

He knew how if you wanted, for example, some water, and you didn't have water, well, a naive person would say that, I have some money. Get me some water. And then they would hand the money over to get the water.

He says, huh uh. What you do is you get the water first. Then you hand the money over.

Yes.

And there were all kinds of little tricks, from how to make a comfortable bed when there is no bed, how to operate in the underworld, in other words,

Can you elaborate more on those tricks?

Well, he would show us how to make beds with very little material. He would show us how, when eventually they took our socks away, when we were in the camps, how to fold a sock so it doesn't rub your foot. There is an art to folding it up and over so that when you walk, you don't get a bad blister.

And he would show us how to disable a cable or a wire so that you don't get electrocuted. You look for insulators of proper kind. I don't remember other tricks now.

But there were parts of things of how a convict behaves. One of the things you learn is never to blab or to talk. And you never give more information than is asked for. You learn that, if you want something, where is it available, not by asking the head of whatever, but by somebody who you have some contact with.

And we learned to write very small and conserve paper. And to conceal pencils, and things of this sort, which we never thought that anybody would ever take away.

And so in those days-- the other thing is that he just made jokes. And these are people who had never been near a jail in their lives. They've never been in these.

And they were in tragic states because they had lost the power to care for their families. The men were just devastated. The women were in shock and very fearful.

But the functioning of men was more impaired. Now I don't know whether the women dealt with their fears more before than the men did or not. It could be that there were more familiar with fear and with a lack of power over their situation.

But the men, who prided themselves in being good providers, and makers of home, and reliable people--

And protectors.

--yeah, when they couldn't furnish food for their families, they felt personally devastated, regardless of what the conditions were. That was a devastating line.

How did your father bear through all this? Same?

Very badly, very badly, very badly. He was in shock.

He managed to get to the detention center all right, though?

Oh, yeah, we got there. But he wasn't doing very well. And part of it, that my father's skill in life was that he was a very good advance planner. His description of what would happen after the war turned out to be-- he didn't live to see it-- but it turned out to be remarkably accurate.

And ironically, I have a relative who still lives now. He's 93. He lives in Palm Springs. He's a retired barber for the Paramount Studios. And he has been there for many years.

He came to visit us just around the time the depression started, before the-- I'm sorry-- before the crash of the market he was visiting. And at dinner, my father said, he says, look, you'd better save your money. Put your money, whatever it is. Because that market's going to crash.

And he was very angry. He was very surprised. And he brought me my baby clothes. So my mother was pregnant. So it was '29.

And I think my father's tendency to look far into the future worked against him. And it works against all adults in situations like this, against their survival. Because the projection is darker. And the darker projection destroys hope. And destroying hope is counter to survival. So I think that didn't work.

He saw negatives?

Yeah, he saw that there was no way out of this. He couldn't see. In a long term sense, he was sure the Allies were going to win. He says, it is only a matter of time.

But it didn't help boost him enough to survive. Well, he was born in 1896. So he was 49 in '45 when he died. So he was 48 years old when he went in the camps.

But I was fortunate in that he and I were together and my grandmother was in on the women's side when we were here. My mother had already been deported. Because I told you, there were divorced. So my mother had been deported by the time we went to the camps.

When was she deported?

A month, six weeks before we were.

Do you know what the situation was, whether she got deported?

No, all Jews, all the Jews except those who were industrially excused.

She didn't have an excuse?

No, no, no, very few did.

Do you know where she was deported to?

Oh, yes, yes. Well, I'll come to that. We were in this house of detention. And we were beginning to wonder what will happen to us, whether we will go to a Hungarian camp, or a German camp, or such. We were there for about two weeks, two or three weeks or so.

And they suddenly came one day and said-- and the food wasn't bad. And we were not starved there. You know, it wasn't great, but there was adequate amount of food.

And they told us to pack up all of our belongings. And we were taken and placed on a boxcar, on a train. We were put on a train.

I'd guess one boxcar full of people. And at this time, there were probably about, maybe, 65, 70 people in one European boxcar. That's pretty tight. But that's the most luxurious boxcar ride I ever had. After that they're much more crowded.

We were sent from there and we stopped in Budapest. Now this is 1944. In Budapest, we were taken off and then taken to the house of detention. It's called the [NON-ENGLISH].

And at the house of detention, we were visited by a representative of the Joint group. And from him, we heard rumors about a Swedish guy who was giving passports all over. And I didn't believe it. I thought during the war, there are all kinds of rumors about Moshiah from the sky, and paratroopers who liberated all the Jews, and all of these.

And they're wishful thinking. It helps to keep up the spirits. Because you retell the story and you feel a little better. But I didn't believe it existed.

And of course, that was the famous Swedish businessman.

Wallenberg.

Wallenberg. Right. And it was Wallenberg.

Well, the man from Joint tried to get us food. He tried to get us medicine. He tried to find reasons for us not to be deported. He tried to interview us on health, if we had other passports, if we had any access to visas, every kind of possible excuse. He tried his very best.

And then we said goodbye to him. And we were placed on a train and moved to Northeastern Hungary, to a little town called [NON-ENGLISH]. There is another town that sounds like it, but Szombathely is a big city. And this is just a little town that had textile mills in it.

And the camps were located in these abandoned textile mills. The textile mills are built with a sloping roof and then a very sharp roof. It's like the Bauhaus version of factories, where there are skylights in.

Well these were set up. And next to our group was a fence. And on the other side of it were Yugoslav partisan families that were deported, I mean, men, women, and children on the other side of this fence. Because the Jews were in this side, and the Yugoslav partisans were on the other side.

We found this out. Let me say that when we got there, there were a whole bunch of other people there also. So they were all Jews. And so it was obviously a collecting point.

But the camp was guarded by Hungarians at that time. And so we thought this was a good sign. Maybe we're in the Hungarian camp. And maybe we'll stay there.

Well, the setup, though, was actually the same as the German concentration camps in the sense that the three tiered bunks were. But men and women were together. Men and women were not separated at this time.

And we were involved in work there. And we unloaded trains and did all kinds of work. And then we sabotaged the train.

Well, what we did, we were supposed to carry sacks of flour. A sack of flour is 80 kilograms. That's 196 pounds.

And so anybody who was male, could walk, was recruited for this. And we did it. And then we took razor blades. And we would pick up the sack and make a cut in the bottom and then carry it. And as we carried it, pretty soon we were walking in flour.

And, well, they took a dim view of this and made an example of us. Tied us up and hung us by the arms and whatnot, that we all passed out. Of course, it didn't change anything. But we did other kinds of things afterwards.

So in this place, our spirits were still good. And the exercise, the sabotage exercise certainly lifted our spirits. And I mentioned the Yugoslavs because in a camp, giving food is giving life. And it becomes abundantly clear pretty soon after you get there.

And these people, there was somebody in the crowd, and I don't know who, spoke some Serbian or some Slavic language. We found out that these guys were Serbians. And they found out who we were.

They had much more supply. They were agricultural workers, I guess. And they had a big bread-baking facility. And they would go, and they would throw breads over the fence.

Well, for going near the fence, you can be shot. And for throwing something over the fence, you would have expected all the machine guns to open up. But they sit there and wait and wait till the guard looks the other way. And shoom, a loaf would come sailing over.

And people shared the loaves. And that was another thing. This was not during the harder times. During the harder time, that probably wouldn't have happened.

But we have to remember all of it. And they did share loaves of bread. We'd cut one loaf into three pieces so three families would get bread.

Then I remember having a nightmare one day that the Germans are taking over. And sure as hell, next morning there were SS guards all around.

How was your father doing from all this?

He was doing much better by this time. I think he'd adapted better. The exercise helped.

We were organized, more organized in the sense that we would help people who needed help. And there were some things to do, and there was work to do instead of just sitting around and waiting for something to happen.

Did he carry these sacks also?

Oh, yeah, yeah, he did. It was very, very hard. But he did carry them.

And my father was a slight person. And well, I'm the tallest. I mean, he was probably about, maybe, 5' 1". And he was more slender in build than I.

And I'm sure it was very, very hard for him. I was much smaller at that time, too. I grew a lot after the war.

You must have been about 14 or something.

Yeah, no, this is 1944. I was 15. This is just s my birthday's in August. So this is in June, June of 1944. We had heard the invasion had happened. And the official word was they were all drowned instantly.

And we knew. We said, yes, next report we're going to hear is that they're drowning them around Paris. We had our own jokes.

[INAUDIBLE].

Yes.

Do you remember what your food rations were? That was under Hungarian control?

Under the Hungarians, yeah, we had coffee and bread in the morning. We had a real heavy stew, usually, for lunch. And we got bread and some cold cut or something at night.

I mean, they weren't generous. But a hell of a lot more than what they were under the Germans. We never had that dried vegetable soup that the Germans gave us.

So when the SS took over, they came and there were guards on the roofs. And there were guards all over. And they fired at the camp nearby because somebody opened the door or something.

So we knew that they were trigger happy and touchy. And then they herded us in the cattle cars. They told us to pick up our belongings.

And they were extremely rough, extremely blue. And people were getting beaten bloody at any opportunity.

And we got in the cattle cars. And we were really packed in, probably 80 or more in one cattle car. And it was very, very difficult.

And then we started the journey to Auschwitz. We went-- I think it was three days from there to Auschwitz. It's not a great distance. But these are not high priority trains in wartime, and so on.

And we stopped in Vienna. And I know it's Vienna because my father had been in Vienna. My grandmother was born in Vienna. And my father had been in Vienna many times.

So you know, he lifted them up, and he looked out the barred window. He knew where we were. He knew which train station we were.

And in Vienna, the train stopped. They cracked the doors open. The guards were gone.

And this guy I mentioned to you, the ex-waiter, the guy who had been a boxer, the guy who had been-- there was he. And there was another guy who had also been a waiter and been around. And he said, he and the other guy said to me, let's run.

We looked and we looked. And the guards were all assembled on the other side. And the door was cracked.

And I knew I couldn't run. And I'm glad I didn't. Because I couldn't have lived with the idea of leaving my father behind.

But that's not just me. Almost everybody who ever had an opportunity to run felt they were abandoning their families. And that's why a lot of people didn't run. One person could have been saved but a group couldn't have.

Only if you were solitary would you feel free to do it.

Yeah, if you were solitary, you could feel free to run. Then you had no attachment. And my father wanted me to run. And my grandmother was already fading. She was having a very hard time.

And the truth is I was not fond of my grandmother. My grandmother and my mother never got along. And she never had a kind thing to say.

[CRYING]

I thought that my father would be left with his mother dying and me abandoning him. So I didn't run.

After Vienna, the next place we stopped was Auschwitz. And we came in the train station. It's exactly as depicted in the various documentaries. And we got off, and we were herded off by Nazis and the SS soldier, rather.

And also, we met the first guy-- have you heard the term Kanada kommando? The first Kanada kommandos were there. And I've heard of very cruel Kanada kommandos. And they were. They were somewhat terrible.

And the Kanada kommandos, the ones that they were going through the material, and they would talk to us as they were going through the material. And they said, shut up. Don't make noise. Stand in line. Don't move.

And if they come near you, just don't move. And whatever they give you, eat. Don't turn your nose up. Don't be a smartass.

Eat whatever they give you. You won't live if you don't eat. You just won't live.

So you're not going to get better food. The food smells awful. It tastes awful.

It was very good advice. It was absolutely true. And people who didn't eat for two, three weeks, and then they died.

Mhm. Why would the other Kanada people be cruel? What was the motivation?

Oh, oh, I don't know why people are cruel. But some people are cruel because it's their way of distancing themselves from those who are about to die.

I see.

Although many Kanada kommandos were then put to death. You know, they didn't last all the way through. Maybe the last ones lasted. But periodically, they'd be picked up and sent away.

So we got off the train and in a distance of maybe a good third of a good city block, maybe longer, maybe greater distance-- I mean, really in the distance sat who I later on found to be Mengele. And he sat in a chair.

And he went like this, or like this. As people approach him in a single file, like this, like this, you know. This is to the gas chamber. This is to survive.

The guards walking along, I noticed that they tended to separate if they saw father and child. In other words, I mean, Mengele would select one this way and one this way if he thought it was father and child. Whereas if they were not, then he'd go by.

And supposedly, they were selected for their ability to do work. And you're supposed to run up to a point and then stop. And the idea-- some people didn't run, thinking that they would be compassionate and give them a lighter duty or something.

Well, it was just the opposite. If they didn't run fast enough, then they'd go to the other side. And the women and children were all going to that side.

So I lucked out. The moment I saw that, I didn't stand close to my father. And all of our materials were left on the train. They said, oh, you'll come and get them later.

But by that time, we knew. Later? There is no such a thing as later.



They greeted with dogs also?

Yeah, they had dogs. Yeah. But I didn't see them actually leave the handler's hands. There were dogs there, but not a huge number.

And the Kanada people said you're going to Ziguenerlager. You probably will hear that term. It was called-- it was Lager E in Birkenau.

So it's called Ziguenerlager because Gypsies had been there. And then a lot of the Hungarian Jews were there. And all the Gypsies were gassed and then the others were gassed before. I mean, some went on, but most of them were gassed. And so we arrived at the camp in Birkenau.

You passed, obviously, by Mengele, or with no clothes on, I presume.

No, we had clothes on. No, no, when we got-- the selection was done just as we came off the train. We still had our clothes on. And after that, we went to the showers.

Excuse me. And well, you know, it was a relief. Because we'd been there three days without anything. We didn't know enough to be afraid of the showers.

We saw the crematorium in the distance. And we heard rumors that that was-- we referred to it as a soap factory.

So they took us to the showers and the mandatory haircutting. And I managed to save my knife, the britola. I held it in my hand. They searched us all over. But I just held it in my hand like this and we went through.

They didn't see it?

No. They didn't make you open your hands. You just have to go like this. I went like this.

And I had that with me. And I also managed to keep my boots. I don't know whether we sidestepped at some point or whether they didn't give us shoes. I don't remember that. But I had good shoes for quite a while. And that was great savior there.

Then we went through the showers. We got the striped pajama uniform, the rags for the socks. And this guy showed us. He didn't run away, by the way.

He didn't?

He didn't run away. And I don't know. I often wondered why he didn't run away. And I think he felt we depended on him. And we did. So I never even knew his last name.

Such generosity.

Yeah. And he had a great spirit that would just take you out of depression. Well, we got to-- I said Auschwitz. The specific camp that I was in was really Birkenau. And Lager E is in Birkenau, which adjoins it.

When we got there, shortly afterwards we learned the drill. Which was you wake up in the morning about 4:30 or 5 o'clock. And you fall outside. I mean, you're chased outside in the barracks.

The barracks that I slept in didn't have the three-tiered arrangement in Auschwitz. They were all bare. They actually were a stable. They were cavalry stables. Because they had a lower channel in the center where you step down where they used to sweep out the stuff from the stables.

And we slept literally on the floor. And they gave us one blanket. I think we got one blanket each.

And we were packed so tight that we all slept on one side. Then in the middle of the night, one or two people would get up. And they would first tell the guard they're getting up. And they would get up. And then everybody would turn on their other side, you know, like spoons, and then lie down again.

There was really not very much to do. We went on various kinds of work details. And we tried to make inquiries about who is there and who is not there. And I got a note, the only written piece of paper I ever got during the camp, that my aunt would meet me at a certain spot.

And I went there. And my aunt was there, my mother's sister Irma. I have her picture here.

She was, at that time, alive. And she seemed OK. What I found out later that by that time, my mother was dead.

Already?

Yeah. My mother died in there shortly after they got to Auschwitz. And my aunt never told me. And I think the reason she didn't tell me was not to destroy my hope.

Yeah.

And I never saw her again. She had been there long enough that her hair was beginning to grow out. And my aunt had kinky hair.

[CRYING]

I remember her with that kinky hair. She was a very beautiful woman. She looked like this Swedish movie star, oh, Ingrid Bergman. She looked like Ingrid Bergman with kinky hair.

Oh, yeah.

She was the youngest of the sisters.

How did she manage to get that note to you?

It went from people to people. And people talked to each other.

You didn't have to bribe somebody?

No, no, it was probably thrown across. And she probably saw somebody in a camp whom she knew. And then attached the note to a rock and threw it across the barbed wire. And then people pick it up.

And we didn't have anything to bribe with anymore. The only thing I had left was the knife.

Was your father with you there in Birkenau?

Yes, my father was with me in Birkenau. And then this now is the fall of '44. We got there close to the high holidays. I think just after the high holidays.

And we met the people who had cleaned up the Warsaw ghetto. So we heard the whole story of the Warsaw ghetto from those who returned. And we hadn't heard anything about it before.

We learned some of the how you live in a camp. And you have to stand at attention because they count you twice a day. They line you up. If you bat an eyelash, you're killed. So you learn to-- even after the war, my aunt used to remark that

you don't bat your eyelashes very often, you know, blink.

I said no. And I said, no, you can do this to me all you want. I don't blink when you do that. It's a reaction that you learn. Because they used to test you that way and then beat you to death for blinking while you were at attention.

Hm.

As I said, the work wasn't terrible. It was just make work, kind of. You carried sod from one place to another. There really wasn't very much going on.

We heard that Buna was nearby. Buna is the artificial rubber factory. And that used up people like mad. Jon Steiner, whom you may know of, he worked at Buna at one time.

Why do you think you had such light work release?

I think they didn't know what to do with us. I think they were overloaded. The front was moving toward the West.

We were deported from Hungary and we found out later on, on the insistence of the Hungarian Nazis. The Germans didn't know what to do with us. The camps were overfilled. When they taxed their facilities, they just didn't know.

And frankly, convict labor is not a reliable source of labor, as they may have discovered. You have to watch everything they do. Because the moment that you don't watch, they'll sabotage.

Mhm.

Passively or actively, but they'll sabotage. And we did, too. I mean, if they laid out a road, that road never wound up the way it was laid out, you know. It was shifted, you know, a centimeter a day. But you have enough days, you move it.

And nothing that was ever ordered was ever carried out the way it was intended to. We worked for a very short time in a little plant indoors. And we destroyed it.

And we used to carry sand in our mouth. You take a piece of paper, and you put sand in it. And you roll it up and stick it in your mouth under the gums here.

And they search you. They search you everywhere. And you open your mouth and you look. Well, it's pressed against the lip.

Then when you're inside in the factory, you chew on that. And the sand mixes with your saliva, and then you spit in the bearing. You don't need a lot of sand to ruin a bearing.

Mhm.

And we had engineers with us. In our free time, all we ever did was plot how to ruin the place. And we learned, if we had narrow gauge railroads, sooner or later, if there was a curve, we'd dig out the ground on the curve and eventually do a pitch over.

And if there was an exposed electrical line, sure enough, there'd be some water seeping there sooner or later. And whatever else we could do, we did.

Were there reprisals for these things?

Sometimes, if they caught you. But very often, they didn't catch you. And there weren't then. If they caught you, there certainly would be reprisals.

But we didn't do it heroically. We didn't do it for a hero. We want to destroy it. We didn't want to leave traces. We were the innocents.

But were you tattooed when you first--

No, I'm not tattooed. I didn't get a number when I left Auschwitz. My reference number is in Dachau.

And it's interesting. Well, anyhow, I was mentioning I was in Birkenau. From Birkenau, we were sent, in early October, to a camp in Bavaria. It was a four day trip. And then we got no food, no water for four days.

There must have been big air raids. Because when we came to Munich, in the Munich train station there, we could smell the smoke in the air. We knew they'd had been bombed. And the only water we got was from the snow that we caught with our hands through the bars. There are people running all around.

Years later, in '72, my wife and I were in Europe. And we had to take the train through the train station. And I remember the part that was missing then. And it's still missing.

[LAUGHS]

Well, when we were sent down, that was the worst trip that I ever took. There were hundreds of people who died. And they were in the car with us.

There was no food. There was incredible conditions, terrible guards. And we got to a place in Bavaria called Kaufering. And Kaufering was one of these small work camps.

And we slept in these huts. They're really not huts. They're dugouts. And then you only built a roof at ground level, a little roof. And you dig out the ground under it, and you step down.

So they look almost like air raid shelters. And then there's a shell. Fortunately, during the winter, they're very warm. Because they insulated in the ground. I mean, not very warm, but warmer than being out in the absolute cold. And we worked around there for a while. And the guards were not particularly bad in this camp.

But then we were sent to a camp nearby. The name of that was Kaufbeuren. And that is the worst labor camp I was ever in. We started with 800 people in November, or early November. And by Christmas time, there were only 200 left. I mean, the death rates were horrendous.

The guards were incredibly brutal. There was a German prisoner kommandant as well as the guards. And they were incredibly cruel. They beat everybody at the drop of a hat.

On Christmas Eve, they amused themselves by flooding a basement of their central building with cold water and having us take a bath in this ice cold water. A lot of people didn't survive that.

We were in one great big barracks. And I remember they had a guy there who sang every night. He was a cantor. But he had a repertoire of other songs. And so this was the great amusement of the guards.

And they killed him. You know, usually entertainers are such-- were safe. They were just incredibly inhuman.

Killed him because he was singing?

No, they just killed him for random killing. I saw people mentioned Muselmans to you?

Yes. But go ahead.

That's where I saw more Muselmans than ever before in my life or ever since. Muselmans are people who have given

up life. And you can see it in their face. And you know they're going to die.

Mhm.

That camp was horrendous. And my father was beaten there very severely because he took a cement sack and cut out armholes and neck holes. We all did that. I mean, I had one, too.

But some guard saw him and decided that was terrible. And he was beaten black and blue. And when you're nutritionally deprived, the wounds don't heal.

Mhm.

And anyhow, Kaufbeuren was the worst. We heard rumors that they did so badly, that we didn't do any of our duties there, that we never built or did anything useful, that they were going to close the camp down. And supposedly the prisoner commander of the camp was executed for killing too many people too soon.

But that's a rumor. I can't verify that. I don't know.

We also knew that things were changing because a lot of the guards became crippled air force men and Heimwehr people, no SS anymore. Means they were running short of guards. And toward the end, and by this, I mean in January, late December, January of 1945, they got the same soup we got, except they got more of it.

Let me say, the food that I got in the camps, I was never in one of the, quote, "good" camps. I've talked to people who were in camps where they got more food. But I never made it to a camp, I had never been in a camp where there was theater, or there was a poetry reading. Toward the end of the war, there weren't any.

What was the food like in this camp?

Well, the same as others. In the morning, you got up and you got sock soup, we used to call it. Because it looks like something you wash your socks in.

And then, for lunch, you would get the dried der Gem<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>se, you see it's called. It's a dried vegetable soup. It's either dried cabbage or dried carrot soup.

Occasionally, there are potatoes. I mean, those are things people fight to the death about, literally. And prisoners position themselves in a food line so that they would get the thicker soup. And they'd pick food servers on whether he's a mixer or non-mixer, meaning when he takes his ladle and mixes the food, or whether he doesn't.

So you have to know all these delicate shadings in order to survive. And if you have a friend there, he'll give you a big chunk of potato. And if you don't have a friend, you just get the soup.

So that's what we got. And at night, we got a piece of bread of varying thickness. And that was also luck of the draw, in a sense. And sometimes a piece of green meat, canned meat, about maybe an inch cube or something of that dimension, or the equivalent of a pat of butter. It was margarine. That was it.

In caloric intake, it ran somewhere between 650 to 800 calories. So that's what we estimated at that we'd get.

Well, you were, I imagine, emaciated by then.

Oh, yeah, yeah. When I was liberated, I was 65 pounds. And when I was liberated, I worked for the American military government as an interpreter. And I worked in the war criminals camp.

Then I met my adopted parents. And by the time I met my adopted parents, that must have been, well, let's see. I was liberated May 1st. And I met them in July, so around early July. So in that period of time, I gained considerable weight.

But they were with the USO show. And I remember my adopted mother giving me her shirts. And they fit perfectly.

And two weeks later, I couldn't get into them. I literally couldn't even bring the buttons this far. So I gained weight fairly fast.

What about the other conditions, like toilet and washing?

The toilets? There are no toilets. In the camps, at best, you have holes cut in the ground, cement holes, and this. And the washing facilities are usually a pipe that's perforated.

The only question is when you get to them. Sometimes they turn on the water. Sometimes they don't.

And toilet paper becomes a treasured commodity. Because paper is very hard to find, very hard to get. Almost any ordinary thing, a pencil, a piece of paper, a rag is a treasured possession.

And a knife is a treasured possession because sometimes the food given out, especially bread, is given out as one bread. And then you have to divide it. And I became good at cutting. Because other prisoners would bring their stuff over there.

So I would cut it equally for two because I had a knife, too. But that really wasn't the reason. Prisoners get spoons officially issued.

So the prisoners usually sit around and hone spoons to make a sharp edge on one. And everybody tries to have a utensil for getting the food in. But it's hard to keep one because other prisoners steal it. There are problems about living under these conditions.

I imagine. What about organizing?

There wasn't a great organization going there. After the war, there was organization.

I mean, organizing as in it's used among the prisoners, of getting things.

Oh, well, organizing is an individual enterprise. And it usually runs in groups. People get something, then they pass it on. When we occasionally worked for farmers, then we could dig potatoes, or get something like that. That occurred. But we really didn't have access to a great deal.

I've known prisoners who were in different commands who were in better positions to get things. There are some people who do share very nicely.

You know, the prisoner world is an accented exaggeration of the real world. There are people who share because they couldn't bear not to. And there are people who don't share because they won't share ever. They'll only share if their life depended on it--

Mhm.

--on sharing. And there are groups that imposed rules. And there is a rule among prisoners, is that stealing food is a capital crime. And I have been in places. They hang a little thread by the bed if they think you stole. And what you're supposed to do is hang yourself.

Hm.

I didn't see many of those. But I've seen some.

Mhm.

The older, wiser prisoners sometimes are kind to new prisoners and inform them. And there are other older and wiser prisoners who exploit them. But the most of the prisoners' survival, most of the survival that I've seen, is due to the action of others.

But it's not evident. For example, when I finally got to Dachau-- from this awful camp, they shipped us to Dachau on January 10th, 1945. My father was there. He was very weak. And we were sent to the showers. And this was after he had been beaten so severely.

And we were in the showers. It was the only warm place I had experienced in months, physically warm. The only other warm place was when we crowded around in beds very, very tightly.

And we were sitting on the floor of the shower. And he couldn't get up. He couldn't get up on his feet. His feet were swollen. And that's a great danger signal for prisoners.

When you get edema, in most cases, now it's a reversible condition. But for prisoners, that was a mark that something is going wrong. And the tissue is essentially-- the water can't be moved out of the tissues. And it means heart failure is going to come pretty soon because you're pumping harder and harder and harder to supply a need that you can never supply. It means the kidneys aren't eliminating because the material is in the tissue and not in the blood circulation.

And people have legs that are swollen huge. And you press in on it, and a hole is left in the leg. His wasn't quite as bad. But it was bad.

And he couldn't stand up. He could not stand up. And I wasn't strong enough to hold him up.

And they came with whips and chased us off. And that's the last time I saw my father.

How bitter.

Yeah. In a way, I think that survivors have a problem that they never buried their parents.

Anyway, we were swept away with the whips. And we were taken to barracks in Dachau. And I became ill with typhoid.

Not typhoid, actually, it's Fleck typhus, which is a viral disease. It's not the bacterial typhoid. And what saved me was is that you go in a coma, and you usually die of dehydration. But my other friends who I was with gave me water. So I survived.

And they took my jacket and stood in line and drew my rations for me. So they could share the rations, and that was fine. But they brought me the water and that sock soup at morning and night.

How did they get your rations with just your jacket?

My number is on the jacket.

They don't care if a body is in the jacket?

No, no, no, you can go through the line twice, because they record the number.

Ah.

The same person can go through twice. It doesn't matter. As long as you have a different number, then you can go through again.

Unless it's a very short line and they remember your face. Most of the time, they don't even look at your face. They just copy down the number.

So I got my number with my father. And we stood apart from each other so that we wouldn't have sequential numbers. And I still have this total confusion. I don't know who's who.

[CRYING]

And the two numbers, the numbers are 112310 and 112114. And I still don't know which one is who. But we thought that if it was sequential, and they would see one old and one young, then they'd assume it's father and son. And then they would split us deliberately. They used to do things like that.

An added torture.

Yeah, yeah. Well, now if you go up to a family and then what they did is say, pick up the child you want saved. And the child goes on the train. And the other one doesn't. I mean, that was something they also did. I don't.

Had there been any medical care anywhere along the way?

Yes, there was. There was. But it was very difficult to get. And it was laying on the hands and chamomile tea and this sort of thing and very minimal care.

There were some physicians with us. And some were very compassionate . And some were very gruff. But they really had nothing to give.

When I got to Dachau, it did happen. And the ironic thing was there was a hospital in Dachau. As I said, with the Fleck typhus that I had, I didn't land in the hospital.

When I got scabies, I landed in the hospital. Well, you know scabies is not exactly a life-threatening disease. But what I had was a prisoner's feared diseases, that I had diarrhea. Now the SS always took the sign of diarrhea as you're on your way out.

So you had to conceal it. And it was my luck that I wound up on a ward where the orderly who took care of the ward was a French Moroccan. And this was a Black Moroccan who had been captured by the Germans. And he could speak French to me.

Mhm.

And so he helped me conceal the fact that I had diarrhea. And he smuggled me charcoal. And so I essentially was saved by that. The scabies went away.

And then I landed in the hospital because I had a broken bone in my toe. My toe was swollen. I couldn't walk on it.

So I couldn't conceal it anymore. People avoided hospitals. Because the chances were high that you don't come out of hospitals.

Uh huh. How did you break the toe?

I lost-- my shoes went to pot. And I got wooden shoes. My shoes go to-- my shoes didn't. I think somebody wanted my shoes. I just realized now my shoes didn't go to pot.

Anyhow, my shoes were taken away someplace along the line. I don't remember now when. I'll have to think about it. Because I had very good shoes.



And it wasn't that long a time. But I was in these wooden shoes. And I had to run sometimes in wooden shoes.

These wooden shoes don't have a hinge. It's one solid thing. And what happened is I broke a toe. And there was internal bleeding. And there was a huge bump on my foot.

So they took me in the hospital. And I put my foot up on a chair. And no anesthetic, you know, there was a guy. And they cut the foot open and removed this lump. And later on, I did have it repaired in New York at Mount Sinai.

But they operated. And I'm trying to remember whether they gave me anything to keep from screaming. And I don't know whether they did or not. But they operated on it.

And so that was also done in the dispensary, in the infirmary at Dachau. And I should also say that in Dachau, I met Danish students who had been arrested because of the student riots. And they were the only people who shared food packages.

Mhm.

The Danish students, they were the most, the greatest reaffirmation that there is really a sane world out there. Because prisoners don't share packages. The survival is so precious.

I mean, the French prisoners got packages. The Belgian prisoners got packages. And a lot of prisoners got packages.

But those who were just there because they were Jews did not. Now if you were a French Jew arrested with the army, you were part of the army, and they didn't identify, then you would get the package. But if you were not, you would not get the package.

And the French had a certain package. But the Danes had wonderful packages. But the Danes came. And whoever was around, they shared it with.

And there was never a point, no matter how brutally they were treated, that they ever treated anybody else brutally. They could not be dehumanized.

Why do you think that was?

I don't know. I don't know. I think that their fundamental orientation-- excuse me.

[SNEEZES]

All right. Any time.

OK.

OK.

Just a question about your school, the Catholic gymnasium you went to. How many other Jewish students were there?

Three.

Oh. [INAUDIBLE].

They instituted a numerus clausus under the Hungarians that only so many Jews could be admitted to schools. And I think it was 3%. But I'm not certain about that figure.

At the time I went to the Catholic gymnasium, they were just organizing the Jewish gymnasium. This is under the Hungarians. The Hungarians took over part of Transylvania where I lived.

And so my father debated it. And he thought that in a Jewish gymnasium I would see an all Jewish world. And I would not be prepared for a world that is not all Jewish. And so he wanted me to go to the Catholic gymnasium.

The Catholic gymnasium was headed by a man by the name of Karl Janusz who was an ordained minister, a PhD in philosophy. He taught math and philosophy. And it's not really a high school, a gymnasium.

So it covers the breadth of what would be covered from the fifth grade of school through junior college. That's what a gymnasium really covers. And in fact, Karl Janusz had gone to school in the United States. And he turned out to be a very, very courageous man of very high integrity.

I think on the other part of the tape I told you that in front of the German authority and such at a graduation, he made a great speech appealing to the principals of Christianity and asking the students to dedicate themselves to the principals of Christianity. And when you look, there were a bunch of flags on one side, which were the church flags. And then there were the Nazi flags on the other side.

And he was clearly looking. I thought he'd be shot on the spot. And he wasn't. But he was certainly a very principled man.

Some of my teachers were very anti-Semitic. Some of my teachers were very supportive and very nice. Mostly the older ones were pro-Allies and such. The younger teachers were nationalistic Hungarians who had thrown in their life with the Nazis. And they thought this would lead to the greater glory of Hungary.

Were there other Catholic students who stood by you? Or did most of them shun you after a certain amount of time?

No, they'd shun me. It's the teachers where the division was clear. There wasn't much division among the students. Yeah.

My other question was on the day that you were arrested and taken to the detention center, did you know that they were coming that day?

They came a couple of days before and they said be ready. And then they came in the morning. And my father had made some arrangement that actually they hired this open carriage so we could get there, put our stuff in there, and take it in.

I remember thinking that we did hear where we were going. And I knew that those people there would probably need some things. And I remember taking in coffee and taking extra sugar and taking other things because they were running low already and thinking in terms of blankets and warm clothes. And I remember making sure that we had sewing kits and all the silly things you need to survive, taking extra soap, which is always a hard to get commodity.

And we took a Maria Theresa coin. Maria Theresa coins are little gold coins. They're used as a way of saving in Europe. Today, you go behind the Iron Curtain, you can buy Maria Theresa coins. They're small gold coins. Because that's how people withstood the tremendous currency fluctuations.

And we took some of those. The other advantage is that they're not large coins. So you can, in other words, carry, you can buy things in small elements, which is very important.

You can't exchange this. Nobody can give you change. You give one, you may be buying a loaf of bread for \$200, or its equivalent there. I don't remember what the figure was. But that's the scope of the dimension of the costs between a loaf of bread and the value of a Maria Theresa coin.

In actuality, I was thinking, how did you as a young boy know all of these details of soap and sewing and the necessities of a home that you would have to take with you?

Well, I wasn't brought up all that sheltered. And I learned to cook from my mother. She liked to cook. She always taught me cooking.

And my mother designed clothes. So I knew how to operate a sewing machine. Unfortunately, I forgot. And I didn't do it for so long.

But I knew about the necessity. During the war, you learn a great deal about necessities of life. Because you're constantly looking for things that you ordinarily need and that you take for granted. It is a kind of education in what you really need, or what one needs to survive. And that's how we learned.

And probably watching other refugees go by, they were always carrying blankets and clothes and that's--

Maybe you discussed this on your other tape. Sorry. Did you ever discuss going into hiding? Did your father?

Oh, yeah, but that was really a romantic notion. Because there was no place to hide. There was no supportive population to go to.

The only existing underground that existed was for smuggling Jews out of the country to go to Israel. That was one underground. The other underground was the Red Underground. And that was destroyed.

So there were no underground. So you could buy your way out of the country if you had the connections and so on. And we were too late for that--

Mhm.

--by that time.

I think that's about it for now.

[RUSTLING]

OK, any time.

When you were in one of the labor camps, you said you had a nightmare about the Germans coming in. And then they came in and--

They sure were.

Did you ever have any more kind of dreams like that or premonitions that you felt like--

From time to time, I think we did. But it wasn't a dependable occurrence, let me put it that way. We all looked for these things. We thought that we'd have a hand. It was tried many times. I can't say.

There are people who felt that through intense prayer, for example, they would lift themselves to a spiritual state where they would dissociate themselves from their immediate surroundings. And I don't know whether they succeeded or not. There are people who retained their faith and people who lost their faith, both. There's no unequivocal way of saying.

It's very hard to predict how people will act under these situations long term, although we always like signs. As a prisoner, you begin to learn to estimate whether you're dealing with a killer or not. And that's an assessment that surviving prisoners probably made better than non-surviving prisoners.

Mhm.

But I don't have data on that. There are people who are the first glance telling you stay away from them.

And I was with a group of survivors. We used to meet periodically. And I mentioned it once. And everybody had these knowing smiles on their faces.

[LAUGHS]

That you do learn the truth killers from those who are passing sadists. Yeah.

Yes. Well, while we're speaking of that, I was going to ask how was it for you from a religious point of view?

I was never very, very religious. Part of the reason being that my mother went through a great crisis of faith when her mother died. My grandfather, whom I never knew, he died before I was born, remarried then. And my mother was very, very close to her own birth mother and never got along for a day with my grandfather's second wife.

And I think she took it as a personal affront of God to her that her mother died. And she could not make peace about it.

I was bar mitzvahed. And she came to my bar mitzvah. And she was also very, very critical of people who professed faith and practiced none of it. Not in the sense of not keeping the rituals, but in their personal conduct.

When she was orphaned eventually, she and two sisters and a brother were orphaned when my grandfather died. And I don't know. I think my grandmother died shortly before that or-- and they had a younger sister, who was a teenager and the others. And apparently, the other people whom she sort of expected a great deal of support and help from were not forthcoming at all. And she was absolutely appalled that people were this way.

So she was, in a sense, anti-religious. But she wasn't anti-religious in the sense that she wanted to keep all of religion from me. But she kept it in a limited region.

Now her social conduct permeated her life, though. She was very active in causes of various kind. She got in trouble first because she was trying to organize an orphanage. And she was very socially conscious and very socially aware. And that part of Judaism she liked very much.

But the ritual, she felt very distant from. My father was more observant in that sense. My grandmother actually kept a kosher household. She insisted on it.

After my parents divorced, he lived with his mother. And so there was a kosher household in the house. But as not unusual in Europe, we also had certain treif dishes. So when he wanted some other things, we trotted out the treif dishes. That was.

But in the camps, I did not have a crisis of faith. I didn't expect to be saved miraculously. I mean, I wished it. But I didn't expect it.

So it didn't really make an enormous difference in your religious point of view?

No, no, it didn't. It didn't. Occasionally, I used to joke about it, that if we had a revolt, can these guys stop davening while you get the guns?

[LAUGHS]

But that was part of our fantasy.

Mhm. I wanted to ask you if you were sick at all other than your broken toe and then your illness in Dachau. Had you been sick anywhere along the way?

Yeah, I had diarrhea from time to time. Everybody gets that. And then we ate charcoal and tried, the best we could, stay away from eating for a while, which was probably not wise.

But after the war, I found out, after I was liberated, that I did have a spot on my lung. So I had TB. Well, I do have a spot on my lung.

And then I had this toe that was repaired finally at Mount Sinai in New York. And I have some scars on my side from being kicked and rifle butted.

That was the next thing I was going to ask you, whether you, too, were beaten.

Yeah. That was many times. So many times that it doesn't stand out as a single event. I mean, when I was rifle butted and kicked, that was the worst.

But otherwise, it was on and off. It was not an unusual phenomenon. After a while, you sort of tried not to stay at the edge of the crowd and things like that.

It sounds like it was particularly brutal in that camp you were in.

In Kaufbeuren it was. It was brutal. And these old guys who were the Heimwehr, who relieved the SS, they were trying to act tough.

They were all 60-year-olds and such, rejects from the First World War. And they were particularly cruel. But they knew that they were losing the war. And we were their local victims.

I kind of have a point of view. But I was wondering how you went forward as a person who joined with others in the camp situation to survive or took a position of being more alone.

Well, as I said, at first, I was very lucky that I was always with my father until January. And then I was in a group. From the original group that came from my hometown, we were gradually diluted and dispersed.

But I always had my father. And there were sometimes two or three others whom I knew slightly. So when I got to Kaufbeuren, I don't think I knew anybody there.

But in Dachau, I met some people. And so when I--