

You were in the middle of telling how your wife got out.

OK.

Congress.

Congress. It was, as I said, a group of lobbies or permanent physicists in the United States who wrote a petition to the Senate to have us included in the bargaining.

How did the scientists know about you?

Let me tell you something. When I arrived in America, I was obviously looking for a job. Among others, I tried Northwestern University. That's near Chicago. And I talked to the dean.

And I told him, look, mister, when I left Romania, I had to deposit all my papers-- all my papers, my learning, my military papers, my driving license, everything, in order to receive the passport. The idea was to have you as impotent as possible outside, incapable of living on your own, because you don't have any kind of papers to prove who you are, what you are, whatever.

I managed, by dint of great protection, to get my driver's license because I said, if I'm somewhere, I have to be able to drive a car. So I told the dean at Northwestern University, I couldn't prove to you, sir, that I even passed elementary grade.

He said, you just be quiet. He said, all I have to do is to cross a corridor to the library. And then there, there are all your papers. And we all know what you have published and what you have done. And you don't need to prove anything to us. By the time I had arrived in America, I had over 240 published papers. Now, I have more.

What was your particular field?

High energy particle physics, things which happen when two particles of very high energy collide, the life of particles-- how they are born, live, and decay-- how some of them originate in outer space and then change inside the atmosphere until you get them multiplied by factors of a million. That's my field.

And actually, in Romania, where we didn't have all the machines that exist in North America, which produce particles of high energy, he only had cosmic rays, which are particles of high energy.

Coming from outer space.

But you had gotten to a point in the lab there that you were able to do the research--

Yes.

--and publish?

Look, I was on the editorial board of the European Physical Journal. I was a referee for the American Journal for the Physical Review. I had a name. So when I came to America, I had a job before I had landed in America.

You're someone we wanted.

Beg your pardon?

You were someone we wanted, America.

Yes.

Yes.

And then the people started saying, well, we've got to do something about the family of this guy. And at the very last moment, they asked for more papers than my wife had prepared for them. She had to prepare such a pile of papers, like proving that she had left the house empty, because if house belonged to the government, idiotic papers to prove that my daughter of-- what was she then, 15?

Yeah. She was also doing that.

To prove that she had no access to secret documents, can you imagine? Who would entrust secret documents to a girl of 15?

They were just trying to make it difficult.

They were trying to make it difficult.

Yeah.

And it also was that we don't know anything to the electricity company, to the gas company.

What year was this?

1976.

Oh, '76.

I had left Romania in November of '75. Then I had waited in Europe. Waited is a way of speaking. I had been running around like crazy for two reasons-- one was to hide, never to be found two days in the same place.

And the other reason was to earn a bit of money. There were plenty of places where I had invitations from previous times and had never been allowed to attend. So now, I went around and said, do you still want me? And they did. And I earned the money for a lecture. And that's how I survived.

And why did you have to hide?

Because, as I'm going to tell you in a moment, they were after me.

He was afraid of being kidnapped there.

I was a fugitive. I had overstayed my five-day limit. And from that moment on, I was a man under a sentence of 10 years. And for instance, I went to Germany. From there, I flew to Sweden. From Sweden, I returned to Denmark. From Denmark, again to Germany, never telling anybody, except two very intimate friends, where I was.

So when I arrived in Hamburg, what do you think I find on my desk? A telegram from Romania addressed to Hamburg for me. I had never told anybody of my intention to go to Hamburg. And telling me that if I'm not back in 24 hours, I will be out of law, and the penalty, and this, and that.

And so I was all the time on the run. And they were following me so closely. Now, to give you an idea what it meant being followed closely and being put under the microscope, I'll just tell you about one man.

I was once, after I was elected to the Academy of Sciences, which is a very prestigious position in those countries, I was called to see a man, very polite, typical security officer. He lied. He says something else. But he was as much a man of

protocol as I was, I don't know, the emperor of China.

It's ridiculous. He was a typical KGB man. Very polite, I say, again, who started questioning me about all my acquaintances, about what went on in my family, and so on. And he had an astounding information. He knew when my wife had bought a new purse. He knew what grades my daughter had at school. I mean, he was informed on the smallest things in my life.

And I had repeated session with him, which served, to my logic, a single purpose, and that was to intimidate me, to make me sure that I am under the magnifying glass, and that they can, so to say, break my neck any time they want.

Keep you in fear.

Keep me in fear. Look, my wife used to know when I had a session with this guy by the nervous way in which I put the key in the lock when I came home in the evening. He really terrorized me in the polite way.

And to show you his power, he finally announced me one day that I would be allowed to give course to one of the invitations, which I received steadily. I was invited by a French group at Strasbourg to take part in discussion on an experiment which we pursued both.

All they wanted from me was 21 photographs-- no more, no less-- which I found idiotic. They could make as many copies as they wanted, for one. But they wanted me to bring them 21 photographs. All right. So I went, paid the money, brought them the photographs.

And indeed, I was allowed to travel. And I spent some time in Strasbourg. I had a visa for a month. To be absent from the country, you needed a visa allowing you to be absent from the country for so many days, after which, you were in breach of the law.

Then I spent a few days in Switzerland at the European Organization for Nuclear Research. And then I spent a few days with my old professor, who was my mentor and the man who made me what I am. And then I flew back.

In Geneva, I met a good old friend of mine, who is a professor now in Germany, retired. And we spent the night together with him and his wife. And then I walked back to my hotel late at night, empty streets, whatever you want. I noticed the lighted shop window, which sold electronics, interesting for me. I am a physicist. I wanted to know what is new in electronics. I looked. I went home.

Two weeks later, in Romania, on a session with the same individual, he asked me, by the way, what did you find so interesting in a lighted shop window at the middle of the night in Geneva? I had been followed all the way there. It gives you an idea how close the surveillance of people was.

This man knew, for instance, in advance that the next day, I would be called upon by an American professor visiting Bucharest. I did not know he knew. Indeed, the professor called. I met him. And he wanted me to tell him how free and unimpeded the work of Jewish scientists is in Romania, which I did, because I knew my home is being tapped.

And I waited till there was a good-ish bit of rain outside. I took my guest outside in the rain. And then I told him the truth. But I wanted to tell you this incident, because it gives you an idea how closely we were observed and controlled.

Now, was that because you were Jewish? Or would that have been the same for any Romanian in your position?

I think being Jewish, it was more accentuated. I think I can understand their motives. The man who was coming over, that American professor from Chicago, had come on a fact-finding mission for the Joint Distribution Committee.

And I think the Romanians wanted, at that moment, to prove how well they treated the Jewish minority. So they needed me as a sort of figurehead, you know. They wanted to use me to prove that Jews live a wonderful life in Romania.

And that was it. I mean, I had to play the game and escape from it any moment I had an opportunity. And when they finally let me go for five days to Germany, then the two of us went out into a basketball court and discussed things over, that I wouldn't return. And I went. And I didn't return.

And then one year later, after they made a terrible fuss about papers, they wanted the paper proving that I had no debts towards my institute. This was in itself ridiculous, because the institute owed me two years of vacation, which I hadn't taken. So I didn't owe them anything. They did owe me.

And it was impossible. She went to the institute. And the institute said, they had never delivered this kind of statement. And they had no experience in that. It was all making things difficult.

And I had a moment of exasperation. Don't forget, it was '76-- Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger. And I told Jo over the phone, look, Henry isn't going to like this sort of thing. I didn't say which Henry. But I knew the phone was being tapped. Half an hour later, she got a phone call. You know, we can do without that slip of paper. But Kissinger, he never knew that his name was taken in vain.

You had mentioned during the intermission that there was a story that you wanted to tell?

That's exactly what I did now.

OK. OK.

So anyway, finally, they were able, in Congress, to push through--

To push through?

--the 19 families.

Yes. And then they arrived on the plane, except for one family, where the lady was killed by a passing bus in front of our house. We never knew what happened. And her husband came out later and didn't want to discuss the matter anymore. Maybe she had knowledge of something they didn't want to get known. I don't know.

That's why she didn't get permit-- didn't get so fast the passport and everything.

So that was the kind of life we lived. You ask how I came to become suspicious of everybody. Everybody was telling on everybody.

And that was the atmosphere during the whole time after the war in Romania?

Yes, during the whole time. You were being-- you're just being attacked for the most stupid reasons. Ignorant ideological controllers would misinterpret something you had put in a book and then would turn it against you as being imperialist propaganda. And then you had to fight with witnesses to prove that there was no such thing. It was extremely frustrating.

How was it when you were able to settle in America, then?

What do you mean by your question? I got, first, a temporary job at Philadelphia, which couldn't be extended. From there, I switched to Cornell University in upstate New York, where they could offer me a job for a year, but without any guarantee that it would be extended.

And then there opened a tenure track position at Berkeley. And I jumped on it, and came to Berkeley, and have been here ever since. I retired in '91. And I've still been doing physics.

When you were younger, did you consider yourself Romanian?

Never.

Never?

Never. By no means.

What do you consider yourself? How would you view yourself?

As a Jew. That is the truth. I was a Czechoslovakian citizen. After '44, I would have liked to get into the Czech Air Force fighting with the British, but they wouldn't have me. I didn't look like some material which it was physically apt. They said, come back when you're in shape. And by that time, the war was over.

Above everything, I wanted to get my German. I wanted to shoot German-- down a German. But it didn't get to that. No, I considered myself a Jew.

Now, you had mentioned going back to Romania, like in 1991, were you?

Yes.

How did you feel when you were back there?

Interesting question. In Romania, meanwhile, there had been a revolution in '89. The dictator was shot. Ceausescu and his wife were shot after a very irregular military trial. But they didn't deserve any better. And the new administration wanted to clean themselves from the stink of the Ceausescu regime.

So I got a phone call from the Romanian Consul at the CIA in Washington to tell me that I had been rehabilitated and reinstalled in my right. And would I come as a guest of the Romanian government to give them lectures and so on? So I went. I came off with very mixed feelings.

On one hand, there were my ex co-workers. And these came to me like family. Really, I had a wonderful reception by them. And then there were the official people. Among the official people, I noticed too many ghosts from the past regime. And I wasn't at ease. So I spent my time with my ex co-workers, and left after a few days, and never went back.

My collaborators were like a family to me. I had 22 technicians and some 10 physicists. And with one exception, which was a disappointment as a person, all the rest were kind, friendly, nice, received me the way you receive a king in old Romanian tradition, with bread and salt. And yes, it was pleasant as long as I was in the circle of my friends. But then I was glad I left.

So you never have regretted leaving?

No, never.

Do you think there could be another Holocaust?

Yes.

Could you say more?

Beg your pardon?

Could you say more about that?

I look at how the whole of Europe has turned against Israel. And there are already problems with the small Jewish

populations which have remained. I have friends almost as close as relatives in Germany. And they are already fighting antisemitism on several fronts.

There has been a big scandal which they hushed up, but where an old and very important German physicist gave a talk in which he attacked Einstein and more or less denied the Holocaust.

And I was working for a while in a German laboratory. And there was a social evening. And graduate students were around, eating and singing.

And what do you think they sang? The Horst-Wessel-Lied, if you know what that is. It was a marching song of the Nazis, with the words which say that things will be all right when Jewish blood runs again from the knives. They came to apologize next morning that they were drunk. But it was too late.

The ingredients for a new Holocaust are there. Whether they are given free rein is a different matter. There is still some - how should I say? There is still a bad resonance attached to the notion.

People don't want to be called antisemites. But they act as such. When you tell them to their face that they are, they will swear their great god that the thought never entered their mind. But there is a tendency to say, well, too much has been said about the subject. It's time to forget.

And if one forgets, it starts again. That's my deep, deep conviction. These things are not allowed to be forgotten. If they are, they will start again. Maybe I am too pessimistic. But have anybody-- other people whom you have interviewed voiced the same sentiment as I do? Or do they think that things should be forgotten?

I would think people who have gone through this think it's going to be forgotten that easily. Whether it's out above ground or whether it's below ground, most people seem to feel that it's there, those feelings.

And together, as we record these stories--

Yes?

--with you as interviewee and us as interviewer, the purpose is to not forget.

I know, obviously.

Yeah.

But I wanted to know whether you get from the interviewees any feeling of OK, let bygones be bygones.

Much less that view than the view that the prejudice exists. It's still there. And I worry that it could really flame up.

Oh. That's how I feel.

Yeah.

Now, your daughter was born in Romania.

Yes.

Were you able to bring her up Jewishly in any way while you lived there?

Well, as much as we could. There was always a danger that as a child, she could give things away. But she went through a harrowing experience of her own, which taught her more than I could have told her.

There was another girl in her class who for some reason was thought to be Jewish, but wasn't. It was a case of mistaken assumption of identity. My daughter, being the daughter of a member of the Academy, had a certain aura of protection.

I was, even against my will, a member of what is called the Nomenklatura, if you know what I mean, a member of the ruling class, by being a member of the Academy. And it was not a safe thing to tinker with people or with children of people from the Academy, because people had some power in the Academy. I didn't have very much, but I was thought to have more than I had.

And so although life wasn't easy for her, she wasn't really made to have the whole impact of antisemitism. But the other girl who wasn't Jewish, but was thought to be, was taken under a pitiless attack, which ended up by forcing her into suicide.

And that was an enormous shock for my daughter. They were sitting in the same bench in school. And this really awoke our daughter to the dangers which were lurking around. So this incident did more than I could do with a lot of education. But I could have done it intellectually until it was emotionally.

Is there any lesson that you feel that you have learned through your experience that you would want to leave with any viewers who would see this tape at some point?

It is the same lesson which we have to draw from the whole of politics. There is a writer, actually a conservative writer, if you heard of Tom Clancy. He is a political and historian writer who puts his very strong views on politics and history under the shape of novels.

And he recently wrote in one of his books the sentence that Americans are not genetically different from anybody else in the world. The only thing which makes Americans different is their Constitution.

And it has served us well for 200 years. And if we let this Constitution to be eroded, we are no better than any tinhorn third-world dictatorship. This goes through the whole spectrum of problems, including Jewish problems. If you let down Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, we let down our own interests in keeping the world democratic.

And the lesson, I would like to draw is that there is a need for eternal vigilance, that we cannot let our freedoms to be encroached upon, that we cannot let Israel being beaten down for the sake of oil, that the notion of democracy must be defended with tooth and nails, and keep the life. Or else we get back into the period of dictatorships.

I've seen the Germans. I've seen the Russians. I can perfectly well imagine the Americans going the same way if the people don't look out for their freedoms. So if there is a lesson to be drawn, it is vigilance.

On behalf of the Holocaust Oral History Project, I want to thank you very much for your willingness to be interviewed, for your tenacity, and continuing with the interview when you're low on oxygen. We really appreciate what you've done.

And I thank you for asking the questions and giving me the possibility to let things out.

OK. We're looking at your wedding picture, is that right?

Yes. The year was 1952. We were just out of university, both of us. And we married under very sad circumstances, because my father's brother, the man who is responsible for getting me into sciences, had died then. But you see, I couldn't marry my wife, because I was a Czechoslovakian citizen, and she was a Romanian citizen. And mixed marriages were forbidden.

And then a teacher at the university, who was no good as a teacher, but who was a member of the National Assembly, wanted to do a good turn to me. And so she appended my name to some proceedings of the National Assembly, giving me Romanian citizenship. And I got it for a very short while. And we had to marry in a hurry.

Oh, so you had it only temporary?

Yes. And my parents were very disquieted, because they were in mourning after my uncle. And they didn't want to break the mourning with my marriage. But I told them that I was not going to ruin my life for a formality.

So we just went to the registrar's, my professor, who is on the bit. I don't know. My professor isn't not on this picture. My professor and a physician friend of mine were witnesses. And we came out married. And that was it. And we were--

Yes, in Bucharest.

Yeah. Very sad because of the death of my uncle, who had been a second father to me. But we couldn't afford to jeopardize our life, you know, our marriage strictly for a matter of ritual.

And your wife's name?

My wife's name is Jo, short for Josephine.

And her maiden name was?

Her maiden name was Weiss.

Thank you.

OK.

While my father was working for the minister of the navy in pre-war Romania, the minister told him that he had discovered a talent, a young marine, who really showed great promise as a painter.

And since he was very poor, he asked his friends to commission a few pictures. My father did. And in a number of sittings, he did this picture for me. And then he was sent by the minister to Italy to perfect his burgeoning talent. But it was too late. The young man died of tuberculosis.

And this is a painting of you at age?

14.

That's a beautiful painting. Again, we thank you very much.

And I thank you very much.