

So and don't worry about the camera.

OK.

We'll just take care of it from there. And so I would say any time, you can say who we all are, and what the day is, and what the town is, and we can start it off.

My name is Leslie Pollak. I was born in Romania in 1921 to Jewish parents.

And today is March 31st.

March the 31st.

And my name is Sue Segal. So continue, Leslie.

Nice meeting you. And I want to thank you for the wonderful cooperation you show in this case.

Wait, I'm going to do one more little thing. So I'm going to move your chair just a tiny bit to the right. There we go. That's perfect. OK, great.

What's going? Think I should take this off as well.

A lot of fun.

And why don't you start from the beginning there, Leslie--

OK.

--since we had that little interruption?

So we start with the introduction?

No, we've got the introduction. But if he can say who he is and when he was born. That's helpful.

To start.

I am Leslie Pollak. I live in the Peninsula, in Palo Alto. I was born in Romania in 1921 to Jewish parents. And we were four children. And we had very good Jewish education. However, my parents were not very religious. But they were traditional.

And in the years of late '30s, when Hitlerism got very strong, and my father seen that there is no future in Jewish education, he thought it would be much better if we all learn a trade. And I learned carpentry and cabinet-making. My father figured, if we lucky, we would make it out to Palestine, at least I have a trade in my hand.

Did your father have a trade?

No, my father did not have a trade. And he really regretted. Those days, when my father was a young one, in the early 1900s, Jewish boys had very few trades, because the Hungarian did not really welcome. They did not like any Jewish boys to learn trade.

So what did he learn?

He learned to be a clerk and a bookkeeper. So he made a living that way. And later on, in the 1940s, when the part of

Romania which I lived, Transylvania-- I come from a city named Oradea. That's near the border right now.

And the two dictators of Europe, Mussolini and the miserable Hitler, turned over that part of Transylvania to the Hungarians. And we fall into the hand of the Hungarians. So I came up to Budapest. And I was working in Budapest, able to send money for my parents to make a living back in Oradea.

Can I ask you, Leslie, when you went to school as a young boy, maybe even from age seven, eight on?

Yes.

Did you experience any antisemitism from your classmates in those early days?

I was lucky to go to a Jewish school, a Jewish gymnasium. And we were all Jewish boys. And separately, there was another school for the girls. But luckily, we came through a Jewish gymnasium. And we had enough of our own. We had the Jewish hospitals. We had Jewish schools, the Jewish gymnasiums, and Jewish lyceums.

I see.

So the city was about 120,000 people. And we had about between 120,000 who were Hungarians and Romanians. We had 35,000 Jewish people. The elite, I would say, were the Jewish people. The prettiest girl were the Jewish girls. And most talked about and newspapermen mostly were Jewish.

But we lived good with the Hungarians and with the Romanians. In business, we were mostly with Jewish people were in business. And the Hungarians were in the industry, industrialists. And the Romanians were the officials.

I see.

And they were the tax collectors, the policemen, the mailmen. So the country belonged to them. And they conducted the affairs of the country.

Was there a lot of social mixing between the Jew and the non-Jews or not?

Unfortunately, not too much, not even close to 1% of what we have over here in America. I have to admit that there was many misfortune situations where we were quite apart, but mostly from a religious point of view. Otherwise, understood each other.

The only thing what we did not have socials functions together. And like for a Seder night, we never remember inviting non-Jewish people. So I we welcomed the way we do it over here in America and have together like that-- the one country. And all the people work toward the same goal.

And the misfortune was, in Hungary, that the youth, the religious, every religion pulled to its own. The Catholics were afraid to lose members, so they kept the Catholicism to themselves and to their people. And they didn't like to-- they were not welcome to mix with Jewish people or Protestants. So with the Protestant the same way-- and not least our own, we were not encouraged to do that.

Did the Jews live in a particular part of town?

No. I would say no. It was mixed everywhere. There was no ghettos. There were no-- there were nothing, really, with a section, a Jewish section. No it was everywhere and wherever people could buy. There was no special. There were some little sections where they were the shul, the synagogues. Around there, there were some kosher delicatessens and butchery, even a little section. But otherwise, people lived in all parts of the city.

Go ahead.

Well, the Nazis got into Hungary in 1944 in April of the 19th. They were one month, they started already with all that whole-- hang on-- Eichmann. Yeah, Eichmann-- with Eichmann, started to put people in the ghettos.

And we had no idea what is going to happen. So they just give the orders. And the Hungarian gendarmes got together the people. And no Hungarian would help us. I had a feeling that they could hardly wait for us to evacuate our homes so they could rob our clothes, and our homes, and our furniture. And as they did. Later on, we found out when I came back after liberation.

And they just wanted to put the blame on the Germans, like they did all the wrong things. They the poor guy. They just sitting on the side doing nothing. But definitely, they did not help us. They could help us quite a bit, but they didn't. I would say the Romanians were much better to us because they hid me, which I come to it later.

And when I was in Budapest, I was working as a cabinetmaker. And we made many furnitures for the Nazi heroes. We under contract from the German government and with the Hungarian government. And we made pretty good money on that.

But I was much happier later on, when I was in the battalion, the Arbeit battalion. And we were making there in that poor time, they needed carpenters, workers, to make coffins for the German heroes. And I was very glad to do this. I'd rather do that for no money than for making the furniture for the Nazi Army for money.

And in 1944, September the 15th, Hungary got out very clumsily from the war, while they were overrun right away by the Nazis. And the Hungarian Army was put back to fight again the Russians.

And our company, which was a workmen's company, which we had no guns, but we had shovels, and hammers, and all kind of working tools, mostly for road-building, we were taken back from the Polish border to inside Hungary. And we had a whole day's march, early morning till about 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock.

Well, I did escape. The way I escaped was that I told the sergeant where we was marching on the road that I have to go to the bathroom. He says, you hurry up. And I went in the woods. There were some trees. And I kept on going, while our battalion the 12-part to Hungarian battalion, they took to a school, which maybe they arrived there about 8 o'clock in the night, were three hours more marching, and over 300 boys.

And they kept them there until the trainload came next day, and put them all the train, and took the whole company to Mauthausen. I was lucky. And another fellow who we were in the same battalion-- after I went in the woods, I heard some voices. And I was afraid maybe it's a German soldier or a Hungarian gendarme.

But luckily, I seen a colleague of mine also. He also took off with the same ideas I did. And together, we hid in the woods. And we were hiding all night. And then around the morning, could see before it starts to get light, we started to walk.

And we walked to a small little house, where we seen the Romanian peasants doing this fibers. And we knocked on the door. And the Romanian said, oh, poor boys. They don't see we are Jewish. What happened to your parents? So I won't let you--

Did you know what happened to your parents? Did you know?

I had no idea. There was only-- the deportation was in May and at the end of June-- at beginning of June. And this was in September when this was-- when I was ready to escape. So he was sympathizing because he says, boys, if you want to, I will hide you here.

So we said, thank you very much for taking us, taking us in consideration, giving us a break. So this brave man with his wife hid us on the top of a stall where they have the cows and horses. And at the top of that stall, and the ladder, and between the roof and the--

Like the hayloft?

--yeah, hayloft there. There, we were hidden about one week or 10 days. And my nerve was raw, so I can't remember how much. So both of my friends were hiding there until-- it was in the night, somebody come and says, boys, come out of here, because some German officers are here. They are looking for war. And they usually look in places where you are hiding.

So we came down fast. And he took us between corn stacks. And we hid there and inside that. And the corn stack, it was very cold and wet. There was water, it must have been. And anyway, we hid there for a few hours until later, the old man comes, he says, boys, the Germans left.

So we came out and back out to the roof again. And then about 5 o'clock in the morning, we heard a great explosion. Then we know that the Russians-- the Germans blew up the bridge so the Russian Army could not follow them. And about maybe--

Excuse me, Leslie, was that right near the Romanian border? Because you say there was a Romanian who hid you.

Yeah, there was a Romanian peasant who hid me. But the territory was given to Hungary. So this territory of Transylvania, at this moment, was Hungary.

I see. So it had both Romanians and Hungarians living in it.

And Hungarians. But the Hungarians wouldn't help us. The Romanians did help us.

I see. Romanians did.

Correct. Yeah. So when the big blowout came, we had a feeling that this is the bridge over the river Tisza was blown up to stop the Red Army to follow the Nazis. But it didn't take a long time, because about maybe an hour later, they had their pontoon bridges built real fast. And they were on their way to chase the Nazis.

And about 9 o'clock-- no, excuse me, about 8 o'clock in the morning, we heard the bells ringing. And a little boy came in, saying, hey, Uncle John, he says, the Russians are coming. And so we heard that. And we get our pack together. And we were thanking very much for the landlord who hid us.

And we started our way. And on the road, there was a lot of armies coming through. There were the heavy artillery of the Red Army-- Mongolians, Uzbeks, and all kind of elements of the Russian Army, very colorful.

And there was one man who was bandaged very strongly his arm. And he looked to me very much like a Jewish. And I asked him, he read Yiddish? He says, sure. So we had a nice conversation. I says, did you got wounded so badly?

He says no. He says, I luckily have a great protector here. The doctor, she is Jewish. She's from Moscow. And she helped me so I should not go to the front, because I will be dead long time ago. She shelters me. That shows you a Jewish heart. And I tried to talk to the doctor, but she unfortunately didn't speak any Yiddish. And I didn't speak any Russian.

Was a woman doctor?

Was a woman doctor.

Who was part of the army?

Yes, part army-- beautiful Jewish girl, a beautiful Cossack girl. And she was a wonderful person. We tried to talk with each other, but she did not know neither German, neither French, only Russian. And well, she didn't speak any English either. But she was a wonderful person. And she helped.

And a few minutes later, I have seen a wonderful, good-looking sergeant. He looked to me. He could not be Russian. He was dark and handsome. And I asked him, do you speak Yiddish? He says yes. And he helped us a lot. And he says-- well, I ask him, can you give us some papers so we be able to go back home? So they wouldn't-- the Russian Army would not grab us as prisoners, because they thought everybody is a prisoner.

And he said, the Russian Army does not give any papers. Even if I give you a paper, other ones will take it away from you, tear it away. But I can advise you to stay away from the road, because the Third Ukrainian Army is coming down. And they are a bunch of hooligans. And they might just do you harm. So you better hide for a few hours.

So we hid until the Ukrainian Army passed. So he helped me a lot. He helped us a lot because of the Jewish heart, how they help each other. You want to ask any questions?

Yes. Well, I had one question. You mentioned that in April of '44, the Nazis first came--

Correct.

--into Hungary. And then it was in September that you really felt that they were putting the pressure on rounding up the Jews. What happened in the interim?

OK. The gradual deportation of the Jews started one month after the Nazis entered Hungary. So they entered in April. And May, they put the Jewish people already in the ghettos. And from the ghettos, they took the Jewish people into the trains, put them on trains, trainloads, so many people pushed into they hardly could breathe. Animals, you wouldn't put so much.

And my family was, unfortunately. And all the 35,000 Jewish people who lived in Oradea were deported from Hungary. And very few of them came back. Between them, I was lucky, my sister was home. She was in concentration camp in Austria. And she came back heartbroken.

But my mother did not survive. And my father died in Germany. And my brother was with him. And my brother was 16-- no, 15 years old. And he survived. But he got a long tuberculosis. And later on, he was taken to Switzerland. And I haven't seen him since.

Do you know, is he still alive, do you think?

I don't know. We tried to look for him everywhere and couldn't find him so far. So luckily, I do have another brother. He is in Budapest. He survived the Holocaust by running away from the Hungarian Army and joining the Hungarian partisans, who were very little, very small in numbers.

But anyway, he did. And these partisans were put up by some of these Hungarian socialists and some communists who were fighting against the Nazis, the German and the Hungarian Nazis. There were very few in numbers, but just enough to help people. But they were the nice socialists, who really believed in human dignity.

So out of all the children, there were four in your family?

Four in the family.

You were the only one that was in Budapest?

I was, yes. And my brother too.

Your brother was there too?

Brother too, yes. And I was taken in 1943, I was taken into a Hungarian working battalion. And my brother stood in

Budapest in our apartment. We rented an apartment in Budapest. And he later on was drafted, but not to the Hungarian Army, but to a working-- what they call it, but it was under the framing of the Hungarian Army.

Can you remember-- I know this is a long time ago, but can you remember what the people were saying? And how were they reacting at the time when they knew that these Germans were now put into ghettos-- I mean, the Jews were put into ghettos by the Germans? I mean, do you recall any kind of--

Fear?

Yeah, and kind of comment.

There was fear of helplessness. And we did not trust the Germans. But there was just no way. We couldn't run. There was no place where to run. There wasn't. We felt like a cornered animal. There is just nowhere we can run. And women with children were crying.

And then everybody had a feeling this is the end, because from all what we heard before, that Hitler, and his Mein Kampf, and his speech that he shall destroy the Jewish people, and obviously, that he really meant business. And we blamed ourselves for not acting sooner and get out of there. And really, there were so many people who didn't take. Between them was my uncle.

But we were a poor family. We couldn't afford a passport to leave. Parents and four children, the six of us, we just didn't have the money to go. And where would we-- who would let us in? We didn't have any funds. To go to Palestine at that time, it took about 1,000 pounds for a person to settle in Palestine. My father didn't have not enough money even for the trip.

My uncle could have, but he was a very wealthy man. And my uncle did not believe that Hitler is serious. Now, later he paid dearly for this, because his whole family was destroyed. And him, as a wealthy man, he was put into all kind of tremendous torture to get his money. And then finally, bleeding in a sheet, they took him into Auschwitz, and when he was murdered over there.

So it was the terrible tragedy that Hitler was not taken for serious. And I would have gladly give my life to try to kill that son of a bitch. Or so would thousands of our Jewish boys. But nobody really took him serious. And there was just a plain impotence on our part. We just didn't do nothing about it. And nobody thought that something was going to happen.

Well, my father didn't think that Hitler was going to last, either, you know. He also felt that he was going to just overstep his boundaries. And somebody was going to--

But later on, when we see then he is succeeding, then we know that he is very serious. And well, we still hoping that the French, who in 1914-- the 1914 and 1918 so wonderfully fought by Verdun and [SPEAKING FRENCH], and they will beat the Nazis. And then the big misfortune came when the Maginot Line was run over.

And it was a terrible tragedy that we trusted the French. We thought, at least, they are the people of the French Revolution, the liberty, equality, fraternity. Little did we know that the French aristocrats, and even the middle class, just plain hated the working class and the lower class. They still never forgive the French Revolution for it.

And they would rather sympathize with Hitler than with the Russians, even the Russians should have been their allies. And this was a terrible disaster how they sold out the Jewish people and how they gladly served the Nazis with the Jewish people. Here, you can have them. Do what they will.

And they were very good that the-- what fate befell us so that their compatriots, their own citizens who live with them and work with them, so that the people of Emile Zola, Victor Hugo was a terrible, terrible disappointment for us.

Well, there were a few people who helped the Jews, you know, in--

Yeah, here and there. It was so small that I don't know if it was even 5%. Here and there, I heard, but I know the Polish people did not behave. But there are some Polish people who were right, the Righteous Gentiles they were. But I just don't know anybody in Hungary.

You don't know any?

No in Hungary. So the Polish, they behaved much better than the Hungarians.

Really? Have you been to Israel to see whether there are any Hungarian Righteous Gentiles in their Yad Vashem?

I looked, yes. I looked everywhere. And hardly, and haven't seen any. I've seen Hollanders. I've seen, of course, the Danish. And I've seen many Polish. But I haven't seen Germans or I haven't seen any Hungarians.

The Hungarians were indoctrinated right after the First World War with such antisemitism. And they believed all that baloney what they get from the Horthy regime, that the Jewish people are all communists, one side. The other side, all the Jewish people are capitalists.

So they turned the way they wanted to us. Whatever something is no good, it's the Jewish people. And they believed all that baloney. They just never used their own head. They never thought any intelligence that they can use their own mind.

You think that if there would have been more mixing between the non-Jews and the Jews that they would have found out that the Jews were normal people just like everybody else?

It would helped. But the propaganda was so big. The only thing that only people which I know that were nice were those few who were socialists. Those who were socialist, social democrats. And there was the Social Democrat Party.

There were some working men who had it rough, because there was-- in Hungary, there was no Social Security. There was no unemployment. And a worker in Hungary, a working man, one day, he had-- he lost his job. He would live out of his savings if he had. If not, he had to sell his coat or his shoes, because there just was no unemployment.

And they lived in big misery. And so many of them were socialist. But many of them just took the terrible propaganda of the rightist Hungarian Nazis.

Tell me-- you said that your dad survived the camp.

My dad did not survive, unfortunately. He died in--

He died. I'm sorry, I misunderstood.

He died in Buchenwald.

Oh, he did.

He died in Buchenwald. And my brother survived. And I still cannot find him.

You had one brother and two sisters? I have two brothers and one sister. My sister live in San Francisco. And unfortunately, she died a few years ago. She went through hell. She went through the concentration camp in Austria.

But she got out.

They defected her. Yeah. And so did my brother-in-law. And so my brother-in-law was lucky. He came from Germany. And luckily, he had a chance with his family to get out to Shanghai. Was Japan allowed so many Jewish people,

actually. They wanted the Jewish people.

At that time, they were not yet-- didn't make this Rat Pack with the Nazis. So Japan did allow Jewish people to come to the conquered territory, what they conquered from China. And they wanted these people to get some blood fusion to the economy of the conquered territories.

That's a tribute to the Japanese. They were smart. Yet Chiang Kai-Shek with his China, he was so miserable, he did not let any-- none of the territories. China was big enough. He did not let any Jewish people to come into China and his territory, yet Japan did.

Yeah, you mean, the Jews who were in Shanghai.

Yes. They got the visa in Berlin, in Germany, because very few people wanted to give visa for the Jewish people at the time when Hitler wanted to get rid of many Jewish people. It was before 1940. There were very few people who give the Jewish people visas.

I know the French didn't want to give. I went with my father up to the French consul. And I spoke in pretty good French. And I asked him to let us come to France. He says, it's impossible. I says, how about let us go to the colonies? You have Algeria, Morocco, Tunis, and all a big part of the Western Africa, which you dominate so readily. I'm a good worker. You could use my skills. My father could help, helpful.

Said, impossible. It's impossible, monsieur. So the French were so miserable. And yet they were themselves under the-- the trope was already under the Nazi arms. So they were already struggling themselves. But they did not show any sympathy. They could have saved millions of people.

Tell me, when did you come to America?

I come to America in 1950. In 1946, in January, I left Romania. I left my father's house. And I came with my sister to the American zone in Germany. And we got a place in the UNRRA camp. And these UNRRA camps were made up by the United Nations Relief Association.

And we did have a place to stay. And we were together with other refugees. And we started to start a new life. And one of them came from Transylvania, rather, to Budapest. I met my wife. So I had my sister with me and my wife. And we came together to Pocking, Germany. And there, we stood for four years.

Four years.

From '46 to 1950. In 1950, finally, on May 10th, we got to Sacramento, California. And we've were in that hot Sacramento for almost a year until finally, I decided to leave Sacramento, because I had a feeling-- I was working for \$0.90 an hour. And I felt that I'm much more worth as a cabinetmaker than \$0.90 an hour.

And I came to San Francisco. And after a while, I got myself a job in San Francisco. And I was working for a showcase company for 10 years as a cabinetmaker and saved up some money to go my own business. In 1961, I went to my own business. It started as a restaurant and delicatessen.

And so we worked ourself up. And meanwhile, while we were working very hard, my wife helped me in this business. Meanwhile, I invested in real estate and started to work myself up in real estate. And I felt that I'm making every sandwich hand by hand.

Even we had little help, so nothing amount to much. So I started in real estate, which I was more fortunate. But unfortunately, five years ago, I lost my son. He was 36 years old.

Oh, how sad. A terrible tragedy. And my wife after that did not survive six more months. She couldn't survive the loss of her only son. It was the second tragedy that hit me.

That's very sad.

So I luckily have my daughter and my son-in-law and try to make a new living, to make a new life, which is very, very hard.

Your daughter lives here?

My daughter lives in Palo Alto. And she works in a department store in Palo Alto.

And does she have any children?

Not yet. We hope pretty soon they will. I hope so.

If you were to think about all the things that happened to you, especially after the Germans came to Hungary, Transylvania, what do you think gave you the courage to leave that battalion of working people and run into the woods? I always wonder. Some people just keep going and do what they're told. And other people have the courage to break off.

Correct.

And I wonder what it was-- you know, that courage.

Well, it was that I did not trust the Hungarians. And I did not trust the Germans. And I knew, if I will keep on going, they will transport us somewhere and still be a slave or maybe killed sooner or later by the Nazis.

So in order to catch up with freedom, will be just by somehow getting into the line for the Russians. I knew that the Russian Army is coming. And I have to deactivate myself. I didn't dare to go to the Russians. They would think I'm a spy. Besides, I couldn't speak Russian. So I just have to act as one of the people who deliberated. So I'd rather take them as liberators.

And this is the way that luckily, it worked out, while the Nazi armies and the Hungarian Army withdraw, and by waiting there until the Red Army came in. But it was really-- there were many friends of mine who were not so lucky. They hid in the woods. And the Hungarian gendarmes caught them.

And they were shot. Instantly, they were shot, because these Hungarian field gendarmes come around to look for people who deserted, somebody-- people who ran away. But luckily, I hid pretty good. So they could not find me in the field. So this man helped me quite a bit, because I was hiding in his house.

Was hiding you, yes.

Yes. And unfortunately, I couldn't find him anymore so I could have show my gratitude to him.

This friend that also caught up with you in the woods, are you still in touch with him?

Unfortunately not, because all I know his name was Noah. And I don't even remember anymore his name. He probably doesn't remember mine. I hope he's somewhere in Israel. He was from Czechoslovakia, but the part of Czechoslovakia that was turned back to the Hungarians.

You know, Czechoslovakia, again-- but I hope that he left Czechoslovakia and he went to Israel. And fortunately, he was not a close friend. He was just one between the 320 people who were in my battalion.

Were there any others that you know of at that time that came into the woods? Or you just know about this one?

No, only this one alone. But later on, in about May of 1945, some boys I met who came back after and told what

happened in Mauthausen, where my company was taken, some of them survived. A good part of them didn't.

And those who survived was thin as my finger hardly. And the American Army came into Mauthausen. And they liberated them. And also, my sister was liberated in Mauthausen from the American Army and from then on, started a new life.

Thank god for that, huh?

Yes.

Were able to start a new life.

That we started an entirely new-- it was very hard to start a new life. But we had no choice. We were young. We cried a lot. And we were hoping that-- we didn't even think of anything else. Just wanted to go to Palestine. We didn't trust anybody else, because nobody can trust.

We seen how pathetic the Western world. They didn't give a damn about us. They could have saved us. How war would have come if South Africa would have let us in, would let in at least four or five million people, they wouldn't have been at the trouble as they are now.

And there were all the people who could let in to work hard and would have built up the country and helped them. So they wouldn't be-- white people wouldn't be such a minority. But they were so silly with their racism. And this time, the racism will have worked against them.

When you were in the UN camp--

Yes.

--were you able to work and earn some money there?

Well, they paid us with cigarettes. And we got cigarettes for our work. And we sold the cigarettes in the black market and so made a living. The United Nations relief organization, the UNRRA, provided us with food from American sources, some maybe Canadian. And we got everything in cans, all kind of food. Even butter came in cans. So we didn't have-- we didn't go hungry.

And we had the army rations, some of the armies left over from American-- from the GIs, they turned over to us. So we did not go hungry, thank god. And we know that sooner or later, they are going to allow us to emigrate somewhere.

Did you have a quota at that time? So few could go to America.

Yeah, there was still a quota. There still was a quota till about 1940-- probably '48. And then Truman made us made a pledge that those people who were liberated in the American zone, they would be allowed to emigrate to America.

Without an affidavit? You didn't need that?

Correct. You didn't need no affidavit as long as they were there at the time of liberation. So they could prove it by what papers what they had. So that helped quite a bit. So I wanted to go-- for a long time, I wanted to go only to Israel. I didn't trust any other country.

But then my sister got sick. And the doctor said, after the 1948, when Israel got independent, and so many people went to Israel, that the situation was very hard on the newcomers. And there wasn't enough shelter-- not enough homes or houses. And my sister developed in the concentration camp a heart condition.

And she couldn't stand the hot weather. And the doctor said, if you go to Israel and the hot weather, you're going to lose

her. So I had to choose to come to America. So that's the way I got to America and not to Palestine. Later, this was Israel.

How come you chose Sacramento?

This is where the Jewish relief organization sent us from New York. Most people, when we arrived, they didn't want to come to California. There was a belief between many, mostly Polish, immigrants who were with me that Sacramento, California [SPEAKING YIDDISH]. Basically, we burned from the heat in California.

It's not that bad.

But luckily, I read before many literature. And I read the Grapes of Wrath from the American authors.

Steinbeck.

Upton Sinclair. And I knew that California is a great country, a great state, with many good products. And there is work if you want to work. And the temperature is very pleasant. So luckily, I knew my wife was also a very red person. So we choose California instead of New York.

And so any time we want to ship us to California, we are ready to go. But I didn't think of Sacramento. But Sacramento was a small town that time, even it was the capital of California. But it was a small town. And there just wasn't enough work. And it was not paid enough.

So after a year, finally, I learned enough English to go on my own. And I came to San Francisco. And I got my own job as a cabinetmaker. I was working for 10 years by Rio Showcase Company, who was at that time a great fixture company. Of course, today's already history. I don't think they exist anymore.

So your father was right. With a trade, you can always make a living.

Yes, correct. Thanks god to him. He was. Yeah. I could even serve the Nazis with caskets.

To school.

And helped people not to go to the front or wherever they were shooting mines. And it was pretty dangerous. I was inside and working in a wood workshop making caskets for the Nazi heroes. I was lucky that part.

Leslie, when you went back looking for the man who hid in those 10 days in '44, did you talk to any other Hungarian people? Did you have any contact? Were there any Jewish people left? Did you talk to any?

Well, not in Romania. In Hungary, when I went to look up this man, this father who hid me, I stopped in Budapest. And with my brother, and my sister-in-law, and my wife, we went to look up this man in Transylvania.

But it seems like the whole farm where I was liberated was erased. Because what they did, they made a kolkhoz out of it. Made a central plan for the communist hierarchy and took these people who had small farms, took them around Bucharest or there, and put them there to work in a commune. So these people were shift away from here. And unfortunately, the heartbreak for me I couldn't find them anymore.

And there was nobody that you really knew when you went back?

No. There was nobody.

There was nobody?

Nobody that I could find that I know.

All strangers.

Yes. I did find some people in Israel who come from my town. Thanks god, they survived. But altogether, between 35,000 people, we're lucky if we had about 5,000 survived-- mostly younger ones, those who were not deported, those who were with me, those who run away, those who ran to Romania.

And we did not know that we would have run to Romania, we would have survived, because Romania was lucky. Romania did not turn over the Jewish people to the Nazis. And at the time when they wanted to take the Jewish people out of Romania, deport them, the August 23 came. And Romania changed sides. And the King arrested Antonescu and gave the order for the Romanian Army to attack the Germans on the side.

And that shorten the war for about a whole year, because as soon as the Nazis fled, well, the Romanians attacked them from the side and from the back, the Red Army came down to Romania, to Bucharest, south and went to Bulgaria and went right with Yugoslavia. So the Nazis were fleeing right and left.

And you say it's the Romanians that--

That's right.

--that attacked them from the side?

That's right, correct. They attacked them. And the Nazis felt betrayed. But was good for them. They were going around saying, the Romanians betrayed us. So they wanted Romanians to fight village to village and destroy every village. The King was smart-- King Mihai was now in Switzerland. And he choose to get rid of the Nazis. And he made an alliance with the Russians.

And a big secret, which was much smarter than Badoglio did in Italy or governor Horthy tried to do while he was overthrown. By he just couldn't. He was so clumsy in making this putsch against the Nazis that he was overthrown right away.

So one day, he ordered to get out, withdraw. And next day, there come the new dictator. But then Szlasi was a Nazi. And he ordered the Hungarian Army back to the front. And fortunately, it failed.

Anything else that you can think of that is in your memory of, particularly, the time when the Germans came into Budapest? You must have then also already then managed not to be rounded up because you were able to continue working. Is that because you were in a work camp?

Correct. What I did was in 1942, I should have come to the Hungarian Army or should have been called into the army. But what I did, I kept up moving every month to another place.

So when the order came out for my abduction in the Hungarian Army, they couldn't find me, because I moved. And then they come to another place, to the next place. And I moved again. And then I moved from Budapest to jpest, to another town. Then I moved to a third place.

So for about half a year, they couldn't find me. And half a year later, when they found me, they gave me, right away, an order to run right away to this place where there is a penalized company. And I will have to go with that penalized company.

But I was lucky with the penalized company because when I got there, the colonel of that company ordered that no more newcomers. I'm not going to go every day and order some more provisation for the people. So now, they come, we send them back. And I was so lucky that that, I would have come a day earlier, I would have been caught in there. But I came just the following day, when the colonel gave the order.

I see.

Yeah. So just, I think, luck was with me. Unfortunately, wasn't with my parents.

But you did show a lot of resourcefulness by always moving, by not just sitting there and letting them take you. You had a lot of initiative.

That's right. That's right. Right away, I didn't leave it for the last minute. I kept on moving. And I kept on protecting myself as much as I could. And the same thing I did when I ran away.

You were young, you know.

I was young. And I made up my decision. I didn't consult with nobody, because usually, when I consult with somebody, people talk me out of it. And when I talk me out of it, then I just was defeated. And I just didn't want to be. So I made my own decision.

You listened to your own inner voice.

That's right, to my own inner voice. And luckily, I was lucky to survive all these hardships.

Thank god you did.

Yeah. Thanks god I did. Yeah. It would have been beautiful if I would have my son and my wife. So my son was born in 1948. And he died in '85, such a short time.

It's been so very hard for you.

It is very hard for me.

You're very generous in telling us a lot of things.

Yes. Well, I was lucky I did not go to concentration camp. Probably wouldn't have survived there. But probably more people would have taken more chances. But then who knows how they would have. Because really, there was nobody in our side.

Transylvania, where the Romanians were, they were good people. And they would have hidden people if they would have a chance. But that was the Romanians, not the Hungarians. God save somebody if they were with the Hungarians. They would call right away the gendarme on them.

But the Romanians, even today, the Romanians and Hungarians fight with each other. But I really believe the Romanians are much better people. They have a better heart, better understanding. There are bit of Hungarians, some very good people too, but very, very few.

Most of them take the-- or took the propaganda they got for about from 1920 till 1940, and later in the '40s, they took it as truth. So for 20 years, be under this repressive propaganda, antisemitic propaganda, all the time from the newspapers from the Hungarian government did a lot of damage to the Hungarian people.

I think the Hungarian people were not themselves already since 1919 when they lost the war. And they started to blame the Jewish people for losing the war-- obviously similar like the Germans.

Are there any friends living in Hungary now that you know of.

Yes, now they are. In Budapest, there is a community of about 80,000 Jewish people live in Budapest. And very few live in small towns. But most of the people are in Budapest. And the government today is friendly. And they're a

different kind of people.

These people are first-- the communists, when the communist government was, they were two-sided. They wanted to be friends of the Arabs too. However, they didn't feel that they owe us much more than they owe with the Arabs. They did not protect us. They didn't help us. And they were saying they're even-handed.

And whatever they could, they helped the Arabs because of the pressure from Moscow. But now, since Gorbachev, they themselves made an alliance-- I mean, made a new approach with Israel.

And many Israelis are visiting Hungary. And some Hungarians are visiting Israel. I seen many doctors coming to conferences, some engineer conferences, countries. And so they learn a lot from Israel. So right now, it's a good relation between Hungary.

Aren't Russian Jews going to Hungary and then flying from Hungary to Israel?

Yes. Yes, amazing, yeah. They do come from Moscow. They buy a ticket from Moscow all the way to Budapest, Hungary. And I'm not sure if in Hungary, they buy another ticket to Tel Aviv. It could be they buy a ticket ride away from Moscow to Tel Aviv but have to go via Hungary.

So instead of going to the lousy Austria, they go to Hungary. And from Hungary, they travel right on to Israel, which is great. And now, my brother told me that the planes are full of the Hungarian flights who fly Budapest-Tel Aviv, which opened a year ago. And El-Al is coming to Budapest.

And they both transport back Russian Jews to Israel, who were coming to bring the Israeli tourists to Hungary. On the way back, they got some Hungarians. But mostly, the Russian Jews come back. Yeah, so it's a wonderful thing.

Good. Do you want to end your interview?

Yes, I think now, we--

You feel you've share your story.

--I said my-- yeah. I'm glad that I could share the story with you.

We're glad too.

And I hope that it will help showing the world what happened to our parents and what happened to us. And those who think that this cannot be, cannot happen again, just look at the time when Germany had a very nice democratic government in 1919 and 1920.

And the only way they thought that to keep away was to-- the war should not repeat itself. But Clemenceau thought to take Germany apart. So Wilson did not allow them. So we had a little agreement for 20 years. 20 years later, they were back again at our throat, like Churchill said.

And the Germans had only either at your feet or at your throat. And this is so true. Now, Germany is uniting again. And these leaders who are so democratic and so nice today, they will be past. 20 years later, nobody going to mention their name anymore. Or they're going to have a new leader over their.

You don't any faith that things will change?

I do not have an absolute in the Germans, because they are very militaristic. I have a cousin who lives in Berlin, in West Berlin. And she says, you don't know. And the only reason she lives there is because she got a very good [SPEAKING GERMAN] from Germany.

And she can help her children in Israel. If she would be in Israel, she could hardly make any money. But here, because her husband was very well-off and very wealthy, and she gets her husband with a good [SPEAKING GERMAN]. And that is a good amount of money. Well, it's not great. But anyway, she can help provide her own family.

And just telling the story and what she told me, which still gives me the chills. This is one day was in the supermarket. And some people came in the line. And they were looking Jewish.

So one of the German women said, oh, [SPEAKING GERMAN], meaning, they forgot to gas these people. So when they say that they never knew about it, don't you believe them. They know very good what they did.

And they are today still militaristic and still think they are much better people than the Americans. The better people here, they show us that they really are friends of America. But when they talk between them, because I speak perfect German, and I traveled in the trains. And they really think that the American [SPEAKING GERMAN]. And what good is in--

They say they have more culture.

Yeah, the Germans. I mean, the Americans have no culture. The French is dirty. [SPEAKING GERMAN]. Only the Germans are perfect. And if there's any good in this world, it should be shared between the Germans. The Germans do not have to share the good things in the world with anybody else, because anybody else is not German.

And they still believe that they are the super people. I know they hate the Japanese because the Japanese give them a lot of competition. But they really think that they are the masters of the world. And they're not going to be happy until they don't succeed, because they didn't need a Bismarck or the Kaiser to make them superior. It's born in them. It comes in their blood.

Do you think even the younger people who grew up since the end of the war?

Well, I have a mixed feeling. Though the educated one, I would say the educated one know better. And they are apologetic whatever happened during these horrible years. And they're very sorry. But they don't feel that owe us an apology, because it's not their generation. The father's generation, they do not have to be responsible for their father's generation. But they know what happened very well.

And today, you still can feel if you-- I was in Berlin for a few days. And I had the feeling that they really think they are superior. When I was in Berlin and they were talking about the bombing, they says, look at what the Americans and the British did. They bombed so many buildings here.

I was in East Germany in a town where about two houses were not built up. They wanted to leave it as a documentary to show how the war is like. So that happened to be that building in Dresden. The building in Dresden is still in ruins. And that was the headquarters of the Nazi party. And the Russians didn't let them put up that building, just to remember how war is.

And they saying, well, that the Americans bombed us. And the Americans were so barbaric. And the British together, that they ruined so many buildings. They don't want to know anything about what they did.

By the beginning of the war, what they did to London, what they did to Coventry, they just like to forget it. Don't even mention. Never heard of it. Only complain what they got. I'm afraid they never got that much, where she promised 10 times as much.

Now that they got even, they're just lucky they got only so much, because they did horrible things to Poland and to Britain, where they themselves, they were offended where they got bombed. We, the superior people, we shouldn't get penalized because we are superior to them. They are inferior. They should get bombed. That's what they're feeling even today.

They really think that?

Oh, I definitely know it. You have to know the Germans, that the very few of them are really democratic unless they go through something different. But they still get from them, they bring a superiority feeling from their mother's milk.

So you think the two Germanys shouldn't be unified?

I think that they're going to pay a horrible price again. Sometimes people never learn. Seems like French will never learn. They really think that it's going to be like this today. They don't think that once they going to be unified, they will be quite different.

They'll work to the way to-- after unification, to get back the territories from Poland and from Czechoslovakia. Then they want more lebensraum. Then they will want more colonies. And they will want to be masters of the world again. I just don't trust them. And I think the world is going to regret it again if they allow Germany to unify themselves.

What about the whole restructuring of Europe? The European Community is different today than it was in 1949, '30, '40, '50.

Yes. Well, those Western countries were mostly democratic. And they never had a-- they were never brought up like Bismarck. They never like Bismarck did to the German people, to make them feel super, super race. And I do hope that is going to work out, and it's going to be a European Community.

But it will-- it could end up another way, with Germany being a very strong power, and Germany dominate and dictate the rest of Western Europe. That probably is not going to be any more of my worry, because that's going to be 20, 30 years later. But after a while, it will come.

Now, they want to unify themselves. Everything is going that way to get back the way it was and continue, because it's in their blood. The Europe will be very, very sorry they did it. There's only change-- things are going to change. And the way Hitler was used against Russia-- and they thought that Hitler was a good thing, because he's going to go against Russia.

So there's going to be some other thing coming up which they're going to use to get into power, while going to be against Russia again, or going to be against France, or somehow, it's going to be a way they will try to show why they have to cling to power, why it will have to be a strong Germany. Is going to be, probably, a strong Germany is going to be needed against Russia, or against China, or god knows somebody, so they can build a new empire again.

Let's hope not.

Let's hope that they going to be democratic. And let's hope. But it's a very dangerous element. And I hope the world learned. For two times making a mistake, I hope-- he has to-- many people make a mistake once. But to make three times a mistake will be real foolish. And only a fool will do that. OK, thank you very much for the wonderful--

Thank you very much.

--occasion you gave me to express my--

You have a lot of interesting thoughts, ideas.

--and I hope that you will be successful. And this going to be for the archives, put away for the younger generation. And my grandchildren will be able to see this and know what I went through and what my parents went through. And I thank you very much, Mrs. Segal, for allowing me to express my views.

Thank you very much, Leslie.

Thank you.