

But generally speaking, if a scholar or a student or journalist doing research wanted to do our interviews, then we explain to them that it's just very wrong footage, and that it may not be in order, and they are fine-- they understand that, then that's how it works.

OK. Well, let's put it this way. Once there was--

I wanted to ask how long your brother was there with you.

Which one?

David. Is that his name?

Well, OK, and David was not with-- when David came-- since we all had this one room, and there were five of us as it were, Alex sent David off to his sister with this drunk boyfriend. And he was staying with them for a while, like maybe a month, maybe two. Then later they were fine. Everything was OK, but he used to come home drunk. They would have their fights. Typical drunk man or husband and wife.

And during one of those fights, he was just lying there. He was sleeping on a mattress on the floor, and he was-- they were having their fight. And over-- some sort of a table or a cupboard above his head, there was this little metal elephant. And while they're fighting, the elephant fell and hit him on the forehead. He still has the scar. And when he's asked what happened to you, where did you get this scar, David's favorite answer is, I was kicked by an elephant when I was little.

So and then he said, all right. Alex said, well, my sister and her bum drunk boyfriend mean well. They're good people, but by mistake they may kill the child. So bring him. So he came probably late '43, maybe October, maybe November or something like that he came still into that little room. And we never separated until we grew up.

Mm-hmm. How long did your other brother come and stay before he died? A few weeks.

Just a few weeks?

Just a few weeks, maybe a month. Just about. Because when he came, I think it was already-- maybe when the Scarlet fever had started about-- scarlet fever doesn't last months. It's not cancer. It's a disease that lasts a week or maybe two, so just a few weeks. Around about a month.

What memories do you have of him?

Like I said, he was thin, emaciated. There was dirt in his hair. The moment of his DEATH the reunion was quite happy because I hadn't seen him. I wondered at how weak he looked. It was his-- it was '43. It was his eighth birthday that we celebrated. It was the seventh, probably the seventh or eight.

Did he remember you at the reunion?

I think so. At least, let's put it this way, I remembered him, and that was enough for me.

Yeah.

OK? Whether he remembered, he certainly acted as he knew who I was. And I think he was happy to come into a normal household without any goats around and where he, I think, at first he didn't like the scrubbing, but later he appreciated. Nobody likes to be scrubbed.

OK. Now, so we are in this little room. Alex is selling fur coats on the market. I am a kid. Urik and Mary go to school. Mela is out helping Alex selling fur coats and booties. And I am at home. And by that time, I have recovered from all

the diseases, but I can hardly walk.

So I spent part of the time just walking from one wall to the other under strong instruction to avoid the windows. Don't get anywhere near the window. You don't exist, remember? Now, in this little room, how do you hide? There's hardly any furniture. It's mostly beds, table, some chairs.

Did they have any curtains or drapes over the window?

No, no, no. I think so. Of course, I was curious. I want to see what's going on in the street. We're over a main street. Actually, when we were in Warsaw, one of the first thing I went to, I said, let me try and find the house. I remember the address.

And I told people, I thought, well, here it is. That window over there. That's the one I was supposed to avoid and I couldn't. I was sitting there, and I was sort of standing on the side and peeking out and pretending that I'm the Invisible Man or something like that and so on.

And the other thing was, when I was not walking, I was peeling potatoes. I was still a very good, excellent potato peeler. And I can't use any paring knife or any of these other attachments. All I use is a plain, old-fashioned knife. That's the thing I learned how to peel potatoes with. That was the staple fare-- potatoes.

And then that was August or September, maybe, and so on. This was the tomato season in Poland. So all the while we had tomatoes. There are these little memories of these things-- peeling potatoes and plenty of tomatoes and so on.

Arnold, is that his name? Was the man?

Alex.

Alex. How did he keep track of your brother? To know where they were.

Well, there was this physician, this brother-in-law of my aunt's. He was still around, and he was there living on these false papers. Later he somehow was caught by the Germans and deported and killed. We don't know exactly how, but till, say, mid '44 or late '44, he was-- mid '44, he was around, very much around.

So he was the one who placed my brothers with these different women, different places. And he, more or less, kept in touch with the three of us. And he was the one who did the-- who took care of them and brought them over.

And Alex, they became friends and we used to sit and talk politics for a while. We became-- later on, when Alex became affluent and coming to that shortly, and the other guy was-- his money was all gone, probably had to pay bribes and so on. Each time they parted, Alex had a note, a 500 Polish zloty note, which was about \$10 maybe or something like that. That could go a very long way those days in Warsaw. And he shook hands, and Alex had this note in his hand to help this other guy out.

By that time, Alex was learning the ropes of the market. And he found out that every once in a while a shipment would come into this open market. And there were different items. Sometimes there were blankets. Other times, there was underwear, male underwear, and so on, thermal underwear, those kinds.

And that the shipment would come in, change hands, sold at retail, and disappear. He got interested if he found out what it was. There were German army transport. Warsaw was a big railroad switching yard, a huge one.

There were German army transport to and from the Eastern front, Russian front. And Polish railroad workers would empty those whole railroad cars and sell it. And he finally, after several intermediaries, Alex got to the source and told them anything you steal, I buy. And he became affluent.

Immediately, he rented and bought another apartment, same house, a few floors down. The floor was on top floor, sixth

or seventh or something like that. And then in one of the lower floors, he rented a spacious apartment. And he became--

They all moved there, and that little room became my place. I lived there. The apartment--

Just you?

Pardon?

Just you?

Just me. They would bring me food and so on, and bring me-- once in a while I would go down for family meals late in the evening.

Your brother would be down there?

My brother would be down there. He was with me part of the time. He'd be down there. First of all, his nose was a little shorter than mine. He was little with a very becoming smile and so on. And people paid less attention to little kids.

He would-- actually, Mary would sometimes take him to a playground. Now, she's telling him now, yeah, I'll take him to the playground, but not the place where I usually went because too many kids knew me. So he'd go to this other playground with her further away. That was a chore because I couldn't go and meet my own friends.

Then the way we'd do it would be I wasn't aware of that. She told me about it much later. But the way we'd do it would be I would let him walk behind me but so as I would pretend, though, that it's just a little kid that's following me but I have nothing to do him. I don't know this little kid.

Because I couldn't very well admit that they had him, because everybody knew, my friends knew that I didn't have any little brothers. I had a big brother but no little brothers. So I would sleep sometimes here, sometimes there. During the day times, I would be there. I was supposed to stay away from the windows, but I couldn't.

There was a movie theater right across the street, so I was-- and at some point, Alex realized that I was getting more frantic and so on-- boredom and claustrophobia, whatever.

Did you have books to read?

Well, yes. Well, at that point that second apartment they took was a library there, leftover by some previous tenants. So I got all the books I wanted to read except, well, OK, put it this way. I still remember one word.

One of the books that I was reading, there was a 10 volume set of the history of the Jewish people by Graetz. It's a very famous history compiled by a guy named Graetz around the turn of the century in Warsaw, in Poland. And I was reading that. And there were of course words I couldn't understand. And one I still remember to this very day-- apologetics.

There was always this business of the Jews apologizing for the history. And this was a word I've never encountered before. I asked them what's apologetics? With their kind of education they didn't know either.

In those days, I became a good friend of Urik, of their son. I mean, the [? matric ?] business was over a long time ago, but he was having problems in school. So I was helping with his homework. And there is something for which I am the originator, author of the story, and it's gospel truth but Alex is very upset that it comes up every once in a while when people recite. I've gotten some books from my interviews. It's not the first time I'm giving.

And, well, he was, like many boys of his age, like I some years later at a somewhat older age but he was about 13, he was experimenting with liquor and cigarettes and stuff. Who didn't? His memory is sacred to his parents because he was killed later on. They wouldn't believe it.

Once in a while, he would come home drunk. And I would cover up for it. I did his homework for him. And since his father is still a farmer, a peasant, he goes to sleep to this very day about the time the chickens go to sleep. And I would stay up and read.

And when he had asked me when did Urik come home, I'd just give a reasonable time. And so on. So we became really good friends.

How much older was he?

2 and 1/2 years. So I was about 10, and he was 12.

You spent a lot of time alone in that book.

Yes.

Did you did you make up a fantasy life?

Probably, but I doesn't remember any of that. Well, I'm really, in a way, very cerebral, as you can probably gather and so on. So I must have had a fantasy life, but I don't remember much of it. Oh, OK. They also get them to one of the kids to go to the public library and bring me. I was reading the usual Last of the Mohicans and you know and cowboys and Indians and all and Robinson Crusoe.

I caught up on that part of books that I had missed earlier. This was my reading time because I also read-- there was also a Bible. The first book, I read the Bible any number of times backwards and forwards.

My brother would be angry with me. I realized that he was even more angry now than I ever realized. He still remembers it, that I wouldn't teach him how to read. He was about five years old, and I didn't know how to teach him how to read.

And he comes to it and says that I want this advantage over him, that I can read and he can't. Still he is 58 years old now. No. Yes, he's 58 years old, coming on 59. 59. 59 years old, and he still remembers and carries a grudge that I wouldn't teach him how to read when he was four or five years old. I read really voraciously.

Yeah. Wasn't that hard, to be across the street from the movie and be peeking out?

Yes.

Had you ever been to a movie?

Yes. Well, when I was little, before the war, I saw Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. And then that's the one I remember. You ask me, yeah, OK, this is one. And the other-- then at some point they realized that I was getting claustrophobic. So they took me to a movie one night.

They what?

They took me to a movie one night.

Uh-huh.

Yeah, we left. It was across the street. We waited till after the show started and walked into the dark theater, and then left before the lights came on. I saw a movie then. I don't remember what it was. I haven't the faintest idea.

I still remember the name of the movie theater. It's no longer there, by the way. It was there then. And there was-- and

also that a little bit later, '44, that time they had blackout in wars, because there were Russian and/or American planes would occasionally fly over, and so there was a blackout. So dark winter nights, Alex would take me on streetcar rides.

To do what?

Would take me on a streetcar, and we'd go out, bundle me up because of the cold and so on, so my face wouldn't show. I'd walk out, get on a streetcar, ride to the end of the line, get out of the car, get another streetcar and go back.

Uh-huh. So he began taking some risks with you because you were so confined.

Yes. Well, he was always taking risk, They were calculated risks, but he was doing these things. And, well, let's put it this way. We had the division--

If he had been stopped and checked for papers, were there any papers for you?

Yes, he had-- first of all, I don't think they would check papers for children and so on. He had his own papers, and he had his nephew-- the papers, he had his nephew's papers, the one that he had sent back to his mother. The kid was still there with his mother. And he had papers, but the occasion to show or to use them never arose.

He was with a-- so anyway, he was making money from those. And there were all kinds of things. Of course, these were Germans' stuff coming from the war, from the front. So sometimes there were German uniforms, were dyeing them black or navy and taking off-- cutting off the shiny buttons and selling them as clothing, jackets and so on.

There was-- there were blankets. Also much of this was carrying a lot of lice, German army-- I mean lice were very common here. So each time, after each transport we would we'd have a delousing operation at the house, scrubbing and cutting hair, and so on.

Were you following the war? Did you know what was happening?

Of course. I was-- well, let's put it this way. There was a division of labor. I was the one who was the strategist and so on. So I knew the geography and so on. That was already where-- we are already-- by then we are already in '44, so Italy has been invaded. The Russians are moving on the Eastern Front. They're already crossing the Polish border. They're following the Germans back from Russia, way after Stalingrad, OK?

Mm-hmm.

And so he was bringing the various publications of the Polish underground based on the broadcasts of the BBC broadcasts, and with maps and so on. So of course I knew it. And I was the strategist, and the politician, and so on.

My brother was the money counter, since there was any number of money. So he used to sit and count money, count bills. That he could do, even though he couldn't read, but he could count bills.

It didn't stop him from counting, huh?

It was interesting for me. I wanted to know what's happening in the world and so on and who's doing what, who is winning the war, and how it's ending, and learning geography, and understanding. So this is how I passed my time.

Would you have maps?

Yes. There were books. There was an atlas. There were maps, little maps in those underground publications, I think. Well, I don't understand it. I need a map. So they would get a map. There were these kids schoolbooks that had maps in them. I had maps. I knew what was going on.

And also since I was reading I knew a lot of history, and I was talking of, let's say-- that was-- I was talking to some

other people yesterday, trying to remember exactly when Poland was partitioned. I knew Polish history very well in those days. I don't remember it now, but--

So then they acquired a third apartment. They moved out completely, if you-- oh, it was about 10 minutes walking distance away. Why did they move? Do you know?

Partly because they wanted privacy and to disassociate themselves from this business that wasn't very strictly legal and so on. So they were using-- so they had-- I was in this little room, and the lady who introduced them to booties would come there and sleep there. Sometimes my brother would come and stay with me.

Then this place downstairs was used for business. It was a business address. And then they had an apartment where he lived.

But after--

Hardly-- no, that was a few blocks away.

I see.

And I hardly ever saw that.

You hardly ever what?

I hardly ever saw that one. I couldn't very well go and walk the 10 blocks. There was no street car that would travel from here to there. So.

So you were really isolated.

I was isolated, yes.

For how long?

Hmm. A month. I'd say six months roughly. I mean, it sounds like long, but there was a lot of events. It's a very eventful times but not much more than six months.

You're 11 now.

Not quite.

Not quite?

I was 10 going on 11.

OK. That must have been a very hard period for you, huh?

Let's put it this way. I've been asked this question any number of times.

Uh-huh.

Anybody who hears the story, reads about it, and talks to me about it pops the same question.

Yeah.

And I don't remember it particularly traumatic. And I try to answer to say why. People have all kinds of traumas and

memories and mental problems because of being exposed as children or as adolescents and so on to this type of experiences. I probably have my share of hangups but nothing really very, very major.

Mm-hmm.

And my answer is that the compensation was the loving care. When I was around them, I was the love child of the family. And I think that compensated, the warmth. This incident of the rolls that I told you about--

Mm-hmm.

Years later, in Germany, in 1947 or '6, 1946, David picked up a half-eaten slice of orange. Oranges were not available in Poland, but there in Germany on the black market, there were oranges. But we weren't orange consumers. The Polish rural family didn't buy oranges. Maybe they buy apples but not oranges.

And David picked it up and he started sucking on it. The following day, Alex went out and bought some oranges for David. This was later, and it had nothing to do with those dangerous times and so on. But again, there was this loving care and conscious or unconscious attempts to compensate for the deprivation by love.

Uh-huh.

At least, that's my answer to that. That's been my answer for most of my adult life was trying to understand that period.

Yeah. Because you got a lot from them.

Yes.

Emotions.

Yes.

The reason I asked if it wasn't a hard period was that you weren't seeing them very much.

Well, I was seeing-- first of all, somebody had to feed me. So they would bring me food. They would come. And there were weekends and holidays and this, that, and the other.

Was that dangerous to be bringing food or were people concerned that they would discover you?

No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I mean, they had this place. Everybody knew that they had this place. I had just to keep quiet. I was not supposed to make noises. I was supposed to stay away from the windows, which I didn't quite observe.

But, well, put it this way. How can a boy make a lot of noise unless he acquires a set of drums and starts playing drums? There were no radios, no television. And so these things didn't exist.

Yeah. I mean, just remembering my own childhood, sometimes we talk to ourselves, talk out loud.

Well, those buildings were sufficiently sturdy, and I don't think there was-- at least none of us thought that the voice, normal speech could carry.

Uh-huh.

And there were members of the family coming and going and so on There was this woman that was sleeping there. She may have been there. She could-- she didn't, but she could have brought a boyfriend or something like that. So I don't think there was any particular tension in those days.

Were you ever discovered there?

I think there was some-- there was-- I think there was one day there was a-- he had a shipment of leather, rolls of sole leather, thick sheets, hides, tanned hides of sole leather. That's something they picked up, and he had to put it Somewhere.

And this is not something he wanted to peddle on the market. He had to bring buyers. And he had started there, and one of the buyers saw me, but I don't think people paid attention. They were interested--

This was different conditions. Somehow the people came there for an illicit business. And then-- OK, so these were good times. We ate well and so on. And the war was-- at least we could see the end on the horizon. The horizon was bright.

By that time, the Russian army, the Red Army, had crossed the Polish border. And there were refugees from the fighting area that were drifting into Warsaw. Some relatives came over, and of course the Roslans being what they are, what they were, they offered one of their three apartments to their relative refugees. And there was--

These were relatives of theirs or yours?

No, theirs.

Theirs.

Again, I had no relatives. Very few survived. I was not aware of any and so on. I think by then even Galar, Abraham, the physician, was dead or at least deported. Because he stopped-- about that time he disappeared.

There was no one to ask because we didn't know about his whereabouts, where he lived, where he sleeps. He would come and go because he had to protect himself. And the fewer people knew of his whereabouts, the safer he was. But anyway, there was no one.

So Alex-- and then one of these days, his railroad friends, the thieves, were apprehended. And one of them had a little note with a few numbers scribbled on it. And the Germans or the Polish police deciphered it as a telephone number and then traced it back not to where Alex was living but his other apartment. And that's how they came to him and arrested him.

They came to-- he knew that they were apprehended and he--

He knew that the railroad men were apprehended?

Yes. And therefore he decided he's not going to sleep at home. He was sleeping at some friend's place. And his wife said-- they decided that she's going to say that they are separated, that he found himself a young girl, and she doesn't know where he is. And add a few well-chosen-- [LAUGHS]

We have to make it plausible. And when she was asked what she was going to do, well, I am selling on the market. What are you selling? Ah, you are selling stolen goods. No, I'm selling radishes. And she always had kept a supply of fresh radishes at home and so on.

So he was in jail in the summer of '44.

He was in jail?

Well, he was in jail. It was July. He got arrested eventually because the people who got his apartment, they're typical Poles. When asked, they told where he was. So he was in jail.



Do you remember that?

Of course.

You remember them taking him away?

I wasn't there when they took him away, but I knew that-- first of all, they found him in a friend's apartment where I didn't even know where it was. But I of course knew that he was in jail. It was a big source of worry.

And he was trying to buy his way out. She was trying to buy his way out. He was told a number of times that he would be helped to escape, but he didn't want to. He said, I walk out of here with a piece of paper. I want--

And eventually she was offering, well, probably thousands or even a few thousand dollars, which was a fortune in those days in Poland, in American currency. This was the black market currency. And there were like 10, 15, \$20,000 around the house. This was the money my brother was counting.

This is what?

This was the money my brother was counting, making packages. They were hid in the house. And he-- she was she was unable to find the right contact and so on. He managed somehow again, uncanny senses, to buy his way out. That was July 30 or 31, 1944. He came out with this piece of paper.

What did the paper say? Do you know?

That he's released from jail. I mean, he bribed. For \$100 he found the right kind of person, for \$100 that was authorized or had access to the proper form or piece of paper and the proper stamp. For one \$100 bill, issued the right paper and Alex walked out.

20-- not quite 24 hours later, the Polish upheaval started. The one where they decided that they were going to-- the Russians were already very close to Warsaw. They were actually on the other side of the river, and they decided they're going to start to stage an uprising and install the British government-- the government-in-exile from London. General B<sup>3</sup>r-Komorowski.

And I remember when it started. I was looking out the window, the forbidden window, and I was seeing some very strange things. These groups of people, young people, standing there in unnatural ways. They were hiding something. They were hiding automatic weapons under their coats, standing on the corners and so on, waiting for, I think, 5 PM. That's was the scheduled time.

And they took over most of Warsaw. Hiding wasn't necessary because there were no Germans around. It was also out-- it's impossible to continue this hiding regime. We had to stay together, and we had to move around a little bit because the Germans were attacking.

So eventually the safest place was as close as possible to German lines, because there we were safe from heavy artillery and from planes. They weren't accurate enough. And for two months, we just lived there, under shellings, under bombing, small arms fire, living not in apartments, living mostly in cellars, which were crowded and so on. Very scarce food supplies.

What's that?

Very scarce food supplies.

I was going to say, how did you eat?

Well, let's put it this way. Everything that was edible was eaten, consumed, starting with supplies. And this was the exhilaration of being free from the Germans, it was more or less equitably distributed, whatever was there, going onto horses, toward the end probably dogs, rabbit-- rabbits, cats. I don't think we ever went beyond, at least not consciously beyond horse meat. Just during that period Urik got killed. Urik is Alex's son. He's 12, my 12-year-old pal.

Yeah.

He got himself killed. Well, there are two versions of the story. I don't really know which one is the more correct one. Kids his age were anxious to get into the fighting, and they're--

I was going to ask.

They were throwing-- they were tossing Molotov cocktails onto the German tanks. He was involved in that. But also that day there was a matter of food, that he had heard that his aunt had some horse meat, and he was going over to get the meat from her place. And he got-- he was hit by shrapnel.

And under other conditions he would have survived. Penicillin, of course would have helped. But he died in a hospital a few days later. Very, very traumatic.

Did people know right away? Did Alex know right away that he had been hit?

Yes. They spent some time in the hospital. They sat by his bed. He was buried later. Was buried. I visited his grave and so on. The last wish of his mother was to be cremated and have the ashes scattered over his grave. She never got over his death. To her last day. Although she came to this country, she had another-- she had another son.

Did you want to get in the fight?

Pardon?

Did you want to get in the fight?

I was too little and too timid. So I don't really know that Urik was actually fighting. I know he wanted to, but I was also enjoying the fact that I didn't have to hide, that I was among people, that I could be myself. I could talk to people. I didn't have to shy away and run away from strangers. I didn't have to go into hiding whenever I heard an unfamiliar voice.

Were you being identified as a Jew at that time?

Well, let's put it this way. Yeah. Make it short answer is yes. I don't think-- I don't think I was wearing any kind of a sign and so on, but people-- well, they were not unknown. This was a neighborhood in which they had lived for a long time.

Yeah.

Everybody knew the family and so on. Suddenly, two more boys show up, and these are Poles who smell of Jew from a mile away. So.

But there were no Germans to turn you in to.

There were Germans to turn you in. There was this exhilaration of fighting, finally fighting against the despised and hateful German, German occupier and so on. Polish are fighting people. I mean, I put it this way. I was very derogatory about their anti-Semitism and so on, but they're also fighting people with very, very strong sense of independence, of national unity and so on.

Why the Russians never, never let their tanks roll into Warsaw? Because that would have been a massacre. The Poles would have fought back. There are not Czechs. No-- Hungarians are sort of in the middle. The Czechs, when they had this spring of '68, Dubcek, but once the Russian tanks came in, they just gave up. The Poles would never have given up. They would fight to the bitter end.

So you think they would have fought the army that came and liberated them?

What do you mean, liberated them? Well, they would have fought anybody, yes. Liberate in this sense, yes, sure. They would have. Poles are fighters.

So we were there, and there were two months of fighting. The Germans poured everything they could. The Russians sat on the other side of the river and laughed their heads off. Let the stupid Poles get themselves killed. There

Were some Polish soldiers in the Russian army, some in Poles in the Russian army who crossed the river, swam across or boated across and so on, but they couldn't-- the Germans were pouring everything they had.

And eventually the Poles had to capitulate. That was-- it was two months, all of August and all of September. The Poles finally signed their capitulation on September 30 or something like that and were given 48 hours to evacuate all of Warsaw. Just walk out.

And of course, again, I think had Alex not been in jail, he would have known about the plans and so on and would have left in a sort of orderly fashion. But this time it didn't work. He was unable.

He didn't know. He was caught within less than 24 hours after he had walked out of jail-- by the way, all the inmates of the jail were executed. It was luck, survival, you name it. We left at dusk, October, dark, rainy, drizzly evening. We left. I think the deadline was 5 PM. We left at 4:30 or something like that and started--

You had to walk out of Warsaw?

We had to walk out of Warsaw.

Were you afraid to be identified as a Jew at that point?

I was a Jew. I mean, everybody knew it, so we had to just stay away from people. I knew that we were going back into German-occupied territory, and the future is uncertain. I was just relying on-- well, I trusted Alex, if he'll find a way to get us out of this mess. So--

Was your brother old enough for you to feel confident that he would not blow the whistle and get you caught?

He was smart enough. I'll tell you a little later. Actually, he was overdoing it. In many ways, he was overdoing it. There was no-- there was no problem. He knew and so on. And since he was allowed to go to his playground and so on, he was smart enough.

He was smart. He is and was a smart child. He was a smart kid. He was a smart man.

We started walking along this main road-- masses of people. There were some German guards about 50 yards or so every 100 feet on the side of the road. First of all, they couldn't see anything. It was getting dark, drizzly, cold. There were German transports driving along the same highway. They would even stop and offer rides to families with small children and so on.

But the road led to a camp where they were supposed-- you were supposed to register, obtain new papers, show you old papers, get them stamped, obtain new papers. And some of the people, especially single males, would be sent off to labor camps in Germany. That was the story. Of course, we couldn't get to that camp.

But this was like a 15, 20 mile walk to the camps, so it was plenty of time. And by that time, the guards were getting sleepy and tired, and there was this mass of people moving on that highway with very little traffic. It was getting darker and darker. It was really dark and--

And at some point, we were not the only ones, but we just veered off into the fields, walked like about a mile across a field of cabbage, wandered into a farm, into an attic, a barn, and spent the rest of the night there.

In the morning, he talked to a landlord, and this landlord, and another landlord. And we and a number of other people, he took us in, and let us use the attic. So there was this attic, and there were like 30 people sleeping there for a few weeks, two weeks, side by side, mattresses, cots, bales of straw, and there would all sleep there. And of course--

These were the people that were there with--

The refugees from Warsaw and people who didn't go to the camps and so on, didn't trust the Germans, didn't want to get into those labor camps, didn't have the right kind of papers. There were some other Jews in addition to us that were revealed and so on. But then obviously that was far too dangerous to be there.

And Alex said, well, we have to move on. We went on a scouting expedition one day, took a train, found a little village in the middle of nowhere. And we all moved there.

How did you get there?

Train.

Train?

Train.

Weren't afraid of being observed? We're there. I mean, the thing was this, that now at this point we're a family-- mother, father, and four kids. Three kids. Sorry. Urik was gone. There's no Urik. So it's three kids-- two boys and a girl. Actually, since I was taught to call him Uncle, so all right. So there were-- it was common all over the place.

So we were in this small village, ignorant peasants. It wasn't too bad. The only thing-- the only thing they said that-- I was doing the little chores, helping on the farm and so on. They would say, well, they're a nice family but why this is bigger boy, everything he does he works like a Jew.

One of the things was-- part of the anti-Semitism, Jews were not used to farm tasks and so on. So they didn't know how to handle a spade or any other of the farm utensils.

Mm-hmm.

And I also didn't know how to do it at and was starting to learn these things and so on. So we were there for about six weeks. It was quite obvious. By that time, the state of the war such. Remember, that was '40-- there was the fall of '44. That was November by now or maybe even December '44. December '44 by then. Mid-November, late November.

And by that time, A, D-day was June. We had passed it by. So the Allies were already way into Germany. We knew that the next Russian offensive-- the Russians would advance by let's say 100 miles per each push forward. So we're the next ones in line. The question was only surviving for a few more weeks. We all knew it.

For some reason, I think someone from the US--

When they said that you worked like a Jew, do you think that they thought you were a Jew, or they're just making that kind of--

These people did not think anything or didn't connect. Because since he was such an obvious Polish farmer, he spoke their language. He spoke their accent. He knew his way around horses. He knew his way around cows. He knew his way around-- he knew farms in and out. And they didn't think that the children were different.

They didn't doubt on them. They didn't put two and two together. Why? I don't know. After few weeks, we had to move on from there. Someone had come by and so on. There were grudges from Warsaw. And anyway, he was afraid someone might tell.

And there were stories that Jews were discovered in neighboring villages and the whole village was executed and so on. The Germans would still continue with their normal atrocities. So we moved after what? About six or seven weeks there, we moved to another place.

How far?

A slightly bigger place. Oh, I don't know. 20, 30, 40, 50 miles away.

Again by train?

Yeah.

And how did he find the farm?

Pardon?

How did he find where to go?

Well, he would-- I think he would choose a place at random or something like that, go out and so on. And since there were so many refugees, the place was swarming with refugees from all over. There was a war going on. There were refugees all over the place.

And they were moving, looking for places to live, looking for shelter. People were trying to make some money by renting places, and so on. So it was common. And there are literally thousands of people milling around those villages, et cetera.

Warsaw was evacuated. There are thousands, hundreds of thousands of people from Warsaw scattered around and so on. So we are part of this crowd.

Mm-hmm.

And fairly safe as long as people didn't observe too close. So we moved to this other place. And there after a few weeks, people started talking. This time they were a little bit smarter. Somebody put two and two together. But they decided that maybe--

And also this wasn't a farm this time. It was like a bigger place, and he was not exposed to farming. So there was this business that somebody said, well, maybe they are Jews. So he heard it, and he decided to confront the accusers and say, well, I can prove to you that I'm not Jewish. Take off my pants. I'll show you that I'm not Jewish.

I've never seen a Jew with his pants off. So how could I tell? I can't tell the difference. They don't know what it looks like. He said, all right. Let's go and see a doctor then. He would know. He went to a doctor and got himself a little certificate signed by a doctor that he's not circumcised, and therefore he's not a Jew. But at that point, he decided he started planning the next move.

And by that time, of course, there was fear, and Mela was very upset. She had just lost her son, her beloved son, and so on. And it's going on and on. There's no end to it. And Mary would say, come on, Mom. it will be over. One more week,

two more weeks, three more weeks.

This one day we were hearing that-- rumor starts. Somebody came to him and told him watch out. Better sleep with your clothes on and so on.

The Russian--

The Russian offensive starts tomorrow. How do you know? I'm part of the underground. We know. We've been told. The new Russian offensive started. And indeed we started hearing from distance of 70, 80 miles. It's like a distant thunder.

The Russian artillery barrage proceeded. There was thousands of heavy artillery pounding for two, three, four hours and so on. And we're living within a quarter of a mile south-- a fairly big highway.

And there you could see suddenly-- great, great sight-- the great German army running away. You could see first trucks. No, more or less organized. then little cars, motorcycles, and so on. Then horse driven cars, then soldiers on foot, and Germans running away. And we knew that was it.

And we are ready for any-- if for some reason fighting breaks up in our immediate area, to run away. Winter January 15, 1945, around it, heavy snow outside, temperatures close to zero. I was wearing boots for the snow.

Went outside. The toilet was an outhouse. I went to the outhouse with my boots on. And then I look out on the highway. I see a truck, an unfamiliar truck. Soldiers.

Totally strange, unfamiliar. I realized that they are Russians. Different weapons, different uniforms, different style truck. So with my boots, there was this white made, freshly made white bed. With my dirty, muddy boots I jumped on the bed. I'm free.

OK. The Russians came in. We are liberated. No more Germans. Alex from his background, he spoke a little Russian. OK, other stories for instance-- some Germans-- and the Russians, instead of-- then the Russian tanks started rolling.

You could see the great Russian army, Marshal Konev was the one that came our way, rolling by. Hundreds of tanks, artillery pieces, and so on, but they start out this little truck was ambushed by some escaping Germans. Were being overrun by these Russians. So they stopped, they got into a ditch, and they opened fire, and a couple of Russians were killed.

So Alex would started talking to these Russians and so on. He said, well, it's a pity you have these two kids that got killed. Come on. Don't worry about it. We have so many of these. The attitude of the hardened frontline troops. These were the trucks that preceded them. They were the penalty companies. People who are in some sort of penalties. Instead of putting them in jail or in stockade, they would send them as scouts.

Out in the front.

Out in front. Typical Stalin attitude. Well, OK, we are in this village, liberated, in the middle of nowhere. Alex wants to get back to Warsaw. First of all, we left on foot. His belongings were left there. Besides, he is a city man. He has to do something. He has to get into the swing of things.

So he runs-- well, we have to-- we take-- he borrows somewhere a little cart, puts our belongings on it, and we get on the road, and start on that highway in the wake of the tanks, the artillery. Going back to that little village that we have left some weeks earlier, because he knows that there in the vicinity, there is a village of German farmers. There are German citizens in Poland, so-called Volksdeutsche.

There were places in Poland and Russia and so on that there are villages of people of German origin, who have flourished under the Germans and so on. And now what he wants, he wants to get to Warsaw. Because there's no

transportation, he wants a horse. He wants to commandeer a horse and a buggy, or a wagon.

Mm-hmm.

So we go to this other village. Hello. How have you been? Everything OK? We want to go back to Warsaw. He's going with the Russians into this German village. Speaks to the Russian. He's a civilian, but of course those Germans think that he is some kind of a high commissar because he's out of uniform and so on.

He commandeers a horse and wagon. We pack our stuff on the wagon, and we get on the roads in a week toward Warsaw. Still fighting every once in a while, Russian tanks all over the place. At some point, there was this German convoy that the Russian overtook. There was some shooting, and he went to see what-- Alex went to see what was there and so on.

He found a little pig dead, frozen solid. Put in the wagon and we have to eat it later. And we just we walked a little because sitting on the wagon, that weather you can get frostbite quite easily. And I don't really how I could after all these deprivations and so on walk for these miles at a time, tens of miles.

But anyway, we made it to the vicinity of Warsaw, again backtracking essentially what we did by trains before that. And then he decided that he found out that Warsaw was totally burned by the Germans. Very little was recuperable. It was very hard. He decided to go to the second largest city of Poland, which is Lodz. And we decided we're going to move there.

This time, we took trains. That was a few weeks later. Trains were already running. We had to ride the trains on the roofs, under roofs, and so on. But we managed to Lodz. He rented a place there.

Where was this?

The city of Lodz, L-O-D-Z. "Woodge" in Poland-- in Polish. The second largest city in Poland, big center of the textile industry and so on. And this was essentially untouched during the war. There was no fighting there. It was intact.

He rented a place there, got into again the textile business and so on. Black market, Russian army, Mrs. [PERSONAL NAME] so and so, et cetera. And he started. He hired a teacher to prepare me for junior high in the fall.

This was January. By the time we got to Lodz it may have been March or something like that. So he hired a teacher. Frankly, I know very little of what he was doing or what he was up to in those days. He kept talking about it. He keeps bringing-- do you remember this one? Do you remember that person, this person, another person?

My memory is gone because I couldn't care less. I was free. I was a 12-year-old boy discovering movies. I saw any number of Russian wartime movies, the great Red Army heroes fighting the dirty Germans. I walked around the streets and so on.

Then, in September, I went to school. I'm not very good at sports and games. Excelled at--

What grade?

Seventh grade.

Seventh grade?

Junior high, seventh grade. Essentially my age group.

Mm-hmm.

Academically, no problem.

Now, you told me in the car today while we were coming over that you stopped speaking Polish at age 12.

Essentially, almost. Closer to 13. 12 going on 13. Closer to 13. After I-- it's coming to-- it's coming to an end. We're ending.

So I really don't know. David-- David-- well, about the same. I don't even know what David did. I know a little. One of the things he liked to do, he was doing the same thing at a younger age. One of his hobbies was to ride streetcars. To get on a streetcar, ride wherever it went and come back. This was a small city and not that difficult to find one's way.

And you liked movies, huh?

I went to movies. I wandered around. I read books. And at that time, we also established contact with my father in Israel. Right next door to where we lived was a Jewish community center compiling a list of Holocaust survivors. And we registered, and I actually knew where my father was because we had a ghetto. In the ghetto, we still got a Red Cross message with an address.

Actually, we knew the address. A little bit misspelled, but I knew it. And that's how the contact was established.

Mm-hmm. Did you know about the rest of your family?

Well, I knew that they were gone. I thought that they were gone. For instance, well, at least since-- Bumek, Abraham, Dr. Galar, and so on, he was trying to find out what happened to his sister-in-law, et cetera, through his contact with the Polish underground and so on. And I knew from him that they were all gone.

And at least I know-- I don't know how I know that Grandma and my aunts and the rest of them went to Majdanek. The ones who were deported early, who didn't hide and so on, like some of my great-uncles, they went to Treblinka. Then the next one was Majdanek. And then Anka, my aunt, she actually conveyed a message from Auschwitz, like I told you before.

And don't ask me how I know these things, but I know them. I've always known it. So that's part of my lore.

OK.

Alex was doing his business. I started school. At that point, Alex decided that he wants to leave Poland.

That what?

That he wants to leave Poland. Anti-- on the one hand, he was making money, and he was afraid of the communist government. On the other hand, he was hearing all kinds of things that you Jew-lover, you Jew-saver and so on. People were jealous of his wealth or his affluence.

He decided that he wants to leave Poland. And of course, he has nowhere to go. He will go to Palestine, Israel. It's my Israel. It's his Palestine. Especially the name Israel didn't exist. This is 1945.

So he will ask-- he saved two boys of the famous Gutgelt family. The Gutgelt family with its provenance and so on will bring him into Palestine. And he will-- he helped the Jews. The Jews will help him. This was the--

By that time he again had two children. He re-adopted or brought back the nephew whose papers I was using. So there are again four-- six of us total. To get into-- to leave Poland, of course you need papers. You need permits and so on. Through his connections with the Russians and money, he managed to get onto a Russian army transport at night on a Russian army truck into Berlin.

All of you?



Yes. We didn't all travel together. There was one point we were separated, but essentially we all got safely to Berlin. And then in Berlin the wall didn't exist. All you have to do is walk or ride a streetcar of some kind of public transportation into the American zone. And then there you didn't have to bribe. The American US Army was helping all sorts of refugees to get into West Germany on US Army trucks.

That's so this is the route we were taking into the DP, displaced persons camps of West Germany. The only thing, there was a hitch on the way. David got lost. Let's put it this way. It's one point of contention. We are good friends and so on. I don't want to argue with him, because he claims he really got lost. He was running an errand, which makes absolutely no sense because nobody would send a little kid like that on errands in a strange big city.

He was continuing with his hobby of riding streetcars, except that Berlin is somewhat bigger than Lodz.

[CHUCKLES]

Like 10 or 15 times bigger, and he got lost.

Uh-huh.

He found himself in the Russian zone, in a foreign town, German-speaking town, which he spoke only Polish. And he ran and-- so he tried to ride streetcars to see if he could find something familiar, getting more and more lost and confused.

So finally he saw some sort of a cafe or a bar of some kind and so on, which was nice and warm. It was again November or December or something like that of '45 now. I was in squalor for two months. It was September and we left in November.

Mm-hmm.

And he was-- so he went into this bar, German bar. And did the obvious for a little child.

He did what?

He did the obvious and natural thing for a little child.

OK.

He started crying.

Uh-huh.

They started talking to him. They couldn't talk. He was speaking Polish, and they thought he must be Russian. They gave him to the Russians, the Russian soldiers. These were still frontline Russian soldiers away from children. Some have lost children.

So they decided, well, they could talk to him. They talked to him and saw that he wouldn't tell who he was. He was afraid that since he knew that we had left Poland illegally and escaped from the Russians they may come and grab us.

Oh. So he was going to sacrifice himself, not tell them who he was. He was a nice-- he was a nice child. And the Russian major decided he's going to adopt him as a mascot, as a kid, as a substitute for a lost child and so on. It's still not very-- there was very little bureaucracy there.

And we were all frantic and started looking and so on. Alex put ads in all the German papers offering a reward for whoever sent the children. There were all kinds of rumors around that there were sausage found made of human meat

and so on. Two weeks went by-- no sign of David.

But then the Russians had a German woman who was either cleaning or offering other services or both to these Germans. And she was reading the German papers. She recognized that this is the kid. So she went to the German police. She wants the reward.

But the police want the reward and so on. But eventually the Russians then wanted also part of the reward. So Alex, I think, paid the reward three or four times over. We're very pleased that the Germans were-- that we were reunited.

Mm-hmm.

So after a few weeks of that, we finally got on these American army trucks at night. The only thing I remember, they were big trucks, and the drivers were all Black. I think the first time I ever saw Blacks, or Afro-Americans, or the way they were called then by everybody, almost everybody-- Negroes, niggers.

So anyway, we ended up in the turmoil of West Germany, the streams of refugees moving back and forth to Western Germany, most on trains. And there was a password, a Jewish password. Many of them were Jews, not all of them. When the Jews helped each other, there was a password called "amcha." "Amcha" in Hebrew means "your people."

And this was the password Jews went by and they helped each other there. It was very difficult to get on those trains because they're crowded. But there were the Jews, there they will make room for you and pull the children in through windows. So that's why we were involved in that.

And we ended up at the biggest DP camp in Germany, Zeilsheim, near Frankfurt. For some reason, we couldn't be admitted into camp or he didn't want to be admitted into camp. My memory here is obviously getting a little bit vague why and how, but we ended renting some rooms from a German family in a house and drawing our rations from the camp. And we lived there for almost-- for about a year.

I was the first one to pick up German and became quite fluent and served as the family interpreter. Schools did not exist. Only organization that was there was the Jewish Agency inside the Jewish camp. And let's put it this way, the teenagers were getting paramilitary training as preparation for illegal immigration. There were schools teaching Hebrew, and the classes were by previous knowledge, not by age.

So we were put-- we actually went to that school. Even the Roslan children started learning a little bit Hebrew. Then we decided we're not interested in that. We didn't pick up any Hebrew. And at that time, all that time I was exchanging letters with my father, telling him that-- my grandfather had certificates and permits of entrance into Israel-Palestine from the very early days.

As soon as he arrived, he got permits and so on. So I could go. And they wanted to bring me always. I said I'm not going to go anywhere until we take care of Alex. I won't be separated from him. I don't want to be a Jew. I don't care about being a Jew. I've suffered enough for being a Jew and so on.

And I was putting it in any number of letters to my father. I don't know what became of them. He must have destroyed them. I never saw them again. But I wrote any number of these letters.

Telling him these things?

Telling him these things. Yes, I have no use for him. I don't want to be a Jew. I want to stay with Alex. If he wants to help, he wants to see me, there is only one way-- he has to get Alex and his family into Palestine so we can all live together.

And Alex wanted to go?

That's what he wanted then. OK. And I kept-- every letter I was getting from my father, he would say I miss you, I want

to see you, and so on. Send tearful letters. He would send messengers and relatives and acquaintances, and this miracle, these two safe children, and so on.

There was a Passover Seder, and they dragged me to that one and showed me off. And people were crying. And I said, I have nothing to do with these barbaric customs and so on.

But as time was going by, Alex was the first one to realize that something is wrong here, that he will never be able to--

Never be able to what?

To go to Palestine and so on.

Why not?

Because, well, the Jews won't have it, one way or the other. He also decided that he can't go back to Poland because he escaped and so on, and he would get himself in trouble. So what else is available? The great big US.

And I still don't know how. By talking, by meeting the right people, by judiciously distributing a few gifts but not too many and so on, he actually got himself and his family an immigrant's visa.

And of course he couldn't take us. Obvious. And he eventually convinced me that our ways have to part and I have to join my father in Israel. And of course David and I, we have to join him, and he will be going to the United States. And he--

Would he have kept you if it could have been?

Yes. Yes. It's the usual biological versus-- definitely.

He really became your father--

Yeah, sure.

--for all purposes.

But it is a very practical sense and instincts of survival. He didn't want to live in Germany. He was-- he spent, all his war years at least, dealing, wheeling and dealing on black markets at one time or another. Those DP camps had the flourishing black markets.

He was only spending money there. Actually, the money he had accumulated in Poland ended up not being worth very much because he had to convert it to counterfeit dollars, and most of the--

The very popular currency, I don't know whether you've ever seen it, but the British currency didn't have-- up to 1 pound they had money, banknotes, like the money we're used to. Above it the money was thin paper, like tissue paper, imprinted with like print and so on. Very easy to counterfeit.

And the Germans were counterfeiting it in millions. But this was very, very popular because it's very easy to hide. It looks like tissue paper when folded. It was very popular for people like Alex, like everybody was trying to move money from one place to another. So he had bought a lot of this, but we found out it was totally worthless. It was counterfeit.

So just toward the end of '46, early '47, January, our ways parted. They went into this camp in preparation for immigration to the US in Frankfurt, Germany. And I and David went on a train to Paris, were met by a friend of my father's who was there on some kind of a mission, and spent a few weeks there and eventually got on a boat and ended up in Tel Aviv, where I started essentially new life.

I became an Israeli, became a scientist, went to school, normal school, and started a completely new chapter.

How was it to be with your father again?

Let's put it this way. No real warm relations at all. First of all, he was Orthodox. I have no use for it, no understanding for it. Just to have the peace of mind, I followed it a little bit and had absolutely no interest.

He had-- there was this resentment, which at one point the usual teenager versus parent fights and so on. I ran and my argument, and I told him, or he hit me, or he threatened me or something like that. And I told him, well, you have no right to do this. You have no right to me at all. You abandoned me for the Germans to kill and saved your own hide and so on.

No, it was very bluntly that, and very, very insensitive and hurting way, like only a teenager would, and so on. And of course he cried. But we never established-- we never got a very close relationship. He is my father, and I respect him for being my father. He is-- and so on. But we never developed a very, very close relationship. And since--

Let's put it this way-- I arrived in Israel, I was 13. By the time I got over learning the language and got into school, I was in the stage where teenagers have very little use for their parents.

Mm-hmm.

And under the circumstances. Then on top of that, he or my grandfather, both of them did something that he was-- I kept writing letters to the Roslans, and they wrote me back. But evidently my father and grandfather were systematically destroying the letters to sever the contact, to sever the relationship, sever the dependence.

Between?

Between me and Alex.

Uh-huh. They wouldn't give you their letters?

They wouldn't-- I never saw any letters. I think they destroyed my letters, too. Put it this way, I was busy. I didn't know where to buy stamps. I wouldn't go and buy stamps. Are you going to the post office? Why don't you mail my letter and so on? Or something like that.

Or when letters came, I was in school. They would pick up the mail. And we lost track. It took years. I was trying to-- in the United States, once you move around a certain community, I wrote the American consulate and so on. Finally, my brother found them, or his wife then found someone who was a social worker in New York City. And she heard the story and said I'll find them for you. And she found them.

Where did she find them?

In New York City. They moved out of the Polish community. Alex came here. First they had another child. Then he started working as a house worker, very hard labor. But he was looking for opportunities. And in the 19-- they arrived in the States in 1947, in the early '50s. He became a builder on a shoestring.

He would buy some land in New Jersey, buy a few lots, build houses, financing by banks, sell those houses, and build another one, and another one. People like him lost their shirts and their pants and everything they had and got into debt for life in the recession of '58. The whole thing stopped.

He came out with the money he never had and with a beautiful house, two family house, in a good section in Queens, Jamaica Estates. Today, it's deteriorated a little, but it was an excellent part of Queens. The house is-- well, his son has it now. It's a half a million dollar plus house.

So he came out on top. He decided that this is too dangerous and so on. So he became a foreman in a cleaning office cleaning company in New York. Did reasonably well, retired in Florida. He did well for his background and so on.

He lost part of his daring and adventurousness when he came here, getting a little bit older. He never quite adjusted to the country. He missed Poland. In his older age for years, he was toying with the idea of going back to Poland and live off of Social Security. It'll go a long ways in communist Poland.

She would have none of it. Now US Social Security doesn't go that far in Poland. He's much better off where he is in Florida. And that's where he will end his life, he said. He's healthy, but--

How old is he now?

88.

88? When did you re-establish contact with him?

Well, by letter in '59, '60. When we first came to this country in '62, they met us at then Idlewild airport.

What was that like for you?

Great reunion. And of course Geulah was there then. That was the first-- oh, the daughter was with us. For her, for both our girls it's Grandpa Alex and Grandma Mela. It's been like that for years. Both visited us here and made it a point to visit Alex in Florida.

I mean, they're grown-ups now, but for that it's another set of grandparents.

Mm-hmm.

When they were little over here in the New York area, they still lived there, we spent Christmases together. And under their Christmas tree there were always gifts not only for their children and so on and later grandchildren but also for our children.

He knows how much you feel about him having saved you.

Yes, but unfortunately he is-- well, there's one great deed he feels he has not been compensated or rewarded and so on.

By who?

By the world in general, by the people, by whoever. He is old. He's alone. His wife died. He is afraid that he will not have enough money to pay for his hospitals and doctors. He has a deep mistrust of the local Florida medical profession, with some justification. He overdoes it. He exaggerates it, but there is some justification because there are dishonest physicians who prey on people like him.

Well, I think I've come the full circle.

So he's bitter now?

Yes. Especially-- well, especially over the last few years since Mela's death. It's hard for-- they've been together for 70 years, 71, which is more than I can think of. It's very unusual because he married very early and so on. They've been together, did everything together, accomplished everything together.

With her common sense and so on, she complimented him in many, many ways. I don't think he could have, in spite of this seeming everything to the contrary, I think he would not have been able to survive. He would have been too adventurous. She held him back. She kept him from making--

Being too impulsive?

Being too impulsive, yes. But I don't think he ever-- now he will tell you all kinds of things, why he did it and so on. And he's telling all kinds of stories, how his grandmother and grandfather helped Jews in the villages in the old days and so on.

I think that he believes in it. I mean, he doesn't invent it, but that's not it. He did it partly because of pity, partly because of adventurousness, partly because I don't think he realized what he's getting himself into, never thought it out, but then his instincts took over. And they are great instincts. Unbelievable.

Jacob, what do you think all this has done for your life, all the hiding, all the being invisible?

Well, I am trying. I'm trying to think and believe that I managed to come well balanced and mentally sound and so on, even being in spite of it all. I'm grateful to Israel for providing the purpose, and the home, and the intensity of this period in Israel of the formation of the state of Israel.

I arrived in Israel in February 1947, six months before the November 29 declaration of the United Nations, lived through this exciting period. For many years, I suffered from a fairly common syndrome in Israel. There are people like me, and there are many, many people more famous than I who pretend to be part of Israel, to be born there, to be sabras, and not to-- They create essentially a fictitious past and so on.

I never got that far. I never. I try to be a little vague. If asked specifically, I would tell it and so on. But many people have known me for years, didn't realize that I was not, at least, if not a sabra then that I wasn't there from my early childhood, that I actually was a Holocaust survivor. And recently now everybody knows it, that I was hiding it. I've gotten over that phase, and I'm not inventing any fictitious past.

But I hope and believe that I have not suffered any permanent damage. Of course, had I been born-- let's say, had the war not come, and had Poland not been occupied by the Germans, and had there not be a Holocaust, I would have probably lived a different life as a son of a wealthy well-to-do Jewish family and so on, and in Poland.

Had I been born in this country, I would have been something else. I'd probably be the same-- I would have probably become a scientist or a physicist, because that's deep inside me. I don't know. I've never been into, say, analysis or something like that. So it's all speculation.

Mm-hmm. Do you think that your experience with Alex has given you a sense of what people are capable of and how much they can give in situations where they don't have to? Or do you think that the Holocaust and your experience in Poland has made it difficult for you to feel about the goodness of men?

Let's put it this way. I think Alex has this influence and so on. He has shown me that there is goodness, that people can be good. I don't believe-- I'm not naive. And I don't believe that these tragedies show they're fairly rare, but a great admirer of him, and I think he has affected my general makeup and so on somewhere.

And it took me a while to realize that I think that part that I really did not develop any very deep, meaningful traumas because of these experience is like I said-- love, the feeling of warmth, that feeling that there is someone I can rely on, that there is support, that I'm not alone. I'm not left to fight the German demon by myself as a little kid.

There's this strong-- and he is-- he always looked young, and strong, and powerful, exuding confidence and warmth. And I think that helped.

Do you think there could be another Holocaust?

Yes. I mean, I don't know how and so on, but let's put it this way. What's a Holocaust? What's the difference between, say, Cambodian killing fields and a German concentration camp? A little bit more organization. There is this total

disregard for human life and for human values, and you feel it all over the place.

I'll give you another sort of experience and so on. I vividly remember night in 1968. It was my first visit to Germany as an adult, as a scientist. I was in Mainz. I gave a seminar at their invitation. I gave a seminar on my work at the university. This is an evening seminar, and they have this custom that after the 7 PM seminar, after the seminar you sit there well into the night, consume cases of Rhine wine.

And the incongruous addition to it, the foods that goes with it are frankfurters and strong German mustard. It's typically German. I mean, mostly it's beer, but since this is Mainz and Rhineland, the beer gives way to wine.

And I was sitting there. There were people around me who were talking of different things and so on. And somehow, as it always does, the talk came to the Holocaust. I don't know. I don't even remember if they knew that I was myself a survivor or just an Israeli and so on.

And eventually came up to the point where why the Germans, are the Germans to take all the blame and so on? And then one of them, the one who sat across the table from me, the younger ones were trying to be a little bit more reticent, but he asked me, let me ask you a point blank blunt question. Are you absolutely sure that under given certain conditions your own fellow countrymen, your Israelis, would not be capable of performing under orders and then and so on the same kind of atrocities that my fellow countrymen performed in Auschwitz and other concentration camps?

Let's put it this way. After all that wine and so on, and being normally a truthful person, I didn't want to lie. We were beyond showing off. The time was 2:00 AM or maybe 3:00 AM. And I said, well, no, I cannot guarantee that.

And you can look. Look at Serbs. Look at IRA. Look at over the world. Of course. I hope that's why this interview and other interviews and fighting the denial of the Holocaust and remembering the Holocaust and so on are so important.

And there's one thing that I hope, that it would be that the difference between the Holocaust and the rest of the things I just referred to, as there are many, many other examples, is that it was a conscious decision, and planned, and it's a engineered execution. All the others are more and more or less random.

This one, that's typical German. They plan. They engineer. They design. They do it scientifically. But that's about the only difference.

Jacob, on behalf of the Holocaust Oral History Project, I want to thank you tremendously for your willingness to come and to tell us your story and to give us so much of yourself in the process of doing that. And we greatly appreciate what you've done for us. Thank you.

You're welcome, and I hope if I can just add my little tiny bit to preventing another Holocaust happening, then it was worthwhile. At least, that's my objective. I agreed to this interview and to future ones like it, if asked, if you were to ask.

All right. Tell us what the book is, and then you can tell us about this photograph.

OK. The pictures we are looking at are part of my cherished personal collection. Unfortunately, the collection is in Israel and not here. What you are looking at is a book, a children's book by the name of Jacob's Rescue based on my story. It's a fictionalized version of my story, written by Malka Drucker and Michael Halperin, and published by Bantam Books a few years ago in this country.

Again, Jacob's Rescue. And in here we have-- the photograph you are looking at now is a photograph of Alex, David, and myself taken in 1946 in Poland, in the city of Lodz. We were living there, and this was taken to really send to my father, to show him what his long lost and recovered children looked like then. I am about 12 years old, and David is-- 1946, so he's about eight years old. And Alex is at his mid-thirties, handsome, smiling. That's it.

This photo?

This photo is a photo of Alex and Mela in their more advanced age. It was taken about 92 in Florida when the book was being published. And this is just Alex and Mela in their home in Florida as they looked. Alex still looks about the same today. Mela looked a little bit older maybe. Regretfully, she died almost exactly a year ago today.

Why don't you go ahead and tell us about it?

OK. This photograph here is of myself and my wife Geulah, taken about 10 years ago at Michael Halperin's house in LA. This again-- part of the book. If you want to take David also?

Yeah.

Why not? I'm doing them all.

So we're going to [INAUDIBLE] down and reveal David.

And then I think we'll take one picture of the book's cover.

OK. Go ahead.

This is my brother David some years ago. Well, Little David, or Tadek, as he was called by Alex during the war, and still is, officially Professor David Gilat of Tel Aviv University.

What's this?

This is the cover page of the book Jacob's Rescue, like I said, based on the story you heard at length. It's a children's book written by Malka Drucker and Michael Halperin, published by Bantam Books. And for the here and now, it's quite a popular reading material in American and Canadian schools.