

1 INTERVIEW WITH: ALFRED TIBOR

2 INTERVIEWER:

3 DATE:

4 PLACE:

5 TRANSCRIBER: Amy Kerns

6  
7 Q Your name is?

8 A My name is Alfred Tibor, T-i-b-o-r.

9 Q And are you a survivor?

10 A I am.

11 Q Where were you?

12 A I wasn't in a concentration camp, and this is very  
13 unusual, because I was in the forced labor battalion. And  
14 the forced labor battalion was one of the organizations where  
15 aged 20 is young man who was drafting age, they were drafted  
16 into the forced labor battalion. We were moving with the  
17 Army and doing the dirty work and systematically they killed  
18 us with hunger and with suffering and with beating and  
19 execution. And meantime we had to work, and were working 18  
20 hours daily, and living in the -- under the sky. I was  
21 captured by the Russians in 1943. First of all I was drafted  
22 into the Hungarian Army in 1940.

23 Q You are a Hungarian?

24 A I am -- I was born in Hungary. I am a Jew from  
25 Hungary.

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1 Q And what town in Hungary?

2 A In Budapest.

3 Q And then you were drafted in --

4 A I was drafted in 1940. And we were sent to the  
5 eastern front and we were serving in the eastern front and we  
6 got captured by the Russians in 1943, January the 12th, and  
7 they promised us we are going to be Jews you are going to be  
8 here equal. It was right. We were equal with the Nazis and  
9 they put us into their prisoner of war camps and I spend  
10 there six years as a prisoner of war. When I came home from  
11 Russia in 1947, at that time I found out my family, all  
12 entire family, was eliminated and they died in Auschwitz. My  
13 brother, older brother, we are -- we were three of us  
14 brothers. One brother is here with me in the United States.  
15 My older brother, who was executed in 1945, and for his sake,  
16 his name was Tibor, and that's why I changed -- my original  
17 name was Goldstein, and I changed for his memory the -- his  
18 name, first name was Tibor, and we changed for family name to  
19 Tibor.

20 Q Both you and your brother changed?

21 A Me and my brother changed. And this is the very  
22 short way to make my stories. Now the sculpting, what I am  
23 doing here and what I am exhibiting, it wouldn't happen if I  
24 wouldn't go through in the forced labor battalion or  
25 concentration camps or if I wouldn't be persecuted like I was

1 from my birth, these pieces wouldn't exist and wouldn't born.  
2 These are the background of my spended years into prison camp  
3 and into the forced labor battalion.

4 Q All right. Let's describe this bronze.

5 A This bronze piece is my first, and if you could see  
6 it, it is expressing a sorrow, a outcry. It doesn't give  
7 anything else, just a feeling if you are looking the faces,  
8 it is just the feeling and the big question, the big sorrow  
9 question is asking why we have to die. It is just only one  
10 person who is not asking the question, the youth one who is  
11 holding the fist. Because in the first time when we were  
12 discovering our family was executed, everybody has in their  
13 mind to try to pay back. Only it is -- it is just changing,  
14 it is the first impulse after you realize you can't pay back  
15 your mother's eye, so it's no eye for eye, or tooth for  
16 tooth, because you can't pay back the innocent childrens who  
17 were killed and executed and the German soldiers who had the  
18 pleasure to killing them. We can't make it. So in this  
19 case, in the first moment you are thinking about you want to  
20 pay back and you hate it, only here is the story where it's  
21 coming, the hatred just like a circle. It's -- sometimes it  
22 is down and sometimes it is up. If I am continue to hate, my  
23 children is going to be hated for somebody else who I killed,  
24 and I would be the same lower level, and I would put myself  
25 into those German soldiers and Hungarian soldiers what they

1 did for me, so how should I go down to their level? So the  
2 hatred stops. So that's why I have just one person here is  
3 holding the fist, because it was the first impulse. This is  
4 my first piece of --

5 Q We've got to explain it a little bit. There's a  
6 group of heads and hands. Describe it.

7 A The group of heads, because the eye and the faces  
8 could express the sorrow the most, and the holding of hands  
9 is showing they are innocent, they can't do nothing, they are  
10 in a flame and they are reaching out, they are trying to  
11 reach out, and they are sinking into, because this piece  
12 actually is -- was designed to go on something which is  
13 giving a story and this is on the top of it.

14 Q Oh, I see. Yeah. Now, that picture has a lot of  
15 hands. Hands were very symbolic.

16 A The hand is very symbolic because the innocent  
17 people, if you are thinking just for your -- for your action  
18 when you are -- you can't do nothing, you are holding up your  
19 hand and you are crying out --

20 Q Right.

21 A -- you are crying out to God, you are crying out to  
22 nature or crying out because you are filled -- filled -- you  
23 can't do anything else; you are just crying out and asking  
24 why you have to do that or why you are -- has to perish in  
25 that situation like that. That's why you are holding the

1 hand up.

2 Q The hand up and palm --

3 A Always --

4 Q -- exposed.

5 A Always exposed. Always.

6 Q Now, the heil Hitler, explain that, in that one.

7 A The heil Hitler is a different, holding hand like  
8 this. This is crying out and they are asking it, why you are  
9 -- have to die or why I have to die. The other one is  
10 holding the hand and giving a direction and telling you and  
11 telling, hey, this is we are. That's why they were holding  
12 the hand like that, because they wanted to destroy and they  
13 wanted to be a super power in holding the hand that way.  
14 They greeted that way. Only this holding hand is a different  
15 hand than this holding hand.

16 Q The heil Hitler is a straight elbow.

17 A Straight elbow. This one is -- it's --

18 Q Bent elbow.

19 A It makes no different the elbow. We are talking  
20 about the palms, --

21 Q Yes.

22 A -- the hand.

23 Q The palm.

24 A The hand is giving you the question.

25 Q Right. It's crying out. Now, then, --

1           A       Now, I have another piece, which is my second piece,  
2 which is the title of the flame. The flame is -- has a  
3 double meaning. The flame where the people in perished. And  
4 the flame, when they are perishing, the old man is holding,  
5 reaching out and giving this scroll, which is our heritage,  
6 giving to the young one, the survivor, who is grabbing it,  
7 and the other one who is holding the hand and keeping the gun  
8 in that hand, and the gun is draped with a Israeli flag. So  
9 they didn't die in vain. This is the basic, fundamental  
10 basic why Israelis existed after 1945. So they didn't -- and  
11 I have the third piece, which is that -- a quotation of  
12 Emi--lou--sa Ba--waing, which if you would quote that I would  
13 hold it for you, and it is the Ezekiel vision, the prophet  
14 vision about the dry bones, and that piece is explaining that  
15 one. This is the remembrance piece.

16           Or I have the fourth piece there, which is the last  
17 embrace, which is going to be in the Youngstown, Ohio, going  
18 to stand in the front of the Jewish Center, 18 foot high.  
19 It's a universal piece. All the people, they are not  
20 related. They are related of the suffering. They are  
21 hugging each other, because it is their last moment. They  
22 are realizing it is their last moment, because they are tied  
23 together with the barbed wire so they are not escape. It is  
24 their last minute, and the last embrace before they are taken  
25 to the gas chamber.

1 Q Could we talk a little bit about your experiences in  
2 the forced labor camp.

3 A If I would start to talk about it I would take too  
4 much time and too much -- because I could tell you stories.  
5 Very shortly I could tell you. In a way I was liberated from  
6 the German Army and Hungarian Army. We have to -- we don't  
7 have to distinguish. German Army is the same army was the  
8 Hungarian, the Romanian, the Italian, who were in the  
9 battlefield. So we were liberated from them because when we  
10 went to the battlefield the officer announced that we are not  
11 going to go home; we going to be eliminated, our dog tag is  
12 going to go home. So in this case, in a certain way, the  
13 Russians liberated us from that situation, only they -- they  
14 put us in the same situation like the Nazis became. So we  
15 became -- became the same person and we became prisoner of  
16 wars, only in the forced labor battalion we were working 18  
17 hours or whatever in the cold weather. We didn't live in  
18 their homes. We didn't rest that we -- we rested by the open  
19 fire under the sky. We lived on the snow field, we died in  
20 the snow field, because the battalion which I had been, that  
21 was 275 people, two of us survived. So we were beaten, we  
22 were executed, and it is just the luck and hope of the  
23 tomorrow kept us alive. The luck I am saying because we  
24 didn't get the bullet -- until we were hearing, how it was  
25 whistling, the bullet, until we were alive. Or if we were

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1 driven to their -- to their mines, mine field, and we had to  
2 pick the mines not with tools, not with instruments, just  
3 with our hand, our hand or the feet. And if you didn't had  
4 been blown up you were lucky. If you were unlucky you blew  
5 up. So this is the situation and this is the situation  
6 where we lived, and I was 70 pound. That time my size and my  
7 weight usually a hundred forty-five. And I was 70 pounds  
8 when I was captured by the Russians. And after that  
9 situation, which was already that time we were just hanging  
10 on. If the Russians wouldn't come one or two months, if --  
11 almost I am saying after that, whatever happen, even if you  
12 have willpower, you wouldn't be able to survive. I was  
13 almost blind, and I was 75 pounds.

14 Q How did you know you were 75 pounds?

15 A Because after, when the Russians get us, they were  
16 taking us to the hospital because we were sick, and --  
17 hospital; so-called hospital -- it was just a place, and  
18 there where they weighed us and I found out I was 75 pounds.  
19 So from that situation we had to go to a -- other dead camps  
20 where in one camp where I was after the liberation. We went  
21 to a camp where it was 18,000 people died by hunger and there  
22 was cannibalism where people ate their human flesh. So this  
23 kind of camps we went after we had a consolidated situation  
24 when they took us to Siberia and we were working on the  
25 woods, we were cutting trees for five and a half years.



1 Q Cutting trees for firewood or just cutting trees?

2 A We were cutting trees and we were supplying the  
3 paper mills with --

4 Q Oh.

5 A -- with wood.

6 Q So the Russians didn't make a distinction between  
7 Nazis and Jews?

8 A No. No. No distinction. We were equal. They were  
9 telling us Jews come over, you going to lose your yellow  
10 band, arm band, because this was our identification. Only  
11 after they took the yellow band and they took -- put us into  
12 their same prisoner of war camps like any other soldiers.

13 Q How did that work? I mean, --

14 A We --

15 Q Well, but I mean you were with the Nazis who had  
16 been killing you. How did that work?

17 A After -- all that, after the Nazis, they weren't so  
18 bad human; they were lower rate than the reds, because when  
19 they beat -- a Nazi soldier was beaten, he gave up, he didn't  
20 have a hope, he didn't have a willpower, because he wasn't  
21 get used to it. He didn't get the chocolate anymore, so he  
22 didn't survive so easily. And they realize they are in the  
23 same mess like we are, so they didn't take any distinction.  
24 We were Jews, we were in a different barracks, and the German  
25 were different barracks. We were working together and we

1 were equal, the same equal, like any other prisoner.

2 Q Did you talk to the Germans about what happened?

3 A Sure, we were -- no, on that situation the Russians  
4 were selecting, selecting the SS, selecting the people who  
5 was making crimes in the Russian soil, and they were taking  
6 to the place where they -- they tried. Only we were the  
7 same, same situation, and we were there five and a half  
8 years. I was captured and generally drugged, and I was  
9 released in 1947, August the 11th.

10 Q Now, how did you -- did you have to prove to the  
11 Russians you were Jew, or they didn't care?

12 A No, they didn't care. After -- they were -- we were  
13 registered and we were saying we are Jews from Hungary and  
14 that's -- that was enough. We didn't have to do anything  
15 else. We had to work the same way as anybody else and --

16 Q Why did the Russians keep you prisoner?

17 A Because in their way, in their view, we were the  
18 same Nazis because we feed, we help the Nazis in their -- in  
19 their army. So we were soldiers even if we were captured and  
20 we were -- we were kept by the Germans, only we were soldiers  
21 in their eye because they said why you didn't revolt; so how  
22 can you revolt when you have a -- you are a platoon, and you  
23 have shovels in your hand and the gun is in back of you, so  
24 you couldn't move. It's -- they were killing systematically,  
25 they are killing people, so it's no way to fight. It is lots

1 of question. In the free world they are asking how come the  
2 Jews didn't revolt? We were revolting someplace, sometimes,  
3 only it just didn't -- didn't help.

4 Q And are people asking how come the Germans, as a  
5 people, could have, so many of them, done these terrible  
6 things year in and year out? I mean, it's one thing to be --  
7 want revenge and kill one person, --

8 A Yes.

9 Q -- but systematic --

10 A They enjoyed it.

11 Q Why?

12 A Why? It is -- it is a very philosophical question,  
13 and again the tape would be too long to say it.

14 Q It's all right. Try a little of --

15 A Only I am just telling you, they were raised -- they  
16 are a military people, they were raised and they were  
17 treated, and they -- the Jews became a scapegoat for their  
18 suffering, so they found a good demagogue who was telling  
19 them, hey, these are the Jews, that's why you are suffering,  
20 you have to beat them and take away and you're going to have  
21 it, you're going to have it fine. The German soldiers were  
22 having deed for the Russian territory, and they told them you  
23 are -- if you are going to win the war, you're going to have  
24 a field -- that is going to be your slavery, all the people,  
25 all the Russians are going to serve you. So they believed

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1 it. Because you are asking a question the Germans are so  
2 intelligent people. Now here we are talking about a little  
3 philosophy. But intelligence is not education. Intelligence  
4 you have to be born. Educated people could be unintelligent;  
5 just could be educated. So that's the whole idea. They  
6 scientifically found out which is the best way to get rid of  
7 the Jews. Only they found a good way to kill people, only  
8 they couldn't get rid of the Jews because I am here to  
9 telling you the story. So they didn't succeeded. We paid  
10 our price for it, only that's why my -- my thinking is --  
11 that's why I am doing my sculpting, that's why I am doing my  
12 interviewing to you, because I want the next generation or  
13 anybody who is not familiar with the histories, I want them  
14 to know that, yes, there was the holocaust, there are people  
15 who are still alive and they can prove it, and I want to give  
16 the answer for those people who are again educated people who  
17 are printing book and they are saying the holocaust is just a  
18 hoax. Those are also educated people and they are living  
19 here in the United States. So until I could open my mouth  
20 and I could make something worthwhile with my life, and this  
21 is my believing, that's why I -- I had been saved. Now, if  
22 you are religious you could think your God help you --

23 Q Right.

24 A -- for that one. You have to believe something.

25 Only God help me because I am here and I am talking to you,

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1 and whatever any question you have you just ask me more.

2 Q Yeah. And you must have been strong then. I mean,  
3 you say luck, but you didn't die of disease, you didn't die  
4 of the cold, you didn't -- I mean you didn't --

5 A Yes. On this case I have to tell you that just a  
6 little episode when I was laying in the ground, completely  
7 naked, and I had the typhoid sickness. And the hank people,  
8 the hank people were saying, hey, this guy is finished, and I  
9 said to myself, on the ground I was naked in the cold, that  
10 was the hospital where we were -- there was no bed, just  
11 ground floor, wooden floor, and I was completely naked, and I  
12 said to myself, no, I am never going to be the corpses like  
13 these are, which is -- was put there in a big stack. And I  
14 said to myself, I am never going to be like that. And I  
15 succeeded, because I had a hope, the hope of tomorrow. And I  
16 said to myself, if it's bad today, only tomorrow it's going  
17 to be beautiful. This is what's keeping me alive. The hope  
18 of tomorrow. And this the way I am working till today. I  
19 never complaining of bad weather, because it is always a  
20 beautiful day, always a beautiful weather, and always the sun  
21 shining. If you don't believe it, people are saying, "Oh,  
22 Alfred, how could you say this is a beautiful weather?" And  
23 I said, said "If it's raining, if it's pouring, oh, it is  
24 beautiful," I said, "I could prove it to you. Just go to the  
25 airport, go fly up to the sky, and you're going to see above

1 the cloud there is the sunshine. So even if you don't see it  
2 you have to believe it." This is the way with God believing  
3 also. You can't see it, only you have to believe it. You  
4 have to believe something. And this is what I believed, it's  
5 -- there has to be a tomorrow and a humanity, and the people  
6 going to change. And there is going to be many other people  
7 who are not bad, and that it has to be, and today I feel that  
8 it is -- this the way.

9 Q So in a sense that -- that ten years that you  
10 suffered so much, you saw the worst, the absolute worst in  
11 human and -- but yet you felt you were also brought to  
12 another place, the absolute best, I mean the hope --

13 A It's the hope which is hold you all the time and  
14 keep you the spirit, and if the people are losing the hope  
15 they're going to lose everything.

16 Q Yes.

17 A You forget everything with money. With everything  
18 you have to have the hope and you have -- that gives you a  
19 willpower. The thing is, how it is the money, for example,  
20 here we are in the United States, everybody is talking about  
21 business. I just could tell you a little episode in a camp  
22 what makes me to think about business and money. And an  
23 episode where one man, who have a belt in his waist, and it  
24 was zippered and it was filled up with diamond and gold. And  
25 he was asking -- he was crawling in the floor and asking --

1 asking a glass of water, clear water, which it wasn't  
2 infected, because all the wells were infected because the  
3 people fell into the water and it was typhus. And he  
4 couldn't get, with all the diamonds and with all the gold  
5 jewelry he wanted to buy one glass of clear water. He died  
6 there and rolled over in the gold, and rolled over in the  
7 diamond. Nobody gave a damn for the whole thing, because  
8 there was something else, and you couldn't get it. So this  
9 is the episode which I was telling to certain millionaires  
10 here in the United States. They said I am crazy; only I  
11 don't think so I am the crazy. I think so the people who are  
12 going for the money, and just the money, that's where is the  
13 mistake. I go because the evil -- the money you have to have  
14 to exist only to live. It is the hope what's keep you live.

15 Q Well, you know, yesterday I was talking to survivors  
16 and --

17 A Yes.

18 Q -- I was looking -- you talk about being  
19 thirsty, --

20 A Yes.

21 Q -- thirsty for some human, thirsty for some kindness  
22 that you experienced.

23 A Yes.

24 Q Was there anybody who helped you, or whom you  
25 helped?

1           A     Only way how I, directly how I survived, I didn't  
2 get any help; it was just a luck and willpower. This is the  
3 way I could. I felt after, I felt human feelings from many,  
4 because let's put it this way, I am thinking in a different  
5 way than you think. Nobody could think the way how I think.  
6 Because I just could tell you the stories; only I lived  
7 through what I am telling you. So that's why it is just  
8 understandable, and I believed in humanity and that's why I  
9 believe the good and not the evil. That's the way everything  
10 went, how I -- you are saying anybody help. So if I am going  
11 back to my memory, and for example when we were driven five  
12 nights, five days, walking without water, without food, it  
13 was that time when the Russians were capturing us and taking  
14 away from the battlefield because we were a certain number.  
15 We were prisoners and they needed us the number. So it makes  
16 no difference we were dead or alive; only they just needed  
17 us. So after the five day march, five day and five nights, I  
18 got the food from an old Russian lady. We were going through  
19 in a village, and they were standing and looking us, and she  
20 was giving me a handful of sunflower seed. That was the  
21 first food what I ate after five days. So when I am going to  
22 the super market and I see the sunflower seeds, you are not  
23 going to think like that. How you can think? I am thinking  
24 about my food, the first food after five days, a little  
25 sunflower seeds, which is the human side. I knew this lady

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1 didn't personally selected me; just she wanted to do  
2 something good and she was, and I was the lucky one who have  
3 the hand out and she put it in the sunflower seeds. So this  
4 kind of episodes I could tell you hundreds and hundreds. And  
5 we were walking night, and we were sleeping night when we  
6 were walking. You wouldn't believe it. You could sleep and  
7 you are walking. Yes, you are walking and you could sleep  
8 when you are marching.

9 An episode, how I believe humanity, I took myself, I have  
10 a statue, it is not exhibited here, the ultimate friendship.  
11 Ultimate friendship when I was carrying a friend of mine more  
12 than 48 hours in my shoulder. Because if I would let him  
13 down he just wanted to sit down a little bit. If you are  
14 sitting down the cold is catching you; you are falling asleep  
15 and you die. Or the end of the column the Russians would  
16 kill you and they put you in the truck, because the number  
17 has to be the same number, dead or alive, he had to keep all  
18 the troops. This is the way, the willpower you are getting  
19 to have. So I was giving helping hand, and I was getting  
20 helping hand. And no other way, just if you are believing  
21 the human feeling. And there are good people and there are  
22 lots of evil people. Only there are all the time good  
23 people.

24 Q Yeah. Well, you got to believe that. I mean,  
25 or --

1 A Sure.

2 Q -- you die of despair.

3 A Just one thing it is important you have to know, and  
4 you can be ignorant. If you are ignorant and you are not  
5 thinking about anybody else, that's could happen. This is  
6 the way, that's why we are here, I think. This is my way of  
7 saying never again. They are not going to able to drive me  
8 anymore, because I am going to fight for it. And I am going  
9 to try to do the eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Only that  
10 situation was different, and today the situation different.  
11 Today I know what's going to be tomorrow if a elements are  
12 getting power, and power like they were before. So that's why  
13 they can't do for me anymore. That's why I believe the human  
14 feeling even if it's happening today, that's why we have to  
15 say and spell it out, and this is not a Jewish question, this  
16 is a human question. My pieces are not just Jewish. The  
17 memorial is always those people who perished in the forced  
18 labor or concentration camps. There are people who perished,  
19 not just only the Jews perished because they were Jews.  
20 There were different people who were enemy of the Third Reich  
21 or the political reason they perished. They are -- they were  
22 the same innocent people. Only this is the way that's why I  
23 am saying I am here and I am opening my mouth and I am going  
24 to spell it out anyplace, anytime until I am alive.

25 Q Thank you, Mr. Tibor.

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1           A     Okay.  You're welcome.  I hope I gave you enough.

2

3                                 (The interview was concluded.)

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