

[TEST TONE] Rolling.

Could you tell me that story again?

When the Lithuanians sent us out to a small city into Lithuania, dispersed most of the refugees, as many as they could-- because they were afraid for the Polish people might plot against them. So they sent us out. Besides, they didn't want too many people unemployed in one place also.

So I had to go through a certain city before I came to the place that they sent me. And over there, the Jewish population, the Jewish committee organized that right away they took us in and sent us to a family for dinner. It was Purim holiday, I believe. And they took us in like children, like their own children. And there was maybe 20 people at the table.

And I was sitting and thinking, the first time I'm getting charity. Somebody is inviting me for a meal which is not from my family or from my home town. And in middle, I had to go out, and I cried like a baby. I never cried as hard as I cried at that. Then after a while, I came in and sat down and I finished the meal.

Try and keep looking at me. You keep looking at the camera or at Eddie, I don't know.

I do?

Yeah. You keep looking over here. And just keep looking at me. Could you tell me what range of emotions you had on this trip, on this journey?

On journey home-- I mean from leaving my hometown?

Leaving your hometown or while you were in Vilna. Were you afraid, were you courageous?

No, we weren't afraid. The only thing we were afraid-- after about eight months, the Russians came and occupied Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. First they gave a part to the--

I don't want to know the-- I just want to know, what did you feel?

We felt again that we are trapped again. We are again in a trap, and how to get out from there? Of course, there was very few ways you can get out. And the only way we knew is either to go to Odessa to Israel or to Japan, through Japan to get out. There was one place open, which was Shanghai.

But we didn't know much about Shanghai. The only thing I knew about Shanghai that when we were teenagers and made a lot of noise in the evening, so our policemen used to shout at us, where do you think you are, Shanghai? Making so much noise. That what we knew about Shanghai.

So after looking for ways to get out, so the only way that was left for me was to buy falsified papers and get out of Lithuania through Japan. And once we got out of the Russian sphere, we didn't mind where to go. We didn't care too much. Our goal was just to get out of Russia, that was our goal. And with these falsified papers, I got the Russian permit, which was a very big thing to get out of Russia. And by buying tickets to Tsuruga, Japan we were very lucky, really.

And the Russians were very nice to us. Because we were considered tourists. And tourists, they gave you the red carpet. Everywhere you came in Russia, any hotel, they gave us the best rooms, the best restaurants, the best food, everything. Very polite. So when I came to Moscow, in Moscow, we started to run around from consulate to consulate. I even went to the Syrian consulate and asked for a visa through Syria to Israel. But of course, everybody said no.

So what was I-- we're left. We are three days in Moscow. On the fourth day, we had to leave by train to Vladivostok. And the ride to Vladivostok took between seven and eight days and nights. Of course, we had very comfortable

quarters. We had wagon D, Pullman wagons, and a [INAUDIBLE] cabin.

But to get on the train, you had to show that you have Japanese transit visa. And I didn't have it. When I came to the Japanese consulate, and I showed him a cable that I got from the consulate from Vladivostok. In answer to my cable to him, I had told him that I had a Panama visa and I'd like a transit, a Japanese transit. So he answered me that the Japanese transit, you'll get in Moscow.

So I took it for I'm going to get it in Moscow. When I came to Moscow and asked for a transit visa, he says, you are reading it not the right way. Well, it doesn't say that you will get in Moscow. You get it in Moscow, he says, but if Moscow doesn't give, we don't give any more visas, transit visas. So sorry, we can't do anything for you. So the only way was to get to Vladivostok. Because they told us, some people told us, that in Vladivostok, the consulate is also very liberal. And he was giving out visas.

But to get on the train, you couldn't get on unless you had a Japanese transit. And the passport was in-- the papers that was my passport was in the hand of the NKVD. When we came in the hotel, the receptionist who took right away before they gave us the rooms our passports, and the receptionist was NKVD also. So when you leave, you had to get your papers out.

When it came the day that we leave, so I had friends on there. And I told him, take my valise. Take it to the train. And I'll somehow, I'll come and I'll get on the train. How and what, I don't know. But I will. And when they all left, I went out with them to say goodbye, they went all in taxis.

And I called over a taxi, I say, please wait for me here. I am also going to the train, but I need another five minutes. So he says, OK, he'll going to wait for me. And they all left running to the receptionist. And as if I was running all the way, and I says, I forgot my passport. I forgot to take out my passport. And the taxi's waiting for me because I'll miss my train. So she asked me, do you have a Japanese transit visa? I say, of course. And she took out the passport. By some miracle, didn't look. And gave it to me. And I went on the train.

On the train, you had to come over, there was a guide. The guide was NKVD, of course. And when you came on the train, you had to come over with your papers and registered. But I came in, I don't have it. Right away, they looked for a Japanese transit. So when I came in, the same visas another two fellows had. The same visas as I had.

So he came in and asked the fellows, what shall we do? We cannot go and register with him, because he'll throw us off the train. So I said let's hide him in time. So I went into our-- we had assigned places. When we sat in the places, and we told our friends that if they NKVD man comes looking for us, let us know, and we'll some time get out from this wagon into another one. Which we did every time they came to look for us.

They knew on this places has to be another three fellows. So we were on another wagon. When we came to the other car, we went into the bathroom. So this way, we avoided them for all these eight days on the train.

When we came to Vladivostok, there came some people who were waiting for a steamer to Japan from Vladivostok. And they had-- and some people knew them. And they had a friend on this train. So they came up and we started to ask them, what do we do? We don't have a visa. He says, come down. The Japanese consulate is giving visas here.

So I went over right away to the NKVD man and we said, listen we heard that you are looking for us. So he said, what do you mean? And he started to berate us. Seven, eight days I am after you and I can not find you. Where were you? What do you think you are?

And right away, he called us over and took us into a black limousine, a Zim, which was the best the car in Russia, and took us to the hotel, to the best, Chelyuskin Hotel. And he registered us, took away the passports, and gave it to the receptionist, which again was NKVD and left us. And on the way, we were thinking that they are going to take us right away to jail and to Siberia. One place they could send us to Siberia. And of course, we were despaired, but what could we do? We couldn't do anything.

But when he came, and he let us free, and gave us rooms, and all this, we were dancing from joy. But then it started again. I have to get a visa. Next morning, we went over to the consulate and showed him the papers. And then looked at it and says, everything is OK, the only thing is you have to show us you have landing money Japan plus tickets from Japan to the United States.

Landing money was at that time about \$120, I believe, \$150, which was more than I could dream of at that time. By the time I came paying for the tickets in Lithuania, by the time I came to Vladivostok, I was left with a \$5 bill and two Palestinian pounds. That was all.

But I had a Sema watch, a good Swiss watch. So there were people that were knew order the city, who were waiting for a steamer to Japan. And they knew that there is a market for watches. Watches for the Russians was the first priority. To get a watch was a prestige. So I said, I can get you \$50 for it. So I said, be my guest, take it. And he brought me \$50. And I was a rich man with a \$50.

Then I went to the consulate, and the consulate, he told us what the problem is. He says, If you will show me that you have landing money in Japan in order to exist in Japan and the tickets to the United States, then I'll give you a transit visa. So where do we get it?

So we had friend left over in Lithuania that couldn't get the visa. And I made up with them that in case we need any papists, we'll cable, and you'll send us out. So I went right away to the cable office and I sent a cable. I need landing money in Japan, and Thomas Cook and Company, and tickets should wait me, is waiting for me in Thomas Cook. And within eight or 12 hours, I got a cable that landing money and tickets are waiting for you in Thomas Cook in Tokyo. And you go and pick it up.

And the Russian cables were made with strips, like the market used to go in strips. So you could arrange any way you wanted. It was glued on on paper. So I arranged it the way I figure it sounds plausible. And with this, I came to the consulate again next day.

When I showed him the papers, he says everything is OK, but no signature. Who sent it? I say, what do I know? That's what I got from Thomas Cook, the cable. So he looked at it, he says, I don't know, he says, come tomorrow. So again was a problem, but what did I do? I was afraid to falsify somebody's signature. And I had there, Thomas Cook mentioned there three times of what I'm-- I could have put down Thomas Cook. But I was afraid. But it's done. What's done is done.

I came back next day, and I say, we came to pick up our visas. And lo and behold, we got the visas. And then we have to wait another five days till the ship came. And it was a cattle ship, of course, which took in 300 people. We slept on straw on the decks and it was terrible.

But when the pilot left the ship coming out of Vladivostok, we all went up on the deck and started to dance-- sing and dances Israeli songs. We were freed of chains. The feeling was now we are free. Whatever happens to us, we are free people. And that was the most joyous, the most dance and the most joyous time that we had.

Then, after three days, we came to Japan and Tsuruga. In Tsuruga waited for us a fellow by the name of Yonis. He was the brother-in-law of the Israeli ambassador later to the United Nations.

OK, I don't need that. So tell me, tell me a little bit-- could you repeat the part about dancing and why you were so joyous? It's because you weren't under Russian rule?

We came out of the Russian--

Right, but say, say Russia.

Wait a second. Wait for John to finish before you tell us.

And then tell me what it was like to see Japan. OK, it was green? It was beautiful? So start with when you got on the ship. And why did you dance? Why were you so joyous?

When we got on the ship, of course there was a Russian pilot on the ship taking us out of the port. So we waited, we were very quiet.

Try again. We just had a horn there three times. Sorry, from outside on the track. So when you were leaving Russia for Japan.

To go to Japan.

Start clean, wait for John to finish, and then tell us.

You have to start without me talking, because I can't be on the soundtrack.

When we went on the ship to go to Japan, there was a Russian pilot taking the ship out of the port. We were very quiet and waited for him to get off. As long as we are on the Russian waters, we knew that we are not free yet. When the pilot left the ship and about five minutes later, we waited for him to go to get a distance between us and the Russian pilot, we went on the ship and started to dance and sing. And that was the most joyous moment of our lives until that time.

Because here, we came out from a country that to us, it looked horrendous. The communist regime for us was something that I cannot describe. You see, you were in constant depression there because you knew there was no way out of there. And times will get from bad to worse. And that, we found out soon which it was true. And then when we came out of their sphere, we were the happiest people in the world.

Of course, the event, three days was horrendous because it was the stench and the sickness of the people. Everybody was sick. But I didn't go down, I slept on the deck. Even if it was cold, I still slept on the deck. After three days, we came to Tsuruga.

Over there was waiting for us a fellow off from the Jewish committee, from the JewCom by the name of Yonis. And he called out names that he has letters for some people. And my name was also called out. He gave me an envelope. I opened up. And I found a note from a friend that left before me, the same friend that gave me his tickets to go from Vilna to Tsuruga.

So he sent me, if I'm not mistaken, three or four yen, which was-- 20 cents a yen was either 80 cents or 60 cents. But it was a tremendous amount of money. Because when we come out on the port, the sun was shining, it was summer. And the fruits and vegetables that we saw there, we never saw in our life. Exotic fruits. And all the beautiful peaches, and oranges, and everything.

And I went for one zloty, and I bought so much that I couldn't carry it. For one yen, I'm sorry, which was 20 American cents. And I divided right away with all my friends and everybody that came. And we had the time of our life.

Then we went on a train for three and a half hours it took us to get to Kobe. In Kobe, they took us to they called it homes, it was hotels. The Jewish committee rented hotels, Japanese hotels, and put us about 17, 18 people in a room. But it was tremendous, big rooms. They had mattresses for us, and blankets, and linen. And we were free people. We were as happy as slugs. We didn't know what's going on there, of course, in Poland.

And from there, we are looking for ways to get someplace. So transit was for two weeks. After the two weeks, they prolonged it for another two months, and kept prolonging it from March till December.

Of course, we were looking for ways to get out. You couldn't get from anybody any visa, so we were thinking of smuggling ourselves on an American ship as stowaways. Two people did it, or three. And I was on the ship with them, but I didn't have any documents with me. So I figured, maybe next ship. And that was the last steamship that left Shanghai-- Japan, I mean.

And the Japanese stopped giving us any more to prolong our transit visas, and we had to leave. The only place to leave, where can you go? Shanghai. Shanghai was an open city, anybody could go to Shanghai. So we had for the 30th of November or 1st of December. And we had to leave. Of course, they told us about Shanghai that it's a terrible place. The heat is unbelievable.

Just wait for the siren.

What was life like in Japan? Did you enjoy it?

In Japan?

Were you a tourist?

Wait for John to finish.

Wait for me to finish asking the question. So what was your life like in Japan? Did you enjoy it?

We enjoyed it, every minute of it.

Sorry, start with something like life in Japan was.

Life in Japan for us was a joy. It was summer, we came from a cold country. And there was the sunshine.

Sorry, we need to cut.

So you took quite a few risks.

Yes.

Could you elaborate on that? Could you start with saying, I took quite a few risks because I was young or whatever?

Because I was young and there was no way out.

But you have to let me know what you're talking about.

You see, when we tried to get out of Japan, there was no place you could go except to Shanghai. Shanghai, they described us, was hell on earth. The heat was unbearable. People used to work in the street, and the sweat used to come down your pants. And people are dying from hunger there. And so many terrible things they told us.

So we were looking for a way to get out to go to the United States. The only way you could get if you couldn't get a visa is as stowaways on a ship. Two friends of mine, acquaintances, went this way, went on the ship. And I was with them at that time. And I went up on the ship also. And I could also hide myself there. But then I didn't take my documents with me. I had no documents at all.

And I figured, ships are coming in every week, and I'll do it on a second one. And besides, three people in one ship, maybe it's too much, maybe I'll be by myself. And that's what I went off. And they went away, and they came to the States. And I later heard that they had a difficult time. But somehow, they became citizens.

From that time on, there are no more Americans came to call on Yokohama in the port because it was already close to December. And I had to leave at the beginning of December on the last day in November.

And we went to Shanghai. There was no other way, no place to go. So we went to Shanghai. Of course, we were heartbroken. But still, we were young, so we figured, listen, people live in Shanghai so it couldn't be that bad. And we

came there and I had a few friends already there. And they came to get me from the steamboat. And they took me to a room which they rented for me.

And it didn't look so bad, it looked pretty good, as a matter of fact. I came there right away, they took me out for dinner, with a lot of schnapps, of course, and for some entertainment. And we had a wonderful time. Of course, it was hot, but the center was already nice there. And I couldn't see how bad it could be there. As a matter of fact, we had a very good life there.

After nine days, the war broke out. The American Pearl Harbor was in the eighth, I believe, of December. At night, at 4 o'clock in the morning, we knew the war broke out because we heard explosions. And when we came out in the morning, Japanese were standing in all the corners with bayonets on their rifles and right away told us to get back in in the houses, which we did.

For three days, they didn't let us out of the houses. After three days, they took all the patrols, they took all the police, and you were free to go anyplace, anywhere you want.

So what we found out that the Americans sank their gunboat when the Japanese came to ask them to surrender. So of course, they told them nuts, and they opened up all the hatches and everything, and sunk the ship, and exploded them, some of them. And that was the war.