My name is Dr. Henri Lustiger Thaler, and I'm here today to interview Mr. Avraham Zelcer. This is a joint interview with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, and the Amud Aish Memorial Museum in Brooklyn. Mr. Zelcer, can you please tell me the town and the country that you were born in, and also your date of birth?

I can. My name is Avraham Zelcer, I was born in Czechoslovakia in 1928, which makes me, I'm 91.

Wonderful.

The town where I was born was [Place name] In 1938, we were occupied by the Hungarian government, so we stayed Hungarian. I speak that language. We had a bakery, home. Under the Czechoslovakian regime was very good, no anti-Semitism. When we became Hungary, then it started up, little by little more, more, more. We had our bakery, but we didn't get flour to bake, as Jewish. So that was it. That was in 1944.

So that was in the Hungarian period, they restricted the flour. But tell me a little bit before. Tell me a little bit about your father was a baker, if you could speak about him, your mother, and also just the family.

The family, everybody, we were seven siblings, four girls and three boys. And we lived in [Place name] till 1944, when the Germans came in. When the Germans came in, so that's when it started.

Right, of course. What were the names of your siblings? The names of your siblings?

You have to know the siblings?

Yeah, if you can remember that, that would be great.

[? Helshe, ?] Helen, Umi, Malki, Avraham, and my little sibling was Frema, a girl.

Did they survive?

Yeah. So when the problems started, somebody came out from Poland and they wind up in our city. He didn't have no papers. My father was friendly with a notary public, and he gave him a paper, it's his Hungarian, you know. That man went to Budapest. While he was in Budapest, they stopped him, ID. So they stopped him, he had such a good papers that he didn't know the language.

I assume they took him in, and probably they hit him or what, and he spilled my father's name, that he got the papers through him. Then detectives like the FBI came down to our small town and came in the house. They searched the house, everything, they threw out everything.

They find his tallis, and open it up, the tefillin. They ripped apart the tefillin, and they see some written there, which we know is the [? krishme. ?] They didn't know what this is. They figured he's a spy. He was arrested, that was a year before he went into the Holocaust. He was arrested, he was taken to the Budapest, and he was kept there as a spy.

Now, my sister, the older sister who I mentioned, her name was Helen. She had Aryan paper as a non-Jew. She was a Catholic with papers. And this was her luck that she survived in Budapest. She used to go to church every Sunday, and she used to tell me, after the war, that she used to say Modeh Ani every morning in the church like this with the cross. She was davening by heart.

And that was lucky that she was there, because she helped my father somehow, I don't know the connection. So they reconnected. He was there through the Holocaust in jail. When the deportation was, they forgot about him. They got him not as a Jew, he was a spy. So they kept him there in jail.

Fascinating. Fascinating.

After the liberation, somehow he jumped down from the second floor, somehow. My sister was waiting for him. He broke his leg, and she took him to her apartment. That was, now, it could come the Holocaust, if you want. Was 1944, the Germans came in. They came in our town also. That was right after Passover, Pesach. And they started to collect all the Jews from the town.

The population from the town was 5,000. From that 5,000 was 1,200 Jew. It's included children, grown ups, old people. They collected those in the shul yard, a big one. And from there, they took us to the ghetto, which was named [? Ouihel. ?]

[? Ouihel? ?]

[? Ouihel. ?]

How do you spell that, do you have any idea of that?

I didn't know.

[? Ouihel. ?]

[? Ouihel. ?]

OK.

Yeah.

Yes, please, go on.

So when they took us from there to the ghetto, to [? Ouihel. ?] And from other places, from around the neighborhood towns, everybody went to [? Ouihel. ?] This is the place. We were there for, I don't know, I didn't remember how long. But in [? Ouihel, ?] I was very ambitious boy. I was 16, I was strong, I was tall.

So I did everything what I can. I volunteered to work with wagon and horses. The reason, we took the Jews from the house, and we brought them into the ghetto. The [? Ouihel ?] population, they brought them into the ghetto. Some of them had furniture, and this, and this, and this. So we picked up their furniture, and we deposited it in one place. Not alone me, a couple of guys.

I had time, I went into a bakery while I was working. And the baker was a Jewish guy, they still kept him there. I stole dough in the bakery. I put it in my pocket, the dough, and my shirt, and I took a string. And when I went home, I had to hid it all the time, because the dough was rising in my pocket. When I went home, I gave it to my mother and she baked little small piece of dough on the stove.

But I didn't have no coal or wood on the stove. I took a chair, I broke it, and I made fire, and that's how she baked it. And then that was still two days before Shavuos. I was there in the ghetto. I was the 10th transport to be shipped to Auschwitz. We were shipped to Auschwitz, I arrived the first day Shavuos early in the morning. Early in the morning.

Then we pulled in to Auschwitz, the name was Birkenau. They gave the name, what kind of town, that was nothing. That was a camp. Everybody had to go out from the train, leave all the luggages on the train. Women on one side, men on the other side. And that's how we went in the line. And it must have been about 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock in the morning.

How long were you on the train?

Pardon me?

How long were you on the train, do you recall?

You want to know, I like that you asked me. About two or two and a half days. 60, 70 people in a train. We had one pail, with one pail. And I don't have to tell you what's going on in the plane, the smell, children, babies were crying. People was sitting like this, you know, no place. I happened to sit in the front, all the way in the front. Excuse me, if I had to urinate, I was lucky, I was in front of the train by the door, so I urinated in the door.

So we arrived to Auschwitz, we landed in Auschwitz, we said, thank God we are here already. The trip was so unbelievable, that was thank God we're here. But we didn't know what's waiting for us. Then the selection started.

So tell me the process of getting off the train. Tell me the process of getting off the train.

We jumped down.

Jumped down.

What about the women and children? The older people?

Children, they, one helped the other. I held my mother by the hand, and somehow I let her down.

Were there dogs there when you came on the platform? Were their dogs when you came on the platform?

No platform.

When you came off the train, there were Germans with dogs?

Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah. It takes time to catch up.

Please, please.

So we stand in a line.

But it must have been complete chaos when you came off.

It wasn't chaos right then, because we were happy from the ride. But we didn't know what's going on. Man on one side, woman on other side. Now the selection started. Women, children who was incapable to work, or we had a lot of people in the camp already, so they didn't make any difference. They put everybody go into the left. They didn't know where they going.

In the same thing by men, I was built good, so I went to the right. They needed labor in those days. Those people who went to the left, they had four crematoriums in Auschwitz. How do I know? Because I was in Auschwitz, and I was working, and I went to different places. I'm going to tell you how I got, I should go in different places.

But mention that a little bit later.

In the camp.

So we're here at the selection line.

That is right.

So women, children, all the ladies, they went on the left in the line, and they disappeared. But the men who they selected, we went to a barrack. They didn't select too much, because transport came all the time, so they had plenty people to go to work. We went in the barracks, this were after the trains was emptied. Meanwhile, there's other trains are

waiting to come.

We arrived in the barracks, and we had to strip. Only the shoes had to be kept, nothing else. No belt, nothing else. And we were asking those people who were there before us, what's going to-- what happened with those people who went to the left? So they told us rumors was that they're going to see them every Sunday.

And then two days, we find out where they went. So we ask them where are they, so he points out to the chimney that's there. They went out there. Now, they gave us striped uniforms.

Before we go to the barracks, Mr. Zelcer--

We were in the barrack already. Quarantine.

So that was the last-- so who did you lose at that point, your mother, and your--

They went already.

And your siblings.

My transport was my mother, my sister, the little sister, and grandmother, and two big sisters. Because one was in Budapest. My two sisters, they selected for work. Now came the numbers. They put us in a barrack, about 400 or 500, they collected and decide to give us numbers. Some of them got, some of them didn't had.

So I tell you why, later on, what the number meant. The number meant you should never leave Auschwitz. Because while you were there, we saw a lot. I'll show you my number. I got the number A10596. 10596A. So I really don't know what a meant, Auschwitz, or it meant arbeit. You know what arbeit is. So I didn't know. But that was my name. I lost my name completely.

So when I got my number, we were still in the barracks. Now they came, they were selecting people for different work. I volunteered as a farmer. I figured, as a farmer, maybe I could supply my family with something.

They picked out about 40 or 50 guys like me, and they took us to Auschwitz, from Birkenau to Auschwitz. And from Auschwitz, they picked out 40 or 60 people, and they took us to a big farm, a subcamp. The subcamp's name was Budy.

Now, the next day, they took us to a stable, and they gave me two horses. I never knew how to harness a horse. But I learned fast, because I started to know already what's going on. The old timers who worked then, they took away, we never saw them again. They were already weak and listless. So I got two horses.

Every morning, we got up 4 o'clock in the morning, just those guys who had horses. Two SS men came with machine guns and they took us to the stable. I had to clean the horse every morning, because they checked us, because the brush, we put down stripes from the horse. We fed the horse.

After feeding the horse, we took them to drink, how do you say it?

To drink at the--

Drinking. Yeah. And we came back to the stable. And every day-- my horse name was Lola Stella. That was the name for two horse. Every horse had a name. So there was a Stallmeister, a sergeant. You know what a Stallmeister is? He was the head of the stables.

Correct.

And he set up where do we go. Budy was a big, big farm, tremendous big. Miles and miles. There's an SS one, they grow potatoes, they had apples, you know. They had fish, they raised fish. Every day, this number goes to work on the

field, to plow, whatever, all the time under a gun.

Sometimes I used to go to Auschwitz. Budy and Auschwitz was two and a half miles-- two and a half kilometers, there's a subcamp. There's a couple of subcamp. So of course, we went on the side road to Auschwitz. But we saw what's going on there. We saw transport coming, and we saw where they go.

Later, I find that where they go. But the beginning, I didn't know where these people going. It was in behind the chimneys and this. The food, I had a little bit good. At night, when we came home from work with the horses, the horses got beets. Each horse got three beets. We cut it up and they eat it, and I was [INAUDIBLE] with sugar beets. I stole from the horses whenever I could, you know. It was cut up.

At night, they got oats. I stole. And we got an extra soup at night. We were considered hardworking people, we got there in the morning, they needed us. So at night, when we finished with the horses, make the beds for the horses, new straw. So then they gave us extra soup, which was just special for us, because one of the guys cooked it in an army kettle, so very good.

We went to plow, we went all over around Auschwitz, Birkenau, Budy. That was going on. In fact, once we were assigned to a latrine, to clean the latrines with the horses, with clothes wagons, to clean in the women's camp, we cleaned the latrines. Suddenly, I met my two older sisters. Block C-19.

Somehow I got to them, which was very, I took a risk. I told them, listen, if there is a transport, because they always send people, volunteer and get out of here. Because here, you have no more place. If it was overloaded, they kill them. OK.

The second time I came there, they weren't there anymore. So I didn't know what happened to them. Or they put them in the gas chamber, or they went away. Anyway, this was my job with the horses, whatever. And that was going on till 1944. 1944, till the beginning of January 1945.

The Russians broke through the front. They were a couple of miles, they came to Warsaw, you know, and they didn't have time to kill us in Auschwitz. So there was a big death march going on. A lot of people from Auschwitz, women, people who were able to walk, they started to walk towards West. They were walking many, many miles, till they put them in wagons.

The town where they put into the trains was Lezsno. Opened trains, and they shipped them. Some of them they shipped to Buchenwald, some of them shipped in this, another camp. Me, I mean, us with the horses, we were going. First of all, we slept in barns, which is a little bit warmer. The dress was a jacket and a pants and wooden shoes.

So we went through Czechoslovakia. We were very close to the Czechoslovakian border. In Czechoslovakia, they took away the horses and the machinery which was on the wagons. They left it there by German farmer. And with us, they didn't know what to do. We were probably 40 or 50 guys like me, we didn't know what to do.

Two guys ran away. That was in a train already. Because whenever on the train, there's always, they always put the wagons to the train, they connected. Two days later, they caught the two guys. I think that was in Dresden. They brought them back to the train, to us, and they shoot them both, that we should see what happened if you ran away.

We went, from Dresden was a train, they took us to Mauthausen. I don't know if you heard about Mauthausen. We were there in quarantine. But before they put us in quarantine, they took us-- the we took a bath. A bath, I know what a bath means. So I was looking that water was going to come, and I was ready to inhale fast. I know what's going on. Thank God, water came.

They took us to quarantine. We were sleeping on the floor, you know. And after two weeks, they took us from there to Dachau. We were walking by train, we walk. We arrived in Dachau.

In Dachau, they put us in quarantine. I remember the block, 23. We was just there, no food, whatever we got. April, in

April, they said all the Jewish prisoners go forwards for transport. They had to go. And a lot of people, a lot of Jews lined up for transport. They went death march. When they came on places, they killed a lot of Jews.

I was lucky. I got sick. I was put in the hospital. It wasn't a hospital, it was a barrack to die. That was block 11. And block 11, and I was there till the American came very close. I was living in a bed with three people, dead people. I says, thank God, I had their food also. For two days, I ate their food. I didn't report that.

Then it was close to April, two days before April 29th, I was liberated. 1945, April 29th was a Sunday morning. The Americans circled the camp. They took Dachau before they took MÃ¼nchen, Munich. When they see what's going on, they came by the train, dead bodies. They find dead bodies in the trains. I don't know how long they were in the trains locked up.

Thank God I felt better, and I was still in the hospital. When I saw the first American, we were glad, fine, beautiful. And then the American came in, and Dachau was generals locked up, prime ministers were locked up. That's special for us. And the Americans start to feed us. They knew our situation. They start to feed us very little little.

Our stomach was shrunk. So we complained they don't feed us. But they knew what they doing. They feed us with cookie, a little oatmeal, you know. Little by little, I came through. But this wasn't enough. We went to rob the storage, the SS storage. I got a hold of one can of margarine.

There were people who said, If you're going to eat fat, you're going to gain weight, you're going to have strength. I was a young boy. I opened up the can-- how, I don't remember how-- and I ate a whole can margarine. I got typhus. I don't have to tell you, when you eat a can of margarine, what it does to your stomach. I had typhus.

It took us, I don't know, about two weeks, and we had there the American doctors to cure us. There was a revenge in the camp from the prisoners. There were a lot of SS who put on clothing, prisoner's clothing. We recognized him, he was strong. And they just beat him to death. When the American came in, they saw a bunch of dead bodies by the crematorium, they didn't have time to burn them.

I remember there was a Lieutenant and a Sergeant, they picked up a lot of SS, they were there for a day or something. And what he did, with two guys, he machine gunned them down. He wasn't supposed to do it, according to the Geneva Convention. But he didn't care. He was so depressed. He saw what was going on, that he didn't care.

Did you witness that, did you see that?

What?

Did you hear about that, or did you see it?

If I hear?

Did you hear about it, or did you see the machine gunning?

Yeah, I remember.

You remember you saw it?

Yeah. We were walking already. Then rabbis came in from London. They brought us siddurs, sedorim. They brought us small tefillin, must have been army tefillin, the tefillin.

When I was liberated, I didn't know who was alive, nobody. I didn't believe in nothing. I didn't believe in God, there is no such a thing. When I got that tefillin, I took off the retsu'ot. I use it for my pants to make a belt. And the tefillin, I threw away. Because I didn't need it, forget about it. It was like this.

And from there, we said settled already, they took the Czechs to Prague, they took the Hungarians here, you know. So I wind up, that's after the war, I wind up in Budapest. Budapest was bombed. And whenever I saw, I put my name down, my name is Avraham Zelcer, I'm alive. You know, wherever I went, in a toilet, or this. And everybody did it. I'm alive, I'm alive.

I came home, I find out that my father is home, our brother is home-- which is unbelievable-- and three sisters survived. It was unbelievable. My father was arrested, he was a spy. I came home, it was a Friday night. In our house, they were home before me. And I came home, I heard my father singing Shalom Aleichem, Friday night, you know what I'm talking about.

I looked at him, I says, that man must be crazy. That man is crazy. Why, why does he? I didn't want to go in the house. I was so rebelling at that time. So I remember, my father says, let him go. Let him rebel. OK.

It took time, and time, and time to come back. I left, that time, when I came back, it was Slovakia already. I went back to Germany. I didn't have no friends, maybe two boys who came home from MÃ¼nchen, from my age, who are in Israel.

I came back to Germany, and I went into a DP camp, displaced person camp. And I stayed there for a long time. Then I--

Which camp was it?

I was camp Foehrenwald, it's next to MÃ¼nchen.

Right, it was in the American zone.

In the American zone. And I was there for, you know-- and from there I went to France, and from France, I came to the United States. And now, you could ask me questions, because I don't remember.

Of course.

After all, this was 70-some years.

Almost 75 years.

And I am 91 today.

Of course. So could you just explain a little bit more what happened after. When you came home, when you came home to [Place name] and you saw your--

My father.

On Friday night. Was there a reconciliation? Did you go back home before you went to Germany to Foehrenwald, did you live at home?

No.

Or you left.

No, no home. I have no home. I was on the loose. No home at all.

So when you came home, you had, some of your siblings survived, your father survived. But your anger was so strong.

Big anger.

A big anger.

I had no friends, and I have nothing to do in [Place name] anymore. I had no friends. Because my [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], mine, they disappeared. So I went to Prague, and from there back to Germany. And then the sisters went to Israel, my father went to Israel also. And I went to France, and I stayed there till I got a visa to come to the United States.

Did you ever see your father again?

Yeah. Because my father went to Israel, and from Israel he went to France, he came to France. He remarried. He marries, I was a short time with him. And later on, I met him in America, my father. My father was 68 when he died. All my siblings died before in their 80s. I'm the only one who is 91 from the whole family.

In fact, this week I have a yahrzeit after my wife. Which, my wife, in 1956, when the revolution, Hungarian revolution, they ran out from there, they came to America. And I met her. I have a lot of pictures here still. And I had a beautiful, happy life. And I'm going to the cemetery this week to her.

Beautiful, beautiful. So my goodness, my goodness, what a story, Mr. Zelcer, what a story. So I'm curious, let me go back a little bit then to some of these different parts of your story. When you were in Auschwitz, and you were working on the farm in Budy--

Yeah.

You must have made friends there amongst the workers, there must have been. You were there for a while.

No friends, but I met people.

You met people.

In fact, I met people, two brothers who were with me, they came to America. In fact, my daughter knows their children who were in Budy with me.

Nice, nice, nice. I'm just curious about some of the discussions, the talks that you had when you were in Budy.

Yeah.

Some of the talks that you had with people. What was a night like in Budy? I mean, you went to sleep, you talked with men? What did you talk about?

At night? You were waiting for tomorrow. And tomorrow, you were waiting for the night. Which will be better. Or the night's going to be good, the morning is better. I had a little bit easier, because I worked with horses. So every time we were close, I got machine-- a gun in back of me. But I knew I didn't care. I knew the only way out from Auschwitz is through the chimney.

And when you were in Mauthausen, and then Dachau.

I was in quarantine.

In quarantine.

Quarantine. Because they didn't know what to do with us.

So all the men, there were 40 or 50 of you, you all went in to quarantine?

Those people who came from the camps to Mauthausen-- because they didn't have time to kill them all-- they put them in quarantine. We were sitting, sleeping, sitting. And the same was in Dachau, they put us in quarantine. Block 23. If I'm there, in the hospital, block 11. And that was my luck, because I would have wind up dead in the [? Tyrols. ?] You could ask, because there's a lot, but it doesn't come.

Of course. So I'm just wondering, so in Dachau, you were in Dachau for a while? How long were you in Dachau for?

I really can't remember.

No? But you were there at least a few weeks.

Four weeks, five weeks, I was there till April 29th, when I was liberated. When I saw the first black man, I didn't know who he were, the colored people. And it's, you know, that I never forget the day. Sometimes--

The day of the liberation. The day of the liberation.

Sometime, at night, I still can't sleep, because I'm in Auschwitz. And I go like this till I wake up, you know? There is not a day I shouldn't go back to Auschwitz.

Aside from the physical dimension of what happened to you, it seems to me also that you had a remarkably strong, strong will to survive. You had a strong will. You didn't care about anything.

No.

And you knew if you stayed in Auschwitz, you'd go out through the chimney.

In the beginning I says, I would like to survive to tell the people what was going on. Because to me, everybody there was dead. But personally, I didn't care. I know I don't have nobody. I didn't know my father home, I didn't know my sister's home. So I didn't care. I took a lot of chances, a lot of chances. If I would have got caught with the chances, they would have shoot me right away.

Right. Mr. Zelcer, we're going to take a break right now. We're going to take a pause.

OK.

And we'll come back to continue our conversation.

OK.

OK, we'll be back momentarily.

Go ahead.

We're back with Mr. Avraham Zelcer. So Mr. Zelcer, if there was any dimension of what we just discussed that you would like to go into more detail with, things that happened to you in Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Dachau, Foehrenwald, Budapest?

I go back to Auschwitz.

OK.

Which, probably I didn't mention. There's a lot of things, you know.

Of course.

Since I was working with horses. So one day, our farm had pigs and cows, but it was in the vicinity where I was. Every day, they send me in a different place. Of course, a gun on the wagon. Once, I went to Auschwitz with my horse, which is very close. We picked up a lot of food, moldy food, which, it wasn't edible.

So they put us on a wagon, and we brought it to our camp Budy. Of course, they put it in a big kettle, all the food, and they mixed it up, in they start to give it for the pigs. While we were mixing it, while we were mixing it, we saw a lot of gold, diamonds, small kind of things.

I wasn't afraid to die. I go over to my Sergeant, he was a bastard, a cutthroat, unbelievable. I says to him, Mr. Sergeant, I find this in the food. I'm afraid that the pig is going to choke with it. I knew what this is. I knew.

So he takes it. So he comes back later on with a rusty cup. He says to me, I tell you what, whenever you're going to find things like this, throw it in there. There was rings, golden chains, people whose hide it in the food. Since then, he was very good to me. I knew what I was doing, and he knew what he was getting.

For me, he didn't have nothing. But for somebody else, he was a killer. And I always was afraid that he's going to kill me, because he didn't supposed to do that either. He would have been sent right away to the front. So always I would thank God he was transferred. Thank God he was transferred, and I never saw him after. There's a commodity, which I had.

Interesting.

And he let me steal too.

How was that?

Like, he let me steal potatoes on the field. Whatever we grew on the farm, he let me, hidden in the pocket. He didn't check me. That was enough.

It was your method of survival. It's how you survived.

But that was always for sure he is going to shoot me, that I shouldn't talk about it. And I didn't. I had a friend who was in the same labor camp where I was, we were partners somehow. Since, it comes, always--

Is there any-- I mean, in this--

To me he didn't hear any bread or nothing. It was golden chains. It was put in in bread, it was put in in eggs.

So there was a lot? You put a lot into that cup?

A lot of stuff get into it.

Uh huh.

Rings, you know, and things which was sewn in in clothes.

That's kind of fascinating. You made him a very rich man.

Who?

The Sergeant.

Yeah, yeah.

You made the Sergeant a very rich man.

I don't know his name, I don't know where he is. I don't know. I stole for him whatever I can.

Of course, of course.

Security.

Absolutely.

Because he became my buddy, in a sense. But I was sure he's going to kill me, to quiet me. But I didn't care. Didn't care. And when the evacuation was from Auschwitz, I was still lucky, with the rest of the women, guys who went walking. I went with the horses.

When we stopped, I put my ear on the horse, because the horse was sweating, to warm my ears, my face. And the end, I put manure in my shoes, horse manure in my shoes to keep my foot warm. And that helped me a lot. A lot.

And this was still with the wooden shoes that they gave you?

Wooden shoe, with clog.

Right, open wooden clogs.

And I put, because it picked up a lot of snow, you know?

Of course, of course.

So the manure-- I'm talking about mine. I don't know about the next one. But I know what I did with the manure.

It seems that you took-- and I think it was clearly your state of mind, of trying to get through this. You took a lot of risks. You took a lot of risks.

A lot of risk.

So tell me some more about that.

I didn't care.

Yeah, tell me some more about that.

I took risks in Auschwitz, and in Budy, because I knew the only way out, no matter what, today or tomorrow, or next morrow, the way out through the chimney. I was young, and I didn't care. I knew that my family's wiped out. I didn't know they survived, some of them. So I says, I don't care. It's no use.

So what are some of the other stories that come to your mind when we speak about the risks that you took in Auschwitz, for example. Anything else that comes to your mind? Because these are fascinating, these things you did.

In Budy, once we came home, we were checked all the time. I had potatoes, three, four potatoes in my pocket. They find it. They laid me down, and they give me five [INAUDIBLE]. Then I couldn't sit for a couple of days. But it was worth it. That's it. If I was very good, because that sergeant, who I stole, he said to the other, that's enough.

So the sergeant came in useful again. He came in useful again, the sergeant.

I couldn't sit, I was laying in my bed, which was a bunk, one, two, three. One, two, three. I was always in the bottom. I figured the bottom is the best, than crawl up.

And when you think about, when you think about Mauthausen, is there--

Mauthausen, again, like I told you before, they took us to a shower, and I closed my eyes, and was waiting for gas. But Thank God, water came. They wanted to clean us up, because we shouldn't infect other people. And I had the same clothing from Auschwitz. People were sitting there waiting for transport. from Mauthausen, we went to Dachau.

In Dachau, we didn't work, nothing. We were quarantining in a hospital, that I could tell you Dachau. Then they got some help from rabbis from London, which gave us the tefillin. I was so angry that I threw it away. It took me a year after the liberation, a year to come back.

Tell me about that. Tell me about that, that coming back. Tell me about that.

I went, after I went to the DP camp, I met already people who start to become religion. In there the Klausenberger Rebbe, I don't know if you hear about him?

Absolutely.

Yeah. He did a lot of good things. Unbelievable. I saw him once, Yom Kippur, to daven. And in the middle of davening, he was crying. So he said [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. You know, did I gave you [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

He had 11, 12 children. He married off children. He married off boys. He brought a lot of Yiddishkeit back. Unbelievable.

He made a yeshiva there in Foehrenwald. I went in there too. So that was my home until I went to Paris.

So if I'm understanding correctly, if I'm understanding you correctly, the Klausenberger Rebbe had an effect on you. The Klausenberger Rebbe--

It's possible.

He had an effect on. You went to his yeshiva.

Yeah. That's what I say.

And he was able to try to put into some sort of a context what happened.

He knows what happened, because he was there too.

Of course. He lost his entire family.

He was there too, he lost his whole family. He was there.

You know, that particular Yom Kippur that you're speaking about--

It made effect on me.

Yeah, that was many-- many people have written about that service that the Klausenberger gave at Foehrenwald on Yom Kippur.

He had an effect on me.

So when you say he had an effect on you, can you be a little bit--

I mean, to come back. To come back. I didn't daven, and I threw away the tefillin in Dachau. I did such things in Dachau, I looked up, and I had a piece a paper. And I looked up, and I ripped it, you know, Shabbos. I says, then now do me something. What can you do me? You did, but, you know, that was when I, you know.

So when you were in Foehrenwald, and Foehrenwald was, there was a lot of [? Juden ?] that came to Foehrenwald, and they and they found the way back into religious Judaism in Foehrenwald, through the Klausenberger. So the anger, where did the anger go? The anger left when you, you felt more--

The anger left me, maybe about in Foehrenwald.

In Foehrenwald.

I think so. In Foehrenwald, the anger left me in Foehrenwald.

And how long were you in Foehrenwald?

I really don't know exactly.

But you were a few months in Foehrenwald, a few months.

I think so. And from there, I went to Paris. There was no borders. I had false papers made in Germany. I got stopped by the border police. I was locked up for two days, it didn't bother me. And somehow I get out, and I arrive to Paris. In Paris, I was loose, you know. Unbelievable. Unbelievable.

You lost everything, you had to rebuild everything. You have to rebuild everything, it's remarkable.

I was 21 when I arrived to America. So let's put it that way, from 1946 or 1945, I was on the loose. Foehrenwald, Paris, you know. And I met my wife here.

Yes, and we're going to speak about your wife we're going to speak about your wife momentarily. But I think what we're going to do right now is we're going to end this session. We're going to stop the camera. And then we're going to start again with photographs of your family, and pre-war photographs of your family, and also photographs of your wife. And we can speak a little bit more about that momentarily. So we're going to stop now.

OK.

We'll continue in a moment. We're back with Mr. Zelcer for our third segment. And we're going to look at some pre-war photographs, and also more contemporary photographs of your family and your wife. So if we can start with this photograph, Mr Zelcer, can you please tell me who these people are?

Sure.

And talk to me a little bit about it about them, also a little bit about them.

This is my mother. This is my brother who was killed in the Holocaust. This is me when I was four years old. This is a little sister who got killed in the Holocaust. She must have been 11, 12 years old. The two sisters survived. This is right.

What do you remember of--

And those pictures, we picked up after they war in the garbage, all over, the pictures.

They were in the trash.

When we came home, so we find it, they're all over, scattered.

And you mean in the yard? They were scattered in the house, or in the yard?

All over.

All over. Tell me what you, what do you remember of your brother? What's your brother's name, the tall one? If you can just tell me a little bit about your brother.

He must have been 22 when he got killed.

What do you remember of him?

What?

What do you remember of him, his character? What do you remember of him?

Of my brother?

Yeah.

He was in cheder when I was born.

A very beautiful family. Very beautiful family.

This is my mother. Here, she was very young, maybe 45 or 50 when she got killed.

And your mother's name was?

Liba.

Liba.

Yeah, Liba. This is again, a family picture.

OK, let me know all the people.

This is me. I must have been 14, 15 years old. This is my mother. This is a sister who survived. That's me. This is my grandmother. And that was my sister-in-law. And that sister, who I told you, survived as a Gentile in Budapest.

How did that occur, that she survived as a Gentile? She went undercover, she was hidden? How did that occur?

My father was arrested. So she got some papers as a Gentile. She spoke perfect Yiddish, perfect Hungarian. She went to Budapest to help my father, just in case the connection, and did made connections.

That's remarkable.

Like I told you before, she lived as a Christian. She went to church. And she was davening Modeh Ani with the cross, like this. Like I told you before.

Remarkable. I'm sorry, it wasn't that clear she was there, she followed your father to Budapest. This was a family decision.

Yeah.

A family decision, that your mother was the head of the family, a family decision that she should go, and she should be undercover as a Christian. And were there people in Budapest helping her? Or did she arrive in Budapest alone?

She survived alone in Budapest.

She came alone, she didn't have a--

Alone.

There wasn't a Chris--

She survived, they never took her to camp. Because she wasn't Jewish. She was a Christian.

But so she went to Budapest, she rented her own apartment--

She rented an apartment, yeah.

How old was she at that time? How old was she at that time?

Maybe about 25. Maybe about 25.

So this was really a remarkable effort--

Well, let me see.

At rescue.

She was born, not exactly-- she was born in 1918. So you got to figure out to '44, how old she was.

So that's an incredible, incredible family story of rescue. And then your father jumps out of the prison and breaks his leg, and she takes him home, and she nurses him at home?

Yeah.

Did they go to the hospital, or did she-- they didn't go to the hospital because he was a prisoner. So that she went and she took him home?

Yeah.

And she took care of him?

Yeah. Then my other two sisters came home from camp. But my father and my sister, they were the first to come home. They didn't know for a while, who is alive, who is dead, you know. Little by little, my sisters came home, and then I came home.

OK.

This picture is when I met her here in Brooklyn. She was beautiful. Unbelievable. She must have been 19 years old when I met her. She was a mother. And a mother, because my mother-in-law was dead. She was a wife, and she was good to the children. She was a beauty.

She went through the Holocaust. She was four years old when the war started. And her mother was hiding her in Budapest. And that's how she survived. In 1956, when, again, the revolution was against Russia, so the mother sent her away to Germany after the war, because she had no future in Budapest. There was no Jewish boys in those days.

And the mother stayed there with her mother till the grandmother died, and we brought out the mother. And she lived with me for 40 years. Could you imagine? A mother-in-law live with her son-in-law for 40 years in the same house? But she was beautiful. I loved her. She gave me this.

It's a beautiful story, Mr. Zelcer. It's a beautiful story.

This is my wedding, 1958. It was a Jewish wedding, a frum wedding, 1958. She was such a good-natured, the kids could tell you. They will tell you. This is my father after the war. This is a cousin. This is-- my father remarried, so she had two sons. This is one of them. This is her friends, and this is her, Judy. This is my wife.

And the wedding took place here in Brooklyn? The wedding took place here in Brooklyn?

Huh?

The wedding was in Brooklyn?

Yeah. Here in Corona, in those days, was a Jewish neighborhood. And I met her in Brooklyn. This is my father.

And it's a picture of him after the war? This is after the war, of course.

After the war. Because during the war, he didn't have a beard. That's right. This is my wedding, I think. That's me, my brother, and my uncle, my mother's brother. This picture, I went to Israel for a wedding with my brother. This is my brother, me, and two sisters who survived.

OK. Mr. Zelcer, if I just could ask you a question, and its a concluding question, unless there's any other things you would like to say. But just what are your thoughts, and do you have something that you would like to speak about in terms of your experience in the Holocaust?

I tell you, it doesn't come to my head. After all, I'm 91. I'm sure there is more, but it doesn't come to me. I'm sure there is more. Because you just can't tell the history in one hour.

Of course, of course.

And in the end, we are the winners, right? We are the winners, not them. Those guys are dead, and we are alive, and our generation, we have already a fifth generation. My great-great grandchildren, a fifth generation from the Holocaust. So we are the winners.

OK. Thank you so much. Thank you so much.