

And what the Russians did-- and meanwhile, the war was over-- so the Russians used to make groups of 120 people and put them on a train-- it was in Europe-- and sent them by train-- Hungarians to Hungary, Polacks to Poland, and Romanians to Romania.

But we were three boys, and we existed as Palestinians. And they used to tell us, well, when we'll get 120 of you, we'll send you, too. And we were just sitting or sitting. And we see it was like a camp where they send home everybody. And everybody is going, and new are coming. And they make groups and send them home. And nothing, no results with us.

So it happened to be there Yugoslavs, too. And we talked to them. And he said that he was in Berlin, but there is, in Berlin, there is a Jewish Gemeinde. Gemeinde means a Jewish community. And they have-- they are doing something for the Jewish people. So we decided that we have to investigate.

So it was decided that I would go there. And the two will stay, because we can't go out of the camp, and then we will be nowhere. You see, we couldn't be on our own. We didn't have any money. We didn't have nothing. And it was after the war, and there were no order that-- nothing.

So that I'll go. So how did we go? We were getting food, too. And our food was the main thing. You know, it was after the war, but we, for us, food was scarce in Germany, and especially for us. And we lived from that-- what the Russians gave to us. And in that camp, the Yugoslavian-- Yugoslavs were managing for the Russians that camp.

So while sitting there we had enough food. But as soon as we get away from the camp, we are out-- nothing, no papers, no nothing. So it was decided that these two boys will stay there, and I will go.

There was a train from that place. And I went on the train, but it was only for military. And I went to the next station. They got me off of the train, so I had to walk. But as I said, it was 60 miles-- I don't know. I walked. I think I slept on the station, and the next day in the morning, I start to walk.

And I walked the whole day. And it was July. And the sun was heating, and I was hot. And I couldn't go in in a place. It was on the highway, first off. Even in a house I couldn't go in. Even I would look for a restaurant. I didn't have any money. Money, we didn't know what it is.

So I was walking, and I had a bag with a bread. And I remember I passed by a pool, like a mud hole, and kids were swimming. And I thought, oh, if I wouldn't be afraid, I would go in with my clothes and then it will dry. I was so hot and sweaty.

And when I arrived-- at the end towards evening, I arrived in Berlin. And after asking people where that what I am looking for, the Jewish Gemeinde, finally I found it. And it was towards evening.

I remember when I saw that-- myself in a mirror, I couldn't recognize myself. My brows, my hair was blond. Before it was a brownish color, but it was like bleached from the sun without a hat.

And that Jewish Gemeinde was in an old synagogue. And towards the evening would come-- the janitor was a German, a husband and wife, two elderly people. And they lived there. The synagogue had a little house for the janitor. And we told them-- and I told him I'm a Palestinian, and I'm going to Palestine.

Listen what she said. She said, we are Germans, but when there was the synagogue, we had a daughter. And one of the members, a Jewish fellow fell in love with our daughter, and they are in Palestine in Acharya. She said, I'm going to give you a letter along. She thought we are going. It wasn't so simple.

But so and the next day-- so we stayed over. In the synagogue I stayed over in the synagogue. And the next morning, the man who managed that came. And he said, what-- we don't have a camp that you can come here and stay. He said, we give only help, advice to German Jews.

So but I said, how can I get back home? So he said, wait, we'll give you a sign, and maybe that will help you. And he gave me this. And when he asked me the name where I was born, and I tell him in Riga, Latvia. He said, oh, we have only the power to take care of German Jews.

So he said, well, we'll put you in that you are born in Hanover. That's why. And I was going back. He gave me some additional bread and food. I thought I would walk home. And I thought to go back. Here what happened-- the Russians-- Berlin was already divided in four zones-- the English and this.

But around the city, you see, were the Russians. And the Russians had roadblocks out of the city. And here I go out of the city about three or four or five miles. And you have to walk roads-- are Russian, and the Russian, there were a couple of them standing on. He said, where are you going, who are you?

So I took out the this. I don't know-- did he know German? He reads, and he reads. And he said, where are you going? I said, I'm going to Furstenwalde. And I tell him for-- in a lager. So he push me away on the side. And I thought, my God, here I am arrested by the Russians.

And here what happened-- and meanwhile, the Russian, the communication or on the roads were only Russian trucks, Russian carts. It was after the war, which they load the trucks on empty trucks.

And these guard at the roadblock block examined every truck. He wanted signs, where they're going. And evidently, he found a truck who is going to our place. When he got the truck, he calls me in and tells me to go get on the truck. And they brought me there back.

And I told the guys what the reason--

What were their names, Irving?

Kovnat one was, Kovnat. And the other was Baron.

Were they both from Riga?

No, Baron was from Riga, and Kovnat was from Dankeri. Dankeri was a little town.

In Latvia?

In Latvia, yeah, famous little town. So we came, so we came back. And we thought, what are we going to do, and what are-- then we heard that, in the English zone, in Berlin is something, they do something.

And sure enough, we walk-- oh yeah-- no. We went somewhere again, or we heard that the English people, the English army and the English were bringing over refugees who don't want to return to their country, Eastern Europeans, especially Polacks like us. So they get them out of the Russian zone, and they take them over to there, so.

And we want our-- what our-- sure enough, they put us on tractor trailers, like. And that's the first time I saw that trailer. You go in, it's like a room, the American tractor trailers. In Europe, they didn't have.

And they put us in, put on with a lot of refugees and was taking us. I didn't know where, when, but to move at least. So again, and the Russians were around. And the Russians kept that trailer, too. They kept that.

And evidently, the papers weren't right, and they want to look in-- what is in the trailers. And they-- and the Allies have with them-- it's none of their business, evidently. And they wouldn't let look in into the trailers.

And the cop kept us for 6, 8 hours. And we were very, very scared-- what's going to happen? But finally, they let it go. And we were brought in the English zone. And again, they put us in in a camp, the English, again, with foreigners.

How did you get out of the Russian camp onto that trailer? What did they do, just ask for people?

Yeah, yes. Somehow, it was facilitated. And we find out that they take out people. And the Cold War was on. And the English-- evidently, people they were not supposed to take out, but they did not let them inspect what they have in the trailers.

And it was they had a big quarrel. Evidently, they had to go to the higher commandant. And finally, we were free, and we went out. And they put us in a camp. And it started almost the same story, with all the other nationalities go home, and we-- as Palestinians, they don't know what to do with us.

So finally, we knew that we are not far from Bergen-Belsen. So and in Bergen-Belsen, we're neutrals. From the English people, from the English soldiers who used to come, we find out that there is Jews left. And there we decided already that we are moving just away.

So one day, we got up. And we start walking and to, towards Bergen-Belsen. In Bergen-Belsen, there was quite a number of Jewish people there, the refugees. And some already were familiar with the area. They were going and coming. And there were-- Hanover wasn't far from that and another little town, Celle.

And they were going to town there. And some started even trading and doing business. But we were ignorant in those. And so, oh yeah, on the road, I remember big trucks would go, some empty tractor trailers with flatbed and a lot of refugees.

And there were bands. When the truck would slow down, they would jump on it, when have a ride, take a ride. So we saw the other do it, we got on a truck, too, on a truck. There were sharp bends on the road. And we-- and I remember-- so some, used to be they would let them off or this.

We didn't know. We got on a truck, and when it came toward we wanted to get out, we were afraid. We were told that we are now about 10 miles from Bergen-Belsen. We were arriving right, and then we decided we have to go down. And that truck wouldn't stop. And we begged him, and he just to start faster.

And I remember we had bags with food, with or whatever. We threw it down, and we jumped then. And I realize now-- you know, we were younger-- it was so dangerous to jump off of a running truck. When we jumped off, nothing happened.

So on the way we walked, again. And on the way, we met a Hungarian girl. And we talked to her. And we tell her the story. And she said, oh, in Bergen-Belsen, you'll be all right. We tell her all what-- she said, we are in the right place. And she said, you come with me, and I'll show you where to register, there is an office.

And so finally, we came. And we went in, and we-- there was an office. In the office were managing two rabbis from England. One was Wilansky, and one was Baumgartner. They were army chaplains. They were wearing the English uniforms, young rabbis.

And we came in, and we tell them. They register, but shows us the place. So here what happened-- in Bergen-Belsen was the camp for the Jewish camp. And there was a lot of Germans who were living in a camp, oh, a block away.

And the Germans had brick buildings, nice 2-story buildings. Over on this was the Jewish camp were barracks from the war. And it was, when we came, it was burned down, everything.

And there were mass graves. And they showed us that here was buried the ashes and these. And but it was try to level out. And we lived there.

And so from there, from there at that time, the Jewish Agency, the Israeli wanted-- and the American government, in fact, Truman made the English-- England should let in 100,000 Jews to Israel from the, left over from the Holocaust, left over.

But England, at that time, the Secretary of State Bevin in England resisted. And the English Government resisted, because they didn't want to get in trouble with the Arabs.

And Ben-Gurion came there once and spoke. And in Bergen-Belsen there were, meanwhile, a lot of other Jews come together, like myself. And we had demonstrations. And Bergen-Belsen was under the English, in the English part of Germany.

And I remember when Gurion came-- and this I will always remember when he said to us, he said the world knows what Hitler did to the Jews. That he said like that-- that Hitler didn't have to kill the Jews like he did, he said. If the Nurembergs laws, what they gave out, would be enough to kill all the Jews.

He said, there was an Aryan should not have any contact with the Jewish people. And he said the Aryan-- a German or whatever it is-- cannot trade with the Jewish people by himself, and they can't do any service for the Jewish people, and the Jewish people can't do any service for the Aryans. He said, that would be enough that Jews couldn't exist,

But he said, in Israel, is a difference. So he said, all of Europe Jews would perish if the Aryans would actually obey Hitler's laws. That he said, in Israel, if they gave out such a law, he said, it wouldn't hurt the Jews, because he said, we produce our own food, we have our own manufacturing business.

And he said, we can live for a very, very long time, because we don't need the others, we can deal with ourselves on own. [COUGH] But anyhow, that was the speech. And it was, in Israel and in the whole America were fighting that they should-- Palestine should absorb those refugees.

But they, in England, couldn't give in. Finally, under the pressure from the Allies, England decided to send a commission to inquire to the Jews if they want to go to Israel. Because in England, said not-- there aren't so many who wants to go to Israel, mostly want to go to their own country. And this is true, too.

There were a big amount of Hungarian Jews. And the young kids who were already assimilated-- some Hungarian Jews were speaking Yiddish, you know. But there were already a higher class, especially from Budapest.

So they wanted, they were begging to go back to Hungary. And the same was with Romanian, and the same was with all, a lot of different. Some wanted to go to Israel, and some wanted to go home.

So there was that Rabbi Wilansky. He was the chaplain. And he was a Zionist and a really fine Jewish man. And he spoke Yiddish. So he came, and he said to the-- and we had there a big movie house. He used to call together a big hall.

And he spoke. He said, a commission is coming in about a week. And he said, no matter who-- whoever wants to go home, we'll send home to Hungary or to Poland. And but at least from the commission come and enquire, send all who want to go to Israel.

And here what happened-- on the next Saturday the Hungarian kids, especially girls, caught the rabbi. They thought that he messed up the chance of going back to Hungary. And they dropped him on the floor and took off his coat or something. And some say even they beat him up, I don't know.

Anyhow, the rabbi called, again, a meeting. And he said, among other things, he said, I'll consider-- I need the coat, my coat, I need-- and I'll consider whoever returns it to me, that the coat, you don't like me. He said, I couldn't say, of Jews, that they took it from me or something.

And so that happened Yeah, so meanwhile, the England with the commission came and with their inquiries. But still they hold tight that they wouldn't allow any Jews to emigrate to Palestine, because they had, before they had already a white paper from a previous government to stop immigration on account of the Arabs.

And at that time it started the illegal immigration. And how-- what did consist of? There were Israeli, Israeli soldiers,

which were in the army in the English army, the volunteers. And they would come in secret and make contact with the Jewish young boys. They would take them to Italy, and in Italy or to any harbor and put them on boats. And they would go to Israel and get them to Marseilles to southern France.

And there was a secret organization. That's when the exodus started. And but there were other many boats. And I myself registered, too, with the Israelis. However, I had here a lot of relatives in America.

And but I didn't know their addresses, because I was a youngster at that time. And my mother and my sister used to correspond with the other side. Was-- so but I remember the Simon Lebow, Bellaire Ohio. So I wrote a few letters, and they didn't count.

I didn't know the exact address. I didn't realize, of course, if you send a letter in normal times to Simon Lebow, Bellaire, Ohio, he would get it without any-- I didn't know then-- numbers or box number. But he's known in Bellaire, he would get a letter. But in those days, I didn't get an answer for about two, three months.

Irving, what year was this, are we--

That was '45, '46.

And you mentioned earlier a Hungarian girlfriend?

Yeah, that-- I'll come back to it.

All right.

Good. So and I didn't get any answers. It passed by three month or four month, and I-- nothing. So one time-- so I gave up. I thought maybe they died, maybe they moved. And in Europe, if you moved and you didn't make good arrangements, it is like you disappeared. Maybe in America, too, if you don't leave a forwarding address, you go away somewhere.

So I gave up, and I settled myself to go to Israel. And here what happened-- and yeah, I was to go to Israel. And I already contacted the people, and I would go on illegal, illegally, like, like everybody was doing. And here what happened-- if you remember, when I said when we, we're on the way to Bergen-Belsen, a girl, we met a girl.

And we talked to her. And she said, you come, and you'll be safe and everything. And a really-- she did for us, and we got acquainted.

What was her name?

Her name was Eleanor Weiss from [PLACE NAME]. And we got acquainted. And in such a case, you get acquaintance, and you get help, you feel it ties you together.

And she told us later on about her, how she was brought to the camp. She was really in that camp all the time.

What camp was that?

Bergen-Belsen.

I see.

Yeah, she was brought from Germany in Bergen-Belsen. And she was taking care, she said. She is called the mother of very young girls-- 13, 14-years-old girls from her neighborhood, about six, eight girls. And she said, in the camp she was with them. And now, she lives in the barracks with them.

And we got acquainted with her. And I used to come in in the barracks. And you know, young people-- and she was quite religious. And at that time, I wasn't religious at all, because we grew up in Riga. And in Riga was under the influence from Russia.

And not only that, in the influence from our growing up, when I grew up, it was, the Jewish question was so imminent that we were taught in school that learning Torah, it's called squeezing the bench, sitting and doing, it is not-- it is just learning is nothing, doing is the main thing.

And that's why we have our problem. We are too much, we have too much intelligence, but we are not used to work. And that, in fact, the Goyim, used to accuse us that the Jews don't work, can't work, don't want to work. They just want to trade or the professionals. That was their accusation.

And somehow, we were so sensitive that the Jewish people, we thought really they were right. And when I was growing up, it was that we have to learn to work on the Zionism were blooming. But in Israel, we'll go, and we'll work the land, and we'll work this.

So we were inclined to accept that the Torah learning, that's not good, or too much intelligence is not good-- work, deeds are-- on doing things. So that's why I said I wasn't religious. Now, shtetl, in spite, there was three shuls we had.

And I happened to live in shul across from the street and spend my days in school, in shul, because we didn't have playgrounds or, like you have here, or a swimming pool. It was around shul where we got together.