

And that girl, she was very smart and very intelligent. And somehow we took a liking of each other, unnoticed. And I told her that about America-- I have so many relatives-- brothers and uncles and things. And she said, if you find about them, will you take me, I would go with you. I said, yes.

So anyhow, but then nothing came out of that. So one time I was at her place with-- in the barrack. And one of her girls, the young girls she takes care of, 13 or 14-years-old girl, writes. I said, what is she doing there? She was writing. She said, oh, she writes a letter to her father in New York, in New York.

So I said, oh, maybe I'll put on a little note in her letter. She said, go and ask her. So I asked the girl, can I put in a little note about my relatives. She said, why not? Oh yeah, and I asked her, the-- she was called the mama, the-- my girl, the Eleanor Weiss. She said, yeah, put in a--

So I write a little note like that that I have relatives in America, Simon Lebow and Joe Lebow and in California somewhere. Maybe he can find out and get, connect me with him, in English. And I put it in, and I forgot about it in a couple of weeks

Oh yeah, so one day when I come to the girls, she said, did you hear, they called your name? And I were-- how it was distributed, the mail in Bergen-Belsen, the camp, the English had a truck with a loudspeaker. And he would go along and call the mail. And then the people would run out. He would go slow, you know, and deliver the mail.

And I don't know where I was, I didn't hear. She said, it seemed to me, for sure, that they called your name. So oh yeah, and the letters the English did not deliver they left with their office, with the chaplains, you see. The camp was managed by the English government, by the English army. And the chaplains were part of their army. Army chaplains, they were.

So I went there. I went there in the office, and I go in and Rabbi Baumgartner was there. And I went. There was a line of people-- they always have something there-- letters or other business complaints-- or demand something. So I have a look on my-- I was 10 closer, about 3, 4. And I look up there. I see what they-- it-- there is a letter for me. And I recognize from whom it is, you know.

And there was already a letter and an affidavit for me to come to America. And here what happened-- this Hungarian girl father was in New York. They lived in Hungary, but he was in New York. He was from the ultra Orthodox people, and he was a collector for a yeshiva, collecting money.

Now, we have the United Jewish Appeal, but in those days, each yeshiva had their man to send out. And he was going from door to door, collecting money. And the money they use to send to Europe to the yeshiva. And he was here.

And it so happened that this man-- he used to come to Bellaire, too. And I had an aunt in Bellaire. And she was kosher, so he used to eat there. And Uncle Simon was a contributor, so he knew him.

What was his name?

I, I forget it. Oh, Schecter or Schuster. I'll remember. In fact, before I was still in-- yeah, remember.

Were there any yeshivas left in Europe to be collecting for?

Well, he was caught in the war, and I don't think he could go back.

Oh, he was there the entire war in New York?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now, Schuster, Schecter. Anyhow, so he called up, right away. And he said, here, I have a note that Irving Lebow, your-- is alive and in Bergen-Belsen. Now--

Simon was your uncle?

My uncle, right. So I got-- and my brother was here then already in Bellaire. So he went to New York, got me papers and everything. Now--

What was your brother's name, Irving?

Joe, Joseph. So here what happened-- my brother thought that if there is anybody alive, I have chances, because I-- he knew who I was. I have a slow temper, and I'm pretty in good health, and I have a trade. So he thought if anybody would be alive, I would. But here, month went by, and they didn't hear, so he thought maybe I perished.

Then I had a sister in Riga. And here what happened-- we got--

Was she the one put on the train?

Yeah, yeah.

OK.

She was on the train. And here again, after the war-- and she remained alive. You know that story.

No, the last time you mentioned her, she was put on a train and being sent to Russia.

Right. We send her. We put her on a train, my brother and me.

Right.

And we thought she should go to our little town or a ghetto town, but the town--

But the train didn't stop?

But the train didn't stop, and they went to Russia. And during the war, America and Russia were friends. She, my sister got in touch with these brothers in America.

Simon?

Simon and Joe. And they were corresponding. At the end of the war, my sister, from Russia-- they were sent deep in Russia near Siberia-- she came back to Riga and expected-- and some survivors came back to Riga. And she asks some, and they said that I was in ghetto in Riga, they told her.

And she didn't meet anybody who would, who could tell that I was in Germany or alive. They didn't know, because a lot you didn't know from each other much.

Was there still a ghetto in Riga then?

No, no, no, no. But survivors arrived from Germany. You know, it was after the war already. And she said, she went there to talk to them. Not only that, there were lists of survivors made and brought to all places, to a lot of places. But still it wasn't with a system. And she wrote to my brother here that it's such a pity that, evidently, I perished.

And my brother later told me, he wrote to her, no, we shouldn't lose hopes yet. And in that letter when I got in Bergen-Belsen was that you evidently know that our sister is alive with her family.

And this was to me such a surprise, because when we send her, we thought she land in [PLACE NAME], that in [PLACE NAME] they brought the rabbi, took the whole community to the shul and burned alive there about three shuls. Whatever they could pack in the shuls, they put it on fire and burned. And then the rest were taken out to the woods and

shot.

So in the beginning, I did not believe that they will do it, but we heard that, in Riga, what they did in the provinces. And they, in Riga, they didn't do it yet like that. They were shooting at night 4 or 5 people, 10 to intimidate or-- we thought. But so for a while I thought, well, we sent them to the, in the, to the mouth of the lion.

When the things got worse-- and it bothered me so much. But on the other hand, I thought, who should know? Nobody could know. When things were got worse, and they were already starting mass execution and annihilation, I thought, well-- and when I wanted to commit suicide, it was a time I thought, well, maybe they had it better. If it came, why did they have to suffer so much? It's over with them. And so I got the papers.

Where was she living at the time?

At the time she was already returned from Siberia to Riga.

And she was living in Riga?

Near Riga, yeah.

With her child?

Yeah, with-- she had two children.

Two children?

And a husband. And the husband was in the Front. He was wounded but all survived.

Her husband was not on the train with her at the time?

Yes.

Oh they--

Yes.

--put him on the train?

Yeah, on the train, too. And then he was mobilized in the army and did that. Yeah. So here what happened-- so I got the affidavit. And they told me, in the office, what I have to do. And they said it'll take time, because the transportation alone-- before I get the visa, transportation alone is not for civilians.

There isn't such a thing, because the American army was returning soldiers. And it was millions of people. And all the boats and planes were basically with soldiers, and they had the priority. The Americans had the priority in those days.

And here, when I got the affidavit, I come to my girl. And I showed her, and she said to me, you know what, she got a letter, too. From Hungary, she got. And she told me that she had a [NON-ENGLISH]. You know what a [NON-ENGLISH] is? A boyfriend with whom she planned to be married. And she thought, too, that he was for sure, he perished.

And she said she got the news that he was alive. And she said to me, you wouldn't expect me to leave her boyfriend and her youth friend and this. And she said she's going back to Hungary. And that was-- and I said, yes, I understand. And I start the work to get to America.

So to get to America, there in Germany were no English Consul. I had to get a visa that they send me. From the camp,

they send me to France, again, by car. Everything went by my car or a bus. They had, evidently, more like I am on-- with them they got a small bus, like a school bus they had.

And they took us from Bergen-Belsen first to Belgium. We were driving, and they brought us to France. In France, they had in, an old grade school, they had a camp for refugees, like whoever had papers and that want to go home. They put me there. And I had to go to the English-- to the American Consul.

And I came, and I showed him I have an affidavit. And they said they cannot give me a visa till I have transportation. I used to go to transportation, to companies. They said they can't book me until I have a visa. And I was going from one place to the other. And in each place when you came, you had to stay on line. I would come out in the morning and be there in the evening, just to say me, no, it's-- have to wait and wait.

I was waiting. And yeah, I was waiting there for a whole year. And meanwhile, I lived in a camp. And they fed us. But I was a watchmaker, and I got there work. I got acquainted little by little. I used to get a watch to repair. And later finally, I got work, and I was working and living there for a whole year.

And I would maybe have stayed there much longer. And here what happened-- my, again, Uncle Simon wrote the letter, and he, evidently, some lawyer must've put it up that we are a big family here and all from the rest of the family perished in Europe, and only one nephew has remained alive. And it is something-- a pity or something that I can come here.

He send my financial statement-- you know, how much he pay taxes and his assets. And one time, I came, and the Consul called me in, and he opened a folder and said, who is Simon Lebow. I said, he is my uncle, he's my father's brother.

Oh yeah, and I heard a young fellow-- I didn't know what English, a word English nor French. There in the consulate, I - English or French you could make yourself understood. So they gave me along a young fellow, a Frenchman. And he knew a little English-- a little Yiddish. He was from Jewish parents. So I used to talk, and he would explain to them.

And he was-- I could hear, according to this. And he-- the statement, he said, he's a wealthy man or something like that. And that helped. And he said, come next day. He gave me an appointment. And my gosh, I got the visa. I-- it was after a year, I got the visa. When I got the visa I went to a airlines. I think it was Air France or American, I don't remember.

Somewhere I think in my citizen's papers, they found out how I came to America, the transportation. I have citizen papers, that is when I come on. And I had enough money saved up from my watch repair, and I bought a ticket. And I came here.

And my brother knew I was-- that I'm about to come, but I didn't know how to wire or this. You know, I was from a small town and without a language in a strange country. And I come, And on the plane, they took-- they registered already. And I came on a permanent visa that, when I got off of the plane, I said, what do I do now? He said, you are an American, you can go wherever you want. [LAUGHS]

Oh yeah, in France, I was started to take English and French in night school at the Berlitz School. And for refugees. It was free. So I took English, and I learned pretty, I would say, pretty fast. At the end of the year I could make myself understood.

Irving, what happened to the other two fellows that you--

Oh, we-- see, after I got the affidavit, we parted. And I knew Baron went to Israel. And I don't know what happened to Kovnak had, in Ireland, had some relatives. And he said he would go to Ireland. So I don't know if he got in touch with his relatives or this.

When you got off the plane, and they told you you could go anywhere--

Yeah, so I said, I don't know, I don't--

Was that different than what you had--

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it was different, but still I was in a strange land. I was in New York at that airport.

Were you-- you were used to people telling you where to go--

Right, right, right, right. And I was so scared. And evidently, that person who told me so how it was, I said, I don't know where to go or what. So he asked about relatives. So I told him I have in Bellaire, Ohio. What's his name-- he got him in a telephone book and called. And I was so surprised.

So he said, here, there is my brother on the other end. He said, oh, you are here. He said, you know what, you stay there, and I'll take a train or a plane, and I'll come to pick you up, he said, at the airport. I said, tell me how I should get-- why I don't-- how I'll somehow get myself. I'll take a cab or something.

And he didn't want that. Then I said, if you'll tell me where to go, and I'll get it-- on a train, or-- He said go to the Pennsylvania Station and get a train, ask for a ticket to Wheeling, West Virginia. And somehow, I don't remember how I got it-- by a cab or something.

Oh, and this I remember. A cab or a porter got me to the station. And he brings me to the where I buy a ticket. I ask him where to buy a ticket. You know, it was so strange with so many people. And I didn't know. So he brought me, and he said you buy a ticket. And I buy. And I go, and I ask a ticket for Wheeling, West Virginia.

And the man in the window-- and he stays with me. And he asks me, one or two. And I wasn't used to listening. When you don't know the language, you know. I said, yes. So he gives me two tickets. But that guy didn't sit at him-- gives me two tickets. I bought two tickets. And I had to wait about five or six hours or more on this station.

And I was sitting around. And at the same time, I'm afraid. I see a train comes-- I shouldn't miss my train. And I go I'm tell him, will you tell me when the train comes on there? And I look at the ticket. I see two identical tickets. And I-- why do I have two tickets? And I got-- and I had so much time. And I got two, and I went after three, four, five hours.

And I said, do I need two tickets, or I need only one ticket? And that-- in the window, he got quite mad. He said, if you need one, why do you buy two or something? He-- I didn't understand. But anyhow, he gave me money back. And so and I remember I was asking, asking-- each train which come, is this to Wheeling, West Virginia.

And finally I-- it was the train. And I got on, and I came. And that train to Wheeling and over there, well, near the river. And I remember I came about 8 o'clock in the morning. And here is Wheeling-- I see, saw the sign. And the conductor I asked he should tell me where Wheeling is.

And I looked through the window, came with my brother. And he arrived. Well, with the girl, as I said, there is-- we got acquainted. And we start to go out together. And I used to come to her place. And she was a real nice girl and a very, very, such a, you know, a real European girl, a nice and intelligent and this.

And we thought we'll get married. We'll go to Israel together or America together. And here what happened-- that she find in the same day or in a day apart that she find out that her old boyfriend is there and have family so much there. And she decided she will go to there.

Irving, do you have any conclusions, advice, or any thoughts, having gone through this whole experience?

Well, no. I think we'll need another meeting, I'll tell you. I have some other-- maybe, what time is it, now?

It's only 10 minutes till 11.

Oh, oh, oh. So here's what I'll tell you. OK, I'll tell you another episode what happened in America. There is a lot of details. When I came to America, I was, again, scared, and also, I had a trade, you know. But still it's a strange world. And I saw hardships, but I settled. In fact, first I worked in Pittsburgh.

And I got a job. I learned. I stayed with my brother for three, four weeks, and I learned here more English. And I learned, I got used to the-- to hearing it. And I went, and I was going from jewelry store to jewelry store and hunting for a job. And I told him I know also how to fix typewriters.

And at the end of the day, somebody sent me over. And it was Penn and Highland Avenue. Penn and Highland of the corner, there was a stationery store. And he was fixing typewriter. And I got the job. And I got the job, and he was very happy with me. I was fixing typewriters.

And that man in the corner of his store he rented out to a watch repairman, an old man. And after I was working there 3 or 4 month or maybe 5 month, he used to-- he told me that that watch repairman, that he is a Swiss from Switzerland. But he's an American, and he's getting older, retiring. And he wants to quit the business.

And that man for whom I was working, he didn't know that I repaired watches, too. But when I heard that he's going out of business, so I tell him, I am, actually, I am a watch man more than a typewriter man, and I would like to take it over. And I said, will, for your typewriters, will take in a young boy, and I'll teach him how to do it. And I'll supervise, and you'll be sure your typewriters will be fixed and this, because watch repairing in those days was a good trade.

And for typewriters I was making-- he was paying me \$35 a week, which, in those days, was wages. And he found me a place to live. And I remember it was an old bathroom. You know, you could see where the pipes are, and it was for a bed. And you could have the squeeze in yourself. And at the end was a little table. And I don't think it had a window even.

And I lived there, and I would come home weekends here. But when I saw this, I thought here it's I have a chance. Working \$35 was enough for me to live. In fact, I used to come here by bus, and I still saved money from it.

Where was the store located?

On Penn and Highland Avenue.

In what city?

In Pittsburgh. That's the city.

Highland, yeah.

So and here I-- am when he said to me, that man, he said, I think it can be worked out. And I thought, my gosh, I knew from watches, to clean out or to fix, they used to charge at those, in those days, \$4, \$5, \$6 a watch. And that would be I can make a living. And I can-- a nice living, I can plan even to get married if I have this.

And I thought that's my opportunity. And here what happened-- I had-- and I was very overwhelmed with hopes, high hopes, because I couldn't wish any better-- to have this, to repair watches. And I planned even then I would bring in some bands to sell and this and that. And I thought that will make it.

On the other hand, I had, in Los Angeles, four uncles, brothers of my-- one two, three, four, four uncles-- brothers of my father. And I have never seen them.

What are their names?

Lebow, Harry Lebow, Ralph Lebow, Sam Lebow, and David Lebow. And after surviving, people are very sensitive about relatives. You know, I have lost there a lot of family in the old country and here-- and very sensitive. And I

wanted to meet my uncles.

So and here I think, if I take this over, you have to tend the job here, you have to tend the job with the typewriters. So I come to my boss. He was an Englishman from England. And I remember he would try to talk the way I talk. You know, he thought I'll understand better. He would try to talk to me in a different English.

But anyhow, I was learning English, because necessity is the best master, because I needed it. And so I come, and I tell him, listen, I have relatives, uncles, in Los Angeles. And before I settle down and this, I want to take off about a week to meet-- and if I can do it. He said, oh, sure, but he points, like that, but be sure to come back, he said.