

This is an interview with Mr. Bert Dan on November 17, 1982 in Oak Park, Michigan. The interviewer is Kay Roth.

I'd like to start the interview by asking you some questions about your life before the war. So would you like to tell me when and where you were born?

Sure, I was born in, in January the 9th, 1916 in Romania. And I went to school in Romania. I was in the army and the Roma...the Romanian army in 1938 and— actually that's when the problem started out in 1938, you know, when I was in the army. But one year later in Poland the problem started and then they detained us and we stayed for a number—period of time in the army because of the problem. They were hav...having worldwide actually. And then in 1940, then the Romanian army started getting in uh, into the Nazi ter...terrors. I'd say that they didn't trust the Jewish soldiers and we knew they didn't before. And therefore they were sent out to some other little towns or communities that the, the population was in the army already.

Mm-hm.

Now I'm telling you what different non-Jewish people and therefore the Jewish people were sent out to work on the fields and stuff like that.

Mm-hm.

And uh, we worked there for about six months or, or less. And then...

You were a soldier then?

I wa...I was a soldier in the army, but no gun. The guns were taken away from us.

And uh, we were in there working on the fields for about less than six months.

And then we were in the East, we were free to go whatever we want to do. And

then in 1940, at that time the Hungarians wanted a part of Romania back from—the army—the Hungarians wanted a part of Romania back that actually belonged to them before the First World War. And though the decision made in Italy at that time ??? I'm sure that you heard of that, the history, you know that, that ??? decision made at a big chunk of Transylvania is being transferred back to Hungary. And that part where I come from was, is the city, it was Kolozsvár.

Could you spell that?

Well, I'll spell it to you in Hungarian and Romanian, so you'll know exactly.

Okay.

The Romanian name was Cluj, C-l-u-j. And in Hungarian it is called Kolozsvár. It is K-o-l-o-z-s-v-a-r. Kolozsvár.

Was that a large city?

Yeah, it was a large city and the, the whole population was about one hundred and fifty thousand people. There was a university and we had our own opera and uh, theaters and so on. It was a beautiful, large city.

How many Jews lived there?

And there was uh, I would say, roughly about twelve thousand Jews in Kolozsvár. And uh, the Hungarians got it back in September of 1940—the end of September 1940. They marched in and the Hungar...the Romanians walked out and the Hungarians took it over. And it wasn't an easy, as easy as I'm telling it to you right now, but they got it back. And actually when the Hungarians took over that's when the real problem started, because the Hung...the Romanians—I don't want to, to uh sound like they were angels. They were by no means, because they

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had um, people like Tiso who you've heard of I'm sure. And there were many, many, many other Tiso's in Romania. But uh, generally speaking I would say that the Romanians in comparison to the Hungarians were like—??? comparison, they just don't—the Hungarians were more of a Nazi or more of a, a Jew-hater than the Germans themselves. And I really mean that. You know, it is—it was unbelievable. Only people who actually lived there, you know, know what the Hungarians—the way that they, they hated with a passion the Jews. They actually hated them. And there was no way for anybody who wanted to make an honest uh, dollar, you know, to make an honest living, there was no way. They wouldn't allow you because everything was rationed, you know. They wouldn't—you couldn't buy anything. And if there was anything to be sold or to anybody who wanted to buy something they gave it to the Gentile storekeepers, and the Jewish people had no way of making a living. So actually they forced the Jewish population into a sort of a black market. You didn't have to be in the black market, yeah, but indirectly they forced you into it. And—which was a very unfortunate thing. And uh, that's the way we lived. Now my part, for example in 1941—up until then I had odd jobs here and there and uh, in '41—in November the 9th actually. That's—cause I remember very, very distinctly. I arrived by train. I was in Budapest. And on my way home, when I arrived in my hometown in Kolozsvár, there were—I see my sisters. I had four sisters, and two of them—the four sisters were at a train at the station. I couldn't figure out why they are there. And I got out and I said, “For crying out loud, what are you doing here so early in the morning?” It was seven o'clock in the morning, you know, and it was

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very unusual, because they never waited for me whenever I was away—they never waited for me and this was an occasion where they did wait. And I told them, “Why didn’t you stay?” “We wanted to come out to wait for you.” And we walked together and I didn’t live too far away from the station, so we didn’t even have to take a cab or anything, we just walked. And while we were walking then one—my—one of my sisters told me that uh, “There are two gentlemen who are walking right behind us and they were over at our house yesterday and they wanted to talk to you and they are right here behind us so don’t get panicky and uh, we don’t know actually what they want.” And they followed me to the house and my mother who was already old at the time, you know, and she was very—an elderly woman. And these two guys walked right behind us and we came and when—the minute I was at the door, before I even had a chance to walk into the house, they pulled out a gun and stuck it into my back and they said, “You are under arrest and don’t make any move because your life depends on it.” And I said, “Hey I didn’t do anything.” And uh, we walked into the house and they searched me without asking any further questions. They started searching me and took a—I had a suitcase, a small suitcase and they opened it up and uh, I had a small uh, prayer shawl and a teffilin, I don’t know whether you know what that means. And that was near in a pack of pajamas and a shirt and stuff like that. And—but they didn’t find anything, I don’t know whatever they were looking for. And then they told me that “You will have to come along with us because we have to ask you some questions.” And they took me into the police station and they started questioning me and they told me that they have another couple of

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men under arrest who are not Jewish and they stressed it very, very strongly. Uh, they claimed that they know me and they will have to take me down there. It was about two hundred fifty miles away from there—from Kolozsvár. And uh, they want to confront me with those two gentleman because they have a lot of questions to ask after that. And I said, “I’m willing.” “Good for you willing to go down.” I said, I had no choice, whatever they told me I have to go along. And they took me down there and uh, those two men—they were talking a lot—I never saw them in all my life. I don’t know who—I didn’t know who they were. One of them had a brother that I had some connection with prior to this—must have been about six, seven months before that. I bought from them—from him something. And evidently that’s how the whole, the whole thing started for me that I was involved in the black market. So they kept me under arrest and the other two guys were also taken. And they took us out to Budapest. And there was a trial. They kept us locked in for about six months without a trial. And there were a lot of people brought in from all over. One of them brought a pound of coffee or a soda—a pound of coffee and stuff like that, you know, and we were all locked in there. And I think it was the end of June and finally they came out with a trial. And they sentenced me to one year in prison and I was locked up in one of the most famous Hungarian institutions, it is called a ???. It is like—in Yiddish it’s called a star. A star jail—they’re, you know it’s like Jackson prison or whatever, you know, the star. It was one of the most famous, you know, where they took all the criminals who were sentenced for life and in prison for murder and stuff like that. And that’s where I was locked up until the 19th of November, 1942.

It's almost a year from the day they first came.

I went ten years and one—one year and ten days exactly I was locked up. And they released me without any hesitation and I was a free man again and by the time I got home one day later because I gave 'em a ticket, you know, to take the train home. I got home the 20th of November and at that point there were uh, how do you call those uh, I don't know what the heck they're called—anyway they put up signs all over the city that every Jewish man who was born 1912 to 1919 has to go in and to the—to a labor camp. But uh, they gave you exactly the place where you have to report. And the date came up every—like I was born in 1916, so I had to report on the 15th of December of 1942, which was about uh, less than a month after my release.

Only Jewish males?

Only Jewish males. Only Jewish males. And I went in, in '19...in December the 15th of 1942 to a Nagybánya it's called—a Hungarian—in Hungarian it is called Nagybánya, before it was called Baia Mare which was part of Romania and then changed it back to—you know, that was part of Transylvania.

Was that a city or a...

A city, it was a city.

Could you spell it? Either one, it doesn't matter.

Yeah, it is uh, in Hungarian it is called Nagybánya. It is N-a-g-y and then another word, Banya, B-a-n-y-a.

Oh.

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Nagybánya. And they kept us there in a tremendous, big uh, school yard for forty-eight hours. And actually they didn't give us any food because everybody ??? and then we took food around, you know. And uh, while we were standing around in that yard, I had to rent in the thing because it was already interesting thing that uh, to show the, the, the, the meanness of what was going on there. One soldier came over to me—maybe I was dressed a little better than the next guy. There were several—many, many people and I wasn't the only one, but they just—this particular time. One soldier comes over to me and he says, “Come with me I want to talk to you.” And I asked him, I said, “Do you want me I should take my, my suitcase along?” He said, “No you can leave it here with your buddies and you come with me and then you will come back.” I said, “Okay.” And I went in there and there was a, a—I wouldn't measure—I would say about thirty soldiers who were all designated to watch, you know, for this uh, ??? . And there was one Jewish man and he was a—you only had to look at him and you could tell that he wasn't all together, you know, he was a little bit on the deranged side, you know. And they kept on beating on him and they told him to sing some Jewish songs and he didn't—he was standing there and saying nothing, you know. And uh, one soldier came over to me and he says, “Now you tell your, your buddy who is your brother, tell him that he has to sing that, a Jewish song, the ???” that was—I don't know how they knew about that uh, particular song, but they want him to sing the “Vetahair Lebeinu” and I should tell him. I said, “Okay,” and I asked him, “Why don't you sing the Vetahair Lebeinu?” He looked at me and he said “No.” “You know, Vetahair Lebeinu” He has chosen that he's not singing. And then he told

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me, "I want you to get a hold of him and hit him in the face and maybe that will change his mind." I said, "I am not going to do that." He said, "Do you know what that means that this is an order and you have to do it." So I went over to this guy and I did this to him—I just slapped him. I wouldn't hit him if my life depended on it, I wouldn't hit him. And uh, he said, "Is that the way you, you hit him?" I said, "Well, I told you, I am not going to hit him. If you want to kill me that is your privilege but I am not going to, to, to hit another Jewish man who's having the same problem like all of us and I have no right of doing it and I am not going to do it." He said, "Okay, now wait a minute." And one of the soldiers went over and he grabbed this man like this here and hit him right in the face with his fist. And the guy fell down and he started breathing. When he got up, he said, "Now you show him how to hit." And then—as I told you before, you know, he wasn't all there, you know, and he came over to me and he got a hold of me and hit me in the face. He knocked me actually out, and I wasn't uh, breathing either but he—actually this guy was a heavysset big fellow, you know. And he hit me and he knocked me and I was bleeding from my mouth. And then, actually I got up. He said, "You get the hell out of here." And he laughed at me and, and they threw me out. The other guy was left in there and they let me out and I was glad that that was the end of that. And uh, naturally the—my friends—they all left me—they wanted to know what happened and that, it was unbelievable, you know, and they're like—five minutes later they came outside and they said that all the doctors and lawyers stay outside. And they told that uh, they need doctors for something and all the doctors and, they went, they went one group and they were

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standing on the side and uh, they said, “Is there anybody who only has a couple of years, years, you know, in medical school,” and there were another few guys who went over, “Yes, we are medical students.” So they said, “Okay, you all come with us.” And as I told you, they filled a tremendous big yard and we had no facilities, no toilets, stuff like that. And they went out back in the fields and that’s where they, they had to go. And they took all those doctors and lawyers and the students and everybody and put their hand—they had to pick up that shit—excuse me for the expression—and bring it over like this here and throw it in the toilet. This was a kind of a treatment they started us out with in 1942. It was incredible, really, you know, it, it is, when I think back about it my blood is actually boiling. It is incredible. And then the next day they invited us up in groups of two hundred each and they sent us to different small towns and they put us in, in a school building and there was one commanding officer, like he was probably a lieutenant, or a second lieutenant, something like that, and he was in charge of these two hundred people and he had about uh, uh, probably twenty-five, thirty soldiers and we were next in the army and they are the ones who told us what to do. And they took us out and we had to make all kinds of crazy exercises like—and we were still new at it, you know and when everybody—when we, we left home we took along food and we took along our uh, belongings or whatever we had and everything was either in a, in a, a, in a back pack, you know, or a suitcase or whatever you had. And the two hundred people were divided up into, into uh, fifty each. So there were four different groups of fifty. And we slept in sep...in different rooms. All fifty in one, fifty in the next room, and so on. And all of a

sudden they—some soldiers ran in during the night and they told us that, that “The American and the Russians are coming in!” and, “Everybody out!” and, “Don’t take anything out of here!” and “Out!” and they gave us one minute to get out. You didn’t even have a chance to put on your, your trousers or anything. Dressed the way we were, we ran out and uh, went out, we got down, they made us run around and uh, run in the back and forth and front and then by the time they said “It’s all over, it was just a, a test. So now you can go back in your rooms.” By the time we got back there all the belongings, whatever we had was in the middle of the room in one pile. You know what I mean?

Mm-hm.

Everything was empty, they put in one pile and they gave us exactly two minutes to clean out the room and go back to bed. Go out and slept on, slept on the floor. And uh, things like this, no one go into details. I just wanted to bring out the most important parts of it, but this was going on and on and on, almost on daily basis. And it got to the point where you got used to it that you didn’t care anymore really, you know. We, we became almost like, like animals, trained animals who did everything, whatever they were told to do, you know. And, and uh, we didn’t care anymore. So...

Did you ever do—did they ever have you doing anything that was real work or was it all just...

And then—I’m getting to that—and then they kept us there for about, I would say about uh, four weeks. After four weeks they divided us up and they took like one hundred people, one hundred of us. They sent us to a, a bigger town, it is called

Nagyvárad or Oradea. In Romanian it is called Oradea and in Hungarian it is called Nagyvárad, and there was a military school. And they put us in there in that military school and we had to take care of the cleanliness and the, you know, clean out the yard and clean out the horses. They had a lot of horses and they had all kinds of equipment, so we did the cleaning up. And in comparison uh, the way it was for the four weeks in the beginning we were in seventh heaven, you know, because we had our freedom inside. And that's—we couldn't uh, go out, they would not—we were not allowed to leave—that was like uh, prison. But at least we had peaceful uh, peace of mind and we were fed very well over there and we had no real problems. And the other hundred from our group were sent somewhere else. They were sent to ??? they call it, and there they were running a train, you know, running a, uh...

A track?

...the tracks. And they needed people over there and this hundred from the other hundred from our group were sent down there to build those tracks. And they had a very difficult, rough time because after I would say about six or seven months later we were together again because they sent us to a place, it is called Szentkiralyszabadja. And there was a tremendous huge place that they're building an airport, an army airport. And they had there—I'm not exaggerating if I would say a hundred thousand Jewish people—mainly Jewish. I think they had probably about five hundred or so non-Jews that were also brought there, but, but the majority close to a hundred thousand Jews were brought in there and we worked on that—building the airport and...

What was this—name of the place again?

Szent...it is a long—if you want me to write it down for you.

Yeah, write it up here for me. That was in Hungary or was it part of Romania that was taken?

That was in Hu...that was—originally it was Hungary.

Okay.

Can I write it here?

Sure.

And we all worked there on, on that uh, on the airport and we were fed very, very poorly over there. But uh, we had our freedom in the camp. We could walk around from one camp to the other and—it wasn't as bad as we thought it would be. It wasn't that bad. This was already at the end of 194... '43. And all of a sudden, they decided that they are going to release everybody for two months. You can go home. Just, without any uh, hesitation they just told us that we can, we are free and we can go home and we have to report back on the 15th of February 1944. And we went home and when we came back in 1944 it was already entirely a different story altogether. At that time they started preparing already, sending out, the whole camp was going to be dissolved and sent people to, to Russia—to the front, you know...

Mm-hm.

...where the war was going on and to Galicia, which was part of Poland at the time. And uh, we happened to be, our group was many thousands of others, we were sent to Galicia.

When you, you went back to Cluj...

We went—I went back to Cluj.

When...

And I was a free man over there. There was nothing. My, my mother was home, my sisters, everybody was home.

All the four sisters were still home?

All four sisters were still home. The families were all together before the 194... uh, December 1943. And we had to go back on the 15th of February 1944.

Were the conditions at home worse there than when you left before?

Well, the conditions—as far as the conditions were concerned you could—if you had money you could buy food and uh, it wasn't as bad as uh, in many other places what I did find out at a later point that uh, how it was in Poland and how it was in Czechoslovakia and so on. It wasn't as bad. As I told you before, you know, people are very funny when they get used to something terrible. You know, they get so used to it that they think that this is the best, you know, it is, it is very good. It was terrible but it was, it wasn't too bad. As long as the families were all together and—unfortunately, we were so misled by our own self. We didn't want to believe it when we heard stories what's going on in Poland, what's going on in Czechoslovakia, what's going on in, in other countries that say they are actually taking Jews by the thousands—by the hundreds of thousands—and taking them into camps and kill them. We thought that it is just a, a, a lie like many other lies. We didn't, we didn't realize it, you know, we were—I don't know when I say uh, dumb or whatever you want to call it. But uh, it is, it was unbelievable what was

going on. And uh, the majority of the Jews didn't, didn't believe it. So anyway—and at this point what I had know, what I know today—I had a chance not once or twice but many a times to cross the border because my hometown was right near at the Romanian border, and in Romania those people were free. You know...

Mm-hm.

...and all I would have to do is just cross the border and I'm in Romania and I'm a free man. But I feared, "How do I know that Romania is not going to be worse than what, what I got here. I know it is bad here, but how do I know what's going on over there?"

Mm-hm.

And uh, very, very few people had the, the, the foresight to make a move like that, you know.

Mm-hm.

But unfortunately very few people had that. And uh, we went back and forth and already 1944 to that camp. And then we were all sent out to different places. Like my group with thousands and thousands of others, we were sent to, to, to Poland. And I was over there in different loca...localities like, like uh, ??? and I don't recall the bigger cities, you know. And what we were working over there is on the road—we were fixing the roads and they took us out to, to uh, build roads made out of wood. Actually, you know, they took us in a tremendous big forest and what they made us do—you had to cut out trees and only four men were allowed to a tree. Now those trees were unbelievable. You know, they were very hard to lift them up and we had to cut off the, the branches and carry 'em, four guys to

one tree and we had to carry ‘em uphill and lay them down to build the road. You know, and this takes the weeks and weeks and weeks to build a road of I don’t know how many miles. You know, it was an unbelievable. And over there we were under the command of a Hun...Hungarian uh, group of soldiers who were like, you know, here I would say something in that order. You know, they were actually roughnecks, you know, and...

Mm-hm.

...and they were really trying to give us a very, very difficult, hard time. And several of us died over there in that camp because they just couldn’t take it—the food was next to zero and the work was incredible, absolutely incredible. You know it was so hard that—I, I myself, you know, as I told you before, you know, I’m not a weakling—I wasn’t a weakling at that time and I don’t know how I survived. I really—many a times I’m thinking about it, “How did I do it that I’m still here?” It, it—you know, it was impossible the work you had to do over there. And—but—and I survived because I am here to tell you the story.

Was it winter or was it...

This was already spring and summer of 1944. In the meantime, we heard, over there—we heard stories that our parents were all taken to concentration camps, but we didn’t have the slightest idea of what a concentration camp means or how it looks like or what it looks like. But we just heard stories. All I know that we kept on writing letters and we never received any mail from home.

Did you get any of those postcards they were made to send...

No, one...

...when they got to Auschwitz?

...one of my friends—one in a group of a hundred probably—received a postcard—received a postcard and it is—that all they said that we are in Waldsee...

Oh.

...that's what they called—Waldsee and, "We are having a wonderful time. We are all together and uh, hope that you are doing fine and hope to see you soon." And that again gave us a, a lift, you know that we know that they are still in existence and they are still alive and they are okay. So this was in 1944. I did not receive a card like that. But as I told you, one of my friends did get one. Probably in the camps they were only one who received it, I don't know, but this is the one—the only one that I know of in our camp who, who did receive one. And—are we out of time?

Oh that's all right, I have lots of tape.

Oh. And then we were there 'til 1944 around uh, September—beginning of, of September and all of a sudden they told us that we are—oh, I have to go back, because this is something very important that I want to bring out. While we were in this camp, and as I told you that many of us died over there from the hard labor and so on. One day—it must have been in July of 1944 that there was—by the time we got into the camp from the, from the work—place where we were working, there were rumors that a new commanding officer came in with a lieutenant and he must be some—a terrible, terrible man and we thought that this might be the end of us. We didn't know what to ex...or what. And we had supper

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and right after we were through eating—they gave us some hot soup or whatever, who knows what, something like that. And after we were through eating—then all of a sudden they gave an order that everybody—whoever—even the sick people have to come out because some new officer is taking over and he wants to see the whole group to...together. And at that particular camp we were two hundred and fifty people and he was in charge of these two hundred and fifty people. And he came outside—I will never forget him as long as I live. He was a very handsome, tall strong man and he introduced himself. His name is ??? That was his name. He was a lieutenant in uniform, naturally and he is taking over command of this whole group, and he would like to know if there is—there are any complaints, anybody has any complaints about the food or about the tre...treatment or what's going on in the camp. And naturally nobody made a move. And he said, "You don't have to worry because if I tell you nothing is going to, to uh, there's no harm being done by anybody stepping out and telling me exactly what's going on because I got to know—when I take over I want to know what's going on." And there was one fellow by the name Rigerman. He is in New York right now—an electrician. And he was really tall guy and he steps out and he said, "Yes, sir," he said, "I, I was beaten up today," and he pointed exactly at the soldier who beat him up—he was a little short fellow, you know, and, and he said, "He beat me up." He said, "How did he beat you up?" He said, "He is so small and you are such a big man." He said, "Well it is very simple, he has the gun and he has a stick in his hand and hits you in, in your face," and he said, "You can see it for yourself." And he had marks right here on his face. He said, "There's not much

you can do no matter how big you are.” He said, “Why did you do—he—did he do it to you?” He said, “Because I am a Jew, that’s why.” He said, “You sure that’s the only reason?” He said, “I’m positively sure because I’m a hard worker and I do good work, so that wasn’t the reason that he hit me because I wasn’t working fast enough or hard enough. Because I’m Jewish. Anybody else who was beaten up today?” At this point half of the group stepped out. You know, he was the, the one who started it. Half of them stepped out and we all said that “Yes I was beaten up.” And then he didn’t question it any further. And then in front of all of us, he turned to the soldiers—because they were out there on the ???, you know and he told them, he said, “Now this here will happen again.” He said, “I want to know about anything what’s going on in that work, what was going on...”

[interruption in interview]

Okay, you can start again.

He said, “Nobody has the right to punish anybody but me. I want you to come to me and tell me what’s going on and I will be the one who will punish.” The following day we walked—we went out to, to work and exactly the same thing was going—what happened the day before and this officer—this new guy—he came out and he didn’t talk to anybody, he was just walking up and down and we looked around and we saw exactly what was going on. In the evening when we walked in, he let us have supper, after supper he called us out “Everybody out!” So, he said, “Was there anything happening today?” And at this point the whole group, everybody stepped out, “Yes I was beaten by this guy, I was beaten by that guy...” and so on and so, so he turned to that little short soldier—he wasn’t even

a soldier, he was a—he had some rank, he wasn't an officer yet, but he was going to school to become an officer—and he told him, he said, “You of all people, you should know better when you are getting an order that you are not supposed to hit or beat up anybody and that was an order from me, I'm your superior. And if you are going to do this once more, I'm warning you, I'm going to court-martial you and it will cost you your life, because these people are here to work and to produce, not to be beaten. And this goes to everybody. If you have any complaints against the Jews you come to me and let me know.” And we left, we couldn't believe it. We just couldn't get over it that someone like that could help me. And unfortunately a lot of, a lot of uh, us, a lot of us had decided they are sick, they don't feel good. The next day you know, half of them didn't even go out to work. They, you know, they thought, you know, that they don't have to do it anymore because this is—this was unreal. And uh, we had a very, very beautiful uh, I would say about six weeks while this man was there. And all of a sudden there was a complete changeover. A different man came in and he took over and this guy was really—we actually cried like children when he got sent out of there.

Was he taken out because he didn't beat you or...

Of course.

Do you know if that was the main reason?

That was, that must have—I mean, believe me, we, we actually don't know. I can't testify that yes, he was taken out because he was good to the Jews. But that must have been the only, the only reason because they sent back a man that was even more than the one...

Before.

...before him. Even worse. But fortunately enough, it was already September and the Russian army started pushing in. And they had no choice, so we had to pack up and we started walking. And we walked through the mud, the mud, and mud and mud without stopping, and we kept on going. A lot of them just didn't—they couldn't go any further and they were left there. Some of them were shot, some of them were left there laying in the ditches. And they—probably some of them survived like that. And uh, whoever was able to walk, we kept on walking.

Back towards where you were from?

Back towards Hungary.

Mm-hm.

That's right. And we arrived about two days before Rosh Hashanah in 1944. We arrived into Hungary into a bigger city, it was called Besztercze.

What part of Hungary was that?

Part of, part of Transylvania. Part of Transylvania.

But from your region.

From our region, that's right. We left Romania and that's the first time actually when we did find out that there are no Jews left in Hungary because they had a tremendous big Jewish population over there and there was nobody. Absolutely nobody in that...

The name of that city was what? It doesn't matter. It was a bigger city than your city?

No, it's Hunga...no, Romanian small town called Besztercze actually. So, so anyway, we were put in there again in a big school yard and uh, and at this point the Russian army must have been coming very, very fast because they had a tremendous big German population in this town in the whole region...

Mm-hm.

...who lived there all their life. They were not from Germany but were German origins, you know, like their ancestors came from—and they spoke mostly German instead of Hungarian or Romanian.

Mm-hm.

That what their mother tongue. And they were all running away from the Russians, because they were told that they are going to come back and there were trains waiting for them. And we had to go and help them carry their belongings—whatever you wanted to take along. We had to help them in getting it to the train and load the train for them, and that was our job. It was a very good job for us because they gave us food—whatever they had left over they threw it to us or they gave it to us or they thanked us for helping them to board the train and carrying their stuff a little. It was bad for—then after Yom Kippur that was our job. And they—for the day of Yom Kippur—like Kol Nidre and the day of Yom Kippur we were free. We didn't have to go out to work at all. We had a—made a synagogue for our events over there. As a matter of fact there was a—one very religious uh, Jewish man who was also from Transylvania who did find on the way coming back from, from Poland—he found that there were so many Sefer Torahs, you know, thrown out in the streets and, you know, you couldn't carry 'em. There

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were hundreds and hundreds of them lying there and he picked one up himself, you know, and he carried it around. He threw away his own belongings in order to bring the Torah along. It was very touching, you know. And uh, that was the Torah that we, we used for the services and for Yom Kippur. And that Kol Nidre night will stay with me. It was a very, very touching Kol Nidre. I—my nature, you know, I'm not the type of cry. I don't know why it brought back to me. I can't help it. I'm sorry that...

Okay.

So anyway, that Kol Nidre night was the most touching Kol Nidre I ever had in all my life. And then a couple days after Yom Kippur we started walking again and now this is something uh, personal. It has nothing to do with thousands and thousands of others that I'm sure it happened to many others like it happened to me. We were walking day and night without stopping and without food and all of a sudden they told us that we are going to stop right here and we're going to stay over night. And they were so glad, you know, that we were so tired that we just couldn't take it any long...and I took my shoes off and I, I was—laid down on the ground and they didn't give us more than five minutes. They told us that they have to keep on going—continue going. And I tried to put my shoes on and I couldn't put them on anymore because evidently my feet must have been swollen or whatever. And I couldn't walk and I started—I tried very hard to walk and I just couldn't make it. And I told, you know uh, like, I'm sure that you have the experience, like there were all those thousands of people—there were four of us very, very close to one another, very, very close, like really brothers, you know,

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we were very close to one another. One of ‘em lives in, in Los Angeles, one of ‘em lives in Australia, one of them in Romania and I’m here. And the four of us we were very close to one another. And I told them that, “I give up, I just can’t take it any longer.” They picked me up and they carried me on their shoulder. They carried me like that all night long and then in, in the morning somehow I got strength and I put my shoes back on and uh, we kept on walking and we walked ‘til late in the afternoon. And we were already still in Transylvania but it was already very, very close to the Hungarian border—to the old Hungarian border. Because this was Hungary at the time, you know, I’m talking to you about—we were very, very close to the Hungarian border and we knew it that this is the end regardless whatever happens they’re not taking us over there just to—because they, they love us so much, you know. They are taking us there for a reason and we decided definitely not to go any further. And we stopped in a small little village and somebody spoke the language naturally. We had no difficulties talking to the peasants who lived there and we wanted to find out exactly what’s going on. And they told us that—they advised us not to go any further because they heard that the Russians are very, very close to us and you should try and hide if you have the possibility. And they gave us directions how to go into the forest from like that and we spent the whole night in that uh, little village and had to be, what, about seventy of us decided that we are going to take off and go, thinking, “If they catch us, all they can do is kill us. That’s the worse that can happen.” So what if ??? sooner or later ??? anyway, so. And we went into the forest and to our biggest surprise—how it happened nobody ever knew—but, but four of the

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soldiers who were with us—watching us and they had their guns—were behind us and they came along with us. And they gave up the guns to us. As a matter of fact, I personally had one gun in my hand. They didn't want to keep it because they had—they were in uniform—we were, you know, in regular clothes, we had no uniforms or som...something like that. And they were all coming around with us and we were hiding in that forest for six days. This was already in October. And uh, that's when these soldiers told us that, that the, the Hungarians—there was a president or whatever you want to call him—the chief-in-command of the Hunga...Hungarian government was a man by the name Horthy—I'm sure you heard of the name Horthy—and that he is under arrest and uh, uh, Nyilas Guard—that was the most anti-Semitic group of the Hungarians—took over and uh, that this is the end of the Jews and they are murdering Jews by the, by the thousands. And uh, we were already in the forest hiding over there and we were there for six days. Now as far as the food is concerned, some of them had a loaf of bread and there were a lot of peasants who ran away from home themselves and they were there with their—they brought their cows along and, you know, and they gave us a little milk and they gave us a little bread and we were kept alive in there for three days. And after six days, two Hungarian peasants walked by there and we didn't know, you know, because we were hiding in, in the forest and we saw them—we are come and get 'em. We didn't know who they are and we went over. I had a gun—one of the guns, you know, was in my hands. And we went over and we stopped them and we told them that, “You tell us where you are going, otherwise we are going to kill you because you, you know where we are

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and we want to know exactly who you are and what you do.” So they told us that the Russian army is right here in ??? and they sent us to find out whether there are any prisoners hidden around here because they don’t want to get killed, you know, unnecessarily and that’s why they sent these two peasants just to find out these parts. And they knew who we were, you know, they didn’t know that we are there, you know, but they knew that uh, we are Jews and so on. So they told us that, “If you want to go to the Russians, the Russians are right there, just a couple of miles away from there.” So naturally we all took off and we walked right into them. And the Russian soldiers when they saw us, they ran over and grabbed the gun and they tell that I’m one of the Nazis with some, you know, and I told them that I’m Jewish and so on and what took place. And they were handling us very rough, very, very rough and they wouldn’t trust anybody. They—there’s no way you can blame ‘em, you know. And they searched us and they took everything—whatever little thing, whatever we had, if anybody had a good pair of shoes or something, they took it away. They took everything away from us. And then they told ‘em that uh, they are going to take us down in...into the little village and they are turning us over to the Russian command, which they did. After they took everything away from us—they took us down and they turned us over to the Russian uh, commander. Through a very—corridor they took us over there and they started questioning us. We didn’t—we were not able to talk to them. There were a couple of guys that came from somewhere—from Czechoslovakia they spoke a little bit of the language, but not enough, you know, to make them really understand. But they had more of an idea what it was all about. And uh, they

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threw us in to a—they took us for a—for about fifty miles from there, we had to walk with them. And always the same thing like with the Hungarians, you know, but it was a little different story already because that ??? you know, we are free, you know. And they threw us into a camp, and uh, there were at least a hundred thousand Hungarians, Germans, Jews. Everybody was thrown, thrown in there and surrounded by Russian soldiers with machine gun. And I thought, “My God, they couldn’t figure it out what they want—what’s going to happen.” But very fortunately, after two days a major looked in—a Russian major came in and he wanted to know whether there are any Jewish people arrived here and naturally we all ran over and we told him, “Yes we are Jewish.” And he started talking in Jewish—in a very fluent Jewish. He spoke to us and he told us that uh, he is going to see to it that we should be free and we can go home. And he came back—sure enough it didn’t take him longer than about an hour or so. He came back and he said “Now it is up to you guys because I don’t know who’s Jewish, who is not Jewish. You are—you have to select because I want strictly the Jews, I don’t want Nazis, see.” And the rest of our number, you know, tried to select them, you know. And those four soldiers that were with us, we took them in as Jewish, you know, because they were very, very, very nice to us, you know, and—so we were—they opened the gate and they let us out. And we were walking all the way, I was about two hundred miles here from my hometown, or two—I don’t know, maybe more than two hundred miles. And that two hundred miles was, again, very, very difficult because we had to walk barefoot eventually, you know, we had no shoes and something like that. And there were no roads built like, like

here, you know. There were just grav...dirt roads and we were actually bleeding here, you know. But we were free.

It was winter too, wasn't it?

It was cold. It wasn't winter yet. There, there were no snow on the ground yet, you know, but it was—it was the end of October, not middle of October, middle of October. So it was a very chilly night and so on, but it wasn't uh, there was no really—so we could stand it. And we walked all the way and finally we made it home—and I call it a home. There was nothing uh, no—my mother and my sisters, everybody was gone and all the Jews—everybody, everybody was gone. And in my hometown I found at that time when I got home—it must have been around the 20th of October, October 21st—there were about five Jewish people who also survived, somehow, somewhere, you know, along the line, and they were home already and we were next group, you know. And uh, as I say, we started recognizing a little committee, and we had a—we took ourselves a room in the Jewish Community Center and we started organizing and find out what's going on with the rest of 'em and if there is anybody coming home. We started collecting a little food here and there, you know, in order to make it easier for the others who are coming, coming in. And uh, which was a very, very fulfilling, you know, it was a good feeling to know that we are free again and we are able to help people and so on—which was a very good feeling for all of us. And uh, by the end of the year, around the end of December we had quite a few people, a few hundred people that came back and uh, we were all like one family, you know. We were all together again. Some of them knew how to cook and, you know. And

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then I had one of my sisters who lived there—her apartment was taken by, by a Hungarian woman. And she lived there by herself, and when I came home naturally I went over there to my house where I lived with my mother and uh, my, one of my sisters, and that house was totally ransacked—nothing left and then in order to fix it here and there—but no furniture or anything. And my sister's house was left intact because this woman lived there. And so now I told her who I was. Then she got very frightened. She thought that I'm going to kill her or do anything like that to her. But she happened to be an innocent uh, bystander. You know, they gave her the apartment and told her you can walk in and use it. And when I told her who I was—then she apologized to me and she told me that she will get anything, she will do whatever I want to, she's going to cook for me and wash and so on. And I told her that I don't need her help—I said that she don't have to worry and if she doesn't have any place to go there are bedrooms you can stay there and so on. And I invited her and my friends over to my house because this was already, you know, already you are home, you know. And uh, we felt very good and we were—felt secure, even though that uh, there are the Russians—they didn't trust anybody, and no matter whether we are Jewish or whatever. It was sometimes dangerous to go out in the street. Even during the day—not talking about the night—but during the day. They just had sometimes, you know, they sent out a whole bunch of soldiers and they grabbed people in the street and they ordered 'em—took 'em to the train station and they took 'em away. Just like, just like that. And unfortunately there were quite a few Jewish people who fell into uh, something like that. Very unfortunately. They came back

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home, all of them. I wasn't, you know, that I knew that they taken away again by the Russians—but they all came back about a month later or so. They just took 'em to some labor camp to, to work. But there was no exception because you are Jewish or because you are exempt or whatever. They grabbed people in the street and then threw them in and go. So what—so we had our bad times too. But it was beyond comparison to what was going on before, naturally. And then in January and February more and more and more people started coming in and we were already organized. We had a Jewish Community Center and we had a home and we were very happy we were back, back together again. And even those Gentiles who were very, very mean people that find out during the, the part and period when, when they took all the Jews in May of 1944—they were very, very rude to the Jews. After we came home—now I don't know because they were afraid or whatever reason there was—but they were really trying to make up, you know, for whatever they did wrong. And they were very nice to us. They gave us food and stuff like that. We didn't want to accept it because at that point we really didn't need it anymore. We—the Romanian border was a few miles away from us and very, you know, at this point there was no border anymore. You could walk and you could go, you could do anything you wanted to and uh, we had plenty of food and everything else. As a matter of fact a lot of Romanian Jews who lived in the other side, you know, and they were not imported. They moved into Koloszar and they come over there and they opened a little business here and there, restaurants and stuff like that. And it was already nearing, you know, and it was getting to be easier and easier as we go—went along. And then in uh, I'm

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trying to concentrate, you know, it's not possible, you know, to think back of dates. Uh, I would say it must have been sometime in March where—in all the larger cities they were organized the same way, like we had our own committee. Like Nagyvárad, which I mentioned to you already, had already organized big committee. And they had a larger community and larger population. Uh, more people came home for that, that city than to ours. And somehow they made contact with the Romanian government. Now this here was no...nobody's land naturally, Transylvania. At that time it was still Hungary, but it was Romania, it was Hungary—so it didn't belong anywhere. But the Romanians took it for granted that it belongs to them again the same way like it was before the war. And the Romanian government offered the, the committee in Nagyvárad, a train, a complete train and, providing if there are enough volunteers for that. Whoever is going to be delegated by them to go into Poland to find the part that was liberated already and bring home—there are a lot of Jews that were deported, you know, and get—and bring them back. And they gave us a special train. And I was one of the very fortunate people. There was two of us total from my hometown, total of twenty-four from out of the Transylvania—from, from this territory. Out of twenty four, two were taken from our hometown and I was one of the two. The other one lives in Israel, his name is Paul Segerty, very dear close friend of mine. He also was in a camp. I was not together with him uh, during the war, you know, but uh, he was also in one of those labor camps and he was home and uh, the two of us were delegated to this train. And they gave us a little sort of a passport with our pictures in it and it was made out in different languages like in Hungarian, and

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German, and Russian, and Romanian, and Polish. Where we are asking all authorities wherever we go to help us out and uh, do anything—whatever they are asking for in order to bring the Jews back from Poland. And we went to Poland and, but I don't recall exactly whether it was March or, or April. Probably it was already the first part of April, the first time that we—train took off. And uh, we had enough supplies like food, and medication was one. And we had two doctors that were also in the delegation—Jewish guys who were also in labor camps and they, they came home. And we went to Poland and we went as far as Krakow. And that was the end station for our train. We stayed right there and from Krakow we were sent out to—four uh, delegates to different places like to Auschwitz, which was already liberated at the time. And so on and on. I happened to be the first time I was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. And it was extremely, extremely interesting to go I—and we had a guard that also came along on the train—he was a Polish Jew who was working in the concentration camp from 1942 through the liberation and were working in the death camp actually. You know he—and he knew every corner. And he came along with us and it was extremely interesting at this point. He pointed out to us exactly where the Krematoriums were and uh, some of 'em were still standing naturally out of order, while they were still standing, and some of them were completely destroyed. And uh, as a matter of fact, I took some pictures. That friend of mine in, in Israel has quite a few pictures. I have a couple or three of them. And uh, there were, I would say, about a hundred Jewish leftovers—pe...leftovers in, in the hospital. And we took food along with us and we gave it to them. And uh, it was an experience that—it will

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stay with me for the rest of my life. It was really something so fulfilling that uh, I can only believe that uh, it's a really unbelievable—you got to see it to believe what was going on there. How those old people that—have you ever seen a skeleton? Those were actual skeletons still alive. How they were able to, to walk around or even move around I don't know. But they were actual skeletons. I don't know the reason—probably you might know, that they called them Musel...Musellmann—that's how they called them over there, not skeleton. But they were actually skeletons. And uh, when we walked in and we brought food to them and they started grasping and crying and hugging us, and you know, it was so touching that it was un...unbelievable, unre...and uh, whoever was in the yard there from, from Romania or Hungary and wanted to come along or they were able to come along—we took them. And naturally along with us—and we took 'em back to, to the train and over there the doctor started taking care of them already. You know, and it was uh, a different atmosphere, naturally. And uh, we were there for about four or five days and we had a train full of people already. We had about seven hundred Jewish people. And we took 'em back home to Romania and we stayed home for about, for about a week or so, and the train came back and we went back and forth. I made the trip four times, okay. And one out of the four times was the most interesting. When a friend of mine—this Paul—it's been a matter of years from the last time I—as a matter of fact I, I just got a letter from him yester...this morning. I talk to him over the phone every once in awhile. And he and myself were sent from Krakow to take a Polish train and go to Łódź. It was a large Jewish city. I mean it was a full city, but a large Jewish

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population. And uh, to look around if there are any Hungarian or Romanian Jews to bring them back to the train and we are going to take them home. And on the train—never, never I will forget. It was just jammed—so many people, thousands and thousands of people were in that Polish train. And we saw that two women sitting in the corners wearing nice looking—nice in riding boots with dress—and you could tell on that train they are entirely different, they are not—they don't belong there. And we didn't—we couldn't figure it out. And Paul and myself went over to them and we started talking. And at first they didn't know who we were and naturally they didn't want to talk. And we told them that they don't have to worry because we are Jewish and we told them exactly what our mission is. And somehow they did believe us and they told us that they are also Jewish and they were in several camps and hiding and uh, they are home already for the last two months and they live in Łódź with their husbands. And they are so skeptical of anybody—whoever talks to them because they didn't know what it is all about. But they believed us. We were telling them the truth. And it was about six o'clock in the morning by the time we got into Łódź. And we took a cab—the carriage was actually a horse and a carriage. And we took that carriage and we had ??? Paul myself, we carried whiskey and cigarettes. Because that was the only thing that we could do anything with, you know. Money was absolutely meaningless at the time, you know. And carried a big huge suitcase, one myself and one he did. And, and uh, we got into this uh, uh, horse and this carriage there and we took these women and we went to their house. And the husbands were home and the husbands didn't know who we are and they were scared at first. And then we told

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them who we are. Then naturally they took us right in and they were—became very handy to us because naturally they spoke Polish fluently—they were born and raised that. And uh, the guy's name was Hal Rubin, Hal Rubin, I will never forget him. I got pictures downstairs with him that were taken later. And he was uh, these two brother-in-laws, you know, they were—these two women were married to these two guys and they lived together in this apartment. So they became very, very handy to us because we ate them breakfast—we had breakfast at the end of their house. And then we went out in the Jewish community already working in roads. And there was a gentleman by the name of ??? who later became a very famous man—he was a professor here at the Columbia University in New York and he was the head of the Jewish uh, community over there. And he was one hell of a man—a very fine gentleman and he treated us royally—very, very nice to us and he told us he didn't want to get involved in it, naturally. But he told us that that is a, a school and he gave these two guys, you know, the exact address where they are. There are about fifty Hungarian Jewish women. They are locked up by the Russians and there is no way to get 'em out because they don't know what purpose they are keeping them there for—but they are locked in there, and can't get 'em out. And he suggested for us to—since we had all these documents to prove who we are and what we are and it was made out also in Russian so we should go to the Russian commander of the city and talk to him and see what you can accomplish, and which we did ??? very nicely. And these two guys were the ones who spoke for us because we didn't know how to speak the Russian language and they spoke Polish—elementary spoken Russian also.

And I explained it to them and they were very kind. They listened to us and they told us that they don't know anything of any Hungarians—Jewish women and there is nobody in there. And even if there would be anybody locked up well, then they be political and Stalin would be the only, the only person who can give you an ??? nobody asked. There was no way that they could release anybody. First of all they denied it—they did not know of anybody. Only Stalin will be the only one that would uh, re...mean anything if he would be near and writing that they should be released. Otherwise, there's no way. And they don't know anything about any Jewish women, whether they are Hungarians or Polish. They didn't know anybody like that. But a criminal told us exactly where they are located at. And we decided we are going to go out there and see what's going on. And sure enough...

[interruption in interview]

Okay.

It was a two story building and four of the girls looked out the window, and then when they saw they started screaming. They recognized me and Paul. They came from our hometown. And they started screaming and crying, “Get us out of here! Get us out of here!” And we told them, “Not worry and don't get panicky, I'm going to try to do everything possible to get you out.” And we went over to the soldiers and two of those guys—we took—we had cigarettes—a, a pack of a thousand cigarettes. Do you know what that meant at that time? You could buy a building for a thousand cigarettes. So, tremendous. We gave them a whole bag of cigarettes—of a thousand cigarettes. And we gave them a bottle—a large huge

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bottle of whiskey. That whiskey was ninety-six proof, you know. And this soldier, when they saw that they were actually shaking. And they started drinking it. If I could on...if I could only smell it, honestly, I would be knocked out. And they were drinking it like, you know, like, like water. And they really let it down. And we told them what we want. "Go ahead, don't worry." And they just let us in. And all four of us—these two guys and Paul and myself—we walked right in and went upstairs and there were about fifty of them and mostly from our hometown. Not all of them, but the majority of them were from our hometown. And that reunion was unbelievable. And we told them "Look, not to worry and we are going to see to it that they are going to get free today." And they're dancing and singing and crying and doing everything. So anyway they had belongings—whatever they had after liberation, you know, when the Russians took over. They went into homes and they grabbed their clothing or whatever they had and everybody had already a package. And I told them when they held those packages, "What do you need them for?" "Oh, we are not going to let it go." Everybody needed it, you know, they wanted it. So, 'kay, we went out and those two guys took us to a place where they had trucks and we rented a huge large truck and we went in back late and they didn't. And we took the rest of the whiskey—whatever we had left and the rest of the cigarettes—whatever we had left—and we gave it to them. And we told them that "We want to take the girls to give 'em a good time and we'll bring 'em back." And they didn't care—they didn't even know what was going on. Actually they were so drunk—they were just knocked out completely. And all the girls came—some of them threw down their packages from the third floor because they

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didn't want to leave it there. Some of it was left there, you know, it wasn't meaningless, but anyway. And then we went and we took them with this truck to the railroad station, in, in Łódź and we told the man in charge at the station—we told him who we are and we have these people and we want to take them to Krakow. And the next train was supposed to leave in about an hour. And he gave us a special uh, car, you know. And we loaded up over there and the next train we were attached—tied to that train and we went into Krakow. We arrived in Krakow around midnight or so—sometimes really early, it was still dark. And uh, those girls adopted us, Paul and me, as their brothers, you know. It is incredible what they carried on like, my God, you know. And then we got home and we had to tell the story over again, you know, tell everybody what happened and how it happened and so on. And that was the most interesting experience that I had out of that—of those four trips. And uh, most of 'em are in, in Israel. Some of them unfortunately died already. And some of them are still there. Every year, when they have a reunion—Paul is getting a lot of stuff from them, you know, presents and so on. And he tells me that how ??? of himself, that he has to enjoy the fruit of whatever we did, you know, and, and that he'll help me here and how much he misses us and so on and so forth. And we were in Israel—unfortunately it was a very short period of time. I couldn't meet any of the girls because I didn't know their addresses. And Paul and his wife they weren't here at that time. When we were there, he was here. We missed one another, you know. So I didn't see them. But he was here again about two months ago—I talked to him over the phone—he was in Los Angeles. And I got a letter from, from him a couple weeks ago. Beth

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wrote him yesterday a letter. We are keeping in touch. Very, very close. But that was a very fulfilling thing that we accomplished at that time. And uh, on the last trip that we made we were left over—about six guys from the train that we knew asked if we would like to stay in Prague—that is Czechoslovakia—and open an office, because that, that will make sense. I mean, were to coming back with the train back and forth. Because first of all it was getting to be a little costly. And secondly, there weren't enough—you know, we didn't know where to wait for them—how to manage the situation. And if they wanted to have an office in Prague—in Czechoslovakia and uh, stay there until all the Hungarian and Romanian Jews were coming back. And uh, I—that was strictly a volunteer basis and I volunteered because I had nobody at home anyway. So it—to me it really didn't matter, I didn't care. And I stayed there and uh, there is one very dear friend of mine who lives now in Providence, Rhode Island and he's a very successful businessman today. But let me tell you, friend, he was one of the delegation. Myself and there's a Dr. Sternman who lives in Hawaii. When we were in Hawaii with my wife and we met him over there and it was a nice reunion. There was another guy by the name of Dr. Abraham—and he is dead already for ten years very ??? that he is gone. And we had an office. First we rented in a hotel, a little office. You know, we rented—I don't remember the year. We had enough of that. But then uh, this Dr. Abraham—his wife originally who came from Czechoslovakia and he spoke a little bit the language and he spoke a perfect German because he went to the University of Berlin. That's where he got his uh, diploma. And through him and through his connections they got the

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Romanian embassy opened up. You know, because there were no uh, uh, legal connections at that time between the Czechs and the, the Romanian government. And they opened up the Romanian embassy and we moved in there and we had an office there. And everyday we went out to the rail stations and we waited for all the trains whenever they arrived. And we were making announcements, you know, in Hungarian and Romanian: “If there are any...anybody who wants to go home to get off the train.” And we are here to help ‘em. And through our office—we had about sixty thousand people that went through our office, which was again a very fulfilling uh, thing what we did over there. It was very, very beautiful, beautiful work what we did in Czechoslovakia. And uh, unfortunately, in uh, the—right in beginning of 1946—first of all, at the end of ’45, my wife and her sister and a whole group of other people—they’re working very hard and my wife was left already after the liberation, you know, the British took over and the Americans and so on. And uh, as I told you before that I went out to the rail station on a daily basis and so on. And one day I got a call that there is a train coming in from Bergen, from that part of uh, Germany—that there are a lot of Hungarian and Romanian refugees that will be on that train. And we went out there and I waited for the train and saw that they had a leader who was in charge of the whole group and he was already dear friend of mine. He’s in New York now. His name is uh, Dr. Solomon. At that time he wasn’t a doctor, but now he is. And uh, when he saw me, he said, “What in the world are you doing here?” And I told him. He said, “You know who was here? Clara and Irene.” And at that time we were engaged already, you know.

Before the war you were engaged?

Yes, before the war we were engaged. And she's glad it wasn't before the war—because before the concentration camp. And at the time when I was home, you know, from ??? that's when we got engaged. And uh, said, “Clara and Irene are here,” I said, “I don't believe it.” He said, “Yeah, they are here.” And he started running up and down, you know, screaming and yelling, “Clara! Irene!” And when they said, “Yes, we are right here.” And I walked over there and I ran in that, that car where they are staying at. Clara look at me. And she passed out right there. You know...

You didn't know that she was alive.

No, I didn't have the slightest idea. I didn't know anything about anybody. So naturally I took her off the train and she came along with me. I had my own car at that time already—I was a big shot, you know. I took them in the embassy where the beautiful living quarter over there and they just couldn't get over it, you know, really were very impressed. We went out and bought more kinds of clothing—whatever we could get, you know. It was really something. And then in uh, in November—the beginning of November we decided that we are going to go home because we wanted to get married. You know, they stayed there with us, and uh, by train—no by car, I had a car. And uh, we drove home all the way—my sister and I, and Clara and another friend who was again from concentration camp. And we all went together and we went home and one of her aunts—of Clara's aunts—her mother's sister was alive. And she escaped from concentration camp. She came back home. And uh, we moved into a house and she already was waiting for

us, you know, and we—after we got married in January—the middle of January—we got married in December—the 2nd of December. And then we went to Bucharest for a couple of weeks and then we came back and we decided we are going to go back because we didn't want to stay in Ro...Romania under no circumstances. I went back to Czechoslovakia to try—and at this point unfortunately the whole story was already changed because the Romanian delegation came in and there were some anti-Semites really who were Jew-haters and they told us, "What right do we have to stay here?" and you know, we started all that laundry business. And then we decided that we had enough of this and we went across to, to Germany and we went to Munich and we lived in Munich until 1949. And that was the time when we finally got our visa and came to the United States.

So you've been here ever since?

Since 1949. Since 1949 and since I'm here I got into the dry cleaning business. I work for the same cleaners for twenty years. And then I went in on my own. And uh, I left my business about a year ago.

And you have one daughter.

And I have one daughter who has managed to get two grandchildren and her husband is a doctor and they just moved to, to uh, Florida. And they're very happy. As a matter of fact we are going down there for three months in January.

Good.

They are very happy and satisfied. We have—can't complain. Except illness or dying—otherwise I really cannot complain. I am very, very happy and satisfied with my family and the way we live.

Do you have any comments or conclusions or feelings that you—about the whole experience—about the war—about...?

As far as, as far as my comments are concerned, all I can tell you Kay that we are all getting older. I'm already sixty-seven years old—I'm sixty-six actually. In January I'll be sixty-seven years old. This will never, never, never happen again. And I tell you right now that if anybody would come into my house like they did over there, and they just ordered you to get out and they took you to a concentration camp or whatever, it will never happen again. Somebody else will have to die before I do. I won't tell you to kill me but somebody else will die for sure before I get killed. Those are my only comments, that I have that this will never, never, never happen again and I hope that everybody who lived through this experience have the same feelings and feel exactly the same way as I do about it.