Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in South Florida

A Twin at Auschwitz, A Soldier in Israel

Holocaust Survivor Isaac Klein's Memoir

As told to Bobbi Kaufman

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Republished by
The Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies
and The George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies

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University of Miami

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The information in this book is presented in good faith. It is not intended to be a history of the Holocaust. The words in this book are the words of Isaac Klein as he recalled his personal experience in the Holocaust. This is his story and his truth.

On the cover: Isaac Klein serving in the Israeli Coast Guard

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FOREWARD

"For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.…

"... I have tried to keep memory alive…I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget we are guilty, we are accomplices."

- Elie Wiesel

As time goes on, the number of Holocaust survivors alive today is rapidly dwindling. With their passing, the incomprehensible cataclysm known as The Holocaust, or Shoah, is fast morphing from a 'lived memory' into a 'historical memory'; from a personal experience of 'those who were there' into impersonal commemorative monuments and museums.

All too soon, there will be no one left to offer first hand testimony of what it was like to actually be there when all hell broke loose; all too soon, even those who knew and heard directly from the victims of the Nazis and their collaborators, will be gone.

It is, therefore, a matter of great urgency that we gather and preserve for future generations as much primary documentation and testimony as possible about the lives and experiences of those heroes who survived the Holocaust, managed to build new lives, and were willing to tell their stories.

Memoirs serve as a very important means of preserving these testimonies. Several years ago, Holocaust survivors began approaching Bobbi Kaufman, asking for help writing their memoirs, describing their lives before, during, and since the Holocaust. She began working with the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach (HMMB), writing the memoirs of Holocaust survivors who were docents and contributors to the memorial. This collaboration was instrumental in her developing a series of in-depth, book-length memoirs. Six books were completed and uploaded onto the HMMB website and the HMMB created lesson plans for each book to be used in teaching about the Holocaust.

Now, in collaboration with the HMMB, the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies, and the George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies of the University of Miami, the series has been named Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in Florida. The existing books were graphically redesigned and several new books have been added to the collection, with the objective of continuing to expand the series. The complete series will be freely available to the public in digital form on the HMMB and Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program websites.

Our hope is that this series will make a significant contribution to the growing literature of Holocaust survivors' memoirs and serve as a tribute to their ability to make new lives for themselves while never forgetting.

Dr. Haim Shaked
Director, The Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program
University of Miami

DEDICATION

To the six million victims of the Holocaust
Including my father Simon Klein, my mother Pepy Gross Klein,
and my six younger brothers and sisters.

— Isaac Klein

With the collapse of the Hapsburg Monarchy at the end of World War I, the independent country of Czechoslovakia was formed. In 1938, after the Austrian Anschluss, Czechoslovakia became Hitler's next target. Threatening war, Hitler extorted through the Munich Agreement in September, 1938, the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany. This appeasement by France and the United Kingdom left Czechoslovakia without allies, surrounded by hostile Germany, Hungary and Poland. Many areas of Czechoslovakia were immediately invaded and occupied by Hungary. In March 1939, Czech independence came to an end.

LIFE BEFORE THE WAR

I was born in a hollowed-out tree on my family's farm in Czechoslovakia on January 31, 1931. The tree was something like the big Redwood trees in California – one of those trees a car can drive through. It would protect us from rain and even from the cold. We had a lot of land with about half a dozen workers. My mother did not work in the fields, but every day she used to prepare the workers' food in that big hollow tree. In those days a woman would work until the last day before she gives birth. So my mother gave birth to my twin brother and me in that tree. In a religious ceremony I was given the Jewish name Isaac. My brother was named Tsvi. Then we were taken to the nearby little village of Somotor, Czechoslovakia and registered.
I was given the legal name Ladislav Gross. When we were born it was Czechoslovakia but a short time later it became

Hungary. Even though I was born in Czechoslovakia, I grew up as a Hungarian. I call myself a "Cancelled Czech".

We were eight children plus two twins who died before I was born. I don't know if the twins were boys or girls. They died right after birth. My brother and I were the oldest children. There were five girls and three boys. I am sorry to say it that I don't remember all their names. I remember one boy by the name of Eugene who we called Jeno in Hungarian. He was less than ten years old. I had a sister. Her name was Aliza. The bigger kids took care of the younger ones, just like any normal family. I enjoyed the fact that I was the big brother to them, that I was a little bit smarter.

Jealousy between my brother and me always existed. We always used to fight. He is bigger than I am and he was the first born. There is half an hour difference, so I was considered his little brother. Even when we were in the camps we would fight.

My father and mother met in a religious school in Munchoch, Hungary. My parents were religiously highly educated. My mother's name was Pepi Gross Klein. She was born in Ukraine. A town called Turek. She spoke close to ten languages: Russian, Ukraine, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, and all the languages around her. I remember her hair was more red than blonde. My father was Hungarian. His name was Simon. He was a chemist. He

used to work making paint. He did not work full time as a chemist because he also worked on our farm. I don't know how my father got the farm. Maybe he inherited it from my grandfather who had a lot of land. There were hundreds of acres. My grandfather lived in a town about fifteen miles from where I lived. I never liked him because he never came to visit us.

I was thirteen years old when I saw my parents for the last time so I didn't know everything about my family, far from everything.

My parents had a plantation, a little one. They grew wheat, barley, potatoes, corn, and every kind of fruit you can imagine that grew in Europe. We had about two or three horses, about six oxen, some goats and livestock. We had chickens, ducks, geese. I still love farming, I still like the animals. I still hope one day when I win the lottery I will buy a little farm. Not to eat the animals so much, just to see them. I used to especially love the springtime with all the chickens and all the ducks and all the trees that start to bloom in the springtime. It was such a wonderful period of time. When I was a kid I used to enjoy seeing the trees naked one day, nothing on them, and the next day they were full of bloom. And the same thing with the little chickens and ducks — with the little ducklings going after their mom. I still yearn for this kind of life. Of course I used to like fishing, too. In those days we didn't have ready made hooks or fishing rods. I used to steal a little bit of

sewing thread from my mother's sewing machine. I took a pin and I would bend it on one side and tie it onto the string. Then I would put on a float. On the banks of the river I would cut a piece of bamboo and tie it all together to make a fishing rod. For bait I had some worms but the worms were too big so I would use a fly for bait. When I would see the float move I knew a fish was there. That is how I used to catch the fish for the family for Shabbas.

As a child, before they took us to the camp, I used to help on the farm. I would feed the animals, clean them. We didn't have a combine to work the field so I used a sickle to cut the grain. I used to be pretty good at it. I could cut the grain so it would lay all in one direction. We would bundle it up in bushels and crush them to make feed for the horses.

We all worked on the farm. We had a few workers, about half a dozen plus my father, me and my brother. There was other outside help who used to work and get part of the produce. The smaller children didn't do hard work but they had to help also. They would pick up the corn, the potatoes, all the vegetables. A kid who could stand on his feet would do these things, after school of course. Everybody did help. That's how it was – life.

As a child I was quite clumsy. I didn't know how to milk the cow. We had about half a dozen goats. I tried to milk the goats but I had no success with that either. The milking was mostly done by my mother. One time I caused a problem

with the neighbors: I picked up one of their ducks by its neck — it died, of course. I didn't know at that time — nobody told me it was wrong. My parents had to compensate the neighbors for the duck.

I did enjoy the farm. I really loved it because I could see the results of our hard work when I saw the harvest. We lived next to a big river and a little spring. We could just stick a finger in the ground and water would shoot up. The land was so fertile. We didn't use chemical fertilizers, we used just natural manure from the horses and the cow. We would put it in a wagon and go out into the field and spread it. Then we went with a machine, covered it, and after a while we planted the crops. Watermelons were so big. One watermelon was 100 kilos! Strawberries, blackberries, and raspberries were growing everywhere. There were fruits in the forest. You could live in the forest forever. The partisans lived on the fruit in the forest.

To preserve the potatoes we used to dig a big hole in the ground and line it with straw. Then we put in the potatoes and on top of them we put more straw. Then we buried it all. This was to keep them from freezing and keep them fresh. Each time we needed some potatoes we would go get what we needed.

At night we would work at home. When we had to prepare the corn for the winter at nighttime was when we would peel it. Sometimes we would have half a room full with just corn. The same story with potatoes, apples, fruits. We

also used to dry the fruits. We put them in a little room we heated with a wood oven. It was a building especially for that purpose. We dried grapes, plums, and other fruits. We used to make jam from the fruits and also booze — especially from the plums. In Hungary the plum brandy is very, very famous. It was very strong. We used to make it in the field in the plantation. We had a special kind of container and we had a fire under it and we stirred it day and night and night and day. We used to sell it. In those days coffee was very expensive and sugar was even more expensive. I could not drink coffee without sugar, so instead I sipped a little *schnapps* (plum brandy) in the mornings in the cold weather. I used to drink it about every day; just a little bit. Of course my mother knew!

We used to make all the dairy products from the milk from our cow. We made our own butter, sour cream, and some cheese. We had a machine to separate the fat from the milk. We would boil the milk to kill the bacteria. We had to carefully boil it — slowly over a low fire.

All our food was natural. Almost everything was grown by us: the potatoes, the corn, the fruits... We hardly ever had meat except our own chickens or geese. My mother bought almost nothing except salt and spices and sometimes herring and other specialties in the village.

We baked our own bread. We used to have a little oven, like a dome, and we used to bake one loaf of bread for the whole week for eight kids and our father and mother. The

bread was very heavy. After ten days the bread would still weigh the same as the first day — not like the bread today that is mostly air. The bread was delicious. It those days we made the bread from the grain we grew in our own field. We used all the good grain from the wheat or barley. We would collect the grain in the field in bushels, put it in bags — four or five bags or twenty bags — and take it to a place, not very far away, where they had a special machine to make the grain into flour. We had to pay of course. The bread was always baked on Thursday for Friday and Shabbat. On Shabbat there were always the Jewish specialties: kugel, cholent, the bread, and the challah. We would prepare it and leave it until Shabbat noon time for serving when we came back from shul. It was finger-licking good!

We were kosher all the way. Every Friday it was my job to take the chickens to the *shochet*. He lived about five or six kilometers from where we lived. Many times I was thinking that maybe I would kill the chicken myself to save the twenty-five cents. But because I was religious and I was afraid that God would punish me, I didn't do it. According to the *halacha* the *shochet* has to make sure the chicken is healthy and then pull out some feathers from its neck, but the first thing he does is ask where is the money. He never checks to see if the chicken is healthy. He is supposed to have a very sharp blade, but I used to see him saw back and forth on the chicken's neck. I brought it to his attention but of course he didn't like it. After that he didn't like me even more, but he was the only one in town. Many times as I had

the chicken and I was walking back to my village, the Gentiles would attack me. The ones bigger than I was. They would throw the chicken on the ground and many times they just threw it away and I would go home crying. My mother would take another chicken I would start all over again. But, nevertheless, we were kosher. Everything kosher, kosher, kosher. That's how it was.

We used to eat a lot of fat, especially the duck and the goose fat. We used to force feed them until they became fat. We used to take a piece of bread and make a sandwich with the fat. My mother would take the skin from the neck of the duck or goose and stuff it with food she cooked and then cut portions for each kid. My mother used to work very hard preparing food for the family and for the workers on the farm. When she finished making breakfast it was already time to prepare for the lunch.

Our home was one room but each corner was used differently. There was no kitchen, really, just an oven where we used to cook the food. In the daytime it was the kitchen and dining room, and in the nighttime in the winter, because the kitchen oven was the only heater for the whole house the table was moved out of the way and we turned it into a room for sleeping. The bedroom wasn't separate. There was a big frame bed filled with straw and covered with a sheet. About three or four kids would sleep on one bed. Maybe even five. We used to make the covers from the feathers of the goose or the duck. My parents probably slept in the same room as us.

There was no electricity in our house. At night we used kerosine lamps for light. They were just starting to bring in electricity when I left there. Only after the war did I first start to listen to a radio or to music. I was a county boy.

We did not have running water. We had to go outside, maybe one hundred feet away, where there was a well. Everybody got their water there. The well went down a good ten, fifteen feet. The well had a big stick with a weight on one side and a bucket on the other side. The bucket was tied to a rope. To start you let it down and when it filled up, the weight lifted it up. You would then fill up your own pails and let the bucket go down again. We would carry home two pails of water on a stick like the Chinese do. We would bring the water into the house and store it in a big container. We used the water for cooking and washing. We had to refill it most likely every day.

We had a big tub made from a big carved out log. We would heat water in the oven so it wouldn't be freezing. We used to stand in the tub and our mother would wash us. When she was through she took the whole tub, dumped it out and filled it with fresh water for the next kid. There was no bathroom, just an outhouse like today's portapotty.

The synagogue was in the village. We went every week. Actually, I went every day because I used to go to *cheder* every day in the afternoon. I went to shul every Friday night with my father. Sometimes my mother would come. Of course she would sit in a different section. All the children went

except the little ones. We went on Saturday as well. It wasn't my idea — I went but not because I wanted to, I was forced. I used to read the Hebrew words but I didn't understand what they meant. But I still had to *daven*.

I would go half a day to the public school and half a day to *cheder*. I used to have a hard time in the public school. There were maybe half a dozen Jewish students and the rest Gentiles. The teacher wouldn't answer my questions because I was Jewish. I would have a hard time when I would go to the restroom. There were always bullies there — especially when they would see I was circumcised. They would have fun tormenting me. Many times when I would have to go to the restroom just to pee, I would postpone, deciding I would go at the *cheder* where everyone was Jewish, thinking over there I would have an easier time. Wrong. Because the Jewish teachers there were not like the teachers today. They said, "You will go to the restroom when I tell you to go and when I decide to let you go." So, many times I used to wet my pants. When it was cold, within five minutes I had ice between my legs. It was no fun. I used to complain to my father but it didn't help. The Orthodox did not believe that Jewish teachers would do what I said they did. Then I stopped complaining. Many times on my way home from school the Gentiles would open my zipper and throw freezing mud in my pants. Of course I used to wear the *payos* (the sideburns), the *kippa*, and the *tzitzit*. The neighborhood boys, the Gentiles, tore off my sideburns and the skin. It would happen at school, after school, on the way to school

and from school. Until today I cannot forget how poorly my father felt to have his little boy go through this. I used to say to myself, "If I were a little bit bigger I would kill them." I had a hard childhood. There is no question about it.

I did not enjoy school. I went to maybe about three classes but I didn't finish because we were deported. After I was sent to Auschwitz, at age thirteen, I never went back to school.

Our village had about fifty Jewish families and about one thousand Gentile families. Probably half of the Gentiles were illiterate. The clerk from the city would come outside and people would gather around him and he would read the news — what was happening around us, around the world. So I knew a little bit. Needless to say, anti-Semitism was already very well on its way. They wouldn't tell us about the Jewish news, but I used to listen to the adults. I used to ask questions to my father. He didn't answer me. And, actually not answering me was the real answer. I knew that something was very, very bad. I knew that hard times were coming. I had an uncle who lived in Poland. He was a well-to-do guy and we didn't hear from him for five or six years. We did not have the modern cell phones and radios like we have today, but there was still a way to have contact. So I questioned,"If we didn't hear from this uncle for five years shouldn't we come to some kind of conclusion that something happened?" But the Jewish people didn't do those things, didn't question. Until today I am still asking the question, "Why the Jewish people didn't resist?"

DEPORTATIONS

Starting in the early 1940's my father would be taken away to the labor camps. The Hungarian military police came without any advance notice. They just came to the house and said, "Come with us." They gave him thirty minutes, that's it. Usually they came late at night or early in the morning. Sometimes we woke up and he was gone. He would take some clothes with him, maybe an overcoat. After a couple of months he would come back. And then a couple of months later he would be taken again. He would sometimes be gone for maybe a month, sometimes two months, sometimes three months. I imagine they had all the information about who to take. They wouldn't make a mistake — there were Jewish lists.

The same story was with the animals. They used to take animals, too. They used to take, let's say, two horses from us. We would get two horses back, but not the same horses. We would not get the same breed and we would get a sick horse. The Gentiles used to get back their original horses, but not the Jews.

We got the news of restrictions against the Jews through the town clerk. He would beat a drum to get the people's attention then he would read the news: The Jewish people are not allowed this, not allowed that. There were separate laws for the Jews and for the Gentiles. Around 1940 the Hungarian government took away citizenship from all the

Jewish people. Once we were not citizens we were not allowed to own property. If Jews now could not own property how could we live? We worked all our lives to have our home and now it was taken away from us. We had to bribe people to let us live from day to day. Once we were not citizens they could also deport us. We had no rights. We couldn't do anything.

I still didn't believe everything I heard about what kind of danger we were in. Then I became more aware of things. Sometimes I questioned why I was born a Jew, why couldn't I be born like them?

My family was deported from Hungary at least twice before I was taken to a concentration camp. The police would come to the house and give us half an hour. We would take maybe some food. We could not take big suitcases. Maybe some small luggage. I don't remember if my father was home when we were first deported. It was my mother with the eight children.

The first time we were deported was probably in 1941. We were simply being deported from Hungary. We were taken by the police, the Hungarian police. They knew my mother was from Ukraine so they took us to the Polish border and let us go into Poland. To cross the border we had to bribe the guards — they didn't just let us go. We wanted to go to Turek, Ukraine, where my grandfather lived. We went mainly by train, but we could not take the train the whole way because the train was not always available where we were. Sometimes we had to walk to the place where the next

train was. Sometimes we went by horse wagon or ox wagon and sometimes we walked. We were always cold.

We were desperate. We were thrown out of one place so we went to try living in another place. But the situation wasn't much better there. The Jews suffered plenty in Ukraine, too. We stayed there for a year or so, then returned home. We thought maybe things would change.

When we went back home everything was gone. Our original house was quite comfortable, but we no longer had any right to that house. Someone else was living in our house. Somebody owned everything that we used to own. They had our livestock, the horses, the oxen, and all the rest of it. We had no rights to it. Once they had that law, they had a free hand. This section belongs to the Jews — take it. We had to rent a much cheaper place nearby in the same town. We had to accept whatever was available. We had to start all over again. For a little rent, the Gentiles let us use a little part of the farm so we could have food.

We were deported a second time in 1943. They must have found out that we had come back. They didn't want us to come back. Once again we were taken to the border of Poland. We traveled to Ukraine a second time. We used to have a little wagon, like a baby's wagon, to carry our belongings. Sometimes the younger children rode in it. We were sleeping in the outside, in the woods.

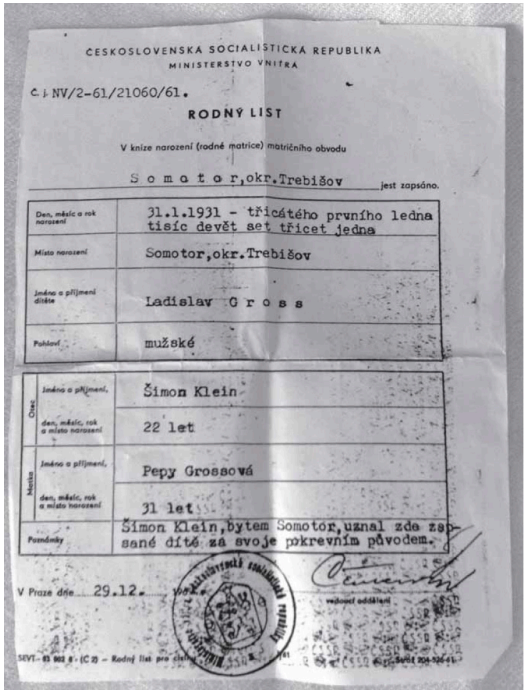
Many times we stayed at some farm that would give us some shelter. Of course that was also through bribery. Sometimes we slept in chicken coops or pig pens. One time a Polish farmer let us sleep in his chicken coup because there was a blizzard outside. We slept on the floor of the chicken coup, but it was much better than being outside. Never mind the temperature, at least we were safe from the blizzard.

We went back home once again about a year later. I don't know exactly why we went back home the second time — perhaps because the situation in Ukraine wasn't much better than in Hungary. We came back home, I imagine, hoping that maybe this time it would be be better. Of course this didn't happen. We had to rent an even cheaper place. We had nothing left. We were penniless. We lost everything.

Money was worth nothing. The government used to change currency overnight. There was no such thing as going to a bank and saying I have old coins, give me the new ones. People who had a little money would invest it in jewelry or gold and silver. It was quite bad, not just for Jews but for all the people. War is not just for one group.

The adults would talk amongst themselves — they didn't want the kids to know. But we knew more than they thought we knew. So many times I said to myself, "How come the Jewish people would let themselves go just like cattle to slaughter?"

A composite picture of my mother, my brother and me.



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RODNÝ LIST

V knize narození (rodné matrice) matričního obvodu

S o m o t o r, okr. Trebišov jest zapsáno.

Den, měsíc a rok narození	31.1.1931 - třicátého prvního ledna tisíc devět set třicet jedna
Místo narození	Somotor, okr. Trebišov
Jméno a příjmení dítěte	Ladislav G r o s s
Pohlaví	mužské
Otec: Jméno a příjmení	Šimon Klein
Otec: den, měsíc, rok a místo narození	22 let
Matka: Jméno a příjmení	Pepy Grossová
Matka: den, měsíc, rok a místo narození	31 let
Poznámky	Šimon Klein, bytem Somotor, uznal zde zapsané dítě za svoje pokrevním původem.

V Praze dne 29.12.

vedoucí oddělení

My birth certificate. It shows my legal name – Ladislav.

My father in a Hungarian labor camp with Hungarian military officers. My father is second from the left.

THE GHETTO

After the March 19, 1944, German invasion of Hungary, about 4,000 Jews in Satoraljaujhely were confined in a ghetto, joined by another 11,000 from nearby villages, all crowded 20–25 to a room. When the ghetto was liquidated between May 16 and June 3, 1944, the inhabitants were taken to Auschwitz in four transports.

In 1944 we were taken to a ghetto in Hungary. The first thing, they came to us and they gave us thirty minutes to take whatever we could carry by hand. Then about half a dozen Hungarian military police walked us twenty-two kilometers to the ghetto in the Hungarian city Satoraljaujhely.

Most of the Jews from my village were taken plus many others that they picked up on the way to Satoraljaujhely. It was quite tough. The Hungarian military police marched us. We had to do everything fast, fast, fast. Sometimes my family was far, far apart from each other. Maybe I was here and they were there. We couldn't tell the Hungarian police we were waiting for our brother or our little boy, or I was waiting for my mother. We were pushed like we were not human. The situation was so bad.

We were sent to the Jewish section which was blocked off. Everything was in very bad shape. The former tenants who lived there were taken who knows where. The way I remember, they just let us go into that section just like they

let in cattle to a corral and they locked the gate. Everyone just grabbed a spot of their own. My whole family was together. We didn't have beds, we didn't have mattresses, we didn't have blankets. We slept on the floor. There was no food. We were not prepared to stay there for a long time. All we had was a little protection, shelter from the weather. No food was provided for us in the ghetto.

The next day they made us work. They were building roads. My work was to take big rocks and chop them to pieces and then a big machine would press it all down and then the final coat like tar or something was put down. That's what I did chop, chop, chop. My brother probably did the same thing. My father, probably the same thing. We were working most of the time. When we were working they would provide some food. The food was distributed at the work site. People staying in the ghetto did not get any food. It you didn't work, you didn't eat. I would look on the street and pick up the corn cobs and the apple cores that people threw away and I would eat them.

We lived in such a tense situation that we just wanted to look for some kind of peace and quiet. We tried to run away somewhere where they couldn't hit us. Most of the time we were like rabbits — if we heard a little noise we would run scared. Most of the Jews were scared, no question about it. The Hungarians would hit us, then the Czechs would hit us, then the Germans. Nobody liked the Jews.

I had not had my Bar Mitzvah yet. We had postponed it because my father was not often home — he was away in the labor camp. In the ghetto there was a rundown synagogue where I went with my father and another man or two. This was the first time I put on *tefillin* and that was my Bar Mitzvah. We stayed in Satoraljaujhely probably a couple of months before they put us on a train. Our third deportation was to Auschwitz.

THE TRAIN TO AUSCHWITZ

Everything was *rouse, rouse, macht schnell.* Everything we had to do fast, fast, fast. The Hungarians pushed us onto the train. I don't remember if my parents were in the same car with me. The last time I remember seeing them was in Hungary in Satoraljaujhely when we were pushed onto the train. I don't remember seeing them ever again.

The trip to Auschwitz took fourteen days. One time we stopped at a Hungarian city called Kaschau where they took us off the train for three or four days. There we had to load bricks from a factory onto the train. We used to fill our wheelbarrow and bring it to the train, to the car, and load the bricks. Other times the train would stop for a couple of hours here, and a couple of hours there, sometimes overnight. They did not give us food or water. I had to take care of myself. I was a thirteen-year-old country boy, not very smart.

Some people had some food that they brought with them and I would ask if they would give me a cracker, a slice of bread, maybe half an apple or something. Later, when I saw that a person was not moving and I knew he or she was dead, I would help myself. So that is how I survived.

There was a little opening between the doors and when the train would stop, we would hand out a bottle hoping someone would bring us some water. Most of the places were under military police and nobody would help. We would send out half a dozen bottles and maybe one or two bottles would come in. People would grab the bottles from us. Many times they would break the bottles right in front of us and make believe that the bottle slipped out. They did that to frustrate us. Right in front of our eyes they did it. Many of the times who knows what they did with the water even if they did bring it. Maybe they peed in it. It didn't bother us as long as they brought back a bottle. We did not fight each other for the water. We were too weak. Maybe someone would grab a little bit from somebody but nobody was in the position to stand up and do any real fighting.

Death, Hell were not the words for life on the cattle car. Imagine being pressed in like sardines — men, women, old, young, no food and no water, nothing? Just to smell the human waste stench? When we arrived at Auschwitz they opened the doors and more than half of the people were dead already.

And then, of course, that's when Mengele came. Mengele was in charge of the human experiments and also of the transport. He decided right away who lives and who dies. The ones that still looked okay, he would line up on one side. The ones that didn't look so okay like old men, women, children, on the other side. They lined up a couple of hundred feet away at the gas chamber. The ones that still looked fit he would send into the camp.

Right when we arrived at Auschwitz they announced that they were looking for twins. I remember my brother came to me and we said we were twins. I don't know if it was the right thing to say or not. Many times those things happen — there are stories that someone is told to go one way and they decided to go a different way and this was better luck. The only thing I really remember is that they didn't shave our heads, our hair off, like the others. My tattoo at Auschwitz was A-2511. I was sent to D Lager on the northwest side of Birkenau.

The barracks were lined up from the east to the west. There were three or four barracks in D Lager. My barrack was number 31. Barrack 32 had political prisoners. Barrack 30 had Russian prisoners. There was also a death row lager. To the southwest were the B Lager which was the Gypsy Lager and the C Lager called the Canada Lager. Beyond these lagers was a row of guard posts and after that was the

women's camp. I do not know what was on the east side of Birkenau.

The Canada Lager did not have barracks. There they just sorted the belongings of the victims. They were sorting the luggage and the gold and whatever. Two sisters, whose twin brothers were in my group, were working over there and many times they used to throw to us over the fence something to eat. One sister is still alive in Israel and the other passed away. My barrack was the closest to the fence where the railroad trains came. I could see who was sent in each direction when the transports arrived. I could hear the noise and the screams.

D Lager was for the male twins. We were about a dozen pairs of twins. There were also males in D Lager who were not twins; we were mixed. The twins in D Lager were aged maybe twelve to fifteen. There were no little ones. I may have been one of the youngest. I don't know if any twins died, but the number of twins began to shrink while I was there. I don't know if maybe one twin lived and the other didn't. Probably some of them died or were moved to other places. I do remember that we started to be less and less. At the end I would say we did not have more than half a dozen. I know that some died after liberation from food poisoning. The twin brother of a guy I used to live with in Israel, who later emigrated to Australia, died from food poisoning after liberation. I remember that many of them who survived went to live in Israel.

In the D Lager they had a little clinic. It was a little building, maybe a couple of rooms, where they did the experiments. Maybe not just on the twins. Maybe others too, because many of them went in and didn't come out. I used to see Mengele in person almost every week. He used to come out to the camp from the clinic. He used to be dressed spic and span with a few German guards not far from him. The twins would have to go to the clinic almost every day for medical experimentation. All I remember is they used to give us injections and they used to draw blood. That's what I remember, nothing more. The injection was in the arm usually. Left hand or right hand. How many times, I don't remember. It probably made me sick, but I don't remember. I don't know how to explain all the extreme pain I went through so that a little bit more or less didn't really make any difference.

I went to the clinic one time, and when I came out my head was swollen up. Of course I had to go right back to my regular work. I don't know what they did to me, but they operated on me. I still have the mark on my right temple and a lump on the right side of my neck. What they did exactly, I do not know. It may have been done in one operation or in two. I may have had some bandages afterward, but I don't really remember. After the operation on my head I don't remember it hurting. I don't remember anything. You see, when you already hurt so much — the limit — it doesn't matter if you hurt a little bit more or a little bit less. I lived everyday just to be safe. Probably I had the will to survive. Something kept me alive.

I do not remember them cutting any other part of my body. I do not remember them experimenting on my eyes, but after Mengele my eyelid began to droop. It still does. They did not do the same operation on my brother. Not that I know of. But we went through the same experimentation together. Surely my brother and I cared for each other, but then again, there wasn't too much opportunity to do that.

My brother and I did not always sleep near each other. We didn't have a bunk assigned to us or a bunk where we always slept. They just pushed us in — *mach schnell, mach schnell*! So I would not always sleep in the same line of bunk beds every day. My brother and I were hardly like brothers because we were not allowed to talk to each other. If we were to talk, converse, or anything like that, we would be punished severely. I was punished, but not because I was talking. We had bunk beds that were about three tiers and everybody wanted to be on the lower tier for some reason. I was always, somehow, not lucky and I would have to climb up to the third one. Then, as I climbed up I would have to roll over people and there would be yelling. So the next thing we knew, they would line us up and we would be punished.

I was mostly punished by lash. They would take a regular chair. They would tie my legs to the back legs of the chair and bend me over the back of the chair and tie my hands to the front legs of the chair. Then I was ready for the lash. I would be hit with a whip or a stick. The minimum punishment was five lashes but sometimes five would wind up to be ten. If they say it would be ten, it could end up twenty. It would

depend on how the German felt that day. I would have to count. If I counted wrong it would go back to zero again. Usually the first and second lash were the most painful. Every time I had to go through it I was half dead already before they even hit me.

On many other occasions even if I did my job and I didn't do anything wrong but it wasn't to the satisfaction of the Germans, I would be pushed, I would be kicked any which way. It didn't matter to them. I was hit with the back of a rifle. I was bitten by a German dog, a Shepard. I was hit with sticks — whatever they wanted. They could do anything. We had nobody. Nobody was there, nobody would be punished for it or raise a finger if they would kill a little Jewish boy or Jewish man. There was no such thing as comfort. There was no such thing. I don't remember any special privileges of food or less work or anything like that because I was a twin.

I had to work at Auschwitz. I used to pick up trash. They used to give us a bag and a stick with a pointy nail on the bottom. It we saw a little trash we would throw it in the bag. Then, of course, we had to pick up bodies. We had a wagon. We called it the Roll Wagon. It was just like a regular wagon except it didn't have horses — we were the horses. We attached one end of the rope to the wagon then looped the other end around our shoulders. The kapo used to hit us, just like a person would hit a horse, to make us go faster. We would pick up bodies to take them from point A to point B. Sometimes we would pick up many other things too, like furniture, rugs or old clothes. Sometimes we used to go almost to the entrance of the crematory and the gas chamber. Those were the kind of things I used to do.

Sometimes I can't believe that I went through all those things. My life had no value whatsoever, less than a fly.

The daily ration of food, most of the time, was soup made with a turnip and maybe two or three slices of moldy bread. We would stand in line and they would give us each a little ladle of soup and that would be it.

I used to take fists full of lice from under my arms. About every three weeks they used to take us to a room and they would take our clothes and they would sterilize our clothes. They put them in a steamer to kill the lice. But nothing was done to kill the lice in our beds. The lice just came back on us.

We each did have a little blanket to cover ourselves. They were all different colored blankets. They probably came from the belongings of other victims. The blanket was the only thing I had. We had no sheets. I am not really sure if we ever had a bath or shower. When they took our clothes to be sterilized we would stand in a group for three or four hours so maybe then there was some kind of shower but surely not with a towel or anything like that. Sometimes we got our own clothes back, sometimes not. Most of the striped uniforms were a big size. Toward the end I did not go through the clothes sterilization any more.

When people ask me what was the worst part, I say two things. First, in the latrine, which is the restroom, there was a long, low cement tank with a row of holes on top which served as our toilet. The canal for the latrines, which was the

sewer line for both the women's and the men's camps was connected into one line. In there, where people do their things, I looked down and and what did I see? A brand-new beautiful baby boy. Newly born. In the Frau Lager, when a woman there gave birth she had to dispose of the baby right away because if she were caught both of them probably would be killed. There was no way to bury the newborns so the women would throw them in the latrine. That is one of the things that still upsets me until today. The other thing was hearing the ghastly screams coming from the gas chamber. This is with me all the time. Only a survivor who lived through these things has these kinds of feelings.

I remember this just like it was yesterday: On December 27, 1944, as the Russian army was advancing, the Germans fled the camp. A group of prisoners fled the camp in every direction. So I followed them. We just ran out the gate. For a while I was outside. I went about ten kilometers. I didn't go on the field because the field was very muddy. I went on the dirt road. The dirt road was a little bit firmer so I didn't sink into mud. The ones that went straight out into the field sank into the mud.

The next morning the Germans regrouped and they came and rounded up us again. The ones who were in the field tried to run but they couldn't run fast enough in the mud, so they were shot. I am not sure if anyone escaped. It is possible, but probably not. We were so weak from hunger that we couldn't have gone too far. Of course all of us were punished. The ones that were recaptured, like me, they put in the death row camp. On my regular striped uniform I now had red patches

in the front and in the back. The red patches meant I was on death row. I remained on death row until they took us on a death march. After December 27th I had the red patches the whole time. Before being on death row I had no patches of any kind — just the regular striped uniform.

I arrived at Auschwitz in early 1944. I spent about ten months in Auschwitz. At the end of 1944 as the Russian army was coming closer to the camps, the Nazis made plans to move the prisoners to the west. While I was at Auschwitz I stayed alive probably because I was a twin. Afterwards being a twin didn't make any difference.

DEATH MARCH

In January 1945 they took us on a death march to Austria. We started in January and in February we arrived in Mathausen, Melk, and Gunskirchen. For close to a month we walked with no food, nothing. More than half of the people didn't make it to Austria which was almost 700 kilometers away. Many died from cold, hunger, and beatings.

One day, I remember, we stopped at a little farm. Our German guards just let us go into the farm but announced that after a little while we would gather again and we would continue marching. This was just a rest. By the entrance to the farm was a dead horse. I went into the farm and I was lucky. I went to the pig pen. There was some food for the pigs like old bread, a half rotten apple, some peelings — it

was delicious to me. I ate the whole thing and I remember I could tell the pigs didn't like what I did. I heard them snorting at me.

At a distance I could see the Germans eating their lunch or dinner, or whatever. We could smell the food. If anybody tried to go over there they would be shot on the spot. Maybe some people tried it because when you are hungry, that's what happens.

When they gathered us together again, the dead horse was picked to the bone. Just like in pictures from Africa after the vultures eat an animal – that's how it was there. I believe that for many on the death march that it was a gift from heaven that the horse was killed just hours before we arrived there.

The death march brought me to three places in Austria: Melk, Mathausen, and Gunskirchen. When I was in Melk my first job was peeling potatoes. They used to give us about ten potatoes to peel but I would take twenty potatoes. I was so hungry I wanted to bite into a potato but I was afraid that when I returned the peeled potato they will notice something. So I thought if I cut the potato in half or in a quarter surely nobody would notice it right away. But I was afraid. So I peeled the potatoes and I ate the peel. Sure enough, someone noticed. He found the potato was too skinny. So he took a knife and put it all the way through my hand. Cut it to the bone. I was in Melk for one month before I was sent to Mauthausen. From there I went to Gunskirchen, a camp deep in the forest. The barracks had no roof so the mud on the floor was two or three feet deep. People died by drowning

in the mud. One night I laid five bodies down next to each other and covered them with a blanket and I went to sleep on top of them so I would not drown in the mud while I slept.

LIBERATION

My brother and I were never separated when we were in the camps, we were always together. We were separated when we were liberated at Gunskirchen.

As the allied forces approached Genskirchen, the Germans fled. When we saw the German guards take off, of course we knew what that meant. The first thing we did was break into the food storage and into the vegetable gardens of the Germans. We raided the gardens just like locusts. Whatever they grew — potatoes, carrots, cabbage — everything down the hatch. Then we broke the main gate in order to get out. My brother went with the first flow. Somehow, I stayed that night and I fled from the camp the next day with several other inmates.

When we left the camp we were just walking. We met the American army some distance away in Linz, Austria. They gave us good food, cooked food, candies, chocolate, cake. And after this, of course, many who survived this far, died from overeating. Because when a person doesn't eat for so long and suddenly eats so much, the body cannot take it. That's what happened.

At liberation was the first time I ever saw a black man. He was an American soldier. I saw with my own eyes what the

Americans did and nobody can tell me otherwise. I saw soldiers with a tank go on the sidewalk and run over pedestrians — Germans, civilians. They fought hard to get the Germans to surrender so maybe they thought they had a free hand. Maybe they did it for revenge for what they went through.

I was reunited with my brother in Linz. The Americans sent forty of us to a hospital in Linz, Austria. It was not a hospital like today. We were all in one big room. At first they just fed me slowly with good nutrition. I mostly slept the whole time. Probably I had every illness, but I don't know exactly what. I was the walking dead. I was in the hospital for about six weeks. Only five of the forty sent to the hospital survived.

When we left the hospital, the Americans may have given us some money, some small change. It may have been German money. They gave us some clothes collected from somewhere — but not too much. Still, we were glad to have them. We changed the striped clothes for civilian clothes. I didn't have a warm coat, I didn't have boots, and I didn't have any other clothes. We were sleeping outside in the fields. If I didn't keep moving during the night I would freeze to death.

My brother and I decided we wanted to go back home to see if we could find any family members who may have survived. There was chaos after the end of the war. It probably took about ten days to get back to Czechoslovakia. Not because of

the distance, but because of lack of transportation. We got rides on wagons, cars, buses, and trains, whatever. We just jumped onto the trains — almost nobody paid at that time. Some people jumped on the roof of the train and many of them died when the train went under a tunnel, underpass, and there was no room between the top of the train and the wall.

We made it back to our family home. Our parents and brothers and sisters did not survive. We learned that many survivors who went back to their hometowns were killed by the local population. They did not want us to come back. We were not safe there.

PALESTINE

I had three relatives of my father, Blima, Ergy, and Helen, who survived. They were a bit older than my brother and I were and they told us about a group that was run by the Jewish Agency. The agency wanted to find orphans and bring them to Palestine. My brother and I joined them and I started my journey. We went through Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, and France and finally to Belgium. We stayed in Boneffe, Belgium until we numbered about 700 people to go on the boat. While we waited in Boneffe we stayed in a beautiful place that before the war must have belonged to very rich people. There were unusually shaped buildings, fenced all around. It was like a castle, like where the royal family lives in England.

We sailed from Antwerp, Belgium on the boat the *Hyelet Ivrit,* 'Jewish Soldier' in English. To go from Belgium to Palestine took about two or three weeks.

The boat was a freighter, not a passenger boat. It was an ordinary cargo ship but in reality it was transporting humans, smuggling humans. In order to get to Palestine we had to go through the Straits of Gibraltar. The British were there in Spain and they did not want us to get through to get to Palestine. So we would have to go down in the hatches and hide where the British could not see us. We were cargo, human cargo.

When we finally arrived at the shores of Palestine in 1946, we were supposed to be smuggled in by the Jewish Agency but once we got there we couldn't land because the British were watching very closely. They were ruling Palestine from 1927 until 1948. We were circling around in the water off Palestine for another two or three weeks until we ran out of food and water. Finally, we decided to surrender to the British. Our boat was towed into Haifa. My boat was the last boat that wasn't sent to Cyprus. (The British did not let the famous boat the *Exodus* land. It was sent to France.) We stayed on the boat for another two or three weeks before the British decided what to do with us.

Finally, they decided to keep us at a place called Atliet, south of Haifa. This was a camp where the outside was controlled by the British and the inside by Arab policemen hired by the British. All the prisoners were Jewish Holocaust survivors. We lived in a tent. It wasn't too bad compared to what I went

through before. The food was excellent because it was supplied by the Jewish Agency. After about ten months the British decided to release us to the Jewish population.

When I was released from Atiet I went to Mikveh Israel, an agriculture school near Tel Aviv. About one month after being released from Atliet we were required to join an organization. It was the law — like having to register for the military in the United States. It just happened that I joined the Haganah. At that time I didn't know the difference between Lehi, Etzel, and Haganah so it happened that I joined the Haganah.

Mikveh Israel had about five square kilometers of land. We were learning agriculture but we were also learning how to use arms, light arms like rifles and hand guns. They also taught us Hebrew. In Mikveh Israel we worked in the fields doing whatever farmers do. They used to teach us on an orange plantation behind a hill. We would go into the plantation with all the agricultural tools along with all the guns. Of course, from the top of the hill someone would always watch for the British. If the British would come and catch us with arms — needless to say what would happen. One day, my luck, I was on watch on the hill, and I was a good watchman, but the British were better than me. Because I didn't have binoculars and they had binoculars, they saw me first. What happened was, when I saw armored cars, I warned the guys to hide the guns in the plantation. Of course the British knew what we were doing — there was no question about it. Three soldiers and one civilian who spoke Hebrew came over and right away they took me

away from the group. But I didn't speak Hebrew. In Israel we used all kinds of tricks: I don't speak Hebrew, I don't speak this, I don't speak that, I don't feel good, — to get away from punishment. Needless to say, the British knew those tricks, too. Trying to get me to talk, that civilian even told me he was a Jewish traitor. They didn't believe I didn't speak Hebrew. So the next thing I remember is I saw the stars in the middle of the day. They took me away maybe two kilometers. After a couple of days they found me unconscious and I spent three days in the hospital. That was my first getting to know who we used to nickname the "Johnnies". After that I had a few other close calls.

Two weeks after the first incident with the British, the man who was in charge of the security at Mikveh Israel came to me and another guy and said, "Tomorrow you are going to go to Tel Aviv. Here is the address and a man there will tell you what to do." I didn't know too much, but I knew one thing — whatever I have to do, I do. I went to Tel Aviv with this other guy, and the man there gave us each a bunch of posters. I put them under my shirt. I also got a bucket of hot glue and a brush. We had to put up illegal posters on the bulletin boards of Tel Aviv. In Israel bulletin boards are very common in the streets because so many people walking by see them. There was constant disagreement between the messages that the British posted and the ones the Jewish organizations posted.

We were told to go to Allenby Street. Allenby street goes north to south. It is hilly, not straight. I had already covered maybe half a mile on this street and I am never going to forget

what happened when I came to Allenby and Benjamin Streets. I was on the top of Allenby where it was merging with Benjamin when the next thing I knew, I saw bullets flying in between my legs. I felt something hot running down my leg. I was next to a stone wall. The bullets hit the wall and ricocheted back to me. I knew that it was the British. I looked down and I saw an armored car firing at us. In those days the situation was such in Israel that first they shoot and then they ask questions. Of course I got scared. They taught us that when you are shot you don't feel the pain right away – you feel hot, nauseous, these things. So I got very emotional. Needless to say I didn't want to be caught by the British. In Israel there are stone walls, and on the top of the stone walls is broken glass or broken tiles, so that if you were going to jump over the wall you would cut yourself. I was wearing short pants, short sleeves, and I jumped over that wall. So I cut myself. I think the other guy did the same thing but I don't know exactly what happened to him. While I'm running over there like crazy in peoples' backyards, after about five minutes I said to myself, "If I was shot I would not be able to stand on my feet. Right?" What happened? The bullets hit the bucket with the glue and the hot glue was leaking on my foot and that's why I thought I was hit.

At that time, Etzel, led by Menachem Began, were setting mines to blow up trains to harass the British. Before the trains would arrive, the British would check the tracks for mines. I would say fifty percent of the time the British would find the bombs. The British blamed us at Mikveh Israel for setting them because we were just on the other side of the railroad

tracks. Every time the British found something, they had to blame someone. Naturally, the Etzel wasn't waiting there saying, "I am here," so they used to pick us up and they used to keep us overnight in their headquarters in Tel Aviv. Then they would release us. It wasn't unusual to be roughed up by them. This was a weekly occurrence.

In Mikveh Israel we were surrounded on three sides by Arabs. At any time all hell could break loose; they would open fire. I would be sitting on a bench with a nice girl and suddenly there would be gun fire. They had much more than we did —weapons, ammunition, everything.

The agriculture school, Mikveh Israel, where I first lived in Israel.
I am fourth from the top in the second column from the right.

At Mikveh Israel. The first picture of me in Israel.
I am in the middle and my brother, Tsvi, is on my left.

ISRAELI MILITARY SERVICE

I stayed at Mikveh Israel for about one year. During that time I was in the Haganah. In the beginning everybody was in the defense forces even if they were not legally in the army. We were in no-man's-land, in danger wherever we were.

Palestine had just became Israel and the War of Independence started, so on May 28, 1948, I joined the Israeli army in Tel Aviv. I was just getting my strength back, but in the Israeli army in those days they took anybody they could get. They didn't ask too many questions. They took hundreds of new immigrants right from the boats into the army and they hardly showed them how to use a rifle. They went right from the boat to the front, and sometimes the army didn't know the names of the bodies. They died as unknown soldiers. My serial number in the army was 29744.

We had very, very hard training. Many times I said to myself, "I don't mind to die, but I can't take the training anymore." It was very, very tiring. Part of our training was to learn to always remember the specific password for each action. We had to remember the password because our life could depend on it. The password could be in Hebrew or not. It could be Za Za Gabor. It could be Marilyn Monroe.

My very first day, or maybe a couple of days after, they sent us to southern Israel to a place called Gedera, near a little airport that the British had there. It was near the famous kibbutz

Negba. While we were going there we were in a convoy. I was on the fourth truck. The three trucks in front of mine went over a mine. Needless to say what the result was.

Negba was surrounded by the Arabs, by Egyptians, Iraqis, and Sudanies. There had been a famous battle there. The Israelis had twice before tried to open the road that blockaded Negba and failed both times. When I was there the Arabs had more soldiers than we did and we had to retreat. We lost a lot of men there. When we went we were about 800 men and less than 200 came back.

I was involved in the Atalena Affair. The was a boat, filled with arms, brought to Israel by the Etzel. Etzel, led by Began, wanted to take over the government. They were fighting Jews in cities throughout Israel. When the Atalena anchored at a kibbutz, Etzel left the front lines and went to unload some of the arms from the boat. The Haganah took chase and finally the Atalena ran aground on the beach near Tel Aviv. My brother was in the Etzel and I was in the Haganah. The Haganah and Etzel were facing off. This went on for a month or so. The Haganah did not want the Etzel to have the arms from the Atalena because the Etzel would fight against the Haganah and other Jews as well. The Haganah was fighting against the Arabs and we didn't want to fight with Jews at the same time. Finally, Etzel did leave the boat and all the arms were left on the boat. After that we used to see little kids running in the streets with guns, rifles. That was the end of the Atalena.

I was at the capture of Jaffa. I have a picture of myself on a rooftop of a four story building holding a machine gun. The Arabs had used the building as the Alliance School. Now our base was there.

After I was at the capture of Jaffa I was transferred to Jaifa and that is when I joined the navy. I was in the military for four years including one year in the navy.

We were called the Israeli Coast Guard. We used to patrol the shores of Israel which is very short, about sixty miles from the north to the south. We had just a few rickety, slow-moving, little boats. Some of them were from Aliyah Bet. The biggest gun we had may have been a machine gun and maybe some old-fashioned guns from the World War I. We built something that looked like a big gun – it was not a real gun. Sometimes the Arabs may have been scared when they saw that big gun so they didn't confront us. That is the kind of thing we had to do. One boat I went on, the P17, was a former ice-breaker brought from the United States. The top speed was seven miles an hour. An ice-breaker doesn't go straight; it goes up and down and up and down — to break the ice. The Arabs had better boats than we did at that time. One time, for more than a month, we couldn't get back to our base because the Arabs were controlling the bay at Jaifa which was our port. We were hiding near the island of Rhodes in Greece until finally the Arabs left and we could go back to our base.

In the Israeli Army in Tel Aviv in 1948.
I am on the far right. Tsvi is on the far left.

Just after the capture of Jaffa, 1948.

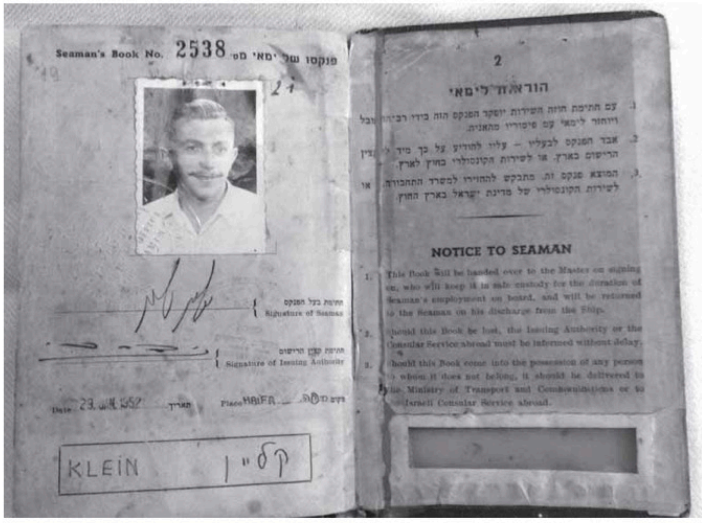
I am on the rooftop at the capture of Jaffa during Israel's War of Independence.

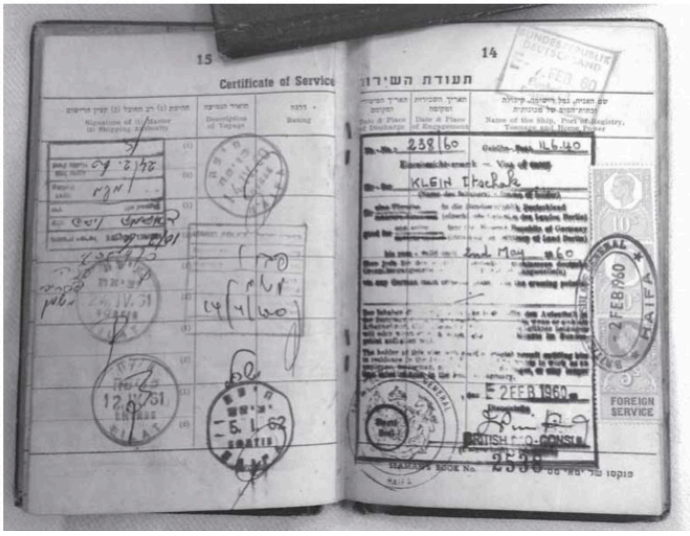
With my fellow soldiers in the Israeli Navy.

Painting the boat, the P17.

In the Israeli Coast Guard on P51 – a landing craft.

In the Merchant Marine.





My Israeli passport.

LIFE IN ISRAEL

When I left the Israeli army I was homeless in Israel for more than four months. I used to sleep on park benches and on buses.

I would often sleep on the back bench seat of the parked buses. One day, a Sephardic bus driver came in the morning, about four thirty, five o'clock, and he saw me there. I started to talk to him. He said he had to call his supervisor. I said, "Don't make a big deal. I didn't mess up the bus, I didn't make any damage. Just take the bus and have a nice day." But he was insistent that he was going to call the boss. He told me he didn't like the Ashkenazis. I asked him why he didn't like the Ashkenazis, "Did an Ashkenazi fool you one time?" He became very tense. The next day the same thing. He was going to call the boss. I said to myself I have to do something. I knew a little bit about engines, so that night I opened the hood of the bus and I did something not easy to see. When he came in the morning the bus wouldn't start. I offered him my help. I told him I am a little bit of a mechanic and I know a little bit about engines. Needless to say, he didn't accept my offer. So he goes and he gets the boss. The boss comes and he cannot start the engine. So I offered my help to the boss. The boss accepted my help. The driver was sitting on the driver's seat and I was not going to put my hand in the engine with him sitting there so I said, "Can you tell him to move?" The boss said, "Sure." He moved away. The boss sat on the side. I

made just a tiny touch on the engine because I knew what I was doing. I said, "Please sit down and start the bus." They started the bus. Then I heard the conversation between the driver and the boss. He was late for his schedule so the boss wasn't sympathetic to him. I told the boss, "I am homeless. I am a little bit down on my luck. I am sleeping on the back seat of the bus. I didn't cause any damage. I didn't mess up anything. Is it okay for me to continue?" He said, "Sure!" You should have seen the driver! He was fuming.

When I finished the army they gave me all kind of papers and said go to a certain office and they will have some buildings where they can give me a place to live where I could lay my head to rest. I went over there every day and nothing happened. I was waiting. Then one day I met a Polish man there and he said he had been in Israel six months, he didn't serve in the army, and he already lives in the place that I am waiting for my number to come up. So I got very mad. I said I am going to go over there and kill the man assigning housing (who also was Polish.) It was connections. I went over there and I was really tense. I was talking to him and he said, "No, no, no, there is still no room for you." There was a picture there of his wife and two kids and I am thinking pretty tough. I didn't care if they were going to arrest me because can you imagine what it is like to be months sleeping in ruined buildings, on park benches. So I looked at the picture and acted like I didn't know it was his wife and kids. I asked him who was in the

picture. He said it was his wife. So I insulted him. I said, "Boy, she is ugly." And then I told him I want to have a place to sleep today. I'm not going to wait because I met a Polish guy who didn't do anything for *Israel* and he already has a place. He was sitting at his desk and this was about a one story building. Behind him was the window and I had to be a little bit physical with him. I pushed him and we broke the window and all the things there. I didn't care. I said, "I know where you live and I'm going to get you." I told him if he was going to call the police I didn't care. So right away he gave me a place in Haifa, in Carmel, on top of the mountain that during the British occupation was an air force base where British soldiers used to live. The place was a big room where about ten or fifteen people slept. I had a little bed, not a bed really, more like a cot. But it was a place. I didn't have my own toilet, my own kitchen, but at least I had a place to live.

In Israel, especially in those days after the war, a little fighting wherever you went was normal. Unless you were really bleeding they would not call the police. They didn't have enough policemen right after the war. But I was in such desperate shape I didn't mind if they were going to arrest me. At least I would get to sleep in a bed instead of sleeping under a big concrete slab, or on a bus, or on a bench in the park. I lived in that big room for a year doing construction work until I joined the merchant marine.

Construction was pretty tough in those days. In those days we didn't have equipment like we have today – cranes, cement mixers. We had to do it all by hand. I had a big pan and I would put in it about five or six bags of cement, five or six bags of sand and maybe some rocks, and then I would mix it and put it in buckets and bring it up to the second floor. Each bucket weighed about 80 kilo. I worked very, very hard. One day the foreman came to me and said, "You are working very good, you have a good future." I said, "Yes, I have a good future six feet under if I will continue." I asked him to detail me in another section. He did after a couple of weeks. It wasn't as hard as the first work, but I remember one day I finished working and walked the half kilometer to the road where we would wait for the bus. After what I went through all day I was tired as hell. In those days it was quite normal to wait for an hour for the bus to show up. So I went on the side of the road and found a little bush where it was a little bit shady and the next thing I knew when I woke up I saw the bus with the same guys who worked with me arriving for the next days work. I had slept there all night! I joined the guys and I went back to work.

I worked in construction until they did not need my specialty anymore. Then I had to go back to the big city and go to the unemployment office and register again and wait for the next opportunity they would have for me.

THE MERCHANT MARINE

When I left construction work I joined the merchant marine as part of the crew of a ship. I worked in the engine room. I was like a stationary fireman. My job was to make sure the vessel produced enough steam in order to activate the steam engines. My title was sergeant major.

With the merchant marine I was in every country in Europe, wherever they had a port. I was in Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Yugoslavia, England, France, Italy, Germany, Belgium. I went to South Africa one time. In some places I got off the ship and saw the cities, but in the communist countries we could not get off the ship. I was in Europe eighty or ninety percent of the time. I came to the United States about half a dozen times, but only to New York. When I came to America to live, I came on the same boat I used to work on, but then I went as a passenger! The name of the boat was *Israel*.

I worked on two oil tankers. On one oil tanker we used to go to Venezuela to get oil. It used to take about a month for a one-way trip. We would arrive in Venezuela and in six hours the ship would be loaded and we would be ready to go back. Then we would get to Haifa and in eight hours they would empty the boat and we would go back to Venezuela. I made about ten trips. I also worked on another oil tanker that went to Iran, to Abadan. There we couldn't get off the ship. They

filled us up and on the way back we would go through Elat, the southern port of Israel. Within about ten hours they unloaded our ship in Israel and we went back to Abadan. The name of that ship was the *Patria*.

My brother and I worked for the same company, ZIM, but we never worked on the same boat. I worked in engineering and he worked as a deckhand. My brother worked on boats in Israel and he also worked on a fishing boat in England. He worked on the mother ship in the North Sea.

I was in the merchant marine for about eight years. I cannot say that I liked it. It took some time to get used to it. But other than that I had nothing else. I wasn't married, I didn't have a girlfriend, other than Blima, Ergy, and Helen who now lived in Israel, I didn't have family that missed me, so I was on my own until I met my wife and then things changed.

I met Shulamit Kadoorie through her cousin. Shulamit's cousin worked on the same boat as me. I worked in the engine room, her cousin worked in the galley washing dishes. This boy, Isaac, didn't like his job. I told him I would talk to his boss. The boss was an Italian. He said he would see what could be done, but time went by and he didn't do anything. So I went to talk to the boss of the boss and then the boy got another job. Either I switched boats or he was transferred, but we no longer saw each other.

In Shulamit's family they had a misfortune. Her mother's sister's four or five-year-old son, David, was killed in an accident. They lived on a mountain and some kids went into a parked truck and turned the steering wheel and the truck rolled down the hill a couple of hundred feet to where David was playing in the street. David was crushed by a truck. He was the brother of Isaac, the boy I knew on the boat.

Isaac had a girlfriend. He was Sephardic and she was Polish. Isaac's girlfriend gave him an ultimatum: "You have to marry me right now! Immediately!" Isaac's mother did not want the wedding to take place because the family was in mourning and they should wait for one year according to Jewish law. Isaac said to his mother, "If you don't let me marry her right now I'm going to kill myself." Shulamit's mother said to her sister, "Didn't you have enough? You lost one boy, are you going to lose another one?" So Shulamit's aunt gave permission to Shulamit's mother to make preparations for a wedding – to make a little party. The day of the wedding they went to the rabbi's office for the ceremony. Where I used to live was a stone's throw away from the rabbi's office. What happened was, that day I had worked on the boat for more than thirty hours with no sleep. Everything that could go wrong had gone wrong. I came home about one o'clock. I was dead tired. A guy I knew knocked on my door and said, "Isaac is getting married and they need a minyan." I was tired and I said, "Go away! If my sister was getting married I wouldn't go!" And I meant it. Maybe half an hour later he came back again. I said, "You come one more time and I'm going to break your neck."

I really was mad, mad, mad. He came back the third time. Just as I was mad the first time and the second time, suddenly I said to myself, "He already woke me up. The rabbi's office is just a hop away so I will go." This was maybe three o'clock in the afternoon. There were not too many people on the street at that time so there would be no one to ask to join the minyan. I thought I would go for a short time, ten minutes. So I went. I was at the main entrance to the rabbi's office. Further inside was the family of the boy. I went over to them because of course I had to be nice. Then I saw Shulamit. I know that she noticed me. I looked at her and she looked at me – but she was with somebody. So I said to myself, "Hey, Dummy, you looking for trouble?" Afterward I found out that the somebody was her brother. So it was okay. The rest is history.

I wanted to start a business in Israel with my brother. I didn't know exactly what kind of business; I was thinking of maybe a grocery store. In Israel as a resident I had certain rights so I could have gotten some kind of backing. But my brother didn't want to be my partner and I didn't want to get into partnership with strangers, so it did not happen. I had a very hard time in Israel. When I got married my brother didn't want to help me. He would laugh at me. He would listen to anyone but me.

When I was ready to come to America I wanted my brother to come with me. I already knew how to obtain the papers. I was thinking of some kind of business even here. But since we were not in agreement on anything, the thing just died. He didn't want to come to America. Our relationship did not get better – the opposite.

My wedding in Israel.

With my wife and sons and the captain on the ship sailing to the United States.

With my wife and sons Glen and Jerome.

LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

Two of my three sons were born in Israel. Glen Simon, the oldest, is named for my father. Our second son, Jerome, was very sick with asthma. We took him to a specialist who said he needed an operation on his chest because his chest was pressed in. In order to make it rounder they had to put in some kind of plate or structure to pull it out. We thought a change of climate might help him. This was the main reason we wanted to come to the United States.

I came to the United States on a quota. From the free countries the quota was already full, but I was born in Czechoslovakia which at that time was Communist and the Communists did not let too many people out, so the quota was not full. It didn't matter where I was living as long as I had proof that I was born in Czechoslovakia – so my quota was open. Because I had my birth certificate, I had no problem whatsoever. We came to the United States on the same boat I had once worked on.

We were planning to go to Colorado where the air is dry, but I didn't know anybody in Colorado and I didn't have enough resources to support us there. So we settled in Brooklyn, New York. After a while our son was okay. Everything worked out. Today the boy is six-feet-two or three and does karate. Our third son was born in the United States. We named him Neal. It means close in Hebrew.

My aunt, Rose Klein, my father's sister, was the only person I knew in the United States. She had come to the United States in 1939. She was really good, a darling of a woman. When I was in Israel she used to send me some money – a dollar or two which was a lot of money in those days, 1956. She was the kind of person who would give her last penny to help someone. She had five children. She passed away about five years ago.

I learned English in America. I went to night school in New York. In Brooklyn I studied for about 600 hours to learn maintenance and engineering.

In Brooklyn I worked in a hospital, Unity Hospital, on Rodchester Street. I used to take care of the heating and cooling of the building. They had steam boilers. I knew a little bit more than anybody else about steam boilers because I had worked on them in the merchant marine. In those days everything in the hospital depended on the steam boilers — the sterilizers, the autoclave and so on. I used to arrive at six o'clock in the morning so everything would be ready for eight o'clock. If I didn't come in on time the whole thing would be delayed. I worked on that shift for about four years. At the same time I was also working in another hospital, Williamsburg General Hospital, also in Brooklyn. In the hospital I used to take care of the equipment — sterilizers, suction machines, autoclaves... You name it. There were about a dozen residential buildings across the street from the hospital and I took care of the boilers there, too. I also worked as a plumber part-time. I used

to leave the house about four thirty, five o'clock in the morning and I would come home after midnight. I worked two full time jobs for about four years. I was making about two hundred dollars. It wasn't easy.

I lived on the sixth floor in an apartment building and the family that lived on the fourth floor had a fourteen or fifteen-year-old boy who was retarded. My sons used to play ball and that boy used to take their ball and throw it on top of the roof. I wanted to speak to the parents to ask them to stop their son from bothering my boys, but they didn't want to talk to me. They called me "Greener" because they knew I was not a citizen and I had to be extra nice and careful and not make any trouble. The wife threatened that her husband was going to hit me saying he had been in the marines. I knew this problem was not going to go away by itself. About a month or two after I spoke to them the first time I went to their apartment to talk but they wouldn't open the door all the way for me. In the springtime most of the tenants would take their chairs and sit out in the sun on the wide sidewalk. One day my sons came to me crying and it really touched me. I didn't want my children to grow up thinking their father could not help them. Something got to me — I had to do something. I did not forget that I was a Greener and it would be another year or two before I could become a citizen — but only if I behaved — so I didn't know what to do.

I had met a black policeman at the station where I would wait for the subway to go to work. I used to chat with him. (He

had told me he had been in Europe at about the same time I was liberated.) I thought I would go find him and see if he could help me. I went to the subway station and sure enough, he was on duty. I told him what my situation was and he said, "Go file a complaint." I thought that because this was just kid stuff it would not help. Then the vice-sergeant came around and he said the same thing as the policeman. I was disappointed and started walking back home. Then in the middle of the block I saw the boy and I stopped him and I said to him, "I am not going to hurt you. I just want to know why you pick on my boys. Stop picking on them." The next thing I knew, the father crossed the street and jumped on me. When I got through with him he ended up spending three weeks in the hospital. He tried to sue me, he tried to get witnesses, but it came to nothing. Afterward I had no problem with the kid and no problem with the family. My nickname in the building became "The Bandit." Not too long afterward we moved to another street.

My wife and I went to Florida just to visit, we were not planning to stay. We went to a hotel on Normandy Drive. I went on the beach and I got so sunburned I almost died! I was roast beef! My wife fell in love with Florida so what's a dumb husband to do? I listened. That's how it started. We came down and I found some Israelis who helped me find a job. I worked in a gas station on Hallandale Beach Boulevard for a while. At first we lived near US1 and Gulfstream Park. Then we moved to Miami Beach and bought our house in 1970.

In Miami I went to Lindsay Hopkins Trade School to learn building maintenance, heating and cooling systems. In the mornings, until about two o'clock, I worked in apartments doing maintenance, plumbing and some painting. In the afternoons I worked at the Miami Heart Institute on Miami Beach from three to eleven. I also worked at the Hebrew Academy. I did what I had to do to raise three children and pay all the expenses.

Today my sons are fifty-nine, fifty-eight, and 50 years old. I have three grandchildren. Yaffa, Daniel, and Emily.

MY LIFE TODAY

Today I spend much of my time speaking in cities around the United States and Canada about my experiences. I speak to students, educators and historians, as well as government and military leaders. I am a docent and regular volunteer at the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach.

On one occasion I was invited to speak to the United States Southern Command in Doral, Florida. They picked me up at my house and after clearing security I was introduced to the general. He took me into his office and showed me pictures of their work. I showed him pictures of me from the Israeli navy. I told him about one occasion that I thought was the end of me. I told him when I was in the Israeli army they sent me to Elat, the southern point of Israel. We took a rickety plane

— one of those old planes that Israel bought from the United States called a Mustang. He said, "Yes, I remember the Mustang." So I told him we flew over the mountains on the border between Israel and Jordan. There were a lot of mountains. At that time the situation was very, very tense between Israel and Jordan. Our plane was carrying about twenty or twenty-five soldiers. I could see that from the other side of the mountain, which was Jordan, that they were shooting at us. I saw a spark. When I saw the spark I thought the plane was hit. Over the desert there are hot air pockets, so when I saw the spark and suddenly the plane went down about fifty feet — it was my first time on a plane — I thought that this was the big one! The general said, "Yes, you survived the Holocaust and then you survived in Israel." Then we went into the auditorium where I was to speak. I was seated next to him and when he stood up to make the opening remarks he said to me, "Mr.Klein, sit in my chair." For me this is ahhh! — me sitting in a general's chair! While I was sitting in the general's chair suddenly I remembered the famous TV show with Archie Bunker when if anybody sat in his chair what a big fuss he would make. And here, the little *Kleiner* like me sits in the general's chair. That was really something for me. I was proud of myself. I spoke, I think, really well. My wife said I was okay, so I know I was very good. The next day the general and his staff came to visit the Holocaust Memorial.

In 2000 and 2006 I traveled to Poland and Israel on the March of the Living to help teach American teenagers about

the Holocaust and the history of Israel. When we went to Auschwitz/Birkenau I showed them where the D Lager was. In 2000 the fence was open and we could go to D Lager. The second time the fence was closed and we could not go there. The barracks was destroyed and only the sign saying 31 was there. Traveling through Poland with the teenagers it hurt me to see the reminders of Jewish life where there are now no Jewish souls, to see the Jewish grave stones made into sidewalks, to see the neglect of the beautiful synagogues, to see stores with Jewish writing and no Jews shopping there, and to see mezzuzahs on the doorposts and no Jews living there.

To some extent I blame our leaders because the Jewish people didn't resist so they were an easy target. If we did resist many more people would be alive. Maybe I am talking like a hero after the war, but I believe that if you know that you are going to die anyway, you might as well act as Theodore Herzel said, "If you are not going to help yourself, nobody is going to help you." If the Jewish people would resist, all the enemies of the Jewish people would think twice before starting with the Jews.

With Eli Wiesel in Miami.

With my son Jerome, my wife, and the general of the United States Southern Command, Doral, Florida.

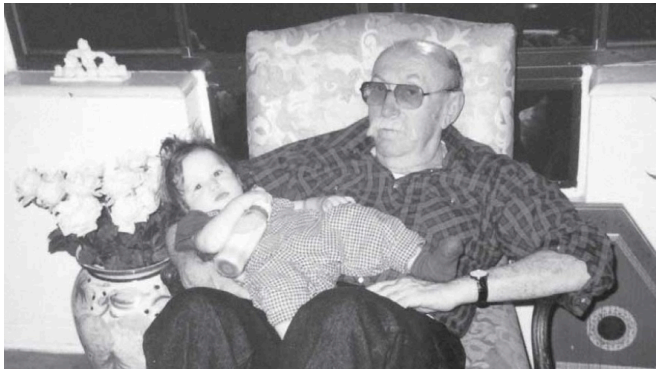
My brother, my wife and I in Israel.

My brother and I with my wife's brother, Moshe, in Israel.

At Auschwitz on the March of the Living.

With fellow volunteers at the
Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach

My son Neal, his wife Sharon, his daughter Yaffa, and his son Daniel.



With my granddaughter Emily.

With Neal, Glen, Shulamit, and Jerome celebrating my 84th birthday. Miami, January 31, 2015

FINALLY

Today my relationship with my brother is a little bit better. We talk to each other, we write to each other and we call each other. He still lives in Israel. He gave me ten thousand dollars, a gift which was like something that fell down from the sky! I think now he has started to realize who I am. It goes back a long story that I was his little brother and he wanted me to behave as he wanted me to — I shouldn't have ideas of my own, but only his ideas. He would laugh at whatever I was doing. Today he realizes that he wasn't always right — that's for sure. Lately he had a quite serious operation. He is slowly recovering.

I am now an 84 year-old man going back 75 years to the horrible place where I grew up — it is not easy. When I was first married I had horrible dreams. My wife used to get scared and wake up in the middle of the night. By the time she woke me up I already didn't remember the dream. That is not to say that I forgot what happened to me in the camp or even before I was in the camp. Many things I don't remember, but sometimes things just suddenly pop up and come back to me. This still happens. I believe more things will come to me.

I want the world to know as much as I can tell them about what happened. Because if I can make even one person believe what happened and he can tell the new generation, I did my job. The world has to know. Especially the Jewish people.

My twin brother, Tsvi Klein, passed away in Israel in June, 2015.

ABOUT THE WRITER

I began writing for Holocaust survivors in the 1990's when survivors I met on The March of the Living asked me for help writing about their feelings on returning to Poland for the first time. Later, survivors I interviewed for Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation asked me for help writing down all the things they did not speak about in their interview. Soon, other survivors began approaching me seeking help writing a book about their experiences in the Holocaust. I met with the survivors, recorded our numerous conversations, organized and wrote the stories in the survivors' own words, printed the books, and then handed the books to the survivors as my gift to them. The books were written solely for the survivors and their families; they were never intended for publication. They are being published now because my friends, Carol and Jaime Suchlicki, recognizing their historical value as first-person testimony, introduced me to Dr. Haim Shaked to discuss finding a wider audience for the books.

Thank you to Dr. Haim Shaked director of the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies at the University of Miami for agreeing to publish the books and for your guidance and patience as we worked together on this project.

I am grateful to the March of the Living for introducing me to the world of Holocaust education and finding a role for me in it.

Thank you to the Shoah Foundation for choosing me to be an interviewer and for mentoring me through more than thirty interviews of Holocaust survivors. Your training led me to do the work I do today.

Thank you to the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach for encouraging the docents at the memorial to work with me to write their memoirs. I appreciate your confidence in me and your respect for my work.

Thank you to the my dear Holocaust survivors for sharing your most painful as well as your most joyful memories with me. Thank you for answering questions that no one should ever have to ask or answer. Thank you for trusting me to write your memoirs accurately and respectfully. It has been my honor and pleasure to work with you.

—Bobbi Kaufman

"The twins would have to go to the clinic almost every day for medical experimentation. I don't know how to explain all the extreme pain I went through so that a little bit more or less didn't really make any difference."

— Isaac Klein

On arrival at Auschwitz, Isaac and his twin brother, Tsvi, were immediately selected by the infamous Joseph Mengele for medical experimentation. After surviving surgeries, lashings, and near starvation, Isaac endured a 700 kilometer death march to Mathausen where he was liberated by the Americans. He made his way to Palestine where, at seventeen years old, he joined the Israeli Army. After many years in the merchant marine, Isaac left Israel and emigrated to the United States with his wife and sons.

There is a concept in Judaism of a positive commandment, something that is time dependent, something that must be done *now*. One must, accordingly, applaud this important effort by the Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program of the University of Miami to collect and publish Holocaust survivors' memoirs as there will soon—too soon—come a time when the last survivors will be no longer. Sadly, tragically, this testimony is not only urgent but timely because the world in which we live echoes their world and the quality of their witness. The very nature of their survival has much to teach today's generations. One must express gratitude for this project and in the sagacious words of Hillel say: "If not now, when?"

Dr. Michael Berenbaum
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American Jewish University
Former President and CEO
Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation
(Now USC Shoah Foundation Institute)