



UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT – RABBI WEISS

[Testimony: 1hr 35” Artefacts: 4’40”]

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10:00:00:00

Rabbi Weiss

My name is Benedict Weiss. I was born 9th May 1930. I survived the war by hiding in a place for periods when all Jewish inhabitants were sent to Auschwitz and escaped the war that way.

[Fade to black and back up]

10:00:30:24

Interviewer

Have you ever recorded your testimony before?

10:00:33:18

Rabbi Weiss

No, I don't think so. As far as I remember, it's the first time - recording.

10:00:39:01

Interviewer

And why is that?

10:00:40:22

Rabbi Weiss

Because nobody, nobody's asked me.

10:00:44:11

Interviewer

Nobody's ever asked you before?

Rabbi Weiss

No.

10:00:48:10

Interviewer

Do you feel it's important to record testimony?

10:00:51:13

Rabbi Weiss

Well, as you explained to me, um, probably for the sake of history, much of it is important, because it get, gets lost over the years. Less and less people know who's been through the Holocaust anymore. It's good, it's right to try to keep a record. The people who have gone through the war and experienced some hard years. So if somebody important, probably would have potential benefits.

10:01:27:22

Interviewer

How much do you, or have you, shared of your experiences with your family?

10:01:34:06

Rabbi Weiss



Well it does, well, over the years, over the years we talk about it, every time we remember the stories we tell them, but never sat down and had a session that says, let's discuss the Holocaust together. Piece by piece they learn. One day if they ask a question that they want to ask about how it was there, you tell them, but take your time, time not to – I've never had a session where I've just talked about the Holocaust.

10:02:03:09

Interviewer

Do you find it difficult to remember that period of your life?

10:02:07:00

Rabbi Weiss

I think so, because I was very, relatively young. I was, when - It probably started when I was only about eight or nine. Then it ended when I was about twelve or thirteen. That's, that's what age I was for the first part of it, but relatively young. So, a child of twelve or thirteen, imagine now, can't have the same experience, can't feel the same as others who know what's what.

10:02:39:10

Interviewer

But yet you're old enough to have understood what happened?

10:02:42:09

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, as much as a child of twelve, thirteen, fourteen. Yes, yes.

10:02:49:00

Interviewer

We will talk about your family in, in a minute's time, but how much do you think your experiences in that time of history influenced your faith?

10:02:59:21

Rabbi Weiss

Er, I don't think that was probably same thing. First of all, belief, everything, whatever, suggests to me that I've got to put up, I've no doubt about it, so – never discussed - just part of it.

10:03:18:02

Interviewer

But do you think your experiences made your faith stronger?

10:03:23:07

Rabbi Weiss

If anything yes, because of what happened. All of us will go through periods, different ones and it almost helps us as we go through it. So there's very strong evidence that, er, if you start believing that things are not - comes, comes from higher.



10:03:46:23

Interviewer

Do you think it's possible to forgive?

10:03:50:16

Rabbi Weiss

Er, it depends. I mean, normally people should be forgive, but if somebody is vicious and, er, out to do harm, terrible harm to people, I think they should be punished.

10:04:07:05

Interviewer

What does that mean about how you feel towards the Nazis in that period of history?

10:04:12:00

Rabbi Weiss

Nazis, I feel that there haven't been enough... they should have been probably punished more than. I can't imagine, I don't what punishment can want for a person who is so wicked. Who it out, out, out to harm and kill and, is ruthless over a period of years to thousands of people. I mean, no words for it.

10:04:41:22

Interviewer

We will have some general questions later about messages to pass down to the generations, but part of of the reason – and I know you understand that we're doing this recording – is for us to learn from per-, people like you about that period of history. Do you have any, any main lessons that you would like to pass on?

10:05:03:08

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah again, I must say again, because I was so young, I was only about twelve, thirteen, fourteen, I don't think we got, at that time understood, but now I'm an adult so - it's, er, it's a very young age, very hard. A young person, a boy of ten, twelve, fourteen I don't think we got at that time understood. But now I'm like, like an adult so - It's a very young age , very hard. It's also a young person of, a boy of ten, twelve. I mean it's, they want, want to play, they want to play sports. It's -, I don't see what, I don't thinkj we realised what was around us. My parents – others – they did, but children of ten, twelve, they live with it, but they don't know. It's taken a long time to realize that here were the faces of vicious people and we've got to start living of start to survive if possible.

10:05:54:11

Interviewer

Do you find it difficult to talk about that period of history, and that period of your life?

10:05:59:19

Rabbi Weiss

No, I don't think I do because I was very young so it was probably -. If I would've been older, probably I imagine with a family around me, and children, fami it would



have been different, but, as the child, it's, it's, it's quite different.

10:06:14:11

Interviewer

We have interviewed a lot of people who find recalling their experiences, no matter how young or old they are, very emotional. Do you find it difficult, do you find it emotional still, when you think about it?

10:06:26:20

Rabbi Weiss

I think, er, I managed to get over it, because, because of the fact that I wasn't old enough to realise exactly what, what's going on.

10:06:38:16

Interviewer

And you've made sense of it in your life?

10:06:41:16

Rabbi Weiss

I've made sense? What sense? I've not made any sense. No sense. When vicious people do things to you, it doesn't make sense.

10:06:52:01

Interviewer

Somehow you've been able to process it though, and use it in your life positively?

10:06:56:17

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah I mean it stays, it stays inside you and doesn't go out so quickly.

10:07:02:24

Interviewer

Thank you for that answer.

[Cut for sound]

Can we talk about your life before the war, and what -, where you lived, what your family was like, what kind of house you lived in. Can you just give me an example of how your life was?

10:07:16:20

Rabbi Weiss

Well, see before, before the war I was a child of about ten, eleven years. I went to school, to *cheder* as it was in those days, and that's all I was in-, interested in. The learning, and boys, and friends. The parents are in charge of the child, whatever it is.

10:07:36:00

Interviewer



But you were part of a very big Jewish community weren't you?

10:07:39:11

Rabbi Weiss

Yes it is, oh yes, very traditional. About 30,000 Jewish people lived in our hometown Oradea.

10:07:49:01

Interviewer

And your father was a very prominent figure?

10:07:51:02

Rabbi Weiss

Oh, yes, yes, yes, he was.

10:07:52:10

Interviewer

Can you tell me about him?

10:07:54:02

Rabbi Weiss

He was a rabbi, a great figure. He was -, lots of authority. People used to come for [*could it be and?*] help from all over the world, asking questions to answer on, er, problems affecting their religious life and he was always there to give the right answer. He was a big scholar, and, er, his personality was well-known and well-liked.

10:08:26:04

Interviewer

So he was a very prominent rabbi?

Rabbi Weiss

Yes

Interviewer

Was it always intended that you would be a rabbi as well?

10:08:32:11

Rabbi Weiss

I imagine that's what -, he would have liked, but circumstances forbade it. My most fruitful years between twelve, sixteen, eighteen, I had to was moving from one place to another one. Other people normally sit down and learn and study. I had no chance to study.

10:08:53:05

Interviewer

Were you an only child?



10:08:54:16

Rabbi Weiss

An only child, yeah.

10:08:56:04

Interviewer

So what was your family like? You had a big extended family, or a small family?

10:08:59:16

Rabbi Weiss [*interrupting Interviewer*]

Yes, I mean I was a child, er, young child and we lived next to my grandfather, my mother's father. He was the chief rabbi in our town more or less, so a very open house. If you lived next door, you've got six in there, I was next door to them. There was always something going on.

10:09:33:21

Interviewer

What was your school like?

10:09:34:03

Rabbi Weiss

Er, I went to a private school, most of the time, and we had to, every year, take exams. See what's happened here, at the town where I'm situated, is, er, an area which was called Transylvania. It changed borders. At one period it was Hungary, and one period it was Romania, but when I was born it was Romania. So the first few classes I did in Romanian and, er, then by twelve years, when I was twelve, then Hungarians came into the country. It's an area where there was two countries disputing it. It's, today it's called Transylvania. It was Hungary -, borders with Hungary and Romania. Hungary wanted that particular area and Romania wanted it, so it seems to be, that World War II, it was -, the whole area was given to Romania. During World War II, the 1940s, they had a party -, conference in Vienna with Germans and Italy, so allies and they give their advice. Their ruling was that it goes back to Hungary, so in 1942 the Hungarian army marched into our place. They changed it from one country to another country overnight.

10:11:04:20

Interviewer

Okay. Can you tell me a bit more about your school and the kind of environment -. it was a Jewish school wasn't it?

10:11:12:10

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, Jewish, it was Jewish, it was a Jewish school, but I asked the rabbi myself, I was given properly organised at private schooling. I had a a mentor teacher. He was there for two hours a day. I studied books and, at the end of year, we went in for exams, but I didn't go to, well in those days a Romanian school, but I studied at a a Hebrew school. That's where I went all day. So I was more concentrate, concentrated on my education, to learn what we had to learn as a Jewish Orthodox



boy.

10:12:00:07

Interviewer

Prior to the war, do you remember any antisemitism?

10:12:05:02

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, I do very well. I remember that when, er, I used to go on the street, so if a non-Jew boy got hold of you, he attacked you, screamed at you, run after you. I used to come home from *cheder*, especially on Sunday when the other people went to church and the clergymen preaching there, most of them preaching anti-Jewish subject because it was dangerous when the priest came out from church. It became very, very -, he looked at a Jewish person and you could see his anger. So he was, again, shouting at them, scream at them. He could chase them, sometimes he could. I felt so bad about it.

10:12:55:16

Interviewer

How did that make you feel, can you remember?

10:12:58:14

Rabbi Weiss

I felt very uncomfortable.

10:13:04:10

Interviewer

Uncomfortable?

10:13:05:15

Rabbi Weiss

Uncomfortable, yes. I mean, went, went home from school, I had to watch back and front, to see nobody was chasing me. Yeah. Most, most times, most times you would be chased by somebody for no reason at all. They came across, hit you, smacked you on the -. You couldn't tell the police or anybody else, they, they not interested. So we had to put up with it. Put up -, put up with it and got used to it.

10:13:34:07

Interviewer

Were you proud of being Jewish, or ashamed?

10:13:37:16

Rabbi Weiss

No, we were very proud. We knew, we knew it was part of life. We've got to put, put up with it and go through with it and hope for the best.*

10:13:149:22

Interviewer

So war was declared when you were ten years old.



Yeah.

Do you remember that?

Rabbi Weiss

I remember that, er, I remember the people around me, parents, and friends, and family, they were talking about what, what's going on. And, er, well, one of my -, there was a radio. The radio was, the radio you couldn't hear because it always jumped, but I had an uncle with a radio and I'd run to him him and listen to the news every day. See what was going on in the world, oh, because from the media there you couldn't know nothing. We didn't, we did not know Auschwitz or concentration camps. Nobody never talked about it. It wasn't very far from our place, Romania to, to where Auschwitz was and it was kept secret.

10:14:43:13

Interviewer

So how much were you aware of what was going on in wider Europe?

10:14:48:13

Rabbi Weiss

Only by hearsay. People, other people kept telling us. Everybody with a different experience. The first, first thing was people mentioned - business people - they suffered first and then anyone who had a shop had to have a licence and Jews had to have a license for their business to run. That's the first thing I remember. I can remember the suffering first. Some people were struggling for a living struggling for a living in those days. From, from year when I was ten years old, around about 1940.

10:15:24:15

Interviewer

So in November, Hungary joined the axis of power didn't it? And where you were living - Oradea - is that how I pronounce it? became part of Hungary. Do you remember all of those changes?

10:15:37:20

Rabbi Weiss

I do, I remember it. I went to the street and Hungarian army had moved in. We all screamed welcoming them: "long life" and, er, we had to show loyalty to the new country that's coming in.

10:15:57:01

Interviewer

And how did your life change at that point?

10:16:00:06

Rabbi Weiss

As a child, at that time, I didn't feel anything until 1944 when the Germans occupied Hungary proper. Then, then trouble started properly. All of us, after that years, were suffering like, er. People were persecuting, I mean you knew, you realised that the



non-Jew neighbours don't want you. They hate you and they will do anything to you, yeah, and you have to live with it, get used to it.

10:16:28:08

Interviewer

But nevertheless, you were still a young child. It must have been a very frightening time for you?

10:16:33:07

Rabbi Weiss

It was, was frightening, yes, because I was a child and because youngsters well, certain youngsters were joining those parties, antisemitic parties, special parties. Their aim was to do whatever they could to hurt Jews and er, everybody was frightened of them.

10:17:00:01

Interviewer

You are a father many times over yourself, you know how much a parent wants to protect their children, but do you remember how your parents told you what was happening?

10:17:11:19

Rabbi Weiss

We heard it at home first and outside the synagogue. We found out that everybody had different experiences for different periods. There were times when all, all Jews were called into sort of, er, the proper army, but because they wouldn't trust the Jews they couldn't work in the army, but were special units for them who -, made, made them help to the the war effort and then they'd all be caught and taken away from their families and sent to different places. Most, most -, unfortunately most of the people perished. They sent to Ukraine, to America and never came back home, never came back home from them.

10:17:55:19

Interviewer

Do you remember, at this period how, um, your family behaved on the Sabbath?

10:18:01:18

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, as far as I can remember. I mean, the trouble didn't affect us. I mean, we kept Shabbath as before. It probably wasn't so easy, but we managed to get it.

10:18:16:20

Interviewer

As a rabbi, um, your father, as you said attracted lots of people. He was there presumably, to try and offer support and comfort as well

10:18:27:04

Rabbi Weiss



People would consult him all the time, 24 hours a day, whatever problems they had, because of the situation. See, the changes come to Sabbath sometimes, food I mean, It's, it's -, many problems which he had to give answers and advice.

10:18:47:21

Interviewer

During this time, am I right in thinking that you had your bar mitzvah?

10:18:51:12

Rabbi Weiss

That's correct, exactly. In 1943.

10:18:54:22

Interviewer

How did that celebrate?

10:18:56:22

Rabbi Weiss

At that time, it's interesting, it's, er, peoples' -, because it was relatively peaceful there. The worst of it started in '44, when the Germans occupied Hungary. Till that period, people lived there in peace, but they realised, it was a difficult time, they realised there were problems. Authorities were going to persecute Jews as much as they could and, er -, but we had to get used to the idea of living with it. People lived with it.

10:19:30:24

Interviewer

You're right, people just had to accept it and get on, but can you tell me about your bar mitzvah. How did that, how was that marked?

10:19:38:17

Rabbi Weiss

It happened, it's, er, very normal. At a bar mitzvah, I said, usually, normally, one says, a bit from the Bible, and, er, I said, I said my portion and people followed. I mean, we do it Sabbath morning. Sabbath. I mean, we, we -, family entertained a lot of people. The other thing people need to know, is at a bar mitzvah people come in to wish what we call *mazel tov*.

10:20:17:22

Interviewer

Because of your father's status, were there lots of people who attended?

10:20:22:02

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, loads of people. Loads of people, yeah.

10:20:23:19

Interviewer

Do you know how many?



10:20:24:24

Rabbi Weiss

I remember that, that, I hardly had I had no room to stand. There was pushing from all angles.

10:20:35:18

Interviewer

So your father must have been very proud of you?

10:20:38:17

Rabbi Weiss

I hope so.

10:20:41:04

Interviewer

I'm sure. So were you able, once the war had been declared, as a family and as a community, were you able to still, um, continue Jewish practices and Jewish life?

10:20:55:01

Rabbi Weiss

We continued normal for -, more difficult and hard, but we went on, nonstop.

10:21:03:07

Interviewer

Can you give me an example of how things changed?

10:21:06:08

Rabbi Weiss

The change, I mean, as I say, we were children, the change was my parents. I remember I used to look out for my father because he wasn't born in Hungary. Anybody, anywhere. He was born in Poland and his sister was not born in Hungary, and I think they were deported to, to Ukraine. And so it appears in 1942 he has ran away from home, he has escaped to another place, he's hiding there, and taking some time to come back, and I felt that my father had run away because circumstances. So, a boy of 12 and he found it very hard.

10:21:52:01

Interviewer

Before we talk about that, um, there were lots of Polish refugees in Hungary at that time.

10:21:57:18

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, what's happened then is Poland started -, it was definitely a lot earlier than in Hungary. It started from 1938, when Germany occupied the war - German occupation - and a lot of, lot of Polish people escaped the border to Hungary and from Hungary they gone to -, to come to various towns and they appeared as non-



Jews, as well as -, they didn't tell anybody they were Jewish. They came and mixed with the people there, so there were quite a lot of Jews with us.

10:22:38:07

Interviewer

And they came with stories, didn't they? of what was happening?

10:22:41:17

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, they came with stories and my father heard these stories and realised what had happened. It was taken that things were going to be very hard, but most of the people there, didn't communicate with them and then didn't listen. They didn't want to listen. It was all pessimistic - or pessimists - so they didn't -, we did and in the end they helped us. My father did everything possible to get round the worst period of, of, taking us on cattle trucks which were going to Auschwitz.

10:23:19:05

Interviewer

So your father was then plotting a way for your family to escape?

10:23:23:20

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, my family -, he escaped with us, he came with us. He came with us.

10:23:30:03

Interviewer

Absolutely. Um, in March 1944 Germany then, um, occupied?

10:23:36:17

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, then, then the worst part started. Yeah.

10:23:38:18

Interviewer

You were fourteen at that time, weren't you?

10:23:40:07

Rabbi Weiss

I was fourteen. Yeah.

10:23:41:13

Interviewer

Do you remember when they occupied Hungary? Do you remember them coming in?

10:23:43:23

Rabbi Weiss

I remember, I remember. As I was saying, I remember, I remember it faintly. As a child I remember, see at fourteen you're still a child, you know what I mean? I knew



that people were very worried and very upset and very, you know what I mean. It felt, felt terrible to everybody when you heard what the Germans were up to, and now you're facing them in your own country. It's, er, a shocking experience.

10:24:19:05

Interviewer

So do you remember that fear in the community and what that felt like?

10:24:23:18

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, yes it felt terrible. there wasn't much you could do, but the fact was that you had to accept it. It wasn't easy to accept, but it, it was there.

10:24:37:15

Interviewer

Can you explain to somebody who has never had that experience, what it felt like to be a Jew at that time in your hometown?

10:24:47:24

Rabbi Weiss

I imagine there's no way you can explain it but, I mean, I imagine it must be hard, hard for them to understand what's happening, but, um, I don't know what -. You had to live with it. Not a day gone by, not a day, not a day at all. Praying for the best, that one day it will get better.

10:25:12:12

Interviewer

But what restrictions were being put on your life? How did your life change?

10:25:16:04

Rabbi Weiss

Well, not my life because I was a child, but most peoples' life changed because the first thing is anybody with a business, their licence was taken away automatically. Every business had to have a licence. Every shopkeeper had a licence to trade. So, the Jews who traded, whatever their trade was, they withdrew their licence and they were not allowed to trade, so they lost everything completely one day to next. They lost everything, and they tried to find something else and they couldn't find something else so easily in those circumstances. So it was a miserable life for those people.

10:26:00:00

Interviewer

How did you feel towards the Gestapo who were around in your community?

10:26:04:04

Rabbi Weiss

Oh yeah, I don't, don't even think -, if you think on about them, if you remember how they looked, was terrifying. They wore swastikas. Just just looking at them, so, so I hated their fierce appearance. It was terrifying.



10:26:27:10

Interviewer

Can you explain that a little bit more?

10:26:30:04

Rabbi Weiss

I don't know, because if a Gestapo looked at you, he looked -. He showed you his anger, you don't know about his anger, and he could do whatever he wants. So nobody told him what not to do and then if somebody -, if you know that somebody hates you, he wants to attack you and nobody will defend you, I mean, that's not very comfortable.

10:26:58:15

Interviewer

And you must have heard lots of stories of what had happened to people in the community?

10:27:02:05

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, everybody had something. Everybody, everybody had different experiences.

10:27:07:16

Interviewer

Can you remember some of those stories?

10:27:10:06

Rabbi Weiss

Er, most people were attacked, and most people got -, I remember, remember, for instance, people going on the train, to travel from one place to another place. You could go on the trains but what happened, you're risking -. People would come and nudge you, pick you up, open the door throw you out. It happened, happened to us many times. People would go on the trains - you had to go on the train - but people were terrified. You didn't know what would happen. No one could say anything, and, er, you had to put up with it. People wanted to travel, had to travel, and they were risking their lives.

10:27:51:18

Interviewer

Your home was turned into a ghetto?

10:27:54:13

Rabbi Weiss

That's right, yes.

10:27:55:11

Interviewer

How did that happen, and what did that feel like?



10:27:59:09

Rabbi Weiss

I've got a map upstairs; I've got a map of the town.

10:28:04:08

Interviewer

Oh, you have a map, sorry, yes. We'll, we'll look at that later, but what happened?

10:28:09:00

Rabbi Weiss

What happened was that we got a notice outside our house, on the street, a big notice. It said that new legislation came in in and that all yid-, all Jews from all over town had to move into certain areas. And, er, to give it time, but, by that time someone saw, nobody was allowed to live outside those areas. And once we moved to there, they put in a fence - a fenced off area, a fence -

10:29:01:00

Interviewer

Was your home originally in the ghetto, or outside?

10:29:03:13

Rabbi Weiss

Our home was in the ghetto and the only difference was that, er, the rules said that everybody in the ghetto - every room, about 16 people sleep in every room - You had to make room for everybody, for, for the population, so we had to squeeze in everybody into every room. We had to make room for everybody to come in.

10:29:27:07

Interviewer

So you stayed in your home, but extra people moved in?

10:29:31:00

Rabbi Weiss *[talking over Interviewer]*

Extra people moved in, and we had to make room for them.

10:29:35:16

Interviewer

So can you tell me that legislation again? Did you say that there was 16 people in every single room? Can you tell me that?

10:29:42:12

Rabbi Weiss

Yes. I mean as far as I remember now, it must have been like this. I don't remember if it was 16 or 14, 13, at the end of the day, but that was the ruling. It said you've got to open your door, and 16 people, ma-, make sure there's room for them, with bunk beds. Provided they could find room. There's got to be enough room for them to stay.

10:30:07:11

Interviewer



Do you remember what that felt like at the time?

10:30:10:09

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, not very comfortable. It's a -, I mean I was a child, but I imagine for my mother, and other people, she must have felt terrible. I mean it's your home, you live there. We didn't have luxury homes, but it was a very normal home, but now it, it's turned into a prison one day.

10:30:34:01

Interviewer

Do you remember there being a problem with food, or was that all fine?

10:30:37:21

Rabbi Weiss

A problem with food? I mean, we managed somehow, somehow with the food, but it was a problem. But I think what happened in the ghetto, my father was trying to find ways to escape from the ghetto. He realised that it was not going to end up pleasant for him in the ghetto. We didn't know what would happen, the ghetto wasn't going to last, what was going to happen. But he realised that sadly that hundreds of people there -, you're dealing with people, vicious people, who probably will not end, not end up in a very pleasant way.

10:31:17:16

So it happened, after six weeks of the ghetto, they want every day -, the ghetto was divided ten districts, and every day, after weeks, one district was taken to the railway station and put in cattle wagons and put on the train and shipped to, to Auschwitz. But we didn't know that. The people there didn't tell us. They kept it quiet. They said they were taking us to camps and to other places. We didn't have -, but my father realised that because he was friendly with those people who escaped from Poland. He told us what was going to happen there. He told us for those reasons and said that's why he realised he had to do something about escaping from there.

10:32:06:10

Interviewer

So the ghetto was divided into ten districts, and somehow you managed not to get put on a train? How did you do that?

10:32:12:02

Rabbi Weiss

Because my father, every time...from a new district before night. Afterwards I couldn't go and see it. Curfew, probably. They always said that they were going to shoot everybody in the street. So every day, before I found out the next district that was not taken, he moved from one district to the next. For ten days he moved from one place to the next place. He said he never intended to get straight out. He realised that.

10:32:48:13

Interviewer



Because you are from such a prominent Jewish family, do you think your life was more in danger than others, or less? Did people help you? Were you less in danger?

10:32:57:19

Rabbi Weiss

It probably was that people, most people from families who were famous ones had already suffered the full force. From 1944 – 1942 only - they gathered everyone from the town and sent them in camps to, to Ukraine. So most of the important people had already gone. Not there anymore.

10:33:25:22

Interviewer

Can we just go back a little bit, because the one thing I forgot to ask you about, was about the yellow star. Do you remember wearing a yellow star?

10:33:32:02

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, I remember. I remember even my grandfather -, All of them had beards, and there would be a big yellow star on their sleeves. That's the first thing we had to put up with. It was very, very sad. Yeah, it was always there for you to see. I mean, if you didn't wear your star and you got caught in the street, you had problems. I don't know what they did to you. They probably put you in prison. Er, it was taken very seriously.

10:34:08:09

Interviewer

Do you remember what it felt like to wear the yellow star?

10:34:11:20

Rabbi Weiss

It felt -, what hurt, hurt from the outside was hurting on the inside. You felt, you felt like an unwanted person. You've got to put something on for no reason at all. Because you're a Jewish person, you've got to wear a star. What for? So, it was accepted.

10:34:40:14

Interviewer

And if you hadn't have worn the yellow star, what would've happened?

10:34:44:02

Rabbi Weiss

They rounded up people one time and they asked for identity cards. Everyone had identity cards on them and they'd ask if you were Jews. If you didn't wear your stars, they'd probably send you to prison. It was a prison in any case, but you were liable to get punished very severely.

10:35:08:16

Interviewer [*with interjections from the interviewee*]



Okay, so let's go back to, um, the ghetto and your father managed to save you and your mother and himself by moving to ten different districts. What happened next? How did you escape finally?

10:35:22:15

Rabbi Weiss

Finally, my father had a friend who had a factory, a soap factory, who made soap. That friend of ours had a partner, a non-Jew, and, er, the partner promised that friend that if -, I told you that soap factory was in the ghetto and during the ghetto it was locked up and there was a notice outside that said, "No Jews Allowed". So nobody could go in there. It was locked up. So, so that partner promised him, if he wanted to stay, that he wasn't going to report it anywhere. If he stays, he's going to help him and look after him. So, everyone was very doubtful because most cases he had non-Jewish friends who, er, promised to help people and, er, at the end of the day, they themselves reported them. So, so they didn't help them. So, they weren't sure whether we should trust him or not trust him, and, er, at the end of the day, apparently he said he had got no alternative. Rather than go on the transport, he'll just stay there and we went to his factory, his soap factory was a building there.

Next to the factory was a garage and in the garage was an attic. There was attic on the factory and in another garage, there was also more attic, but the garage was lower level than the attic and he tried to conceal the entrance there. People had to climb down to the garage. So people coming upstairs looked at the attic but they could see nobody else. It was all concealed. And he told him we should go there and try to go down to the small attic over the garage and, and put -, board it up so nobody can notice. I tried to help him as much as I can. What was going to happen? Nobody knew what happened, but for the time being, don't go, don't go to Auschwitz with everyone else.

10:37:39:19

Interviewer

Okay we will talk about, um, the attic again in a minute's time. Before that, can you tell me the story about -, there was a point when you and your father were sent to a forest for a few days, and this is while you were in the ghetto, isn't it?

10:37:53:18

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, that's early days. In the early days it was reported, apparently, that they needed 300 people from the ghetto, people capable of work to go to a forest, miles away from our home, and cut wood for the army to, to -. You know, they needed a lot of wood. And my father went and, er, he wanted to register. I also want to go. So going -, I was only 14 years old and, er, not of the age to be taken into army, but I was told that my father was interested in taking me as well and he reported then that they should accept. He looked at me and accepted me into the army, a soldier. So, I was put up with him. And we -, that time, a few other people went out to -. We were out in the woods, near a village, and everybody that went to the village first, they found accommodation with a non-Jew neighbour, and morning we had to go to the woods and cutting wood, it was timber and we went out on a Wednesday and we did work



Wednesday, Thursday. It was terrible you see. I remember it was raining and a thunderstorm and we were working there, with no idea how to do it, but we had to do it. And, er, then Thursday we went back. Then we tried to find a way, when Sabbath came, how you do to get around it not to come to work. So father hurt himself, put his finger in something, and then he said -, reported it as -, but he wanted to stay at home on the Sabbath. So after that day, he didn't go. So what happened – middle -, dinner time, Sunday morning we all of a sudden heard screams. The Gestapo came around and screamed at everybody, "Raus! Raus! You must go out!" And there were big lorries outside and they shifted everybody, "Get to the lorry!" They didn't tell us what for and we, we all put us in the lorry.

10:40:15:15

Interviewer

Where did the lorry take you?

10:40:17:17

Rabbi Weiss

Some were worried about the lorry. A lot of people thought the lorry was taking us straight to Auschwitz, or to a place to be killed right away. We didn't know, no idea, because the lorry stopped a few times and people were worried that, er, the end of it, end of it. Apparently they decided -, they'd to send it back to Oradea, to our place, and send them back to the ghetto and open the big synagogue and put in 400 people, squeezed in the synagogue, and told us to stay there, and we stayed there for about four days and nights. Not very comfortable. No facilities at all. People were waiting to know what we were there for and apparently for some reason, they seemed to have wanted us to be sent to Auschwitz first, but then probably decided they've got -. Then they tried to avoid a panic in the ghetto itself. They didn't want people to talk. So they decided that they better allow us to go out of the ghetto, back to our homes. At least families there won't be no panic and for the time being, we could live together with them. So we were allowed to go back home - after four days.

10:41:29:21

Interviewer

So you were reunited with your mother?

10:41:31:00

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, exactly.

10:41:32:17

Interviewer

That must have been a wonderful thing?

10:41:34:00

Rabbi Weiss

A wonderful thing. For two or three days she brought us food, pushed it in through the door, the window, and then we were reunited.

10:41:45:19



Interviewer

That was very lucky for you, but at the same time something terrible was happening to your aunt Brindel Catz. Can you tell me about her? Your aunt?

10:41:56:00

Rabbi Weiss

My aunt, yeah, my aunt Brindel Catz. Brindel Catz, she's, er, she's, er -, married a person who was a rabbi. In 1934 she emigrated to America and she lived there for a few years, and in 1937, '38 she wanted to come to -. She had an elderly father in our place, Oradea. She said she must come see her father. She decided at that time she had to come see her father. She came back to our place, Oradea. And then, unfortunately for her, the war broke out in 1938. And then they stopped everybody going out abroad or to America, or to trips to America, and she got stuck in, in Oradea. And some people, I think, they managed to get released if they thought they were American citizen. Unfortunately she wasn't and she stayed there, and she said she wanted to accompany her father and she stayed with her father - went together to Auschwitz. And children fortunately -, unfortunately the children in America who were waiting to hear news, all of a sudden -. Normally, I think, they expected foreign citizens, English and American. This time, for whatever reason, she was unlucky, she was taken.

[Cut for card change]

10:43:31:12

Interviewer

So can we just recap about what happened, so that I understand, to your aunt. Your aunt lived in America.

10:43:38:13

Rabbi Weiss

My aunt lived in America. She came to visit her father who lived in Oradea, next door neighbours to our house, and she came in 1937, '38. Late '37 to '38. She came to visit her father and when the war broke out, they stopped liv-, giving. They both stopped -. She couldn't get out during the war. It was cut off completely. So they were stuck in Oradea.

10:44:12:10

Interviewer

And what happened to her?

10:44:13:16

Rabbi Weiss

She went to Auschwitz, together with, together with her father - on the same transport.

10:44:20:07

Interviewer

And who did she leave behind?



10:44:22:07

Rabbi Weiss

Three sons in America. Her sons, her sons were terribly -. It was very upsetting, heartbroken. She had young sons, children. Their mother was gone for a few weeks, two months to Europe. It was a tragedy.

10:44:43:02

Interviewer

That's such a sad story because she didn't even need to be there did she?

10:44:46:12

Rabbi Weiss

No, no.

10:44:47:01

Interviewer

She was visiting.

10:44:48:17

Rabbi Weiss

She was visiting, yeah. She was visiting before the war started. She was caught in the war.

10:44:55:21

Interviewer

Do you remember that happening?

10:44:58:00

Rabbi Weiss

I remember, I remember her very well in those days, so, I mean -, you realise that it's -, it was a very unfortunate event. She was hoping, she was hoping all the time that she was let out. Some people were very lucky, managed to get out, but she, she wasn't.

10:45:19:19

Interviewer

So this was your father's sister?

10:45:22:03

Rabbi Weiss

No, my mother's sister.

10:45:23:00

Interviewer

Your mother's sister, but your whole family must have been just beside themselves with grief?

10:45:29:15

Rabbi Weiss



Yeah, I'm sure.

10:45:34:06

Interviewer

Um, so if you're ok can we talk again about the factory? Because the factory saved your life didn't it?

10:45:42:18

Rabbi Weiss

Exactly, yeah.

10:45:43:00

Interviewer

In the space in the roof. Can you explain again how that happened. How many people were hiding in the factory and how did you find out about it?

10:45:50:24

Rabbi Weiss

So, there was this person called Mr. Rothbart. This person is a friendly -, he was a non-Jew who was, more or less, a partnership. During, during the hard period, probably, people taking on -, non-Jews taking on Jewish partners and they more -, they could work more freely, it's not restricted. So, they were friends and um, they were working together in business. Then it comes to 1944 when problems started. Then. er, he realised he got to do something, he was not going to stay too long. That's what was going to happen, but you could see that some shops want, wanted to do something for the people there. So the non-Jewish person told Mr. Rothbart that if he wanted to stay there and hide us, hide us in the factory, he'll try to look after them and provide us with food and something. It wasn't Jews that should accept us because, most cases, you couldn't trust them. They said they were going to help them later, but then themselves reported. But he decided, at the end of the day, to accept the offer that he was going to help them and they went before the day they should've been taken away. They went into hiding, upstairs in the attic.

10:47:24:23

Interviewer

How many of you were up there?

10:47:26:12

Rabbi Weiss

Thirty-eight people.

10:47:27:15

Interviewer

How long were you there for?

10:47:29:05

Rabbi Weiss

It was about six or seven weeks.



10:47:32:15

Interviewer

Do you remember the experience?

10:47:34:10

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, it was not a very pleasant experience, an attic of a garage in the middle of June, July, very hot days and, er, no, no food, no, no comfort, no facilities, yes and it's, it's, er was very hard, very hard days. Every hour was hard in those days, and the worst part was, what we going to do by the end of it? What's happening? I mean, every, everybody wants to see a light at the end of the tunnel. They want to see what's -, what -, where we're going from here. Nobody had the foggiest idea. You knew that it not very good to go on the transportation with them, but what -, what -, where we were going to end up, nobody knew.

10:48:19:05

Interviewer

And Mr. Rothbart put his life in risk by hiding so many people?

10:48:24:15

Rabbi Weiss

People-, yeah, yeah, put like this, it wouldn't make any difference. If they were caught and he was not hiding people he'd have the same fate as if he was hiding people. It couldn't be, couldn't be worse than sending us to the gas chambers.

10:48:42:00

Interviewer

Can you tell me the story about when he would bring food?

10:48:46:05

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, an interesting story. We arranged it with him. He was a non-Jew that er -, he would tell us about what was going to happen, and we were pleased regarding the ghetto and everything, and he'd bring, bring food. How are you going to bring food? when, when -, who's going to get into the attic and go down? He's on the ground. So they arranged with him that he'd come at night and bring his dog with him and he'd scream at dog, call it by the name. So, he called "Pitzi!" You see? Then we would realise it was him and then we would open the bunker to the hiding place and go down -, and go down to the door, the garage door, er, the soap factory door, and get his food and bring it up. So, that's what we arranged with him.

10:49:43:08

Interviewer [*with interjections from the interviewee*]

So you had a secret code with him that he would call his dog Pitzi and you would know that it was somebody safe who was bringing you food?

10:49:56:00

Rabbi Weiss



I said last time what happened there. For 40 days nobody came. We thought they had forgotten about us and we didn't know what was going to happen next. We had no food, it was getting warm, no water, nothing. As it happened, we were lucky to get water because -, here's what we think -, that, er, Mr. Rothbart went on a -, on business somewhere and somebody came and, and offered him bottled water, a few dozen bottles of -, a few cases of bottled water. During the war, during the war sometimes people needed water and, er, he did a deal with the other person. He bought bottled water and stored it in the factory there. That, that was a big help for us later. So, at least we were provided with water from there. What we had to do undo the hiding place upstairs, we had to climb out, get downstairs, and bring the water. When they came with food, his partner could trust him to go down. So he came, after 40 days, and went, went downstairs and he opened the door and he got the shock of his life. He found three girls there, facing him. And so he didn't know what to do, I mean -, he turns round to the girls and he told them, if they're going to be quiet and they survive the war, he's going to buy each one a house for them - after the war, if they kept quiet - and the girls said it's a deal and they kept the deal. Didn't report anybody, because most of them reported people, everybody reported.

10:51:53:10

Interviewer

So he, he bribed the girls and said if they, if they spoke there would do nothing but if they kept the secret that he would buy them a house?

10:52:01:14

Rabbi Weiss

That's right.

10:52:02:06

Interviewer

And he was true to his word and he bought them each a house?

10:52:05:08

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah he bought them houses, yeah.

10:52:07:03

Interviewer

He sounded like an amazing man?

10:52:09:23

Rabbi Weiss

Who's that?

10:52:11:11

Interviewer

Mr. Rothbart.



10:52:13:00

Rabbi Weiss

Well, Mr. Rothbart he is an amazing man. He helped people because -, puts his life at risk as well. But he was very friendly, because she -, Mrs. Rothbart she used to come into father for consultation many times and knew the family and, er, she really wanted to help us. But the interesting part were -, she used to repeat to herself. She was going to her hiding place on the Friday, that was the day. The last day you could do something was a Saturday. Every day, the people -, six o'clock was the curfew, couldn't work. And once, after all the transportation had gone, it was the final week, the last day, the final transportation would've gone to Auschwitz was on Saturday, and she said Friday to her husband, because of the attic. She wanted to go on -, in the bus with children for Sabbath. He says it's not normal, in those days -, because what happened police everywhere at night. She can't -, she wants to go on bus. He said, I can't let her go like this. She went down to the street, she went past -, a few houses away, I didn't tell you before, we were hiding in another bunker there, and -, we were hiding first in a different bunker and um, my father realised that that bunker wasn't very safe because lots of people came in and it was impossible. No food, no visits, he couldn't see that it was going to last very long. So we decided, in the evening, before six o'clock, that we were going to go out and and -, she wanted us to find something else, we had no idea what we'd find. So we went out, we went -, I found my mother was standing in the gate outside the front garden there. While she was standing there, Mrs. Rothbart came there with two children. She was going to take the bus with the children and she saw my mother, Said what are you doing here? So my mother told this whole story. She had to go out to another bunker, and she asked her that if she still had room in her bunker, because one time she told her she was going to make a bunker. She told her she was going to make her own and then she went to bus with children and when she came back, my mother was there and then they went together to the hiding place and stopped there Friday afternoon. Two families saw us going, followed us, and they also went to the same bunker. We couldn't tell them not to go because people worried if they got upset they were going to report you. You better just accept them. So we all went into hiding on the Friday evening, just before, before curfew.

10:55:11:21

Interviewer

How long were you in hiding in the factory?

10:55:14:11

Rabbi Weiss

Almost six or seven weeks. Six and a half weeks, seven weeks.

10:55:17:24

Interviewer

How did you escape eventually?

10:55:20:02

Rabbi Weiss



What happened, eventually, we escaped. I had an uncle who was -, I don't know, some reason he managed to escape, er, Auschwitz. He was in Budapest and there was some underground movement who probably were active to find out if any Jews had survived in the area, and he got in touch with them and they said they found out that four families hiding at that place because there was one caretaker who, for money, was helping people to escape and what happened was it was night-time and nobody was around to see it. They'd go into a dangerous place with the caretaker and he arranged for a taxi to take us out of town and he also arranged a place where he was going to hide some people to smuggle us across the border to get to Romania. It was the same with us. We went out one evening, went to -, the problem was also very -, but because it was a non-Jewish caretaker and he took us, sent us taxi and sent us to a place near our hometown. We met my uncle there and we got organised. Those few non-Jewish people take us -, smuggled us across the border.

10:57:03:21

Interviewer

To go back a little bit, who is Moshi?

10:57:07:17

Rabbi Weiss

Pardon?

10:57:07:23

Interviewer

Who is -, how do I pronounce this?

Yiddish translator [*off camera, prompts*]

Moishe.

Interviewer

Who is Moishe?

10:57:13:08

Rabbi Weiss

Moishe was one of the sons of Rothbart was called Moishe.

10:57:17:11

Interviewer

Pardon?

10:57:18:18

Rabbi Weiss

One of -, Moishe, I think, was one of -. They took Moishe. He warned us, he was trying to help us and he was -, unfortunately he was the only one who did not escape the bunker with 38 people. He was out, went out the bunker a few nights before and was looking around to see if he could find a room, make contact with people who would take us, smuggle us out and never came back, unfortunately.



10:57:45:11

Interviewer

What happened to him?

10:57:46:24

Rabbi Weiss

He probably was caught. Anybody caught in the street, or anywhere else, yes -, it was fatal. They'd be sent to Auschwitz right away.

10:57:57:07

Interviewer [*with interjections from the interviewee*]

So he was in hiding with you and then, during the night, or at some point, he went out to try and find help?

10:58:02:18

Rabbi Weiss

He went a few days before, a week before, out to try to find an escape route, how to get out from here.

10:58:11:19

Interviewer

And he was killed?

10:58:12:21

Rabbi Weiss

He was killed. He was taken to Auschwitz. He was killed there.

10:58:17:20

Interviewer

Before we talk about you escaping, did you ever have a chance to thank the owner of the factory, the man who had hidden you?

10:58:26:11

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, I think apparently he was arrested after the war, by the Communists. He was writing letters to be helped and we all sent him money over the years. We sent him roubles, sent him -, and, er, he was very grateful that he had some support, because in those days occupied by Russia was very -, communism was very strong. Nobody had nothing, and the people lived in poverty and he also had nothing and we'd send him money all the time.

10:59:01:11

Interviewer

So he helped you and many others and in return you were able to help him?

10:59:06:17

Rabbi Weiss

That's right, yeah. That's exactly as it happened, yeah.



10:59:10:23

Interviewer

Do you remember when Moishe was, was taken to Auschwitz? Do you remember how that felt?

10:59:18:20

Rabbi Weiss

No, I don't remember. We were hiding in attic and he was taken by police transportation. You, you lost complete -, no, no contact then in the ghetto. No phone calls, no communication. If you lost somebody, you've lost them. Finished. Can't make contact with them.

10:59:44:18

Interviewer

It's interesting, isn't it, because you talk about it in such a matter-of-fact way but I guess you just had to get used to the fact that people were just taken all the time?

10:59:55:06

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, because reason -, that's the reason why, one of the reasons we're lucky, because that's why we got escape because we realised where they were taking us, terrible places and we had to do something, to hide somewhere to, to get out of the situation.

11:00:15:02

Interviewer

So you and your family escaped to the border, but what happened to the other people in the factory. Do you know?

11:00:19:23

Rabbi Weiss

Everybody escaped, everybody the same day.

11:00:21:24

Interviewer

Everybody went?

11:00:22:24

Rabbi Weiss

We were lucky. Except for that man Moishe, everyone escaped.

11:00:27:17

Interviewer [*with interjections from the interviewee*]

So you all found your way to the border between Hungary and Romania and then what happened?

11:00:34:10



Rabbi Weiss

Then the men -, there were two people who were youngsters, who knew the way to countryside -, mountains where you can -, border crosses from Hungary to Romania and, er, we had to climb those mountains - steep mountains there - to, not go around where the border was, obviously, and he shows us a way to get to other side of border to other country, er, so escaping Hungary.

11:01:09:19

Interviewer

So there was some people in the group who knew the way, or at least -

11:01:13:13

Rabbi Weiss

No, no, there -, these youngsters knew the way.

11:01:16:19

Interviewer

They knew the way.

11:01:17:09

Rabbi Weiss

We had to pay money, then they showed us the way to go. Not only show the way, leading the way for us.

11:01:23:15

Interviewer

How long were you climbing?

11:01:25:19

Rabbi Weiss

It was not a very pleasant experience, very steep hills. Our area, Transylvania, was quite steep. We were climbing at least four, five hours a night.

11:01:37:15

Interviewer

And during the day?

11:01:39:11

Rabbi Weiss

During the day rested because frightened at night – we were frightened during the day. Even after -, once we got to Romania there was still a risk of -, at the border. Romanian people caught you they'd send you back. So -.

11:01:52:14

Interviewer

How long did it take to cross the mountains?

11:01:55:12



Rabbi Weiss

Almost five hours, probably.

11:01:59:08

Interviewer

So it was only five, I know 'only,' I don't mean it like that, but it took one night to cross the mountains?

11:02:05:10

Rabbi Weiss

For us it took one night, yeah.

11:02:08:04

Interviewer

But it was a very difficult climb?

11:02:09:18

Rabbi Weiss

A very difficult climb, yeah.

11:02:11:12

Interviewer

And all of you, apart from Moishe, so there were 37 people?

11:02:15:08

Rabbi Weiss

All went the same way. Different routes, different ways, but the same way. Very lucky, yeah.

11:02:24:04

Interviewer

So all of you climbed the mountains and you all escaped?

11:02:26:12

Rabbi Weiss

All escaped, yeah.

11:02:27:10

Interviewer

And you all ended up in Romania?

11:02:29:02

Rabbi Weiss

Romania, yes. We ended up in a village and even there we frightened they should catch us because if they caught us there you could send you back across the border. So, some Jewish people helped us, we were hiding with them and we went from one village to next village and and tried to get away from border as much as we can until we ended up in the capital, in Bucharest.



11:02:59:05

Interviewer

So the village that you were at in Romania is called Arad. Is that right?

11:03:03:06

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah that's it. That's not village, it's a town really. The village called *Junta?*, another village. Arad is a town - next town outside the border called Arad.

11:03:15:12

Interviewer

In Romania?

11:03:16:03

Rabbi Weiss

Romania, yeah.

11:03:16;23

Interviewer

And from there you went to Bucharest?

11:03:18:10

Rabbi Weiss

Then Bucharest, yeah.

11:03:19:14

Interviewer

How did you get to Bucharest?

11:03:20:24

Rabbi Weiss

Well we had to -, do it all by hiding. How did we do it? We take a lorry from the army, Sometimes we could find a army -, lorry from the army, at the end of it, and they'd put us into it, inside -, into the lorry, and they took us by lorry to -, we ended up in Bucharest.

11:03:52:10

Interviewer

So at that point, did you feel like you had survived and that you were free?

11:03:58:02

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, well, you must remember it was still war and the country Romania at that time was still friends of the Nazis, the Germans, and some areas in Romania suffered persecution and, er, as a matter of fact, a lot were killed as well in pogroms. So it wasn't a very comfortable place to be. But for some reason Transylvania they shared a border with Hungary, that area was quiet so people there lived in peace and and we'd practice religious practices in synagogue and learned at schools. It was amazing.



11:04:38:24

Interviewer

So did you start to establish a new community then, in Romania?

11:04:43:20

Rabbi Weiss [*starting over the end of her question*]

But the risk of staying there was because they were small places we thought people know each other, it's risky to stay there because if they report you to police you can end up anywhere.

11:04:59:13

Interviewer

Do you remember feeling a bit of relief that you had managed to escape?

11:05:02:18

Rabbi Weiss

Big relief, it was big relief. I honestly cannot describe the relief. It turned a new, a new life. Yeah, it was a big -, big changes. I'm amazed how time passes. I mean, it's amazing we survived and, er, we carried on.

11:05:38:20

Interviewer

But it must have been so difficult after everything you'd been through to find yourself in a strange country without any of your possessions -

11:05:46:06

Rabbi Weiss [*interrupting Interviewer*]

Strange country and on top of it we're illegal there because we're not supposed to be there, but people, lots of Jewish people lived there find accommodation for everybody, but, er, most people somehow managed to escape.

[Cut for card change]

11:06:09:19

Interviewer

It was then that your mother died?

11:06:11:14

Rabbi Weiss

That's right, yeah.

11:06:12:10

Interviewer

How did she die?

11:06:13:18

Rabbi Weiss



She, er, took ill and, er, probably no proper facilities to operate on things. She, er, died naturally. She died of cancer, but it would have been a long time if she had been properly helped, operated on and so forth.

11:06:35:17

Interviewer

How old was she when she died?

11:06:37:11

Rabbi Weiss

44.

11:06:39:13

Interviewer

She was very young.

11:06:40:17

Rabbi Weiss

She was probably forty-two. She was born in 1902 so 1944, so forty-two.

11:06:48:17

Interviewer

It seems especially cruel after everything that she had been through to finally find some peace and then to be so unwell.

11:07:00:02

Rabbi Weiss

Very hard, very hard times.

11:07:01:22

Interviewer

Do you remember it very clearly?

11:07:03:18

Rabbi Weiss

I remember it, yeah. My father suffered a lot, and I suffered a lot. On top of it, we were in a strange place and we had nowhere to go. The authorities provided some refugees with some flats where to live. That was after my, my mother went. We had nowhere to go because the flats that we had before decided -, I think it was confiscated by the government because of the war effort, so everything was given back to them and they wouldn't let us in. So we had nowhere to stay. So someone let us in and gave us a room. We had no home, no family, no environment.

11:08:03:01

Interviewer

And how old were you now?

11:08:05:00



Rabbi Weiss

Fourteen.

11:08:05:18

Interviewer

You were fourteen.

11:08:07:11

Rabbi Weiss

I was fourteen and a half.

11:08:10:13

Interviewer

And how did your father cope with losing his wife?

11:08:14:02

Rabbi Weiss

He was very strong, he managed to keep on -, it wasn't easy for him, but, er, he had to be very strong.

11:08:26:19

Interviewer

What happened next?

11:08:31:12

Rabbi Weiss

Next one was, er, possibly a couple of years after we escaped, we settled in -, just outside Romania, in Bucharest. And, er, after that we were free to do whatever we wanted to do.

11:08:52:13

Interviewer

So the Russians arrived, didn't they? Did the Russians arrive in Bucharest?

11:08:57:18

Rabbi Weiss

Then, about, er, September time or so, the Russians arrived. They occupied -, see, they were coming from east to west so -, they were coming from Russia so it's possible. Romania, Hungary, Poland and the others. So, the Russians came and occupied Romania. But the Romanians then were liberated. We found ourselves liberated.

11:09:25:10

Interviewer

So that was the end of the -

11:09:25:20

Rabbi Weiss



A lot, lot earlier than -, the end of the war was May '45 and we were already freed, liberated or freed, by November '84 -, '44.

11:09:41:18

Interviewer

So what did your father decide to do after liberation?

11:09:45:03

Rabbi Weiss

Well, he was a rabbi so first he wanted to get back to his hometown and see if he could find any manuscripts. He didn't have the manuscripts because they were in Oradea. He had to try to find it. As I said, the first thing he had to do at home was go to the safe. He had a safe at home, put everything, all the manuscripts in that safe. He'd worked out, it probably wasn't a very clever thing, his thought that he'd put it in a safe and nothing would happen. But out the country what happened, because of the safe, whoever came in tried to attack the safe, see, in case people had some valuables, so all papers got lost, thrown out.

11:10:40:05

Interviewer

But you were at least back in your home country.

11:10:42:13

Rabbi Weiss

That's right. Yeah, yeah.

11:10:43:16

Interviewer

And you returned to your house? Was it still -, did it still exist?

11:10:47:14

Rabbi Weiss

We were back at our house, yes. It wasn't, wasn't fit to go in the house but we had to make it fit.

11:10:55:13

Interviewer

But it was just you and your father?

11:10:56:22

Rabbi Weiss

Me and my father, yes.

11:10:59:14

Interviewer

How did it feel to be back at home after everything you had been through?



11:11:03:13

Rabbi Weiss

Not very comfortable.

11:11:07:01

Interviewer

Tell me.

11:11:07:18

Rabbi Weiss

Not very pleasant. I feel a bit lost. I was an only child, no mother, and, er, it was very helpful, as a matter of fact, the town. A lot of help for people. There was a hostel for girls and a hostel for boys. And there were soup kitchens for the whole town. So whoever wanted -, people looked after you, basically. Nobody had to go hungry or worry about food, or anything like that. It was plentiful. Just people were lonely because they were missing their families. It was terrible.

11:11:49:15

Interviewer

What was the atmosphere like, do you remember?

11:11:52:14

Rabbi Weiss

I remember that it was hard. People didn't know what to think. People were determined to get over it and get on with a more normal life.

11:12:03:22

Interviewer [*with interjections from the interviewee*]

And because of your father's status in the community, he then was called upon in lots of different ways.

11:12:10:16

Rabbi Weiss

That's right. He was called upon. He wasn't, wasn't intending to stay there. He was intending to go to Israel, to America but then he was called upon -, made him -, he got to build up the community again.

11:12:25:11

Interviewer

He arranged a lot of marriages very quickly, didn't he?

11:12:28:04

Rabbi Weiss

He did, yeah.

11:12:28:23

Interviewer



How many?

11:12:30;20

Rabbi Weiss

Well, the book there, probably a few hundred, but I know that, in one day, he did about 30-odd marriages. What he did was he had to -, to get married, most people come -, people who came back from Auschwitz were mostly men. Unfortunately their wives didn't survive. So men who weren't husbands with wives and children home. and also girls who didn't accom -, anybody accompanied by a child went to Auschwitz, so -, if they saw a girl on their own, they kept them out of the camps. So those girls, lots of them, came after the war because -, after the war, nobody communicated. People didn't know if they had sisters or brothers, if they had family. So it got lost. So they decided the first thing to do was go back to hometown, where they come from, and see if anything -, they may find anybody. So lots came back to our town Oradea to look for them. And a lot of people came back, men who lost their wives and girls who survived because they were not sent to death camps, they were sent to work. It just happens, some had been married. Men married those women who came back.

11:14:16:03

Interviewer

So everybody re-congregated in Oradea, and do you think that there were so many marriages just because they were determined to start again?

11:14:23:14

Rabbi Weiss

It seemed to be something like that. There was a lot of -, those girls could go from house to house. They found it impossible. They had to do something. It wasn't easy for them, but, er, it was something.

11:14:43:15

Interviewer

And you have a copy of, um, the work that your father was doing at that time, a book, have you, a record?

11:14:49:03

Rabbi Weiss

Yes. I've got it -,

11:14: 49:20

Interviewer

You have it here, okay, we'll look at that, thank you. Um, have you been to Oradea?

11:14:50:21

Rabbi Weiss

I've been back, yes. I've been back to -, there's an album over there, pictures I've taken. About four years ago, I went back with about 20 members of my family, to show them the whole, the whole place.



11:15:14:19

Interviewer

And how did that feel to go back with your family?

11:15:17:14

Rabbi Weiss

Well, I'd been back before, I was back -, I went -, wanted to visit my mother's grave. She's in Bucharest. I went there to have a look at it, what happened and, er -. At that time we knew what was happening, I mean, it was quite a few years after the war so we'd got used to the idea.

11:15:41:11

Interviewer

Okay, we'll talk about that again in a minute. After you went to Oradea, what happened with you and your father? Did you go to Prague?

11:15:51:05

Rabbi Weiss

A few years later, my father decided to leave Romania, then we had to take -, the way to do it was via Prague because the only way he could get to the place where he wanted to go, like America and Israel, we had to go to the consul to get a visa. So, in Prague was an American consul and people used to come there, went to the American consul and applied for a visa. The consul then sent it off to New York, to the State Department, for approval. It would take about six or seven months and you got your visa and you could go to America. That was the procedure, usually.

11:16:36:22

Interviewer

And why did you not want to stay in Romania anymore?

11:16:40:16

Rabbi Weiss

Really because it turned Communist. My father realised -, it was -, beginning was a sort of amnesty there, then, all of a sudden, the Communist regime became so strong and started to fear for his life, and people. He started to fear for the education, for the children, and he said, under those circumstances, he can't stay here. He decided he was going to make his way to America or to Israel, or somewhere else to go.

11:17:16:07

Interviewer

So you went to Prague to get a visa and then what happened?

11:17:19:22

Rabbi Weiss

What's happened then -, after seven months we got the visa. But what's happened I, I had, er, I had a passport jointly with my parents. I turned eighteen and the consulate said you can't use - for me - that, that passport. I had to apply again. So, it



was, er, take about another seven months to reapply for a visa. So in between, there were relations in London found out we were there. They sent a message to us saying what's point of sitting in Prague if they become Communist and it's dangerous, come to England and apply for a visa in London. And that's what we did. They sent us, er, to somebody from England, Doctor Schönfeld, with influence at the consul, and we got, got the visa. Went to, went to England - stay in England. We applied for an American visa but then my father got a position here, a position over here, since '48.

11:18:24:10

Interviewer

So you came with your father

11:18:25:24

Rabbi Weiss

Yes.

11:18:26:14

Interviewer

And at this point he had remarried himself?

11:18:30:23

Rabbi Weiss

You mean after the war?

11:18:32:10

Interviewer

Yes. Your father married again?

11:18:34:02

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, married again.

11:18:35:01

Interviewer

So the three of you came to England.

11:18:36:24

Rabbi Weiss

That's right, yeah.

11:18:38:06

Interviewer

And, and what did it feel like to arrive here after everything that you had been through?

11:18:43:15

Rabbi Weiss



I'd say it wasn't very pleasant. We've, er, come here and went over to -, nobody knew anybody here. New country, new environment. We had a few relatives who took us in but, er, other than that - it was a relative at a college - so we could stay there. We still had to get used a new life in a strange country and wait for better days to go to America. Which we did but, apparently, it didn't materialise.

11:19:26:13

Interviewer

So you didn't go to America in the end? You came to Manchester.

11:19:29:19

Rabbi Weiss

Came to Manchester, yes.

11:19:30:22

Interviewer

How did that happen?

11:19:32:02

Rabbi Weiss

Because my father got a position.

11:19:33:18

Interviewer

Pardon?

11:19:34:09

Rabbi Weiss

My father got a position here as a senior rabbi in Manchester. So, in America he didn't have a proposition. Here, there was an offer of a high position as the head rabbi, so, so he decided no point. He would go to America later. He come here and tried the position, accepted it. He stayed for 20 years in the same position.

11:20:03:21

Interviewer

And, I guess, slowly you found a new community in Manchester?

11:20:08:00

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, exactly, yeah.

11:20:10:12

Interviewer

How did that feel?

11:20:12:02

Rabbi Weiss

Well, you have to build from scratch. No alternative, no alternative. You had to accept that's what life is and get on as much as you can. It's a strange country with



new people, other people have disappeared, and, er, if there's an opportunity to start life again, you try it.

11:20:39:07

Interviewer

It must have been very hard with everything that you had experienced as a family, to suddenly find yourself in Manchester. Were there a lot of people in your community who'd had similar experiences?

11:20:51:15

Rabbi Weiss

Not many rabbis. Most people went to America, or to France. Very few -, because we came to England only because, only because we had a relative here, who took us here. But most people had friends or neighbours or stayed in France, or stayed in France, or in Prague. From there, they went straight to America. So, we had a bit of family here so got used to the idea.

11:21:17:10

Interviewer

And so very soon after that you met your wife. Is that right?

11:21:22:03

Rabbi Weiss

Er, yes. 1952 is when.

11:21:22:03

Interviewer

You were 22 years old?

11:21:27:17

Rabbi Weiss

Right.

11:21:28:17

Interviewer

Can you explain a little bit about what happened?

11:21:32:06

Rabbi Weiss

I was introduced to my wife and that's how it came about.

11:21:38:14

Interviewer

And since then, you've had a very big family yourself?

11:21:41:24

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, yes. Eight children.



11:21:44:00

Interviewer

Eight children. And at what point in your life did you become a rabbi?

11:21:49:17

Rabbi Weiss

I wasn't a practicing rabbi as it happens.

11:21:51:22

Interviewer

Pardon?

11:21:52:07

Rabbi Weiss

I wasn't practicing as a rabbi. I got a diploma as a rabbi, but I wasn't practicing.

11:21:59:12

Interviewer

Okay, so when did that happen?

11:22:01:17

Rabbi Weiss

Well, straight after the war, after we got married. I went into business and tried to make a living out of business rather than to practicing rabbi.

11:22:13:12

Interviewer

And what happened to your father?

11:22:16:18

Rabbi Weiss

Well, he was a practicing rabbi. He was a senior rabbi in Manchester as well. He was in a senior position. He was the main rabbi in Manchester. Head, head of all the rabbis.

11:22:34:06

Interviewer

And when did he die?

11:22:36:11

Rabbi Weiss

He, he died about 20 years ago. In 1970.

11:22:43:17

Interviewer

And I understand that there was a very big funeral for him. Is that right?

11:22:47:05



Rabbi Weiss

Yes. People say about 200,000 people.

11:22:50:05

Interviewer

20,000 people?

11:22:52:03

Rabbi Weiss

I would say 200,000 people

11:22:54:08

Interviewer

200,000 people?

11:22:54:14

Rabbi Weiss

That's what they say. I don't know if it's true or not.

11:22:58:13

Interviewer

That's a lot of people, but that shows his standing in the community.

11:23:07:19

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, the papers supported my father.

11:23:07:22

Interviewer

Why do you think so many people went to his funeral?

11:23:10:18

Rabbi Weiss

Because they respected him in the community. It says, usually, if a person of that calibre passes away, that people pay their last respects. At least come to the funeral or something to show their respects.

11:23:31:06

Interviewer

Can you tell me a bit about how much you have shared with your own family your experiences?

11:23:39:10

Rabbi Weiss

With my children, that's why I took them there three years ago, or more than three years now – four, it's five years. To all the places here to show them what's happened there. That's how I shared with them. But tell them all the bits here and



there. But they've seen the whole picture of what it looked like before the war, during the war, and after the war.

11:24:01:11

Interviewer

That must have been a very emotional journey for all of you?

11:24:04:04

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, very emotional.

11:24:07:23

Interviewer

Do you still get emotional about that part of your life?

11:24:11:21

Rabbi Weiss

Well one time I was, but now, as I get older, I'm getting more used to it, I think.

11:24:17:05

Interviewer

Because some people I speak to they find it more difficult the older they get, the more harder it is.

11:24:23:20

Rabbi Weiss

Yeah, I think I'm -, I've got -, getting used to it. You have to get used to it.

11:24:34:17

Interviewer

Why do you think it's important to share your story?

11:24:40:00

Rabbi Weiss

I think it's history. People should know history and people should know what's happened to your life before. What's happened to your parents' lives, your grandparents' lives. It's important. That's why people study history. And, in another case, it's not just history, it's more than history, it's the experience of life. It's something else. Your life turns upside down for a different role. In a normal day's life, a normal citizen would've felt out of place.

11:25:22:20

Interviewer

When you look back at that period of history, do you feel that we have learnt anything?

11:25:29:14

Rabbi Weiss



I don't know but hope so. I hope you've learned a lesson about what ruthless people can do.

11:25:47:22

Interviewer

Are you filled with forgiveness or with hate?

11:25:53:00

Rabbi Weiss

I don't know. It's those vicious people cannot be forgiven. People make mistakes or accident - other things - can be forgiven, because everyone makes mistakes, but vicious people who are out to harm, those that kill and -, they shouldn't be forgiven, they should be made to pay for it.

11:26:23:03

Interviewer

When you are speaking to your community, what lessons do you share with them about your own experiences?

11:26:33:05

Rabbi Weiss

I mean, I think most people realise what's happened because I'm not the only one, hundreds of thousands of people have got different views but it more or less boils down to the same. They lived through a very difficult time and there were some vicious people looking out to harm you and, er, most -, lots of people, unfortunately didn't manage to escape everything that happened. It's, it's, that's how I lived. You get used to the idea.

11:27:08:07

Interviewer

With the generations that will come, we are all hoping to learn from that period of history. Do you think there is any one lesson that we can take with us?

11:27:20:17

Rabbi Weiss

I don't know. It's very hard to say one lesson you can learn. You can learn, you can learn that people have done things that they shouldn't do and, er, it is not right and what else can you do?

11:27:41:11

Interviewer

How do you feel now that we have talked about most of your story?

11:27:47:03

Rabbi Weiss

I feel that I'm very lucky to give the story to other people who didn't -, who fortunately didn't have this experience, and, er, I think it's a good idea to share with other people. People should know.



11:28:08:19

Interviewer

Do you feel because of your position in the community, that you are able to encourage other people to talk?

11:28:15:02

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, if people ask me, I'll tell them, yes. I'll talk.

[Cut for direction]

11:28:21:00

Interviewer

So I just have about three more questions for you and then we have a couple of questions in Yiddish. Is that okay?

11:28:26:18

Rabbi Weiss

Yes.

11:28:27:02

Interviewer

Okay. So the first one is, we were just understanding that when you and your father came to Manchester the Jewish community here was very, very fragmented and it was a refugee community essentially, and that you were very instrumental in bringing the community together. Can you tell me a bit about that?

11:28:46:10

Rabbi Weiss

Well, I wanted to say is, um, when we came here it wasn't -, there wasn't many refugees. Probably -, most -, of a lot of people were born here, as it happens. In Manchester we didn't find lot of refugees after the war. There were very few.

11:29:07:00

Interviewer

But you really helped to establish the Jewish community in Manchester?

11:29:10:16

Rabbi Weiss *[interrupting Interviewer]*

Over the years, more and more refugees came in from countries liberated, from Hungary and Romania. They came over here, but when we came here in 1948, there weren't so many. In America and other places, there were a lot more, few refugees. Not a lot of refugees.

11:29:33:03

Interviewer

Okay, and the other thing that I don't think I understood about your father, eventually he went to Israel. Is that right? Where he was the rabbi there.



11:29:42:13

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, oh yeah. After 1970.

[Cut for sound]

He got a position there. High rabbi in Jerusalem. Senior rabbi.

11:29:54:21

Interviewer

But you were here in Manchester?

11:29:56:11

Rabbi Weiss

I was still in Manchester, yeah.

11:29:57:13

Interviewer

And he was in Israel?

11:29:58:10

Rabbi Weiss

Yes.

11:29:59:04

Interviewer

And so, when he died, that is why there were so many people at his funeral, because he was such a prominent figure in Israel?

11:30:04:11

Rabbi Weiss

Exactly, yeah.

11:30:05:10

Interviewer

Okay. So now I will hand you over in a second, but I just one final chance to pass a message on for generations. Do you have any message that you can share?

11:30:21:01

Rabbi Weiss

I mean, I don't have a message, but people can learn what people can, can -, what people have to do and hopefully the world will become different.

11:30:41:01

Interviewer

Is there a message of tolerance, or suffering, or forgiveness?



11:30:48:03

Rabbi Weiss

Well, much -, it's a message of everything it depends who, when, and the time, and the reason. You need to forgive if you could find a good enough reason for the person who did, did you wrong but, for doing you wrong, it was vicious. I don't know whether there's a reason to forgive.

11:31:13:06

Interviewer

And how do you feel towards the Nazis?

11:31:16:07

Rabbi Weiss

The Nazis were very vicious people, I remember it. If you looked at one of those Gestapo officers it went through you shivers just to look at them. It was a very terrible experience. They were vicious people out to harm and kill for no reason at all.

11:31:46:07

Interviewer

And how do you feel that your experiences as a young child have shaped you as an adult?

11:31:53:11

Rabbi Weiss

I don't think I was affected a lot because I was an only a child, together with my parents, and I just lived through a very difficult period and I survived and accepted the fact of what we'd gone through then and tried to make things better as we went along.

Caption:

**TWO QUESTIONS
FOLLOWED IN YIDDISH**

11:32:21:07

About the heder in Grosswardein,

11:32:24:07

Rabbi Weiss

Yes?

11:32:25:08

Interviewer 2

was it a big heder, a small heder?

11:32:28:06

Rabbi Weiss



Well, then, that's the difference. In Grosswardein in my time, the heder was not as it is here. Every rabbi set up his own class. The rabbi had to make a living. He approached 10 Jewish families with twelve-year-old boys to become their,

11:32:53:12

Interviewer 2

Melamed.

11:32:53:20

Rabbi Weiss

-religious teacher. If he managed to get 15 boys, he made an even better living. He was paid a salary every month and thus made his living. As a matter of fact, the community had an organised Talmud Torah, Yesodei Torah - religious school.

11:33:10:14

Interviewer 2

Did they study secular subjects there, too?

11:33:12:24

Rabbi Weiss

Yes. It was both a grammar school and a high school. The difference was that Chassidic children did not attend that school, they attended the heder. But the Ashkenazi children went to that school. It was the legal school, and they took their exams there.

11:33:37:22

Interviewer 2

And they went to a yeshiva at the age of twelve, thirteen?

11:33:40:20

Rabbi Weiss

Sorry?

11:33:41:10

Interviewer 2

They went to study in a yeshiva at the age of twelve, thirteen, fourteen?

11:33:47:00

Rabbi Weiss

Thirteen.

11:33:47:16

Interviewer 2

Bar Mitzvah?

11:33:48:08

Rabbi Weiss

Yes. Bar Mitzvah, fourteen, fifteen.



11:33:52:21

Interviewer 2

Okay, during the war, could one get kosher meat?

11:33:56:21

Rabbi Weiss

Yes. During the war itself it was difficult, but there was a lot of shechita.

11:34:05:11

Interviewer 2

Local shechita?

11:34:06:20

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, local shechita.

11:34:08:02

Interviewer 2

You said earlier that after all the experiences, you manage. One finds a way. Was it under duress or -,

11:34:20:12

Rabbi Weiss

Well, one really has -,

11:34:22:23

Interviewer 2

No other choice.

11:34:23:14

Rabbi Weiss

One thinks all kinds of -, but one must remain positive.

11:34:39:22

Interviewer 2

Do you think a lot about - ,

11:34:41:00

Rabbi Weiss

One must remain positive.

11:34:45:17

Interviewer 2

Do you think a lot about the meanness and the evil?

11:34:49:19

Rabbi Weiss

Yes, it remains within your bones. But -,



11:34:53:21

Interviewer 2

Every day? Once in a while?

11:34:57:13

Rabbi Weiss

I can still hear the gentile rascals shouting, "Dirty Jew". Well, that's a fact. That's the fate of a Jew.

- END OF INTERVIEW -

ARTEFACTS

ARTEFACT 1: a book of marriage testimonies

11:35:13:17

During the war, unfortunately, a lot of people went to -, sent to Auschwitz, those places. And, as we know, there was gas chamber there and normally families went together. So, families went together until they arrived to Auschwitz there. Once they got to Auschwitz, they had to go -, everybody had to be selected. A vicious person, Mr. Mengele, he was the selector. People went to him, he looked at every person. If he thought they were fit to work he sent them to the right. If he thought they were not fit to work they'd go to the left. Left meant they went crematorium on the same day and disappeared. Now, after the war, lots of people, married people, er, married people lost their wives, they hadn't survived, and wives lost their men and came home and, in Jewish law, if somebody has a husband or a wife has a husband, they're not allowed to marry someone else unless they get a divorce. So what they did, every person who came back from Auschwitz, usually girls, most of them survived. But other girls who had no families, or men who had families and their families perished there, because they went to the gas chambers. So then, after the war, people were excited for everybody to get remarried again. [...] But if they had been married before, they were not allowed to get married unless they had evidence that their wife wasn't alive anymore. So peop-, every person who wanted to get married had to bring evidence that his wife perished and not here anymore. So all the witnesses came to give evidence to the person. They had to tell a story - where did they get it from? Why is that person not alive anymore? So what they did, they'd write the story in most cases like that, "I went together with so-and-so, and I went past the selector, the selector was Mengele, and we saw them. We had to send those girls or men to the left-hand side". That was enough evidence. Once they'd gone to the left they probably perished in gas chambers and so the book is about every witness

ARTEFACT 2: scan of a page from the rabbi's book

Rabbi Weiss o/o/v

in their own handwriting. You had to write exactly what had happened to him or his wife or a wife what happened to her husband.

ARTEFACT 3: scan of a second page from the rabbi's book

[...] It was a marriage testimony because they only had to prove that the wife had no chance of ever coming back again.



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This isn't the only book. There are a few books like that. This is dated from 1944 to 1947. There's a few other books. So three years. All the people want to get married, and people would come in and ask them to tell -, to give evidence that the wife had no chance of surviving anymore. Or no chance that their husband was alive. Everyone came, they had to bring evidence that, according to official records, they disappeared, he disappeared and went to -, he suffered like anybody else in Auschwitz, went to the crematorium. Being sent to the right was good because there were lots of people who could work. If you were sent to the left, that wasn't good because most of the people who went to the right also didn't survive. But at least it was better than going to the left. To the left -, the same night they were gone.

ARTEFACT 4: scan of a map of Romania today

ARTEFACT 5: scan of a photograph of the synagogue in Oradea [?]

ARTEFACT 6: scan of a photograph of Orthodox Jews approaching a low building