

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series
Murray Lynn Interview
Conducted by James Newberry
November 14, 2013
Transcribed by Lauren Hohn

Full Transcript

Interviewer: This is James Newberry. I'm here with Murray Lynn on November 14th, 2013 at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University. And, Mr. Lynn, would you share your introductory statement with us?

Lynn: Yes, I would. This documentary will bring future generations face-to-face with a terrible and shameful chapter in the human history. It invites us to reflect on what history tells us and how that history should guide us to learn, to remember, and apply the lessons of history to build a better world and a safer world than the world of my childhood. This is my message.

Interviewer: Thank you. Mr. Lynn, when and where were you born?

Lynn: I was born in what is—what was that time the northeastern part of Hungary, a community called Bilke, B-I-L-K-E, which was roughly 125 miles northwest of Budapest. I called it a frontier of civilization.

Interviewer: And, uh, what was your birth name?

Lynn: My birth name was Maurice Leicht, L-E-I-C-H-T.¹

Interviewer: And what was the year?

Lynn: The year was September 19th, 1930.

Interviewer: And what was life like for your family and friends in the years before World War Two?

Lynn: Our community was...perched, what I call, "on the outer limits of human habitation." It was a rural area. Life was very hard. Um, it, um, evoked living in the 18th or 19th centuries, uh, we did not have any paved roads. We did not have any running water. We had no electricity. Life was very, very hard. My parents were small shopkeepers. We owned a small store, clothing store, and we managed to—my parents managed to eke out a living from that store in addition to doing some farming. We had a farming that supplemented our income.

¹ Maurice: The Bremen records Lynn's birth name as *Moshe*. Maurice would be a close Western version of his name.

Interviewer: And what role did your Jewish faith, your Jewish identity, play in your life at that time?

Lynn: Faith was a very, very important part of our lives. It was...it gave our people a sense of peace and a sense of hope, hope because we all lived for a Messianic world, for a better world, in the years to come. And we felt often our parents and our community at large, often felt that we were just living in a temporary world, that we have a better future than the world that we live in. So it was a...very hard life, but we were resigned to living that kind of life because we didn't know any better.

Interviewer: And did you live mostly among other Jewish people? Or among Jewish people and non-Jewish people?

Lynn: Our community was fairly well integrated with the Christian community. We did not have a ghetto, or we were not relegated to ghettos. We lived fairly mixed-in, fairly integrated, in the Christian community, but we did not...socialize, or have any social intercourse, with the Christian community because we were considered by most of them as, as a subhuman people, and they didn't socialize with us very much.

Interviewer: And can you tell me any about your parents?

Lynn: My parents were, by European standards, they were well-educated people. My dad was a scholar and educator in the community. And my mom was a Hungarian beauty queen. She was crowned at the age of 19 ½ a Hungarian beauty queen, very well-known in the community, very well respected, very well admired. She was crowned as Hungarian beauty queen at 19 ½. Sixteen years later, she was—when she was 36, she was murdered in Auschwitz.

Interviewer: You said that non-Jews considered you and your family and your Jewish friends subhuman. And so can you describe the nature of Anti-Semitism in Hungary in the 1930's?

Lynn: Lemme answer that question two ways: We did not have in Hungary the overt Anti-Semitism as Germany had and other European countries in central and Eastern Europe, but there was a...thinly veiled façade of dislike and distrust and disrespect for us because it came from the church leaders. Church leaders for centuries preached every Sunday that we were a...people who...Godless people who worshipped a Godless ideology, and this kind of teaching, this kind of doctrine, was deeply imbedded in the local community, and indeed, across Europe, that we were a Godless people, worshiping a Godless ideology, and we should be treated as pariahs, and we should be isolated, and not have any social intercourse. They were encouraged not to have any social intercourse with Jews because of that. So we were shunned to a large degree, but there was not, as I said, overt violence, until we realized later on when we were taken to Auschwitz,

we found out they inhibited hatred, that they nurtured, and yet it was never manifested.

Interviewer: So how did your life stay the same or change when the Nazis initially came to power in Germany in 1933?

Lynn: Our lives changed dramatically when the Nazis started—seemingly started winning the war, and won...large chunks of Europe. The Nazis emboldened our people, when I saw our people in our community in rural areas and Hungary in particular, the Nazis fanned the fire of hatred, and they emboldened the local community, the Christian people, the churches, to unleash all their pent-up anger, all their pent-up frustration, all their pent-up...distrust for us, to unleash all that during Hitler's presence. And so our lives became more difficult during Hitler because, while we lived a relatively passive life before Hitler, they didn't bother us and we didn't bother them, but during Hitler, all that anger, all the pent-up anger, all the pent-up...contempt was unleashed, and so our lives changed dramatically at that point.

Interviewer: And so why do you think the Nazis were able to come to power in Germany?

Lynn: Well, the Nazis came to power in Germany for the same reason that many dictators take over. There was a great deal of unrest in Germany. The Depression robbed a lot of people of livelihood, and there was a great discontent in Germany with the government, with their lifestyle, and they—many of 'em blamed the Jews for their problems as—in fact, most of 'em blamed the Jews for—for their discontent and it was ripe for a Nazi ideology that promised them a better life.

Interviewer: So did you family consider fleeing Europe at this time? Was there any sense that...something down the road would be more extreme and you needed to leave?

Lynn: My family would have loved to flee those terrible conditions that we were subjected to, even before Hitler's time, a difficult, harsh life. Unfortunately, we were all slaves to poverty. We didn't have the money, we didn't have the financial resources to leave that part of the country, so we became slaves to that lifestyle because we had no place to turn. We would have loved to come to this country, or to other parts of the Western world where we were, would—where we would have a better life, but we didn't have the financial resources to get there.

Interviewer: So when the fascist element took power in Hungary and they began to institute anti-Jewish laws, how did life change at that point, and how did it affect your daily life?

Lynn: Well, it unleashed a lot of hatred at that point. We didn't have much as I mentioned earlier, we didn't have a great deal of violence or hatred before then. What happened was that when the Nazis became more emboldened because they won much of Europe—they conquered much of Europe—they became more

emboldened to speak out against the Jewish people, and that made our lives less secure, made our life more difficult. They used to taunt us...the word “jew” became a...more and more common and—in the school system and the social environment, they taunted us more so than before. These were people who were relatively quiet, relatively inhibited, they suddenly unleashed their pent-up frustration and anger against us.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me about when the Hungarian secret police came for your father and what year that was?

Lynn: Right. In 1942...the Hungarians, at the urging—I presume—of the Nazis...they decided that they are Hungarian fascists, they are no better than the Nazis, they decided that—they knew what was going to happen to us, they were apparently apprised of what to expect, and they were encouraged to do away with its leaders first 'cause if a community is deprived of leadership, they are more manageable, and so they decided to surround all the leaders in our community. We have roughly 200,200 Jewish families in our community. So, they surrounded roughly 13-15 Jewish leaders and took them to the Carpathian—including my dad. I remember vividly: we had a knock on the door at 2:00 in the morning, and I was twelve years old at that time in 1942—two fascist soldiers burst in with their dogs and bayonets and asked my dad to get dressed and follow them to an unknown destination. And we were all hysterical. We pleaded with them to tell us why dad was taken, what the charges were, but we did not get any response. All they kept on telling my dad is to get dressed in a hurry, and take with them, take with him, whatever he wanted to take with him. But they would not respond to any of our questions—we were all hysterical. I had four younger—three younger brothers, a total of four of us, and my mom was just hysterical. My mom was 34 at the time. And so my dad got dressed and took his *Bible* with him, that's all. And they took my dad and roughly 13 other leaders, community leaders, to a Carpathian section of Hungary, maybe 30, 40 miles away. They were called Carpathian Mountains, excuse me, 30, 40 miles away. And they forced him—them—to dig their own graves, and executed them all. So my mom became a widow at the age of 34, that was in '42. My mom became a widow and I became less secure, harsher, and we were all hysterical. We didn't know what happened to my dad until two to four weeks later, that dad was executed along with roughly 13-15 other people, and that opened a Pandora's Box for us because we didn't know what to expect next. We were very insecure, we were concerned—not only about our safety, but our livelihood as well. So, that was a turning point in our lives.

Interviewer: And for that time, after you found out, how did you, you know, find enough food to eat for the family, how did you continue to live at that point without your father?

Lynn: Life was much harsher after my dad was executed. We still maintained our farm, and we had a small little farm enough to subsidize us...with the very, very bare necessities. In this country, we would be living well below poverty level, the way

we lived. But we were thankful that we had the little we did because some of our neighbors had less than we did. But life was—we became very insecure, very traumatized—and my mom just cried endlessly and it just had a very, very profound effect on our lives and our security.

Interviewer: And how were you receiving news at this time? What did you know of the war?

Lynn: We only knew about the war from hearsay. Why? Because there were no newspapers in our town. We were not allowed to have radios. So, those who had secret, clandestine, radios passed the news on when we met in our synagogues on weekend—on Saturdays, news got around what was going on, but that was second and third person news. And so...we had no...connection to direct news, all we knew is what we heard from others.

Interviewer: And did you know of any resistance efforts in the area, any people moving secretly, partisan groups in Hungary fighting against the fascists?

Lynn: We did not have in our community, as far as I know, as far as I remember, any resistance groups...I wish...we did. Life might have been a little easier for us, but the reason—and I have often thought about why not—the Jews in certain parts of Europe were so poor, so intimidated, so insecure, that we did not have the courage and the wherewithal and the knowledge to become resistant, and this is disputed by a lot of Holocaust scholars, what I'm going to say, that many Holocaust scholars claimed that we had a lot of resistance, I for one have not found or seen or heard of any resistance in our area, and not because we didn't care, not because we were not afraid, but we didn't have the leadership. This the reason why they took our leadership, so that when the time comes to take us to Auschwitz, there will be no resistance, and this is what happened. For example, in larger communities...where they did have resistance, like in Poland, where they had over 3 million Jewish people living, they couldn't take all the leaders and execute them, so they formulated some resistance. In our community, because we were so small and the leaders were disseminated, we didn't have any resistance.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me about y—the attack on your mother in 1943, when you were visited by another member of the Hungarian secret police?

Lynn: That was...by far, if there's one area that I, one thing that I have a difficult time with, even today I break down every time I think about this, because my mom was violated. I have a real problem with talking about that, but I remember there was a second knock on the door. My mom was a beautiful, beautiful woman, everyone admired her in the community, everyone looked at her, everyone watched her. And we had a knock on the door, again 2—3—4 in the morning, and a Hungarian fascist soldier forced his way in the house and wanted to see my mom, and managed to go to bed with her. And I was in the same room with mom, I had bed, slept on a cot. Mom was afraid to sleep by herself after my dad

was executed, so I had a cot, and he insisted on going to be with my mom and I started screaming at him and yanking at him away, he was forcing himself on my mom that night, and he said to me “If you don’t stop it,” he says, “you see the pistol here?” He says, “I’m gonna blow your brains out and no one is gonna care.” My mom was terrified that he was gonna kill me. My mom said to me “Leave him alone.” She was willing to sacrifice herself to save me. So...I still had a difficult time, I kept the yanking, and...finally mom told me again “Stop.” Next thing I knew, I woke up at 6—7 in the morning and he was gone. My mom was never the same. It broke her spirit. She felt that she betrayed my dad. She betrayed us. She betrayed her faith. She was never the same. I never—I don’t ever remember seeing her smiling after this, it just absolutely crushed her spirit and nothing would restore it. And so, that was by far, the most traumatic experience that I can remember, it was worse than not having food, to see your mom raped, your mom violated. Nothing that I remember is more painful to me than that one incident.

Interviewer: As the oldest child, what responsibility did you feel to take care of your family and...as the oldest?

Lynn: Well, I was fourteen, well at that time I was either 13 or 14 ‘cause my dad was murdered in ‘42, I was twelve years old, and that happened when my mom was raped...I don’t remember, I’m guessing, perhaps six months later, perhaps a year later, I don’t remember exactly the date, but I did not have much of a role, my mom pretty much ran the show at home. My mom was a very bright, strong, self-reliant woman, and I was too young at that time at the age of thirteen to assume any responsibilities, so mom had to make sure we had enough food, that we had enough clothing, that we don’t starve, so that was her role. My role was—mom tried to relieve us of any responsibilities because we had enough on our minds when we became orphans, when we had no longer a father, when we had to, we were scared of our own shadows, we didn’t know what we gonna—where our next meal was gonna come from, and she didn’t wanna burden us with more responsibilities.

Interviewer: Did you carry on your religious traditions despite the Anti-Jewish laws at that time?

Lynn: Yes, we—our Jewish traditions have not changed till the very, very last moment because we felt religion was our opiate, it gave us a false sense of security.

Interviewer: And you weren’t going to any school at this time, you were staying at home all the time?

Lynn: No, I—we were still going to a school at that point, elementary school, high school, etc.

Interviewer: When was your family called to...to go and-and when all the Hungarian Jews were transported to Auschwitz, at what point did that take place?

Lynn: Yes...that was the third knock on the door in a two year period, and it will always be etched in my memories all long as I live. Two fascist soldiers burst into our house roughly...between 4 and 5 in the morning with their bulldogs and bayonets and asked my mom to pack her backs and our bags and follow them to the train station, and my mom was just hysterical, she couldn't believe it. She asked the fascist soldiers to tell us where we're taken—why we're taken, what we did wrong...and they would not respond to our questions, and they kept, my mom walked back and forth, crying and pleading for mercy and redemption. And...the soldiers kept on barking at mom to start packing, and I remember my mom...yanking the sheets off our beds and blankets and started packing—putting some food, bread and flour and beans and other stuff that we would need to sustain ourselves, she did not realize that in the end, she would not need any of that. And, so after we—she started filling those blankets and sheets up with our belongings, she tied it around our necks, 'cause we didn't have any luggage...and we were...led to the train station, and...what stands out in my mind...more than anything else...is our neighbors, there was an orchestrated scene on the street on our way to the train station. There was an organized and orchestrated scene where hundreds of neighbors lined up the streets and they were taunting us and throwing epithets at us, throwing stones and spitting at us, and these were people who were our neighbors, who were allegedly our friends, some of them, we thought they were friends, sympathetic (if not friends certainly sympathetic with us). They all lined up the street and yelled at us “We hope you never return, I hope you never return.” And it just taught us about how...that hatred was unleashed against us and it reminded us of the thinly-veiled façade of hatred that existed for so long that we didn't realize, and this episode when we were taken to the train station with bayonets and dogs, hundreds of soldiers following us with dogs and bayonets, it was one of the most frightening experiences that anyone can go through, and neighbors lined up on the sides of the streets, hurling epithets at us as we were led to our doom. It reminded us how...deep..ly rooted, how deeply rooted that hatred was, it reminded us of the long and deeply rooted hatred that was so deeply imbedded in the lives of those people that we were not...aware of most of the times. We knew they didn't like us, but they were tolerant, but all that hatred was unleashed at that moment against us.

Interviewer: And did you have any sense of where you were being taken at that point, did you wonder whether it was to a labor camp, did you have any sense?

Lynn: We had no idea, we don't—did not have the slightest inkling. We were told or—we heard, I don't remember which, whether we heard it second hand or we were told we were going to be relocated. And that was a very broad term, they didn't elaborate. And we thought this was just a...judgment on our part, we thought we were taken somewhere else and we would be relocated in some barracks or something. We had no idea where our final destination is going to be.

Interviewer: And can you describe the trip on the train?

Lynn: Well, the first...we were first taken to a temporary ghetto, a temporary holding station, until they got all the Hungarian Jews together. And so we were taken to a larger community that was a holding station until they accumulated enough people to fill a train to Auschwitz, and if my memory serves me right, and I don't quite remember, we might have been there for a week or maybe a little longer at this holding station, and...after that, we were transported, we were taken to Auschwitz from there.

Interviewer: And was it like a cattle car?

Lynn: The Auschwitz experience those trains were...scenes that, surreal scenes that...resembled Dante's Inferno. They were cattle car, dumped roughly a hundred of us in a cattle car, I'm guessing, I may be off a little bit. We had no toilet facilities. We had no food. We had no water. We had no air. It was the most dehumanizing experience that anyone can ever imagine. It was unspeakable experience. I remember people were wailing and pleading and crying for mercy. Pleading for redemption. I remember my younger--three younger brothers were begging mom for food, for water, for air. People had to relieve themselves in their clothes because we, or if we had pots and pans in our personal luggage, I remember mom took out some pots and pans to relive ourselves. It was the surreal scene that you only see a monster in horror movies, that is the best way to describe it. This went on for two days. Without toilet facilities, without food, without water, and the crying and wailing and screaming and pleading was unbearable.

Interviewer: And can you tell me about the arrival at Auschwitz?

Lynn: When we arrived to Auschwitz, when the train finally arrived, it was a...huge relief for us, at last we could at least have some fresh air. As soon as the trains arrived, the SS soldiers, they opened the cattle cars. We were surrounded by SS soldiers and barking dogs and also Sonderkommandos—Sonderkommandos were Jewish prisoners who helped us unload. And we were—they yelled at us in German, "*Los, Los, Los!*" meaning "Fast, fast, fast! Move fast!"² And they started separating us immediately...line, and they line them up right and left, the...ones on the left side, mom and my three younger brothers were...were...moved to the left. And a Sonderkommando, the Jewish prisoner who came to help us removing the luggage, removing the sick, and the dead, many of them died, the sick died, any young ones died on the train, they were responsible for removing all that. And they whispered, one of them came over to me, and whispered in my ear, he says, "How old are you?" I says, "Fourteen." He says, "Tell them you're sixteen." I didn't know why, but he knew something I

² "Los...fast": *Los* is the shortened version of the command *losrennen*, which translates to something along the lines of *start running*.

didn't. If I was sixteen, I'd be assigned to work. If I was fourteen, I'd be going with mom to the gas chambers... So when the Germans approached me, when they separated mom and I and the children, and my three younger brothers. We were—I was fourteen. My next, my brother, the next one was 12, 10, and 8. We were two years apart. So the three younger brothers were whisked away with mom and they were asked to throw all their belongings on a big heap in a big area, and I remember my mom was always concerned that she wouldn't find our luggage. Little did she know where she was going. And...the last thing I remember mom when they yanked me away from her, she said, "I love you, son, I hope to see you again." She knew—she knew that something is going to happen. I'll never forget mom—my mom's grief, my mom's horror. I've never seen horror more nakedly exposed than my mom's face when she was in the cattle car and removed from the cattle car. She didn't know what to expect...her eyes, beautiful face, still haunts me, the horror on her beautiful face, still haunts me today. And so...within an hour, I was assigned a striped suit and my number was 83,000 on the suit, no underwear, striped suit and wooden clogs. And...I was taken to a barrack. I didn't know where my mom went, where my three younger brothers went, and I approached a prisoner there, who's already been there for weeks. I said, "Do you have any idea where I can find my mom and three younger brothers?" And he says, "How old are your younger brothers?" And I told him, and he knew right away the answer. And he hesitated for a while, he didn't wanna tell me. And then he said, "Come on out of the barrack and I'll show you where they are." So he takes me out of the barrack and points to the chimney. Said, "That's where they are." And that was a sinking feeling...a feeling I'll never forget. I didn't quite fully understand, I was fourteen years old, I didn't quite fully understand, I had a hunch. I says, "Would you tell me what that meant, what that means?" And he explained to me that they were gassed and now they're burning. That's how fast their lives...were snuffed out. And so...I said to myself "Now I'm alone. I have nobody left. I have to care for myself." And life became more of a challenge for me at that point, to fight for survival. So, my mom and three younger brothers were gone. I was left alone to fend for myself.

Interviewer: Can you describe the conditions in the camp, and what you were forced to do in terms of labor?

Lynn: Well, I was in Birkenau, which is called Auschwitz II, very few people survived there. Life was unspeakable, incredible. We were scheduled to work every morning...to—I had to walk, 2, 3 miles, 4 miles, I don't remember. The Germans built some under—underground factories, and I was assigned to carry cement bags from the freight train to the mixing plant where they were mixing concrete, at the age of fourteen. Two prisoners would put a bag on my back, and I would haul it...I don't know how many feet, 5—600 feet, a 1,000 feet away, to the mixing equipment, mixing plant, where they were mixing concrete. This went on for twelve hours a day. Then we alternated. We were...it was impossible to survive there on the food. They gave us a cup of coffee in the morning and one

slice of bread, and nothing at noontime, and at night, we—we were given one cup, one cup of fowl tasting potato soup. That was our diet for the day, roughly 150, 180 calories. The average person needs 2,000 calories, a very active person needs 3,000 calories a day to survive. It was impossible to survive on, on that 150-180 calories. We ate grass, we ate whatever we could find in the woods there, wild mushrooms, animals if we could find and kill them, rabbits...raw. Most people survived...most people did not survive. Those, most people died of starvation, disease, malnutrition, and we never knew, from moment to moment, from hour to hour, whether we would be felled by the bullet, whether we would be felled by savage beating, whether we would be felled by starvation and disease, or the gas chamber. It was an existential nightmare. We had, during the winter, remember Auschwitz is in Poland, temperatures would go down to 20, 25 below zero. We had no underwear. We had no socks. Just a striped suit. But I would take...at that concrete plant, the paper bag from the concrete that I emptied and put it under my shirt as a buffer against the wind and cold weather. It was impossible to survive in...in those, under those conditions, with our food, without clothing, working twelve hours a day. A third of the people, in Birkenau, died the first 90 days, of starvation and disease. And those, the rest of us, fought for life, every moment the rest of the day. We never knew how we would be felled, how we would die. We knew we were gonna die, we just didn't know how.

Interviewer: And did you form any...relationships with other people in the camp or was it—were you focused only on survival?

Lynn: Well, we had relationships. I had a cousin with me there, but on the whole, we were very animalistic there, fighting for a crumb of bread. But—I'll give you an example the kind of existential nightmares that we went through. Every morning we had roll call at 5:00. Well, they didn't need roll call because there's no way to escape, we're surrounded by electric wires. The roll call was the purpose of the roll call was to call the sick and told them they were going to the hospital. Well the hospital, there was no hospital. "The hospital" was the euphemism...for the gas chambers. My cousin who was there with me, his name was Sam Green, he was my age, and they yanked me out of the line no less than twelve or thirteen times, quote "to go to the hospital," and I slid back because I knew what the hospital meant. But my cousin, Sam Green, he volunteered. I said to him, "Sam, you realize where you're going? You're not going to the hospital. This is not a hospital. There's no hospital in Birkenau." And he said something memorable to me that still haunts me. He says—my Hungarian name was Maurice—he says, "Maurice...I know where I'm going, but I'll only suffer for ten minutes, maybe less. You'll suffer from here on and die as a dehumanized person. You'll die of starvation, disease, or a bullet, or be clobbered to death, or be frozen to death." He says, "Who is better off, you or I?" He says, "I can't take this anymore." And this is after six months in the camp, it was just impossible to survive. So...my cousin volunteered and got what he wanted. Easier death than dying of starvation and disease, a bullet, or being beaten to death.

Interviewer: And what about when the bombings started from Allied planes? Do you hear that, was it around you?

[Lynn nods]

Interviewer: Or...did you have a sense that the war was being lost by Germany?

Lynn: We saw the planes over us. We saw the British flags on the planes, and we knew that they...were getting the, this is the beginning of an end, but we didn't know that we're gonna be able to live long enough to survive to see the end of this. But the transported in January of 1945, (or perhaps it was maybe a little later Janu—late in January, early in February, I think it was January). The Germans decided they were gonna evacuate us from Auschwitz-Birkenau, because they didn't want us be liberated by the Russians, the Russians were getting close. And so we were...we started first on the trains. They put us all on fr—freight trains and closed trains to evacuate us, and they bombarded, the Brits bombarded the railroads. They didn't realize it was us, maybe they did. And so, then we started walking...to a destination, they knew where they were taking us. We didn't know where we were going. Most of us were too weak to walk, and most of us died, or they were clobbered to death or shot to death. There were dozens and dozens shot to death every day. After a while they were running low on bullets and they were clobbered to death, the Germans, SS, they didn't wanna waste a bullet on them anymore...and they were left in the fields, they were left in the gutters, they were left on the streets to be buried in an unknown grave by the hundreds and hundreds of people. We ultimately ended up, I don't remember, either in Buchenwald or Dachau, I don't remember which it was, I was ultimately liberated in '40...May of '45, in one of those camps, either Dachau or Buchenwald. I think that it was Buchenwald. The reason I say so because Elie Wiesel said that he was liberated in Buchenwald, and we were in the same camp, I presume that I was liberated in Buchenwald.

Interviewer: Can you describe when you were liberation?

Lynn: Well, when I was liberated, I was in semi-comatose condition. I was 14, I was close to 15 in the time I was in Auschwitz for almost a year, well, a little over a year in fact. We were, most of us were skeletons, we didn't...we...our bodies, as sure you saw pictures, we were skeletons. I was semi-comatose condition. I didn't fully realize what was going on. All I remember is we were liberated by the Americans and they took me to a hospital and I was fed intravenously for two weeks. I was too weak to be fed by food. My body would not absorb the food. Those who ate food Americans...what the Americans provided them, many of them died because their bodies could not absorb...in the hundreds they died, I was taken in a makeshift hospital and I was fed intravenously with two weeks. After two weeks, they released me, and that is when I...decided to go back home to see if there were any remnants left of my family.

Interviewer: And what did you find?

Lynn: First a, lemme just say the train, the train...ride home was also something to remember, I could write a book. I didn't have no idea, I was fifteen years old, I was a naïve young guy, I had no idea which way my home was, where the train was going, didn't provide any organized transportation for us. So, I just hopped on a train, hoping the train was going in the right direction. I took me two or three weeks finally to get home. I finally find the right train that was going in the direction where my family, ancestors, where my family was taken from. I'll always remember the night I finally got home on a freight train. It was 8 or 9:00 at night under high moon and darkness, and here...I'm walking home alone. I had some clothes on me that was provided by Jewish organization, and...after we were liberated, we had secondhand clothes that we were provided. You know, walking home alone in the darkness, we were roughly 2 to 3 miles from the train station, or our home was, and here I remember 15 months earlier, or 14 months earlier, walking *to* the train station, to Auschwitz, and all those neighbors shouting and cursing at us. Here, 15 months later or 14 months later, I'm walking home alone, without knowing who survived, without knowing what to expect, had nothing but my clothes on me. Nothing else. Just their shirt and jacket and trousers and a pair of shoes. And I was walking a little closer as I got a little closer to our home. I saw a light in our house. And for a moment I said to myself, "Well maybe someone survived, an uncle or aunt or somebody." As I got...to our home, I knocked on the door, and an un...and a hostile person opens the door and takes a look at me, and he knew who I was, I didn't know him. He said, shouted at me, he says, "I thought you folks are all dead!" And I was...again, also shocked by this reception, and I don't know what possessed me to say this, and I said to him, "I'm the ghost." And he slammed the door in my face, and kept watching me through the door to see if the ghost was going to disappear. And it was the night, maybe 9:00 at night in a dark summer evening. Finally opened the door. And he saw me standing there, the ghost didn't disappear, and he invited me in. And the Nazis gave him, he was a Nazi sympathizer, and they gave all the Jewish homes to Nazi sympathizers. He was afraid of me, and I was afraid of him. I was afraid he might kill me, murder me at night. No one would know, no one would care. He was also afraid of me because I...that I would report him as a Nazi sympathizer. So, for two weeks, they fed me, and reluctantly so, but after two weeks he decided he was gonna move out because he was very uncomfortable in my presence and I was uncomfortable with his. And that became a new problem for me because at that point, I had no one to feed me. I had no money, no resources, no food, and I had no one to care for me. So I had to depend on...on Christian neighbors when begging for food, and that's how I lived for...couple of months until I decided to leave.

Interviewer: And when did you immigrate to the United States?

Lynn: Well, what happened was...I came to United States in '49, but it was a very...what I call, a eventful...journey. I decided on my own I was going to

leave but, just for the record, when I was still at home—and this was the trigger mechanism that motivated me to leave, to leave—when I decided one day, after a few days at home, after my neighbors moved out, to go to the synagogue for spiritual renewal. I was depressed. I was scared. I was bewildered. All alone, lost everybody. So I went—decided I was gonna walk to the synagogue for spiritual renewal...when I walked into the synagogue, there was only one synagogue in our community. All the doors and windows were ripped out. All the...the *Torah*, the *Bibles*, were strewn all over the floor. The...epithets all over the door, all over the walls, about the Jews. I saw goats and chickens running in and out 'cause it was a small community, running in and out of the synagogues, and it became just like a stable. And I said to myself, “These are people that we lived with for centuries when my parents lived, when my parents ancestors lived in those, lived in that community for hundreds of years.” I said “These are the people we lived with that hatred so deeply embedded in their psyche, in their hearts, to take a house of worship and desecrate it the way they did.” That was my turning point I said “I’m gonna leave.” So, I had no...idea of geography. All I knew was that part of Hungary at that time was already taken over by Russia, was no longer Hungary, and the Iron Curtain was already down. They already closed off all the borders to Hungary and all...and I decided that I’m, that I received—a Jewish organization gave us each a 100 dollars, in Romania, before I came home, I went to Romania, HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Association gave each one of us a 100 dollars, so I decided I’m gonna use that money to get somebody to take me across the border.³ And so I did some inquiry—inquiring, and they told me there was a guy, 25, 30 miles away who will take me through the Hungarian border to Romania, from there, I can get easier to Hungary and from there to wherever I wanted to go. 'Cause that part of Hungary where I was living was already closed off. So I paid a guy 20 dollars to take me across the border and I was supposed to meet him there at a certain hour at night, at 2 in the morning, 30 miles away at a stable on a farm. Instead of him being there, I was met by the secret police. He turned me in. And they locked me up in a makeshift prison...and this a few months after Auschwitz. I said, “There’s no way that I’m going to be incarcerated again a few months after surviving Auschwitz.” They had a metal cart in that room, and a ceiling about as high as this one, and I erected a metal cart so I can reach the ceiling. And I broke through the ceiling, climbed up in to the roof, broke through the roof, and fled the prison at the age of 15, and so, went back home and then 2 months later, and then 2 weeks later, excuse me, 2, 3 weeks later, I made another attempt. They arrested a guy who turned me in. I say they arrested, the partisans helped me get across and the partisans got a hold of him and...beat the heck out of him for turning me in, and they found me another person to take me across Romania, from there I went to Hungary and from Hungary I lived in a *kibbutz*, you know what a *kibbutz* is, I lived there in a *kibbutz* in there for a few months, and they—it was difficult to get out to the West from Hungary 'cause the Iron Curtain was there, to, to coming down very quickly, so I went to the Czech Republic, and this is again all alone at the age of sixteen. Finally ended up in Bratislava, which is the capital of Slovakia, and I listed at

³ HIAS: Hebrew Immigrant Association.

a...at a Jewish yeshiva, which is a seminary, a Jewish seminary, where I lived for about a year in Bratislava, roughly a year. A gentleman by the name of Dr. Schonfeld who was a humanitarian in Great Britain, he heard that there were roughly 100 to 120 children in the Czech Republic who came there from Hungary because it was easier to get out of the Czech Republic, who were scattered all over.⁴ He came to the Czech Republic to rescue us from yet another tyrant, which was Stalin. And it took u—took him about six months to get us passports and visas, and he took us, took roughly 120 of us, many of 'em were children hidden by Christian families who were too young to know what was going on, roughly half of us were survivors of different camps, took us to England and from there...they couldn't take care of us in England, didn't have a place big enough, and a Jewish philanthropist by the name of Mr. Levy bought us a castle in Ireland where we were relocated outside Dublin, which was roughly 25, 30 miles outside Dublin, called the Clonyn Castle, where we lived for...a year, and then relocated after a year—the Irish government was very Anti-Semitic in those days, that was '48, three years after liberation.⁵ They wouldn't let a single one of us remain in Ireland. Three people offered to adopt me. I was at that time...18, good looking kid, I was...and three people offered to adopt me, they wouldn't let a single one of us remain there. And so, three of us got scholarship to the United States, and the rest of them were relocated to different parts of the world. They were relocated to...some London, some England, half of them went to Israel, and the other 25-30 to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, scattered all over the world. And by the way, I went back to Dublin, Ireland, I was invited this past May, on a speaking engagement by the government and the Jewish community and the Historical Society, to speak about our experiences in the...in the 40's.

Interviewer: Mr. Lynn, where did you arrive in the United States?

Lynn: New York

Interviewer: And how long before you made your way South?

Lynn: Went to school in New York for six years. I got scholarship to the [?] University, ultimately I transferred to business school and...I finished school, I went to, I lived in York until '56. And...I didn't like New York. New York was a harsh life, I wanted an easier life. And...I got a job in Atlanta in 1956 as a management trainee, and I ultimately became President in Chamber of the board of that company.

Interviewer: And how did you adjust to living in the South, the American South?

Lynn: It was...after living in New York for six years, New York...was very harsh life, and it's expensive and lonely, but it was a huge adjustment because the lifestyle was very, very different in the South, it was...it's a more...subtle life. It was an

⁴ Dr. Schonfeld: Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld.

⁵ Mr. Levy: Yankel Levy.

easier life. I still, had difficulties adjusting for a brief period, but it was probably one of the best moves I ever made, moving down South.

Interviewer: And when did you begin to tell people about your experience during the Holocaust?

Lynn: I did not speak very much about my background until I retired from corporate life. In fact, when my children were young, when they were 5, 6, 7 years old, I remember, and this should be said for the record, and for the document to your film, my kids used to ask me “Dad, why is it that we don’t have aunts and uncles and grandparents like all our other friends?” And it was a very painful response for me to tell them all, “Honey, your grandparents, your aunts and uncles died during war in Europe.” “Well, why did they die?” It was very difficult for me to explain this to them. But I wanna mention this for the record also, that my children were also victims of the Holocaust, even though they were born in the South, my wife is from Tennessee, because they were raised without the love and care of grandparents, without the love of cousins and aunts and uncles, without family connections, which are so important for all of us for emotional development. They didn’t have that, and neither did I. As they got older, I told them a little more, but I never told them the complete story until I retired from corporate life in 2000. My middle daughter, who is an attorney in Atlanta, said to me, “Dad, I know you speak at the Bremen very often. Do you mind if I come and hear your story?” And I said to her, I hesitated for a while, I said, “Sure.” She came, and her name is Anita, she is a trial lawyer, and I’m mentioning this for a reason because trial lawyers are supposed to be tough people, after about 15 minutes, after she heard me talking about my life, she broke down crying and walked out. She ultimately came back and...so I decided her, to introduce my story to my other children. They knew I had lost my parents in the war and Auschwitz, but didn’t know my horror stories. They didn’t know my—the existential nightmares that I went through in Auschwitz, before Auschwitz, during Auschwitz, and even after the war, what I went through, they knew very little. In fact...my next door neighbor was a Presbyterian, and I was invited to speak at their church one day, by the preacher, he found out about me through newspapers, he invited me to speak. And I asked my next door neighbor, we lived in the Riverside area in Atlanta, I asked him if he would like to come, I says, “I’m speaking at your church.” He says, “You are?” He says, “About what?” I says, “About the war.” We lived next to each other for 35 years, they knew nothing about me. All they knew was I talked a little funny, but they didn’t know why I talked funny or where I came from. But...he was an executive with Southern Railway, and he was flabbergasted when he found out about it, my next door neighbor. I spoke very little about my background for several reasons. First of all, it was too painful. When I was going through, building my career, I didn’t want to relive the past. I wanted to forget the past. And speak at the appropriate time when I no longer have to focus on raising a family, when I no longer have to focus on building a corporate career. So, I didn’t wanna talk about that for that reason, and secondly, it was too painful to open the wounds and talk about this

again, the wounds have never healed. As I often tell people, the body recovers much quicker than the mind. The body, I never thought I was gonna live this long. But the body has amazing healing power, but the mind doesn't, the mind doesn't forget. Just as a point of information, my wife still wakes me up on the average of every month or two, screaming at the night. I have nightmares, so many years later. They, this tragedy, this horror story, this narrative, this—my nightmare, is so deeply embedded in your psyche, in my psyche, that just cannot flush it out, cannot erase it, cannot eliminate it. I will take this with me into my grave. So, for that reason, I never spoke much, but my nightmares became increasingly frequent in the last ten years since I've been speaking because the past has been e—awakened in me, I relive the past, whereas before it was internalized, now I have unleashed my experiences for the purpose of educated you folks, future generations, but it was been a very painful experience for me to talk about, still today because the wounds have never healed and never will heal, they left indelible experiences. Lemme just mention this again for the record, one additional thing, the kind of impact this had on me when I came to New York as a student. I had to take a train to go to college. I lived in Brooklyn with a poor aunt of mine who has been here since the '20's. I would not take the train, I was afraid to take the subway, because it reminded me of the cattle cars. I took the subway once or twice and I broke up in a cold sweat. I had to stop taking the train. I took a bus. I was afraid of soldiers. I was afraid of police. I would not wear anything with yellow on it, yellow tie or yellow sweater, because it reminded me of the yellow band, the yellow stars. It left a...I was terribly insecure, I was afraid of authority. It left indelible marks on my psyche which have never healed and, in spite of that...because of, I'm a highly disciplined guy, I've done very well in corporate life, I've been very successful, but it has been a painful climb. And I think this something people should know, you should know, that you know, you cannot erase the past. The body heals...but the mind never does.

Interviewer: And would you share your closing statement with us?

[Lynn pulls out a sheet of paper]

Lynn: Yes, my, my daughter, my oldest daughter, her name is Roberta. And I took my oldest daughter to Auschwitz to give her a feel where I've been, what we went through, a feel about our history...she was deeply moved, and she said to me, "Dad, how would you like to be remembered? How would your generation like to be remembered?" And I said to her, I said, "Honey, let's wait until we get home and I'll drop you a note." I said, "Let me give this some thought. It's a very profound question." And so when we got home, I sent her an email, and this is what I said to her:

[Lynn reads from the paper]

"Remember us not with lavish and brave words. Mourn us not with sorrowful tears, but rather with positive and engaging deeds. Strive for social justice. Work

ceaselessly to safeguard our revered precepts of religious pluralism and diversity. And not least, pay any price to protect the ideals of our nation so it would never belong to a racist ideology that stripped our people of all hope and humanity over the centuries. May this message be enshrined in your hearts and ennobled in your memories as an enduring legacy to future generations.”