

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand and Members of the Aging Committee. My name is David Schaecter, I'm 95 years old, a proud Jew, and a survivor of two Nazi concentration camps. I am a witness to the greatest act of antisemitism where 6 million Jews were killed for no reason other than being a Jew.

I was born in a small town in Slovakia in 1929. In 1940, my father was taken away from our family by the government. That was the last time I saw him. A year later, when I was 11, the rest of my family were rounded up and placed onto train cattle cars. The cars fit no more than 50 people and they put in 80. There was nowhere to sit. We could only stand or fall on top of each other. Sanitary facilities were limited to one bucket. Approximately 25% of the people were dead or dying when we arrived at Auschwitz.

When we arrived at Auschwitz, the Nazi's separated us. My mother was holding the hands of my sisters, Leah and Miriam, when they were taken away. This was the last time that I saw them. Someone told my older brother Yaakov to have me stand on his feet to appear taller, and I did. At 11 years old, I was shaved bald, and given a tattoo.

We were assigned to a work detail. We rose every day at 6AM and walked 2-3 kilometers to our jobs cleaning the rail cars that we arrived in. The floors were covered with human feces, urine, blood and corpses. I can still smell and taste the filth and the chemicals we had to use. The Nazis were not selective on who they beat or who they killed. Yaakov would take the beatings meant for me, and he shared his food with me, and did small things to help me survive. For example, the grease canisters for the axles of the trains were as big as me. Yaakov would try to get the smaller canisters of grease for me to carry.

Yaakov and I were at Auschwitz for more than 2 years before being transported to Buchenwald in Germany in 1943. I was about 13. By this point the war was not going well for the Nazis. I remember the air that I was breathing was horrendous, it was the smell of burning flesh and smoke. We knew what they were doing. They also poisoned the water. We knew to boil the water to keep from getting sick. One day I saw Yaakov drink the water without boiling it. He said, "I don't want to live anymore." The next day he was sick from dysentery, frail and weak. They marched us to work, but I could not pull him up and I could not stop because the guard pushed his gun beside my head. I let go of Yaakov and he just laid there as we continued. About 10 seconds later I heard the sound of a gunshot. I knew they had shot him. I never saw Yaakov after that.

After almost a year, around November of 1944, I was placed on another railroad car. Along the route, near Passau in Bavaria, the US Air Force bombed the train. I was alone, without my brother to protect me, but I jumped out of the train car and ran like

hell to the forest. After 8 days, I was found by Czech partisans. I was almost 15 years old and weighed 83 pounds.

After recovering at the hospital at the end of war, I returned to my hometown. I had hoped to find comfort but instead I found more antisemitism. I had to hide in a barn on my family's farm before making my way back to the train station and back to Prague. Other Jews that returned had been killed.

Many years passed before I learned that my father had survived the Mauthausen concentration camp, but had died three days after liberation from typhoid.

Before the war, we lived on a farm that was in our family for 7 generations. I had lost 105 family members: siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins - all murdered. Our land was taken, and I was an orphan.

I came to America in 1950; learned English in 9 weeks and went to college. Upon graduation, I married and started a family. Today, I have two children, five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. I wish I could say that antisemitism stopped after World War II, but it rages on.

On October 7, 2023, we saw Hamas kill 1,195 Jews. It's been over 570 days and we still have hostages. These atrocities are and were barbaric. To say they were traumatizing to survivors barely scratches the surface. Protests on college campuses that intimidate and threaten Jewish students are not benign and cannot be ignored. I remember vividly when Slovakian classmates taunted Jewish kids like me, and what's happening today looks and feels the same. And most recently the Pennsylvania Governor's residence was burned by an arsonist during Passover.

I spend my days going to schools talking about my experiences, and teaching children about the dangers of antisemitism. 18 states, including Florida and New York, have a law requiring Holocaust education. This is important because a recent survey shows widespread ignorance about the Holocaust, especially among US Millennials and Gen Z, and we must do everything possible to educate our young people.

On the subject of restitution, we survivors have been pressing for years to ensure restitution of looted assets such as stolen art, which is critical to documenting the realities of the Holocaust. That is why survivors and our families strongly support amendments to the HEAR Act and other legislation that will enable families to recover their property from those who still want to profit from the Holocaust. This is also important because part of the Shoah's terrible legacy is that for the past several

decades, nearly half of all survivors lived and died in poverty, without adequate food, medicine or home care. Survivors suffer from extreme physical and mental-health challenges due to the long-term effects of starvation, beatings, disease, malnutrition, and the murders of our loved ones. I am here to remind everyone that there are still thousands of survivors alive today who are in desperate need, and who cannot be forgotten.

Thank you for having this hearing on antisemitism. It has been a problem and is still a problem.