

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Jack Brauns and Avraham Tory**  
**September 27, 1991**  
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## **PREFACE**

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## **JACK BRAUNS and AVRAHAM TORY**

### **September 27, 1991**

B: My father is an apprentice to shoemaker. That gave him the right to go to high school, and my father went to high school and he was an excellent student. And the director of that high school was my father's protege. And he was en...always encouraged my father to continue higher education. My father finished the high school with the highest in...in Dorpet with the highest marks, and had a really new problem....a Jewish problem which was to enter a university. He wanted to study medicine. He wanted to study medicine and for a Jew to enter Dorpet university was one of the most difficult things. More difficult it was for me or anybody else to enter in the modern time in a medical school. And at that time my grandfather had a cousin who was one of the one who was kidnapped on the street, and was a Russian soldier for 25 years, enlisted. He had no children and he, the cousin of my grandfather, had a legal right to enroll his children to a Russian university. But he was not the father of my father. Therefore, it was worth my grandfather who was the Rabbi...Rabbi in the little town of Velendi did something which is really...I consider thinking about it, very humiliating for him. He had to declare himself mentally insane, not able to take care of his son, and legally transferred the right to his cousin to adopt him and take care of him. My grandfather who was a very learned man and a very sharp man did it for my father. As a result my father succeeded in enter university as a faculty of medicine. Uh...After a year or 2 at the university of Tarto, my father succeeded to be accepted to Cologne, the Cologne University in Germany, where he completed medicine and...uh...had a excellent education. He married my mother was from Riga, and they both settled in Kaunas in 1940 and my ...excuse me...my father became...uh...interested in contagious diseases, and was in charge of the hospital, in the Jewish hospital of the contagious disease department. In 1940, approximately 6 weeks before the World War II started, a epidemic of typhus developed in the city of Vilnos.

And my father was dispatched to be in charge of the epidemic in Vilnos where he...uh...directed the treatment of the thousands of people who got sick. On the day of the war in...in...he...on a Sunday when the war broke up, that was the day when he came to Kaunas. And when he traveled in the train he still did...didn't know that the war started. When the war started...uh...he again was in charge of the contagious disease hospital in...in the ghetto. In...in...I'm sorry, in...in...in Kaunas. And in August when the Germans have ordered the...uh...the Germans have ordered the movement of the Jews into the ghetto...uh...my father had the task in organizing the contagious disease hospital in the ghetto. Now, Avraham, as you know at that time, and you were the Secretary of the Judenrat, you probably know...

T:There was no Judenrat. There was an Altetenrat, a Jewish Council.

B:I'm sorry. A Jewish Council.

T:In Vilna, there was a Judenrat. In Kovno, there was not.

B:Okay. In the Altetenrat, how was the mechanism and what role my father played in the beginning in the ghetto, and later in the ghetto?

T:Yes. Uh...I mentioned in many...in many occasions, the important role that...uh...your father, Dr. Moses Brauns, played in the ghetto from its very beginning because...uh...30,000 Jews were ordered to move in the small area of the suburb of Slobodka, which was inhabited about 8 thousand normally, and now 30 thousand Jews had to...to be squeezed in an un...impossible density, and this created the first...the first big problem of contagious diseases because Slobodka was a very famous...uh...a very famous suburb from the point of view of \_\_\_\_\_ big scholars were world famous. But it was

one of the most neglected suburbs. There was no...no sewage, no water, not any of the military installations and that's why there was no, for instances, toilets. There was not such houses....houses were small ones. One...one story... story houses of wooden. There were in...in all of Slobodka, were approximately two or three big...uh...houses of...of ...three story houses with bricks. Others were mostly wooden of...of one story or two stories. So this in itself brought about it that many Jews were...fled from Kovno to the ghetto, didn't find there housing. And the housing department was...was...uh...was in...was not able to ...to ...locate houses. When I talk about houses, we speak about a room. We speak about a part of a room, a dwelling. And this too was there were so many thousands were in the streets under the sky. And others...we used to... we used to house them the...the roofless we used to house them in previous synagogues or Yeshivites but they were packed to capacity and you \_\_\_\_\_ to a former school as I did with the head of the \_\_\_\_\_ department. At that time \_\_\_\_\_, we were looking for a place where we could install a hospital, a general hospital. So not only in the...in the rooms, the family sleep but only in the staircase. Only in the...in the...the toilets. In the...in the... in the...in the upper floor where it was only for storage, there also lived people. And this created immediately danger for contagious diseases. The...the Lithuanian sanitary department of Kovno was searching where they were spying in the ghetto just to look and pick up one case of a contagious diseases. It was typhus or something we've had. And there were such, because it was impossible, but also in this we called them reservats where hundreds of families lived in one place, a formal Shivot or formal synagogue. And when...the...happened such a thing, there was no possibility to...to isolate the sick one, so Doctor Brauns was the one who had two tasks in one time. First of all, to help give medical care to the contagious sick person. Second to isolate him from the rest of the people in the reservat, which was full packed, and where to put him...put him at a bed that there was no such a bed even on the...on the ground, but to isolate him from the others. Second, he was the one who served as address for those Lithuanians, municipal spies I

say, medical spies or sanitary spies who came to Dr. Brauns, and they asked him how the situation...where are your contagious diseases. So he said, "We don't have any." And he was duty bound as head of the...of the...the Department for Contagious Diseases to report to the municipality in Kovno, to the health department of Kovno, and they would have come. In addition German Police, the Gestapo, on their own initiative, used to come to the ghetto and search. On the spot they used to go into the reservot. They used to go in...in...uh...they used to go in the...

B:The houses?

T:Private dwellings. Houses. Dwellings. Corridors. Court yards. They were packed. But Dr. Brauns used to take out of such places the diseases and found some other places in a very...in a small hut, and it was much like as if it is just a hut, but inside the court yard, he used to...he built with them, and this separated them from the others. Always the night, he was the buffer, I could say to...he was to rebuff...to rebuff the attacks of the Germans, of the Lithuanians, not less than the Germans from spying...from spying where the contagious ill people are. This was...this was supposed to be the motive to liquidate all the ghetto because if there is a contagious diseases in the ghetto, we wind on the other side of the...of the...of the free...free part of the barbed wire, there was a Lithuanian population, also in the...in the very same small suburb. So they...excuse that they would be a danger to the Lithuanian population. They would even be a danger for the German soldiers passing by. And he stood firm. First of all it was a very big morale responsibility to cure. There were excellent physicians in the ghetto. Surgery...and in out this is and out this is, and whatever not a very specialist in medicine. But not one of them was ready to take over the risk and deal with, cure this diseases of typhus and so on. The only who took it over and did hisself the very great, not only respect, but the trust of the Jewish Committee, the Council. Dr. Elkes, the head of the Jewish Council. We're great

friends. They wrote for long years. It was a long standing, long year standing...uh...uh...friendship. And that's why they trusted him fully. He was the...the man, the doctor who was the only one whom the Jewish Council relied upon to protect the ghetto inmates from first of all contagious diseases in...in themselves a danger, and for the other one to stand courageous...courageous and steady right to...to reject and to...to buff back all these questions, sometimes cynical questions, sometimes provocative questions, some provocative unexpected visits. And when Dr. Brauns was...went in the ghetto and he met on...on the streets of this \_\_\_\_\_ and he recognized...and he recognized the Lithuanian physicians who came and they knew what they came for. And immediately just interfered, they told them, "Please, where are you. What are you doing? Please come. You ought to see my hospital. Please and so on." But he knew them. They wanted sometimes to avoid meeting with him, and to reach exactly...uh...the...the...uh...the \_\_\_\_\_ itself, the sick man who was sick with typhus. And this is a task that will be written always in the annals of the three years of the Kovno Ghetto. I don't know of any other such person, physician, who took upon himself the daily risk of life, his own life, in fight from...from both parts. This, you know, the..uh...the Czars emblem was a two...two heads...uh...two heads of a...of a \_\_\_\_\_.

B:Eagle.

T:Eagle. Two of them. And Dr. Brauns, I could say he had...he had two parts of Dr. Brauns. One part they wrote it to his fellow inmates in the ghetto. Protect them from the very diseases. He's a doctor, a physician. And on the part, the second Dr. Brauns who stood on the outlook everyday against the Germans, spies, against the warnings, the threats that they used to say Dr. Brauns, "You are the person who are responsible to report to us and if you will not report you bear responsibility yourself." And you know what it means responsibility? This means just death. No compromise. And I'm not exaggerating. So

this is the way you, Dr. Brauns, in the ghetto...he knew very well because on the...he used to come to the very...very urgent cases, the very especially hard cases. When four or five got sick with contagious diseases at one time, we used to find immediately to take them out from where they been and bring them in certain places we didn't know where.

Because we didn't have such hotels or somewhere to bring them there. But then we used to take even a hut or something like that, take out the dwelling...the...the citizens, the inmates and put in these...uh...under very strong and sometimes we used to put on the outlook on this...on this hiding... hiding hospital you see, uh...the outlook, two or three policemen...Jewish policemen on the outlook so if somebody comes close, near to it.

This I how I knew Dr. Brauns and I cannot but end this...uh...this characteristic that in the course of the years I knew Dr. Brauns from the \_\_\_\_\_ from the Kovno Ghetto? He was the President, but \_\_\_\_\_ the French was really...uh...really was developed in the ghetto and it was only nature that after the liberation when I was already in Israel and I got word that...uh...this Jew came to...we were in Dachau, we were in concentration camp, and then we were in Italy. We were...we were together in the 1945, 1947. You stayed there until later I...I made my \_\_\_\_\_ October 47. So that you came to...to America, you succeeded to...to...to study medicine and establish yourself as a well known physician in the United States and then to learn from you when you visited Israel, you came to me and told me that your father and mother were rescued. They survived and they are in... in Soviet Union and you are trying to bring them out and what can I do for you in this case? I while in Italy I was the Secretary of the clandestine Aleia to Palestine. But we at that time already used to send our messengers inside Russia to take out from there...uh...Zionist...former Zionist leaders and bring them to Italy and then to Israel. So I had all the connections how to take out from Russia to Palestine...to Palestine...to Israel. And it was a fact that I was the only one in Israel that dealt with it and when they used to come to...to...uh...we used to come to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for help, they told them go to Avraham Tory, the lawyer, and they thought they have to come to Tory and



obey me. See and so on, I never took a penny for that. And mind you, the President of the State of Israel, Heil Weitzman, had a sister that remained in the Soviet Union. And then Vera Weitzman, who was a very you know a lady and she was with the all the Ambassadors over there, so she spoke with the Russian Ambassador, they're bringing in...in Washington and she was here and she spoke with the French Ambassador there and here. And they asked. Nothing came out. So then I don't know someway they got word that Avraham Tory is dealing with bring the...the...the Jews from Soviet Union to Israel. I was the first one to bring Pnina's father who was in Siberia, exiled, to bring him the first one in 52. To bring him in...from...from Siberia to Israel. And I had there...when I...when I got word that he's already in Moscow, I...I spoke to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they called the Embassy in Moscow they shouldn't beat him because he is 70 years old man. Anyhow, so the...one of the family of the President came to my office and asked me could I do anything about this? And I told them...gave them one advice. If they want me to deal with to bring the sister of the President, Heim Weitzman, to Israel, they should not mention a word about the President, about Heim Weitzman, about Israel. Nothing! A plain \_\_\_\_\_ woman comes...comes is...is in Russia. She has a sister. It's mention because \_\_\_\_\_ in...in Israel. \_\_\_\_\_ Only the sister should apply. And in their name I applied for a exit visa for this woman, and the...after 6 months she came to Israel. And then I got a very nice letter, nice but it so \_\_\_\_\_. But when your father came to Israel, came to...to...came to Russia, I told you the same thing. You cannot get your father out of the Soviet Union and bring him straight from the Soviet Union to America. I suggest to you you formerly be...live in Israel. And I took your card and I put it on my private home as if you lived together with me in Israel. And they gave you the ...the...the aerograms...Israeli post office and you used to write the aerograms and send them in a closed envelope to me, and I used to put it in the...in the post office in Tele Aviv. And the same thing your parents used to write the letters to you, but send it to...to Jacob Brauns, Tele Aviv, 17 Aldair Street, Tele Aviv, Israel. And I used to send it to you. And

by so doing I succeeded to get the permit for your parents to come to Israel. And it happens so that when my wife went to Berkeley where our oldest daughter was studying at University and she was...was to give birth to a...to a child, that wife was visiting you and you were host, and you took her to Los Vegas and I don't know where. And that date I got...I went to the airport of Lud to meet your father and mother and took them to my home. They were speaking very slow because they shouldn't hear...somebody wouldn't hear this way...how they...they way they were frightened to talk to somebody. And, of course, after several months or so there, you...you...you took them over to the United States. And this is the happy end of Dr. Moses Brauns with his father and with his father, and of course the...the friendship continued with Dr. Brauns and his wife when they were here in Los Angeles, and this friendship grows on with you, and with your family.

B:I want to add something. Being...we have two topics. We have topic of the ghetto, and topic of getting my parents out. I like to add an interesting story to that. When Mrs. Krushev happened to be in the United States, I was lucky enough to be introduced to Vice President Nixon. I wrote a very passionate letter to Mrs. Nixon. I compared two mothers. She is a mother who has two sons and lost her son and my mother who unfortunate lost my brother, one of her sons. And this passionate letter was given by President Nixon to Mrs. Krushev, and within one week we got a permit. However, what you have done, we have really together deceived and covered because my father always said when the mailman used to come, he used to scream loud on the staircase, "Dr. Brauns, I have a letter from your son from Israel." So the \_\_\_\_\_, the KBG, at that time has not...

T:Had no idea.

B: Had no idea the big deception. But the morale of the story is with your help, with President Nixon's help, with Mrs. Krushev's generosity and interest we succeeded it, in this big project to get my parents out. Going back to the ghetto thing, I am recollecting a few things about the ghetto which was about about...about the period you said. First of all, my father was heart broken when he had to take the patients from the contagious disease hospital and bring them to the ghetto. They were transported on open trucks. They were sick people with high temperature and they were dumped on the street. It was at that time when my father had helped to organize or I mean help...with the help of the people because he made a small hospital of 50 beds which was called the contagious disease hospital. The people everyone was very generous in the ghetto. They had nothing, but each found a little sheet, a little pillow, an extra bed to fill a 50 bed hospital, which I personally was working in the hospital. And I...the hospital become a symbol of security for the people. The people when the hospital felt that they feel secure. And you know better Dr. Elkes got a warning about three days before the tragedy in the...in the hospital that they're planning to do something with the hospital. My father went to the hospital and tried to discharge everybody. And fort...I mean unfortunate...fortunately, the people in the hospital were not very sick. They used it mostly as a shelter not to go to work. But nobody wanted to leave the hospital. And you described what happened on October 4th, 1941, with this hospital which was one of the big tragedies. My own life was and my father's life was saved by the fact there was a bridge to cross to the hospital.

T: Up a bridge.

B: An upper bridge I recall went over the highway, over the street or highway which was not part of the ghetto. And for some reason my father never know who it was, there was a man who stopped him. And my father...

T: On his way to the...near the...near the bridge?

B: Near the bridge. And delayed us by 5 minutes. That was the 5 minutes that gave my father and me life. Why don't you describe what happened that time at the hospital?

T: Well, I told already...spoke about it all I want. But what happened that Dr. Brauns usually at 6 o'clock, he was already walked to the ghetto, to the...to his hospital. And they when they came to the...when they came to this day at this 4th of October 1941, he came to pass the bridge, they was already closed. Nobody comes into this small ghetto and nobody goes out. In the small ghetto was the...the contagious disease hospital headed by Dr. Brauns and they didn't let him in. He says, "I am the doctor of the...of the hospital. I must be there. The people are waiting." Not nothing. And you accompanied him. You were at the age of 14 at time.

...16.

...Pardon.

...16. Well, I thought you were younger. Anyhow, it doesn't make really...uh...so...uh...both of you and your father was in great distress. To leave a hospital that he is heading just to the fate of the people. And...and very short after 6 the...the hospital was put on fire with the patients, with the doctors, with administering personnel and also with the adjacent home of orphans of about 400, 300 orphans registered to the \_\_\_\_\_. And the ghetto...the was on fire. The...uh...people...the children were taken to the ninth fortress together with another thousand of the small ghetto and the ghetto, small ghetto, was liquidated.

B: At that time my father made a solemn commitment that the word of contagious diseases did not exist in the vocabulary. And that what led in the clandestine treatment of things. There were two people, as far as I know, you and...and ...uh...and Elkes that knew about it. I happened to know about it too, and I tell you a little about what happened. Uh...The...it's a very interesting thing and my father described it in his memoirs. For some reason that we don't know many of the contagious diseases, like dysentery completed disappeared from the ghetto, inspite of the terrible sanitary conditions. My father's nightmare at that time was the excrement that were used...the winter was very cold. It was the...the coldest winter in the history, actually since Napoleon time, and my father was always saying, "What will happen in the spring when all this excrements will start melting?" But in spite of this, dysentery disappeared. Diphtheria. Diphtheria is a disease that is curable provided you use serum in the proper time. As you are aware, we didn't have diphtheria serum. And if we succeeded by clandestine methods...my father succeeded or you succeeded in the...from the ghetto, you...Altestenrat to get serum, it was always given too late. In spite of that, in all the records that my father kept, there was not one child that died of diphtheria and other diseases. But the really tragedy in the ghetto, for my father, was in 1942. When the Germans were defeated in Moscow, there were a lot of Spanish troops who didn't have proper clothes. The blue brigade. There were Germans who didn't have clothes and they were amputees sick and by train they were sent by the Red Cross train of...German Red Cross train, they were sent to...back to Germany. However, the German...being this people, full of life because the hy...hygienic conditions were worse in the German army of that part than it was in the ghetto. And being them full lice and having typhus \_\_\_\_\_ which is a little different type is from the typhus of the \_\_\_\_\_, which is typhus of the \_\_\_\_\_ is translated through life. So in Kaunas, they established an \_\_\_\_\_, which means they delice.

T: Delousing.

B:Delousing. So the train would arrive and the patient would be taken out from the train, taken off, stripped from the clothes, shaven their hair and their clothes were disinfected, and the train was disinfected. There were two teams working. There was the Jewish team working on the dirty side and there was a Lithuanian team working on the clean side. I don't know if was by providence or whatever happened, the Lithuanian side...people workers there developed typhus.

T:I don't know. I know it.

B:No. Well, developed a epidemic, and many Lithuanians died. As a result, the Lithuanian health department immediately flooded the ghetto, and it is in your book written the dates they came and flooded because they justifiable looked for the...for the cause of the...of the disease. But in the... on the Jewish side, they were 74 cases of typhus \_\_ that my father treated them, hid them, and he got from the Alttestenrat extra soap, extra consideration in moving the patient to certain parts, but he succeeded in...in treating the patients. Now if you take an American textbook, \_\_\_\_, which is a top text book and you write...look up the page on typhus \_\_\_\_, you will find that the morality rate on people who are not treated with any medicine is 60 plus percent. My father in the 74 patients had only 3 deaths, and the only three people were people who begged him to die. They said they would like...love to die in a bed. They are too tired to continue their life. And the Godless in medicine that I practiced for 40 years, I learned that when a patient does not...when a patient does not have...uh... the will to live, he doesn't live.

T:That's right.

B:This was the job of my father. Now I would like to mention a few recollections of my father's.

T:Too late. It's too late.

B:A few recollections...

Q:You're fine. You have 10 minutes.

B:Of my father. What the recollection. What do I remember of my father? I remember my father teaching me the morality of life, which the logic in life morality which I greatly appreciate. I also remember of few things of my father. My father practiced medicine for 40 years, like myself, and never sent a bill to a patient. And I always was wondering how he survived. But he did survive. And he always told me that the last...that the last bill he got paid was the heaviest payment he got. And the...I have to mention it because it's very important. That was...there was a patient in 1938 a woman was brought to the Jewish hospital. She was very poor. The husband was working as a clean...horse cleaner in the Jewish brewer in Lithuanian, which happened to be a Jewish brewery. My father took care of her in 38. My mother put packages of clothes for her, and I remember the house calls that my father used to make and take me because it was in \_\_\_\_\_ and I loved to go. I loved to go for a ride. In 1939, as you recall...uh... the Germans took away the...uh...the port of Clipedell. The Lithuanians got very upset. They took all the Lithuanians of German descent to...uh..and send them to...uh...Germany. This man knew only to clean horses, and in 1944 when my father and I and Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, and Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ and...and \_\_\_\_\_ got to...lager...Dachau, lager 2, this man was the chief of command of the SS. He recognized my father and he extend the most unbelievable courtesy. In fact, he risked his life to help us. One of the things he did outside of helping us in food and I have to mention later a few things, but basically he...uh...when my...when the first patient... person died in lager 2, I wrote in the report 'Died of starvation.' Well, to make a

long story short, this... this report went to Dachau...to Berlin, to send the Commission, and the chief doctor of Dachau who later was hung in the Nuremberg trial was looking for my father to kill him because he wrote a report and a commission came to investigate. At that time the German SS were stealing food, and they were investigating exactly that problem. This SS man of my father's friend took my father out, and my father lived for 6 week in his house til the storm was over. And...uh...I...I...after the war, letters were written by Dr. Nobliski and Dr. Pepsico to save this man from the gallow because he helped. The other thing I want to tell to tell I was in Israel one day and I went into a famous bakery kaposki. And I didn't know about it, but I recognized...he recognized me...Kaposki, the son. And he immediately called his father and he kissed me and hugged me and said, "You don't know what your father did for me." At that time, the son was dying. He had no meat, no protein and needed meat. My father asked this man to provide meat. He didn't...and the German obliged him. He brought meat for Kaposki's son to save him. But I was a muscleman myself and I didn't have meat, and my father did not worry about me because I was not in the medical condition...medical physical condition that he...so this is the character of my father. That one of the dramatic things of my father which took me many years to understand is when my...when the Russian left Lithuanian and the Germans advanced to Lithuanian.

T:I cannot wait. I must go.

B:Please. Please. When the man waited for...uh...they postponed it. But let me finish it please.

A sentence. It's a courtesy. Okay? When the man...uh...when the...the Russia...the Lithuanian government....the Russian Lithuanian government send a car to pick up my father and it was 12 steps or 15 steps from the second floor to go down, my father refused to...to leave and run to Russia where his life and my whole family's he would have saved because he felt he cannot abandoned his patient in the hospital. Uh...I have...I cannot...I



feel that my father...his morality, his philosophy, he lived by it and he taught me the way of life. Sometimes I listened to him. Sometimes I deviated a little from it, but I am very grateful to his being him and teaching me the things that I...I taught.

...Thank you.

**Conclusion of Interview.**