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Irene Weber interview 2/14/95

Sandy: I want you to tell me a little bit about your impression

of liberation. How organized it was, what it meant, what

emotions you saw.

IRENE WEBER:

I was liberated in a strange way. I was in a prison in

Czechoslovakia because i escaped twice. And finally I was

found and put in a prison. And that prison was totally

abandoned by the Nazis and we were locked in until the Red

Cross, the International Red Cross came in and liberated us,

and opened the doors for us. But where I was liberated

where the Russians came in to liberate the place, that area.

In Czechoslovakia. So I was--of course, they didn't just

let us go, but they--we had health check-up, we were de

liced and sent to the hospital the persons that needed it,

needed hospitalization were sent there. I went to the

hospital. Because I suffered from undernourishment and I

had the symptoms, and while I was in the hospital something

happened that really made me feel good. I saw the mighty

German armies through the window in the hospital, I was the

armies walking with their arms up and hands behind their

heads, and the Russians soldiers that were leading them. And

this is when I really believed the war is over.

Sandy: Tell me how organized it was after the Red Cross

came in, what happened.

IRENE WEBER:

Then, as I said, they checked us out and put us in the

hospital and after that, I was on my own. I did not really

, I was not in any organization under any supervision of any

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kind. I was free and i was on my in ? in Czechoslovakia.

What I got from the Red Cross was change of clothes and

little bit of money to tie me over and from then on--I did

not want to go back to Poland. If I wish to go back, they

would have arranged it. But I didn't want to go back, I had

no one to go back to. So I stayed in Czechoslovakia. I

got, I met a girlfriend, and we had small apartment that was

left by the Germans that escaped and we stayed there, yeah,

and I wasn't quite well yet. I met that girl in in the pr,

in the hospital and I had to look for a way to make some

money. And of course registered as a Czechoslovakian

citizen. I totally rejected my Polish background at that

time.

Sandy: Was there much support ,,,?

IRENE WEBER:

I did not feel abandoned, I felt free. It was very hard for

me. But the strange thing is that I was not in contact with

any other people that came from concentration camps , so I

was really totally detached from everything. And I wanted

to make life for myself and go to school and I had to work

and learn on the job because I wanted to be free and I

wanted to be away from from everything..

Sandy: Tell me about the --tell me about the physical

condition you were in when you were liberated. Like what

you looked like, how much you weighed.

IRENE WEBER:

I lost a lot of weight and I had wounds in my mouth from

undernourishment, so I was treated for that. And I had, I

had wounds inside my cheeks inside my mouth,. so I was sick

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until I stayed in the hospital for probably close to two

months.

Sandy: Did they--you said they gave you clothes, do you

remember the clothes?

IRENE WEBER:

Yes,

Sandy: Tell me about it.

IRENE WEBER:

A pair of shoes, flat heeled shoes, socks a dress that I

remember distinctly, quite nice, and that's about all. And

the reason I could in that apartment and not need anything

because everything was left behind, linens and dishes and

things like that. But I still was not quite well, I had the

gastro-intestinal problem for long time.

Sandy: Now tell me about the occasion that you came to a

displaced persons camp.

IRENE WEBER:

Well, after a while in Czechoslovakia, the Russians, the

communist party was voted into power, and as soon as this

happened we were not allowed to leave the country and we

were closed in. We had to have out IDs with us all the

time, and there was lots of propaganda, how wonderful life

is under communism. I was very young, somehow I did not

believe that because I thought if can not leave, if I cannot

travel and leave the country, it didn't sound good to me. I

was not very well informed on the ideology of the communist

party, but I just didn't like it. So I went to Prague. Was

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very difficult, I just left everything behind,i just take

the little bag, took a little baggage with my clothes and

went to Prague and tried to get help to get out of the

country. I was very determined to get out and be free.

That was my--this is what I wanted most just to be free.

And with there was an organization, underground organization

that smuggled people through the border and I remember we

had, I had to stay in Prague a couple of days and then we

went on a bus. There were several people. WE went on he bus

to the border line. There we spent the night which was

absolutely horrible, and at a certain time we were told, now

we can crawl under the fence and get to the other side to

Germany. And that was the American zone of Germany. And I

did that and it was a terrible experience this whole thing

because there were renegades and people that were not very

kind to us. And we our my life was in danger in really.

But once I crossed the border, there was a bus waiting for

me,for several people I guess, and we were taken to

Landsberg In Germany, in west Germany. And there we were in

a DP camp.

Sandy: Tell me about that.

IRENE WEBER:

I didn't like it at all because again I was in a camp with

bunkbeds and crowded and lots of people and no privacy. And

it just felt that I was in a camp again except thee were no

Nazis around. Ad I don't know how I met--and people lived

there, they were getting married, they had babies. And they

didn't have babies while I was there, but they were

pregnant,and I thought, this is not a life--I can't do that,

I cannot stay here. And then I found out that one of our

people somehow was on a farm several miles away from

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Landsberg, and I wanted to see her and I walked several

miles and met her. I knew her from concentration camp, and I

told her I wanted to stay with her, I don't want to be in a

camp again. I want to stay with her if she will have, let

me stay until I find a different way and I can settle and

something until? figure out what to do with myself. And so

I did. I picked up my little bundle again, and I went to the

farm. And I was working, it was a German family that owned

the farm. And I was working on the farm a little to earn my

keep. And in the meantime, I found out that there is a

place that there are several of our people settled in and

that is Rosenheim. Not too far from Munich. And this

is--and I went there. I went to Rosenheim, and I got a

room, two room, actually, a sitting and a bedroom, with a

German family. And I paid them. The only means of paying

them I had is because the jewish organization was sending us

cheese, 5 found boxes of cheese, and wine and cigarettes.

And I didn't drink the wine and I didn't smoke the

cigarettes. I ate the cheese. So I sold it and some kind

of shortening, I sold all that to the Germans, I gave it to

them and they let me stay and gave me a few dollars, marks,

not dollars. And I stayed there and then I thought now what

next step is. I have to go to school. I have to do

something. And I found about that was ORT, I think, the

American ORT. I went to Munich and I found out about that.

And I, I chose nursing school. And then I had to go to

Foehrenwald,which is a small town, a village and this is

where

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IRENE WEBER:

So I found about the nursing school and I went there and I

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went to school, I practiced in the hospital, and when I

finished I got my diploma, I got a job in Poking which was a

DP camp also. But I lived in the nurses quarters. And I

was, my patients were all survivors. And many people were

going on the Alia to Israel. And we were taking care of,

taking blood and helping out that way, and I also had a

steady job in the hospital, in the DP hospital, hos hospital

for displaced persons.

Sandy: Tell me about the people going to Israel.

IRENE WEBER:

They were people just like myself. Some of them, young,

some of them older people. They all wanted to go. And many

of them did, I think. Of course, it was not yet, Palestine

was not yet the state of Israel, is was Palestine, and they

actually were entering illegally. The country that is now

Israel. But nevertheless they wanted to go there. I

probably would have gone to Israel after finishing my duty.

I felt that I am doing a very important job. working as a

nurse in a DP hospital. And then I thought that I may

eventually go to Israel.

Sandy: Tell me again about not wanting to stay in Landsberg

and why.

IRENE WEBER:

Why I didn't want to stay, I have to stress very much that

the conditions were very crowded. No privacy of any kind,

and too many people, and too much eh emotionally it reminded

me of the concentration camp, although it was not. And I

realize that all along, of course, and I was free to leave

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whenever I wanted which was great. But the life in those,

in the DP camp was not for me. Lots of people were very

happy that they had this safety of those camps. I just

chose not to stay there.

Sandy: What about being in Germany, travelling in Germany.

WERe you afraid?

IRENE WEBER:

No, I was not afraid, because I kept still my place in

Rosenheim, My room, And I was quite a distance away in

school, so about once in two weeks I used to come by train

back to my place, knowing just I want I just had to know I

had a place of my own, my privacy is so important to me.

And I traveled back to school throughout the whole night

because the railroads were bombed, and I had to change two

or three trains, and I slept while waiting for the next

train, I just slept on the bench and the station master knew

me, and the gave me some blankets, army blankets to cover

myself up because it was cold. And I was never afraid,

Somehow I was never afraid. I was the only at that station

in the middle of the night because I travelled at night. I

started late afternoon and I travelled at night so I could

be back in school in the morning.

Sandy: Were you given enough support after liberation?

IRENE WEBER:

Well I tried really to help myself as much as I could when I

was in Czechoslovakia. I didn't get any support because I

left this whole, you know, network of help, you know. So I

didn't get it. But when I went back, when I came to Germany

I did get the support. Whether it was enough or not, I

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really don't know from the perspective of those times. It

probably was very help- helpful. So, but I thought I cannot

continue doing this forever. I wanted to build-make some

life and future for myself. And when I was working in the

hospital, of course, there was some money that I got. I was

paid for my job and also we still had some aid from the

United States, Jewish Organizations, the Joint Organization

and the UNRAA and such, so it was. Yes, I did travel in

Germany. And I just simply did not have any fear at all

because I felt that what I went through during the years of

war and concentration camp, and especially prison, and after

escaping, then I had nothing to be afraid of.

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