

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Frances Davis
August 3, 1995
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Frances Davis, conducted by Randy Goldman on August 3, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Murrieta, CA, and is part of the United States Holocaust Research Institute's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

FRANCES DAVIS

August 3, 1995

01:00:43

Q: I'd like you to begin please by telling me your name, where you born and when you were born and your name at that time as well.

A: That means my maiden name, right? Yes, o.k. My maiden name is Frances Przygorska. Shall I spell it for you?

Q: Sure.

A: The last name P-r-z-y-g-o-r-s-k-a.

Q: Your name today?

A: My birthday is November 12, 1918. My married name is Frances Davis, D-a-v-i-s. I was born in Lodz, Poland on November 12, 1918.

01:01:47

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family life before the war?

A: We were just two children at home when we grow up. My self, I was the older one, the oldest and my brother who is a few years younger than I am. My brother is still alive. We come from a very caring family. My father was the sole supporter of the family at this time,

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and my mother was - He was a textile designer. He managed a textile mill with 300 people. My mother was a housewife. And they're very loving and very devoted to the family, my parents. So, I grew up, they were very charitable, you know, orthodox people but at the same time they were interested what's going on in the world. They read papers, they spoke a few languages, except Yiddish, we spoke at home Yiddish. That's why I know to speak Yiddish very well. Never forgot.

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Just, you know, middle income people. At the summer, when I was younger, my mother used to go -- the climate is like, winters are very cold in Europe, in this part of Europe, and summers are hot but dry, so she used to go when we were small, she used to go to the country. So, I remember that time in the woods and it was very nice. Later on when I was older and I went to high school, I loved to travel so I just traveled the whole Poland with groups, with students and things like that. Later on I didn't want to go with my mother. So, what else?

01:04:13

Q: What about your schooling?

A: First I went to public school and then they sent me to private, one of the best private schools in town. I'll tell you about the city a little bit, Lodz. Lodz is called the Polish Manchester. That's the city of fabrics. It's just they make fabrics, not, like lining, linen fabrics. Not very expensive fabrics like woolens, there were other cities in Poland. It was mostly, in, maybe

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one third of the population, about 100,000 at that time, maybe a few years before the war, there were 100,000 Germans living in Lodz. They were mostly professionals working in the textile business.

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My father was a very reputable man in the community; they used to ask him all the time when people had a dispute, to, according he was learned in, little in the Talmud and they didn't want to go to court, they would ask, I'm talking about Jewish people. They would ask; he, Raul would know what means, "Beit Din" (?) [court of Jewish law] --

Q: No, talk to me please.

A: O.k. He would know, he would understand what means -- to make a judgment, he'd listen to both sides and they will obey for that what, my husband think, he has to be a very respectable person. Sometimes he did that just for no money, just to help out people. He always tried that he get, you know, it was at the times the government in Poland was not anti-semitic, but the people were.

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See, it's different, and you live with the people, right? So he tried to see that some Jewish people will be employed in the factory; it would depend on my father. He tried. Even the owners didn't, they were our family, the name of the factory was Prechegubski(ph.). It was cousins that he worked for.

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So, we were very comfortable before the war. They sent me to high school, the best high school in town. When you graduated high school you had to take five years Hebrew, five years a foreign language, I took German, five years Latin. So, you can imagine when you graduated school it's like two years college in the United States.

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Q: This was a Jewish high school?

A: I mean, it's not, it's not, it hasn't anything to do about religion. It's not like a shiva.

Q: But the students were Jewish?

A: Mostly, yes, mostly. Anybody else could go there.

Q: I'm trying to get a sense of the Jewish community in Lodz and whether you mixed with Gentiles that sort of thing.

A: We mix with Gentiles?

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Yes, if we had some neighbors, mostly where we lived, it were like, we had about three addresses where we lived a long time in Lodz. Mostly were Jewish people, but some we had very good relations with people. My parents were respected and loved in the community.

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Q: Was there sort of a rich Jewish community culturally and politically that you were part of?

A: I tell you, this I tell you, we had a really Jewish observant home. All the holidays, all the Saturdays and everything was really observed. When I became a teenager, I belonged to a Zionist organization, the Herzlia. I never did anything that will, most my, my parents didn't know that I belonged to that organization. Because either they were for it that a Jewish state should be established, that we'd have a place to go like we used to have a long time ago.

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Girls were raised at that time not to have special, that they get independent, that they get a trade to make for the future. Not always stay with parents, stay 20 years with the parents and then you live by yourself and get married and have a family and children. Well, I had different ideas. I wanted to first, I don't know where I got the idea, but I had my idea, I wanted to be independent. Wherever I go and whatever I'm going to be; that was before the war. That I can make a living somehow and not be dependent on anybody else.

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Q: So, what was the value of this Zionist organization. Why were you doing it and what did they teach?

A: The goal is to bring the youth, everybody that wanted to go to Israel had to go as a pioneer and it was called the Aliyah Bet. That means illegal immigration. Because it was the English mandate, you know. First before were the Turks, then the English came and they didn't let anybody in. People had to smuggle in the boats and things. So, that was it.

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It was to bring up now like we want to bring up the Jewish youth will remember the Holocaust. At that time, it was that the Jewish youth for the future they will come and settle in Palestine, that was Palestine, right, and build a land and politically, that we can, what happened after the war, but had to be a Hitler first, to bring a Jewish state.

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Q: So, before the war you felt strongly about Palestine?

A: Right, about the Jewish state, yes, definitely.

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Q: Now, you had a large German community. What did you know about Hitler and Nazism in Germany proper at that time?

A: Ah, we, we watched that. And in 1933, when Hitler was first legally voted and became the chancellor and he made the -- he burned the Reichstag and the [authors] and the books, so we were very well informed what's going on. We couldn't imagine what a magnitude and what it's going to be. A lot of people who had a lot of money could make plans and go elsewhere. The border's open if you have a lot of money.

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But if you're middle income people and you have no, you live, maybe you have some savings, you can't just afford to escape, even before the war, some years before you can even plan about this.

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I remember one incident and that lasts for me forever. I was home by myself and came at the door a vendor. He was a German, and he wanted to sell me something. I didn't have no idea and nothing on my mother wanted it, I said I'm sorry, I just don't need anything, nobody's home and I won't buy anything from you, and thank you. And you know what he told me. He told me I, this with angry and with such a hate, he told me now wait until Hitler will come and you see what happen to you Jews.

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Q: Did you take that threat seriously?

A: You know, it made a, because it happened and because of the outcome, I've never forget this. That's why so many years -- That was maybe two years before the war. So, you know how the Germans were very, and a lot of Poles collaborated with them.

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Q: At the time '38, '39, were you finished with school? Were you working? What were you doing?

A: I was going part time to college, what Lodz had to offer, it was called Wszechnica(ph.). That was like free university. I always took classes in art. I was interested in fashion design and always wanted to paint. I never had time. I was designing clothes and I was taking courses in fashion design. I was very good at it. What other people took in two years, I made in one year.

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The teacher that was there she said, there were some students that were with me in the high school, she said, well this one must be an apprentice somewhere. Because how did she know, in Poland at that time you just didn't go to school and learn a trade. You were sitting for a couple of years in a, with a dressmaker, a good one and you learned the trade that way. Didn't get paid anything, beginning. That was apprenticeship. So, she said, she must have

been -- and there was one that went to me to school, she said no, no, we just graduated school last year and she never went to, she wasn't apprentice, no place. She couldn't understand; and you know what, I envy that teacher of mine, I remember her name, that I want to be once and do what she does. And that realize, I was teaching the same way she did.

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Q: How did all this change and when did it change?

A: Well then, in 1939 the war came. Lodz was not far from the German border. By September 8, the city of Lodz was occupied without any opposition.

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There was no -- Warsaw it took them to take, six weeks it took them, until they take that part of Poland, but Lodz they took without a shot.

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So, the Germans came with a big parade with the tanks and with the airplanes on top, and people, when the day would, people come, there was a, I remember, was like an exodus. People were, whatever they could, they put, you know, bundles and things. Whoever had cars had the car in, had horse with a buggy, whoever buy food; and people try escape the city towards Warsaw. On that road, so many people got killed because the Germans flew over

their heads and they were throwing, you know, shooting. And the screaming was, like -- A lot of people never made the destination where they wanted to go.

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Some wanted to run away to Russia. Russia later on was no picnic either because what they did to one they escaped, they put them to jail, sent them to Siberia.

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So, and then they came in September. We know the things, but we couldn't imagine what is waiting for us. We just couldn't. Slowly they started to, with the Jewish star, with the thing, and then, by January 1940, they had, they chased all the Jewish population to the ghetto, an old dilapidated section of the town near the Jewish cemetery. There was a round thing with barbed wire and little bridges to pass for people to go out and in, overpasses, and towers, watch towers.

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Q: Let me just interrupt you a moment because there's a lot I want you to explain about the ghetto, but there were a few months in between and I'm trying to get a sense of what your life was like and what happened to the Jewish people. Were there orders and restrictions, and what was going on in the city before the ghetto was formed in those few months. Was it scary?

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A: It was very scary and we know that we had no other choice, I mean, I'm talking about my family. We had no other choice, even from my family the young people, cousins like, my mother came from a family of four; they were all were married, so there were cousins about my age, a little younger. So, they escaped.

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They were, and some, this one, my cousin from my mother's side, just disappeared. We never heard from him anymore. He run away toward Warsaw, what happened to him nobody knows. We couldn't find a person that would know or heard of him or anything. To organizations, nobody could find what happened to him.

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My mother's youngest brother -- people went to different towns, and they thought maybe they escaped because Lodz was called as the Reich, that means the main thing. The other parts like where David come from, I don't think was the Reich, was just like a next territories. So, here they want to put all the rules that go for their own country, and that was industrial city and they had a lot of support because there was a lot of German population.

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There was about at least 300,000 Jews in Lodz. It was a very cultural city. All the concerts, Jewish theater, used to come Maurice Schwartz, biggest singers and players. Used to come first to the Philharmonic in Lodz. I used to go. I loved the theater; and it was a very cultural

city. Libraries and everything.

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So, we knew that something dreadful, but we could not imagine in our wildest imagination that something like this would happen.

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Q: Did you family have plans? Do you remember what you talked about, what you should do?

A: No, I don't think we had any choice what to do, because that required a lot of money. My parents didn't have that kind of money. You know, to lend in a different-- you know you need a passport for that, and you need a passport, well you could buy it, let's, you know how it is. For money you could get everywhere. You could get to the United States. People didn't know;

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there were people that came back in '39, back when they went for a tourist trip to the United States and they came back, to share our goal, I mean, all the things what happened to the people; because they didn't know what happened, what's going to happen.

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Q: So in this period between September --

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A: Uncertainty, uncertainty and very, waiting, just waiting what everyday used to bring something else. First they were kind, friendly. We shouldn't be afraid of them, you know, when they marched in. And then they started with the business and the local people started, the Germans they raised their heads. They said not to buy from the Jews. They took away everything what we lived. The population, our neighbors, they took over our homes, our furniture, everything what they had. You could take only what you -- when we went to the ghetto, you could only take with you what you can move. That's all you could take with you.

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Q: So there was no real normal life left? After the Germans came?

A: No.

Q: Could you go to synagogue?

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Q: I was asking if there was any part of your regular life left? Did you continue to go to synagogue?

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A: I don't remember. My father used to go for the high holidays. They used to take a sitter and leave it open I should say my prayers. Put something between the pages.

Q: So, you were still allowed to do this after the Germans arrived?

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A: Well, after they arrived -- it doesn't come over night, you know. They have to slowly, slowly, it get worse and worse, then every day comes a loud "Achtung!", that's take care, look, what kind of rule they're going to put. And everything was special directed against the Jewish population, you understand.

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So, then we started to wear the star of David. We had to wear it on the left side, on the chest, right here. So, we knew that -- I tell you Lodz knew because when they had crystal night, that was in November 1938.

Q: In Germany?

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A: From Germany, they chased out all the Jewish people, just they broke the windows, that's why it's called crystal night. They broke the business windows and the glass and they chased all the people out. They just ran out to the boarder. They came to Lodz, and the Jewish

community in Lodz took care of them. That I remember and it really hurt me.

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I knew how to speak German and you walked on the -- that was before the war, after this happened, the crystal night, there came a lot of German people. They considered themselves better than the Polish people. They always said they were more educated, more intelligent, more assimilated; that for sure they were.

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And they used to say, I tell you in German and then translate: "in unser Vaterland." They used to go on the main thing, it was a beautiful Petegauer Strasse(ph.) in Lodz, beautiful stores, with, you know, like Fifth Avenue in New York, and they used to say, "Oh, in unser Vaterland!" They chased them out to where they were and they still said, "in unser Vaterland," that means, in our country; the German, it's their country.

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So, people were stupid. They all ended up anyway, going to Auschwitz and you know what Auschwitz was.

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So, I'm just telling you the atmosphere wasn't any good, even before the war; and when the

Germans came we knew that the Poles, they could never defend themselves and just against, because they had -- they prepared for that, for the annexation of, you know, without one shot.

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Q: These "Aktionen" in the first few months, were any people beaten or killed? Were people sent away anywhere? What were some of these before the ghetto?

A: Before the ghetto? That, I, to tell you the truth, I don't remember. The whole hell started when we went to the ghetto. We knew, we expected the ghetto, you're going to be rationed food.

Q: You knew this before you went in?

A: Oh, sure. We knew. We expected this, but not to such a degree, how life became. It was terrible.

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Now he had to determine, where he put the Jews to the ghetto, he had to determine a Jewish management of the Jewish people, so the German Jews, his name was -- he was a man that was 72 years old at the time and he ran an orphanage in that part of the city, before. So, they chose him as the Judenälteste, as the commander and chief, he was responsible for the Jewish people. Chaim Rumkowski. I'm sure you heard that name.

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So, you want me to tell how was, because he had to organize the ghetto like a separate identity, has nothing to do with the city where the general public lived. So, he had everything separate. They had, they have working place --

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Q: Let me just stop you because we only have a couple minutes left on this tape. How did you get to the ghetto, what did you take with you?

A: We walked to the ghetto. A car we didn't have at the time, so we walked and we took bundles that everybody could just take. My mother, my father, myself, I don't remember.

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My brother was a counselor and he worked in a place, I think he worked in the orphanage, in that part, that's called Marishin(ph.), that's out of town, that was, the ghetto was there. He worked there. He lived there. He didn't come home. It was -- that was a job that sometimes he couldn't home for a couple weeks. Sometimes on the weekend he would come home.

02:00:45

Q: We were talking about your moving to the ghetto.

A: We had a place to go in the ghetto because my mother's, my uncle, one of my uncles, his business was -- he lived in that part of the, because he made a living from giving out to women; you know, they manufacture, in Poland, the women wore, Polish women wore big, black shawls, woolen shawls with big fringes. When the shawls were made in the factory, woven, then they had to be given out to people, to women who made some money on the side. And made, the fringes had to be, you know, you get the threads, to cut, and to make it and to put it on on the thing, black fringes.

02:01:55

So, the women used to come to him, he'd give them a bundle and they bring it back, and that was his job. And because these people, that did that job lived in that section, so he lived in that section. My mother's, next from my mother's, her brother. So he lived there, so he got for us an apartment.

02:02:20

There was a room and a kitchen. I remember that place. He lived on the other side. I remember the address, and it was just on the border; it was Mimanoskigo(ph.) 19. On the top, when you go out on the street, there was the overpass to go out, outside the ghetto.

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Then we had, our grandfather, my maternal grandfather, grandmother had passed away some

time ago. So he, before the war he lived by for himself. Then he lived for a while with us, and when the ghetto came he lived in the same building with the uncle, with us. He had a room for himself. He wasn't so easy, you know, people get older; they're not easy in some bad circumstances. He wasn't so easy. I think by the time we went to the ghetto he passed away; uncle Heinrich Novomirst(ph.). Grandfather -- Then, so,

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so, my father, from malnutrition my father got sick. He had diabetes and I used to -- he was very well, working and everything, and when I was in high school, it was before the war, I used to make him insulin injections, for my father, in the arm, all the time, everyday. We came in the ghetto, was no, he died away of malnutrition in 1942, in April 1942.

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So, we have a -- then and there's a place we put a stone, on the cemetery, the old Jewish cemetery in Lodz. And I, I wasn't there, but sometime, my cousins from Israel came there and I know because we got some money through some friends that lived in Poland, not Jewish friends, and they put up a stone, they sent a picture us. So, we have a picture of my father's stone. Anyway, I come now to '42 --

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Q: No.

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A: No, you don't want to go so fast.

Q: No, don't go so fast. I want to know more about life in the ghetto.

02:05:10

A: The life in the ghetto -- Now, at that point we knew that conditions, everything was rationed. You know, it was a rationed bread; and the rest we got some every week or every month, we got that many supplies on the Karte [card] and that was it. Then you can buy everything on the black market, but for you need the money. Now, how long the money that last. People would sell their jewelries and diamonds and whatever they have, and some people have dollars. Anything that had value, to live, to survive.

02:06:00

Well, it looked like, really hopeless. Conditions about health, forget about it. First of all, there were places to work. We worked for the employer or the German government. They had factories there they made. Factories from clothing. I worked in one. They took people that could -- they were trained in certain things and they, it was, that's why I think I survived, because I always worked.

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Q: What kind of work did you do in the ghetto?

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A: I worked in the factory, that they manufactured women's housedresses, very plain dresses. From shiny fabric you know, and very plain dresses. At the beginning I used to work in the, I was responsible for the cutting room.

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If you, we cut 300 pieces, 300 dresses at one time, the layout, to make the front and the back and the collars and the cuffs and the sleeves and everything, what you need, and you have to make the layout, that you use the least fabric. Then you had, they had machines that they cut, and men was mostly employed.

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You had to watch them that when it goes, and then they make bundles when it's cut up. For each, let's say, the one that stitches on the machine and then Then the white dress has a front and a back and whatever, and two sleeves and a double collar and cuffs and pockets and whatever it needs for a dress, so in neat bundles; let's say, she got 10 or 12 dresses, so she made. It was like section work.

02:08:20

One used to make let's say sleeves and the other used to make collars and the other, until a whole bunch we got ready. How they work in the garment industry today.

Q: Who were these dresses for?

A: For the German government. Went to Germany it went.

Q: Did you work hard?

02:08:42

A: Yes. I'm telling you I was responsible for the cutting room. It was, if something would go wrong, and the cutters would get, let's say, I wouldn't have a good relationship with them, talk to them nice or whatever, or criticize them too much, or whatever, they had a way to get back at me, like cutting in.

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If you cut in, let's say, in the collar, where you have to have a round, and you cut in straight, you can't use that part ever, so you need more fabric. So, the Germans come and say hey, you need more fabric. What's the matter? You doing sabotage?

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So, it was like you had to use a lot of diplomacy. I was young then. That was a matter of survival. Because I worked there, I got a little better ration than other people. It was a responsible job. I work at that factory all the time. Then they changed. They stopped the, later, when they stopped the dresses, they gave me another job in the same factory.

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They started working on women's bras and intimate things, the pieces. So, I was then. But I never had any problem with the cutters, so, because I knew that I could be responsible with my head, if something went wrong and they spoil some pieces.

02:10:28

Q: You mentioned sabotage, was there sabotage in these factories in the Lodz ghetto?

A: Some people tried of course. But if you made and you got caught, you risked your life. They shot you right on the spot. There is, there is no mercy.

02:10:53

Oh, if you want to know how the German behaved, when they saw the Jewish people, you know they could recognize the Jewish people in Poland, the religious. They wore a flat hat, and they had beards, and the locks. No, my folks didn't wear this, no. So, if they saw on the street people like that, the SS men or the SA, they grab them, and they were the laugh of the whole public, and they cut the beards and cut the locks. It was such a horror, and they beat these people up, no matter how old the men were or children.

Q: Did you see this?

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A: Oh sure, that I see, yes. That was before the ghetto.

Q: Did the Germans come into the ghetto much, or was it run by itself?

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A: No, they just gave directives and things to the Judenälteste, to the commander. Sometimes they came in to inspect things. We didn't like when they came in. The Judenälteste was bad enough. He had, like Dave talk about kapos, we had twenty kapos,

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that mean Jews, who were against their own brothers. Who were collaborating with the Germans. It was that they were good, that you should be law and order and stuff, but they were really bad people. You had to have no heart to have a job like this.

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That there was the same thing in all cities, they had the same, that the Jewish people, the German picked, not the German, but the Judenälteste, the commander, picked some people and that was his police, the kapos. Called them the kapos.

02:12:58

Q: How extensive was this Jewish administration? What kinds of roles did they --?

A: Well, their role mostly were, in the beginning, life was so bad, we just didn't know what happened the next day, because they grabbed people from the streets sometimes.

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Sometimes they just came in, knocked at the home, took off the father, and left the children, and if somebody protested at the thing, either the kids or something, they cry, or they make an alarm or stuff, they shoot a few people right away, because they couldn't stand that somebody was against their will, protested.

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So, we know, a lot of people just got, we lost a lot of people this way. That they came to homes and they just took away people, at random.

Q: This was a constant threat?

A: Yes. Constant, constant.

02:14:02

And then, when they established a way, how to get rid of people, the crematoria, then they wanted people, it says that the people register for work. So, at the beginning, because the

conditions, the food was terrible. You know what we ate?

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We got a ration of bread. Then we would buy, not potatoes, potatoes would be very good. We used to buy potatoes peels, wash them, scrub them that they should be sandy and grind them and make potato pancakes, Latkes(ph.). That was -- and we got some oil, it was a ration, if you want this oil for a month or whatever, and so we used that, and kollrabi, that was the vegetable that you get. Everything you could buy on the black market. But that was, was skyhigh. It was just affordable to people who had a lot of money.

02:15:23

Q: Who was running this black market?

A: Who's running the black market?

Q: Within the ghetto?

A: Within the ghetto? Oh, within the ghetto. Sure, within the ghetto. It was always some private. You go there and you know one who knows this, and this, and you go there and could buy eggs. You could buy a chicken, but you need the money.

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Then the health conditions were very, very bad. Sanitation was bad. Old people were dying. There was no medication. There were very few doctors. Life was hopeless. Sanitation was terrible. There was no sewage, so they had to, you know, cesspools, so all the time they haul wagons to clean, the thing would run all day to the city back and forth and then something else. Those little wagons that they picked up the dead people every day, how many people died in the ghetto every day.

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From malnutrition, from disease, and people got sick, there was no hope. If you got sick and you work and you didn't come to work, then that was the worst thing. I learned this in the ghetto. If you get sick and you don't come to work, in a few days they come after you to find out why. The deportation was the worst thing.

02:17:14

At the beginning, people who wanted, thought that they go in, the German said that they sending the people to labor camp. They're going to work. They're going to be fed better, better conditions, better living conditions, so a lot of people, men, young people, volunteered, and they wanted to go. Never heard anybody came back, never, until, first we knew what happened to these people is, see the Germans kept everything secret. They tried to, everything to be hidden.

02:17:56

In 1942, somebody escaped from Chelmno. You know, when they shoot, what they did with the people before they had the, how you call it, the crematoria, is, they took the men and they told them to dig, like graves, but one big grave. When we dug the grave, they, when they were ready, they figure out, it's enough for a pile for that many people, they start the thing, and they say, face in and they shoot from the back and the bodies fell in and they pile up and that was the end.

02:18:41

So, one guy was shot, but he wasn't shot dead. So, he crawled out from that after they left and somebody helped him out, and he came back to the ghetto, and he told the story.

02:19:01

So, then he knew that they're building a crematoria and they going be much faster. That all, they mostly think, that they selected people that able bodies go to work, and women with children and invalids, everything goes; they liquidate. That was called the final solution.

02:19:31

So, in 1942, so the whole ghetto was very panicky, after this, because they never knew. First, they gave that Judenälteste, Chaim Rumkowski, they gave him like an order that they need 500 able bodies. So, he had to select. His friends and his acquaintances he wouldn't select, so he took people just at random, whoever bad luck was, you went. And people didn't want to go, so there was a, they opposed him, and then it came to a point in the ghetto that

people just didn't want to go voluntarily, so he went to the Germans and he told them, that he can't deliver because people didn't want to go.

02:20:34

So, they made their way that they're going take themselves. Sometimes they came with dogs and people couldn't go out from the homes. They came, you know, those big dogs, and they smell out people and if there was a person inside hidden the dog will start barking and they will break the door and find that person and drag them down and they will shot it in front of everybody. So, anyway --

02:21:12

Q: Were there certain categories of people that went first? I mean were there people that they decided to deport first or was it just everyone?

A: People with families with small children and things. Well, like I tell you.

02:21:37

Now we come back closer to 1942, because I told you the conditions and how was, how the ghetto, the streets of the ghetto were looking, and what was the most thing you could see driving there. The dead bodies and cleaning the cesspools. That's what you saw in the ghetto, on the streets.

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Q: Let me just ask you were there --

02:22:20

A: I'll tell you about the culture. There was an underground too. They tried to, there was an underground. There was, when the ghetto was finally, in 1944, liquidated, there was underground left 800 people. They lived under the ghetto and at night they would go out for products and stuff. They had friends that helped them out. They remained, when we were sent to Auschwitz, they remained and were liberated later by the Russians by the end of the war.

Q: Did you know any of these people? Did you know about it at the time?

02:23:01

A: We know there was an underground, yes, but I didn't have contact with them.

Q: Did they help you at all in any way?

A: No. They were Poles who helped out with the -- but they tried to be very inconspicuous. They couldn't be visible, because the German would; they wanted, these people mostly lived through the war, because who ever survived healthwise. They wasn't, when the ghetto was -
-

02:23:44

they came out and they mixed with the other neighbors. If the neighbors didn't just tell them that they Jewish, they wouldn't know. But anyway, that was the story.

02:24:04

Now, I'll tell you how I lost my mother. Do you want to hear that?

Q: Yes, I still want to ask a few more question. Whether there were efforts to help the people in the ghetto, whether there were welfare organization or educational, trying to help the children or culture.

02:24:24

A: Yes, there were, I myself had a group of young children, maybe eight, ten, girls and boys, mostly girls, that I teach them dressmaking, sewing. Once a week, there was a class, that was volunteer work.

Q: It was permitted?

02:24:47

A: This was permitted. Like Jewish status(?) would not permit it. But there were, they were hidden. There's a lot of things that were hidden in the ghetto, because Jewish people don't give up their culture and their stuff.

Q: Were there cultural activities that you went to that were hidden or anything like that?

02:25:14

A: Cultural activities? I tell you, we had so much tzures, you know, troubles, our own, health, nutrition, family, that besides that what happening with our neighbors, our immediate family, that wasn't even the will to participate in anything, all the time. In the evening we wouldn't go out, no place. At day time, I work. Then I had my mother.

02:25:56

In six months my mother, you know I lost my mother she was only 48 years old, and my father died at 54. That's the hardest story to tell.

02:26:45

Once there were, the German came and they made, that was in 1942, was six months after, about five six months after my father passed away. It was about August, September at the time of the Jewish holidays, and the German came and they want a transport. At that time Rumkowski could not make it, so he said to the German, you come in the ghetto and do it. So, they came. You know how brutal they were.

02:27:27

So, they came and they ordered everybody "Raus!," out, from the houses. At that time, my mother was my responsibility. In six months she became -- her hair became white, grey. She was a young woman, after she lost her husband.

02:27:58

So, my brother worked as a counselor and at least he had better food than we had, the two that were still there. So, he worked with the orphans there. So, I didn't see him, it was maybe ten miles away. So, how could I see him. No telephone, nothing. It was like I was one, alone, and my mother was my responsibility.

02:28:26

So, I figured do I go down or not go down. Then people said, if you don't go out, on the streets, they'll come with dogs and it's going to be even worse. So, I went down, and from my side, they took away my mother.

02:28:54

They grabbed her, and I couldn't do anything, I wanted to go with her. That was the last time I saw my mother.

02:29:05

I knew the place where they had the gathering place of all the people that they took, so at

night, and the next day they took just a few days until they organized and they have wagons on the side, a train to put them in, to a different -- But from Lodz, the first time they put people to Chelmno, it was in the woods and they made this thing that I told you. I think they had the first chimneys over there.

Tape 2

03:00:48

A: I left at that point, that next day they took my mother, I got a note from her, somebody came from there and brought me her wedding band and a note; and so I felt that I want to see her. So, it came to evening. I got dressed, dark. I took my ration of bread, and when it came dusk, I went out in the direction where that building was where the people were gathered.

03:01:43

It was like between, you still could see but it was, the night was coming in. And far of the thing -- It was just across to go a big field. Like from here, over there, to the, you know, twice the golf course. And you could see, on top you could see the light from the guard, on the tower. I was a distance, when I came close, and I crawled, just like this, like this on the ground. All of the sudden, from the direction where the tower was, they start shooting at me. So I stopped, then, when they stopped, I crawl closer, then they start shooting again more.

03:02:44

So, I stopped and I was thinking, the instinct of survival in a human being, in anything that's alive, is so strong, that you think, what I'm going to achieve, if I'm going go and they going shoot me and I'm not going to see my mother anyway. I should go back.

03:03:18

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So, while I thought, the light came in, and I start crawling a little more and they start shooting after me, I change my direction, then I figure out that I'll never make it and I went back to the house.

03:03:41

You know what? My mother's ring I still have, how I have it, I don't know. It's just a puzzle to me, because you couldn't have a photograph, you couldn't have anything that you own, except your body. If you remain alive, nothing. From one place to the other. So, I had really no idea how I got that ring. Sometimes I think about it and I don't know; have no idea. That haunts me. 03:04:46

See, with my father I could make peace. He died, natural death. The war was the villain, malnutrition. But with my mother, I can't make peace. I could never tell this story.

03:05:28

When my first grandchild was born, my daughter-in-law sent me a book, a grandchild book, to write down my background, my, everything. When I came to the war, to that point in life, I just stopped and I never put any word, and I couldn't. And they couldn't understand why. They said, what's the matter, are you guilty about that your mother is not alive, that she was taken away. I just couldn't put this on paper. So, you can understand why. It's 52 years, 1942.

03:06:23

My kids say, mother you are strong [knot/not], hard.

03:06:50

O.k., let's go. So, when I lost my mother, I just didn't want to live anymore in this house. I didn't. What happened? One day, that was before that, I came to class, there were no children. The children went to heaven. We knew that's going to happen. The same thing happen with the orphanage, with my brother's orphanage where he worked, so he came back home.

03:07:37

So, he lived with me until the ghetto was destroyed, unil, maybe 1942. Yes, we lived about two years together. So, we changed the address, we moved to a different place.

03:08:00

One time, I don't remember that, I remember I was sick, I was once so sick that they didn't think I would survive. I had very high temperature, so high that they just didn't know what to do with me. I was home because I would never go to a hospital, because if you go to a hospital, you never, they take you out from the hospital and they finish you off. They don't want people to get well. They want to get sick and they get rid of them. That was the best solution.

03:08:39

Alright, so, but I recovered, so, obviously, I had some years to live. Then I was still working, then I was working in the same factory, but on a different job because they took away that, so. I was responsible for the final product. I inspected the product, that it's one hundred percent o.k., each piece. That was, I had the title, like I'm the instructress; all the time I had that title. So, I told you, so I got a little better ration, something a little more. But it wasn't much, anyway.

03:09:28

Q: Let me just ask you, because you had this position of responsibility and you got a little bit extra, do you think the other workers resented you?

A: No. They didn't resent me, no. Maybe they did, but not on my -- there was no reason to -- there was one, there were above me, like the manager from the factory, or things like that. I was just a little person. I just, I wasn't sewing on the machine because that wasn't my job. The other women, they were sewing on the machines, and I had nothing to do with that because I knew how to manage certain things.

03:10:18

Q: Do you think within the ghetto life was any different for women and men? Was it more difficult being a woman, were you treated differently, were you taken advantage of?

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03:10:43

A: Let me tell you. It was bad for men and women. It was uncertain for everybody. The first victims were little children. Then, if a woman got pregnant it's hopeless; a small child --

Q: What would happen to a woman who got pregnant?

03:11:14

A: Listen, is better if they shot her instead to taking her. They were making like they make research of animals, they used to make research on Jewish people, all kinds of research and they learn on this and they crippled a lot of people.

Q: In the ghetto, or are you talking about later?

03:11:39

A: Not later, in the time of the war.

Q: In the ghetto, though, in the Lodz ghetto?

A: I don't know on the Lodz ghetto, but the German did that.

Q: So, if a woman in the Lodz ghetto got pregnant, could she have her child?

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03:11:56

A: Well, she had her child but when she went to the camp, they say a woman with a child they took her away right away. Even the kapos, they were grabbing little children like, without mercy, the Jewish police.

03:12:18

So, you understand, it's the uncertainty, the misery and that life has no value and what happens with your family was so terrible that it was meaningless, it was no hope, no hope whatsoever. No hope for survival.

03:12:45

Q: So there wasn't a real difference between the way men and women dealt with this, or the way they were treated?

A: No, not that I remember. They were a different between class, the one, the ruling class.

03:13:05

You see, Rumkowski was, like I told you, was an old man. He was 72 years old that time, that time people didn't live that long. He married a young woman of 38, and he had a brother, and the brother had a wife and she was like, they say here, Miss America -- Helen of Troy they used to call her. And they all thought they were the elite.

03:13:39

They thought they make themselves rich. People left diamonds, they left, they just took it, take people away, whatever was left and had value, they took it away, the kapos took, the Judenälteste; I mean Rumkowski himself was a, maybe, an honest man. But, the trend was like this.

03:14:04

So, they thought that they're going to survive the war, for sure. I tell you what, shall I tell you the end, what it was. When the ghetto was, they dissolved the ghetto in 1944; they came to Auschwitz. They sent them to Auschwitz, the whole Rumkowski family and kapos, over there, that waited for him, they all were shot on the spot.

Q: By whom?

03:14:44

A: The old men and the women, everybody, the whole family. They thought they going to survive. Not with the Germans. First they shot the people and then they shot the helpers, the one that work. There should be no witnesses. They always did that.

03:15:08

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Q: Was Rumkowski on your transport? Same group?

A: No, I was told no.

Q: So this was something you learned later?

A: Yes. Sure, no, I wasn't in the same transport.

03:15:21

Q: So, you still had a few more years in the ghetto with your brother?

A: Yes.

Q: You must have been very close?

A: Yes, we were very close. He worked, he worked, he had friends and these people were managing a, what kind shop was this -- they used to make from rags things.

03:15:55

Because over there, in the war, they make everything, that's recycling, because there is no, everything is very tight and you can make whatever you can make from old [dinkerydoo], and make something useful. He work at, I don't remember what they used to make from that material, but it was like, they were doing something from rags. I think they were collecting

them, old clothing and stuff and either renewed them, or something that somebody can use it -
- for the inmates, I really don't know.

03:16:33

But, he worked and he went with them, like he was sent, we were separated then, when the ghetto was dissolved. We were separated.

03:16:47

He wound up in Bergen-Belsen, from Auschwitz, and I came to another place, to South German, that was the part that used to be the Russian part, the East German, Hainichen. That was where I worked there.

Q: You're talking about a little bit later, right?

03:17:17

A: Yes, right. That was the other half of 1944.

Q: Let me ask you also, in the Lodz ghetto, all the people who were living there, not just people from Lodz, were they bringing other people in?

03:17:37

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A: Yes, I worked in my place, I worked with a German women, Frau Gerz(ph.), that she came, they sent her in, from, she came from Cologne, from Germany. A lot of people came from Germany that they sent.

Q: Did they need more workers or why?

03:18:05

A: They need some people that would work, yes. They got rid of, you know, the natives here, so they needed, until, in 1944 they figure out, it's final, they're going to liquidate the ghetto, and the war changed their whole picture.

03:18:28

They were surrounded and they didn't think they going to loose the war. But, it was different, the Russian came closer and the Allies, the places that I were, on the way from Hainichen, then we went on a trip. When they sent us out, six weeks we were walking. You know, six weeks!

03:18:57

Q: I want you to tell me about that, but in time. Tell me about the last days of the ghetto and what happened. As time went on from 1940 to '44 did the ghetto change? Were there noticeable changes?

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03:19:17

A: Yes. People got very desperate. We lost so many people, families. I lost, my father had a sister, another sister, they, I don't know what happened to them. They went on a transport, and they're gone, little children.

03:19:43

My mother, one cousin, my mother's brother, one died, the one that had this business I told you, where we lived, they have five kids. So, the oldest went, escaped when the German came and we never heard of him. The rest of the children, I think, he sent with the younger, his younger brother, to another town.

03:20:14

The younger brother had two boys, and they moved out from, they moved, I think there was a Polish city, Czestochowa. They went there. I mean, we had no communication with them, we don't know. We couldn't write letters. There was no telephone. There wasn't any communication. And anyway, I think they were some, they were hiding out, and some Polish people tried to, I think, help them out.

03:20:52

Anyway, they didn't survive either. One boy survived, the older one.

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03:21:01

After the war, by accident I met him. I just want to tell you this. He was tall, he was 18 or 17 years old when I met him. And I came in the place, that was after the liberation, we were in Landsberg, and I went into a place that woman sells some stuff, a private house, fabrics or whatever she sells, or food, I don't know what.

03:21:25

Anyway, I went over there and I know the woman and that was a young man in a uniform, very young and handsome and I looked at him and I looked at him and I walked at him and I said, are you Kubanawonya(ph.), that was my cousin, my uncle's son, the one that I said the one. He looks at me, he says, how do you know my name? I said, you're my cousin, and I told him who I was.

03:22:07

I hadn't seen him maybe the whole time of the war, he grew up, but there was something that I recognize him.

03:22:15

Well, he went to Israel, to Palestine. He told me that he goes on the Aliyah Bet, and in 1948 he was killed in the Negev, in the war of liberation. So,

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Q: Tell me what the last days of the ghetto were like?

A: That was after the ghetto.

Q: I know, but you haven't finished that story. Tell me how things were in the last days, and what happened?

03:23:02

A: We figured out, life was hopeless in the ghetto. Was worse and worse and worse. People were dying, and there is not help, no food, people were dying of malnutrition, disease, cripples and things. We know that the final solution, that they have to finish off all the Jewish people. So, whatever is going to be we're just resigned, hopeless. That was in that train that they put us, cattle train --

Q: Wait a minute. How did you get to the train? How did that happen?

03:23:50

A: How did we get to the train? We walked.

Q: No, no, but you haven't explained to me, while you were in the ghetto, how this came about.

A: Well, they gave an order, "Aussiedlung," deportation, whole ghetto, liquidation of the ghetto. So, that's it.

Q: When was it?

03:24:10

A: In August or September of 1944. That was the last, one of the last transport of the ghetto. So, my brother went with one, I went with one. Mostly went with the places where you worked. You went with these people, and then, together with all the people, and then they select. So, from ghetto Lodz we went to Auschwitz.

Q: What was a train ride like?

03:24:44

A: The train like? It was a cattle train that they transport cows, horses. So, you can imagine. They stuffed, how many people, they didn't care, we can sit down, we can stand. Men, women, children, everything got stuffed in, locked the doors. It was summer. It was hot. People died of lack of air, oxygen, of thirst. In the morning, we looked around and there were dead bodies. So, there was no hope.

03:25:38

Q: How long were you on this train?

A: We traveled the whole night, from Lodz to Auschwitz is about, the train went slow, takes

about 12 hours.

Q: Were you with any friends or anyone, or were you totally alone?

03:26:00

A: Well, let me tell you how didn't help to be with friends or with, because people got pushed in just, just shoved in the wagons. If you didn't, you just get hit with the left side of the weapon and you know that's hard, and they didn't care, or they hit your head or your leg, or they hit a child. It was merciless. No mercy.

Q: Did they tell you where you were going?

03:26:34

A: No. We knew that we going to Auschwitz-Birkenau. That's the place where you come and there's a big sign on top in German: "Arbeit Macht Frei," "Work Makes You Free."

Q: How did you know you were going there?

03:26:57

A: I told you that in 1942 we knew the destination where people were going. Before that, we didn't know. And we knew that that might be our last ride. The shower, first was Mengele.

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Q: What happened when you arrived?

03:27:21

A: We arrived when they chased us out from the thing, there was a band and music was playing. You know, they didn't want any panic, because people would panic. So, they made music, can you imagine, from a place like this. It's a farce. So, we couldn't understand.

03:27:50

Then Mengele, he was tall. That devil, they called him the "Angel of Death," and he said, one point with the finger, right, alright. So, he segregated, left was destruction.

03:28:13

Women with children were first to go, anybody that has some kind of ailment that he could see, they won't be able to work, had to go, on one side. Women separate, men separate and able bodies also separate. So, we were young, the one that, we went to able bodied. So, it got a whole different group of people. So, they put us on, get disrobed --

04:00:44

Q: So, you arrived at Auschwitz, you were selected with the able bodied people.

A: The able bodied people.

Q: What happened next?

A: I want to tell you, we stood before, we were disrobed before.

Q: You were taken someplace?

A: No, just what you wore, you had to throw away and put it on a big -- they had a pile of shoes, a pile of women's clothing. You had to throw your garment on the pile. They say for disinfection because you shouldn't bring any disease.

04:01:29

From then, after the selection, we went to get a shower. And the shower, that we know already, that instead water, in the thing, they want to get rid of the people, they put gas, in the shower comes gas and the people get it. It takes a while and they all passed away.

Q: How did you know this?

04:02:02

A: We know this. We know this, but after that, people would, we know, we were afraid for that shower. We said the Shema(ph.), the last prayer, and that was it, we said. Then they shaved off our hair. We came out from the shower, we didn't recognize each other. You know, how a woman looks when she has no hair any more. Can't recognize, I didn't recognize my

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friends, that I went together with them to school. I never see them anymore after this. Until today, I don't know what happened to them. We were very good friends, went the same transport.

04:02:54

So, somehow when it came water, there was a scream. That's not the end yet. We're going to live. So, when we came out, we had to pick at random some piece of clothing from the pile. You got another, or it fit you or didn't fit you it didn't matter, from a different pile, something for the feet, wooden shoes or whatever, and then you went to the barracks.

04:03:37

Those barracks, I was only about ten days or two weeks in Auschwitz, but that was the worst part that anyplace that I was. They were so merciless that people that could survive Auschwitz must have been some, must have been, had some, they had to do something, have some function, that they survived in Auschwitz.

04:04:11

Because that was the worst place that you can, just the psychology of that. We were up all night and talking and what was going on, how people were sick and the sick and the able bodies and the sick one were in the same one, the place was huge. The kapos were there,

women kapos and they were commandeering and showing their power, what they can do, what to obey, and how they, the rules, and they were so rude. Just our own fate!

04:04:53

It was just unbelievable; and I figure out, if I have to stay, and I just prayed that they send me as soon as possible to a labor camp; that we're going to work. You know people got in Auschwitz, Auschwitz was surrounded by an electric fence.

04:05:19

Some people got so mad in their mind that they run to the fence. They want to run away, and they got killed, electrocuted.

Q: Intentionally?

A: Yes. A lot of people died this way.

04:05:40

Q: The people who were there, did you talk to them to get a sense of what life was like there?

A: Yes, you got the sense of it, because you saw what's going on, how they talk to you, other women. No respect for life, nothing. Just to survival of the fittest. They were the fittest, you understand, and we couldn't survive there.

04:06:14

If we just had to eat and to sleep and to live there, no, there was no way of survival, not physically, not morally, just no way. So, I just prayed -- I knew that I wouldn't be able to survive over there.

Q: Who were these kapos?

04:06:36

A: Some nights, we were afraid to sleep at night. Just fall asleep, somebody watch it, because they know what going happen at night. It was a big place and there's so many women, and the, the beds, up and down, up and down, and they're supposed to be nurses and they took care on the sick, and they talk and they talk too much and they told the stories and everything, you have to obey here, there's no revolt. You can't think because this is a death place. They said, this is a dead place. Nobody goes out here alive, even if you weren't gassed out.

04:07:21

They tell you this. They told us, the one that were a long time there. And they worked there on different, very unpleasant missions, they work. The other people. We weren't assigned,

see I have no number, and the folks that were with me had no numbers. They were in a hurry, the Germans, that time, and they didn't make any numbers, because all the forces came closing in and in and in. The Russians came closer and closer, so they wanted the most what they wanted, get rid of us, the most of they could. And the one that were capable to work, they sent to work. Well, after some time, about ten days I think I was there in Auschwitz. 04:08:19

Q: Did you do anything in those ten days?

A: No, we just talked and were miserable and listened to the stories and what they commandeered with us and then in the morning we could hear what happened to other people, how people got killed at the fence and all kind of things, about life, what is there.

04:08:45

So, they told us that we're going to be sent away, with a transport to work. So, one day it came that they sent us to, that was not far from a industrial city of Essen, Essen in Solingen. That's famous for steel work, so they worked at that time of the war, they built airplanes there.

04:09:14

And I worked, Framo-Werke was called, the shop we work. I was a welder in the camp. I was working with the mask and with fire, in a tub like in my bathroom, but the top was open and the bottom was open, because the "Halle" was very big, the hall, and there were all kinds

of different machines. The big women worked on "Bohrers," [drills] that made hole in iron.

04:09:50

We worked on the, we made Anti-Luftwaffen, to shoot down airplanes, the V-2 was called. So, I was welding big pieces, huge pieces. They used to come, they had Russian and French prisoners of war over there, at camp, so they used to come and bring, so they worked, they had a different camp.

04:10:22

Maybe they were treated better than we were, because prisoners of war, that is, but the Germans didn't care very much about the Geneva convention, that they should be treated like human beings. But maybe they were treated a little better than us.

04:10:43

So, they used to bring parts to be welded. So that fire shouldn't disturb the order, I had a cabin. There were just three women for the whole thing. There was three of us that were welders. God forbid if I burn something. How do I know to weld? Do I know to weld? I had no idea, I never did this kind of work. 04:11:10

They gave me a torch. They showed you how to do, don't press too much because if you put too much fire, too hot, then the whole iron burns, and you can't do nothing with it. You had to just join it together and not to burn, so I tried. And we did, like big cannons, big cannons

I was welding, the rings on the cannon, so they are not welded round.

04:11:48

They welded like round, they welded a piece then a piece, space, then another and another, in pieces, and it lies on a row and the man that came, would turn it. That could be turned, that, each time on a different place. Because, they explain, if you weld around, that piece is not strong enough, you have to be weld in parts, round and round.

Q: How did you know to do this?

04:12:24

A: Well, I did all right. I never burned anything. Sometimes, but you know. If you burned, then you were accused of sabotage. One of the girls made ["Bohrers"], big tall machines, they took big strong girls, and they make holes in pieces of iron.

Q: Let me just ask you a few questions, you were near Essen, was there a name to this labor camp?

04:12:55

A: Yes. It's called Hainichen, the town was called Hainichen.

Q: How large was this labor camp? Who was there?

A: Who was there? There was, I don't know how many women. That was, I was, most the camp was some people from Poland and a whole group of Hungarian women.

Q: A couple hundred, a couple thousand?

04:13:22

A: A couple hundred, I think. I have no idea. We start counting, counting; sometimes we stood on "Achtung," until they count, you could stand for two hours until they counted us.

Q: Where did you sleep?

A: On bunk beds, straw bunk beds.

Q: Was it crowded? Was it a big barrack?

04:13:48

A: Long big barracks and somebody slept on the bottom and somebody slept on top. I slept on top. And on the bottom I had a woman that she survived because of me. Because she always wanted, she said she's sick, she said she couldn't work, young woman, my age, and she said, I'm sick, I can't work, I go to the "Krankenstube," the sickroom.

04:14:20

I said, Anne, if you go, and in Polish they call it Hanka, Anne is Hanka, if you don't go to work, you know, in a few days what happens to you - this happened, you see, I gave her an example, this happened to somebody else; this way you have a chance to survive and see your family. I think she was married. And see your husband maybe. Go, we are going to protect you, cause we all working, it's going to be that you work too. Just go. She can't. She went; because, if she would go to the "Krankenstube" --

04:15:03

She met me after the war, she lives now in Chicago, I hope she's still alive, and I met her in Landsberg am Lech. She came to me and she said, you know, I thank you that I'm alive; she knew that. I did a few times risk my life by trying to find out how far the war was.

04:15:30

We know at that time, where was the San Francisco meeting in January '45. You know in San Francisco they met for the, to put, in the United Nations, that help to settle the war. You know about that meeting, so we know, I'll tell you how it worked.

04:15:55

At one spot from the big barracks, that a hole, was tremendous big hole; in the walks

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between, there was, at the end was a room where they had their office and the SS women they slept there, all night. They had a radio, and we could understand German, so the one that slept closest, would listen. They made believe they went to sleep, by time they were supposed to and then they listen and they knew things.

04:16:37

Then was another source, the people there would come sometimes to me, and to other people and they bring things to do a part for you for them. You tried to communicate with them. Well, I don't speak French. I can speak Polish. I understand Czech. So if was a Czech, there came different, they were prisoners of war. They or, they bring a piece of newspaper, we could read. They knew that we wanted, survival, is, if you have hope, you be able to survive. So, they tried to help.

04:17:25

Once I had, I had a very close, very close thing. The woman, that she stood by my, when I had somebody inside, and I was welding inside, she would stay by the door and, obviously, and watch. I didn't know that. So, once, I think I had a French guy, or, and I tried to communicate with him, he should tell me something, or explain how the war was.

04:18:06

Anyway, when he finished, she called me out, and she slapped me over the face. She was a husky, strong women with the SS, you know, the black band, SS, there were those zig-zag

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star. And she said, in German, she knew that I understand, and she said, you spoke with the guy and she hit me over the face, that I saw stars; boy, that I didn't [fell down]. And she said, like this, and the whole place where they were working was so quiet, like a pin it would drop, the machines stopped and everything.

04:18:48

And she said, when you come home I'll report you to the Oberscharführer. That's the commander of the German commander of the camp.

04:19:01

Well, when you get reported to the Oberscharführer, give you such a beating that you have to go to the sickroom. When you go to the sick room, you don't go to work, forget about life. O.k., so, look, it was nothing that you could do. I just shook myself off and I just told her, that I don't speak his language, how do I could communicate with him? That I told her in German; it wasn't, and it's no use. Alright.

04:19:37

Now, how I survived, I tell you, after I was told, all the women that knew me, they, in their heart they pray that she should forget, they shouldn't remember to, to report me to the Oberscharführer.

04:19:56

When we came home, we start counting and counting, that was in the evening, and counting, how many, and first we missed two, then we missed three, and we were standing maybe, maybe three quarters of an hour or an hour. She forgot to report me.

04:20:17

And that was, that story I called the power of prayer. They told me later that, that they all prayed that I, that they shouldn't remember, she should forget to report me, that what happened.

04:20:36

Q: You said there were a lot of Hungarian women. Did everybody get along pretty well, or --

A: Did everybody get along? It was --

Q: Did you help each other?

A: Help each other? Well, I tell you. It doesn't have to be Hungarian women. They, all people were hungry. And people lost their dignity, do you know, they were stealing bread, from each other, at night.

04:21:06

There was one woman, that we know, from, other people know, from home, comes, you know, a very fine person, and she, she stole the bread from, from her neighbor, the ration. I tell you, people lost their dignity. People what lost everything that was humane, left.

04:21:44

Q: Would you say the conditions there were, okay? That you had?

A: Oh, the conditions, oh, I'm telling you, you have to, I had a person that was very close, and she got sick, and she went to the "Krankenstube," to the sickroom, and we never saw her anymore.

04:22:08

Q: Were a lot of people sick?

A: She got sick. She couldn't go to work, and she never came out from there. You know what they said, they would transport off to, to; just to finish her off, that's all.

Q: Were there many sick people?

04:22:27

A: Sure, always sick, in the ghetto were sick people and the thing, you could, you couldn't, and, you know how it was. They made themselves a show, the Germans. The rationed bread we

got, everybody got the ration bread, right. The soup, they came with the soup, with a kettle, outside, and we used to run, with the, you know, the plate. It was such a thing that we had on the belt here, and with the spoon, that's what we had.

04:22:59

So, when you eat up, there was still there, a lot of people were hungry, was a watery soup. They run the second time. Well, the second time, if you run, they made themselves a show. They hurt, with a, with a "Peitsche" [whip], they hit you, you got hit.

04:23:17

I got once hit, until today I have a mark. It's, the skin is not straight, smooth; it became like a, like a [grater/grey] there. Sometimes I, I wear something, a nightgown, and I wear it, on the same spot, if I wear it long, it will make out a hole, so rough the skin is from, from that hit, that he hit me. Was bleeding and then it healed up.

04:23:47

So, since then, I knew, I told myself, Frances, you don't go anymore for any seconds, because this is a death sentence. It's better to be hungry, and sit in your bed; I was sitting upstairs and I was watching through the window, how they, how they make the show. So, people were still running for the thing, and they got hit. And they got hit, was no good. So I didn't want that. 04:24:14

Q: Now, you had mentioned, that the Germans were concerned about sabotage in their factory.
Did that happen? Did you guys do that?

04:24:31

A: Well, if we tried, and I told you, and get caught, there was one way only, very cruel sentence.
So, sometimes the people did, yes. Sometimes people did; of course, they, you know, you
had to make something, in spite, they were so cruel to us.

Q: Did you ever try to do anything?

04:25:03

A: No. If, if I, if I tried it, I do it in such a way that I thought I could never get caught.

Q: Can you give me an example?

A: Yes, well, I,

04:25:20

like, when I worked in the, in the factory with the, in the ghetto. If somebody did this, and I
was the one that were responsible for this, I didn't want to have that, because it would cost

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me my life. And here at, the things, so, I saw even if they -- it was very difficult, but I know that people did. I, I, I, I can't tell you how, it came about, but I know that people tried. And a lot of people lost thier life because of that.

04:26:01

Q: Who were the guards in this camp, where did they come from?

A: The guards?

Q: Your kapos or, and the guards.

A: The kapos came from within. They selected, women they were stronger, and they, they felt that they were the kapos, from our own.

Q: Jewish? Women?

04:26:18

A: Jewish, yes. And, the other, were SS women. They wore the uniform, and with their insignia, with their, you know, epauletts and the thing, the SS or SA, SS. This woman that hit me, she was, she was strong, and cheeks like this, red cheeks, and not like us, that we, we just had no food, to eat, nothing, starving, and had to work.

04:26:54

At, five days we worked in the factory. On, on the weekend, they sent us in the woods. We worked in the woods, we gathered wood, caught little things and picked it together up, and make it in piles, and bring it to thing.

04:27:14

In the middle of the week, we walked like a, walk a mile, in the morning. It was dark, still, and at night, when we came home, was dark. The five days we didn't see the sunshine. Just on the weekend.

04:27:28

But that was the winter, it was cold. And, and, and that's Niedersachsen, that's cold over there. And I have wooden shoes. See, my, this part of the legs, I have very thin legs, and this got frozen, and right after the war they were all purple, just purple, from, because it was frozen, and swollen. But in the years, it got a little better.

04:28:00

They say that after what the work I did in, in the camp, that I'm going to get TB and I would have to go to Switzerland to a sanitorium. But I did not.

04:28:15

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Q: How long were you at Essen?

A: In, ah, in Hainichen? We were from August to mid March. Enough.

Tape #3

05:00:44

Q: So, you were at Essen until March of '45?

A: Not, not Essen. Essen was about 20 kilometers from, from the camp. When they bombarded Essen, because it was, so, we could, we could, we could hear it.

Q: What were you thinking?

05:01:02

A: We were, we were, we were thinking that, ah, things, that there is a hope, that maybe we survive. I always hoped. I had such a strong will, to see Hitler's demise. You have no idea. I, I just wished so, that I say, I just want to live and see him finished off, and I did.

05:01:34

Q: So, what happened next? How did you come to leave Essen, why?

A: Well, one day they said, the, the German saw that they, they were surrounded, closer and closer and closer. The Russian came in, that's not, was not the Allies, the Russian. Maybe the, the Allies and the Russian at that part, from the air, and then, they, they, the closest place was to send us was Theresienstadt. That's Sudetenland, between Austria and Germany and Czechoslovakia. It's about, Theresienstadt is not far from Prague.

Q: How did they send you there?

05:02:32

A: We walked! Six weeks! Six weeks! The, ah, we walked along the river Elbe; it's a very long river, and it goes -- we went so many cities by; at night they put us in wagons. I think they were on the, standing there, and we went over there to sleep.

05:03:11

In the day time, we marched, and whoever couldn't walk, either was left, behind, or was shot on the spot; it depend on the, and some, the, the Germans start running away, the one they were for the permanent, they were watching us. One day the Oberscharführer disappeared; the head of the camp. And, about, what we have --

Q: Did you eat? Did they give you food?

05:03:53

A: They gave us some watery soup, and mostly we, we picked, there was spring already, and we learn how to pick what, what work, was edible, like some berries, and spinach. So, we supplement that diet from this. We washed in the Elbe.

05:04:17

We took off the dresses and looked for, all kinds of, dresses should be clean, cause you wear it so long and you can't wash. By the, I tell you, all the time that I was in, in the, in the camp we just had cold water, never any warm water, to bathe. very cold, ice cold water, was terrible.

05:04:48

Q: Let me aks you something else. On this six week march, did you go by German people or the local population, did they see you?

A: No. We saw, we came on a city that's called Aussig an der Elbe [Ústí nad Labem] and that was after a bombardment, and you should see what was swimming on top of the river.

05:05:15

All kind of things, [live/light] things, were swimming on the river; was bombarded out from homes and it was, it fell in the river and was swimming on top, so we know. And then, sometimes when on the road, it came airplanes, either Russian or the Allies and they bombard and the German would hide under the trains. There. Now we were walking. We were walking.

05:05:46

Q: You would just continue walking, with the bombings?

A: Yes.

Q: Weren't you frightened?

A: We, we were happy when they come. We were happy then they came. Because they know something is going on, that some, some hope there is. But for us, even when the war was finished, the war wasn't finished for us; for us, it wasn't.

05:06:11

Q: We'll get to that. So, after you were walking for six weeks --?

A: We came to Theresienstadt. We came to Theresienstadt about, about end of April. Yes, about, I think about two or three weeks we were until the liberation came in Theresienstadt.

Q: What were your impressions of Theresienstadt?

A: Huh?

Q: What were your impressions of this particular place?

05:06:41

A: They were, you felt the smell of the chimneys in Theresienstadt, but that time they, they,

they didn't have, they didn't have time to, to gas us. Look, they were busy with their own troubles, the Germans, you understand, so.

Q: So you were allowed --?

05:07:08

A: And then it was very difficult to survive, because was no food and we, we lived in a big place what we talking about, the "Kaserne," [barrack] remember? There wasn't a barrack. It was strong houses, that this house, this building that I was, was housing five thousand people, in one building, can you imagine?

05:07:39

Q: Women?

A: In one building, five thousand people.

Q: All women?

A: Women. Yes, well, in this room; I don't know what they all were women. In this room, we had a big room, was a very --

05:07:58

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Q: You were telling me about Theresienstadt and this large building you were living in. What did you do all day? Did they feed you? Did they do anything with you?

A: They, they, they, first was the Germans, and we didn't know how things, how long this going to take.

05:08:23

In Theresienstadt we didn't work, we just, we loaf around. We thought that something has to happen, something is going to happen. We didn't know what, and who's going come from, we knew just that the Russians are closer and closer.

05:08:41

We were liberated by the Russians.

Q: So you just wandered around the camp?

A: Yes. Sure, how, how to, how to survive.

05:08:53

Q: And they gave you a little food?

A: Well, they give you - their first words along the German, were, they, they had to give us

some ration of bread and a watery soup. That's it.

Q: Now, could you tell, that the conditions in this camp were any different from other places you had seen?

05:09:14

A: Yes, each place about has the same. You know, we know that there were designed, just to, to finish people's live, that's what they all were designed these, all camps.

Q: So, this didn't seem any better than the other places?

A: No. Better than Auschwitz.

Q: What? Why?

05:09:49

A: I told you, Auschwitz was just a despair. It was, Auschwitz was so terrible emotional. You came in, and you felt, from there, nobody goes out. Couldn't sleep at nights! This was a very hopeless place.

05:10:14

Here, we just thought, well, hope, hopefully they not going to finish us off, that we going see

the end of the war; we just hoped. In Theresienstadt.

Q: Was this place where they had you sleep, was this part of the main camp or was it a little separate?

05:10:32

A: No, there was like a room, and I don't know how many of us slept in that room, but that when, then I tell you when, the thing, when the Russian came what we had to do.

Q: So you weren't aware of, you know, in Theresienstadt, we learned later on, it was, conditions actually were a little better and they had cultural programs and all kinds of things but at the end, none of this was noticeable?

05:11:00

A: Well, nobody thought about, we thought about survival. If people are hungry, they don't think about any cultural things. If the stomach calls for food, you can't think about culture, or reading, or anything, or art, or whatever, or whatever your profession is to do. You just think, that without food you can't exist.

05:11:26

So, that's, there was no any need for that, because, there was one, one, one object, one thing, goal, to survive. That's all.

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05:11:40

Q: Did the Germans who were in charge there, stay there until the liberation?

A: Well, the most, they, a lot run away, that became like a chaos, later, towards the end. They threw away the uniforms, and they find some, you know, if they weren't from there, and put on civil clothes, there was plenty clothing over there, and they just, make belief, like, you know, then they fished them out to find out who was who, and some escaped. You know, South America helped a lot of them to, to escape.

05:12:20

Q: So, tell me about the last week there and then what happened?

A: Well, what happened? We were liberated the last day of the war, that was V-day, May 8, 1945. That was the day of our liberation. But for us, it wasn't a day of liberation, anyway. I explain you why.

05:12:46

First of all, at the beginning, in the camp, a, a young girl was so excited, and we knew that the Russians are coming, the Russians are coming, and she run, and wanted to greet a Russian soldier in a tank, and she got killed. She was runned over by, by the tank. That was the first thing, with the first Russian thing, so that was one.

05:13:16

And then, when the Russian came, they spoke, I could understand what they talk to us, they used to say, well we liberated you, we did liberate you, they said in Russian, and you don't want to love us, so we knew it's going to come for us, so it came at night;

05:13:41

we used to barricade all the doors and windows; all the furniture, there were benches over there, and chairs, you know, the furniture heavy, like oak, heavy oak furniture was the, so we put it against, and we didn't go to sleep first, until the barricade was up the ceiling, that they couldn't open the door. We were afraid for raping.

05:14:05

Q: And that was happening? Right away?

A: Well, these people came, they didn't see a woman for, I don't know for how long. They came from those, you know, oh, far parts from Russia, Asiatic, Asian parts Russia, and they were women crazy. So, wasn't - and each invader, if you would think, soldiers come, come on a foreign territory, [that, no kid ourself], they do that.

05:14:42

Q: So, did you know people who were raped? Did you know of circumstances?

A: We, we, we, we just tried to prevent that it shouldn't happen to us. We were afraid of this.
Of course, to begin the captain, the one that run the Russians, he didn't know about that;

05:15:06

so the first few days we had to, with the food was, who was stronger would run three times for the soup, and the one, of --. So many people were, looked like, we called them "Muselmanns," just skeletons, nothing, flesh and bone, you know, nothing left. 05:15:29

So, they didn't have the strength even run for the soup. They couldn't get the soup because the stronger one ran before them and it was finished, with the kettle soup. So people got sick, after the liberation, people died.

05:15:49

You know, that they died, first of all, they brought, they didn't know how to feed people like us. They brought sacks of sugar. They distribute the sugar. If you give people on a hungry, on a empty stomach sugar, from sugar you get diarrhea. And you get diarrhea when people are so, you know, there is nothing left, they die. No medication for it, or anything.

05:16:19

People die from the diarrhea. You know, dehydration. So, people died from diarrhea. Then

it came, no hygienic, no sanitation, no things, so it came, typhus. You know that 5,000 people after the liberation died on typhus, in Theresienstadt, 5,000 people!

05:16:48

So, then it came to the commander, the Russian commander, and he was the boss, he was a nice man, he understood the situation, and he told them, he said that these soldiers, they're going to do things like that. They gone, if the woman doesn't want to go with them, they going to be very severe punished.

05:17:11

So, at least, if the commander knew, we were, we had a little security. And then they, but it took time to organize that everything, and organized that everybody would get food. So, that's what I wrote in my story, that the war didn't end for us. No way.

05:17:35

Q: Did they bring in doctors to take care of all of the sick people?

A: They had Czech doctors over there. They had a hospital, they had Czech doctors, but look, it was also everything very primitive, what they had, aspirin and stuff, I think some; eh, it took me, it could go away, very fast, but it, life has no, where should I go?

05:18:02

No home, no parents, no family, where to go? What was the, what's the destiny? Where do I go. So, you had to get settled in some way, your mind. That, you had to organize somehow your life, and this is not so simple, after so many years, that somebody told you what to do, not that you could do what you want to do. That's difficult.

05:18:40

So, first I think, sometimes, yes, then I find out that, then we start looking for, if somebody's alive from the family, so I start looking for. I knew, my father was, died, my mother wasn't there anymore. I was looking for my brother. So somebody said, the people coming in, because it was an open border already, but traveling was very difficult.

05:19:07

Even with travel, we had to travel with the same cars, not such a crowded condition and stuff like this, but same cattle cars, still if you want to go. Because Germany was, most cities were, bombarded and ruined. So, that my brother is in Bergen-Belsen.

Q: How long did you stay in --?

05:19:34

A: About July; I went to, we register to go; we, we, I, I figure out, they register us either to go to, whoever we had a choice, either to go to Israel, or to Palestine, or, or to the United States.

At that time you had, they open, they open the doors for, for refugees, the United States. So, I sign up for the United States. So we went to, they sent us to Landsberg.

Q: O.k. You were in Theresienstadt from May, April really, but from May to July, what were you doing there for those months? What was the life like?

05:20:30

A: We just, I, I don't know. I don't remember, or I worked there, or I did something. I just, oh, I know, I know what I did. Theresienstadt. O.k.

05:20:44

Somebody organized a sewing machine, and I tried to help the women, so they should look a little more presentable, so they, we, they got the dress, I would help them to make it that would fit a little better, to make from one dress, take something, make a trim, or something; that we look, the hair grew a little bit that March, because, you know, where they got bald, cut to zero, so, we try to look like, like women. So, that's what I did. I sew a lot at that time.

05:21:25

Q: Was it difficult to, kind of, resurrect yourself, after all of this time, to feel human again, feel normal?

A: Of course, that's why I couldn't go, like I told you, the feeling was, where to go? This is all.

Where shall I go? Where to go, where to go. There's no place where to go. So that's for us, was no place, there was nobody and there was no place. Then I find out about my brother, from Landsberg I went to Bergen-Belsen.

05:22:05

Q: So, first you decided to go to Landsberg?

A: Right, because from Landsberg we should go to the United States.

Q: So, did you go to Landsberg alone?

A: No, I know, I met my future husband then.

Q: How?

A: In, eh, here, I, I think yesterday he said that I didn't remember that he talked to me before, but the talk we had when we traveled from Theresienstadt to Landsberg.

Q: You met him on the train?

A: That he approached me before that, in Theresienstadt. Yes. So, we -- And then I was just a few weeks in Landsberg, and then I said, I'm going to find my brother.

05:22:59

He lived in Hannover. Hannover is, is not far from, but it's a, it's a big trip from Landsberg to Hannover, to Bergen-Belsen.

05:23:11

Q: Where you traveling alone at this point?

A: I think, I think somebody else, but, I was traveling myself, yes.

Q: Was it difficult?

A: Was difficult, was difficult.

05:23:28

They came and sometimes I remember, came in the middle of the night and they let us off from the train and that was on the north already, the city of Kassel, which was all bombarded out, and we sat down on the edge of the like, sidewalk and waited for a next train, and you look at that city, and you think, boy, what happened.

05:23:53

Is just unbelievable, and how you get there, how you going to organize your life, and stuff like this. Then I remember, we came, and they brought us to Hannover.

05:24:06

And Hannover was a flood at that time and the streets were flooded, and that was, in Hannover was the British zone. And the soldiers, they had, the army, had very high, they had the trucks, with very high wheels, so they give us, give us a ride in the city, through the whole flood, and they brought us, I had an address, and they brought us over where my brother lived, with a friend, in, in Hannover, by a German woman. So, how I got to Bergen Belsen, I didn't have anything to do in Hannover.

05:24:46

Q: What was it like seeing your brother?

A: Well, it was just, a lot of joy, unbelievable. But I couldn't stay and stay idle. I had to have something, life has to go on, and in order to go on, you have to do something with your life. So, there was nothing to do, wasn't any Jews in Hannover that I could meet.

05:25:12

All the Jewish people were in Bergen-Belsen; they were liberated there, and I could find people that I know and stuff like this. O.k. So, I went to, to Bergen - it's not far, it's, again, with a, some kind, a army truck, we went, a few people, and they took us to Bergen Belsen.

05:25:35

They were very accommodation, they accomodate us, the, the soldiers; they were nice, the American -- that was the British, because Bergen-Belsen and Hannover, that's the, was the British zone.

05:25:51

So, over there, I met friends that had, and they were willing to, like, they were two of them and I was the third. They had a big room, and they were willing to take me in as a roommate.

05:26:07

Q: In a house?

A: In, in, in, in a building. Yes, right. Well, we, we got married in Bergen-Belsen. He came, about 1,500 miles. That he told you yesterday, where they stole his camera.

05:26:29

Q: So, tell me about the life in Bergen Belsen?

A: Well, in Bergen-Belsen life had a, a meaning, because we tried -- there were a lot of people from my town, people that, professional people, that worked in the shops. And they could do, organize things, and teach people, other people that they can be useful in life, later on.

05:26:56

So these people, we got to all together, and we organized a ORT Fachschule. You know about, you heard about, you know about the ORT? There is a lot of ORT going on in Washington DC. This is training through rehabilitation.

05:27:16

And they are a non-sectarian organization that teaches people a trade. Sewing, boys teach, they teach mechanics, fashion design, all kind things. So, I was one of the, in came, the UNRRA came; they brought us, they brought sewing machines.

05:27:46

And, oh, I have a picture, that I had, one picture that I have; I was teaching the children, the, and there was for everybody. We had young kids; everybody that wanted to learn could come to those classes. They didn't pay anything for that. And it was a big sign, we had a building, ORT Fachschule, with insignia, and I, I taught this, over there. I had a class.

Q: Young and old people? All kinds?

05:28:24

A: All kinds, younger people, older people. If they were beginners, they were in the beginner's

class. If they were advanced, they were in advanced class. And we just organized, that was just the beginning.

05:28:40

Well, I, I tell you one story that I connected with this. When I lived in New York, and I worked at FIT, the Fashion Institute of Technology, I had access to go on, on 7th Avenue. That's called the Fashion Avenue. There's a lot of places that you can go, that designers can go and get some fabrics, discount fabrics, they have remnants, beautiful pieces.

05:29:12

So, I, I, they know me at this, some place on the 8th, 7th floor, some place, different places. O.k., I went to such a place once, and there was two women, an older one and a younger, look like a mother and daughter, and they look for things and I look my things. There's just, not a lot of customers, just some people.

05:29:33

So, all of a sudden, this woman, the mother, comes over to me, and she tells me my maiden name. I look at her, no, doesn't register anything, I don't know. So, she said, how do I know my maiden name? She said, well, you were my teacher, in Bergen- Belsen. You taught me dress making. And this is my daughter and we live in Israel, and that helped me make a living. I got married. I have a family and I help them.

06:00:43

Q: So, you told me the story about finding --

A: Yes, the mother, and she said that this helped her to make a living and to raise her family, you mean, the trade that she learned. And she, at the same time, taught her daughter how to sew. So, I was so happy to hear that, and we embraced and we were, and they say they go back to Israel, and that was a very beautiful story, isn't it?. Very heartwarming story, hm? Don't you think so? Yes, I thought so.

06:01:19

Q: Now, in Bergen-Belsen, what was the life like? Were you free to do whatever you wanted? Did you have enough food? Were the living conditions okay? What was it like?

A: Well, it was, we would make; it was more like fear, it was different. Of course, we could travel, you could do everything. Sure, yes. It was free.

06:01:55

Q: Who was in charge? Who was running the camp?

A: Who was running the camp? I don't remember, I just know one lady --

Q: Were they relief organization, or military administrations,--

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A: Yes, there was, --

Q: -- or Jewish people?

06:02:19

A: First of all the UNRRA helped. They brought supplies and stuff, like we need sewing machines, can't make a thing with sewing, without sewing machines; we need fabrics. So the UNRRA helped, yes, it was on the auspices of the UNRRA:

06:02:48

Q: Was there an internal administration, was there a Jewish administration that was helping to take care of people?

A: Yes. I, I think so. Like I told you, Bergen-Belsen was British, the British zone, so I think that the government must have helped too. I, I really don't - but in Bergen-Belsen, you know, we're free, you could travel.

06:03:17

But how you could travel? There was no, unless somebody came, and pick you up with a car, or see, we had no means of transportation, or somebody bring you to the, to the railroad, to travel. The closest city would be Hannover. And Bergen-Belsen was woods, woods,

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woods. Barracks in the woods, was Bergen-Belsen. It's a big huge camp.

06:03:47

Q: Was it all Jewish? All the people were Jewish there?

A: Not everybody was Jewish, mostly. Yes, most.

Q: But everybody got along?

06:03:58

A: Yes, well, I got along with the people that, that I lived. I lived with one young lady that, who later became my sister-in-law. My brother's wife.

06:04:18

Q: Were people beginning to form political organizations, to begin again with religious observations? Any of that sort of thing?

06:04:31

A: People start thinking about what to, you know, if anybody had a trade or whatever, a skill,

whatever to do, how to start up, how to get hooked on; people got, used to get married, it was a very big -- people were lonesome. They, family is gone, right, so people, it didn't take much time, people get acquainted and they used to get married. Sometimes worked out and sometimes it didn't.

06:05:08

I know, we know each other for two years after we got married. Met in '45 and we married in '47.

Q: Anything else you can think of about Belsen?

A: Bergen-Belsen.

Q: You were there how long?

06:05:32

A: I worked there.

Q: Right, for how long?

A: I worked there from -- I came in '45. And got -- After I got married, the ORT transferred me to, I went back to live in Landsberg with my husband. He had, we had an apartment then.

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Q: How long were you at Bergen-Belsen?

06:05:59

A: In Belsen? A little less than two years.

Q: So, if you were there two years, were there, did people start with cultural activities, schools?

06:06:11

A: Yes, sure. We did. We used to have groups, with, read poems, sing songs, stuff like this, play theater. Something certainly like this. Whoever was capable, right.

06:06:27

We did just a lot of nostalgia, old things that people came from the old time, from the homes, whatever they brought, the culture that they brought themselves.

06:06:37

And a lot of people, especially the young people, they didn't have any schooling. They, when the war came they were very young, they had very little education. That was sad.

Q: So did they get schooling?

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06:06:51

A: Well, they started to teach them; that's why, the first start to teach them a trade. Then when they came to the city, they had to teach them, that they graduate somehow high school.

06:07:11

Q: What about religious activity?

A: Religious activity? In Bergen-Belsen? Tell you the truth, I don't remember.

06:07:25

I was, right after the war, I was really inside angry. I asked the Above, why this happened to good innocent people. I got really upset and angry. Nobody could give me an answer, I asked rabbis, I asked chaplains; I think, it's a destination and that's happened, happened before in Jewish history, that the people get, you know, so, we don't know. There's no answer for that, so I made peace with this. Certain things there is no answer, you have to make peace with that.

06:08:12

Q: So you kept your faith, and beliefs?

A: Yes, I did.

06:08:19

Q: What about, do you remember any political or Zionist activities at Bergen-Belsen?

A: Oh, sure. You would think. I was in - no, we were in Landsberg when Israel became, when the United Nations voted. That was in 1948, then I lived in Landsberg already, back.

Q: So you don't remember this?

A: No, not in Bergen-Belsen.

06:08:42

We were -- there were a lot of people that went, yes, this I remember, now I remember, look, it's a long time, with the idea that, they went illegal to Israel. A lot of people went.

06:09:00

Q: I'm just sort of curious, because you were in a British camp. So I wondered if there was any effort to control the political activity?

A: It was hidden, it was illegal. Because they were British, of course, it was illegal. But everything, we had, like, they had meetings and they had things, and they had the, how you call, I don't know who worked there, but from the Jewish organization they had the Haganah

I think, and people that, from Israel worked here after the war, in Europe to bring young people over, to work, to build the country, as pioneers.

06:09:47

Q: Through ORT, were other kinds of courses offered also? You taught, you helped with the sewing, were other courses taught also? Other kinds of courses?

A: In Bergen-Belsen, in Bergen-Belsen, I think, later on, when I came back, when we got married and I came back in 1947, and I came back to Landsberg.

06:10:11

In Landsberg they had a bigger school. Over there in Landsberg I didn't teach. I was managing all women's classes, was about 200 women, so I was managing those classes.

06:10:30

And there were mechanics, there were, electronics wasn't so developed like today, but was some, whatever, but, there were, were other classes. In Landsberg was a very big school. Where they had some experience already, and had some graduates at that time.

Q: So, you moved back to Landsberg to be with your husband?

A: Right.

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06:11:00

Q: Where did you get married?

A: In Bergen-Belsen, we got married.

Q: Did you have a ceremony?

06:11:06

A: Oh, yes, sure. In Landsberg we went to the, how you call it, where you get a civil thing - to the, to the office, like you get a birth certificate or you get a thing, and you make a document that you married. You tell your credentials and stuff, so, we got a, a civil marriage. And, the religious marriage, we got in Bergen-Belsen. Yes.

06:11:41

My students sewed a dress for me; there wasn't white material, it was blue, well, over there at that time, you couldn't have anything what you want, whatever was available. So, I remember it was a light blue chiffon dress.

06:12:04

Dave's one friend which was a very good photographer, so his, his gift for the new couple,

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for, he made us wedding pictures. It was nice. We still have those pictures. Very good pictures he made.

06:12:24

Q: Were a lot of people getting married?

A: After the war, a lot people got married yes, because you know, life was, people were lonesome. They lost their family. Life was no, had no direction. They thought, two people can work out things better, and they have support from one another, which is true.

06:12:46

Sometimes, today people know each other and they say, every other marriage ends in divorce.

06:12:57

Q: How long did you live in Landsberg, you lived there in 1947?

A: In 1949 we came to the United States.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the life in Landsberg?

06:13:12

A: The life in Landsberg. Well, I worked, and Dave worked and my daughter -- we have two kids. We have a daughter and a son. My daughter was born in Landsberg, in Germany. In July '48 she was born. What was life? Well, it was a lot, a, all right.

06:13:43

The Jewish people did the same thing. It was a lot. We, we had groups that we were singing, and some would play theater, Jewish theater. And some people were talented. People were from all walks of life. Young people got together, and singing was, the biggest thing was singing.

06:14:16

Now, we used to have -- in Landsberg there was cultural life. There was a lot of people that came, entertainers came from the United States. Eh, what's his name, he was then a very young performer, the conductor, Leonard Bernstein, so he was maybe 31 years old then, and he performed, and we thought he was brilliant, well, you know, because he was just a brilliant man.

06:14:54

Jewish actors, a lot of people, they came to different places just to entertain. We had to buy tickets but to entertain and it was, it meant something. It was important. It was, like, a spiritual revival.

06:15:23

See in Poland I was used to that, because I used to love the theater, and always go to the theater even when I was a student. Travel, go to the theater, I love a lot of the things, museums; I would go anyplace that make some variety, and some, that's what life is about.

Q: So what else was going on in Landsberg?

06:16:02

A: And then was the, the thing -- the talk of the town then, then was, yes or no, of the state of Israel will, became, they'll declare as a, as a, the United Nations will vote as a state.

06:16:17

So, that was the most important thing at that time. And it happened in 1948. My daughter is just, just born, at the same time, when the Jewish state was created.

06:16:37

Q: Were there efforts to prepare people to go to Palestine, or to go to Israel?

A: Sure. There were, there were, there were. I told you, my cousin, that I met I told you, in a store, he was in Landsberg. From Landsberg he went to Israel and it was before, in 1948 he

fell in the Negev.

06:17:05

Q: How did they prepare people? What sort of things were --

A: Well, if they prepared, that was the Haganah's work. They did that. Big job; the young people, to convince young people; life has no, had no meaning, and the young people had no parents or anybody to direct them.

06:17:30

So, it was important, so that was a goal, to go there and to fight for your own country.

Q: So, they gave them military training? Is that what you're saying?

A: Yes, sure. Ja, I'm talking about military training. Obviously they did, yes.

06:17:48

Well, at that time, at that time there was still was boats. They couldn't, they came to the shores of Israel, they didn't let them in. You know this, from history, right. So, it was a lot of things. Until, until they declare, that the Jewish state, what's his name, President Truman was, he was instrumental in this, that this happened.

06:18:31

Q: When you were working in Landsberg, did you get paid, did people get paid to work there?

A: No.

Q: So when you had to buy tickets for theater or whatever, how did you pay for it?

06:18:45

A: I, I, for my work in Germany, I didn't get paid anything. When we came, that was like this, when we came to the United States, I think I got some, I got a certificate and they sent me to a bank, and I got some. For all the years of work, just got --

Q: You got it after?

A: After, right.

06:19:11

Q: Did you kind of see a rebirth of Jewish life in Landsberg?

A: Well, let me explain you something; we, the way we thought, a lot of people thought, very few people had in mind to remain in Germany, because that country was, or Poland, was soaked with Jewish blood.

06:19:44

So nobody has decent mind and think, does, does, didn't want to stay there. They want, immigrated elsewhere; a lot of people went to Australia, to Canada, to the United States, and of course, with Aliyah Bet, to Israel. So that's what I'm telling you, and that was just building a new life;

06:20:07

you think we thought -- My brother went a year before me, so, oh, they thought I thought when we come, God knows what's waiting for me in the United States. It wasn't so rosy, believe me. So.

06:20:24

Q: Was the morale fairly good in the camp in Landsberg?

A: I didn't follow you.

Q: The morale.

A: Oh, the morale? The morale was good, yes. Morale was good.

Q: Anything else you can remember that might be important, interesting about the life in Landsberg, and how people lived and what they were doing?

06:20:51

A: Oh, I tell you. A lot of people had different, had different goals in life. A lot of people, especial men, they, they went to Poland and they brought some articles and they could make -- they make money. They bought for such a price and sold for more. They sold for the demand; people wanted those items. So.

06:21:19

It was always kind of risky, traveling back and forth and stuff, but some, a lot of young people did that. But this is nothing for permanent, for to settle, wife; so, it depends. Some people that could work with their mind or with their hands and some people just different, feel different like making a living.

06:21:54

Q: So, you decided to come to the United States, why, instead of Palestine, Israel?

A: Well, I didn't, I didn't think, we just didn't think that, over there at that time you had to be a pioneer. That after the war, and after what we went through, how much I was for Israel, I didn't think that I can go and go through the hardship in build a new land.

06:22:24

Just, just honestly, I didn't feel that I was capable to do that; and that's why well, we figured out, we come to the United States. it's not that it's going to be -- Manna doesn't come from heaven. It's going to be a struggle; but every beginning is hard.

06:22:50

Q: Was it difficult to get a Visa?

A: No, you have to have an affidavit that you're not going to fall to, you not going to get, that you be independent, that you're willing to go to work, and you have somebody that will offer you the job and you're not going to fall, I say, think that you be, must pay you for welfare, stuff like this, that the other citizen will have to support you, no. So, if you had an affidavit like that, they would give you a visa. At that time.

06:23:32

Q: So, it didn't take too long?

A: No. No, didn't take much long. Well, we were just that, and that was, you know who helped then, the HIAS. You know the HIAS? The organization? Yes. And the HIAS helped solve stuff in the United States, and when we came, we had a, first we live in Brooklyn on the third floor with, a little girl that was, what, maybe 18 months old and the room was, this size, no smaller,

06:24:15

and the carriage had no place, to, it stay in the hall, by the lady, we lived with, the, as a, tenant, with the lady that has the house, she gave us a room, just a room, pay, so it wasn't so easy. I had to look for work; I had a small child, I couldn't go to work, so just my husband had to go, to work, find work and that wasn't easy.

06:24:43

Look, I just start working, you know when? When my kid could get the key from the house, they were ten, twelve years old, and I could depend that they can open the door and stay by themselves, and they don't, I can trust them they won't let anybody in, then I, you know, there were no parents, no family close by that could just do the thing there. And then I looked, I looked, I looked for a job. I wanted to work.

Tape 4

07:00:44

Q: When you arrived in New York, what were your first impressions, do you remember?

A: First thing, we thought, that we have to learn the language, because to be in a country, and without, not knowing the language, it's a big handicap. So Dave went to school and I went to school. And, like, he, we managed somehow and sometimes we take from a neighbor a kid, they were watching, you know, we had a -- one kid and then, my son, the kids are two years apart. That's what I had - a daughter and a son, that's all.

07:01:39

So, we went to school and went to school, and I was just keeping house and watching the children and raising the kids. When the kids start growing up, we lived in a section where the school, we didn't like the school.

07:02:07

So, we figure out, when the chil-, when my daughter is going to be five years old, we have to move from that neighborhood. We did, we made an effort, and we moved the neighborhood that she be able to go to a different school, public school. So we did, we moved from - that was in Brooklyn, we moved to Astoria, that's Long Island. I mean, it was, the school was a nice school, an old school, a public school. And then, when we, look, I told you-

07:02:41

I told you, I first, my thing, I wanted to work in my field and accomplish something. It gives me a good feeling when I work in my field; I love to work. But I couldn't, before I had, I had the duty to raise my kids and there was nobody to trust with.

07:03:02

So, first, when they were about ten, twelve years old, then I figure out, it's time for me to go to work. So, once I answered an ad in the Herald Tribune; it was for a fashion consultant, Macy's. I said, well, I'm going to answer that; I didn't work such a long time, and I had no recommendations, and nobody think where I worked and what I was.

07:03:36

Well, I figure, well, I know my work, and I could make a very beautiful sample and stuff like this, anyway, I figure out, what I do; what I do, I, I went for the interview. There were a few people. So, the, the woman that interview me, so, she liked me a lot. She said, you're going to get the job. But I have to, what I did, I brought with me a few dresses that I made, and they were, I designed them and I sewed them up and they were, just very attractive.

07:04:17

So, I showed her that this is my work; and she was very impressed with that and she said, I'm going to get the job but she has to, for curtesy for other people, about five, six people

applied, that she's going to, that was the chairman from the department. She was, the, her name was the same as mine, Davis, Regina Davis - Havasag(ph.). So she said that she have to interview, and then, at the end, I get the job, and so it was.

07:04:48

So, I worked for ten years, I work, fashion consultant, Macy, Herald Square, the main building. For ten years I worked there. And when she retired, I stopped working there, because I got another person that I couldn't get along with. She wasn't very nice to our people, was an Irish woman. O.k., anyway, so that was one.

07:05:13

When I knew that this job eventually gone to come to an end, I, so I had some credentials already. That's a very prestigious job, fashion designer, fashion consultant for Macy's, is a prestigious job. So, I went to FIT, FIT is two, a few blocks away, this is 34th Street, FIT is 27th Street, on the same--

Q: FIT?

A: FIT - Fashion Institute of technology, you know.

07:05:43

So I went there, and I spoke with the chairman of the department and I said, who I was and

where I come from, and what I was doing; and I, I had some papers from ORT, that I was teaching and working there and things, o.k. So, I got the job. And I worked there for 15 years, until I came here.

07:06:18

Q: That's quite accomplished.

A: So, I went to school, I went to city college, I went to FIT, I took classes in things, for fashion, art design and things, the things that I liked, and free time between classes, I used to take courses, in, at FIT, the courses that I wanted to take. I paint for hobby.

07:06:47

Q: At this time, when you had a whole new life, did you think much about what you had left behind in Europe and these experiences?

A: You mean about the past? Yes; my mother haunted me, really, the memory, the things, that for many years when I was starting in that, or I think, I would cry my eyes out. Oh, terrible. Today there's nothing.

07:07:14

I'm just very collect, but not, not at that age, younger years, I couldn't even mention, I couldn't, if I think, I would, I'd fall apart, so bad it was with me.

07:07:30

Q: Did you talk about it with friends or other people? Your husband?

A: No. No, I did not. So the kids, my daughter said, when, when I start telling her, and I didn't want to talk, now the grandchildren start growing up and they could be told, I go to different schools and talk about this, why don't you tell my thing; I have, I have family in Israel, that's my cousins.

07:07:59

One of my mother's sisters, the second sister, immigrated to Israel, in the very early 30s with the whole family, and this family survived.

07:08:11

So, I have a cousin that's Yuval(ph.), same name. And when I go there, I can't even go to hotel, I have to stay with them, they very warm and wonderful to me. So, the old folks, the uncle and the aunt, they're not living anymore, but is the, the other, the cousins are here.

07:08:40

Q: Do you think that these awful experiences you had in Europe, you think that these experiences you went through in Europe, had a long term impact on you? Do you think they

affected the way you lived your life afterwards?

07:08:56

A: Well, it did, I think it did a lot of damage to my health, to begin with. That's for sure, I know. Of course, but, in order to live, you can't remember the bad times all the time, because otherwise, life is impossible, you can't. Do you understand? You have to let go, so eventually I had to let go.

07:09:36

So, that's the story, and at the end of this, I wrote down, there is without hope, there's no life, without hope.

Q: How were you able to let go? You just sort of forced yourself to do it?

07:09:49

A: Yes, I never had any help, that I would go to a shrink or something, that we talk. No, I never felt, first of all, well at the beginning I didn't have the kind of money that to a shrink would cost, alright.

07:10:03

Then where I worked, I had, Macy had insurance, the school had insurance, but I didn't feel,

I didn't want to go. And I had to, I had to work it out myself. And time did the most.

07:10:28

Q: In the very beginning when we were talking, you said as a girl you had a real independent spirit.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you think that that helped you survive and get through it?

07:10:38

A: Oh, sure, definitely, yes, yes. I, I just, I, I had so much hope, that I lived with that hope. That made me survive, that I'm going see the defeat of Hitler. And after all the things what happened, what I lived through the ghetto and the camps and everything, and I saw this, I believed there is something above that watches, above both of us.

07:11:14

Q: So, religion was important to you throughout all of this?

A: Yes.

07:11:26

Q: Is there anything else you want to add, anything else you want to say?

A: Well, I don't know what to say. I, I think that I am happy, and I think, my family is proud of their father and myself. That what we achieved in life. So, that we were achievers in life, that the kids are proud of us. I know;

07:12:36

and we were very good with the children, family, it's a close family, and with the grandchildren; we are. So, that's very important; and life goes on. You learn to live, you don't live just for yourself. You live for other people. You try to help other people, you give charity, the way my parents used to; whatever you took from home, that's you take for life, for you.

07:13:07

My little -- my daughter's daughter, she said like this and I have to tell you this, and on this I'm going to end, she said like this in school, she goes to a private school in Santa Monica, so there was a question, what your grandmother mean to you, so she, and she's nine years old, so she answered like this; 07:13:31

to think that I went from my mother, my mother went from her mother, from my grandmother, and that's the, all things that she had teaching me, she know from her mother. And that was, it is true, because she knows sewing, she knows embroidery, she knows paint,

everything. That little one can do everything, the little one. So, it's like a chain, like, it goes from one generation to the other. So. What can I tell you. O.k.

07:14:11

Q: One more question. Last question. You were talking about the way people behaved, because they were trying to survive and often times it did not bring out the best in people;

A: That's right.

Q: How were you able to maintain your humanity and your dignity, was that tough?

07:14:31

A: Very tough. Very tough. And you have, well, I had to; see, I, I, I think I'm a Libra and Libras are supposed to, I read the horoscope sometimes, not that I believe in it, that I read, Libras are very, people that think justice is very important.

07:15:00

So, I, I thought don't, in the ten commandments, and you think that you should never do something to other people that you don't like others will do to you. And that's what kept me, the morals that my parents gave me, you understand, that they gave me, that kept me and that I could survive. You follow this?

07:15:28

Yes, I think that's the spirit of that, so, I never wanted to do any harm to anybody, and if I would steal, God forbid, steal a piece of bread or do something wrong to anybody, I wouldn't like that somebody do this to me, because it's a matter of dead and life. If I steal you bread, I steal away your life.

07:15:48

Like other people did, but, they come from good homes, but they couldn't, they, they just couldn't help. We condemn them, and there was a very sad story, in the camp.

07:16:01

I told you, the one girl that stole the bread from her neighbor, now, until we find her, she would, she did this in the middle of the night.

07:16:15

Q: Do you judge that?

A: Well, we, we condemned her, because there is no way we understood. I told her, listen, we're all hungry, how, how can you do so, she, she just couldn't control herself. So, the animal, the human just disappears and the animal takes over;

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07:16:45

but it's not the way it's supposed to be, a lot of people can't help, right? So. Do you have anymore questions?

Q: Thank you.