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Irene Weber interview 2/14/95

Sandy: I want you to tell me a little bit about your impression of liberation. How organized it was, what it meant, what emotions you saw.

IRENE WEBER:

I was liberated in a strange way. I was in a prison in Czechoslovakia because i escaped twice. And finally I was found and put in a prison. And that prison was totally abandoned by the Nazis and we were locked in until the Red Cross, the International Red Cross came in and liberated us, and opened the doors for us. But where I was liberated where the Russians came in to liberate the place, that area. In Czechoslovakia. So I was--of course, they didn't just let us go, but they--we had health check-up, we were deliced and sent to the hospital the persons that needed it, needed hospitalization were sent there. I went to the hospital. Because I suffered from undernourishment and I had the symptoms, and while I was in the hospital something happened that really made me feel good. I saw the mighty German armies through the window in the hospital, I was the armies walking with their arms up and hands behind their heads, and the Russians soldiers that were leading them. And this is when I really believed the war is over.

Sandy: Tell me how organized it was after the Red Cross came in, what happened.

IRENE WEBER:

Then, as I said, they checked us out and put us in the hospital and after that, I was on my own. I did not really , I was not in any organization under any supervision of any

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kind. I was free and i was on my in ? in Czechoslovakia. What I got from the Red Cross was change of clothes and little bit of money to tie me over and from then on--I did not want to go back to Poland. If I wish to go back, they would have arranged it. But I didn't want to go back, I had no one to go back to. So I stayed in Czechoslovakia. I got, I met a girlfriend, and we had small apartment that was left by the Germans that escaped and we stayed there, yeah, and I wasn't quite well yet. I met that girl in in the pr, in the hospital and I had to look for a way to make some money. And of course registered as a Czechoslovakian citizen. I totally rejected my Polish background at that time.

Sandy: Was there much support , , , ?

IRENE WEBER:

I did not feel abandoned, I felt free. It was very hard for me. But the strange thing is that I was not in contact with any other people that came from concentration camps , so I was really totally detached from everything. And I wanted to make life for myself and go to school and I had to work and learn on the job because I wanted to be free and I wanted to be away from from everything..

Sandy: Tell me about the --tell me about the physical condition you were in when you were liberated. Like what you looked like, how much you weighed.

IRENE WEBER:

I lost a lot of weight and I had wounds in my mouth from undernourishment, so I was treated for that. And I had, I had wounds inside my cheeks inside my mouth,. so I was sick

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until I stayed in the hospital for probably close to two months.

Sandy: Did they--you said they gave you clothes, do you remember the clothes?

IRENE WEBER:

Yes,

Sandy: Tell me about it.

IRENE WEBER:

A pair of shoes, flat heeled shoes, socks a dress that I remember distinctly, quite nice, and that's about all. And the reason I could in that apartment and not need anything because everything was left behind, linens and dishes and things like that. But I still was not quite well, I had the gastro-intestinal problem for long time.

Sandy: Now tell me about the occasion that you came to a displaced persons camp.

IRENE WEBER:

Well, after a while in Czechoslovakia, the Russians, the communist party was voted into power, and as soon as this happened we were not allowed to leave the country and we were closed in. We had to have out IDs with us all the time, and there was lots of propaganda, how wonderful life is under communism. I was very young, somehow I did not

believe that because I thought if can not leave, if I cannot travel and leave the country, it didn't sound good to me. I was not very well informed on the ideology of the communist party, but I just didn't like it. So I went to Prague. Was

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very difficult, I just left everything behind, i just take the little bag, took a little baggage with my clothes and went to Prague and tried to get help to get out of the country. I was very determined to get out and be free. That was my--this is what I wanted most just to be free. And with there was an organization, underground organization that smuggled people through the border and I remember we had, I had to stay in Prague a couple of days and then we went on a bus. There were several people. WE went on he bus to the border line. There we spent the night which was absolutely horrible, and at a certain time we were told, now we can crawl under the fence and get to the other side to Germany. And that was the American zone of Germany. And I did that and it was a terrible experience this whole thing because there were renegades and people that were not very kind to us. And we our my life was in danger in really.

But once I crossed the border, there was a bus waiting for me, for several people I guess, and we were taken to Landsberg In Germany, in west Germany. And there we were in a DP camp.

Sandy: Tell me about that.

IRENE WEBER:

I didn't like it at all because again I was in a camp with bunkbeds and crowded and lots of people and no privacy. And it just felt that I was in a camp again except there were no Nazis around. And I don't know how I met--and people lived there, they were getting married, they had babies. And they didn't have babies while I was there, but they were pregnant, and I thought, this is not a life--I can't do that, I cannot stay here. And then I found out that one of our people somehow was on a farm several miles away from

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Landsberg, and I wanted to see her and I walked several miles and met her. I knew her from concentration camp, and I told her I wanted to stay with her, I don't want to be in a

camp again. I want to stay with her if she will have, let me stay until I find a different way and I can settle and something until? figure out what to do with myself. And so I did. I picked up my little bundle again, and I went to the farm. And I was working, it was a German family that owned the farm. And I was working on the farm a little to earn my keep. And in the meantime, I found out that there is a place that there are several of our people settled in and that is Rosenheim. Not too far from Munich. And this is--and I went there. I went to Rosenheim, and I got a room, two room, actually, a sitting and a bedroom, with a German family. And I paid them. The only means of paying them I had is because the jewish organization was sending us cheese, 5 found boxes of cheese, and wine and cigarettes. And I didn't drink the wine and I didn't smoke the cigarettes. I ate the cheese. So I sold it and some kind of shortening, I sold all that to the Germans, I gave it to them and they let me stay and gave me a few dollars, marks, not dollars. And I stayed there and then I thought now what next step is. I have to go to school. I have to do something. And I found about that was ORT, I think, the American ORT. I went to Munich and I found out about that. And I, I chose nursing school. And then I had to go to Foehrenwald, which is a small town, a village and this is where

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IRENE WEBER:

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

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went to school, I practiced in the hospital, and when I finished I got my diploma, I got a job in Peking which was a DP camp also. But I lived in the nurses quarters. And I was, my patients were all survivors. And many people were going on the Alia to Israel. And we were taking care of, taking blood and helping out that way, and I also had a steady job in the hospital, in the DP hospital, hos hospital for displaced persons.

Sandy: Tell me about the people going to Israel.

IRENE WEBER:

They were people just like myself. Some of them, young, some of them older people. They all wanted to go. And many of them did, I think. Of course, it was not yet, Palestine was not yet the state of Israel, is was Palestine, and they actually were entering illegally. The country that is now Israel. But nevertheless they wanted to go there. I probably would have gone to Israel after finishing my duty.

I felt that I am doing a very important job. working as a nurse in a DP hospital. And then I thought that I may eventually go to Israel.

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

IRENE WEBER:

Why I didn't want to stay, I have to stress very much that the conditions were very crowded. No privacy of any kind, and too many people, and too much eh emotionally it reminded me of the concentration camp, although it was not. And I realize that all along, of course, and I was free to leave

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whenever I wanted which was great. But the life in those, in the DP camp was not for me. Lots of people were very happy that they had this safety of those camps. I just chose not to stay there.

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

WERE you afraid?

IRENE WEBER:

No, I was not afraid, because I kept still my place in Rosenheim, My room, And I was quite a distance away in school, so about once in two weeks I used to come by train back to my place, knowing just I want I just had to know I had a place of my own, my privacy is so important to me. And I traveled back to school throughout the whole night because the railroads were bombed, and I had to change two or three trains, and I slept while waiting for the next train, I just slept on the bench and the station master knew me, and he gave me some blankets, army blankets to cover myself up because it was cold. And I was never afraid, Somehow I was never afraid. I was the only at that station in the middle of the night because I travelled at night. I started late afternoon and I travelled at night so I could be back in school in the morning.

Sandy: Were you given enough support after liberation?

IRENE WEBER:

Well I tried really to help myself as much as I could when I was in Czechoslovakia. I didn't get any support because I left this whole, you know, network of help, you know. So I didn't get it. But when I went back, when I came to Germany I did get the support. Whether it was enough or not, I

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really don't know from the perspective of those times. It probably was very help- helpful. So, but I thought I cannot continue doing this forever. I wanted to build-make some life and future for myself. And when I was working in the hospital, of course, there was some money that I got. I was paid for my job and also we still had some aid from the United States, Jewish Organizations, the Joint Organization and the UNRAA and such, so it was. Yes, I did travel in Germany. And I just simply did not have any fear at all because I felt that what I went through during the years of war and concentration camp, and especially prison, and after escaping, then I had nothing to be afraid of.

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