

As we were finishing the first tape, you were in the middle of the dramatic story of having met your brother. You were hugging with each other. And I'll ask you to continue from there.

We were hugging each other, holding. Disbelief. I didn't believe that I have anybody. A brother. I couldn't believe my eyes that I have a brother. I was holding him.

But we did not talk. We didn't convey a word. All we could do is kiss and hug. How long that took, I don't know. But it took quite a while till we separated. And I told him my mother is dead.

He told you?

I told him.

Uh-huh.

My mother is dead.

He didn't know?

He was running in different direction--

That day.

Everybody different direction. And my mother was holding me. I said, we were holding each other by hand, running. And she died.

I told him what she said, that her last word was, where are my children? What happened? God should be with them. That's what I heard. I told him.

While we were sitting, I asked, are you the only survivor, or do we have a father? Did sister Fay alive? And where were you? I had questions. All kind of questions.

We both couldn't talk, and kept looking at each other. He said, Dad is alive. Excuse me.

It's quite all right. He said Dad is alive, and we have sister Fay. I was the happiest kid alive. You can't imagine my happiness that day. I don't think anybody could imagine what went through my head.

I had questions. All kind of questions. But the words did not come out. We just looked. Just our eyes were talking. And I didn't want to let go of him.

It was evening, at this point.

Yes, very dark.

Where were you talking?

Outside, in the yard.

And the Polish couple, where were they?

They were standing.

Listening?

Just listening and looking.

How long was this going on?

Quite a while. They just were listening. They did not talk. They did not question my brother or anything at that moment. All they were seeing that we were crying together.

I think she was crying, too, the woman. Looking on us. All you needed is to look on us, and you would cry.

Just to hear it?

Just to see that moment. How we cling to each other. He looked like a skeleton. I didn't look any better, even though I was already washed and uh, the friend's dress on. But I was nevertheless a skeleton. I couldn't walk straight, because I was always in the barn, sitting in that position. So--

Even after liberation?

No, after the liberation, she let me walk around. But when you get used to sit like this, you go back to that position.

Uh-huh.

Even if you walk around. I walked around a little, but still, when I sat down, I sat like this. To this day, when I sleep, many times, I sleep with my feet-- cling to-- I dream every night. There was not going by a night that I should not dream and scream in my sleep.

When? Now?

Now. I don't know why, but I can't let it go. I can't forget it. I don't think I'll ever forget it. I don't think, to my dying days, I'll forget or forgive those Germans.

They ruined my life. And the Poles that killed hundreds of Jews for no reason. They haven't done nothing. I haven't done nothing. I didn't commit no crime. All I wanted is to live with my family in peace. That was my crime.

It's now after the war?

That was after the war.

And your family knows where the members are. So what happened, then? Did your brother take you to your father right away?

My brother took me right away.

That same night?

That same night. He says it's not healthy, it's not safe for you and me to remain here, because now you're exposed. Because I came to pick you up. He brought me--

This was 1945, probably. Your brother was 16, and you were 14 at the time.

Is so.

OK. I just wanted to get the picture of what we were talking about.

I was so small. I looked like 10 years old.

So the 16-year-old brother came on one day. We don't know exactly when that day was, but we figure it was in 1940.

No, I don't.

And that very day, that very evening, he took you away. How did you leave the Polish family?

He came with a wagon. A horse and a small wagon. That Polish family gave me a piece of bread on the way. And she hugged me. And she was sorry. And we said goodbye.

And as I left with my brother, scared that somebody might recognize us and kill us again, because that's what they were doing right after the war. If they saw a Jew, they would kill them. Especially when I was a witness, and I knew those people who killed my mother. I knew where they are, where they're located. We were scared, both of us.

But the Polish woman was a very fine woman, it seems.

She was a very nice woman. But I think that she was maybe one of a million that did that. They were not nice, the Poles.

And the Polish man?

He was a nice guy, too. Very nice.

But he made that statement.

Yes. Yet he made that statement, that he said, a dirty Jew you were, and a dirty Jew you'll remain.

He wanted you to be with him?

He wanted me to remain with--

To be his daughter.

Yes.

As a Polish Catholic.

Right. He wanted to make me a Catholic, and I should stay with him. He was very nice with me.

But they knew that you were leaving that evening.

Yes. So all in all, they were really very, very nice.

Very nice. Very nice. In fact, when we left, we came to Krasnik, another city.

Town. How large was it? A small town.

It was bigger than the town that I was born. Krasnik. I wasn't yet a month in Krasnik, and he came to visit me.

The husband?

The husband of the Polish family.

So he knew where you were.

No. He kept asking.

And then he located you.

He located me. He came in. I was scared of him.

Was your father there?

My father was outside.

What was your family doing at the time? Were they doing any work?

No. That was right after the war. Nobody was working.

What did they live on?

The Polish gave us some food from the city. Everybody was giving, donating food. The camp was dissolved. There was, in Krasnik, a little--

Concentration camp?

Concentration camp. They were working there.

And your father worked there?

He was in Bedzin.

He was in Bedzin.

He was in Bedzin?

Yeah, he was not--

And your brother?

The same thing. They were all caught and shipped away--

And your sister Fay?

They all went to Bedzin, to the camp.

And your mother died that day? And what happened to your sister, [? Rivka? ?]

She died.

Oh, she had the business with the [? handicapped ?] [? boy. ?]

She died.

Yeah. OK.

And he came in. He wanted to see whether it's really true that he's my brother, that I have a father, because he didn't believe. He had the mind to take me back, because we were talking slightly. And he says I'm glad that you have a

family. I'm really happy for you. How they're treating you?

He couldn't believe that this is my father. He thought, just strangers. So he said, how they treated you? I said, this is my father.

Did he meet your father?

I don't remember. Maybe he did.

Your father didn't want to see the family that saved you?

He was afraid to go back.

Your father was.

Yes, to thank them. Because he heard a lot of Jews went to Janow, or any place that had houses that they owned and they want to sell, they were killed. If anybody owned a house then went back to their town and wanted to sell, that they should have money to live on, they killed them. The Poles.

So now, the war is over.

War is over.

Your family-- the four of you are together.

Yes.

And you're in Poland, in Krasnik.

Yes.

Then I assume-- what happened after that? You must have left.

After that--

Where did you go?

I heard there is a children's home, because my father couldn't take care of me. And I went to a home.

In Poland?

In Poland.

Where? In Krasnik?

In Lublin.

In Lublin.

Yes. I went to a home. I was a short time there. That was after the war. My sister met her husband there--

Her husband-to-be.

Her husband-to-be, right. Got married and went to Bergen-Belsen.

Not to the camp, but to the city?

To Bergen-Belsen, Germany.

Yeah.

I was there a short time. My father came back and took me out from that home, and took me to Germany, Bergen-Belsen.

And your brother?

And my brother. We all left.

So now, the whole family with your new brother-in-law are in Bergen-Belsen?

In Bergen-Belsen.

And this is after the war.

Yeah. There was a camp there.

And how long were you there?

Also a very short time. I went to a home near Hamburg, Germany called Blankenese. Over there, they had a school and Jewish brigade from Palestine, at that time. And they collected all the children.

How long was the family in Palestine? Or did you--

No.

In Germany. Did you leave Germany together or separately?

Separate. We separated again. We kept separating ourselves.

Who left Germany first?

I did.

You left shortly after the war, after coming to Germany. And that was when the Jewish brigade came.

Right.

And they took you to--

To Palestine.

To Palestine.

At that time.

So here you are, a young girl of 14, 15. You're the first one out into Palestine.

Yes.

What happened to the rest of the family?

They remained in Bergen-Belsen. They were saying that they're going to come to Palestine. Now Israel.

They let you go to Palestine, telling you that they're trying to come to Palestine, also, to get the family together.

Right.

And what actually happened? Did they get there?

We separated. I came to Palestine. And they took me, put me in a school so I could learn something, because--

What I want to know now is how did the family leave Germany?

My father heard-- he remembered, rather, that he had a stepsister in Canada. So he left with my brother to Canada.

All right. So now, three people are out of Europe. Your sister and my brother-in-law are still there.

My sister and brother-in-law had a sister-- a step-sister, also-- in New York. And he left to New York. Now, I'm alone in Israel.

When he left for New York, did he leave with your sister?

With my sister.

OK. So everybody's in America, and you're in Palestine. In Israel.

Yes. And you're a young girl.

At what point-- did they come to Palestine, eventually? What happened?

No. They never came. I stayed.

--which became Israel, and they stayed here.

And my father went to Canada, stayed in Canada. My sister came to New York state in Brooklyn.

Now, you stayed in--

And I'm in Israel alone.

You stayed in Palestine, which became Israel in '48.

Yes. And at that time, you're getting to be a young lady of 17, and so on. And you're raising yourself.

And I'm raising myself.

And what happened to you?

I was in a kibbutz.

Yes.

It's called, rather-- first, I was, like, in a nice school. Half a day, I went to school. And half a day, I went to work on the farm. And they were teaching me Hebrew. Teaching me. I needed to be taught from A to Z.

But you learned it.

I learned it. And then, in Israel, in '48, the war with the Arabs.

Right.

And I'm alone, a girl. Have no one to talk to besides friends.

Right. They're in the same position, probably.

They're in the same. Children my age-- the same position as me.

How many years were you in Israel?

I think I was about 12 or 13 years.

So you came there, let's say, in '46, and you remained till about '58?

No, no, no, no. Less than that. I came beginning of '47.

OK. '47.

And left in '59.

'59. So that's about 12 years.

Yeah. Something like that.

Did you marry in Israel?

Yes. I met my husband in Israel. He was in the army. And after, I met him through a family.

All right. And what year did you marry him?

1950.

1950. Still a young girl. And I assume you had children in Israel?

My two older born in Israel-- my son and my older daughter.

And then in '58 or so--

In '50.

The family came to America.

My sister sent me papers to come to America. But at that time, during Eisenhower's time, would not allow a whole family to come. So I got separated from my children and my husband again. It was tormenting. I was nervous, upset.

You mean, you came and left them in Israel?



In Israel.

For how long?

About two years.

And then you managed to get them over here.

I worked and brought them here.

And the family has been here since?

Thank God, ever since. We have another daughter. A little one named Gracie. I named after my mother. Her name was [? Gracja ?] [? Mendek. ?] So in Jewish, I named her after my mother.

This is the little one.

The little one. She was very dear to me. I miss my mother. Even that I'm older and have children of my own, but I miss my mother very much.

What do your children do?

My oldest son is a salesman.

Of what?

He sells furnitures.

He works in a store?

No. He goes around selling to stores.

Yes. And--

And my daughter, the older one, is a teacher.

Where?

A school teacher.

In New York?

In Brooklyn.

In Brooklyn. So public school.

Public school. Yes.

And the little girl who's named after your mother?

Yes.

She's a big girl now.

She's beautiful.

What does she do?

So beautiful. She works in New York. A legal secretary.

Fine. Now, I'd like to ask you a few general questions, if you don't mind, before we conclude the interview. When did you start talking about the Holocaust and with whom?

I start talking-- they maybe were 3 or 4. Telling them stories.

3 or 4. To the children?

My children.

Yeah.

3 or 5, telling them because a 4-year-old knows, already, that they should have a grandma. Other people have grandparents. They don't have no grandparents.

But in Israel, there are quite a few Holocaust survivors, aren't there?

Yes. But I was living in a place where they had grandparents.

Not exclusively survivors.

Yeah.

OK. I understand.

I was telling them stories.

So you started gradually with the children.

Telling them the stories. Crying. I was very nervous, always. They didn't know. They couldn't understand why I'm screaming at them? Why am I screaming many time?

So you explained it to them?

My son says, Ma, why can't you talk to me? Don't scream.

And I says, honey, I don't mean to do it. I don't mean to scream. It just comes out of anger that is bundled up in me.

Yeah. Well, maybe, in a way, you're beginning to answer part of my second question. How has the Holocaust affected your outlook on life and your understanding of human nature?

Of course, I can't forget what happened. And I'll remember till my dying days. But life goes on. We have to live. I have to live for my children. And I hope that a catastrophe like that will never happen again.

Yeah. I asked, also, how do you understand human nature? You spoke more about the Poles than the Germans in your story.

Yes. Because on one side, the Germans killed some of my family's. And on the other side, the Poles killed the rest of mine. And they were helping to kill. A Jew was worse than a dog.

What does this say to you about human nature?

Well, I have to be more understanding. I understand--

You're talking about yourself. I'm talking about the people who brought about the Holocaust.

I hope that will never happen again, a Holocaust like that, to anybody.

Right.

To any human race should not happen what happened to the Jews, to our brothers. That should never-- my eyes should never, never see another Holocaust.

Towards any people.

To anybody.

Yeah. Now, my last question. Has the Holocaust affected your faith and religious observance?

Somewhat, yes. Because I come from a very religious family. But I keep kosher home. Not just for me. I dedicate it to my mother, that she was such a religious woman. And I do that for her. Not just for me.

I keep kosher. I go to the synagogue. I fast, which I didn't know what Judaism is.

You fast.

Yes. I didn't know what Judaism is when I came out. And I was in various places that didn't teach me much of Judaism. So I didn't know how to make kosher, even. If I wanted to make kosher the meat, how to do it. I didn't know even how to boil water.

But you learned.

I had a woman, an older woman, when I got married. She was a neighbor. Since I didn't have a mother, I used to go in to her and ask her how to do certain things. She should teach me. And she did.

And she did. And you took it on.

Yes.

All right. Thank you very much. Your story is really a very unique story-- the story of a young girl who went through what you went through. Even though we do many interviews, I find this unique. It was an important story to be told, not only for your children and grandchildren, but for all of us. And I want to thank you for coming down and sharing this with us.

I thank you very much, too.