

Bernard Weinstein, director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies project on the Holocaust. Sharing the interview with me is Dan Gover. We would like to welcome Margit Feldman.

Thank you very much. I can't say it is my pleasure, but I will say it is my duty to be here with you today, and to remember my past, so the future will know what has happened. And with that help, let's hope that the world will do everything in their power not to let another Holocaust happen to anyone, whether they are Jewish, or Christians, or Blacks, or white.

My name is Margit Buchhalter Feldman. I was born June 12th, 1929, in Budapest, Hungary. Now, I was born in Budapest, but we did not live in Budapest. The reason I was born there, because my mother was having difficulty and my father took her up to the polyclinic, which is the biggest hospital in Budapest, to give birth to me and my brother who died even before he was born. So I was the only child to Joseph and Theresa Buchhalter.

We lived in a small town called Tolcsva, near the Czechoslovakian border. Being the only child, I could tell you was not the easiest. A lot a responsibility, and a lot of loneliness goes with being the only child. But of course, you receive a lot more loving and a lot more caring, and an awful lot of protection from the outside world. With this wall, I was still brought up with a lot of hatred from the outside world.

I remember as a child, my Christian neighbors' children would play with me because I had nice toys, but I had to go to a Jewish parochial school. I could not go to a regular public school, because I was Jewish. I remember being called dirty Jew, filthy Jew. I remember stones being thrown at me as I was walking back and forth from school. And I also remember very well, my father-- a blessed memory-- trying to always, from a distance, follow me. Just to keep an eye on me, that no harm should come to me.

Did I have a beautiful childhood? Yes, in my home, I had a beautiful childhood. But for the outside world, most of the time, it was taboo to me because I was a Jewish child. I went to elementary school in Tolcsva. And then for gymnasium, I went for one year in Budapest. My mother had two brothers living there. So I went up there. But of course, the war was coming, and the news from overseas was kind of upsetting, and my father insisted that I do come home and stay home with the family.

Excuse, me how large a community was Tolcsva?

Tolcsva might have had, maybe, 4,000 or 5,000.

And what percentage was Jewish of that population?

Of that population, maybe you had about 200, 250 Jews in there. It was a shtetl.

And what did your parents do for a living?

My father had a general store. Mostly food and some clothing. And of course, as the war was ending, he was allowed to sell less and less food that was on coupons, especially. No sugar, no flour. The Jewish merchants were not allowed to sell those things.

We had a little farm near our home where we had our own animals. They had chickens and turkey and geese. Those were my playmates. I remember those days very well, very vividly. And we had cows. I used to play with the little calf. And we used to deliver milk, especially to the rabbi's home, and to the cantor's home, because we were a strictly kosher home.

My father-- of course I was the only child, so I was his son and his daughter. He was a very religious man, and he would go to temple, any occasion. We had a small temple in our town. And I would carry his tallis, because come Shabbos, you're not allowed to carry anything. I would do everything to with him or for him, as much as I was allowed to do in a Jewish religion. But those are beautiful memories which I will cherish for rest of my life.

My mother was a homemaker. She stayed in the background most of the time to help my father in the store. Taught me how to make all those wonderful Hungarian cakes and cookies and food, which, thank god she taught me. I resented it at that early age, because to get up early in the morning and make the dough and all that. You, as a child, you don't want to be awake. But I'm thankful to her for all those teachings.

We did have, you would call it here, a maid who helped us out in the house, so my mother was more free to help my father in the store. And my grandmother lived with us. My grandfather, both my grandparents lived with us. I think I was six years old when my grandfather passed away. These were my mother's parents, the [PERSONAL NAME].

We had relatives in the nearby towns. There were cities already, and there was a lot of intermingling with holidays, or visiting with cousins and aunts and uncles. I think the European families were much more closely knit than the ones you see here in the United States. I'm sorry to say that, but this is my personal feeling. You will go out of your way. It didn't matter how many miles, just to spend time together.

I grew up, as I said, in a very religious home, and I think that upbringing and that believing in God saw me through a lot of dark periods of my life up to today. Did I didn't know anything about the war forthcoming? As I said, I was the only child, so I really didn't. My father shielded me from any bad news.

I know that in 1943 the Jewish men were taken into forced labor camps, into neighboring cities, to do manual labor. To help out on the farms, and to clean the streets. And they were taken away for some time, a month at the time, or six weeks at a time. And I would go and visit my father. So I knew that something was forthcoming.

But the fear wasn't there, because I still saw him. He was still able to come home on furloughs, and we still were able to together be together as a family unit. But my world really stopped one day in 1944 when the Hungarian gendarmes come knocking on my parents', on my home, to inform us that they had to collect all our belongings that we're able to carry with us, and all our valuables.

This was April of 1944. And I know that the Passover dishes were still out, so it had to be during Passover time. And we collected as much as we could, and packed it up. And the next day, we left our home and assembled, with the rest of the Jews in my town in the town hall. I remember there were no Germans there. This was done or by the Hungarians gendarmes.

Of course, when we entered, they registered every family, and they asked immediately to give over all our valuables, meaning any jewelry or any money. Some people were able to hide some, although it was not revealed to us where we were going, but some didn't. A lot of times, when I'm asked to lecture, I'm asked, how could you just obey and pack up your things and leave your home? And not to rebel, and not to fight back?

Well, there's only one answer that I could give to the world for that. I did not come from a free world. I had to do what I was told to do, especially because I was a Jew. And when the gendarmes told you to do something, either you did it, or you were brutally beaten for it, or even your life was taken from you. So we followed orders, and we did it.

Now, once there, all the people from my hometown, and the region around my hometown, was gathered our march started on foot. Our belongings were put on horse-drawn wagons, and the elderly who could not work were put on the wagons. Excuse me. And our march started for the capital of my region, which is called Storaljahely, where they had a ghetto waiting for us.

Now, in the ghetto, everyone was there from the region where I come from. Of course, we were together with all my aunts, cousins, who lived in that region, plus my other grandmother, my father's mother. We stayed in that ghetto for a few weeks. A lot of people committed suicide in the ghetto, I remember vividly. The region where I come from, there were no indoor plumbing, or no indoor heating, or no electricity. So we had to use the outhouses.

And when, in the ghetto, you would go to the outhouse in the morning, you would find a lot of people with their throats slashed, or their wrists slashed. These were people who no had an idea of what was forthcoming. And of course, we had

to take care of-- not we, the adults in the ghetto-- had to take care of all these dead bodies and bury them. This was going on every single day until we were transported.

I had one pleasant experience happen to me in a ghetto. In Europe, you don't fall in love on your own. I don't know if you're aware of it or not. You're promised to someone. A shidduch is made for you. So my father, a blessed memory in the First World War, promised his best friend, if they survive, whoever will get married and have children, a marriage will take place. And I was promised to his best friend, who had a son. And in the ghetto I was introduced to this young man.

Now, this was in May. I was 14 years old. He was 18. And of course, immediately asked my father that the marriage should take place now. The promise was made to him. I think I was pretty mature young lady at that age. But my father said to him, now, look. My word will stand. The future for all of us is very uncertain right now, but I promise you, like I did your father, wherever we go on and will come back, that marriage will take place. And of course, I survived, but the young man didn't, so that marriage never took place.

But going back. We stayed in the ghetto with minimal food that was that we were able to bring with us, and what the government there was able to give us. Wanted to give us, I should say. In the rooms, they put four or five families, and they had straw mattresses on the floor which we slept on. These were the areas, I think, where the Gypsies in Hungary, or the unwanted, used to be living. And they just dislocated them from their homes, and they made the ghetto out of it.

Of course, one day, we were told, once again, to collect all our belongings, and we were being shipped into a labor camp. Not to worry, the families will remain together. And we all assembled and we marched towards the railroad station. This was my very first time that I saw what a German as a soldier looks like. They took over the screaming enjoyment to mach schnell, get in the railroad cars, push you in there with their police dogs at their side. They pushed in as many as they could push in there. I think in my cattle car must have been at least 100 people there.

Was the entire ghetto dissolved?

Yes.

Or were some people left behind?

No. That was the first transport really out of that region. I must tell you that there were 15,000 people from my region that was transported. Out of the 15,000, to my best of my knowledge, 250 survived. Out of that 15,000, 68 was my immediate family that I could count to survive.

Going back to the transports. We got into the cattle cars. Of course, there was just standing room only. If you could crouch yourself down, you did. They put one pail in for bathroom facilities. Water by the door. As they opened the door on the transport with a ladle, they would come, and whoever was near it was able to have some. I would say more than one third didn't make it to Auschwitz alive.

I know there were infants on the train that I was on, in the car, and the mothers just really twisted the neck of their own infant just to silence them. They weren't able to feed them, and the children just wouldn't be quiet. You know, an infant, you can't comprehend what is going on.

Our food ran out, because the transport took quite a few days to get to Auschwitz. Why? I find that out now by reading a lot. That they had to, every time they came to, they had to stop. They had to get a new conductor. They had to pay so much in money to go through that time to the people.

This was already May, and the outside world was coming alive after the winter. I remember looking through the slits of the train. The trees were starting to become green. Some were in flowers. The irony of it is that the outside world was becoming alive, and my world was coming to an end.

The German race, in my mind and heart, is a brilliant, highly educated race. And they knew what they were doing.

There was very well thought out, and very well done. As you were coming towards the gate of Auschwitz, you weren't scared, even though you were dehumanized already in those cattle cars. But number one, you were still with your family.

Number two, when you approached these iron gates in Auschwitz that said arbeit mach frei. Before you came to it, there was one area that had small little homes with flowers and children running around outside. Family units together. So this is what you saw. Now I once again, believe firmly, if the world Red Cross ever did go to see the camps, this is the place that the Germans showed them. They never were allowed to go through the iron gate that said arbeit mach frei.

Because once you went through that iron gate, you really entered into hell itself. They quickly opened the doors on our trains, and the capos, who were all Polish men-- Germans did not dirty their hands. They didn't handle any of us. They just stood there and screamed out orders to get out of those cattle cars. Mach, you know, schnell, schnell. Get out, raus. And leave all your belongings on the cattle car.

They made two lines, one men and one women. The German soldiers were with their police dogs. The capos were emptying the trains pulling us out of it. And I remember one figure that really is burnt into my brain for the rest of my life, and that was Dr. Mengele. In leather boots, in his leather jacket, leather pants, with his dog at his side and his leather stick. He played God. That stick he pointed. If he pointed it to the right, you went to the crematorium. If he pointed it to the left, for the time being, you stayed alive, and you went into the other side of Auschwitz.

My father risked and received a tremendous beating. He ran back from the line that he was with his two other brothers. And he put his two hands on my head, like he did every Friday night, and he said his last blessing over me. And he-- I'm sorry.

It's all right.

He asked me to take care of myself, and I should be a good girl for him. After so many years, I try not to get emotional.

Where was your mother?

My mother was already separated from me with her mother, and her sister-in-law, and my two younger cousins. And I stayed with my father's sister and her sister-in-law. My mother went straight to the crematorium that day with her mother and sister-in-law and the two younger cousins of mine. I stayed with my aunt and her sister-in-law, and we ran towards the other side of the camp.

And as we march towards the camp where the people were staying alive, there was one distant cousin of mine who yelled out to my aunt, who recognized us. Who came maybe a day or two before, from another region of Hungary. And yelled out to my aunt, lie about Margaret's age, because if you tell them she's 14, they will send her back to the crematorium. So at that moment, I became 18 years old.

I had difficulty, when I was liberated, to reclaim myself. But with the help of some of my friends who were with me, I was able to accomplish that.

Can I go back over something for a moment, Margit? You mentioned about your father being beaten. I know it's painful, but did you actually see him being beaten?

Oh yes. Oh yes. He was pulled away from me, and he was beaten for getting out of line, coming over to say his last goodbye to me. My mother just waved to me, and we never said our goodbyes. And my aunt, of course, embraced me and calmed me down. I think I was in more of a shock than hysteria or crying or anything.

And as we marched towards the place where they disrobed you and shaved all your hair, I remember, that's when I first broke down. Because there is nothing more frightening than see a room full of women and some young ladies, not children, starkly naked with nothing on you, your hair shaved. You don't recognize anyone. So I was 14 years old. I was petrified.

Of course, my aunt reached for me, tried to cover herself, and reached for me to be quiet. You'll be all right, just be quiet. And I went through that procession with her and her sister-in-law. Now, the Germans were notorious to keep you in line for hours and hours at a time for counting and recounting. Why? I don't know.

To escape, where could you have escaped? I'm talking about my group. You were in Auschwitz. The whole camp was enclosed with barbed wires full of electricity. If you would have run anywhere, there were German gestapos who were watching you from the watchtower. Either they would have shocked you, or you would have been electrocuted. But yet, they continued their counting and recounting that would wake you up wee hours of the morning.

After we went through the procedure, I was given a cheesecloth dress with a prison number on it, and a pair of wooden shoes. And that was my garment for the time being. We were eventually allowed to go into the barracks, and stayed there. The facilities were unbelievable. I remember one thing that used to really make me sick to my stomach, and used to burn my eyes. That horrible, horrible fume coming out of the gas chambers.

Did you know what it was?

Not on my first day of arrival, but I became smart overnight. Because transports were coming in every single day, so the furnaces would go on day and night, day and night. And the fume was, I mean, it just burned your nose, it burned your eyes. You couldn't smell it. You would cough and whatnot. My barracks were not that far away from it. That I remember vividly.

Now, I did not stay in Auschwitz too long. See, the Germans were also notorious not to keep you in one camp too long. Stayed in Auschwitz for a few weeks, and then I was sent to Krakow. In Krakow, I was sent with my aunt and her sister-in-law. The three of us were always together.

In Krakow, I worked in a quarry. Chiseling stones out of a wall, lifting them and putting them on a lorry, and then pushing them from one end of the quarry to the other. Unloading, and going back. If you didn't move fast enough, or if you didn't lift a heavy enough stone quick enough, you got the beatings of little life.

The Germans had one game, which they played in Krakow. I don't know if any of you are aware of it or not. Once again, they would wake you up when it's still dark outside, and you would have to assemble, stay on line. And as you stayed on line, they would shoot every tenth person right in front of you. I don't know why I was so lucky, because I will live with this guilt of being alive for the rest of my life, which will go into in detail later.

But either I ended up in the end or a few away from it. Once, I ended up next to the person. And of course, we had to collect all those bodies. Still alive, many of them, put them on trucks, and they were buried in mass graves because Krakow did not have a crematorium.

And then, we would be served our soup, which I could close my eyes and still see in one of me. Was a green soup with cabbage, and the green worms swimming in it, and whatever else they could throw into it, and a piece of black bread with it. Why did we eat it? There was just a will in you to defy them, that I'm going to stay alive, even though you didn't want to. But something inside of you made you do this. And you begged and forced your friends and your relatives who were with you to eat, no matter what it tastes like.

Was your aunt and your other relatives--

Her sister-in-law and my aunt were with me in Krakow. I stayed in Krakow, once again, for maybe six weeks or eight weeks, and then I was sent back to Auschwitz for the second time. When I went back to Auschwitz for the second time, I received my tattoo number, which is A23029.

The second time back in Auschwitz, I worked where they made the food in these big kettles they cooked the soups in. They would make a hole in the ground and make a fire and put the kettles on it. My job was to clean up those kettles to the best of my ability for the next meal. And I remember, I would just lick it off with my finger and my tongue as much

as I could to get as much more nourishment out of it as I could.

I saw quite a few horrible things going on the second time, but once again, I was more wiser and know more what was going on. Learned a lot more than when I first arrived. I saw a very dear friend of mine, a young girl, she was maybe a year and a half older than I was, recognizing her mother on the other side of the barbed wire in another barracks. And running forwards it, calling her mother, and both running, touching the electric wire, and board getting electrocuted at the same time.

I saw a lot of my good-looking inmates being taken away and being used as prostitutes. Once again, we had the capos taking care of us. Life was like, by then, you were dehumanized. You did as you were told. I'm sure they gave you something in your food that stopped your-- girls who were menstruating stopped their menstrual periods. Stopped all type of a growth inside of you. And you followed orders.

A lot of people ask me on my lectures, didn't you rebel? Didn't you tried to escape? I'm sure there was some rebelling going in different concentration camps. But I never saw it, because it didn't happen with my group. From Auschwitz, I was sent to Grunberg. In Grunberg, I worked in an ammunition factory. They took 2000 Hungarian inmates, and 2000 Polish inmates.

You said from Auschwitz. Do you mean from Krakow?

No. From Krakow, I went back to Auschwitz, where I received my tattoo. Then, from Auschwitz, I was sent to Grunberg, where I worked in an ammunition factory. You see, the war was ending. Coming from Hungary, we only had one year of concentration camp. Not like the Polish Jews or the other Jews. So the war was ending, and they needed all the labor that they could get. And I was making munitions in a factory.

Life was much more bearable there, because they needed you. And believe it or not, some of their people risked their lives by sometimes sneaking an extra piece of bread in under their skirt and following you into the bathroom, and giving it to you, and you would eat it right there. If they would have gotten caught, they would have been punished, killed, or so would I. Prisoners who received that food.

We lived in a barracks on straw beds, but you were out of the environment of so-called concentration camps, so life was more bearable there. Which was short lived. Do you want me to go to that person who I found after all these years?

Yes.

Because this is where she was.

Yeah.

I had the opportunity of meeting someone who was with me in Grunberg. Her name is Gerda Weiss Klein. We were both together in Grunberg, and this October 15th, she came to my community in Bridgewater, New Jersey, to speak at the Pacesetters Dinner. And while she was giving her life story, we both looked at each other, and realized we were both together.

So after 40-some odd years, 45 years-- no, more than that-- 47 years, we discovered that we were both in Grunberg together. We were both on a death march out of Grunberg to our final camps. And she didn't realize that I survived. I didn't realize that she survived. And it was a great reunion for both of us. And I only wish and prayed that there were more reunions like this going on through the world.

Going back to my story. When I left Grunberg, we left on foot. The Germans did not allow any transports on trains anymore or on buses. This was in the middle of the winter. This is why it's called a death march. On foot, in a deep snow, we marched. One thing we had plenty of, and that's liquid. Because if you take the snow, put it in your mouth, you have plenty of fluid.

A lot of my inmates fell in the snow and froze to death. Believe it or not, the Germans didn't even give them the dignity of shooting them to death with a bullet. They didn't want to waste their bullets. I remember, once, specifically, we came upon a big barn that had hay, and we spent the night indoors in this barn. As many of us on top of one another. Just to be in indoors somewhere, we didn't care.

But in Europe, there wasn't that much refrigeration, so to keep like potatoes, or kohlrabi, or beets, you put it amongst hay, and it stays, believe it or not. It doesn't get frozen. So as we arrived into the barn, we were looking to lay down. We found pieces of raw vegetable and we ate them. And some of the people went on the other side of the barn and found some live chickens. And we just twisted off their necks and plucked their feathers and ate them raw.

Starved out we were, not realizing how deathly sick we all got from it. We had nothing to eat but the snow, and to eat raw vegetables and eat raw meat, we all got terrible, terrible, diarrheas and whatnot from it. We were very sick from it. But our march continued, and my final destination was Bergen-Belsen.

I don't know if any of you read about life in Bergen-Belsen. But that was really the pits. It was hell in itself. People were just deteriorated. Bodies were covered with lice. Diphtheria and typhoid was rampant in the camp. No facilities to burn the bodies or bury the bodies. Just piling them up on top of one another. This is where you saw those heaps of corpses, at Bergen-Belsen was one of them.

We were put into barracks that didn't even have straw. Just the concrete floors and the cinder block walls. And people who didn't have strength to go out-- they didn't even have outhouses, they just made holes in the ground to relieve yourself-- would just do whatever they have to, right wherever they were laying. They were so weak they couldn't move.

So it didn't take long for us to arrive, the new arrivals, to become into the same state. My body got covered with lice, and I came down with typhoid and Diphtheria. Lost all my hair. No matter how you tried to brush the lice off your body, within seconds, there were even back more.

Food was very minimal. German soldiers were still around, watching us. For what, I don't know, because none of us had strength. Slowly, it went all the way. As I said to you on the phone, I was liberated in Bergen-Belsen by the English soldiers, the Tommies. I lost my aunt in Bergen-Belsen, maybe two or three days before liberation. She died in my arms. Her sister-in-law died about four weeks before that.

So there I was, all alone at the age of 15. Except my rabbi from Hungary, his daughter, was in my group. She was in the room, in my barrack with me. She's still alive, thank god. And two of my friends-- one lives in California and one lives in Cleveland-- who survived with me. Liberation finally came. But before I go into liberation, there is two things that I will never, never understand and forgive the free world. Their deathly silence through all this.

I mean, it's hard for you to understand, but I cannot accept it. There was a free world outside. Why were they so silent? There were aeroplanes going over our camps. Why didn't they bomb the camps to get us out of misery, instead of letting us lay there and rot, and die by the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands? These are questions that no one could answer me. And I don't know if the world will ever have an answer for it.

Did the people in the camps talk about these things, or was it a kind of a silent?

No, we talked. We were hoping and praying that a bomb would hit us to get us out of our misery. We were hoping that America would come to our rescue. It was uncomprehendable then, and it's even worse for me now. But what makes it even worse, that if you do go into Washington to the archives, the government had full knowledge what was going on there, and they did nothing.

I don't know if any of you saw the film of the liberators when they came to the United States. I have that film. There was a Polish general who came to see President Roosevelt. Pleaded with him, told him what was going on, and President Roosevelt replied, we will win the war, and we will punish perpetrators. And that's all.

These words will ring in my ear forever. Because President Roosevelt was a very well-loved president, not only by his country, but for all over the world. And the world expected more from him than just say that we will win the war, and the perpetrators will be punished. So now that I'm reading more and learning more, it makes it more difficult to accept what went on there.

But going back to my liberation. The German soldiers, all of a sudden, disappeared because the English were coming. They did not want to be found. They did not want to be exposed to what they did. So they all ran. So the camp was left on its own for quite a few days with no supervision. Not that they supervised, but no brutal behavior or mannerism from them.

People were dying by the thousands, and those of us who still had strength would just pull out the corpses from our environment and pile them on top of this heap of dead people rotting away and the germs and it was going just, unreal, rampant. No. Liberation came when the English soldiers finally drove into the camp, and it was just unreal. Unbelievable. You couldn't comprehend. You couldn't accept.

And you didn't want to believe it, or maybe it was a hoax. Maybe it's just part of your punishment that they did, just pulling a fast one on you. But when the soldiers started to mingle, and some spoke Yiddish, and some spoke German, to try to calm us down, and opened up their bags, and handed out candy or food, whatever they had. And touched us, tried to calm down. They were not afraid to touch us, believe it or not. We eventually started to sink in that we were going to be free.

They took us out of this environment with the help of the Red Cross, the World Red Cross that came in. They de-fumigated us, they de-iced us, and they give us some clean clothes. And we were allowed to go into the facilities with the German soldiers used to live. Into their barracks. And that's where we stayed. And we were given permission to go into the town of Bergen-Belsen, and ask for anything from the people who lived there, food or anything, or take anything they want. I don't even think we needed permission, we just would've done it.

So being starved out, one day, a few of my friends and I went and got a pot and some meat and potatoes. And we were going to make a stew. And dug out, made a fire, and while we made the fire, the soil got heated and there was a tremendous explosion. You see, the Germans had all intentions of blowing up Bergen-Belsen, but they ran so fast that they never did their final solution. And I got covered with shrapnels.

I still have a piece in my skull embedded which doesn't interfere with any of my functions, so it was never taken out. I had a big gash under my left breast, and a big hole into my thigh. So my freedom was short lived. I was taken into the army hospital immediately and given first aid, and then taken to the Red Cross hospital. And eventually, my transport into Sweden was made on the ship.

But while laying in the bed, not being able to move or anything, I developed pleurisy and pneumonia, and that was really, I barely fought through at that time, I remember. We arrived into Sweden. And let me tell you, my friends, the Swedish people were our guardian angels. If you could ever visit Europe, make sure you visit Sweden, because they came to our aids.

They visited us in the hospitals. They brought us food. They brought us clothing. There were a difficulty of verbal communication, but when you love and care, you don't need words. Your expression speaks for itself. And with their help, I became well enough once again. I had no intention, whatsoever, to go back to Hungary at 16 years old by then. None whatsoever. No, 15. I had my 16th in Sweden.

I made all my enquiries to HIAS, to the social workers who came to visit us, to see if anyone stayed alive. They informed me that my mother and my father were dead. They didn't even inform me that one of my father's brother, who remained alive, went back to Hungary. I don't know. They couldn't trace him at that time. I found out later. And as I said, no, I don't want to go back to Hungary. I had to make all the arrangements to make all the way out to Israel. I was already booked on the ship with a lot of my friends.

And as the news came out of Sweden, and the little article appeared in the Hungarian newspaper here in New York,



Margit Buchhalter looking for-- I know my father had two sisters, my mother had three brothers in America. Where in America, I didn't know. I didn't know my aunt's married name. All I know, her maiden name.

And her next door neighbor, who was a Hungarian lady-- non-Jewish, but Hungarian, very nice lady-- read this article and took it into my aunt and showed it to her. And of course, immediately, she contacted me through telegrams. I identified myself, because a lot of survivors-- you could not blame them-- tried to come out under false names. Remembered who died in their arms, and took up, I want to go to your family, you know. So I identified myself that yes, I was her brother's daughter. And then, immediately, paperwork started for my coming to America to be with my aunt and my uncles.

I arrived here August of 1960-- 1947, excuse me. The arrival was a very memorable day for me, also. I came on a Swedish big ship, the Drottningholm, and as we were coming into the pier, the pilot ship came out to meet mine. My uncle's wife's sister worked for HIAS and got permission from my immediate family to come aboard ship to meet me so I did not have to go to the Ellis Island and that part of it.

And I didn't know this was forthcoming. And when I heard my name being announced to come to the captain's office, I got petrified. Here I go, my papers are wrong, and I'm being sent back. And when I walked into this room and saw my aunts and my uncles, of course, I don't have to tell you. Looking at my father's sister was like looking into my father's face. And my mother's brothers. It was a terribly, terribly emotional reunion for me.

I went through a lot of resentment when I first came here. Every time I would go down the street in the Bronx-- I lived on Starling Avenue in the Bronx. 121 is my present day address. And when I would go down the street with my aunt and my uncle and their children, and I would see a child with a mother and a father, I would just break away, run upstairs, and throw myself down on the bed and cry for hours. This was the worst period. One of my worst periods in my life.

You come into a free country. You see so much love and freedom, and so many beautiful things, and all yours was taken away from you. And never to have it back. This was difficult for me to cope with. But with their help, and a lot of loving, I've overcome. Just like I overcome so many other things in my life.

I tried to go to James Monroe High School to start to catch up with my education. But I had to stop, because I was only here for a short time, I don't remember the exact time of it, when my uncle passed away. So I went to night school, and I went and got my very first job to work for Spears Furniture Company on 23rd Street in New York. I did filing, and whatever I was able to do with my limited English.

Somehow or other, when you're young, you learn faster than when you get older. So I was able to comprehend and catch on to the English language. My writing and spelling didn't come so fast. I even have trouble with it today, because you pronounce, you read, and you write things differently.

Once again, my freedom was short lived, because I took sick. I developed a spot on my right lung. I had to be hospitalized, and I ended up in Montefiore Hospital in Bedford Hills. And then I finally was transferred into Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, and I had a three stage thoracoplasty. I had seven or eight ribs removed, and my right lung was collapsed.

Sometime, I really wonder why go on, but God gives you strength for so many things. And this is where I met my husband, Harvey. We fell in love. And he went to become-- with my influence-- he went to become a lab technician. And once I was well enough, I was working in the X-ray department in Bedford Hills.

And in 1953, we got married in New York. We moved to New Jersey. He worked in Bound Brook Hospital as a lab and X-ray man, and I worked next door in a medical group as the pharmacist. I was always very interested in medicine, and I really wanted to be in the medical profession desperately. If Europe would have remained Europe, and I could have finished my education, I'm sure I would have been a doctor of some kind. I was very good with the terminology of the pharmacy, and the measurements, so I worked in the basement in their pharmaceutical department.

We got married December 13th, 1953, and lived in Bound Brook for a few years. And my first child was born in '57, February 2nd. My daughter Tina. And my son was born January 29th, which was, yesterday, 30 years ago. 1960. I did bring in two beautiful children to this world. And with their love, and my husband's care and love, I've come a long, long way.

I devote any spare time that I have, really, to serve my community. I've been president, you name it, every organization. I spend a lot of my time, if ever I'm needed or called on, to lecture on the Holocaust. And I pray for a world of peace for all mankind. And then I ask the question, has the world learned anything from the Holocaust? And I'm going to answer it at the same time.

As far as I'm concerned, no. Very little. Because hatred is all around us. All we have to do is open up the papers in the morning, and you'll see all the anti-Semitism, all the hunger, and all the killing going on in the world. So, I'm afraid history has a way of repeating itself. And I hope the leadership in the world, maybe peace, one day, will reign. I would like to take some questions from you. I'm sure you have plenty.

How do you feel about the current situation in Eastern Europe? And particularly, about the unification of Germany?

How do I feel? I must tell you one thing. I'm very unique. I have no hatred in me. Because hatred breeds only destruction. So I don't hate the German people. I'm afraid of them. I will not trust them. But I don't hate them.

Will there ever be peace in Eastern Europe or in Germany? I don't know. I don't trust it. I'm always afraid that there is a Hitler lurking somewhere in the background, that eventually it will come to power. Let the world prove me wrong. I'd be the happiest human being.

I wonder if you'd mind telling us the story of your granddaughter?

How can I ever omit her? I do have a beautiful two-year-old granddaughter, Karen Hailey. And what a joy she brings to my life. I must tell you, my daughter is named after my mother, and my son is named after my father. My mother's name was Teresa, so she's named after Tina. It's my daughter's name, and my father's name was Joseph, and so is my son's name, Joseph.

My granddaughter got the name of my father's brother. And did I want to believe that she was born? Do I want to believe that out of these ashes, such a beautiful thing as my two children and my grandchild could come? I'm very thankful for her being here, to God.

But as I told you before, things do disturb me, especially when she first started to talk. I was visiting her. They live in Commack, Long Island. And she loves her mama's cooking, and was making her French toast from Holland. I put it on her little plate, and when to cut it up, and she noticed-- I had some short sleeve on-- she noticed my tattoo, and she put her little hand on my arm and look at me and she said, mama, boo-boo, boo-boo, boo-boo.

And, of course, my daughter and I just looked at each other, and we both choked up tears. Time will come when she gets older, that I will sit down and tell her all about the meaning of this boo-boo. And whether she will understand or not, I don't know. I'm sure she will be troubled for quite awhile.

Talking of troubled, I think, I feel in my heart, that the second generations are extremely disturbed. Are they coping? They're coping to some extent. But I don't think there is any psychiatrist in the world-- I hope I'm wrong-- that could really help them. They have second generation groups, and the ones who do go to it do get a lot out of it, because they ventilate amongst each other. But you cannot get the majority to go to these groups.

I don't know why, but I wish they could, including my children. This is a big concern of mine. I know my friend Bernie said he's planning a conference here in the fall for second generations. I hope that a lot of them will come. Because once they get to a conference, they do get a lot out of it.

I also want to tell you the story that I did bring on a Holocaust tour. We could not get one out of Czechoslovakia-- out of

Hungary. So I got one out of, it was a Czechoslovakian tour which is, it's all collected, and it's in England in the Westminster Abbey. And through the help of my rabbi and the Congregation Kneseth Israel in Bound Brook, I had one brought out and I had [INAUDIBLE] made for it, and a cover made for it.

And the crown on the Torah was made by an artist made out of copper and iron in the symbol of the Holocaust, with bodies reaching for the flame. It's very unique. But when I went into the Lower East Side to have the cover made for it, I came across another fellow survivor, which was heart rendering to me, to thank god she's alive. I went up there. And of course, with all Hungarians, we started to talk.

She's not as easy to talk about the Holocaust as I am, but she couldn't verbally express herself accept pull up her sleeve, and I pulled mine up. And we realized, we were standing in Auschwitz getting this tattoo 20 people apart from one another. So we were together, and thank god, you both survived. These are the experiences that I wish I had more of, to find more survivors.

Were you able to speak right from the beginning--

About the Holocaust? Oh, no, no, no, no.

What triggered your--

I remember about, I would say, 15 years ago. Very dear friend of mine, they were really sisters and brothers to me, Rosalie and Edward Burrow in Bound Brook. Their son, Philip, went to Bound Brook High School. And he is a lawyer now, but he was always into European History, and it interested him what he heard from me here and there. Talked to his parents.

And he called me up one day and he said, Aunt Margit, please come to the Bound Brook High School to talk to an audience of students. They don't believe there was a Holocaust. You have to tell them what you went through. And I said, Philip, I cannot do that. I'd break down. I can't talk. And he said, well if you can't talk in person, I will come to your house and you have to speak into a tape, and they will hear from your voice.

And that was my very first-- I made a tape for him. And he took it to school to the auditorium, and he let his fellow students listen to it. How did I come about talking?