

Mrs. Mandelbaum, continue telling us about Aschersleben.

Yes. From Auschwitz, we left in we left-- when was it? Yes, January '45 to Hamburg. We didn't know where we were going, naturally. It was a station of 300 women. And we started to ask questions, each other. So whoever knew something said, it is a factory of planes, and we will work there.

They took us to the barracks, like usually 3 story. You know. And we started to work. I mean, first the Appell. You get up and get counted. And then five, five and we were marching maybe a half hour to the factory. And everybody was assigned to his work.

I was cutting on a machine windows to the airplane from a sheet-- from a sheet of plastic. And this plastic burned. You know, slowly like a candle. And I found out-- so from the machine what is thrown off from the squares what I had to make, I made candles. And every Friday I lit the candle in Aschersleben.

We had a table. In that barrack, we had one room with a table, where the foreman for us had to divide the bread, and the marmalade, or margarine. This was our everyday food. So on that table, I lit the candles. And I had to watch, because when the German came, a woman sometimes.

But we had from our woman, one who had to take care. So this was a Jewish woman. So she-- and it was a Hungarian. And the Hungarians and the Poles doesn't like each other. So I found [? mirror ?] in her eyes, you know, that she didn't persecute me. In some way it was a forgetful thing that we shouldn't think of what was, only live with the life here.

And the life was not-- I would say that it was not so horrible, like in the past. It was a little leisure. It was January, and maybe the people alone, the Germans, they felt that it's going to the end. Anyway, the day started like 6 o'clock. And we came very tired home. We slept. And it was like every day the same.

But some time I was experiencing a very bad accident. Because the fore-- the woman who was taking us, like we marched five in a row like 100 women. And then again, a lot of Germans, these SS women. And she came. She had a rubber weapon. you know this--

A truncheon, a rubber truncheon.

A truncheon. And before our five, the women started to talk, and they talked something that they started to laugh, maybe a joke, something. And she thought that our women were talking. She came. I was the first one, and she hit me with this truncheon, my head, and she made me a very big gash, and I started to bleed.

So she took me to the-- from out from the five. And we sat. We didn't talk. [INAUDIBLE] We couldn't even say that we didn't. Because who did? So you have to-- so we didn't talk. But she took me to the Krankenstube. You know the--

Dispensary.

Dispensary. And they said that I have to be, but I was afraid because who was in the dispensary today is unable. So they get rid of her. So I said, no, I'm all right. I want to go with the band-aid to work. And I worked. This gash I had like that. But this is an empty space on my head. You can see I have it.

Anyway, so it was not-- It was like monotony, but we prayed every day that we should survive, not to be killed for some reason, what they do that because we are Jewish. And it was January, February, March, and April. The situation was very grave.

I have to tell you that during the marches, the planes were attacking the city. And it was close to Hamburg. So the planes were close range, from wherever they came, from London or from Paris. And because the Americans were already in France and the English, together they were very much attacking our vicinity.

And so we went to bunkers. They had special for us, too. I mean for the Germans. And we were there a little while. And when it was quiet, the sirens blast, we come out. You know how during the war.

Yes.

And it was like mid-April. All of a sudden at night, they said, "los, los. Make ready, we are going." I have to tell you once incident, what happened. It was Pesach. You know, because-- and as I told you, I didn't eat the soups. Only I ate bread, marmalade and bread and margarine. So during the Pesach, they gave bread.

So my aunt, what we were together, she worked in the kitchen. Because there are people who worked someplace else, not only in the factory but whatever they wanted to give them. So my aunt was working the kitchen. And every day she brought me potatoes. And we were a mattress from hay. You know these mattresses? On that bunk it was like wood, and here a mattress. So I hid the potatoes. Every day she brought me before holiday potatoes.

And all eight days I ate potatoes with the skin. And nothing more. Only water and the potatoes, and I survived. And I'm proud of that, that all during the war I didn't eat treif. So coming back to that day when at night came that we are going, so everybody had something smart to say. You know, you live a life like that, wherever you find is a precious thing.

So everybody had bundled up the bundle, and like the Jew what you see on the pictures with a bundle.

The wandering Jew.

The wandering Jew.

Wandering Jew. We were all women wandering Jews. And go. Where we go? We don't know. We go. And we go, and we walked the whole night. And we went to a peasant, to give us to sleep. So some women said when they had the idea to stay by the peasant. But if he wants to keep you? He was afraid, too. Because he was German. And he saw us.

So they suspected we are prisoners, that we murdered somebody or something. Because they couldn't-- some Germans there, it's far from the civilization, that they maybe didn't know that Hitler was so bad for the Jews. So they thought that we are prisoners. So he will not give shelter for a prisoner.

So we had to go on and on and on. And so we're wandering and wandering. And there came a night, after a few nights what we were walking, that we decided, my sister-in-law decided, we are not going farther. We are not going. Let them shoot. Let them. It was up to here.

Yes.

So we hid in the hills. It was a hilly territory, like a park. And by the day-- and they went on. The whole Kommando went on. But so they tore the emblems from their sleeves. So something fishy is going on. We knew that. And we were waiting until daybreak.

So we saw that barracks, and we heard the Polish language. Oh, so Poles are here. They came to work as Zwangsarbeit.

Forced labor.

Forced labor. So we spoke to them. And we said, look, we are Jews. Only because of that we are in the prisoner clothes. We didn't do anything wrong. Some of them were sarcastic. Some of them, but there are Menschen, too. So they gave us their rags. You know, to throw out, instead of the garbage, they gave.

And they took from the women, too. There were men and women from the other side. They went. They were very helpful. This until this day, I cannot be all bad for the Poles, whatever they did. Because they showed us heart. And we were in plain clothes.

So we could move around the town, and we were still not having where to live. But with them in the barracks, they let us. They go to work, so we were in their barracks. You know, they were good for us. But one day, it was-- the planes were coming constantly. Because we were hearing here and there.

But one day it was like thousands of planes, and they are bombarding that city, because they knew that a lot of factories were there.

Right, it was an industrial area.

Industrial area, right. So they were bombarding somewhere. And we were lost. Because we didn't know what to do with ourselves. The Germans were running to the shelters, and we were afraid. But we had to go, too, and we went to the shelters, too. We start now to talk. We're invisible, so to say.

And when it was quiet, the Germans say, the English and the Americans are here. Because they came up from the bunkers. They saw the soldiers. They go, the English and the Americans. They were very scared.

We were not scared. But right away the soldiers didn't know that we are Jews. But anyway, when we came out very carefully, we tried to get in the stream, so to say. And we were cautious to find somebody who will be for us. And sure enough, we find an American soldier. And he was Jewish. Ben Stein was his name. I never-- I came to America, but I never looked up him.

Anyway, and this guy was good to us. And we -- you know, like our father. And everybody wanted to tell him the story. So he called a few of his buddies. Even Americans, they are Jewish. We didn't know how to speak English. We know Jewish. We know German. But he didn't know.

But somehow we--

Communicated.

--communicated with hands. And we said, we don't have a shelter. We don't know where to-- "ah, come with us." So first of all, he gave us a house. Then he said he will bring food. So from these rations, we got this compote. But we were very careful. Everybody from us five said to each other, remember that we couldn't eat because we are not used to it. We have to eat slowly. Thank God we were all right.

And it was very, very good at the beginning. What we will do next? Next, we have to get dressed. Because we had nothing. Only the schmattas what the Poles gave us. So the stores were closed. Everything was closed. And whatever he could bring was not enough for us. Even the house what we got.

So it was a meager thing, but we had a shelter. We had a roof above our heads. This was very important. So my sister-in-law, she was very-- so she said, let's go to the trains. And you know when war stopped, everything stopped. The trains were loaded with food. And a wagon of sugar, and rice, and barley, and vegetables, and apples.

We didn't even have a bag. You know, it's primitive things, what for us today not to comprehend. Because how can you not have a bag? How can you not have money? How? How? We didn't have nothing. Only ourselves, our body.

And she was-- she goes-- she took a schmatta and she made like two women hold, and she loaded whatever she could. And she brought. And I was never timid. I was outgoing. But here I was so-- I just came to-- it was a transformation in me when the war stopped. Not stopped. When the Americans came to our town. It was not stopped, the war. The war, because the war stopped the 5th of May, and this was by the end of April. But--

But the town was already occupied? It was already--

Yes, absolutely.

The Germans had been driven away.

Yes, some Germans stayed. And some Germans went away and ran. The conscience was bad if they were SS, you know? Because some Germans said [SPEAKING GERMAN]. Anyway, so slowly we came to a condition that is human. You know? Because before it was not. And we started to be normal. And my aunt was the cook, and we started to go to the stores, because slowly they opened. And a committee was formed. And they gave us--

Even a Jewish community. They gave us our identification cards. And everything was rationed. So we can have a ration, too. For food, for clothes. Because it was like nothing was new for them. Everything was during even rationed. So we were a part of them, and we could go to a store, and we bought a piece of material. And I was the sewer, and my sister-in-law. And we were making a skirt and a blouse that we should wear something.

And the time was going on, and we heard that it's over, the war. When it's over, the war, we want to come to our country and to our home. So we started to gather things that when we go that we should have. And it was like the time was with us.

And this was like May, June. June, by the end of June, we were sort of ready to go. Because nothing was working. The train, how will go? We walk. We had to wait until the establishment will be ready for us, too. Because we cannot be independent from Germany to go to Poland.

The trains. And first the military was going. So the priority is for them. So the civilians could not even let be on the train. So we were stuck in Aschersleben. And then we went to another-- from Aschersleben, when we survived, it was Bitterfeld. Because it was another town when we walked somewhere. So really we were in Bitterfeld.

So in Bitterfeld we had our home, and waiting, and waiting until-- because in Bitterfeld we had the Kommando, what they gave us the identification. And they formed-- and in meantime, we found out that we are not the only one. Because then we find out that 16 other women also escaped. So they were now with us.

And they were coming more, these VIs-- the very important--

VIPs.

VIPs came from the English and from the Americans.

Generals.

Generals, yes. And we were sort of introduced by these people who were in this town, that we were the survivors. And we were very important. So some of the generals, because the other women would also survive but they ran away, they were very sophisticated girls. And we are homely girls. Like I and my sister. But they were reaching for the generals, to have friends, you know? Like independent girls they were before the war. But now they are--

So they made us feel that we are the naive girls and they are the sophisticateds. So anyway, life went like today, let me tell you, after the war. But it was always the woman, you know, yourself, if you are free. If you are you are a nebish. But if you are free, you show your being.

And they were dressed beautifully, and they wore makeup right away. And we are looking at them, what they are doing? We are only thinking to go back to Poland. And they were like establishing themselves here, with the IVP.

They were thinking of going to the United States, maybe?

yes they were thinking to catch a husband. That's what they were thinking, because they were not married, these other women. So anyway, so we had fun and gossip and a normal life. But then we found out that civilians get their permission to travel. You know, because as I said, only the soldiers were. But it was a lot of soldiers still on the trains when we boarded the train to go, too.

It was like-- if you see the map, you are in Germany to go to Poland, you know, it is a long journey. And it took us a long journey. And we had to beg for food, because you are a traveler on a train, and you don't have. But we provide ourselves with food for the time being. And when we didn't have any more food, we got of a station, when they made it. And we went to a committee.

Because by then, it was sort of a normal existence for people. Because it was after the war. May was after the war, May, June, July. So we went to a committee, and we said, look, we are repatrians. We want to go back to Poland and to our village.

And we came, and we came to-- there was a very big gathering of the DP persons in Theresienstadt and in Prague. And we were traveling until Prague, our five women. And there was-- oh, there was a lot of organizations, a beautiful organization, Prague. They were giving you permission to go here, wherever you want.

They give us very good food, and they give us even-- like the UNRRA supported it. So they gave. So the UNRRA gave us. And then in Prague, people from all Poland, from all Germany, whoever survived and was in Prague, we could commune --

Like I ask about my family. "Did you meet maybe the family Reich. My brother, my sister. Her name was Sophia. Did you hear? My husband Simon?" "Simon? Simon Mandelbaum?" Somebody said, "was it Kafka?" So I said, "yes, Kafka." "Kafka? Kafka survived in Gusen. He is now in the hospital in Weis." You know? Like that.

And he didn't-- he knew him only as Kafka from that camp, where they were going there, and he remembers how it happened. But Kafka was standing on his head. Kafka is a black bird in English. So I said to my sister-in-law, sister-in-law and my aunt and the five women, I said, I will say goodbye to you. I take my pack, my bundle, and go to Weis to look for my husband.

And I traveled. Whenever I-- so they gave me a permission, because I didn't even have money. From where do I have money? So I got this permission to travel without money looking for my husband. So I come to Weis, to the hospital, and as you read. And, "oh, Simon Mandelbaum. Yeah, he was here. And he registered to go back to Poland."

So I said-- because we made up when we survive, we will meet there and there. So I said, but when did he register? When did he go out? I asked questions. They told me this was two days ago. And he went. This was Weis. And this was a neighboring town from Linz, also in Austria. So you have to find out.

So I took the bus. And the Schaffner comes. Sorry, this is the conductor. And I said, "look, I am looking for my husband." So they say, "Oh, so go to the Jewish committee." The Jewish-- it was like an office.

The Joint Distribution?

Joint Distribution. Right. So they knew about it, so I came there. They were closed. So I don't know. I sit in the office. I sit maybe two, three hours. Finally, they opened the office. "What do you want?" I said, I'm Manya Mandelbaum. I look for my husband, Simon Mandelbaum. He was registering to go back to Poland."

So he said, "Yes. Yes, he tomorrow goes with the transport. And he lives in Windbichl. Where is Windbichl? You take the bus this and this, then you take other bus. So I did it. But this is all one, two, three to say. I come-- I come to that Windbichl. There were barracks, very nice barracks, because they were made for the soldiers, for the German soldiers.

And there was a very big corridor, very big. And from each side a door and a room. And I go to the first room, open the room, and there is a bunk bed, three story, and another bunk bed three story. And nobody in.

And I started to call Simon, because I said, maybe he's in another room where I cannot all the rooms check. So from the other side of the corridor, a woman comes. I didn't even see her, so long was the corridor. She said, who is that? So I said, "I'm Manya Mandelbaum. I'm looking for my husband, Simon Mandelbaum." All this Polish.

So she said, "Oh, I don't know, but I know one thing, that yesterday somebody came, [? Hilla Costman, ?] who lives in this room where you are standing. Isn't he right there?" So I said, "No, I don't see here." So she comes over to me, and we started to talk, in the doorway, you know. And as I said-- she said, "What is your husband's name?" I said, "Simon Mandelbaum."

And she started to think. And all of a sudden, I hear a noise from the third bed up. I hear a noise, and somebody leans out. He was like a skeleton, the face. And said, "Manusha, you came here." I said, "Simon." And he hardly walked. And he came down from the third floor. And we embraced, and this was that we met after the war, in that room.

And we started to cry, both of us. And I said, take it easy. Good that we met. I said, tomorrow 9 o'clock I would go to Poland. Sure, I would go after him. Because the transport were going and going. This was the beginning of our life. That day. And this was 16th of August, my day of birth, when we met in that room of [? Hilla Costman. ?]

And then it took me September, October, November, December, that I had to take care of him. He was not well. Not well at all. And we lived together. And we had from the UNRRA food. So we didn't have to work. The food came. We were going like the soldiers, this-- how you call what the soldier has?

Knapsack?

Knap-- yeah, but he has for the food?

A canteen.

A canteen. [? Manieshka ?] in Polish. So it was the canteen we go in, because UNRRA gave us food, and gave us shelter, and gave us even clothing. And we lived in that-- this was not yet Windbichl, because they were building this Windbichl for us. Because German soldiers were still there.

Anyway, and this was August '45. And by January '46, we came to Windbichl from the other lager, the [INAUDIBLE]. And there we got a beautiful apartment, where everybody got a room.

So three rooms were these apartments, three room. So in one room we lived, I with my husband. And the other, other parties, you know. And the kitchen was for us. But we still had from the UNRRA this food. We didn't have to work.

And so we registered for going to America and waited for the quota to come. In the meantime, I got pregnant, and I gave birth in September '46 to my first son, Richard. And visited [INAUDIBLE]. We waited 3 and 1/2 years until we got the papers from America. And in November '49, we came to America.

Did you come right to New Jersey?

No, we came to Boston. The boat was General Ballou, and it was stormy weather. So he couldn't come to New York. So he anchored in Boston. And we were in Boston a few days. They took us to a hotel, the UNRRA, everything. And from there they put us on a train, and we went to New Jersey with this train. Everybody could go wherever, but we had here-- my husband, I mean, we had the Zuckermans. Bolek Zuckermann, Abraham Zuckermann, was my husband's partner in Austria. They were partners. Very nice business they established.

They went to Germany. Not Zuckermann. My husband was the initiative. And he brought merchandise to Austria, where all the stores were empty after the war. Because all these years, from when he got better [INAUDIBLE]. So like in '46, from '46 to '49, he brought merchandise like scissors and thread, lotions, and he sold it to people in Linz. And this was a very good business, a trade.

And from Austria, he took something else to Germany. And so he was traveling. And then in '45, we came. So we were in touch with the Zuckermans. So they said, you have to come to us. And they lived in Newark, on Peshine Avenue. So they had a very big apartment. So we came to them, and we stayed. Though my uncle was waiting. Simon's uncle.

Because I don't have.

Simon's uncle was waiting on the pier when we came. We were in touch with the uncle, too. Because the uncle said that he lives in Peter Stuyvesant-- no, on 86th Street in Manhattan he lived. Right before we came to America from Austria. So he reserved us a room that we should come to Peter Stuyvesant hotel. But because Bolek was a friend, and he said, no, you are not going. So uncle came, and he greeted us with a niece. And we stayed with them.

He said, all right, if you want to stay with friends, stay. But remember that in Peter Stuyvesant there's a room for you. So we stayed two weeks with them. And then we went to uncle, and we stayed there. And we find out that friends what came before have connections. In '50, it was so hard to get apartment for the refugees, because a lot of people came. People under the table gave money to get an apartment.

But we found out that the girlfriend what came before, she was living with us in ghetto, all the time in ghetto and in lager. We were very good friends. She gave us an apartment with her uncle on the house. So we went in February. February '50, moved to Brooklyn, and we lived 16 years in this house.

And then you came back here.

And in 16 years-- after 16 years, we moved to Elizabeth. We lived three years in Elizabeth. And after three years, we bought a house in Hillside, and we lived since. In '65--

To be close to your friends. Is that right?

Yes, right, right. And my husband was building with them. And there were good times and bad times.

Have you been able to talk to your sons about your experiences? Have they asked?

Yes, yes, yes. All three sons are interested very much, in that what we went through. And they talk even today, our children. That's what Yaki called me. Yakov, short-- Yaki. And this is a wonderful boy. He is so intelligent and so educated. As a matter of fact, he's going-- 16 years he's only. He finished college-- he finished high school, and he applied for four colleges. And he was accepted Penn and Cornell, and he waits for Princeton. Because his father finished from Princeton, my son Richard. So he hopes that he will get into Princeton. I hope, too, because he will be very close to us. So he could come for Shabbos to us.

What professions did your sons go into?

My son-- mathematician. My second son is an accountant, CPA. And my son is in advertising. He has a good job, my son. The youngest one is divorced, and he lives with me. And the middle son, the CPA, is in New York in Suffolk. And the oldest is in Rochester. And he has a very, very good position there. He is a head of the department of computers. He has a budget of \$20 million to spend. And all the computer section is under his orders. He has a lot of people working for him, secretaries.

He is very well liked, very well. And he's very religious. He never goes without a hat. Always with a [INAUDIBLE]. And I am proud of it. He's religious. And he has a position, I tell you the truth, that only in America, I have to say. I don't know the whole America, but I know the three states, like Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. I can be proud that he as a religious man has a position that he has, that in Poland he would never be able to hold this position as a Jew.

Have you gone back since the end of the war?

No, I don't go back. My husband mentioned, just before he was sick, he said maybe we'll go and see. I said, I don't want to see them. And anyway, until this year, what they made up with Israel that they are now in friendly terms, they don't want to have the Jews. Because after the war, Jews would come back to their country. This was where I was born, where I was raised. All my life was Polish, and they didn't want us.

So it was no other way but to look for another country. But I love very much America. And I really see and say only good things here. Though I am always with my heart in Israel because I'm Jewish and I love Israel, too. I sort of have two countries-- Israel and America.

Is there anything you want to say in conclusion?

I would mention that I appreciate my husband, that he wanted to come to America. I really-- because as I said, it's freedom, and I could give my children a good education. And I love America. It's like my country. And I love Israel, because this is my state. And I appreciate that you asked me to tell my story. So it will be like for my family to leave when I go. So they will always can hear my voice, and know my life story.

Thank you very much, Mrs. Mandelbaum.

I appreciate--