

Please continue, Mrs. Sonnenberg.

Before I forget, I want to tell you that any time there was an action, anything that was going on, we had a beautiful time with the SS together. And it sounds strange. It's ironically sad really. Then sometimes, many times actually, we have been asked are there any musician here, are there any dancers here, gym, some artists or what?

By tonight we want a performance. We want to show you that we are also your friend, and we want to have a good time together. And we put something together. We had comics. We had anything. I mean, we had anyone. Doctors, lawyers, actors, whatever. You name it.

And I met also somebody whom I was friendly with for quite a while who was a pianist, and we had a very nice performance. And I never forget he played the hunting quartet by Mozart. I knew it was Mozart, but I didn't know what it was.

And somehow I never forgot a part of that melody. And much later I asked my husband. I was singing. I said, what could that be? Oh, he said, that's the hunting quartet from Mozart. That was the first time I heard it, and that was in the ghetto.

After that concert, the next morning, they sent 2,000 people. They knocked on the door. And out, out, out. That is all they said, out. And we had to go on that collection point where we always had to appear. And then you, you, you, you, you on that side. You, you, you on that side.

And then before you know, you were separated from your family. And they were loaded on the truck and you never saw the people again. And at night, the clothes came into the ghetto. So many people recognized their family that way. They were killed. There were constantly action. But not without having had a nice performance before. That's very generous.

Finally, we caught on, but it didn't help us. We had to perform. And that was also the way when my parents got away. One morning I went to work. And something-- I don't know if I forgot something. I went back in the house and said, give my mother an extra hug and my father, and I don't know why.

And when I came to the commander and wanted to stand in my line and ready to go, I noticed a couple of people who never were there because they are old, and one woman had even a hunchback. So what is she doing here? Something's must going on, and I -- very reluctant I went.

And I happened to work at that time in we called it like cleaning store. We had to-- we got laundry from the front, the soldier's clothes. Sometimes we had an arm or a finger still on. Came to us in these freight trains. We had to unload it. We had to count it. And God forbid a piece was missing.

And then we had to put it in boxes. I mean, it's effectively-- I mean, boxes-- I mean, fenced in places. There goes the underwear. There goes the jackets. There goes the pants. And they stay there a few days. In the meantime, they put us on the truck again, and we went to the laundry and pick up the clean, washed soldiers' uniform. And then we had to come back and count it and put it in another section. Then we picked up the dirty again.

So this is what I was doing that day. And we passed by the ghetto and I see an oodle of people standing on the collection place, and I said, something is terribly, terribly wrong. And at night when I came home in the dark, my girlfriend and I-- speaking of friends, I met a friend there-- we ran in the house, and I go to our room. No light on.

Usually when you come back to the ghetto, the whole ghetto is lighted up. People are exhausted coming home trying to make their little cooking and whatever. And the hustle and bustle, there was nothing. It was dead, dead silence. But those silence I have never seen.

So we run in the house and nobody was in my room, of course. Neither my sister nor my mother nor my father. In her house her mother and father were there. So I went up, and as I [? flew, ?] I said somewhere they must be hiding. And I

come on the attic, and nobody was there. My sister wasn't there.

I said, oh my god, that was an aktion. They must be all killed already. I said, and my sister too? What do I do here? It's that moment I really didn't want to live anymore. And I was just ready to jump down out of the attic window when my girlfriend run after me and grabbed me. And she said, you don't do that. Get down.

And I remember sitting in the room and waiting and waiting, and all of a sudden the lights went on. And after a while, my sister came. So I said, what happened? Where's father? Where's mother? So she said, they're gone. And I wondered who was with them.

[? Mammy-- ?] mother didn't let me. She said to me, go and get my jacket. I'm so cold. I'm freezing, she said. And I rushed, and I ran to get it. And when I came, they were all gone. So my mother had the feeling and knew, and that shows also in that booklet when my parents got hold somehow of a piece of paper and a pencil, and they wrote a little note, which I have.

Where did I write it? [INAUDIBLE] But what did it say? It had the hardest time to translate it because when I got that note-- I got the note through a policeman, a Jewish policeman whose parents he had to bring to the same train and said goodbye to them. And my parents gave him a little note along.

I don't find where it is, but it was about like-- my father wrote, like, dear children, we are in a freight train. We don't know the destination yet. And hold together in all life situation. I love you. Your father.

And then he wrote a few Hebrew which which said, [SPEAKING HEBREW] I can't say it. [SPEAKING HEBREW] Something which meant-- somebody translated to me-- may God bless your--

[SPEAKING HEBREW]

May God--

The priestly blessing.

And keep you.

Yeah.

And here we are. And my mother wrote, I have loved you, and all my thoughts are you. If it only would be over. Hold together. Love, Mother. That's all I have. So my mother know for sure. My father I think too.

So this fellow brought the letter had his parents to bring there. That must be even harder. He's living now in Sweden. He stayed there. And I called him Sunday. I call once in a while. Unfortunately his wife is very sick, and the letters don't always arrive in Sweden, so I thought I'd better give him a call once in a while. So that's a friendship which started in Hannover, and lasted through the concentration camp, and it's still binding. OK, that was that.

Pretty soon, the-- oh no, I would like to speak a little bit about my sister. She worked as a nurse in the hospital. In this hospital was a Jewish doctor who was from Cologne, and she knew him then. He was a miserable person. And for a smile of the commandant, he could kill people just to get a smile.

And the Jews-- the Jewish women were, of course, not allowed to have children. And abortion were made secretly because if it comes out that you got a child and you got pregnant in the concentration camps, they were definitely hanged or killed or shot or whatever. So in the closet, my sister and the doctor, another doctor, Dr. [Personal name] performed those abortions.

And one day, the commandant didn't like anything better but watching operations without anaesthetic. Like my sister had-- people whose hands were frozen, feet were frozen, she had just to cut them off. You couldn't even give anything.

And then the people were helpless, and then they were killed, of course with the next transport. But his greatest pleasure was to watch those things.

And one day, there was a boy in that hospital who was a nature freak. I think he was a man down and a woman up there. And the commandant was in that room, and for some reason, he made him get up. And with the little nightgown, so he had whatever fit, he must've seen there was something wrong.

And he said to the Dr. [Personal name] what's wrong with that kid there? And he very happily told everything. That's a freak of nature and everything. Maybe he couldn't have done anything else. But the way he said it, so it was a guy that-- the boy that was sent away for an experiment purpose, and it was the end too. So it was incredible, things which happened. I could go on and on and on.

But anyhow, the Russian front came closer in Riga. And after these 2,000 people-- out of about 20,000 Jewish people there all what I know what came out was about 200. Everything is finished. And when the front came closer, they liquidated the ghetto, and they sent us to ABA-- ABA is the army, soldiers-- to work for the soldiers.

By that time, so many people are being killed on the front and so more merchandise came in. And they needed us badly in the army, and the SS I think got the money. I mean, we were paid. Not we, I mean, they got the money for us that we could go there.

So they liquidated the ghetto finally and sent us in a factory building into the army, which was a little bit better [INAUDIBLE] army. Some people were just as bad as SS, but there were also some more decent people there. And we worked very hard there.

We slept on the bunk beds for five flights up. And the youngest one on top, like my sister and I. When even you had to move a bed downstairs, you had to move too, and it was constantly swaying. And the alarm-- the bombs they just drop them during every night, three, four times. And we had to run for about a mile to the bunkers where you go in to be protected from the-- which didn't help much.

And you saw all of this big-- it was like a balloon that lighted up the whole sky. This way the enemy could see the location very well. It was just like not as light as this, but you could see. And then we run into the-- for the protection, and then there was this big, heavy soldier sitting there, and he was shaking in his boots. God forbid, dear god that nothing happens, you know?

And actually, our life wasn't worth much anyhow, but we really in a way enjoyed it, seeing him sitting there like a baby, shaking. And he said, bomb falls down. Leave your luggage downstairs. I never forget that. We had no luggage. We had nothing. But you know, he was so-- oh no, how do you call-- [INAUDIBLE] about it. It was unbelievable.

Well, after it got so bad that it never took an end, we were sent on a boat, and we went to Libau that is Courland And in Libau we had a little house where we lived in. By that time we were not very many people. Maybe 3, 400 at most.

And we were sent out to work. My sister was in a hospital again there, and the rest was going to work. And one day was such an alarm that so bad for hours the whole town was burning. And by night, it finally was over. We had the hardest time to get back to the building where we lived because all over the fire.

There was nothing but the houses down and fire, and it was just unbelievable. And after hours when we came home, something happened. What is going on? You could feel it. And sure enough, in this bunker-- I don't know if bunker is the right word. You know where people hide in-- the soldiers hide in trenches.

Trenches.

Trenches, that's the word. It was opposite of the building. And my sister visit SS commandant who was there, had to stand in front. She as a nurse and the doctor. There were two doctors. And this one doctor had to stand in front and my sister and the SS men.

And my sister had a terrible cold, and so the commandant said, I don't want your cold. Go in the back. So my sister said, my place is here. He said, did you hear me? March. So my sister went in the back-- the moment she went in the back. The bomb came down and hit the trench.

So he was killed with his girlfriend. He had a Jewish girlfriend, which was miserable. She-- you won't believe it. She really helped killing people and gives them all away, the whom she didn't like. And the SS man just shot them.

And the good doctor, [? Joseph, ?] was killed, and the doctor took right away the uniform of the Jewish doctor, from the Dr. [? Joseph ?] [INAUDIBLE], and now I am a doctor. It's just unbelievable. So that wasn't safe anymore.

So they had to bring us-- the soldiers had to go to Germany. But they needed us yet. We were-- by the meantime, we were about 200. So this was already got killed again. We go on the boat, and we come to, after a couple of days-- oh, when we went on the boat, first we had to load it with these guns and these helmets and these clothes and these cooking pots and whatever they had here.

And then we had to go on the ladder and go deep down. And as soon as we started to move, the order came we have to go on board-- on deck. And the soldiers just went down because when we were on deck-- in the meantime, I forgot to tell you. Our hairs were so shaven, our head. One day came that order that we cannot have any hair.

They shaved the men with a shaver this way and this way. So they had little tufts standing here, here, and here and here. But us, they cut the hair so much, and my hair was really so long. And so were many others. And then came the commander and said, so much hair. Here's a shaver. Shave it. So then our whole head was shaven. It was so pitiful.

Then we got the uniform, the gray and blue striped uniform, our number on it. My number was 8,808 at that time. And with our shaven head, the soldier couldn't stand us, and they gave us some cloths, a very rough gray-black cloth and said, put that on your head. So we looked like bats. That's the way we look.

And while they were shaving our hair, we picked up a handful, and somebody had some glue. And we glued it on here. It was so pitiful. My sister and I, we took a shower. Three, four people go in the shower. All of a sudden, somebody took my soap.

And I said, that's my soap. She said, no, that's my soap. I said, I know it's my soap. I know my soap. She said, I know my soap too. I looked at her. I said, Herta? Gertrude? We didn't recognize ourselves so did we look. It's unbelievable that you wouldn't notice anyone.

So with that, before we left, we had to be deloused. We had terrible lice, of course. And we couldn't go to Germany with all those lice. That would be a crime. [INAUDIBLE]. So regular soldiers came with a flashlight and they took our clothes first and got them deloused. And then they checked all over if you have lice on our [INAUDIBLE]. And then we could get dressed, and then finally we could go on boat.

And that's when we had to stand on board as soon the boat went out because they didn't shoot at Jews. And they were safe. At first when we were on high sea they came out and we could go down again. Then we came to Hamburg in Germany. And what to do with us is another thing. So they had no idea. They brought us to prison.

The prison was actually the best time of the whole concentration camp. We didn't have to work. We got some food, better than in the concentration camp. It was real prison food. Unless-- except they put the soda in. Because we shouldn't get any feelings, womanly or manly feeling and so on. And so they put soda in.

What do you mean soda?

Baking soda.

Baking soda.

Baking soda. Apparently it's supposed to have-- we were separated anyhow. We were 96 women in one room for 45. We slept together. Where 45 people sleep, we slept 96 people. And we stayed there six weeks.

Then one morning-- oh, while I was there, they took me out-- if somebody could sew. They took me in an extra cell, and I had to sew. Somehow I must have pricked my finger here. Don't know how. And it got inflamed.

And the next morning we were called to get out of the prison. We're going someplace else. And we had to march 96 kilometer. It's about in the 60s of miles. We got each one a loaf of bread, a blanket, and that was it. We didn't know where we go. We didn't know how long we will go.

I know that was the worst thing of our life because we were walking and walking and walking for three days. At night we slept with the sheeps, which was wonderful warm, or with the cows or with the horses. That was the only warm place we had. It was in 1944 in I think it was April. I think so.

And I got so sick. My arm, the line went up to here. My arm was sore. I had high fever. I couldn't walk. I was walking between my sister and my girlfriend because nobody was allowed to know otherwise I would be shot down. And be marched and we marched.

And one day, my sister said, this is ridiculous. Let them shoot me. And she put herself down on the highway. And I say, Herta, please. I want to be dead. And then I said, so then I want to be dead too. I have nobody else, and I sat down. And my girlfriend sat down too.

So all of a sudden, the SS came, and so she saw the gun. She got like if she wakes up of a trench, gets up, and we marched and marched and marched. And then one day, the last day came a delegation. And they looked at us, and somebody heard them saying who's that? And they said, they're leftover Jews. Where do they come from? They come from prison from Hamburg.

And this guy, this one officer who asked, who supposed to be [INAUDIBLE]. And he was on his way to Himmler for exchange prisoner. So instead, he must have chosen us. But that took another two weeks. We didn't know anything what was going on.

We came to this Kiel-Hassee, which was the worst of everything what we went through. It was a new building, which wasn't finished. We slept about 220 people in a room because they had gypsies, whores, Polish, French, Russian, everything whatever was possible was under one roof. Sick people with one pail on the end of the long, long hall where we slept that was a toilet. One, which constantly run over.

I know I had my pair of boots yet, and I slept, and I took them off. And the mistake I made, I take them off. The next morning I had-- somebody used it as a toilet. I can't even blame the people because we had nothing.

We got water-coffee-- water-coffee we called it. We didn't drink it. We used it for washing our face and our hands. The next day we were so hungry and so thirsty-- thirst is worse than hunger-- that we just had to drink it. And we didn't wash anymore.

It didn't matter. The lice running over. And I had the lice all in my arm. They were in the wounds and everything. I wasn't able to go to work. I had to stay in the barrack. While my sister-- I see my sister everyday coming in with the face is my-- am I still alive?

You know, when I saw that face I said, how come that I'm still alive? And how come, said an SS man-- I think they said that he was Danish, which is unusual because the Danish were so good to the Jews. I don't know. Maybe he lived in Germany and was an SS man by that time. I don't know.

He went to the beds and said to the woman there, you don't feel well? No, I'm so sick. And he took a needle, and that the next one and took a needle. I said, uh-uh. Sick as I was, I better get out here. And I sneak by him while he was busy, and

I found a toilet where it said for sick only. That mean for venereal sicknesses. I had no idea.

Was never used, I guess. It was-- everything was new, and I was sitting there what I think for hours. And when I came back, those people who they gave needles, they were not alive anymore. They were not there anymore. They were already picked up and they're gone.

And there was one woman who had to see-- not a Jewish. A woman who had to see over us. And one day she took pity on me. I don't know why. And she said, I'll let you be operated on. I bring you to a doctor. I said, no. No. I knew then I'm finished.

She said, you don't tell me no. I tell you you'll go, and I take you. And she took me. And the doctor looked at my arm and he said, boy, that doesn't look very good. Well, let's operate on. I said, I don't want to be operated on. He said, you have no choice.

I said, if you operate on me, I said, you'll kill me. I want to live. I still want to live, believe it or not. So he said, you will? I will operate on you. And then I got the needle in the arm, but it didn't make me-- I mean, I wasn't knocked out. I knew what was going on.

And he said, tell me something. Why do you want to live? What for yet? You know the end is near. I said, as long you live, I told him, there is hope. Even as sick as I am. Well, he sewed my arm and my stitches up, and he gave me even a hard boiled egg.

I see already when my sister comes we can share that. He said, and you eat it here. I said, I'm not hungry. He said, I don't care whether you're hungry or not. He must have guessed something. You eat it right in front of my eyes. So I had to.

And then I gave my only slip which I had to the woman who brought me to the doctor to thank her. And she took it because she had-- the Christians had nothing to wear either anymore. They were so bad up. I remember when I was on the march from Hamburg to-- from Hamburg to Kiel-Hassee, there-- I forgot what I want to say.

No clothes.

Where there were no clothes. They had nothing anymore. We were calling for water, water, water, water. And some-- a German came out and brought us water, came close to us. And the SS pushed him away, We couldn't have it. And [? water ?] stood there. We grabbed to it [? where ?] they took it out of our hand and threw it out.

So then one day we heard terrible shooting at night. And in our-- where we slept there were windows but there were no windows in. It was bitter cold. And we looked out, and there was about 150 people, soldiers-- not soldier, officer. And they were Polish officer. And they killed them. It was the last day of the war already, the last couple of days. Killed them.

And then they got us out at around 11 o'clock in the pouring rain and said, take your clothes off. No. This is the end. When we have to take the clothes off, that's bad. We refused, but we had to do it. They forced us with the guns, and we took the clothes off.

And then they gave us these bloody uniforms. Put them on. And we had to put them on. And then they sent us out in the rain, pouring. And it was just-- the blood from the uniform and the rain dripping on it. And it was-- it was the end.

And we stood there for hours and for hours and for hours. And all of a sudden, there come like furniture trucks. Big white furniture trucks with a red cross on. And the SS said, go in. Nobody goes in. Nobody made a move. I mean, we have to die. Why should we go somewhere else? Let us die right here.

We were finished. Finished physically, mentally, anywhere. And they pushed us in. And they closed door after us, and we're laying in the dark. There was just so much opening that was there. And then after hours of driving, the doors-- the

truck stopped, the van, and the doors opened, and there were some friendly faces that said, you are in Flensburg. You are free. When we stop again, you are free.

And they closed the door again, and we went and then we wound up in Denmark. And we were free. And it was unbelievable. And they had a little station where we got out and there were showers where they showered us. We [INAUDIBLE] our louse uniform with the coats and everything on again.

And then they put us in the train, and they gave two people a package of food. Every two people got one package. There was everything in what you can name it. Chocolate, I haven't seen that in four years. And marmalade and sandwiches and you name it, it was there. And we ate it all up.

And two young fellows died right on the spot. Their stomach couldn't hold it anymore. Young people who survived because they had big children's transports where they killed all the babies and put them on the train and let them dry out in the heat, close everything up.

I saw that one girl from Hannover, she had a little child of two or three years. Adorable. And her mother-- oh, that I have to tell you. I can't even stop. There was an action, and that was Dr. [Personal name] Dr. [Personal name] was really a doctor, and you had to get undressed completely naked in front of him, and you had to walk around him.

And if he saw a little pimple on your body, right side, left side, right side, left side, and there comes this-- [Personal name] was her name, with her mother, who was 50 years old, and [Personal name] was in the-- maybe 27, 28, and had a little two-year-old girl.

And he said to them, either you, to the older-- to the mother, or you, the daughter who had the baby. One of you has to go on that side. So they were so stunned. And the mother said, I lived my life, good bye, and gave them a kiss and went to the other side. And that was the transport where they were killed because they might have had a pimple.

So I forgot again what I want to say. So anyhow, this is a part of this story. And then we came finally to Sweden. Oh, then they had to clean first the whole train again because we couldn't leave anything with us.

Can you imagine you hadn't had any real food in about three and a half years, and all of a sudden you are loaded with chocolate and with cake and with sandwich and marmalade, whatever was there. Your stomach couldn't stomach it. So with the whole train had to be cleaned again.

And then we went finally on our way. And the train went on the boat. And with the boat-- the train on the boat-- we came through a couple islands. I had to look at the map. And then we came to Sweden. We were very much delayed. We come to Sweden at night. And there were two big tents for us waiting.

And they had potatoes, big potatoes, but it was cold because it was done during the day, and chocolate milk, which was cold. So we grabbed it and ate it, and then they stripped us. The Swedish people, they were fantastic. They stripped us completely, scrubbed us, and gave us new clothes. A new dress without stripes. No uniform. Nothing.

We felt like Queen Elizabeth, I would say. It was unbelievable. And then they brought us by bus to a school which they emptied out, and there were beds, right? Linen-- not linen. Paper beds, you know? Paper sheets and paper pillows. It was such a luxury. That was absolutely unbelievable.

And before I forget, I have to say, the Swedish Jews were miserable to us. I understand the reasons. The reason was that they were afraid we would stay there. Many of them came from Germany, escaped to come over to Sweden. And they really saw-- this can be seen another antisemitism wave.

When the rabbi came, and I never forget he said, oh, I want to tell you, I am so happy that we were able to rescue you. Well, he didn't rescue us. That was Swedish [INAUDIBLE]. You know, I was also in Hamburg. Is anybody here from Hamburg? And so somebody jumped forward and said, I am from Hamburg. He said, please, my dear. Don't come so close. You still have your lice. That was a rabbi.

Oh, and I was also in Berlin. Is anybody from Berlin? Naturally, you know, we were no human beings. We were already animals. We had no feelings anymore. We were so run down to say the least. We've had more deaths than a life.

I was 90 pounds once. And I was there-- when I came to Sweden, I was barely 60. And other people who were much heavier lost more, you know? And we were nothing. And we had no hair and a uniform. And we were skeleton, and we were sick, and we had lice. So I don't blame people that they don't want to run to us right away. But the Swedes didn't care. They did it.

But the Jews-- I know the first Oneg Shabbat in the school, they came with the challah. They cut the challahs in pieces and society ladies with the rings and all over and the new hair style and Friday you had to look good-- especially good.

Now, let me tell you something. Each one can have one piece of challah, not more. Do you hear me? To us who starved for three and a half year, who went through that, we couldn't have more than one piece of challah. They had to tell us that. That was the Swedish Jews. It's unbelievable. So I don't-- I'm not [? talking ?] [? about ?] now. They're not all that way, but this is what we experienced.

Am I-- can I ask you--

Yes, sure.

--for a moment to backtrack a little bit and tell us the story of the rings of who made them and how did you manage to keep them with you?

Yes, that's a good question. I wonder sometimes myself. I had a friend who was Latvian, and we are really-- we are good friends. And he was a jeweler. And one day he surprised me and came with that ring, which was done out of a screw. And he said, I wish I could give it to you in silver or gold, but this is all I had. I said, oh, that is lovely. And I really was very happy.

And then I had another friend who was a musician. He was also Latvian Jew. And he's living in Morgan-- a university in-- is that Morgantown in Virginia or somewhere? And he's teaching there. And he had a silver spoon left, and he liked me too. I don't know why. And he gave this friend who made that ring when he saw that to make a ring out of the spoon.

So I have them both. How I got them-- I kept them, that is also surprising because I had-- most of us had a little wallet hanging on a string in our bosom here. And I had a few pictures. The few pictures I have like this here from my parents. It was all in there, and the ring was in there.

And one day I cleaned for SS man, and he was so miserable, and I couldn't stand him. And he really was incredible. And one day he wasn't there, and I know he was a typical German. There's a calendar. You know, we had leafs calendars, not like monthly. Every day you had to tear it off, and I didn't tear it off.

And he didn't come back the next day. I didn't tear it off. The next day he didn't come back. After five days he came back and he saw that. He got such a rage. He grabbed me and shaked me and he suddenly felt something. And he grabbed in and took it out.

And I said, please don't take it away, I said. It's only a few pictures. You will die for that, he said. I will go to the commandant, and he did. And it was a new commandant, and he wasn't broken in yet. He was later on terrible. But in the beginning he didn't know what he was doing.

I said, please, commandant, just let me have it. There is nothing in but pictures, and you can look into it, and a letter from my parents. It's all I have, and the rings. Now the rings, I don't know where I had them at that time. If I would have hidden-- I knew that I had to go to him, must have some place I have hidden. So he gave it back to me. And that's where I got it.

And I once-- once I did something. I think I suffered terrible for that. I had rheumatic fever. And we had nothing. I got one aspirin a day. That's all they could afford. I was laid in cotton, and I was laying for three weeks that sick.

And I got a little bit better, and I got up when the new action came. Everybody had to come out, and I barely made it to the collection place. I have been told by this miserable Dr. [Personal name] I can stay so and so many days and get you. And then I go back to work. And if I cannot get to work, then he didn't say anything. That means then you're dead.

The action came, and I was called up to go on the wagon. And I didn't. I said, I'm not going. Dr. [Personal name] said I don't have to go. I'm not going. And they pushed me up. And here I was standing on the wagon, and I jumped down. As sick as I was, I jumped down.

They put me up again, and I jumped down again. I did this procedure three times, and I said, I am not going on. You can shoot me on the place. I see my parents standing there. They were there at the time. They had the tears running down that I have to leave and they couldn't do anything.

I was so determined. I said, I am not going on. I said, if you want to shoot me, you can do it right here. I am not going on. And so the commotion came on, and then that Dr. [Personal name] came and said, what's the trouble, Gertrude. Thank god my sister was a nurse and she knew them all. So I told him. He said, to Dr. [Personal name] if you promised her that, she's not going on. And they took somebody else.

And for years and years, I feel like if I killed somebody. And it took years and years of therapy with a psychiatrist that I finally came to grips with it. I was so bad off I couldn't even walk. I couldn't cross the street. I was completely like-- almost like paralyzed because the guilt.

And it's until I realized it wasn't really my guilt, that man was doomed as much as I was doomed. If it wasn't that on this-- the doctor said, on this trip, it would've been on another trip. She said, you cannot play god. And slowly but surely I came to grips with it. But it still is there. Once in a while it bothers me, and once in a while I just can't walk just like if I'm paralyzed. But it goes away.

How long does it last when it happens?

You mean that I can't walk?

Yes.

Oh, it could have been a whole day. I can walk in the house, but I could not cross the street. And that's it. So we all left our mark some way or another. Oh, and then I came-- when I came to Sweden with my blood poisons, they took me right away to the hospital and they opened it up a couple of times. It grew [INAUDIBLE] together again. Then we came in a place where we had to be [NON-ENGLISH]. You know what [NON-ENGLISH] is?

No.

You have to be separate from everyone and from [INAUDIBLE] from everybody see first what sicknesses you have--

Quarantine.

Quarantine. That's it. And my arm got so bad that doctors actually sent an ambulance. And they said, well, if it's not better by tomorrow, we have to amputate the arm. So what could I lose? My sister said, you know what, Gertrude, come on. I have soap suds. We had the green, heavy soap, a liquid, and hot water. And I take a kitchen knife and I open it up and we see if the pus comes out.

So that's what she did. I almost fainted, but she did open it up. And the pus, yes, was running out. And the next morning when the ambulance came back and wanted to pick me up and the doctor look at the arm and said, what happened? I don't know.

We never told them. Because we couldn't play doctor. -- well, I think you don't have to get it amputated. And here I am. All I have is a stiff thumb, and that's it. That's it. Do you want to go home I guess? Otherwise I talk more.

How long were you in Sweden?

About three and a half years. It was a lovely time. I was sick for a whole year. Everybody who got better could-- they were so great, the Swedes. When you were ready to go, you were examined and you were ready and able and spoke enough Swedish, then they supplied you-- if you didn't want to go to another country, they supplied you with an apartment, which paid you the first rent, and then you had to do it yourself.

They gave you a job in your field, whatever you wanted to. And you were on your own. And that's what happened. I was a whole year in-- they had these wonderful homes for us in the woods. It was beautiful. Two people in one room. My sister and I, we had one room.

And we had kitchen privilege. We had to help in the kitchen a little bit, but it was about all. And after a year I was ready. My sister took a job as a nurse in a family. They had two children. Not as a nurse, a kindermaid. How do you say? Not a maid, housemaid.

Nurse? Governess? Or--

Something like that, yeah. And when I came out after a year, I lived in the same room with her. And then we got our own apartment. And I worked in the dressmaker shop. And she went back to the hospital in Sweden to become a nurse.

And then she got an offer to work as a nurse in a TB hospital near Stockholm where all refugees who survive who had TB were brought there, and she became the head nurse there. And I went with her, and I was doing all the like sheets or fixing and alterations of what the kids-- young girls wanted something or the nurses wanted something.

And then we were there for quite a while. Over a year there. And then we decided why don't we go see our friends [INAUDIBLE] if we want to come [INAUDIBLE] let's try it. We don't have to stay. But that was-- some 30 some years later we're still here.

Yeah, why did you come to the United States? What precipitated that?

Curiosity. Honest to god, curiosity. You know, we have been around so much and everything. And you were on [INAUDIBLE] lucky [INAUDIBLE] and a happy [INAUDIBLE]. And Sweden is beautiful. But it was something like you wanted something new. You want to see something new. And that's what we did exactly. Then we get stuck here. We got married. My sister unfortunately a widow. We got our own family. I have a daughter.

How did you meet your husband?

My husband was a blind date. I went to the Catskills. Everybody said-- I couldn't find nobody which I liked enough. And going out, yes. And I'm getting older. And someone said to me, why don't you go to the Catskills? That is where all Jews meet somebody.

Well, I packed my things, I got a taxi, and went to the Catskills. I lived in Philadelphia at that time. That's where we came to. And I stayed in a hotel in Pine Hill. I think it's Pine Hill, it was. It's so long ago. And there was a Jewish-- German Jews were going there.

And there was a German Jewish family, and they had a son, but he was much too young for me, and I didn't like him. But the mother said, I know three nice men. One is a very intellectual type and nice guy and loves the better things of life. And two are rich. If they two that turn something out, I want money. The other one is free.

[LAUGHTER]

I said, OK. So the other one with the better things of life I would like to meet first. And I met my husband, and two weeks later, we were engaged. And three months later, we were married. Then she sent me a note and to my husband. She was really [? a sneak. ?]

She sent me a note and said-- saying she tried her best. She would like what I feel about Ralph, because she has somebody else otherwise if I'm not serious. And to Ralph she wrote the same note. And then after we got engaged and we told her that very happily, she said, [INAUDIBLE] for her troubles she wants \$250. \$250 36 years ago, that was a lot of money.

A lot of money.

So we sent her each one \$50. And she could be lucky with that, I mean, we wanted to send her anyhow.

And you've had a daughter.

I have a daughter. She's 35 years now. And I have a 14 years old grandson whom I adore and who is really-- it's interesting. My daughter doesn't speak about the concentration camp. I really thought she doesn't want to hear about it. I really thought she isn't interesting, but it's not true. She told me only once she cannot bear to listen to such a thing what happened to me.

My grandson on the other side, whomever he can tell, he tells about his grandmother, what she went through and so on. And one day after his bar mitzvah he said to me, the rabbi said I should come to an Oneg Shabbat, and they live at least 45 minutes away from us, so I don't see them very often. So my husband and I, we went to the rabbi-- to the--

Oneg.

--temple for the Oneg Shabbat. And all of a sudden I said, I can't believe it. That's me. He starts to read my story word for word.

Who started to read, I'm sorry?

The rabbi.

The rabbi.

So the whole temple was sitting as quiet and shocked like I was. You know, it is such a strange feeling. Here it stands written, and he reads it to you from the pulpit. And that was thanks to my grandson. I have never had such a-- every year is it. All of the sudden, my sister Herta and I grew up early years like when any other German --

You had already written this at the time?

It was written already.

What precipitated-- what precipitated you writing that?

Here's my husband again. Now, I mean, this is what happened. We had this folder from the temple. I think it comes out three or four times a year. And I think they run out on the subjects because he put a note in that anybody who has to contribute something, be it art or music, please come forward.

So my husband said to me, how would you like to write your story? I said, no. Who wants to read that? Because we always knew, everybody told us, forget about it. It is a long time ago. Even at even four weeks out of the concentration camp they said, forget about it. You're in a new country. It's a new life.

So I said, who wants to listen to my story? He said, I know somebody who could write that. And he called her up, and she came, and it turned out I had one of her children in my nursery school where I work. Oh, Enid! Oh, Gertrude! And she said, oh, gladly I do that. And that's what brought it on.

And did that make you want to talk about it publicly? Or--

I have a commitment. I swore to myself many times should I ever get out, for those who cannot speak anymore, I will speak. And believe me, it wasn't always easy. And before I came here, I took quite a few pills. Maybe that's why I talk so much. But I must. As long only somebody want to--

And you know something? We have a temple. We have a rabbi. And I want so badly to speak once for a Jewish congregation. Not for the congregation alone, for the Jewish schoolchildren who go to Hebrew school. You think I'd be able to do it? No.

When I spoke to them first time in school, my boss in the nursery school, showed to rabbi, the thank you notes I got from the kids. And he wrote on one of them and said, very interesting. And that was it. So I will not have--

Well, we have quite a few Jewish people who survived who are living on the Bridgewater area in Somerville So there are some which are pretty prominent like the baker, the Gaston Bakery. I don't know if you ever heard of it.

He was born in America. His parents went to Germany. They go up there and they were sent in the concentration camp. So he's speaking. So maybe they want to take always the same person. But it should be interesting for other people to hear different sides, wouldn't you think so?

Yes, sure. Sure.

But if these [INAUDIBLE] never mind it, I can't help. So that's it. And so it's really-- and as long as I live, if only somebody wants to listen, I will speak. And that's it. And then my husband saw your-- in the paper, in the Courier news article about you and you looking for people.

He say, how about? I say, oh, they don't need me because they probably go to New York. They can have so many there. They're so many more people. Why just me? And why was just my sister and I and five others chosen to go to Cincinnati and be witness for the criminal? I said also to the lawyers there, why just us? Well, your story is different.

It is.

I don't know.

Thank you very much--

No, you're welcome.

--for coming to tell it.

Thank you.

Oh, you're welcome for listening.