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Good afternoon. My name is Bonnie Kind, and I'm a member of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We're affiliated with the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale.

Sharing the interview with me is Dr. Phyllis Tobin, clinical coordinator of the Yale project in the New York area, and associate clinical coordinator at Kean College. We're privileged to greet Miss Lotte Baum, a survivor presently living in Whiting, New Jersey, who has graciously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Miss Baum, let me begin by just asking you to tell us a little bit about where you came from, what the town was like, and your date of birth.

I was born August 9, 1915 in Essen, Germany. And I went 8 years to Jewish public school. And I graduated in 1929 and went two years to a secretarial school. I had one brother who was 1 and 1/2 year older than I am.

What kind of a home did you have?

Oh, I had a very-- my parents, very loving parents. My father was a salesman. My mother, she didn't work, naturally, as it was at those times. And had a wonderful--

Were you comfortable?

Very-- yeah, comfortable.

To what extent was being Jewish important to you at that time?

My parents were not very religious, but we went every Saturday to the temple. And we were, naturally, members. We both went to the Jewish school, which we didn't have to. And my brother was bar mitzvah, like any normal Jewish family.

Had your parents been residents of Germany for many years?

My mother was born there. My father was-- he was born in Holland, but he lived for quite a few years in Germany. My grandparents on my father's side, they lived on the border in Germany, right near Holland.

Your social life, as a child, was it primarily with Jewish people or was it mixed?

I had only Jewish friends through school. And we were very involved with a Dutch club, where we went almost twice a month. We had gatherings and so.

What language did you speak at home?

German.

German, not Dutch.

No.

But there was a large Dutch community in Essen?

Yes, yes.

What year did you graduate secretarial school?

1931.

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So then you were quite a young lady by the time the rumblings began.

Yeah. The rumblings began 1933, but you could feel it already 1931, 1932, that something was coming.

How did you first personally know that you or your family were in danger?

Not in danger. My father couldn't do his business as well as he used to do, because he was a Jew. And then on the streets they say, there goes that Jew again, you know.

How was that understood and reacted to by your family?

Very sadly. So I was working at that time.

What were you doing?

I was a secretary.

Yes, and what kind of a place? Was it a Jewish place?

Yes, I was working for a Jewish lawyer. He was a criminal lawyer. And but then they-- he was a Jew. So they did all kinds of things to him. He died.

Before-- what--

No--

He died as a result of--

After 1933. After 1933. And then I started in a department store.

That you were permitted to work in.

Yeah. Jewish department store, till the Kristallnacht, 1938. There put everything-

Do you remember that night particularly?

Oh, yes. I was with a gymnastic club. We were in a neighboring city to perform. We were just in the middle of performing and the Nazis came in. They took us by our hair and threw us out.

p I left my jacket inside with my Dutch passport, so they let me go in, took my jacket off. And then we went home. Somebody took us home.

And in the meantime they demolished everything-- most of them, from most of the Jewish families, the houses and the stores, and the synagogues. We had the most beautiful synagogue in Essen, which was all destroyed. That was the end of that job. And then I started with the Jewish community in Essen.

What did you do?

Also as a secretary.

So the community was cohesive?

Yes, many Jewish families since they owned-- could go ahead. So I stayed there till about 1941, till May.

What were things like?

Oh, very bad. You couldn't go shopping anymore, you know. There were still good Christian families who did that for you. And they try to help you, some people, whatever they could. But then the bombardments came. We had to go in the middle of the night down in the basement, you know.

Were you still living with your parents then?

No, my parents passed away. My father passed away in 1931 and my mother, 1936.

So how were you living? What was--

I was living with friends.

And was your brother with you?

No, my brother, he moved 1933. He moved to Holland. I visited him there, but he never could come back. But then he was deported, and I have never heard from him.

Did you feel very much alone?

Yes, I had nobody. So in 1941 I moved to Holland when I got married there. On June 4, 1941, I got married in Holland. And my husband had a big factory of upper heels and soles. That was 1941 till about 1942.

They took everything away from us. We had nothing anymore. We still had money to live, but that was about it, until 1943. We had to move out in barracks out of Amsterdam. And there we stayed until the beginning of-- no. Then till the end of 1943, when they moved us to a concentration camp in Holland, in Westerbork.

Did you know this man?

I met him about a year before, because I could always go to Holland to visit, because I had a Dutch passport.

And when you finally went, was it difficult for you to leave Germany, or was it easy for you to get out?

No, no. I could, because I was Dutch. I had no problems. Once a week I had to go to the police as long as I lived in Germany after the Nazis took over, and had to report, because I was an enemy.

As a Jew, or as Dutch?

As a Jew, and as a Dutch-- after 1940, 1939, after the Germans went into Holland. They took over. So we got-- as we got married. So we couldn't go out after 6 o'clock at night anymore. We had to wear the yellow star with the word "Jew" on it.

And finally, end of 1943, we had to go out into the barracks. And there we stayed a couple of months, and they put us into Westerbork. And in Westerbork, I had to-- we all had to work. I worked in the laundry. I had to iron shirts, eight shirts an hour.

But it wasn't as bad, you know. People could smuggle food in for you and so. Then they said to us-- and every day, transports went to Auschwitz and Birkenau.

They said to us, if you want to stay here-- if you pay in gold, you can stay here. You get a booklet with a stamp and I just-- so we paid in gold through our Christian friends. But they still send us away with the last transport. That was September 1944. They send us to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Was your husband with you?

Yes.

So you stayed together till you were sent to Auschwitz, at least in the same camp?

Yes, yes. We went with the freight cars, where they transported cattle. We went to Auschwitz six days, six nights.

Did you have any contact with one another, in the barracks, before you went to Auschwitz?

Yes. There we could walk around free.

Did you stay as a couple there?

Yes, as a couple. First we were all together in a big room with bungalow beds. But later we had a small room, each, where we lived together. Well, as we arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau, they stripped us from-the SS stripped us from head to toe.

Did you know what to expect?

No, we didn't.

Where did you think you were going, or what kind of a place?

We knew, but we never knew it would work out that bad. So they tattooed our number on our arm. It's still here. And they put us into a-- it was just horrible, unbelievable. We hardly had anything to wear. We had no shoes, no nothing, and it was bitter cold there.

Can you document it for us with as much detail as possible, when you arrived, since you were so-- you were surprised.

Oh, yes. We didn't expect roses, but we never expected that. I don't think I would have-- I don't think I would believe it if I wouldn't have gone through it.

Were you with anyone, through the experiences, that you knew? Any women?

Yeah, with friends, you know, or roommates from Holland. That's about it. But then we were all separated.

We had a lot of children with us which never came out alive. And we were right next to the building for Mengele, which you heard about.

Yes. How did you know?

Because there was a big sign on the door-- on the building.

Can you give us any of the images or the thoughts or the feelings that you had during the time, that you think is unbelievable?

Oh, we were praying God should take us, because it was just unbearable.

How long were you there?

We were there from September-- thank God, only till January. January they send us to Sudetenland, in an ammunition factory.

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In Auschwitz, we worked. We had to carry sand in two big buckets around our back from one street corner to another-senseless, altogether.

You thought it was senseless?

Oh, we had-- it was terrible. You hardly had anything to eat, and you were in horse stables you were living. You have to get up every morning around 4:00. You had to stand for two hours with no shoes on or nothing and it was bitter, bitter cold. So I guess everything was senseless, you know.

Then, if you didn't feel good, or you were too weak, they took you out and they march you off to the gas chambers.

Did you know at that time that that's where people were being to?

Oh yes, yes. The ovens were smoking day and night.

How did you manage, physically?

Thank God I was in good health or be tired, you know. But sometimes you just wished it was all over. And you couldn't-- you didn't hear anything from the war. You never knew what was going on.

So till then, January, they sent us away. And we had to work there. But there it wasn't too bad, because there were a lot of French people who talked German, which were also prisoners. And somehow they was told was war-- the war was ahead and it was almost over. We never believed it anyway.

How long were you then in Sudetenland?

Until May. One morning we came down to have our so-called breakfast, and everything was closed. The German were all gone. They fled because of Russian forces nearby. And then within 24 hours, the Russians freed us.

Do you remember that? Do you remember--

Oh, do I remember that.

Yes, could you give us the details of that?

Yes. It was very hard to talk to them, because we finally found a few Jewish men who talked Yiddish, so we could converse with them. And they took us to the next office, where the Russians were. And they gave us some food and clothes. So we slept over there.

And within a few days, they transported us to Leipzig. That's the first time town where the Americans were. And from there we went to-- within two or three weeks, from one train to another, we finally arrived in Holland.

Back to home.

Back to Holland, yeah.

And when you came back there, what did you find?

In Holland?

Yes.

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A lot of cities destroyed and so, but where we used to live, everything-- Amsterdam was everything fine. In Rotterdam, everything was flat, let's say. But the people were very happy to see us back home, because only very few came back. My husband didn't come back.

When were you separated from your husband?

The day we arrived in Auschwitz, he went one way, and I went the other.

You didn't see him after that?

No, no more. But I had witnesses who said, I saw him die.

How did you then rebuild your life?

I was working. We got our factory back.

Who was we?

My brother-in-law. He came back. He was with his wife in Bergen-Belsen.

And we built it up again. And we finally sold it. And after 1947, I got married again. I met my husband in the neighborhood, through friends. And he was underground, in Germany, for 2 and 1/2 years, with his sister and another friend.

Also Dutch, [BOTH TALKING]?

No, he was German. He was German.

But living in Amsterdam at the time?

Yeah, he had a butcher store in a small town. But they took everything away from him, too. And my sister-in-law, she had two daughters, 17 and 19 years, that never came back from concentration camp. And we, the three of us, emigrated to America on March 17, 1947. We arrived here.

Who are the three?

My husband and his sister.

And his sister?

Yeah, who lost her two daughters.

I see, I see. And you came here. Did you have family here, waiting for you?

No-- yeah, my husband had two brothers here.

And they had gotten out of Germany when?

They had one that got out of Germany in 1937, and the other one went to Ecuador, to South America, and came from Ecuador here. 1946 he came here. They were very helpful.

Yes. How did you adapt here?

Oh, very well. Everything was a cinch after what you went through, right? So my daughter was born 1948, in October.

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection And my son was born 1952, in July, which was the biggest blessing.

Yes.

And you lived where?

We first, as we came, we lived in Brooklyn. And we moved. We stayed there til 1951.

Then we moved to Long Island, Valley Stream. We stayed there til 1974. Then we moved to New Jersey. And my husband died October 19, '82.

I see. So you had some years together?

Yeah.

Yes. Have you ever thought about how those, the darkest of years, have affected your life today?

Say what?

The darkest of years, how it affected your life?

Yeah, I tell you, my high blood pressure came from that. And that's about enough.

It certainly is.

I was always, since I came back, on the doctor's care for that. And the doctors all said it just came from all those years.

Were you able to receive any reparations?

I get social security from Germany, because I worked there.

But no disability from [BOTH TALKING]?

I get a small rent, like a disability. Yes, I do. But nothing come-- if I should make a living from that it, it will be very hard.

Yes, of course. Do you have any extended family from those years that you've been in touch with that have survived?

Yeah, I have a cousin. He lives in Long Island. He was a cantor and a schoolteacher in Germany. And he was underground with his wife, overseas in Germany, in Freiburg.

He came here also 1946, he came here. And his son was born 1946. Unfortunately, he passed away four weeks ago, the son. And the parents was alive. They are quite old.

Oh, yes.

So they had to color the hair and everything, just not to be recognized.

Is there anything, as you look back now-- what you've told us about, your life before and during and after, that you might have missed, or that you want to make sure gets documented for the archives?

In 1933, I was 18 years old, which could have been a wonderful time for me-- which couldn't be any more than it was. Then it started to and it gets worse from day to day.

https://collections.ushmm.org Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection And also you had lost your parents before, so you were really alone in that way, too?

Vac My father 1021 - I was just 16 years old Just suddenly And my mother she couldn't just cone This is 1933 She

r es. My latner, 1	1931 1 was just	ro years old. Just s	uddeniy. And my n	notner, sne coulan't ju	st cope. This is 1933. She
had a stroke, and	1936 she passed	away. Yeah, I had	to take care of her.	My father didn't live	in Germany anymore.

No, it wasn't.

OK. Thank you very much. [OFF CAMERA WHISPERING].

No.

Thank you very much. We--

So your youth wasn't so youthful.

You're welcome. I'm glad I have it off my chest.

Yes.

I never could talk about it.

Yes, well, you have, and we really are very grateful to you. Thank you.

Thank you very much.