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Good afternoon. My name is Charles de Fanti. I'm a member of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center.

We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at the Sterling Library of Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Bernard Weinstein, director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project. We're privileged to welcome Edith Farben, survivor presently living in Union, New Jersey, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Welcome, Mrs. Farben.

Thank you.

We'd like to begin by asking you something about your early life before these events, these terrible events, occurred. Could you tell us something?

Yes. I was born in a small town. When I was born, it was Czechoslovakia. The name of the town was Polana.

I'm one of four children. The third in the family. My mother was a-- my father was a shoemaker. My mother was a housewife.

We lived a very-- almost poor. We had enough to eat and clothes on our backs. We lived in Polana for-- when I was about seven years, we moved to the city. There, we lived until 1939, when the Hungarians occupied MunkÃ¡cs, the city.

And Polana was still Czech. So we decided to go back home, which was short lived, because a few weeks later, the Hungarians occupied there, too. And with that, our problems started a little bit.

The men were called to forced labor camps. It wasn't like concentration camp, but they had to work, and we had to wear-- we had curfews. Not right away. Maybe in 1940, '41, we were not allowed to go out at night. We had to wear yellow bands, and life started getting difficult.

Do remember the first moment when you sensed any danger?

Well, real danger-- I think the first time we sensed the real danger was the night before we were taken to ghetto. Yes.

Before we go into that aspect of it, would you want to tell us a little bit about your life prior to the coming of the Germans or the coming of occupation?

Well--

What was your was your life at home like?

--it was nice. We didn't have the material things that the children growing up in the United States, and it was no competition for like going to the movies, going to show, going to dinner, because we did not have that. If we went into the city and we went to a movie, that was a big event.

Go out to eat? There was no place to eat at. So, I mean, if a boy dated a girl, the biggest treat was a bar of chocolate, or in the summer, an ice cream cone. I mean, that was it.

Life was, as I said, wasn't rich, but it was nice. It was relaxing. We had to go to school. We couldn't-- the eight grades, we had to finish. There was no such a thing as you don't.

My brother, my oldest brother, went to Hebrew gymnasium. He came out here in 1938 to the United States on the last vote. And after that, there was no school for Jews. After '39, we didn't go to school anymore. And then it started getting more and more difficult.

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Was your family a close-knit one?

Yes.

As a matter of fact, the whole town, we were 60 Jewish families in that town. And my grandfather was everybody's uncle. It was a close-- everybody knew everybody and sort of distantly related, most of us.

So there was a communal as well as a natural family?

Yes, very much so.

It was a mixed town, Polana?

Yes.

Jewish and Christians?

Well, it was more Christians, more than Jews. The whole town was about 300 families.

I see.

We're about 60 Jewish-- between 60 and 65, something like that.

And what did being Jewish mean to you personally at that time?

Before 1939?

Yes.

I just took it naturally. We are Jews. That's it. Before 1939, there was no difference, because the Czechs were very, very liberal, very Democratic. And there was no discrimination in any way--

Yes.

--at first shot.

So you never felt yourself set apart or to be different?

Well, we were set apart, because we were the better. Like all the others were the, in our town, for instance, the Gentiles, they were all peasants. And they really weren't very smart.

They didn't go to school if they didn't have to. And when they went, their primary thing was not to learn. They were there because they had to be there.

So we were set apart, but not as far as--

Discrimination?

--discrimination, no. We were not discriminated against.

Ill treatment?

No, not until the Hungarians came in. Once the Hungarians came in, and they were being fed propaganda and whatnot, that's when it started.

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Yes. What sort of propaganda?

I mean, Jews do this, and Jews take your money, and Jews-- you know, stuff like that, the usual.

The kind of defamation that we're all too familiar with?

Yes.

Go back to where you were before when we were talking about the danger and the--

The night before you were taken.

The night before, yes.

Well, as I said, it started in-- we knew that we were discriminated. We knew we were different. Because in the winter of '43, we needed yellow stars. They had to be a certain dimension.

So we already knew we were discriminated. As I said, there was a curfew for us. We couldn't get-- as far as food was concerned, we couldn't get the food that the Gentiles got, not as much.

And then it was Passover of 1944. It was like the middle of April. The last day of Passover, my father went to temple with my brother. My mother, my sister, and I stayed home.

And before that, there were Hungarian soldiers in town. And if there was somebody between the soldiers that really wanted to speak to a Jewish-- a girl, spend an hour or two, a social evening, the would go to a Jewish home. Even though they were not allow it, but they'd come in.

So there were these two Hungarian soldiers that were sent away to a neighboring town, but they came. And one of them stayed with my sister and I. And the other one asked my mother for a walk.

I didn't know why my sister didn't know why this other young man didn't want to tell us. And then my father came home. And my mother asked my father to go for a walk, and we didn't know what it was all about.

It turned out-- we found out the next day-- that these two soldiers knew that we were going to be taken away the next day to ghetto. So they came and asked-- wanted permission from my parents to let my sister and I go with them. And they were trying to send us to their parents and hide us out.

And my father did not believe it. My father said, these two young men love your daughters, and that's the way they want to get them away from you. That was in the evening. I would say about 7 o'clock in the morning.

5 o'clock in the morning, my father went out. We did not have bathrooms. He got up in the morning. He went out.

He came back. And he wakes us up. And he said, I think we better get dressed and pack. Every Jewish home is surrounded by I guess what would be here Boy Scouts, and those were Nazi.

Nazi [INAUDIBLE].

Hitlerjugend, right?

Yeah. They were from our hometown--

From your hometown.

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--but they were Hitlerjugend Hungarian. They called them [HUNGARIAN]. And, of course, that's how he found out that those two young men were right, and maybe he should have let us go.

You were 15 at the time about?

I was 19.

Oh, 19?

Yes, in 1944.

I'm sorry.

And how old was your sister?

22. Well, not quite 22. Under the terms here, she'd be 21. But in between, we had to like-- between '39 and '44, we have to find papers that are like, for instance, would be my great-grandfather was born in that country, that area of the Carpathian. I can tell you some incident.

Please.

I was trying to find these papers for my grandparents and for ourselves. Because those days already, we did not want my father on the road, because there were Hungarian soldiers. And most of them were anti-Semites, and they would see a Jew, they would even pull his beard or whatever-- beat him up.

Your father wore the traditional beard?

No, my father did not. But he was a Jew. My grandfather did.

Yes.

So I was in charge of finding papers for my grandfather, my mother's father, and for us. I succeeded for us. But my grandfather at the time was 87, and to file papers for his grandfather was kind of difficult-- for his great-grandfather was kind of difficult. So I guess because he was an old man, they did not deport him.

Was there a reason why it was so difficult to find the papers?

Because his parents did not come-- they came from-- his grandparents or great-grandparents came from Poland. And then they had no offices. They had no birth certificates.

They had nothing. Those days, they didn't. They knew they were born in the summer of such and such year or in the fall of such and such year, but they didn't know dates or anything.

Yes.

So my grandfather had to report to the gendarme every Sunday.

He remained behind?

They left him home, but he had to report that he's here--

I see.

--as if there was any place for him to go. Being, again, a Jewish girl and with a little education, the Hungarian

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gendarmes, also if they needed a-- if they wanted to spend a social evening, they too went to a Jewish home where they were girls. Because they could not-- there was nothing in common with the peasant girls. And I knew them all.

So they agreed to let me come. It was supposed to be on a Sunday-- to let me come every Sunday morning, and bring my grandfather's papers, and they would sign them so my grandfather would not have to be exposed to somebody pulling his beard. He did have a traditional beard-- or whatever. And besides, he was old.

And he-- you know? One day, one Sunday, I go there, and for some reason-- that was already towards the end. It was like in the spring of '44. For some reason, they changed all the people in that office.

Yes.

And when I got there. And I got there so I had to already tell them the reason why am I there. And this man said to me, this paper says Victor Hirsch Jacob. And he's 87 years old.

You don't look like him. He says, you either bring him, or you're arrested. So I had to go home and bring my grandfather. And it's always with the fear that he was going to be hit, or his bed was going to be pulled, or pushed, or whatever. But that's what we had to do.

Was the person who told you to do this Hungarian?

Yes. Yes, he was Hungarian. So then came that day in the middle of April of 1944, and we were taken to the ghetto.

My grandmother was a frail little old lady, and my grandfather was-- he wasn't well, but he was pretty good. When we got there, the first thing they did, which was shave off the beards for the old men that had beards. And from that day on, my grandfather looked dead.

2 and 1/2 weeks later, he died in the ghetto. When we cried, the rabbi said to us, children don't cry. He is going to have a grave, but the rest of us, we don't know.

So my grandfather died. We buried him. We were not allowed to go to the cemetery, but he was buried. And about 10 days later, he was deported to Auschwitz.

So you were in the ghetto for all of about a month?

A month, about a month approximately.

You said it was Mukachevo?

Mukachevo, yeah.

Mukachevo.

In a brick factory.

In Hungary at the time?

That was Hungary at the time, yes. MunkÃ¡cs in Hungarian.

Did you work in the ghetto? Were you--

Not really. I mean, they made us sweep the barracks, sweep the streets. You know, just stuff like that.

And where did you live, and under what circumstances?

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In the huts that the bricks used to be. When you make bricks and you put them out and has to dry, that's where we stayed. On the floor, there was straw-- not enough. And we brought our own bedding, and pillows, and that's where we slept. That's where we were.

The whole family was together at this time?

Yes, in the ghetto.

With the exception of your brother who had left for America?

Yes, we were all together-- my grandparents, my aunt, my mother's younger sister. The rest of my mother's family was here-- not really. Two brothers were there. And we were there, as I said, for about a month. And then we would put on a train, the cattle cars.

Was the ghetto liquidated prior to you're going? Or were you just selected to go?

It was liquidated. I mean, we all had to leave. Maybe not the same day. Maybe a day apart.

But the ghetto ceased to be?

Yes. Then like between the middle of May to the end of May, the ghetto was-- all the ghettos were liquidated in the Carpathian.

Yes.

So we were on the train, I don't know, 2 and 1/2 days, 3 days. We really lost track of time. And when we got to Auschwitz, and they started-- hurry up, hurry up, get out fast, fast.

And right away, the men went one way, and the women went another way. And there were the-- what do they call-- the Polish Jewish men. They wore striped suits. They were called the kapos.

They weren't supposed to tell us anything. But quietly, they would say, young women that have children, give them to your mothers. A young girl, if asked how old, say older. An older woman, if asked how old, say younger.

But we had no idea why. We didn't know what was happening there. And unfortunately, most young mothers did not give up their children.

Then, of course, we got to the famous table, where the finger was your destiny, whether you live or die. If you go left, you die. If you go right, you live. And we got to that point, and we were with this family-- very close.

They were three girls, three sisters and a mother, and my aunt, my mother, and my grandmother, my sister, and I. And he was showing my mother to go to the right. I mean, it was such a-- almost chaos. We didn't even know what was happening to us.

He showed my mother to go to the right. And my mother says, I have to take care of my mother. He says-- and then this other woman that had the three daughters came to the table. And she takes her kerchief off.

And she says to him, look, I'm old. I can't work. So he says, you take that old lady, and you can work, he says to my mother. The reason she did that is because the youngest daughter they thought was going to go left.

So my mother came with us, and the other one went the other way. For the first couple of days, we didn't know what was happening. We saw the chimneys. We went to Birkenau. That was Auschwitz, too.

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We saw the chimneys. We saw the smoke and the flames. We smelled, but we were told it's bakeries, factories, whatever.

One day we were noisy, and the block elder-- that was also a Jewish inmate that what there, they built a camp-- she started screaming at us, what are you in such a good mood for? Why do you talk so much? Don't you know your mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and children burning over there?

Well, that was like a shock. We knew that it can't be too good, but we didn't think it was that bad. Then after, I don't know, a week or 10 days, we lost track of time.

When you went with your mother, what had happened to your father and your siblings?

My father and my brother went separately. They were separated, I guess chosen for work in separate commandos. So they were separated.

Yes.

My father, which we were always afraid that he was going to give away his bread for cigarettes and die, did not do it. He gave away his cigarettes for bread. But unfortunately, he was killed anyway.

You know, like some people will try to get away from work and go to the bathroom. So every now and then, the Gestapo, the SS, would go into the bathroom and club them. It didn't make any difference where they hit. My father was there, because he needed to be there, but he got hit over the head and died right then and there. And my brother survived, which, of course, we didn't know until the end of the war.

Was it your brother who told you this?

No, somebody else. My brother wasn't there. Somebody else told us.

So anyway, about 10 days-- a week or 10 days after we were there we got tattooed. I have a number. And we were sent to work. We worked what was called-- they called it Canada, because it was a rich area.

That was for women, primarily?

Well, men worked at the station, and women worked in the barracks. Well, we sorted. There were, I think-- if I remember correctly, there were 10 barracks, and each group was assigned to a barrack where we sorted everybody's, we came across, papers of people we knew-- different things that we-- physically, it was work, but it wasn't very hard work.

Like we didn't have to carry rocks, or bricks, or clean bathrooms, or poor concrete. We were under cover, like in a barrack. We didn't get wet. The sun didn't burn us. And whatever food-- we did not have enough in whatever we were given.

We had-- everybody had something in their bundles. There were cookies. There were crackers.

There was bread, sugar. I mean, everybody had something. So we were like--

Relatively luxurious?

Right.

We were kept clean. In fact, we wore white kerchiefs. Our hair was shaved off, completely shaved off. We had white kishifs on.

We're used to, from the beginning, take stuff and put them in the kerchiefs, because they were like tucked under-- put

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stuff in the kerchiefs. Or we had belts-- lose up the dress and put something in for people in camp that were not as fortunate as we were, if you can call it fortunate-- a cookie, a lump of sugar, a piece of bread, or whatever we were able to, and, of course, shoes. Shoes-- we used to go put on a pair of shoes at work, go back to camp, and then give them to somebody that needed shoes that worked outside, that needed them. Go back in rags, whatever they had, and the next day do the same thing-- underwear.

And then for a while, as I said, we used to carry things in our-- we got caught one day. And my hand was hit with a club. And after that, we decided everybody has to fight for their own lives, and as much as you'd like to help the next one.

So we didn't hide anything in our dresses or in our kerchiefs, but we did bring shoes, and we did bring underwear, and whatever we were able to for other people. We would even put a dress under our dress. Anything that wasn't visible, we brought into camp for other people. And, as I said, we considered ourselves fortunate with material-- like working under a roof, having supplement for our diet. But the other way, mentally, it was awful.

We're talking about seven months in this place?

We were there seven months, but in that place we worked only about five, maybe six-- between five and six months we worked there. Because then the transport didn't come in anymore. So they didn't need us there anymore.

We used to see people going to the crematorium, because we worked between all the chimneys. We used to see people going in. And very soon, we would see the smoke, and flames, and the smell of bones. And many times--

And this happened on a daily basis?

Oh, yes. At the beginning, it happened a few times a day.

And you had no mistake about what this was now?

No, we knew what it was. We definitely knew what it was. They used to bring in people, elderly, that couldn't walk. They would put them on a truck at the station and bring them to the crematorium.

For the first time I saw it, they dumped them. A dump truck-- lifted the truck and dumped the people. I mean, very few people saw that. I went to Washington to the Holocaust gathering, and I got to speak to a couple. They were from Greece, and they were also-- they were in Birkenau, the same camp that I was at.

And he asked me, where was I, and where did I work? And I told him. And he turns to me, and he says to me, I want to ask you a question. How do you live a normal life?

He says, we all knew what was happening, but we didn't see it, and you did. And it's true. We did. We saw it. They used to take little old ladies and men on a pushcart, one of these that used to be on the East Side, the olden days--

Yes.

--and bring them. And that, the inmates did. And if one of them wanted to help an old lady of that pushcart, the German would say, we did not bring her here for vacation. Just drop it.

So when you drop that, it goes over. You know, the kind on two wheels.

Yes.

It goes over, and they would just drop. And that was-- anyway. I had my mother there-- my sister, and my mother, my mother's sister.

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We all kept very close together. We always made sure that wherever we went to line up that my mother was not in front of the line. She was always in the middle-- not in the back and not in front, because they would go around, the SS. Always in the middle, because we don't want her to be very visible.

And then when we stopped working in Canada, you know, when the transports stopped coming in, also the uprising at the crematorium where they threw a few SS in the oven and whatnot--

There was an uprising there at the time when you were there?

Sure, in October.

Can you tell us a little about that, please?

We really didn't know much about it. We just heard something happened, because tales like that were not carried around. And those were men, and men in Auschwitz-- men and women were not in contact.

We were in different camps in Birkenau. Other camps, they were just in different barracks. But in Birkenau, we were different camps divided by electrified barbed wires.

Yes.

So we really didn't know much. When we worked where we worked, we used to-- the man that locked away the-- separate issues and separate this and that-- we would sometimes save jewelry for them, because they sort of-- I don't know how-- but they were in touch with the underground. We would say jewelry for them to give it to the underground.

So then we, once in a while, would hear something. They would maybe tell us something. But after we stopped working there, we didn't know anything.

We just knew that there was an uprising, and that a few SS were thrown into ovens. And after that, there was no more burning. We saw no smoke, no more fire, and that.

So they put us in a factory where we were making ropes for parachutes. And there was an incident. It was Yom Kippur, Erev Yom Kippur. We had a quota how much we needed to make.

Somehow, we knew that Yom Kippur was on the way. We found out that it was, and we decided that we are going to try and make up so that that day we can just play around. It's a holiday. We shouldn't work.

And the SS somehow or other found out. We were kneeling all night outside because of that. And the next day, they made sure that we worked.

The next day being Yom Kippur?

I mean, we knew we were going into the factory. There was no two ways about it. We just thought that maybe we can goof off and not work, because it was a high holiday. We couldn't do it.

Also, in the summer, Tisha B'Av?

Yes. That's the day of the destruction of the temple.

Where you're supposed to fast.

Yes.

They found out that some people were fasting. They rounded up as many as they could and took blood. They drew every

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ounce of blood they were able to get out of the people, because they found out that we were fasting.

I mean, they took blood anyway, but maybe not to that extent. Maybe they would leave a few ounces. But as long as the blood was coming out of the veins, they let it run.

They selected certain people to do that to?

Whoever. That day, it was whoever they could round up. For some reason, I was lucky. I escaped it.

My mother did and my sister. We did not fall into their hands. But those were the things that were happening.

And then we were there sometimes in November. Every time we went to the showers, we never knew who was going to come out or who was going to be taken away. At that point, my sister was quite sickly-looking. And one day, they just took her out of line, and we were sure that that was the end of her.

But then we found out that she was sent away. And she died in Bergen-Belsen two or three days before liberation. In fact, my mother got to Bergen-Belsen just a day or two after she died.

How was she told? Someone told her that they saw her and that she died. She had typhoid when she died-- typhoid.

Anyway, so that was about November of 1944. In December, again, they made a selection. And they looked for younger girls, and they also asked occupation.

So I was dressmaker. In fact, I still do it for myself. So I told them what I was. And so I was separated from my mother.

And this other friend of mine that I mentioned before, the three sisters--

Yes.

--the oldest sister-- that was my very dear friend from childhood on-- she and I were separated from the others. We didn't know what happened to them. They didn't know what happened to us.

We were taken to Germany, Sudetenland, to a camp. It was only about 300 or 400 women. It was a small camp and an unknown one. And we worked in a factory.

We were working on communication systems-- telephones, radios for the ships, for the planes, for stuff like that. So they wanted someone that has flexible fingers that can-- like we needed to solder a thin little wire--

Yes.

--and that precision. Where, again, if you can consider yourself lucky, we were lucky. Because it was winter. We worked in a worm factory.

We did not have enough food, but at least if you're hungry, and warm, and basically not too filthy, it was more bearable. Nobody in that camp died. And then we had the Czech forced laborers working there. It was like a [NON-ENGLISH], an inmate, and a Czech, an inmate, and a Czech.

They weren't supposed to talk to us, because they were civilians. We were prisoners. But we would sit and work, do our work, and they would tell us what's going on in the world. So we knew more or less that the war is ending soon, and we were just hoping that somebody survives, that somebody will be there to tell the tale of what has happened.

They would bring us maybe sometimes a lump of sugar and push it with-- if they would have been caught, they would have been dead-- sometimes a little bit of salt. You know, these were very dear commodities.

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They had access to these things?

They had a ration, but they had. But we didn't. This friend of mine, she couldn't eat without the food. I mean, it was really like you chewing on paper. It was horrible.

So he had brought us salt and in a piece of paper. And she was so happy. She took that salt, and she was like going to put it in her soup all at once. I grabbed it from her.

And I said to her, I'm not going to eat it. I'm going to save it for you. But I'll give you a little bit at a time. That's how I did it. On every soup, I gave her a little bit.

Well, she and I, as I said before, we were very dear friends from childhood on-- still are-- we went through from beginning to end together. We had a friend with us that has some kind of an eye disease. Right now, she's almost blind. But at the time, she was OK during the day, but she couldn't see at night.

What would God give? She was sent to the night shift. And we knew that she cannot see how to walk to steps. She's going to-- they're going to kill her.

But we know some other women at the night shift. This friend of mine and I knew these-- they were also three sisters. And we ask them to please take care of her, and we told them why. And nobody was supposed to know about that, but we told them why.

Because if they're going to see that she can't see-- inside already she was OK, but not outdoors. And she always-- every time we speak to each other she always says, I owe my life to you and Helen, always. Because if not for us, she could have never ever survived. And--

No. Please, go ahead.

She was lucky. Her mother and father survived, this girl's. So she's OK now. Almost blind, but she's OK.

How old was she at the time?

She was about 21. 21, yes. And then came spring-- March, April. Then it got nice, and things don't change.

Because we work and all that. Everything's going on the same. Well, we may one morning. We went out to work.

And again, we could be out at 6 o'clock in the morning, what they called [INAUDIBLE] Appel, to be counted.

Roll call.

And we went out to stand five abreast and wait to be counted, wait to go to work. And the time goes on. Nobody shows. We don't see any Germans around. We don't see anything.

We don't see anybody. It was like late morning when finally the director of the SS women came. And we started scrambling to our places.

She says, no, no, no. Stay where you are. You don't have to be in your places. I have something to tell you, and I wish you would listen.

And so she said, it's good news. The war is over. The Germans surrendered. Nobody's going to do anything to you.

The fence is not-- the barb wires and not electrified. The gate is not locked. The warehouse is open.

I know you have no reason to listen to me, because I'm a SS woman. But I wish you'd listen. Don't go anyplace, because

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there are a lot of angry Germans on the road that have arms. And if they'll see a [NON-ENGLISH], they'll shoot on sight.

Don't eat raw potatoes, or turnips, or whatever you find in the warehouse, because you are going to get sick. Be careful of what you eat, and by all means, don't leave the camp for a few days until either Americans or Russians come around. Because there was no one there.

Did you believe this when you heard it?

We did, and we didn't. We were afraid. Believe it or not, we were afraid to go out. Nobody left.

Everybody stayed. And then a couple of days later, maybe two days later, these men that we worked with, the Czech forced laborers, came. And they each took a girl, two girls, three girls, whatever, to their homes.

We went with them. And we are just all very sorry that we lost touch with these people. These people were so nice to us. They were so good.

The first few days, they only gave us potatoes without anything on them and bread without anything. Because-- and not as much as we wanted to, either. Because they knew that if we're going to start eating all we want or anything, we'll get sick. And within two weeks, you'd be surprised what a difference it does. It makes a tremendous big difference.

So we stayed there for two weeks, and everything was-- these people were just great. They gave us materials. They bought us shoes. I made dresses for everybody.

We had blankets from camp. I made jackets. I was busy sewing. They made a big party in town hall in our honor.

Everything was great. If we wanted to, we could have just remained there for the rest of our lives. Everything was fine. But we decided it's time to go home, because we have to see if there's anybody left for us-- if we have a family or whatever.

So one day we said, well, tomorrow, or whatever, we're leaving. These ladies cooked, and baked, and gave us food. We should have food for the road. And we started for home.

But to get home, I mean, you got on the train. And the train was running. It was going like an hour or two hours just up to the station for a day or two. So really, it was horrible, just horrible.

So after surviving concentration camp, we had other problems, the girls especially-- Russian soldiers. It was unbelievable. If they got a hold of a girl, she was raped by 3, 4, 5 soldiers, 10 soldiers-- makes no difference.

In fact, from a neighboring town, one girl died. So it's a problem, too. And they said, it didn't make any difference-- 16 or 60.

The liberators were solely Russian?

Yes.

In that area?

In the area where we were traveling home, they were Russians.

Yes.

So we had that problem. So we had to try and attach ourselves to a man. If they saw a girl sitting with a man, they didn't bother her.

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One night we were standing in a train station. There were no men around. My friends and I went into the bathroom.

We went in as many as we could, standing up so that nobody can open up the door, because we were afraid of the Russian soldiers. So it took us a long time. As I said, the train would ride for an hour, two hours, and stand for a day or two or even three days, and we didn't know what to do.

How much distance were you covering?

Very little, very little. We didn't even know-- sometimes we didn't even know where we were, because they didn't even stop at the station. They stopped like out of town out of the station. And we would maybe cover 20 kilometers, 25, 30-- whatever, very little. And it meant that it's going to take us a whole summer to get home.

It must have been agonizing.

From what is now Russia back to Czechoslovakia?

From what-- yes. Well, we were in Czechoslovakia, and we were going back to Russia. Where I come from, the Russians occupied it.

So we're traveling. We're going home. And we got to Bratislava, and the train stopped. And there were a lot of people in the train station.

And I said to my friend, I said, Helen, there are a lot of people here. Let's stop. Maybe we can pick up-- maybe we'll find someone.

She says, my father said, whoever survives is going home. And the sooner I get there, the sooner I know who survived. So I said to her, my father said the same thing, but maybe somebody is here. She says, no.

I said, you know, it's too bad. All this time we shared a bite of bread. Someone gave us a basin of hot water, we both washed in that. I said, and now?

She said, well, if that's what you want. I felt I wanted to stop. She felt she wanted to go.

I got out of the train. And I said, reconsider it, because your sisters were with my mother-- maybe. She says, no. She's going home.

I get out of the train, and the train started moving, and she is on the train. I get into the station house-- not alone, other people that I knew also. I get into the station house, and I see this woman that I know. And she says to me, my Jewish name is [? Idel. ?] But as endearing, I was called [? Idy. ?]

So she says to me, you're [? Idy ?] Miller, aren't you? I says, yes. And she starts, ah-- like this. She goes, your mother.

I says, what's with my mother? I couldn't wait for her to say the word. She says, your mother is here. I says, where? She says, just go in town, and ask, and you'll find her.

I run to find my mother. Then I meet this other girl from a neighboring town. And she says to me, ooh, [? Idy, ?] your mother is here. I says, where? She says, just follow me.

And she runs ahead of me. And here I see my mother. Even now, she's kind of stout-- always was. I see this skinny little broken-down woman coming towards me with a young man that is skinny and tall that I didn't recognize. That was like a distance.

And then I see it's my mother and my brother. When I saw them, you know, we stopped, and we embraced, and we

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cried. And everybody around us cried. That was lunchtime.

My mother went for breakfast that morning. And someone comes running to her and said to her in Hungarian, [HUNGARIAN]-- that's like aunt--

Yeah.

[? Volvi's ?] here. And in front of that same store on the same spot, she met me at lunchtime. Everybody, but everybody did-- the people that owned the stores-- and everybody was around us and crying.

And wherever we went, fingers were pointed at us-- a mother has two children. And so I was already happy that I have somebody. And then we found out about my father.

And then I see my friend's two sisters there. And they knew we were together. So, of course, they got very scared that she's no longer.

I said, no, she is. She's on the train. She's on the way home. But the train pulled out of the station and stopped. So she decided to--

Join?

--join, to come into town. And just as they were running to the station to see maybe she's there, she was coming into town. And that's how, little by little, we went home.

Did you believe that you would survive while this was going on?

No. We didn't believe-- I didn't believe that anybody was going to survive. We really thought that, if the Germans would lose the war and if anybody's going to be alive before they lose it, they'll kill us. That's what we believed.

What kept you going? Was it just the idea that you were living from one day to the next?

Yes.

Or was it fate? Or what?

Just I guess the idea for one day to the next. We used to stand there as [NON-ENGLISH] roll call, and we'd see birds, butterflies. And we'd say, aren't they lucky?

Or many times, we would stand there and freeze to death. And a plane would fly by. And we would say, God, please let them throw a bomb so we'll be out of misery.

And yet, as I said before, I did not go through half as much as-- I mean, in the camps where I was, at least physically. I did not work hard. I worked. I had to produce, but I didn't have to do any concrete or stuff like that.

There were girls that would chop stones for gravel. There were people that were cleaning the bathrooms and taking the stuff to the fields, making bricks with their hands-- no machinery or anything-- pouring concrete. All these things, I didn't do.

So basically, I say in comparison, in comparison to what my mother went through, we had it very easy. And yet, it was a nightmare.

We'll take a brief intermission now and rejoin Mrs. Farben in a few minutes.

It'll give us a chance to get out from under the lights. How do you feel?

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I'm OK.

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