

We continue our interview with Mila Bachner. Mila, you were telling us at the end of the last segment that a British soldier, so-called Liberator, said something to you that that was very, very shocking. Can you tell us specifically how you felt at that moment when he said what he said?

At that moment, I felt very sick to my heart because it's ironic that I to begged to die rather than go-- rather than go through this sufferings and pain. But I did say to him in German, [NON-ENGLISH] God wanted me to live. And so I am here. These are the words that I said to him in German. And when I looked at his face, I could see that he turned red. Perhaps, ashamed of what he had said to me.

Do you still feel that way? That somehow it was God who wanted you to--

Definitely. I do believe in God very strongly. And I do believe that he wanted me to be here. Like-- I will tell you something Dr. Weinstein. My daughter said to me one day-- not recently but many years ago, because we always talk about the Holocaust and she is involved in it. And I said [Personal name]-- I said [Personal name], I call her that lovingly. I said, why did I survive this war? Why didn't I go with my mom and my dad, my sisters and brothers? And she said, "mommy, HaShem wanted you to live because He knew what kind of a person you are and what children you're bringing to this world. And look mommy what you did bring into this world." She really meant that I have three beautiful children. I have two sons and this beautiful child. My sons are both attorneys. My daughter got her master's in social work. And I think that I-- my husband and I did a very good job. I really believe that God wanted me to survive this horror.

Are all of your children involved in this and can you speak with all of them freely about it?

Yes. Very freely. All of them called me up last night. My daughter called me maybe five times, "mommy, I am very proud of you. What you are doing is the most beautiful thing in the world." And my sons called me to tell me how proud they are for me, and they wished me luck. And I thought, this is just great. I thought this is just great.

Let's get back to your feelings during liberation. What were your experiences-- what were your thoughts when the camps were opened--

After the war?

--after the war, in April of 45.

People became-- you know, when you open up a cage and you let an animal out, it will go wild. And I thought that we acted as such at that time. People were starved. People were filthy. People needed food and they did not care how they get it. Of course, they started to run into homes, to kill animals for flesh-- pigs, [? cunning ?] rabbits only to-- only to-- they did it because they were hungry. And so do animals kill because they are hungry. And since the Nazis made us subhuman, so we acted a little bit subhuman, perhaps. And perhaps, not.

I personally could not do any such thing. I remember one time only that I caught a little chicken. One time. And I'm clutching that little chicken under my arm. And I said to myself, "Mila, who is going to kill this chicken? Because you won't do it." And I let that chicken go. Because I could not slaughter. I couldn't.

But I walked out of the gates just like the other girls, and I wanted to help myself. And people were very selfish, and they just did not care just yet at that time about the next person. Everybody was for himself. I was still very ill. I was still swollen-- my hands and my feet, but I did put myself up and I walked out of the gates, and I walked into the first house that was close to camp. This was when they took us to Lingen. This was when we were already transferred to Lingen. This is when this happened.

And I walked out of this house. And I walked out of the gate and into this house, and there is this lady, and she told me her name is [Personal name] I told her who I was-- that I am-- I'm hÃ¶ftling from Hitler's concentration camps. She said, hÃ¶ftling hÃ¶ftling means prisoner. She said I should not use the word anymore, because we are no longer

prisoners. And she said, [NON-ENGLISH]. What can I do for you, my child? And I told that I was very hungry. And I needed food and I needed shelter to get back to my health.

And she did not let me out of the house anymore. She and her husband, [? Hermachol, ?] kept me in their house for an-- for quite a few weeks until we went to [INAUDIBLE] and back to Bergen. And she-- every day, Mr. [Personal name] would take a tape measure and measure my hand. It was like a little-- it was like a little baby's wrist. And he would measure me and my neck to see if I gained any weight. I did not sit with them at the same table yet because they thought I had tuberculosis. So I sat separately from them. They had their little grandchild there.

Yes.

[? Marlis ?] was her name. And their daughter lived with them and Frau [? Dinger ?] and her child. Frau [? Dinger ?] and her daughters' husbands were SS men. Mrs. [? Matchel ?] told me this. They never came back. I think that they died somewhere in fighting or whatever they went to do.

And when, finally, the English doctors came to check our health, to give examinations to all the so-called häftlinge the prisoners, the survivors, and when he was told that my lungs are clear, this man became totally elated. And from that moment on I was part of the family. I had my own little room. And I sat with them at the table. And they were very good to me.

Do you know happen to know whether they helped anyone else that way?

I don't. I don't, and I don't think so. Because we were the first brought from Bergen-Belsen to have been transported to this. And I remember that people came and they attacked. They wanted to kill the animals, the little rabbits and the pigs. And she said to me-- they called me Emily.

They said Emily, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], I beg you, tell these people not to do this. And I said, Frau [? Matchel, ?] [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. This I cannot do, I said. Those are people from a concentration camp. I said whatever they are, it's what you made out of them. Remember, we are subhuman.

And after that she didn't say one word. They slaughtered the pigs. They slaughtered the [INAUDIBLE]. But this incident was only once, I think. Once they got enough food, it never happened again.

Did they ever express to you any, maybe not remorse for themselves, maybe they were perfectly innocent of it, but did they feel any guilt as Germans for what had happened?

Well, the only way I could think that they were guilty is by treating me the way they did. Perhaps they tried to make it up in this way. Otherwise, I don't see any-- I just cannot see anything else.

Maybe they were just good people who cared.

It could be. But their son-in-laws were Nazis. There were SS men. But at this point, I feel that they saved-- perhaps they saved me to get-- they helped me to get well.

To recover.

To recover.

How long did you spend with them?

Just a few weeks. Maybe six weeks. Because then again, the British had transferred us to Bergen. And I was with my friend, Sally Rosenbaum and her sister [? Rusia, ?] who were in camp with me. We lived through the whole thing together.

And [? Rusia ?] said at one point to Sally and me, she said, you know what, staying here and not knowing what is going to happen again is not the right thing to do. So I'm going to let myself go. I'll try to cross the German border to Austria. And I will see if I can find any of my brothers.

So I said [? Rusia, ?] when you do go God be with you and please keep your eyes open for Moniek Zagorski or somebody by that name. She said fine. She left her sister, Sally and-- she left us in each other's care, let's put it this way. Because age wise, we are only maybe a year difference.

And it didn't take too long. I don't know how I got word, Dr. Weinstein, I honestly cannot tell you. But I heard that she found-- Mila, there's-- I know what happened. She came back. She came back to Bergen. And we said, Mila, guess what, I found your brother. Moniek Zagorski is alive.

I became speechless. I became immobilized. I was like-- I felt myself rooted to the ground. I became speechless. I didn't know what to say. And then I jump, and I said, [? Rusia, ?] are you telling me the truth. She said, Mila, would I tell you a lie with something like that?

And it didn't take long my brother comes to Bergen, that beautiful, frail-- this is my brother, Murray.

Yes.

Moniek.

Yes.

This is the picture that was taken after the liberation.

Right.

We embraced. And we kissed. And we did not let go of each other. And we cried and we screamed. Like again, only God could hear our screams that went on. He

Had known nothing about what happened to the rest of the family?

He doesn't know anything that happened. Because my brother went in 1941. He was taken from us. And after that, he told us that he going to take us to Austria. And he wanted us to see the camp that he was liberated from.

Yes.

So he took Sally and [? Rusia ?] as sisters. And he smuggled us on coal wagons because the German border was still close to Austria. So he smuggled us under coals. And we made it to Austria.

He was the closest to you and age, wasn't he?

Yes.

Of all your siblings.

Yes.

Were you close before the war?

Yes, very, very much so. Very much so. Actually, our children were all close in age. We were just two years apart.

Yes.

But in different, like the sisters and the-- you know. But we love each other very dearly. My brother and I, we are inseparable. And we hope to continue to be so.

In Austria, we went up to Gorzan, which there was a hospital for people with lung diseases, but also people who had no lung diseases. I was in that hospital for a few weeks. I was carefully checked by a German Doctor, Dr. Miller. And I was deathly afraid of him because there was a doctor Miller in Auschwitz too. And I did not trust him. I did not trust him at all.

He never gave me any injections. Even if I complained that something hurts, he said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. I did not allow him to touch me or give me any needles. I was deathly afraid that he might kill me. Because there, he could have been a Nazi in a camp and killed people.

Yes.

So he could have said I died of natural causes. I did not allow him to touch me. In 1947, my-- at the end of 1946, my brother, Charlie, was also liberated with my-- OK, my brother, Charlie, was also liberated with my brother, Maury. They were-- he was also in Ebensee. So they were in Austria.

My brother-- my cousin, Charlie, knew about an address of my uncle in America. He left home in 19-- 1920, perhaps, my uncle. He came to this country. He was the only brother of my father that was alive, in America. He made it.

And so he got in touch with them. And my uncle made affidavits for us to come. I could have come through the UNRRA, but we came through uncle. We arrived in America March 3rd, 1947. And he had this little house in Nutley. so we lived there. I lived there for five years.

And it was nice. My few cousins who survived were here and my brother. It was nice. America is a beautiful country. I only hope and pray that people should appreciate it. You don't have to go through sufferings to know when you have something good. People abuse it. It's such a wonderful, wonderful country.

Anyway, after five years I was invited-- I was invited to a party. And I met my wonderful husband. We got married within three months. He also is a survivor. And he's also from my hometown in Poland. We get along great. We understand each other.

We have three beautiful children, Larry, Michael, and Marla. Our two sons are attorneys, both of them. Our daughter has her master's in social work. They are all married. I have three wonderful daughter-in-- two wonderful daughter-in-laws, and their wonderful son-in-law, and three beautiful grandchildren.

My only hope to God is, and my prayer goes just to him, that he should keep the world at peace and not to allow, God forbid, anything like that to happen again.

I hope not. Mila, thank you very much. What you've done is remarkable.

I felt I had to do it. Because it is us. You see, Dr. Weinstein, we have no graves to mourn our dead. But we carry there with their souls within our hearts and the monuments that are being erected. And we have one in Israel and Holland from the people of Chrzanow.

And we have a monument in Clifton of the people of all the towns in Europe. The ashes were brought from Auschwitz. And I go there before Yom Kippur. And I cry my eyes out because I know there must be a little bit ashes of my loved ones.

And every time that I touch this monument, I could almost hear whispers of my loved ones saying, please, never again.

I hope it won't-- I hope it will be never again. Thank you very much.

You're very welcome.

[MUSIC PLAYING]