

Helen Herman. Helen, I'd like to backtrack a minute and go back to what you were saying about when you were at the point where the soldiers had left you alone. You were free to go, and it was the one particular woman who you didn't like who your revenge was making faces at. What was the position of these people? Were they stuck there also? Was the transportation so limited that they couldn't go anywhere? What did the people who had you in captivity do? How did they get away?

Well, that's the whole bunch left. That's the story. They all left at the same time. They packed, and they left. I don't know how far they were going, but they were going the other direction. They were going to Germany. They were escaping home, and this was part of Czechoslovakia. They just occupied that part.

So they tried to get back home. I don't know how far they got. They wanted to leave this place as soon as they can before the Russians were coming. Because the rumors were going that the Russians are not that nice to those that they captured, especially SS.

So the whole bunch left at the same time. This particular-- everybody, she was a cruel woman. We used to march to work through the whole town every day twice a day. Three times, really, in the morning and then we went for lunch home. They served us some kind of a soup for lunch. And if there were puddles-- we were going 5 in a row. And if there were puddles there, and we-- our shoes we're not the greatest. We had holes in our shoes. We tried to avoid. She used to hit with the stick over the head. You were not allowed to. You had to go wherever you go.

But the last Saturday before they left, we didn't care because we knew there was chaos going on between them because you've seen so many people, the civilians were going down the roads and everything. And those people I talked to, those French guys, told us that something is happening tonight. We didn't care. We avoided the puddles, and she told us marching back home-- because Saturday we only work the half a day. She says, you think that Hitler is kaput? Hitler has time five minutes before 12:00. Don't worry, you're not going to get away.

That's what she told us that Saturday. Hitler is not kaput yet. Hitler this time five minutes before 12:00. These were her words.

Do you remember other people who were particularly cruel or kind during this experience?

The-- not too many kind as far as I could-- As I said, that foreman, that was my foreman, he was in the [FOREIGN LANGUAGE]. He was an engineer. He was a little bit human. He used to ask questions, and he couldn't believe what I was telling him. He had asked me, where are your family? I said where is your mother and father? He didn't believe that 500 girls live alone in that camp. They were downtown, and they didn't know what was going up the hill there.

I says, Hitler killed my mother. I says, don't you know? He says, we are not told these things. And he says-- he has asked me, where is your Moses? That he asked me. I had no answer. He says, our Moses it's Hitler. What he promises, he delivers, he says. But he was human because he-- As I said, he used to leave a little salt for us there that we should have that little extra salt. And if he would have been caught, I'm sure they wouldn't be too kind to him, the Germans, the SS.

And-- but other than that, they were all very, very brutal. The experience is undescrivable. The fear. The fear, especially in Auschwitz that every week to stay naked and going through the selections in front of Mengele plus the one that selected. At that time, I didn't know his name, but there were so many.

Every week, as I said, we had to stand in front of him. And, especially, I wasn't fearing for myself so much because I felt pretty strong then yet, but my sister, Frieda, always fear for her that we're going to lose her one day. And every time before the selection came, we used to take some rouge paper and make her cheeks red and pinch her cheek they should look red because the one that they didn't like, they went the other way and that was the last time you seen them.

There was no explanation. As long as somebody was sickly looking, or he didn't like the way your body looks, or the way your face looks, or the way your hair looks, you go the other way and there is nothing you could have done. That

was-- And that was going through every week we were going through that.

I'm not talking no more the humiliation of standing in front of them naked. Eventually, it probably just was part of life. But the fear was unbelievable. And we got a little bit lucky, as I said, when we got that job to sort the clothes. We used to bring in a lot for our friends that weren't so lucky.

We used to put on extra underwear, which they could not detect, underwear like dresses. But my big red cross is we couldn't change that often. But under, they didn't check the underwear. We used to put on 5-6 pair, as much as you could, underwear and bring it into the camp to those less fortunate that worked in the fields, and it was cold. And it was very cold there. And we used to strip at night and leave it to them and go in the mornings, 4 o'clock in the morning, appell just a dress on. And knowing that once we get there, we have fresh ones to put on because there was all these clothes there, and leave it to them.

You also had said that you were saving the sil-- you know, you'd find little pieces of silver and gold.

Yeah, we used to give that to those boys. They used to call the Scheisse kommandos. They used to clean, excuse me, the toilets. And they used to call the Scheisse kommandos. They were the one-- the only one that we had contact with. And we were going to those toilets, these big latrines, you know, they were only holes. And that's where we used to come across them.

We used to give it to them, and they said they're going to bury it. I'm sure that they did something with that gold, or maybe they did give it to the underground. They had connection. That, we don't know. But they had said to us if we come across silver and gold, diamonds, which we did. We did. We found many times in toothpaste hidden or in a prune. We opened a prune. You know, people used-- these were the bottles that the people brought with them, and we supposed to sort it. So we found a box of prunes. So of course, we gonna gnosh on and we ate. An one time I bit in a prune and there was a big diamond like this, and I'm not going to give it to them. So we hid it and when we seen the guys, we gave it to the guys.

Have you ever heard, afterwards, of anybody finding any of this afterwards?

Nothing. Nothing. Never. Never seen anything-- I wouldn't even remember the people. Well, you just remember the faces, no names. I wouldn't know where to look. But I'm sure that there was somebody that-- I hope there was somebody that it was going on a good place, but it wasn't go to Germans.

And you mentioned a scheme about hiding something in a--

Yeah. We used to have wide kerchiefs, and they were tucked in. And we used to pack mostly medicine because the Dutch people came to Auschwitz, they were wasting away so fast. They get the diarrhea, and they were going fast. So we tried to bring in as much medicine as we could, and we found those black pills. It was called the-- I don't know what it was called here, the name of it in, there and whenever we find the box we used to save it and bring it to them.

And little knives that the girls that worked in the field would have something to-- we used to bring little clothes for the girls, whatever we could salvage, usable things for the girls. Inside they couldn't get these things. We used to bring in for them, whatever we were able to. Food we weren't able to, and there wasn't much food anyhow. They wouldn't allow it because you had to carry it in your hand.

And, as I said, my sister, Frieda, the youngest one, she had no fear in her. She did a lot of unlawful things, and we went through with her a lot. And then there was-- they called the air raids that you were supposed to be inside. And if you were caught, either you were shot on the place, or you were hit hard or whatever.

And I remember one time there was an air raid, and she wasn't near anywhere. And I ran out to look for her, and sure she was there in those latrine it's called. And she was giving out-- there were a whole bunch of Hasidim. You know, so-called people that she brought every day, and she was giving them out things there, and she didn't hear the air raid. I dragged her from there so hard, and I hit her so hard. I said, don't do that again. Because a lot of things could have

happened then to her.

How old was she then?

15. She just didn't know the fear, the consequences, what those people could do. And that's it.

Was she the one who was caught with something in her hand?

Yes. We were once going home, and we had to pass two gates, the first one out of that place that we were working. And in both sides-- we were five in a row, and both sides there were SS one side and the other side, and they had big sticks. And it started to rain and she stuck too many things under that kerchief, and it started to rain and every item was showing through that kerchief. And he went and he pulled with a stick down, and down went all the things.

And he called her out of the line, and we thought this was the end of her. But she had somebody-- she was like a couple but a good one, a nice girl, and she ran. She used to love my sister. She was her favorite. She ran and she-- she slapped her so hard both sides, that for fear, you should excuse me, she-- And she pushed her back in the line. And she said to the SS, I'll take care of her. I'm sorry. I'll take care of her.

And then the next day, she came back and she hugged her, and she kissed, and she said, I am so sorry. I had to do that. I had to save you. Yes, she had the least fear in her. She did a lot of daring things. We all did what we could but within a reasonable danger to ourselves. But she did without any fear.

Could we ask you about the problems you had getting to America?

Yes. That was also very unfortunate. We were with a cousin of mine that we grew up together. And he is my age, and we went to school together, and we stayed together. And we also registered to come to America together, and we were called to the consulate, to American consulate to-- Before you come to America, they interrogate you. You had to go through.

And we were called on the same day. And the next day, we were told that we did not pass because we told a lie that-- Marcus is his name. Martin Stern is my brother, so-called brother, in that my brother, his brother is not my brother. And we-- pushed us aside and we were two years had to prove that we told the truth. That he is not my brother. He's my cousin. And it was a very hard time.

And meanwhile Frieda was here, and we were discouraged, and always said-- I remember we wanted to go already to Israel. It was such a hard time, and she kept on writing letters, crying, don't do that, and come here. And we knew that if-- We heard that Israel was rough with the climate, and she was a weakling, Frieda, that she will not make it there. We'll have to sacrifice and wait till the time comes we should be together again. It took us two years, two years extra.

What years were those would you say?

1947 Frieda came to this country and a few months later, we were refused, and we had to stay another two years. In 1949, we finally came to this country, which was a great, great day.

How old were you when you came here?

Well, 24.

You were 24?

24.

Did you know your husband in Europe?

I met my husband in Europe, yes. And we were so-called unofficially engaged for two years. We couldn't get married because I said, we sacrificed too much to be together, and once you get married, you go where your husband goes. He had no relatives here. And I said, I'm going with my sisters and brother to America. And if it meant to be, we'll meet here, and we'll get married here. And he was willing to wait, and that's what happened. And he did come out two weeks after me.

Do you mind to tell us the story of how you met him--

In the same camp. In the same camp in Gaberse after the war. He was-- his brother married a girl from our town. And we lived in the same building and he used to always come there to us. We were like nine boys, cousins, and brother, and so forth. And the four girls, we did for those boys. Washed, and cooked, and cleaned for those boys. All that separated us was a little cardboard wall. Seven boys-- or nine boys, and so he used to come out from there.

And that's how we met, and we were sort of friends. And friends turned into a love, and he proposed. But I said, if it meant to be, we'll get together here. And so we were like so-called engaged, and he didn't give me a ring or anything. He couldn't afford one. But with this in mind that we we'll get to America. We'll get married, and it happened. We came here in May at the beginning, and he came two weeks later, three weeks later, and we got married in December '49.

And by the way, Frieda-- by the time we got here, Frieda had gotten us an apartment. And she had fixed up a beautiful place, and we lived all together for a long time. And up to this day, we live next door to each other. And with Margaret, we share one house and Frieda lives next door. And we raised two beautiful children. And one is married and grandchild on our way. Just a great day in our lives.

And got a son, he's a CPA, beautiful boy. Very proud of him. And Frieda lives next door, as I said, and we're still taking care of each other, helping each other. And that's-- and that's all. I hope that my story wasn't too boring.

No, it's wonderful.

And I only hope to God that there is never going to be any people to have to go through that kind of situation again. And we all have to work and pray and be alert. It should not happen.

I'd like to ask you a question now that deals with the present. How do you feel about being Jewish here in America today?

I am very proud to be Jewish, and I keep on telling my kids the same. I paid a dear price for it to be ashamed to be Jewish. I'm very proud to be Jewish. But I also say to my kids that you should try and support Israel as much as you can. But I feel that would we had then, Israel, as Israel is today, maybe these things wouldn't have happened. Those people that didn't want us, if we would have where to go, maybe they would have let us go. But there was no place to go. And if there would be an Israel and there is going to be a country that don't want you, you could pick yourself up and go. But I hope to God that it'll never come.

OK.

OK, thank you very much--

Thank you.

Thank you.

Mrs. Herman.

Thank you.

We appreciate it.

Thank you.

[FOREIGN LANGUAGE]