

[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Robert Roth. I am 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 Dr. Freda Remmers. We are privileged to welcome Mrs. Mala Sperling, a survivor presently living in Clark, New Jersey, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Welcome, Mala.

Thank you.

Could you tell us something about your life before the war?

Yes. I was born in Krakow. And--

And that's in Poland.

That's in Poland. And I led a normal life as a child would. I had a sister and brother. I was the youngest of the family. And I went to school, played with my friends. It was a normal childhood that everybody has.

Summertime, we used to go to the country with the family. Sometimes some aunts and cousins would join us. And it was nice. I had a nice childhood.

And my father was a businessman, a very successful businessman. He had a store with veneer and plywood. This is the material of which furniture is made. And also, we had a sawmill, which was not far from Krakow in the town of Bochnia. But he was a very religious man, a very fine man. A whole week, he wore a business suit and went to business. But came Sabbath, he was a very observant man, and he taught us a lot of good values and so on.

My mother was also a very educated woman, an avid reader. And in general, we had a lot of love at home. And it was a normal childhood, as I said before.

Did you attend school in Krakow?

Oh, yes. Well, not much, because the war started when I was about 12 years old. But I attended grade school. I went to Hebrew school. I had a teacher that came to the house and taught us English. And my sister, of course, went to high school. And my brother also went to school and religious school and so on.

Was there, as you recall, anything in terms of the position of the Jews in Krakow?

Yes.

Your community that already had an antisemitic situation.

Yes.

What could you tell us about that?

Sure. We felt it in Krakow. Even though I had a wonderful childhood, a normal life, and my father succeeded to have a business, but we felt that with every step. My parents made sure that I went to a public school, and my sister and brother too. But it was an all Jewish public school, all Jewish children. The teachers weren't Jewish. So in school we didn't feel it that much.

But you felt that in the streets. You felt it-- sort of the Polish community tried to separate themselves from the Jewish community. Once in a while, there were outbreaks of violence. And when you went to midtown--

Can you recall any specific thing of that nature?

Well, one that comes to my mind is after General Pilsudski, who was a very well known general, died, they burned his body and put the ashes into an urn in the archives that they had there. Sukiennice it was called. And we went on a trip a school trip to see the urn and pay homage to him.

I don't know why, but that time, all of a sudden a band of young people, Polish people, started to scream and yell and run after us. And it was a terrible experience that I cannot forget, because I ran. It was quite far from my home. And I was running home. I forgot where everybody was. I just ran home and came breathless.

And then the next day, or the few days after, when we walked we saw painted on the walls with red paint in Polish, kill the Jew, hit the Jew, kill, kill the Jew and so on.

About what year was that, Mala?

Well, he died-- what year did he die? In 1936 or '7. '6 or '7. But anti-Semitism was prevalent. Jewish people stuck a lot to themselves.

And you were aware of that?

We were aware of it, although my father as a businessman had a lot of dealings with non-Jewish people and so on. But we felt it.

Where you lived, were there mostly Jewish people living or were there also non-Jewish people.

I was born in an area, which was called Kazimierz. It used to be years and years ago, when first Jewish people were brought to Poland, it used to be a ghetto. And most Jewish people live there. But as my father became more successful, then we moved out of that area into midtown, into a better area.

Did you feel as comfortable in the midtown area as you did in Kazimierz?

Well, I did because I was a child and I had my friends that lived not far. And what did I know? I just went to school and played games and all that.

How did your family or your parents explain to you or did they try to explain to you these kinds of things that were happening? Did you ask? Did they have explanations?

Oh, I must say I didn't ask, because I guess I was too young to really be too much interested in it. And I didn't go through anything so terribly-- I was with my parents and had a comfortable life. But I remember my parents talking between each other. And when grownups got together, they were discussing what was happening, read in the newspapers, and at times it was scary.

Did they say anything to you when you ran home after visiting the urn of Marshall Pilsudski?

Well, my mother was home. So what could she say? I came home crying and breathless. She just hugged me and kissed me and said, don't worry, we are together. And that's about all.

Yeah. When did things begin to change from that pattern of life?

Well, the last summer in 1939, as I said, we used to go every year, we were in the country, at a small place, a small village, called Kroscienko, which is hard to pronounce probably for America. And towards the end of the summer season, we heard rumors. There were rumors that there are spies around, the German spies around. As a matter of fact, they said that one spy was caught and all kinds of wild stories that had directions tattooed on him. All kinds of wild stories went around.

But we had already a premonition. And my parents said, no, we're not going to stay here anymore. We're going to-- because there was talk that the trains were getting too sparse. We couldn't travel. So they said, no, let's not wait till the last minute. Let's just go back. So we took practically the last train, and we went back to Krakow.

And that's when it started. The war started September 1. And that night, there was a lot of cannon shots we heard and a lot of firing from far away. And then the next day, we saw little dogfights in the sky, these two winged planes, and the puffs of smoke. We weren't really scared, because we didn't think-- we hoped nothing will happen.

But then one day, maybe a few days later, my mother went to the market, and then she ran home and she dropped everything she bought. And she said they were saying that the Germans are on the Polish border. And she, having survived First World War, you know, she was a young girl during First World War, that made a huge impression on her. In that time, Poland was under Austrian occupation when she was a young girl, that part of Poland.

And it didn't take long. A few days later, the Germans marched in almost without resistance, because the Polish army was not prepared. And they were such a big might, that even if they would be prepared, I don't think they could resist much.

We lived not far from the railroad tracks. And we saw the brave Polish soldiers-- they thought they were brave, that they're going to a few days-- don't worry, we'll bring Hitler's head back. But a few days later, they were coming back as prisoners. And the Germans came into town.

And almost immediately, they started with the Jewish people. They started all kinds of rules and regulations. I don't remember exactly, but I think the first thing was the issuance of the armbands. We had to wear in our city was a white armband with a blue Star of David. And in some cities had the yellow patch and whatever. We all had to have ID cards, yellow ID cards with the photographs, stating all the particulars about the person, also the Jewish, the name Jude on it.

A few days later-- I just say a few days, but it could have been-- it wasn't long after-- they issued a proclamation that all the Jewish people have to give up all the valuable stuff that they have, like fur coats and jewelry and silverware and all that. And they had a huge repository on the other side of town. And we had to physically, ourselves, bring it there at the-

Do you remember what you brought?

Well, my mother had a couple of fur coats. We had silverware and very prized possessions, which were candlesticks which were down from generations in our family, you know, these silver, big heavy candlesticks. I don't really remember exactly. But these are the few things I do remember.

And then they raided the houses. And if they found something, there was trouble for the people-- severe punishment or sending away or beating or even shooting.

Were you there when any of that went on?

Well, it didn't happen in our household. But we heard about it. And we knew people that it happened to.

Yes.

Then they started marking Jewish stores, Jewish store fronts. There was a Jewish, the Star of David painted on it and then the Jude on it, Jew on it. And we weren't allowed to shop in any other stores. And also, the supplies were very scarce, as far as the Jewish stores were concerned.

But we somehow on the black market we're still free. So we had connections and so on. So we weren't hungry at that point. And we were together. So that was the main thing.

At this point, did you get any assistance from non-Jews in Poland, business associates of your father or--

No, we didn't. No, we didn't. Some people did. But we weren't lucky enough. We, my family didn't.

And my father continued going to his business. But it became not his business, because they installed a Gestapo man in there who took over the books and took over everything. And my father was just like a subordinate. He told him what to do, and he did it. But he didn't want to leave it, because nobody knew-- nobody really anticipated anything-- with everything that happened, we thought, well, this is the last thing. Probably won't get any worse.

So he played along with it. Not that he had a choice. He had to, because if he hadn't, then harm would come to him and his family. But he still went to business.

Did you know of any people to whom harm came?

You mean at that point?

At that point.

Yes, there were people that were severely beaten. There were people, you know, Jewish people, Polish Jewish people was a big orthodox, I mean, Hasidic community, and men wore beards. And so the Nazis just ran around-- the Gestapo with the brown shirts, they were the worst. They were especially trained for that. It was a special unit. And they ran around the streets. And if somebody walked-- they saw a person they didn't like, say a man had a beard, they grabbed him and shaved him and made fun of it and undressed the person or beat the person, just for no reason at all, just because he was a Jew and he was walking down the street.

And you heard about those stories.

So we heard about it. And we knew about it.

Did you see any of that?

I personally didn't. I really didn't. But I know it's the truth, because it happened. And my husband, even after the war, took some photographs of some Nazis that showed this particular happening.

I remember the first high holy days, you know, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. There were no synagogues or shuls or whatever anymore. We weren't allowed to go. So people organized, called their friends or family-- for instance, my father said, listen, the prayers will be in our house. So-and-so, come, because we're going to have it.

But it was dangerous, because the Gestapo again was running around. They knew it was our high holidays. I know my German-- English is correct, but-- and so they pulled the people out in the tallit. I don't know if-- tallit and everything and just made fun of them in the streets and beat them severely and made them do all kinds of things that I really don't want to go into, because it's too horrible.

Well, we had such prayers in our house. I remember we still lived in our apartment in the good part of town. And it was scary. And yet, it was beautiful. When I think about it, there's something about that particular time that really stands out in my memory, because it was so poignant. You know, we all prayed-- excuse me-- and we knew that things were coming and we knew what was happening. And yet, these people prayed, and prayed to God with such faith.

Yes.

I don't know, I was a young girl then. I was about 12, well, 13 already. But I don't know what moved me. I just ran in and kissed my father and mother. I didn't analyze it then, because now that I think about it maybe I had a premonition, maybe it was a moment, or whatever. I don't know. But that's something that really sticks in my mind. Thank God nothing happened in our apartment. Nobody was taken out. The prayers were finished. And my father was very happy. My parents, rather, were very happy about it.

Yes.

And that's how it went on and on. And let me see, we were taken to all kinds of hard labor, young children right there. Oh, no, now, shortly after the holidays, there was a Gestapo installed in our house. He just came and took over a room. And we had to tiptoe in our own apartment. But fortunately, he wasn't a vicious guy. So he just left us alone. But this didn't take long. They just told us to-- they evicted from our apartment. And we had to go to a different part of town, the one that was where most Jews were. And there, we had one large room with a kitchen. But we were still together.

Were you allowed to come and go from that area?

Yes, at that point, yes. If you wore your armband, you could go. But it was kind of dangerous, because you didn't venture out to midtown or something, because you never knew if a Nazi won't like your looks, he'll do something. So you only went when you had to. Now, my father's business was in midtown, and he had to go. So he really jeopardized his life every time he went.

And we lived there for quite a few months. And then we had to move to the ghetto. They made the ghetto in one part of Krakow, where they constructed a high wall with two or three points of entry with huge doors. Well, I can't think of the word. But there are points of entry that were guarded at all times. And people can only enter by special permission. And we, from the ghetto, could go out by special permission. The special permission was given to people that had jobs, work.

So I, for instance, was taken a few times in wintertime to clean streets with a bunch of people. There was not much. Poland is very severe winter. So we stood there a whole day without food, without anything. But they didn't care. We came home frozen. And we didn't do, much because how much snow can you clean? But they just left us there standing. It was just a sadistic way of treating us.

What were your living conditions like then at home there in the ghetto?

Oh, we had a small apartment in a huge apartment house. It was a small kitchen and a bedroom. And at that point, my grandmother stayed with us, my mother's mother. So we were five people, our family plus my grandmother. But, you know, we did the best we could with it, and it was OK. I mean, if you have no other choice, you will make do.

Was there enough food? Were there enough supplies?

At that point, I must say we were not hungry. We had food. I don't know how it came into the ghetto. But we had food. My father was still going-- he had special permission to go to his business, because this Nazi, I guess, took a liking to him or something. I don't know. But he still had the permission. So he still went in and out. So he could smuggle in some food, bread and butter and so on.

And then I had to work in a brick factory. It was a very, very tough job, very hard. This was also on the outskirts of Krakow. And it was a group of young girls and boys that had to go and work there. We worked a whole day, more than-- about 12 hours. It was a tough job. And my parents were very upset that their youngest daughter has to work so hard and so on. But I was young then. So it didn't really bother me too much when I came home to my parents. Excuse me.

What were the conditions like there? What kind of work were you doing?

They were making bricks from scratch. You know, there was a part where they mixing the cement, the substance that the bricks is made out of. And then it went to huge ovens where it dried up. And then-- no, no, first, we had to put it all over the place where things from wood made to put the bricks, the wet bricks to dry in the air first. And that was hard, because we had to carry heavy bricks and stack them up on these wooden platforms. And then we had to take them off a week later and bring them to the hot ovens, where they were burned. And that's where they got their the brick color.

And then there was a selection in June of 1942, came the first selection of people. And my parents-- unfortunately, my

parents' ID card did not correspond-- the numbers, because each one had a special number-- their number did not correspond with the list that were allowed to stay in the ghetto. So they were taken to a big square and called out from the house. And they were taken away. We really didn't know where.

But then the rumors came. Some people probably knew. I don't know from where. But that they went to Belzec, which was the first destruction camp. That's why I know my parents and my sister definitely couldn't have survived. My brother stayed with me, stayed on, because his ID card was OK and he worked where they made furniture as a carpenter, in a place where there was carpentry. Then after-- excuse me.

Your grandmother was still with you at that point? Living with you--

My grandmother, after that selection, was put into a so-called hospital. It was a place for older people. And I went there every day. At that time, I was already beginning to be hungry. There was no food-- not much food. And I had to work. I didn't work in the brick factory anymore. They told me I had to work in a brush factory. That was we making all kinds of brushes, not only out of hair and stuff, but out of feathers. You know, the stem of the feathers we made brushes. And I used to go to grandmother and share with her whatever I had.

And that was in June. And then in September was another selection. At that point, my grandmother was killed. And they just went to that place and just shot everybody. And they took us again to that place, to that square. And they selected. You and you go on this side. You and you go on this side. And there was no choice.

There were a lot of terrible things happening, because mothers were separated as children. And because mine was the youngest year that they allowed to go to camps, below that everybody was not allowed. And so there was a lot of, as you can imagine, unhappiness and everything. And they took us from there to the first camp in Plaszow. I kept on working in the brush factory. And it was tough.

Was your brother with at still at this point?

No.

You were separated--

I separated from my brother at that point. And I didn't know where he was. I knew he was alive somewhere. But I didn't know where or what. There was no way to find out.

So we stayed in this camp. There was a lot going on. They were still raiding-- I didn't take anything with me, but the photograph. That was the dearest thing I had. But the raided even the barracks that we were in and took everything away, antagonized us whenever they could.

I had a meeting with the commandant of that camp, not a meeting-- but as it happened, my friend and I, we had to go out to the latrine. You know what the latrine is. And in the latrine we heard that-- his name was Goeth. He was a very imposing man, always talking with the two Great Danes by his side. And they were vicious dogs, taught how to get at people.

And we heard while we were there that he's going to working place, you know, because they set up special barracks for each. There was people who are sewing, people who are making brushes, all kinds of different carpentry. And the living quarters were on the other side. And the latrine was sort of in the center.

So when we heard that he is there, and we were very much scared, we went to the living quarters. And lo and behold, we're going and who's coming towards but this man. I tell you, I was meant to survive, I told myself many, many times, because when I saw he was a very tall, very imposing man with the two dogs and an entourage of Nazis, always walking. And he asked me in German, where are you going? I said, we went just to the latrine. And I spoke German pretty well. So I was lucky at that.

And I said, we're just at latrine. So why aren't you working? I don't know what, but I had the wits to say I'm on a night shift, because we did work night shift and one week night shift, one day shift, 12 hours each. I said, I'm on a night shift, so I'm in the barrack. So he hit me slightly with that leather whip that he always carried and he let me go, let us go. I was there with my girlfriend.

Well, we ran to the barrack. And we went on the highest bunk bed we could. And we told the woman that took care of the barrack, please, that and that happened to us. Give us a kerchief, give us something, because he was known for recognizing people. He did come to the barracks. But he didn't see us. And then after a while the coast is clear, so we went back to work. So that was something that really-- I was lucky that, because we heard that afterwards, whoever he met walking-- I guess we were the first ones. Because whoever he saw walking, he just killed or let the dogs do their job on them or whatever.

And they used to come to the place where we worked, not only in my place, but all of the others, the SS people with the guns, antagonize us, you know, scare us and all this and pull people out and just shoot them. There was a hanging. Two of my friends managed to run away from this camp. And unfortunately, they were caught. But we all suffered for it.

First of all, there was a public hanging. We all had to watch it. And then every 10th person was selected, just at random. I don't know why they did every 10th person. But they at random took out people. They set up huge tables. And they whipped them with a whip, just like that. I was unfortunately one of them. So it was a severe, severe beating. And things like that happened.

At that point, I felt very alone. When we were on camps, sometimes I was walking down the so-called street that were lined with gravestones-- you know, the sidewalks were made out of gravestones. Because the whole camp was on a Jewish cemetery, constructed on a Jewish cemetery. I felt very alone. At that point, really it hit me how alone I was in a vicious world like this.

Was there any medical attention available? And what was the food like there? The living conditions in terms of food and care?

The food was rationed. We used to get a piece of bread and a soup. As far as medical attention, in this particular camp, there was a so-called hospital. They called it the Red Cross place, you know. But I don't know, people weren't just taken care of. Some doctors were Jewish. So if somebody really was sick, they tried to help. But there wasn't much. They didn't have medical supplies or anything like that. So it was hard.

And then one night, I was on a night shift. The Nazis came in. The Gestapo came in with wielding the guns and everything. And they took us all out. It was winter. It was November of 1943. They took us out from the place where we worked and put us on trains. And at that point, of course, we didn't know where we were going. Nobody told us. There were cattle cars, of course.

And I don't know how long we were traveling. I had a discussion with my friend, Luna. But neither of us remember. It was cold. November was already winter in Poland. And we were just taken the way we were.

And I remember we arrived to such darkness. We arrived at night some place. But we often talk how the darkness was so severe. I don't know whether it was our mood also. It happened to be a very dark night, woods and everything. And we were brought to a camp, Skarzysko. That was an ammunition factory. They made big bombs over there.

And when we woke up in the morning-- well, when the morning came-- I don't know whether we went to sleep that night, but when morning came, we couldn't believe the sight we saw. This was the worst place I was in really. We saw really dead people walking I must say. They were wrapped in paper from the substance that-- they put picric acid, that's explosives that they put into the bombs. And that came in big paper, like bags, sacks. So they had no clothing. They were there before us already a long while before us. So they wrapped themselves up in this paper. And I cannot describe that site to you, because it's just indescribable.

Over there, it was very bad. We used to get a little slice of bread and a soup, that was called a soup. I don't know what it

was. Just some water with something swimming in it and huge barrels. And we all had to line up and got one helping of it. And we were very hungry there. There it was really, really bad.

Understand, there were no sanitary conditions at all. Where in Plaszow, we could go and take a shower, whatever. Here, we had no sanitary conditions at all. There was just an outhouse and one stall shower. So we had to line up. If we managed before the curfew to take a shower, fine. If not, then you couldn't help it, because there was a curfew in the camps also.

We all got infected with typhoid fever there, because there-- I don't know if I should say. There were huge lice crawling around. They were all infected from one to one. And we suffered with typhoid fever, including me. A lot of people died. And there, again, you see, it was meant for me to survive, because I don't know how I survived. Typhoid fever is a very severe sickness, very severe. Till today, I cannot give blood because there are some antibodies in me that I'm not supposed to. But it's a very severe sickness with very high fever.

Now, we had no medication. It was non-existent. It was nothing. I was lying on the dirty bunk bed with the lice crawling and the bed bugs crawling on me. And I came out of it. I don't know how. I just came out of it.

But I had a dream. I don't know if it was a vision or a dream or it was when my fever broke or what. I had a dream also that I will remember all my life. I dreamt that my grandmother-- I see a beautiful, green meadow, very bright with sunshine, very bright. All of a sudden, I see my grandmother walking, dressed in her holiday clothing, having a prayer book in her hand, and praying. And she's just walking.

All of a sudden, she picks up her head, looks at me, smiles and waves at me. And then starts praying and walks on again. And the vision faded. I don't know whether it was a dream or a vision or what. I don't know. But that stayed with me. And it gave me--

It comforted you.

It comforted me a lot, yes. It really gave me a lot of comfort. And so from there, as the fronts were coming closer, because I was already-- it took me a long time. I never recuperated really from it till we were sent out. I was very sick for a long, long time. But I managed to go to work. That's the only reason they let me live.

Yes.

As the front was coming closer, they sent us they took us from this camp to a camp-- the same factory-- to a camp near Leipzig. It was on the outskirts of Leipzig. There, we were assigned a huge, like a factory, like a room, like a loft you would call it here. It was huge. We were 600 girls.

And in this camp there were all nationalities. There were Jewish girls, Russian girls, French girls that were taken there for some reason or another, for political reason or whatever. But we were 600 girls, I remember, in one room, huge room. And we had three tier bunk beds there. The conditions were a little bit better than in that Skarzysko. I recuperated a little bit. And I didn't work as hard. In Skarzysko, I had to work at these huge bombs. You know, they came up to my waist. And they were filled with the picric acid. And my job was to put papers and a round piece of paraffin inside.

But here, I was sitting at a table and had a monitor with little things, also probably for arms or something. I don't know what it was. But the conditions were much better. Not that they were good, but they were better.

We were counted twice a day in every camp. That was in every camp. We were counted morning before we went to work and in the evening when we came back from work. As I said, the factory was on the outskirts. It was a little bit further than where we lived. So we were taken there by the Nazis with huge German shepherds on our side. You know, you couldn't go out of the line or anything. One time somebody pulled an apple from a tree. And this person did not survive anymore. It was we're walking down the streets.

So we stayed there, and then the fronts were coming closer. So we saw planes, our Allied planes coming. And for us, it



was a very happy sight. Especially American planes were up there. We somehow knew that there were American planes. We knew because they were bombing. Even a bomb hit our building one time. They were at an assembly, standing outside. And the plane-- I don't know if the reconnaissance wasn't right or whatever, they thought it was some kind of an assemblage. And they bombed our building.

Did you have any way of knowing what was going on in the rest of the world or the rest of Europe at this time?

We really didn't know exactly-- I must say that we did know the main points. For instance, we knew when Roosevelt died.

How?

I don't know. Maybe somebody found out from a German woman that was watching over us, a Nazi. You know, at that point, we had women watching us. Somebody must have said something somewhere. And the rumors spread like wildfire. And we were all very upset about this, because we thought, oh, my God, now, we'll now for sure all be destroyed, because we believed that Roosevelt will help us.

As you were living there with women now from all different countries in Europe, would you describe what that was like? Were you able to communicate with them whenever you wanted to? Could you talk freely? What could you find out things from them?

We were able to communicate, except that not everybody wanted to communicate with us. The French women were very nice to us, very nice. They were very patriotic. And then when their national holiday came, they used to invite us over and so on. The Russian women stood apart. The Polish for sure. They even went to the German commandant to say, how come we get the same portions of food that they do? We are Jews. We shouldn't get the same portion. And this German Nazi said, I don't care. You are all the same prisoners by me. Can you imagine?

So even in camp. But they weren't destroyed the way we were. I mean, they were there for political reasons, or they perpetrated some crime. But we were there only because we were Jewish. And the only purpose for us, for them, was to destroy us. As long as we could work, we were fine. But whoever couldn't, couldn't.

And there was in that particular camp another moment that uplifted . Us we knew there was our high holy days. And we had a woman that took care of our barrack. And she was extremely mean to us. She was always beating us and didn't let us talk. She was very, very mean. There's really a lot of spite and everything. Things she shouldn't have done.

Well, that particular night, we knew that the holidays are coming or are here already, something like that, our high holy days. And when the lights were out, we weren't allowed to even whisper, nothing, no less talk. All of a sudden, somebody started singing a Hebrew prayer in the darkness. And then after a while, somebody sang Jewish song. And it went on and on. And somebody else another one and another one. And she didn't move. She didn't budge this one. She slept in the same barrack with us. She had pillows and everything. But she slept in the same barracks with us. She didn't budge.

So we took the opportunity. We got off the bunk beds. And we sat down in the center of the barracks. And that night really gave us hope, because we were talking about our homes, telling each other stories from homes, singing the prayers, appropriate prayers for the holiday, and Jewish songs that our grandmothers and mothers used to sing to us.

And the next day, we just couldn't understand, why the woman-- why didn't she say anything? Why didn't she beat us? She used to pull out the broad from her bunk bed and hit us with it. How come she didn't say anything? Well, I guess she was taken in by it too. I don't know. Maybe because it was such a beautiful moment, that-- I don't understand till today why she didn't do it. But she didn't. And this uplifted us too for a long, long time.

As you were moved from camp to camp, did you try to find out about the rest of your family? Did you ask people coming from other places?

Yes, I asked people coming from other places. But that was the only way you could find out, because there was no other way really. We had no communication with the outside world. And there was no help from the outside world. Nobody cared really.

And then as the fronts were coming closer, they took us on a forced march. They took us on the forced march. The idea being to take us to the Theresienstadt where the ovens were and just to destroy us. But the fronts were coming too close-- one side the Americans, one side the Russians.

So they were dragging us from place to place. We were walking without food, without anything. And whoever sat down was shot immediately. And it was March. So there were freshly planted potato fields. We used to sneak out at night at the risk of life and dig out the potato from the ground. And let me tell you, it tasted delicious whoever could get it.

How many people were on this march?

A lot, a lot, because our camp, as I said, was 600 more probably. And then they combined some other camps. And I really don't know which ones. But here and there, I hear from survivors that they were also on this march. So that's how-- I mean, we saw other people walking too. It was a horrible thing, because we were walking day and night to the point where we had mirages, you know, that we see houses. We see lights. We see something. But there was nothing.

And we came to a point where the fronts were too close together. And at one point, they took us and put us in a huge barn, I guess. When we got out of there, we found out it was a huge estate of Germans. German people had left it. So they locked us up, a couple of girls, in that barn and left us there.

And we heard a lot of shooting and everything. The next day everything was quiet. And we we're waiting and we're waiting. Nobody's coming. Nobody's opening the door. And we decided that we're going to die whether we go out or whether we stay here. We might as well go out. So we started forcing the door, all of us together, as week as we were. But there was a lot of us.

And we came out. Soon enough, sure enough, we saw they already ran away, the Nazis. And we saw the uniforms thrown all over. They were lying all over. And we saw big, giant-- the potatoes were prepared for winter. I guess, they prepared for themselves, the people that live there. So we started making fires and eating potatoes.

And then the Russians came. And I guess at that point, we were liberated, because the Nazis were no more there. And then the Russians came in on their tanks. And they divided us into small groups. I was with Luna and her mother. They brought us to homes, to German homes.

Luna was your girlhood friend?

Yes.

So you had really been with her this whole time.

Yes.

The two of you had been together.

Yes, we were together, somehow. It was by luck, because we could have been very easily separated also. And we were brought to a family, German family in a small town. And they were supposed to feed us and everything. But the Russians didn't care, didn't care. They were really-- they did a lot of harm to us girls also. And we were very afraid of them.

We used to sleep at the little cemetery or hide or in which way. They were really-- they didn't really care. They came this Caucasian-- from Caucasus, well, from their country, you know, from the woods, like barbarians really. So we were a little bit afraid of them.

And then, Luna and I decided, we're not going to sit here with the Germans. We have to go back to Krakow and see if anybody survived, because if anybody from the family survived, they will certainly go back to the city where we came from. And that was a whole long trip. We were walking most of the way. And finally, we came to one point and a big freight train came with Polish people. They wouldn't let us on the train.

So I started talking Polish. I never looked Jewish too much. So I started talking Polish. Well, after such a war, a Polish person will not let the Polish person-- and we passed as Polish people. And we came to one point and we finally arrived in Krakow. And we got lost with her mother. It's a whole story by itself. But at that time, we were already liberated. So it was different.

Now, in Krakow, they set up a committee, a Jewish committee, because there were people that were already liberated before we came. They set up a Jewish committee. And they gave us a house to live in. The only house that was bombed. There were no windows and doors. But that was the only thing available for the Jewish people, even after the war, because there was a lot going on even after the war. There were killings and everything.

And so they gave us like a straw sack with straw in it and two blankets. And we went to this place. And we stayed there. But I found out through another girlfriend of mine that they're giving some kind of passes that you can go to the American zone. As soon as I found out there's nobody there, I just couldn't walk the streets because the memories were so strong. And houses were there, but nobody else. So it was just heartbreaking.

And I went for the pass. And sure enough, we went. And in Czechoslovakia they turned us back. The Americans, believe it or not, they wouldn't recognize the pass because there's something not written. They sent us back to Prague. And the conductor on the train when we are going back to Prague, said, no, you get off at the next train station and just walk along the tracks. And by morning, you'll be on the American zone. And that's what happened.

And once we got to the American zone, I mean, the Americans were fantastic. They set up camps, DP camps. And they fed the people. And they gave medical attention where needed and so on and so forth.

Wonderful.

OK?

Yeah. Had you wanted to say something about the meaning of all this?

Well, I hope that the stories we tell is not only the terrible things we went through, which is bad in itself. But we are here. I hope that people learn a lesson that we all human beings, that we're all on this Earth for the same purpose really, and to be aware of leaders that preach hatred against any other people or single out in a bad way any other people. That that's really my message. I think we have to build bridges between people to have more understanding. And we have to tell the story, so that it wouldn't happen again.

Did you find any of your family after the war?

No. My immediate family, nobody survived. I found out about my brother from a mutual friend that was with him. He went to Auschwitz, and he did not survive. I found a cousin who is now in Israel. I have a few cousins in Israel, three, as a matter of fact. And that's all the family I have.

Thank you, Mala.

You're very welcome. I hope I did OK and gave the message you want.

You've done wonderfully well.

Thank you very much.

[MUSIC PLAYING]