

[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein. I'm Director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project with the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Yale Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Robin McCue. We are privileged to welcome Pearl Davis, a survivor presently living in Springfield who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Welcome, Mrs. Davis.

Thank you.

Hi, Pearl. Pearl, will you begin by telling us a little bit about the town that you grew up in and spent your early childhood in?

It was a very small town. I think there weren't more than 1,200 people, and about 10 Jewish couples. That's all. I had a very happy home with loving parents, a brother, and two sisters. And I cannot even say that I've been through any troubled life while I was growing up. It was a very normal home with a lot, a lot of love.

What did your family do for a living?

My father was a scholar. And at that time, men really didn't work as hard as, today, people do. He made a very nice living. We lived like middle-class people. No big riches, but we didn't miss anything in life. And it was just a happy, happy home. And we didn't discuss too much, that time, what you're doing, how you're doing, what you have and what you don't have. So we really have everything that other children had.

Did you attend school?

Yes.

A public school?

Yes, I did. We were four children. I went to Hungarian school with my younger sister. And two older siblings went to Czechoslovakian schools.

What were your experiences like in school and in your encounters with non-Jewish people?

I never felt it. Never really, from the beginning, when I was young. I didn't feel any different, because most of my friends were non-Jews. And I really didn't-- I was a blond, blue-eyed child. So I don't think there was a big difference. I never felt it when I was young, that I was somebody different, till 1938, when I heard the first time that there are troubles, when it was changed. I think in '38 the Hungarians came in.

How did you hear about it?

As a child you just overheard things, because they shielded us from everything. Not even the papers we were allowed to read, because our parents didn't want us to know the troubles-- what came. And very little they were discussing in the house about troubles.

So I spoke only Hungarian. And my parents spoke many languages. So they didn't want us to understand most of the things. They wouldn't let us know that there are real troubles.

Had you heard anything in school at all?

No, not till around 1940, when we started hearing already that we are different. But in school the children never told me anything.

How did you learn that you were different, or that people perceived you as different?

I remember one day my mother went to see my brother. He was in the military. And she came home and she told us that they were discriminating. Like, my brother was supposed to eat kosher food, and they wouldn't allow it. So my mother made sure that she prepared things. And she would take it to my brother, that he shouldn't eat non-kosher food. That's when I started to know that there are troubles.

And what happened after that? How did it progress? When did you notice it getting worse?

It started getting worse when one day there was-- I remember like today. At night there was a rally, or-- how you call it? A get-together somewhere. And the Jewish people would come too. And from the military, one guy came out and told my father, you're better off to go home because you're so obvious. You're showing that you're Jewish, because he had a long beard. And he said, you're better off if you don't show yourself here. He was Jewish.

And that night, when we came home-- we children remained there. We were singing and having a good time. And that evening, when we came home, is the first time when I remember my parents being very upset.

How did they act?

They were just sad. They didn't want to show us. And that's when it started, already, that-- in Slovinsko. The children were taken away. And this we found out because there was a family in our town that she received two children from her sister. They lived in Slovinsko. And they lived with that aunt. And we didn't understand why. So that's when we found out, slowly, that because of discrimination and they took, already, the children from there, that they brought the children to our town. And they lived there with their aunt.

In other words, they brought them to your town so they'd be with someone who would watch over them.

Yes, because there was no danger yet where we lived.

And when did the danger, for you, begin?

Oh, about a year later. We started wearing, already, the yellow patches.

The star of David?

The star of David. That's when we started really knowing that we are different. And people were starting to treat us different, too, than before.

Now, when you say people were starting to treat you differently, were your old friends from school-- were you still in school at this point?

I was still in school at this point. It wasn't really in the school. Our neighbors made us feel, already, that we are different. We were very close friends with all the neighbors. If they needed some help, they would always come to my mother.

I remember one of our neighbors' daughter was pregnant, and she needed a doctor to go to. So who did they come to? My mother. And my mother went with her to the doctor, because the father didn't want her in the house. So my mother almost took her into our house.

And then we-- my mother made sure that she has where to stay by an aunt of hers. And that's where she had the baby. She was a big help to them. Till I came back from a concentration camp, then I found out that they were really not as close of friends as I thought they were.

So during this year your own, personal friends-- you were still in school.

School. But in school I didn't feel it yet.

And your own friends treated you just the same.

Just the same, yes.

And it was only at home.

Yeah.

Small town. What about your parents at this time? Were they beginning to tell you to be more careful?

No. They didn't want us to feel that we are the parent. So our parents tried to shield us from all the troubles yet.

But you saw it already in the home, that in the morning when the newspaper came-- we lived the first house from the railroad station. And the paper would come in the morning. And they would never let us look at it.

So we knew already the headlines were always with Jews. So they didn't want us to feel bad about it. They would hide the papers. That's when I started to be suspicious that something must be very, very wrong.

When did the change-- now, it seems to be going pretty much status quo, which is not good, but it seemed to be holding steady for you. When did you notice the big change? Were people moved out of the town? What happened?

The big changes started when they took us to the ghetto. And we took the things-- everybody was standing in the window and having fun, to see us. Nobody was prepared with suitcases or with anything. We didn't know that it's going to happen.

So the most valuable things you would put in a tablecloth. And you would wrap it together and just take it on your back and carry it. And that's when we started to see that all our neighbors and everybody was in the windows having fun. And they took us for three days. We were all put to a school.

You mentioned, Pearl, that you were in-- you had about 10 Jewish families or so in your town. Were you all transported to the ghetto at the same time? Did they--

Yes. Except two people were remained-- two people remained in town. One was-- he was a sick man, mentally. And his father, who was a war veteran. So they didn't take him. Otherwise, we were all taken in the same time.

And you were taken directly to the ghetto?

To the ghetto, yeah.

How far was the journey?

That was about a half an hour by train.

And what happened when you got to the ghetto?

In the ghetto we were all put together in one room. Maybe 50 people were there in a big room. And we were just all sleeping on the floor. And everybody tried to cook, to prepare for the children meals.

And they still shielded us from all the troubles-- that it's only temporary, it's not going to-- nothing going to happen to us. And as religious as my parents were, they said that Messiah is coming, and he's going to help us. But it didn't happen.

Were all the families still kept together?

Kept together, yeah.

They didn't separate them yet.

Yes. My brother was hidden in our house for about a year. He got out of the military. In some way they made him, that-- all kinds of things were happening at that time. And they had only that only son, my parents. So there was a rabbi who was teaching them how to put on the epileptic seizure, or what you call it.

Sure.

And to a point that they learned it so well that they thought that he's an epileptic. And that freed him. But in the town, people knew that he was a healthy guy. So my mother was shielding him in the house. Nobody knew that he's home. The bathrooms were outside the house. So he would go only at night.

Was this in the ghetto?

No, this was at home.

This was in the house.

This was still at home.

Yeah.

Yeah, still at home.

And I wish they wouldn't have made him come out from there, because everybody who was in that working camp afterwards-- they all came back.

And when you went to the ghetto, your brother went with you.

Yes, yes.

Yeah. He wasn't hidden in the ghetto.

No. No. There already--

There was no way. There was no way.

It was only Jewish people. So they didn't have to hide him.

Aside from the crowdedness in the camp-- the cramped quarters that you lived under, what other--

In the ghetto?

In the ghetto. What other conditions can you describe?

I was so young. And I tried to forget it. It wasn't a pleasant thing. But still, people would get dressed. And they would sing. And they would dance the children. And they would want to make the parents happy. So we did many things that didn't look like we are in trouble. But we knew, already, that time, that it's bad times coming.

Even as children, you knew.

Even as children, yeah.

And how long were you there, at the ghetto?

About seven weeks. And the last week before they took us-- we had a lot of gold. My grandfather was a very rich man. So we had a lot of gold. My mother would put it into bread and bake it with the bread, that we're going to take it with us wherever we're going to work. At least we will have the gold to sell. And we will survive on that.

I remember standing in the bakery and waiting for the bread to come out. She put in some kind of a mark in it that we should know which one is ours, because everybody else came to the bakery to bake their bread. When I brought home the bread my mother was sewing into the coat holes the rings and the diamonds. And then she made-- from tablecloths she made blankets. And inside it was all the valuables put in that they take us to work, we should have what to sell and eat.

And when I came to the concentration camp I found my sister's coat. And I was looking in the pads. They were sewn in, the diamonds. And I was looking-- that was all out. The coat was her, but that was all looked over. And that was taken out.

And it was taken out.

What happened at the end of your stay in the ghetto? Was there a roundup of people and transport?

For money, you could buy papers to get to Budapest. And then you could have survived, because from there they didn't take yet. So there were three papers offered to my parents for three children, the older children. But we didn't want to divide the family. And she begged us, my mother, that we should go. And we didn't want to leave them.

So at the end of the seven weeks, what happened then? Did they gather all the Jewish families together and take you somewhere else?

We went in a train. The train was loaded with the people. And it was-- there you couldn't even sit. There wasn't enough room even to sit. For three days we were there. We couldn't go to the bathroom. We couldn't eat. We couldn't do nothing. Food-- we took along bread, whatever we could.

Probably with the whole family still together at this point?

All together, yes.

And also the other 10 families.

Oh, there were more than 10 families. We were, in the ghetto, a lot more than the 10 families.

Yes, but the ones that came with you.

They didn't take them by the-- from city to city--

I know.

--no, to town-- no. No, they just put-- I think it went by the ABC or something. And they put us in the train. We were traveling in the train. They never opened it to give us air or anything.

How long did you travel?

Three days and three nights. And we came to Auschwitz. And we all went out from the cramped quarters. We couldn't

even walk.

Did you know where you were?

No.

Had you heard of Auschwitz before?

No. Maybe my parents did. But I didn't. I didn't.

You had been so sheltered that--

They didn't let us know nothing. They would always use a different language. We shouldn't understand it.

Yeah. This is a very hard question for me to ask, but I feel that I must ask it. Do you think, when you look back at it, that if you had known what your parents were shielding from you, that you might have-- that you might have escaped or that you might have run away?

You couldn't escape. You couldn't have escaped. There was no way. Only with the three papers that we had that we could have escaped. But who wanted to break up a family? Just-- but there was no way that you could escape otherwise.

I remember, once my mother went home from the ghetto. They gave her a slip that she can go home to put things together. So she went home and she baked some breads and she prepared some meals there. And she brought it back. And she came back so sad that nobody wanted to look at her there. None of our neighbors, nobody wanted to have anything to do with her. She was very heartbroken. But she wouldn't tell us. She would only talk it over with my dad. Nobody else.

So we come back to Auschwitz. What was your impression, your first impression when you got off the train?

We got off the train, it was about 4 o'clock in the morning. It was still dark. And now I know who it was. Mengele was there. And my mother was only begging us that we should watch each other, whoever can stay. She begged me that I should stay with my sister, with the older sister. She would stay with the younger one. And my dad with my brother.

And Mengele came with his stick and showed, you're going there, you're going there, and you're going there. My mother was taken with my younger sister. And I never saw her afterward.

But my father we saw the next morning. Our heads were shaved already, so we were embarrassed to see him. So my sister cut off from some kind of long dresses we had there-- cut off a piece of material. And she wrapped my head around, that my father shouldn't be heartbroken to see us, that we lost our hair and everything. That's the last time I saw my father with the brother. And he asked us we should keep together.

Your brother was with your father.

Yeah.

They took him, the next morning, to a working camp.

Your father or your brother, or both?

Both of them. And I remained in Auschwitz with my sister till August.

And that was the last time that you saw your father.

--I saw my father, yeah.

And your mother and baby sister as well, right?

Right away, that night, took them.

That was the last time.

But we didn't know where they were. People were telling us, you hear the screaming? You hear that-- you see the fire? But we thought that they were joking. Who would believe that? A whole night you heard the screaming and the fire and everything. And they used to tell us that this is-- your parents are burning there and your sister. But we didn't want to believe it.

You were a pretty little girl yourself. You were a young girl then, with all this going on.

Yes.

Where did they send you in Auschwitz?

We stayed in Bergen-Belsen-- no, in Auschwitz. I was in the C barrack. I think the number was 19. And we had there a miserable person who was the [GERMAN] or whatever she was. She was beating on us and screaming and everything. It was a terrible sight.

Every morning we would stay on-- it was, I think, [INAUDIBLE] Appell or what they called it-- till they came to count us. And many times we fell off our feet. I was very skinny and very weak. So I would fall down. And when they-- my sister saw that the man comes to count us she would hold me up just I should stay up.

Were you assigned jobs at Auschwitz?

No. We didn't do nothing there.

No?

No. They were waiting so they can get us out to work in camp. That's where I was [INAUDIBLE]. Whoever was there was prepared to go to work. And meantime, they were selecting whoever they didn't want to have. They saw that they are weak or something.

I was on the truck three times-- the truck on which they took people to the crematorium. But we didn't know where we going. So there were always sisters who wanted to exchange, that they should remain together. My sister pulled me out three times from those trucks.

How was she able to do that?

Because they used to make exchanges when the Germans wouldn't look. They would pull off and one would go up, because they took only so many on a truck.

So you had to be very quick to--

Very quick.

--to do this.

She protected me all this time. She was like a mother to me. She was only three years older, but she was like a mother. And I could really thank her for it, that--

--that she saved your life.

Yeah. Not that we knew, that time, what was going on. Nobody knew if it's better to stay on the truck or to stay away, because some of them were taken to working camps. But we didn't know that.

And then, in August, we were taken to a working camp. And there you had to work 100%. If you didn't work 100% they sent you back to Auschwitz, the crematorium.

Was this working camp far from Auschwitz?

Yeah. We went by train. I don't even know how long till we got there. And we lived in a forest. There were barracks made there. But this was already-- next to Auschwitz, this was a beautiful place to live in. And the food was different.

And they would take us every afternoon, when it was dark, towards evening, to that factory. And we would work a whole night. Or sometimes we were working daytime. They would take us in the dark in the morning and bring us back at night.

And I could never work 100%. So my sister worked more than 100%. And there was a very nice old man, a German, who risked his life and would take the leftover work from her and put it on my desk that they shouldn't send me back to Auschwitz. He used to bring us sandwiches for my sister.

He was very nice. I cannot remember his name for the life of me. But he was already an old man that time. He was very nice to her. They could have really killed him for it. And he did it all the time that we were there.

Did they know that he was doing it?

No. No. Nobody knew it. He was like the foreman there. He liked my sister a lot.

My sister was-- everybody says my sister was beautiful. My mother was. But my sister was as beautiful as Elizabeth Taylor is, and taller, and very, very good shape. And fast. And she was a very talented girl. She was a designer at a very early age. She had a lot of talent.

And what kind of work were you doing in this work camp?

We were working as-- we were making for aeroplane parts. You have to having those little round things. There were holes made into it. And the needle would always break. And he would see that I'm in trouble, he would always bring some needles for me, that they shouldn't send me back.

Who supervised the camp? Or who-- was it the SS? Or was it the military?

Yes, the SS. But they were not as terrible anymore as they were in Auschwitz because they thought that we produce, we work for free, just for the food and for the shelter. So they were not as bad to us as in Auschwitz they were.

You said the food wasn't as bad and the accommodations, compared to Auschwitz, were not as bad. Were you still all together? You were all kept in one barrack?

With my sister, yeah.

And was the nourishment a bit better for you there?

Oh, much better. Much better.

So at that time, did you begin to get a little healthier?



I became ill one time. I had pneumonia. And I was out of work for two weeks. And I remember that they wanted to take me back to Auschwitz again. And that man who was the foreman for my sister-- he took care of it that they shouldn't take me back.

What did he do? How-- he just had connections?

I don't know. He was a German too. So he probably knew, there, somebody. Because there was no reason they shouldn't send me back. I don't think I weighed 50 pounds. I don't think I weighed 50 pounds. And I was very short. I still don't know how I survived.

About how old were you at this time?

15.

In recalling this particular experience, what struck you the most about this camp or this work that you were doing? Was it the longness of the hours or the brutality of the people, or--

The brutality there wasn't as bad. They just threatened us, always, if you don't do the job they're going to send us back to Auschwitz. It wasn't as bad as in Auschwitz but [? First ?] [? of all, ?] in Auschwitz you got up every morning and you saw, by the barbed wire, how many people took their lives through the night. I was so young and so protected against troubles that to me, this was the first thing.

One night I remember one friend of ours-- she was a singer. And she was in such agony mentally that she screamed the whole night. And the next morning we found her by the barbed wire. So it was terrible days to go through, just thinking of it. It took weeks till we really could calm down after a-- no matter when you got up, every morning you found five, six people by the barbed wire. It was terrible times.

These were suicides.

Suicides. Many of them. And if my sister wouldn't have been there, I would have thought of it myself.

I mean, there was no way out. You were hungry. You were cold. You were wet. You were everything. If it rained you stayed the four hours in the morning. If it was anything-- it was so cold there. Nobody was dressed for it.

Or there was, I think, only one half an hour water running daily. So if you didn't get to it you couldn't wash yourself. Nobody should see it or know it, what things happened there. Just try to block it out from your mind and go on living.

So the work camp had to be some kind of improvement over that.

Work camp was improvement. The only thing was that I was scared that when it ends, because I just couldn't keep up with them.

When did it end?

It ended-- we went back to-- they took us to Bergen-Belsen, I think, the beginning of March. So about six months I was there. But this, too, when I was sick. You were always scared that-- my sister used to go to work and then ran into the room to see if I'm still there, if they didn't take me back. It was terrible, terrible times.

And how did they transport you from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen?

By train again.

Was it hard for you and your sister to stay together? Or was there not a problem in staying together at that point?

By then they saw that troubles are coming. So they were not as strict anymore. And they took us to Bergen-Belsen. And we didn't have food for three weeks-- not food and not water or anything. And we all caught the ty-- what was it? I don't remember what kind of a typhus it was.

Typhus?

Yeah, but I don't know what kind it was. It really wiped out almost everybody. I remember that I couldn't stand up on my feet. I was just crawling. And there was no water. I remember I saw from potato-- a peel from-- potato peel. So I was crawling to it. And I ate it with the dirt and everything.

So there weren't even the minimal rations that you would have--

Nothing. Nothing we had there. But we got plenty lice and sicknesses and everything else. There was really-- this was the most terrible thing.

Were there crematoria there, too, and gassings and things going on, as they were in Auschwitz?

I don't even know. I really don't know. You see, when my parents were not around my sister did the same thing to me as my parents did. She was shielding me. I shouldn't see. I shouldn't know. I shouldn't hear things because she didn't want me to suffer so much. It was enough that she was suffering. So she didn't let me know. She would always do something that I shouldn't find out.

Did you work together all the time, side by side?

Yeah. Not side by side. It was in a different end of the building.

But in the same building.

In the same building, yeah.

You were always together.

Yeah.

And you saw each other every day?

We were always together, yes.

Now, at this point, had you seen anybody from the village that you had known? [INAUDIBLE].

We had there one-- one girl was there from our village. But she was much older than I was, and even much older than my sister. A friend of mine's sister. But the friend never came back. She went with her mother right away in the crematorium. So only her sister was with us. She lives in Canada.

Now, at this point, what kept you going? If you can remember, what were you thinking? What were you thinking about?

I don't think we were normal enough to think. But my sister was very much on the religious side. And she would always ask me I should pray. And I said, no, I'm not going to pray, because look-- my parents were so religious and so nice. They never harmed anybody. And look what happened to them. So why should I pray?

And we would always have something to talk about. I never wanted to pray. I became the complete opposite. I went against religion completely.

So by this time, no matter how sheltered your sister tried to keep you, you knew that--

But you saw already.

You saw it going on.

First of all, in Bergen-Belsen we met some people that we knew from Auschwitz. And they told me that they saw my father and my brother in a working camp. So I knew that they were alive. And then-- but I knew my mother and my sister wasn't alive, because by then everybody was talking about how they were killed right after we came there.

And then, one morning after we were freed-- I think 10 days later-- my sister was dead in the morning, when I got up. And those people were all very nice to me. They said, look, your brother and your father is still alive. You go home. And you're going to have a life yet.

But I didn't want to meet my father after that because my father loved my sister a lot. Well, she was a lot like him. She was on the religious side and looked a lot like him. So I felt that my sister died because of me, because she was trying to protect me.

So I couldn't picture it, how I can meet my father and tell him that my sister isn't alive. So there was a time that I didn't want to live. But there were always people who were older than I was, because very few people were there my age.

What did your sister die of?

Of typhoid. When the English soldiers came in they gave us meat from cans. I wasn't able to eat it because I was too weak to eat. And she was already feeling better. And she ate it. And that killed her.

But even then, they wanted to put her in the hospital. And she didn't want to go because she didn't want to leave me. And they didn't want to take me to the hospital because I was already better, because there were so many other ones who needed the beds. So she didn't want to be separated from me.

When you were in Bergen-Belsen, how-- as time progressed, did you have any sense that you were going to be liberated? What was going on while you were there?

The only knowledge you really had was there was a [GERMAN] or a [GERMAN] [? there, ?] or whatever her name was. She was from [NON-ENGLISH], not far from where I am. And she had a 16-year-old daughter with her, a beauty. And she used to be so mean-- because people cried. Their sister died and whatnot. So people cried, and we were emotional. She said, nobody will survive it. But I will, with my daughter.

And about 10 days later, her daughter died. But they gave her daughter a beautiful funeral, the Germans. And they buried her in Bergen-Belsen, somewhere there. I would love to meet her mother if she's still alive. There were times that I couldn't-- I didn't want to think of her name and I couldn't have faced her. But today I could face her. And I would have a few things to tell her.

So she and her daughter were also prisoners?

Prisoners. But she was a mean one. A very mean one-- unnecessary, she was mean. She would always tell us, I'm going to survive with my daughter. You're going to all die.

She was a prisoner in charge of the other prisoners.

Yeah. She had a separate room for herself, for-- with the daughter. She had food. She had everything.

The word you used to describe her was what? I remember you used a word that ended in [GERMAN], which means servant, right?

She was, yeah. But she was already somebody who made her way. I don't know what way, but she made her way.

Did many people do this as a means of survival?

No. For every barrack there was one or two of them.

These were Kapos?

Yeah.

You were liberated by the British.

Yeah.

What was the liberation itself like for you?

The only thing I remember is there were booths like the booth on the top. They were watching us, the Germans, that nobody should go no place. And I remember that when the English came in there were white flags there. And the Germans were taken off. That's the only thing I can remember.

Did you see the Germans being taken off?

Yeah. Yeah.

Had you noticed a change in the way you were being treated? Or did you notice that there were less guards around weeks before?

There was no guards anymore. But whenever you went out you saw piles of dead people. You didn't even want to go out from the barrack. When my sister died 10 days later, you saw her black, beautiful hair sticking out from the whole pile of people. You didn't want to go out from the room. You just didn't want to live, really.

When the English came, did you immediately-- did they come right into you? What happened? You must have been frightened to even go out to them at this point.

We didn't care any more. There wasn't enough energy to care what's going to happen. At that point, we were so weak that we didn't really care. The only thing we were happy-- they brought us something to drink and to eat. But most of us couldn't eat it. There was plenty of people who died after the war, after it was over.

Because their stomachs rejected the food.

Rejected the food. It was a very rich food. And who knew that you're not allowed to eat it?

What happened to you after your sister's dying?

After my sister died I went through a terrible time. I didn't want to live. And they took us into some kind of buildings already. We were together there a lot of people, too, but it was already different circumstances. And they promised us they're going to take us home, all of us, where we belong. But it took weeks before they took us.

And then, when I came home, this was worse yet than anything else. Everybody has a brother or a sister. I didn't have nobody. I came home with the idea that my father is alive, and my brother. And nobody was alive. And people didn't want to tell me, at that time, that that guy who came back who was together with my father-- it took him four weeks before he gathered courage to tell me what happened.

After the four weeks-- I didn't know nobody from the family. But I knew that I had some cousins. And I knew they had

names. So they lived in a different town. And I went to visit them with one of the women from our town who was much, much older than I was. And I went there with the idea that maybe they would give me a home.

But before that, I came to that town. And I went in to the people that were very good friends of ours. And the next door neighbor gave me a picture of my father that she found. He had a lot of books there. I don't know how they call those books. They were very expensive books. He had a lot of them.

And she found-- in those books she found the picture of my father. She gave it to me. Then I went in to my mother's best friend, whom she helped that time when her daughter was in trouble and everything. And I came in the house and I saw the bedspread. And I saw some work that my mother did by hand.

And I said to her-- her name was [? Fagetta. ?] I says to her, Mrs. [? Fagetta, ?] I don't want nothing from you. Just give me the bedspread. I should have-- something to touch what was my mother's. And she said to me, you don't even know what was yours. She never gave it to me. Thank you. I'm sorry.

It's all right.

Then I went to see my cousins. And they were very nice to me. They took me in. They were like little sisters. But I had a very bad time.

Your cousins had come through.

They were five of them, and they came back four of them. An uncle of theirs came back. And they really gave me a nice home. And I didn't need much from them because I have the home that I sold in the place from where I come. So money I had. But I never even touched that money because I couldn't touch it. In 1940, my parents built a brand new home. And somehow, I couldn't use that money. I said, how can I use the money what they were building a home? And I went to work in a factory.

In the town itself, or--

No. I went away from there and I met some other cousins in Czechoslovakia. And I went to work in a factory. And I lived together in a cold flat with my cousin from my mother's side.

I was more hungry than that, but I had to pay the rent. You cannot think of everything-- what and how you lived through. But I remember it was terrible times.

Everybody had their relative, a close relative. I didn't have nobody. And we could never even talk about it. We would sit, we would cry. But we would never talk about it, what happened.

So you came from an existence that was totally sheltered by your parents and your sister, and suddenly here you were--

On my own.

--with nobody, on your own.

Yeah.

It must have been--

It wasn't an easy time.

--a terrible shock to you.

I went through terrible times.

I think the neighbor-- your mother's best friend was a shock. As well.

That was the biggest shock of my life, because at home my sister was a designer. And she used to make nice money. And they were-- in that house they were about six girls. So my mother felt sorry for them, said for my sister, see if you can take one of them with you. And maybe they can work and make some money too. And whenever she could help them, she did.

And then I come back, and she didn't want to give me one bedspread. What was it worth to them. Because the good things we took all with us. There were summer bedspreads and winter bedspreads. So the good ones we took with us. It was only the bad ones that they left behind.

So then I found, in the town from where I am, at my mother's best friend's, the bedroom [? set ?] [INAUDIBLE]. The other room furniture by other friends. Nobody wanted to give it back. They said, oh, you just don't remember what you had. You were too young to remember what you had. That's not yours. So what can you do?

Let me just backtrack a little bit. When you came back to your home, then, you found that there was nothing. Nothing was left.

I never could face to go into the house. The house was empty. But I could never go into it. I couldn't. Just stopped once by that neighbor because she said she has a picture.

Then I found-- then I was thinking once that our mailman made us some snapshots once. So I called up his-- I went over to his wife and I said, maybe you have those snapshots. Meantime, her husband was in the military. So he never came back from the war. But she looked it over. And she found the negatives. She gave it to me. And that's where I had for my sister's pictures I have.

Now, you said that you were working in a factory.

After the war [INAUDIBLE].

What were you doing?

In orthopedic. I don't know how you call it. You make the-- men usually have this. How you call it? And you make belts for it. And it keeps it in-- how you call [? that? ?]

A truss?

No.

It was medical.

Medical, really.

Yeah. It was to keep in hernias [? and things? ?]

Yeah, hernias. Yeah.

That's a truss.

Yeah, it's a truss.

Yes. That's what I was working on. You made that by hand. Not like today, everything is made by machine.

And I was working there. I would go in the morning at 6 o'clock and it was freezing cold. And hungry all the time. Skinny and hungry. And I came back, and there was nothing better facing me in the home than outside. But you made it somehow. I don't know how, but you made it.

And you had your cousins with you at this time.

Yeah. One cousin I lived with.

One cousin.

Yeah. She was working in the factory too. But she was already more advanced. And she spoke Czech. So she made more than I did. But we split everything. We had rooms there. It wasn't central heating like today, so we froze plenty. But we lived together.

Did this keep you going, the fact that you still had some relatives or some--

Somehow, you felt you were going. What else was there to do unless-- you didn't want to take your own life. So you were going.

You must have still been numb at this time.

I think so, that you were numb completely, because if you wouldn't have you wouldn't have made it. Sometimes you want to think back, and you went through so many things you just can't even think about it. It was nonstop troubles since I was 14 years old.

And when you were with your cousin, did you decide then to come to the United States? Or did you-- what did you decide to do?

When I came back from concentration camp-- my mother had a brother here in the United States, in New York. And he was a very successful man. And we had the money to come to the United States.

So my mother wrote to him in 1938 or '39, when she-- they already knew. My parents knew it. So she wrote to him that he should send the papers. We had the money to come to this country. So he did the same thing. He said, for his sister he will send a ticket-- he will send no ticket. He will send the papers. But that's all-- for the sister.

So which mother wanted to leave her children behind? My mother was happily married. They had four children. She didn't want to go alone. Unless the whole family went she didn't want to go.

And I carried such a bitterness against that uncle that I cannot tell you, because I felt he could have saved us. So when I came back from concentration camp and my cousin said that uncle-- we went once to Prague. And I says to him, how if we should go to the Red Cross? I knew his name. And I still don't know from where I knew his name. But somehow it came to me. And I says to that uncle of theirs, let's go find out by the Red Cross if I could get in touch with him.

I couldn't. But they found his address. And they told me I should write to him a letter. And believe me, I did. I wrote to him. I said to him, you know, you could have saved my family. I'm alone in the world. I stay now with a cousin. I think you owe me papers. Know that I survived. I don't want to go alone. But I think you can do that much for me, to send me papers.

Sure enough, he sent me papers. For my cousin too. And that cousin wasn't from his side a relative. That was from my father's side a relative. He sent us both papers and tickets to come. But the quota was going so slowly that I never got into it.

Meantime, I met my husband and I got married. So I never came on those papers. And when I got married I asked him he should send my husband and for me one. He said, no. If you got married, let him worry about you.

When I came to this country I really didn't want to meet him. I really didn't. I just felt, I don't owe him nothing. He doesn't owe me nothing. But I don't want to see him.

But my cousins were here already, and they told me, let's go. Why wouldn't you meet the uncle? But he told me in the car going there, don't question him. Don't tell him anything. And he was always-- made sure, that cousin-- he sat next to me, that I shouldn't say nothing. And I wanted so badly to tell him, why didn't you save your sister? You don't have nobody.

We were sitting in the restaurant eating, and he said what a beautiful family he's got. And I started already saying that, you see, you could have had a more beautiful family, a bigger family. And he was kicking me I shouldn't say nothing.

That uncle wasn't bad to me after the war. He used to send me, once in a while, \$20. I couldn't use it. I just felt, this is blood money. Why didn't you save my mother? Why didn't you save my parents?

So I met him once. And then, once he came to my house. I really didn't have no use for him. And he was a very funny guy. He was a multimillionaire. And he was ashamed [INAUDIBLE] that he is Jewish. He lived in Miami Beach. But he had license from a different state, because they shouldn't think that he is Jewish.

So he used to live in New York. He had, that time, streets of buildings where there was only garages for cars. I didn't want to have nothing, really, to do with him. When he died I went to his funeral. But I still am bitter against him.

Pearl, we're going to pause for a few moments and then go-- we'll resume.

Got it.

We have to change the tape.