

But she didn't have the koyach. I was telling her a few times what you said. She said, I don't have the koyach to talk.

All right, we're on tape now. As the first hour was running out, you had just finished reading your mother's description of leaving the ghetto. And the help from the Jewish militia person. Do you know anything about that person?

Well, he was a neighbor of ours, before the war. And he became a militia person during the ghetto. And by that, he was able to take us out of the gates of the ghetto wall.

He played a crucial role in saving the family.

Yes. Yes, yes.

What happened to him? Do you know?

Well, he perished. How. I don't know, because all militia people perished. There was no special treatment because they were militia.

And your mother said the only sentence that we could not get-- I'll start here. Our friend wished us good luck in saving ourselves. Unfortunately, this friend was not saved, and perished. There it is. With all of his family together. One of his sisters was here in America. Did you ever meet that sister?

Yes, I met. We were in touch with her. She lived in New York. Then she died of old age.

She knew that her brother saved you.

Yes, she knew.

You both met her.

I did not.

Erwin did not. But I did. And my mother. We were in touch with her till she died of natural causes.

And she has family here?

She has a niece.

She was not married?

She was married but--

No children.

She lost everybody. She lost her husband and children. She herself survived, by hiding out, or I don't know how. And of course, the brother that helped us through the ghetto also perished. So she was the only survivor.

What happened when you left the ghetto? Where did you go?

We went on the Aryan side and mother took an apartment-- room, boarding room by somebody. And till we decided what to do further, we stayed in the apartment for a very short time. Till mother could get more secure Polish papers for the family. Not for my father.

And the transportation to another part of Poland. Because in Lviv she could not walk around. There was always

somebody that she met, that followed her, that wanted to extract money out of her, to expose her. So she-- There were a few incidents that a neighbor or a Polish friend saw her, and they followed her. Took her sometimes hours to lose them, running away and so forth. Because once they would catch her, or followed her where we lived, we would have been all exposed.

Being able to escape once she was spotted by a person, her ability to escape is very impressive. How did she get away?

She walked from door to door, and then the person followed her. And she made faster steps, and faster walking, till she went to an attic, and lost sight of that woman. And stayed in that attic or top stairs, some abandoned building, till nightfall. Then she came back to the apartment.

And this happened about how many times?

A few times. A few times, till we were--

This is frightening.

Very frightening. Because Erwin and I and my father, we were in that apartment. We did not go out because of exposure. And we thought, if mother doesn't come back, that's the end of us. We have to go out because-- but finally she came back. And then we have the story that she had to-- took her a whole day not to come to the apartment. Otherwise the woman would follow us and give us all out or just the men money or whatever else we had of value.

And that value saved us to be transported by train. We went by train to the village that we were finally liberated, outside of--

We went to a village and we worked. We stayed on the farm. And we stayed there to the end of the war. My mother worked on a farm. She help with chores.

Is this near Krakow?

This is near Krakow.

Yes, this is the village near Krakow.

So you went to one place?

To one place.

And the place was?

Lipnica.

Lipnica, all right.

Near Vilichka, near Bochnia near Krakow.

You don't have an idea of the date? All you can say is that you think it was in 1943?

Which month I completely don't know.

And then you were in la pitra? Did I say it correctly?

Lipnica.

You were there--

Till the end of the war. Then we were liberated by the Russians.

We were there for about two years.

When were you liberated?

In January '45. January, February, December, I'm not--

So it was well over a year that you were hiding out.

Oh, yes.

About two years.

A year and a half, two years. What did you do during that time? Who were you? Who are you?

We were-- our papers were that we are from a different part of Poland. And my mother with the two children--

Displaced family--

Displaced family from that part of Poland, and looking for a place to work and to have a roof over our head.

For work for your father?

For my mother.

No, my father was incognito. It was not known to the farmer woman that there is a father. My mother--

Was that because she had no papers for him?

She would not. No, a man you don't, it's not--

And we also didn't have any papers for him. He had no Gentile papers. We did. And when my mother was arranged to this elderly woman, farmer owner, needed help to work with her farm and the cows and whatever. She needed some help. My mother and two children was the family would come and help her.

So for all the help, the only thing mother ask is a roof over our heads, and the food. Whatever she could she would be--

At this point you had no money.

Very little, no. Nothing to be able to pay her for.

Because in Lviv I gather, you had money.

Yes, we were able to-- Yes.

But a lot of the money was spent for various things that we needed to survive during the time,

Including the papers.

You mean it was used up? It was consumed.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--papers Whatever. Favors.

And getting out the gate--

Everything. Yes everything.

Different things that I had to do.

See, decisions were made, and they were important decisions. And probably one of those decisions was, we're spending this money. Because if we save the money and not ourselves, it's not worth anything. These hard decisions. These were decisions that were being made constantly. And you as children don't know anything about it.

Not too much. Not too much. Because it was our parents daily thing that I don't think they shared with us at the moment.

Even after the war?

After the war, yes, she told us that. But not during the war, total details to--

So what did you do for a year and a half, or whatever it was?

We helped mother in the fields and whatever the peasant woman needed to do around the house.

My mother actually worked very hard during that time. She would tend to the fields, gather the crops, whatever was on this little farm. It's a small little farm, very primitive. We had no running water. Because I remember, I myself and my sister, we all had to go always to the well.

To the well, to get the water from the--

To get water.

Now you're back in the 19th century.

That's right. Yes, in that part, yes.

This is not Lemberg anymore, this is a farm.

And completely not to be exposed ever to a village, farm, and things like that. But we just have to go it like we were born to it. So we did it.

What were your names at this time?

His name was-- I was Ursula Osofsky.

And I was Kazimirz Osofsky.

How do you spell Kazimirz?

K-A-Z-I-M-I-R-Z.

I thought I did that for you.

I know Ursula is U-R-S-U-LA.

Yes, yes.

And that's how you called each other?

Of course. Yes, there was nothing-- It was drilled into us by mother completely to forget our previous names. Not if somebody will ask us, what's your name? Not to just-- I mean, for something in your situation, you don't tell a child--

For a year and a half, you did not call him Erwin?

No, of course not. It was life and death.

You knew it.

We knew it, yes.

And your mother taught it to you?

That's right.

And not only that. During that period of time, being that my father didn't have Aryan papers, my mother had to arrange a hiding place for him on our farm. Which she did.

That the peasant lady didn't know?

No, no.

She did not know.

Was there a peasant man or just the lady?

No, it's just a woman.

Only an elderly woman. Maybe she was in her 70s.

She was alone?

She was alone. That was probably our saving grace. She needed help. She didn't get out of the house too much. So when my mother--

Your mother was terrific for her.

She was terrific. But it went two ways.

Yeah, sure.

It was a good situation for us too. And during that period of time my mother-- my father was in hiding on the barn, underneath the floorboards. He made a hole in the ground underneath the floorboards in the barn. And that's how he survived till the end of the war.

And he stayed there?

He stayed there day and night. Day and night. Could not get out.

This was as difficult a time as you had. This is a very difficult, nerve-racking--

Absolutely. Nerve racking.

At night we used to go out to bring him food.

Food had to be brought to him every day, which we did.

Did nobody in the neighborhood suspect anything?

No. These farms were quite a distance apart. There wasn't like a house next to another house.

Listen. When the family left Lviv. Or Lemberg. I don't know, what am I supposed to say to you? You seem to say Lemberg more often.

That's OK. Whichever way, it doesn't-- Lviv. To me it's Lviv.

Don't be friendly, just--

Yeah, yeah. No. Yes, Lviv. I say Lviv.

You say Lviv.

So when the family left, did you know you were going to Lipnica?

Yes. Yes.

How was the decision made that this little 19th century village. Or it's not even a village, it's less than a village. That's the place to be. How was that decision made?

The decision made through some other people that--

They arranged with this--

No, I cannot describe it exactly. I'm not so sure how to say it. Mother, it was mother's thing to do. I don't know how she came up on that.

Basically the arrangements were made that this is where we would go. They were made, that we would go to this little farm, and work there.

Oh, she was-- she knew exactly what farm--

That it's a possibility. That there's a possibility. There's an old woman in the village that might need some help from people like ourselves. With a woman and this and--

This is amazing, that this should be known. That there is a person over there who was isolated, really. That if you go there. That's it. You're just with that lady.

We looked for an isolated place.

Nobody, and nobody on Lipnica cared if you were there or not.

Well, there were people that were gossiping.

Yes, they were suspecting, possibly that we were maybe Jewish.

It's possible that this woman maybe-- So there were some other incidents where they tried to find out a little bit more about us. But again, mother somehow overcame all these things.

There was an incident with me, myself for instance, where they tried to-- on one of my daily, or maybe every-other-day trip to the well, which was maybe 2,000 yards away from the house, was down the hill. There was a well. I would go there for water with a bucket or maybe two buckets, and bring water back to the house.

There were a few fellows there, men, young boys. And they were there. When I got there, they tried to interrogate me and ask me are you this, are you that, where are you from? And they wanted to examine me--

Physically.

--to see--

Because you're Jewish.

--if I'm Jewish. So of course, I knew what that meant too. And I dropped everything and ran back to the house.

Ran away from them.

I ran away from them. So of course, that caused other problems. That's suspicious. How did my mother handle that? She explained to them, he's a young boy. He's embarrassed. You embarrassed him. What are you bothering him for? And the embarrassment type thing explained it.

Why he escaped to be physically examined. So that's how she explained.

So they left you alone after that?

They left me alone after that. But there was an incident that if I didn't run and they examined me--

That's right, it would have been the end.

Because in the early 1900s, '20s, '30s, I don't think circumcision was a generally accepted medical practice, which it is today. Today, I don't know, maybe in America 95% of the people born are circumcised I would say. But in those days, I think it's only Jews. so that's just one of those telltale signs.

So it was a nerve racking existence.

It's another-- any one of those incidents. It's just one.

And there were many that Mother encountered herself. That they were saying to her that she's holding Jewish children. She herself being non-Jewish. But I'm sure he said, the children are Jewish. I guess we did not look so non-Jewish. Like she, the way she combed her hair or whatever else. So that was another rumor. This woman is probably hiding her Jewish children. And the two of us.

What do you remember about the war ending? Liberation.

The war ending-- the Russians came very sparsely, not in full force, to our village. Because we were so isolated. And they came, I remember, with white--

Paratroopers.

--with white uniforms against the snow, to be covered. When they came first to our house, so we right away told them that we are Jewish. Mother spoke to them-- not in her presence, in the woman's presence-- that we are Jewish and Russian.

Why did she tell them so quickly?

He said that we are not here in full force yet. And that there still are pockets of Germans here and there, and they are still fighting through. And we decided to stay, yet I think another day or two.

And then came somehow that we had to leave earlier. Just when they first stepped in. Because there were neighbors, and they said, I think they on us, that they are Jewish. And we might do to kill them. And another neighbor came in and told it to my mother. I think they are suspicious of you and the children. They intend to--

Harm you.

--that you took advantage of them. That you are, after all, you probably are Jewish, or your children are Jewish. And they don't intend to let you go freely. That meant that they probably will come at night and kill us, before the full force of liberation comes through. So we decide to leave at night.

Where did you go?

We picked up our father from the barn. And walked toward--

How was he? Physically?

He was all swollen. Because he contracted kidney disease. He was laying-- if he had to be hidden during the day, under the boards, it was full of water. And he always laid in dampness and water--

And he couldn't do a thing.

Couldn't do-- no medication, nothing.

He had the most difficult time--

Yes, physically, yes. Yes. He was not suffering hunger but this-- And then he was swollen. So they knew he's very sick. Which he was, with the kidney disease. He retained all the water. The kidneys probably were shut up.

And we walked towards-- the next town was Bochnia or Vilichka, I'm not sure which came first. And we caught a Russian truck. A Russian transport truck took us to Tarnov. It was already liberated. And then the first thing that we did was taking our father to the doctor. And he gave him medication. Of course, we knew that he had a kidney problem. And he was, I think he was put in the hospital. And he got better. And we immediately joined Jewish communities formed--

So how long did it take for him to get better?

This, I also don't remember. How long it took.

But we were in Tarnov for a while.

For a while. It was a Jewish community already formed. Like Jews were coming from concentration camp with their striped uniforms, and very haggard-looking. But everybody-- and my parents were talking about going back to Lviv. Not knowing that there's nobody left of this.

And everybody was telling them, please, don't go back. There's nothing there. And whoever made it will come this way



anyway. And just let's go the other direction. Toward big cities. And of course, eventually-- So from Tarnov, we went to-- I forgot where we went to.

We went to Katowice.

Katowice. That was a liberated part that I think belonged before to Germans. And we stayed there for a while. And then, again, Jewish community. And people were recruiting the Jews to live. Not that my mother ever wanted to stay.

But she waited for her sister to come back from Russia. My mother, she decided she wants to stay till the sister with her daughter will come out out of Russia. And together we should leave.

It took her a while to come out from Russia. And we waited, and then we left for Germany, to wait out-- to Germany, to the American zone.

With the sister.

DP Camp.

For the sister. Yes. Together we went, and she went to Israel. Later from the DP here.

That's where she lived?

Yes. Yes. And we went to America.

How were the decisions made as to who went where?

There was the person. Israel was not, that was Palestine at that time.

You couldn't get in easily.

No.

Right, so that was that. But she went because she was just with one daughter. My cousin had an uncle in Palestine. At that time that was Palestine. Her father's brother. And that was one decision, that's why they went there. And we didn't have anybody here or there. And it was not easy to get to Palestine, things like that. So my parents--

The immigration to the United States was more open. I mean, it wasn't open but there was--

We had to wait the quota to sponsor--

It still took a few years.

It took you a few years. But at least you knew that a certain amount of people every year would--

1950, people were getting over. Some of them said this-- President Truman signed some kind of an order and the gates opened.

In 1950.

Your arrival was sponsored by the Birmingham Jewish community.

And you went to Birmingham, Alabama.

Yes.

How long did you remain in Birmingham?

My husband and I and Ziggy. At the time I already was married and had a child. I think a year. I think a year, approximately.

So it didn't take long to get out of Birmingham.

No, we didn't intend to stay there.

I lived there for two years, about two years.

That was the extent of your high school education?

In Birmingham, there. Yes.

Yeah. And when you came to New York you-- no, you said you--

When I came to New York I went to, for a little short time, Forest Hills High School. Then in Woodside. Woodside High.

Then he went to college.

How much college did you do?

Two years.

Which one?

CCNY.

OK. And then you decided--

And then I had to roll up my sleeves and go to work. And actually, no, that's really true. During that period of time, my father got sicker and sicker.

Yes, the kidney didn't--

Eventually he really couldn't work.

Was he able to do anything in America?

He started a little bit on the jobs in New Jersey.

Yes, he did some-- He worked, he worked. Different things. But he couldn't work steadily because of his health. And so-

At that time they didn't have the--

Again, we have to do the right amount.

So life was difficult for him.

For him it was, because there was no dialysis at the time. There was no kidney transplants, nothing. So just diet, some

water pills, which was very-- and the kidneys both failed, and eventually--

When did he pass away?

'59.

He was 57 years old, or?

He was 59. I think so. Yeah. He was born 1900.

But he was paying the price every day.

Yes, yes. Because that failure of the kidneys came from the place that he was hiding.

There in hiding.

Yes, yes, yes.

And you came to Elizabeth. How did you get in here? Business brought you here.

Business. Yes, opportunities.

Business. The Jewish community in Elizabeth. First Joe and my sister came to Elizabeth, and I followed them within--

Joe's parents were here, and Joe's brother.

Actually, his parents and his brother I think were here first.

Right. Yes, yes, yes. Then we followed. And then the brother followed.

The family's coming to Elizabeth was hopefully good for the family, certainly good for Elizabeth. So that's the story. It's a remarkable story of a remarkable woman.

Yes. Yes, she certainly was.

And she remained a remarkable woman all these years.

All these years, to the end. Really to the end. The way she looked at her life, at her old age, things that she could do or couldn't do. She came and--

And she was alive and alert--

To the last minute.

She did a remarkable-- she lived a remarkable life. And did a beautiful job of saving the family. And the sad part is that there were so few people who were able to do it.

That's true.

It's encouraging to see that you benefited from it. And you realize as you go through the story, how rare it was. Because this is the only one you hear about. In all of Lviv.

From the whole history of Lviv that my parents were telling us that after the war, they were talking to other people or documentaries. We are the only intact family that lived through the ghetto and the entire, without-- because there were

many that went to Russia that made it. Or people that individually made it.

But the intact family, it was, if not one, this Yes. Because through the ghetto through the-- because usually these members were lost in the ghetto during other acts.

So it's a remarkable story, which is a tribute to a remarkable woman.

Yes, we're very grateful that she saw a lot of bad times, but she also saw and had a lot of naches in her years after the war. And she saw naches from my sister's family, myself. She saw happy occasions. 13 great-grandchildren she has. She had, she still has. And weddings, bar mitzvahs. So she shepped a lot of naches, and we're grateful for that.

That she was strong, she was traveling to Israel often. She said that my children will be here. Well, I could live here. But with all the children she--

It is very understandable. I have some questions over here. Let's see how we handle them. When did you start talking-- you know, I really don't know how to-- I look at you people and I'm thinking, hey, this really is going to your mother, you know. You're a combination of survivors and second generation, rolled into one.

That's true.

All right. And that's because of how your mother protected you.

Exactly, exactly.

And you said that on the Stern College tape. I understood what you were saying. When did you start talking about the Holocaust, and with whom? I think your family was always talking about it.

I think we were.

I think yes. But maybe--

Because you know there are a number of survivors who didn't talk to their children about it.

No, no. I think that-- it's not a daily thing, of course. Because it's just--

In beginning, possible that we were getting ready to establish our lives in America. And we are very much concentrated on that-- establishing our family life, religious life. And just busy. Busy with establishing our life in America.

So maybe it was not such a-- of course, my children was not big enough to be talking to that. And with us, mother, I don't know how much she-- she was always reminiscing about her siblings, her mother.

But your children had you to talk to, and your brother. So was there this communication going on about the Holocaust with your children?

When they were young--

I think when they were small, maybe not.

When they were small.

It's such a serious topic and subject that it's-- but somewhere later on, I remember that my kids, and I think your kids, they know all about it from us and from-- it wasn't something that we were--

Not maybe with such details, like my mother put it in the paper. This came later.

This could be one of the first times that incidents and details are related in this type of a form.