

Let me go back a little bit. Were you sorry to leave Paris, in some way?

In some ways, I must say. There was nothing like Paris. And what I gained in these three years, the joy of living there, the culture, the people, the way they treated us like a-- not only healing effect after coming from the Holocaust, but in general. The three years, I told my friends, the Manns, I said they were the happiest three years of my life because there's nothing I had to do but just go and absorb everything in Paris. I was going to school, and I was going to get a job, maybe to work. I love the language. I like the city. I like the-- and they were very good to us, yes, in a way, but we knew this was not the end. We had to finally go somewhere and settle. And America was our-- and the family was our purpose. But who would want to leave Paris? Yeah.

[CHUCKLES] Did you like the food?

We didn't go out much to eat. We couldn't afford it. I liked everything about Paris. I liked there-- and I had a shock, cultural shock when I came to Paris from Poland, because Poland was still a country that was very, how do you say, traditional. When I went to gymnasium, I had to be home by 10:00, and then very tradition. And then I come to Paris, and I said, ooh, la, la. I say, what's going on in here? They're all sitting, smooching on the benches and on the trains. I said, what kind of a country did we come in here? There's some perversion or something like this.

I wasn't prepared for anything like this. What to expect in Paris, you know? [INAUDIBLE]. Well, it didn't take very long, and I learned-- [CHUCKLING]-- not quite as much [INAUDIBLE], but this is part of living in Paris, you know? Nobody will ever laugh at you if you want to kiss somebody on the bench, or something like this. So it was a culture shock. And yes, I had a lot of friends there, because we were all going to Alliance Française, and we all had the same experiences, and get away from Poland, waiting for our papers to go on to another country.

But what I wanted to tell you, and I didn't mention to you before, when the war was over and I missed five years of school, and I wanted-- I always was a very good student, and I wanted to learn, but besides that, I was so very eager, and I went by the motto, a Jewish word-- I don't know if you know it-- says "davka." "Davka." It means in spite of. And this was push me to everything. And I said, in spite of what they wanted to do to us, the Nazis, and kill us, and deprive us of school and [INAUDIBLE], I'm going to make it.

And I remember my teacher used to read it in my English papers, and it said the word "davka." And it's a Jewish word meaning in spite of. And that really was my guiding light until I achieved what I wanted, which I did. I came in here, I have my wonderful family, and I got my education, and my jobs were very rewarding because working with the Russian refugees was very rewarding to me. When I came to this to Washington, I said, I would like to have some day a job to help those people who are newcomers too, because I understand what it is like to adjust to a new country. So the job, when it turned up, I loved it, and we got along well, because I was able help them get jobs, and all, and I love the Russian language.

So I had this job, and then I loved working at the Library of Congress. Again, I used the Russian language. I loved it. And I couldn't believe it that I have lived to get a job working for the government. It was such an honor. And then I just couldn't-- coming in here, and even getting education, you have to have the education to get a job for the government. And I work in the library for 10 years using the Russian language in here. So in some ways, life was very rewarding to me, and kind. If I didn't go, maybe, through this war, I wouldn't have met the people I met. I would have never lived in Paris for three years. So looking on the bright side, as long as I'm here, and alive, and enjoy the fruit of my efforts, I am very blessed-- I feel very blessed.

Does it make you sad, in some ways, that you went through what you went through, or it's just part of--

No.

It doesn't.

Because it wasn't directed at me. It was a horrible thing that happened all over, and who do I have the right to complain

to? I'm the one who survived. It's the people who perished, the people down there who say, why me, what you do to us? I had to go through, but I did make it on the long run. I survived. I never even knew about a concentration camp until the war was over. Nobody ever talked--

When did you find out?

After the war.

When you were in Lodz, or when you were in Paris?

No, when we were in Lodz, and when we came to Lodz, and we bumped into other people who were survivors from the camp. And I remember once, two women were sitting in our house, and they were sewing. And one says to the other, it was Yom Kippur, and she says, I can still remember the smoke coming from the chimneys. And I didn't know what chimneys. This is something-- it didn't register because we didn't know it. There was so many different stories people had. This one was in Russia, and this one went this, and this one that, that-- little by little. And then when I came to France, really, I knew more. Ran into survivors from the camp.

And incidentally, during the war-- you probably know yourself that, when the camps existed, and Roosevelt was told that something was going on there, they had planes flying over the area where the concentration camps were, and they could tell that they were active because there was no snow on the roof. So they knew that something was going on in those barracks. This was during the war still. And they said, there must be something going on, but nobody believed. Nobody would believe that something that is-- could have this-- even now, still, people can't believe what happened.

I watched the History Channel religiously, when they opened up now all the files and all. And I hope this-- but it's not-- human nature is strange. It doesn't seem to deter people from fighting. When I came in here, I thought there will be no more wars. I came in 1949. And take a look how many wars we had since then. Every time you look around. This one, [INAUDIBLE] I remember-- Korean, this Vietnam, and then you had the Irish, and then you had the Isra-- I mean, every time. What is it in human nature that has this need to constantly hurt others? I don't know. I just don't know, but it's a shame. It is very much a shame.

Did it shock you when you heard about the camps?

Yeah, I couldn't understand it. I thought it was just-- the first time-- they didn't show picture, they just said [? the word camp ?]. To see burn-- Yes. Very much. It was, to me, so unbelievable. And the scope of it. We never knew that-- or maybe one or two, but we never believed at such a rate people came. And what also shocked us later on to see, that even after the war was over-- and Poland did too-- these people came to their homes, and there was pogrom in Kielce or something, in spite of the fact-- because they didn't-- antisemitism was still so great. They didn't want the Jews. They were sorry they weren't killed.

And do you think your parents knew more before you did because you were so young? Or did they find out about the same time you did?

About the camps?

Mm.

No. We all found out more or less the same--

Time.

We found it by word of mouth. People you sit down in the cafeteria, or we meet some survivors. And it always was the first question, so how did you survive? And everybody has their unique story. I survived, my mother didn't, my wife didn't.

And I heard there was incidents-- one incident particular told me. A young man survived the war. And they say when he found out that nobody in his family survived, he didn't want to live. He didn't want to live. So--

Did he commit suicide?

He committed-- yeah. I didn't see this. This is old story, you see. People came out with-- you see sometimes movies too, where families' survivors, the husband stayed, and they made a life with them, something, and then something snaps. Something snaps. And it's like a delayed reaction or something that they-- it comes late to them. Some of them came here. And even though they lost a wife or family, they tried to make a new life for themselves. They remarried, and they have children. But it's never left them. And they would have later breakdown, or--

Sometimes children had to carry also the-- listen to the-- what went on. They couldn't-- it's called the second generation. Yeah. But--

And what about you? Do you think there's a price that you've paid for your experiences?

Is there a place [? where I pay? ?]

No, price. A price. Is--

A price that I paid? Well, I don't think it's my personal-- it's not like I was the only one punished. I think the year in Moscow, starving and hungry, I almost died there. It was-- the others were more hardy. The others were more hardy. They were peasant stock, and this.

And I was used to my mother pampered me always. There you go. She always did everything for me. She wouldn't eat until I have something to eat, you know. And I wasn't prepared for it, and I wondered, maybe it was a mistake for me to come to Moscow. But then again, I look around, I'm not the only one. All around me, people were hungry.

Once, a girl invited me to come to her grandmother. Some were way out in the country. You know what the kolkhoz is, right? You know what a collective commune, the Russians. And she says, you want to come with me to my grandma for about a week? We'll take time off from working at the plant. I said, sure. I thought, when we come there, probably there's going to be food and so on.

So we went on the train in the middle of the night, God knows where in Russia. We get off the train, and we start walking. We had to walk a long distance on a highway. The snow was so high. There was no transportation to come and pick us up we were the only two girls walking. And the wolves was in the forest looking at us, and with those big eyes. I said, well, any time, they'll come eat us up.

But we walked the whole night till we came to the grandma's house. She was a very kind old Russian lady, and the week was wonderful. I remember all I did is lay there on top of the-- in a warm spot in the house. I didn't want to come down, because at least we had enough bread. I wasn't hungry for a week. This was the highlight of [INAUDIBLE].

But people had it worse. People had it-- I always look at it this way. God blessed me. I always look at it that I survived, there wasn't any camp, that I achieved what I wanted-- the hard way. The hard way, but I achieved what I wanted. I had my parents with me, became reunited with our family. I have my family. I got my education, which I was-- wanted so much. And now all I want is good health. And I hope it will stay all well.

And I was-- I appreciate the opportunity for letting you the first one I told the story. Even my children didn't get-- if there's anything else I can tell you, or if any questions--

Well, is there anything that you think you would like to talk about that you haven't?

Sorry?

Is there anything you would like to talk about that you haven't ta--

I don't reme-- probably when I come home.

You may think--

Don't expe-- [CHUCKLING] [INAUDIBLE] the middle of the night, you know.

Well, let me ask you something. What have you told your children? Or is the testimony you're giving today really a gift to them as well?

It's [INAUDIBLE] them. They knew little bits. They knew like that I was in the partisans. And then when I start telling my daughter, so then I went to Moscow, she says, now wait a minute, she says, mom, you told me you were at that time in Poland, so how can you be Mo-- they couldn't piece things together.

And my youngest son, the one who lives in New Hampshire, he says he refused to read any books of somebody else's life story. He says, I want to read your story, your account, how you survived. So I found a note yesterday in the computer, on email. Good luck, mom. We wait to-- excuse me-- we wait impatiently to see it. But he was very firm, they wanted to have it for their children, for their grandchildren. And I feel I owe it to humanity too, to leave something behind. Not to take it for granted, everything that I have. This is it. So I'm still in relatively good health at 81. I hope to travel some more.

I hope so too.

I hope so too. [INAUDIBLE] I was-- be realistic, but I hope so. And I look forward to very many good occasions with the family, and all this, and yeah--

Well, I thank you for taking the time and being willing to do it. I know how difficult it can be.

Oh, yeah, but don't thank me. You have no idea what a mitzvah this was. You know what that means, right?

Yes, I do.

I have never sat down and fully-- you made me very comfortable, and very at ease. And it was hanging [? over me ?]. I wanted to do it, and then I would back up, and-- and I'm very grateful for you-- patience, and for your kindness, and for the-- [? everything. ?] If there's anything else that you want me to tell you, I don't know. Nothing else--

I can't think of anything right now.

I wore you out. How many hour-- how many hours did we talk?

We've been doing a number of hours.

Oh, really--

So I think we'll stop the tape, and we'll do your photographs.

Yes.

And Rosette, who's this on the left?

The woman on the left is my mother. It's a picture of her before the war, probably taken in Rovno. I'm not sure.

And the gentleman in the uniform?

The gentleman is my father. He was a Polish officer, and he served in the army. I'm not sure if it was-- what part, but-- cavalry-- I don't know. But anyhow, he was an officer in the Polish army.

And this photograph, the couple?

OK. The couple in this photograph are my parents, probably shortly after the engagement, or after the wedding.

And who's this on the left?

The person on the left is my father's stepsister, and she was feeding the ducks, something-- all the domestic animals which we had on our farm. Behind her is one wall of the mill where they were making flour.

And what was her name?

Her name was Feigel.

And what is this group?

This is a group of Jewish youth who used to come every summer, almost every summer, to spend on the farm to learn agriculture and farming in preparation of going to Palestine and work on a kibbutz.

And this photograph here?

The photograph here is of myself when I was in grade school. And we always had to wear a certain uniform. But the inscription on the back is very significant because my parents wrote the address of my uncle, Rozansky, who lived here in Washington, in case we separate, the family breaks apart, I should know that we have family in Washington, and alert them that I survived. It's--

And just say how long you carried this. You carried this--

I carried this picture just the beginning of the Nazi occupation, and I had it all until the war was over. This was my lifeline with the outside world should my parents perish.

The picture on the right.

The picture on the right is myself in a uniform, like a Russian school uniform, when I worked in Moscow on the-- I was attending the technicum.

How old are you here?

Over there, I must been about maybe 14 years, between 13 and a half, 14, somewhere like that.

And what about this shot here?

This shot in here, that's my parents and myself taken after the war in the city of Lodz.

And what is this here?

This is my passport issued in Poland, in Warsaw. This is my photo and my signature on the bottom. And on the left is the description when I was born, and in which city, Rovno, and my face, and the color of my eyes, and height, and the hair color, and physical characteristics, you should say.

And where could this picture have been taken?

OK, this picture was taken only one place, in Paris. And we lived in Paris for three years, and in the front of the Eiffel Tower. And very dear to me.

And what is this ship here?

Oh, this ship is the Queen Mary. It's the ship I came on from-- boarded in France and came to the United States.

And who's that on there?

And that's me descending the ramp on the Queen Mary, coming down of the ship finally to the promised land.

[CHUCKLES]

To coming-- and this is New York. That's where I arrived.

And Rosette, what is this?

OK. This is my mother's prayer book. It says in Hebrew letters, machzor, which means prayer book. My mother had this with her always during the-- in Poland, and she carried it with her during the Holocaust, wherever she was. She held it close to her heart. There are inscriptions there pertaining to the Holocaust, when it took place, and where, and some dates of some of the members of the family who perished. This is my father's handwriting. Here.

And this is your father?

My father's handwriting.

Writing on all of it.

Explaining.