

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Miriam Fridberg on October 6, 2015, in Lauderdale, Florida. Thank you very much, Mrs. Fridberg, for agreeing to speak with us today and to share your story with us. I'm going to start with very basic questions. And from there, I hope we'll be able to help make your testimony unfold. So the very first question is, can you tell me the date of your birth?

December 5, '25.

December 5, 1925? Can you tell me where you were born?

A city in Poland-- the city of Lodz, L-O-D-Z.

In Lodz, Poland?

Right. And what was your name at birth?

Oh, a big name, Dutkiewicz.

Dutkiewicz?

Yeah. You want me to spell it?

I'd like you to say your full name, your first name and then spell your last name. So you were Miriam as well?

Yeah.

Did you have a middle name?

Yes, Rachel.

Miriam Rachel Dutkiewicz. How do you spell?

D like in David-- D-U-T-K-I-E-W-I-C-Z.

And did you have brothers and sisters?

One sister.

And what was her name?

Ava.

Was she younger or older than you?

Younger.

She was younger. What year was she born?

I don't know.

You don't know? Was she three or five years younger than you?

I would say five, probably.

And what were the names of your mother and your father?

My mother was Rose, R-O-S-E. My father was Nathan, N-A-T-H-A-N.

And do you remember about when they were born, not specifically but the year or something like that?

I was a kid before the war.

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

So your father was Nathan. And remind me again of your mother's name? Rose?

Rose. But we didn't call him Nathan. We called him Nachum.

So how would you spell that?

N-- I don't know. I know Nathan.

Would it be N-A-C-H-U-M?

Could be.

Nachum, something like that?

Yeah.

And your mother's maiden name?

Goldman, G-O-L-D-M-A-N.

Were both of them from Lodz?

Yeah.

What about grandparents? Did you know your grandparents from either side?

I would say so slightly. I was a kid.

But they also were from Lodz? And did your mother have any brothers and sisters?

I don't know.

Your father?

Yes, he had brothers and sisters.

Did you know them--

Yes.

--as you were growing up?

Yeah, but I was still a kid. Not much-- yes, I knew he had brothers and sisters. I knew them slightly.

The reason I ask this is to find out the people who were part of your life before the war. And often people will say, we were a large family. We'd see each other all the time. We'd spend holidays together. And I'm trying to get a sense of whether your family was a small nuclear family or one that was larger that had lots of siblings and aunts and uncles and a larger clan.

Yes, it was a large clan. But I don't recall too much. What I went through after, and then I was young. I was a kid. So I don't recall too much about the family.

I see. The larger family? Yeah. Do you remember your home that you lived in before the war?

Yeah.

Can you tell me a little bit-- paint a picture for me of what it looked like? Can you tell me, was it in the center of town or in the--

Yes, the main center of town, the good part. Every city has low class or-- it was a high class part of the city.

Does that mean your parents were well-to-do?

I would say so.

Was it a home or an apartment?

No, a big house.

You had a house?

A big apartment house.

I see. It was a big apartment house, and your family apartment in it?

Yeah.

About how many stories high was it?

Five.

And on what floor did you live?

Third.

And does that mean, third in American or in European? European is where the first floor is our second floor.

I don't know that question.

It's too detailed.

Three flights up.

Yeah, it's too detailed. I'm sorry. Describe the apartment for me. Was it a large place? What do you remember from the apartment itself?

It was a large living room, larger than here. Two bedrooms, a kitchen-- that's about it.

Did you have Windows looking on to the street or onto a courtyard?

No, to a street.

Onto a street. Do you remember the address of this home?

Yeah.

What was it?

34 [NON-ENGLISH].

[NON-ENGLISH]? And does that mean boulevard or street?

Street. [NON-ENGLISH] Street. And you said it was a well-to-do neighborhood?

I would say so, yeah.

Was it also a Jewish neighborhood? Or was it mixed?

Mixed.

It was mixed?

Yeah.

About how many other apartments were in the building?

Maybe 50.

Oh, that's a lot.

Yeah. I come from a big city.

Did you know many of your neighbors?

Yes and no because-- I don't know what to say. I hate to say it. I know it's a little bit different. I belonged to an organization since I was 9 years old. But I was very well developed, so they were lying that you-- we had to be 13 to belong. They said that I'm 13.

So what organization was this?

Zionist Movement.

And were there other kids in your apartment building who belonged to it as well?

Yes, but I don't know why-- I hate to say it-- I never liked children from that. So I went to the organization there with different class children.

So most of your friends were part of the organization?

Yeah.

What was the name of the organization?

HaNoar Hatzioni.

HaNoar Hatzioni?

Yeah.

I'll ask you about that later. But right now, I'd like to find out a little bit more about how your father or how your family lived. So how did your father support the family?

Oh, we had that the dairy. The whole family was in dairy business. It was-- here, I don't know-- Deutsch, Deutsch-- dairy-- used to be New York stores. So we had all over the city and was a supply from the family to give to all the stores.

So the family-- if I understand this-- the family would be a supplier of dairy products?

Not a supplier-- supplied to our own stores.

Oh. So your father's family owned a number of different stores? Were they grocery stores?

No. It's very hard to say. Deutsch-- dairy-- they were dairy stores, not grocery.

So you would--

You had--

--only have--

--eggs, butter, cheeses, sardines imported from Norway-- boxes of sardines-- szprots, things like that.

So did the family own these dairy stores?

Yeah.

And it supplied its own products to the dairy stores?

To their own stores, to the family's stores.

Got it. Did it buy up, let's say, the milk from farmers in the area and then process it?

No, they had delivered. They didn't go to farm and buy. It was a big city.

No, I'm asking about the business that your family had. Did you also pasteurize the products?

No. Ready made-- was bought from I don't know where. I was a kid.

Did you ever visit in any of the stores? Did you ever go to any of the stores that your family owned?

Yeah, I knew all the stores and different places. If I've got to give you the addresses, doesn't mean anything.

No. It's just I'm trying to get a sense of the size and the activity, whether most of the profit was made from selling dairy goods or supplying dairy goods.

Both.

I see. And what was your father's role in this?

There were a few brothers. I don't remember how many. And they were partners.

And he was one of the brothers? Had it been a business started by former generations of the family?

I think by his parents.

And did your mother help him in this business?

No. Did she take care then of the household? Was that her job?

Yeah.

Did she have any help in taking care of you and your sister?

Part time.

Part time, so most of the time she did it by herself?

Yeah.

Can you tell me a little bit about the personalities of your parents? What kind of person was your mother? What kind of a person was your father?

Very hard to say for me that-- I don't know.

Was your father a quiet person, a strict person, or was he very open and extroverted?

Medium.

Was he somewhat easy for you to talk to?

Yeah. I talked more to my mother. And then I was a very busy girl because I was always making money for charity and very busy. Went to school, came home, did my homework, and then we had some little books to sell for poor people, and I was always the one, and always written up in the [? gold ?] books that I collected the most money. So I was always busy.

So you were very active?

I'm still that way.

[LAUGHS].

I just finished my organization here.

Always active in some sort of voluntary way?

Yes, because I was not a girl-- I don't know here-- they were playing in the street. They had dolls. That was not me.

Were you more serious than they?

Yeah. I never had a doll. I looked at them, say crazy.

Really?

Mm-hmm.

Did you have other types of toys?

Not really because I was busy with so many different things that I didn't have time for toys. I don't recall any toys. Maybe when I were much younger, but I don't recall.

OK.

My little sister, she was a completely different girl.

Was she?

Yeah.

In what way was she different?

Let's say she was playing with toys, things like that, and she was skinny, and I was heavy.

Tell me a little bit about your mother's personality.

My mother looked completely different than me. I looked like my father's family. She was a very pretty woman. She was very dark, black hair-- dark. And I don't know much.

But did she tell you stories? Was she the one that put you to bed at night? Was she somebody that you said you could talk to more?

I don't remember it. I don't. You're asking me for a story from a thousand years. What I went through my life, is more than thousand years.

We'll come to these things. What are some of your very earliest memories, about no matter what, whether when you're very small-- what are some of the first things that you remember that happened in your life?

What I remember is to sneak to an organization nobody should know how old I am because I was too young and going around with books, selling tickets for poor people. And then people start asking, do you know for what it is? And I had to tell the whole story. And otherwise they wouldn't give me the few cents, like \$0.25, \$0.50, and from that amount, I collected a lot of money for the poor people. It's like now for the Haitian people, our organization collected a lot of money. The organization is dissolved as of last year. So this is more my work, my job, than to play. I never had a doll-- to play with the doll or something.

Did your parents know that you were doing all this kind of--

Of course. They were proud of me that I'm doing that. They knew that I didn't like dolls and I didn't like this.

That you were more serious?

Yeah.

What kind of school did you go to?

Public school. And I was registered to go to gymnasium You know what was gymnasium? But then the war broke out.

So how many years of public school did you go to?

Seven.

And was this a school that was close to you in your area?

It was about a 20-minute walk.

So you didn't have to take a trolley or something to get there?

No.

You'd walk?

We were meeting a few children every morning. We were holding the things on our shoulders. And then it was quiet. There was a time that it was very difficult for the Jews.

Before the war?

Of course through the war, that's a different story. And I was very disappointed because the Catholic children went Sunday to church. And they were taught to hit Jews-- if they find Jews in the street, to them.

Did that happen to you?

I never walked Sunday because I knew they're going to hit me. So once I came home, and I cried. And I said to my mother, I was walking-- they hit me once-- I was walking quietly. I didn't say even boo, and they were hitting me. I said, why?

And what did she say?

Beg pardon?

What did she say?

I'll tell you. My mother said, don't you know, you're a Jewish child?

I said, but I didn't say nothing. I couldn't comprehend. She said, [? honey, ?] that's what it is. Then when I got older, I realized that Poland was very bad for Jews.

Let's go with your experience in the school. Were there are many Polish children in the--

No.

--schools?

There were separate schools for Jewish children and for Polish children. We did not go with Polish children to school.

Oh, I see. So you didn't know any Polish children?

I knew Polish children. I lived in a big building. There were Polish children. We knew them. And we would play together. [INAUDIBLE] we lived together. They didn't hit us.

The ones who were your neighbors were different from the strangers?



I don't know if they were different or not. But they knew me since I was born. They wouldn't hit me. But once I came home, because I was hit, I talked to my mother, why? I didn't say a boo. I was there. I was standing in line half a night for a piece of bread. It was so cold. Poland has a very cold climate in winter. So I said, I was staying. And they came to my next to get the piece of bread. They threw me by the hair, and they pulled me out. I said, why? So my mother explained to me that I'm Jewish. They recognized the way I look, That I'm Jewish.

It must have been very hard to come to that realization. Tell me about Lodz as a city.

The city?

Yeah.

Well it's the biggest industrial city of Poland. It was a very big city. And we have gymnasiums. Do you know what gymnasium is?

Tell me.

High school-- not high school, high education. And seven grades were compulsory from the government. And then if you go to gymnasium, you had to pay.

Oh, I see, tuition?

Yeah.

But that was not only the Jewish people. Everybody who went for higher education had to pay.

Got it. So the school that you went to was a public school, but it was for Jewish kids only?

Right.

Did you have religion classes in that school?

Yes, I think once a week.

Was your family very religious?

No.

Did you go to synagogue much or only on holidays, or even not then?

My father, but not my mother.

What language did your parents speak at home?

Jewish.

So Yiddish? Did they also know Polish?

Yeah.

And what about you, did you know both languages?

Yeah.

Which one were you taught in school?

Polish.

So the lessons were all in Polish?

Everything Polish.

And when you were with your friends in the youth organization?

Polish.

Did you have-- so you said that sometimes the kids in your neighborhood knew you-- those who weren't Jewish-- and so they didn't pick on you?

No.

Did you have much interaction with them, with non-Jewish families or non-Jewish children? Or was it like two separate worlds?

No, not to two separate worlds. We had a big building with a big backyard. And so we were talking to each other. When we're young, we were playing. But later on, when we were there-- I was not a playing child--

You told me that.

--because I was always with business.

Tell me, when you were walking around and collecting money for poor people, you must have gotten to know many people in the community-- been exposed to many people in the community. Did you become well known?

Yes.

So in what way would that have shown itself?

Beg pardon?

In what way did you become well known? Did everybody in the Jewish community then, in your neighborhood, know you?

It's not what is Jewish community. We had a mixed community.

But when you were collecting money for the poor, was that from everybody, Jews and Poles alike? Or was that--

No. For Polish people, I wouldn't go because it was for Israel. Why should I go to Polish people for Israel?

Got it. And so the money, when it would be collected, it would be sent to Israel for poor people in Israel?

Yeah.

Lately it was a disaster in Haiti. We send money to Haiti. So it's not strictly Jewish.

I understand. But that's today, you're talking about. I'm trying to get a sense from [CROSS TALK]

It's not today. Today I do nothing.

By today, I mean this is recently in the United States. What I meant is that when you were in Poland as a child and as a young person, you got to be better known within your Jewish community because of your activities?

I would say so. Beside that we had big organizations for Jewish kids. And a Jewish child who went to an organization was more aware of world affairs because we had meetings once a week. And the leader was always-- how do you say matura-- high educated. And they taught us different things.

Such as?

About the world affairs.

So did they talk much about Hitler?

When Hitler came to power, everything dropped dead.

In Germany, you mean?

I heard you, no, up by us, we didn't have any more meetings. We didn't have anything. They took away the parents there and here, there. Life was completely different. My mother died from hunger. Did I tell you?

No, we haven't come to that yet. But I wanted to ask, when Hitler came to power, it was in 1933 in Germany. And Poland was not yet occupied. So my question--

In '39.

Yeah, so in those six years, when Hitler was in power in Germany, did people in your youth organization who talked to you about world affairs, did they mention him at all? Did they talk about what was going on in Germany?

I cannot tell you. It's so many years, and I was so young. I don't recall it.

What about at home?

No. We said we don't know what's waiting for us because we heard from the newspapers, from the radio-- there were no televisions yet. So we say, who knows what's waiting for us?

And this is before the war starts? The war starts on September 1st, 1939. Do you remember where you were when the war started? Do you remember the first days?

Yes, I remember we were in our apartment where we lived before. Then we were chased out to a ghetto.

I understand.

So at that time, you said the war started, there were sirens to go to the bunks. That's all I remember. That's about it. I don't remember.

And tell me, when did you first see German soldiers in the streets?

I can't remember.

Was it soon after that?

Of course. They right away marched. And we had windows going out on front, and they were marching and they're

singing German songs and this, and we said, oh, it's coming.

Did your parents have any plans for what to do? Or they said, well, there's nothing we can do. They waited?

There's nothing they're able to do. Where would we run? Where, to the ocean?

What happened to your father's business?

We had to leave everything. They chased us to a ghetto. Do you know what is a ghetto?

Tell me. What is a ghetto?

A ghetto is a part of the city separated-- the different part-- low, the dilapidated. They chased us all out of our apartments. And they gave to the German population the nice apartments from the Jews. And we were sent over there. And over there three or four families in one little room, they put us.

How soon after the war started did this happened?

Very soon.

Very soon? The same year, maybe?

I would say so.

And Lodz famous for its ghetto.

Lodz ghetto, I think, was the biggest-- Warsaw and Lodz were the biggest ghettos.

And so you went from your comfortable apartment in the center of town to--

I think we had three families in two little rooms.

Was there inside plumbing in the ghetto?

No. The water was running, I think. I don't remember. We had to go downstairs.

What about facilities, like toilet facilities, bathroom facilities, were there any?

Outside because this was the cheapest part of the city. So they didn't have that. Where we lived, [INAUDIBLE] we did.

You had indoor plumbing, and you had-- was there electricity?

Oh, sure, electricity. I don't remember when we didn't have [INAUDIBLE]. All the time, electricity.

Even in the ghetto?

Yeah.

When you got to the ghetto, what happened with your parents and with you and your sister? Did anybody have to go to work or something? What happened?

Yes, we had to go to work. Otherwise we wouldn't get a piece of bread. Whoever worked got a little piece of bread. If you didn't work, you didn't get bread. You died.

Where did your father go to work? What was he doing?

I don't know. They sent him away very early to work. I don't know where, what-- I don't know.

Did he come back?

No.

So he was sent away from the family fairly early on? And then it was just your mother and your sister and yourself?

My mother died soon after from starvation. She was 38 years old. She put my hand here. And on my hand, she died. And she said to me, my dear child, I hope one day you'll have enough bread to satisfy your hunger. She closed her eyes. And she died. At that time, at 38, I thought she's an old person. Then when I got older, I realized that she was very young.

How old were you when this happened?

I don't remember exactly.

Do you remember the year she died? Do you remember back how long you had been in the ghetto?

At that time when she died?

Mm-hmm.

No.

But it must have been a while?

Not too long. My father, I don't know what happened.

Did you also have to go to work in order to get some food?

Of course.

What were you doing? What was the job that you did?

I was sewing hooks in the collar of the Germans' coats. Each coat was 100 pounds.

Heavy?

Yeah. Everybody had to work. Kids had to work.

Your sister as well?

Yeah.

What did she do?

She was working in a straw resort. She was making something from straw.

We're going to repeat this because there had been some background noise. I was asking about the work that you did, the work that other members of your family did, so you said everybody had to work, is that correct?

Yeah.

What did you do? What was the work you had to do?

They were wearing-- the Germans-- the army-- long heavy coats. So these coats, I was supposed to put a hook and close the neck [INAUDIBLE].

And your sister, what was her job?

She was making from straw-- they made shoes.

They may shoes from straw?

Yeah. So she was making from straw, certain things.

And what about your mother? What was her job?

My mother died in my hands.

So she hardly had an opportunity?

I don't remember.

And once you would work, did you have to fill a certain quota?

It had to be a certain amount finished. They were counting at the end of the day.

Was it Germans who were counting?

No.

Who would be counting?

They were Jewish people who overlooked everything.

Does the name Rumkowski mean anything to you?

Of course.

Tell me, who was Rumkowski?

You want to see if I know what I'm talking?

No, I want to know how he figured--

I tell you one thing. Rumkowski was the leader, supposedly, that he had an orphanage children. Before the war, he was the leader over there. And when they move him to ghetto, they made him a leader of the ghetto. I don't know too much. I remember he was an older gentleman with white hair.

So you saw him?

We saw him. And he was riding in a kareta, I mean, [INADIBLE] this. He had a guide what took him around all over the ghetto. He was the leader from the ghetto.

He was the Jewish leader of the ghetto?

Yeah. And then there were Germans above him.

What did people say about Rumkowski?

Let me put it this way. The people were hungry. People were starving. They wouldn't talk good about anybody. So he's the leader that-- so maybe he couldn't help it that we didn't have food. But after all, he was a leader, so they blamed him. But I don't know. I was too young. I was a kid. So I don't know too much.

So when your mother died, your father had already been gone. It just meant you and your sister were left? What happened to you then once there's just the two of you? And you're still a teenager yourself. You're not an adult.

When, [? why ?] adult? We were living, me and my sister, and then they put another family to our apartment because I didn't have the parents anymore because our apartment was too big for just the two people. And she went to work, the kid-- my little sister. She was making from straw different things, whatever they supposed to. And I worked, as I said, I sewed hooks on the coats.

So you continued doing the same work that you had before?

Yeah.

How did you-- did you bury your mother?

No, she was laying on the floor. And they came to pick her up. I don't know where she was buried. Later, after the war, I went to the cemetery. And there was a little sign that she was there.

Oh so, was it by name? Her name was there?

Yeah. It was a Jewish cemetery at the end of the city.

I see.

And my father, I don't know.

So when they took your mother-- who took her? What kind of people came to take away her body?

I don't know.

Were more people dying of hunger in this apartment, in this place?

In this apartment? No, there was no more people were living there. But I want to tell you one thing. It was a horror. I had beautiful long hair. At that time everybody wore braids. And my mother washed my hair. I couldn't wash my hair myself. And I went to sleep. And my hair was frozen to the wall. It was so cold. And it was wet. It was frozen to the wall. In the morning, I couldn't get up. My mother had to take a scissor, cut my hair, I could be able to get out of bed. My hair and the wall till summer-- till the snow my hair.

Oh my goodness.

And I tell you my story. And certain things you don't even comprehend that that could be true, that people did that. They went home, played with their children, and now all day they were killing children. I don't know how in the world.

Were there many Germans that you saw while you were in the ghetto?

I don't know. They were policing the ghetto.

When you first moved to the ghetto, you said people were living like several families together in one room. But your parents, did you have your own separate room-- your family when you moved there, or were you sharing it from the beginning with somebody?

I was sharing at the beginning. They sent in another family.

Did you get to know the second family?

I don't recall anymore. I was a kid. And they were grown up.

So after your mother dies, you continue working with your sister in the--

I took care of my sister.

You said there were about five years difference between you?

Yeah. But her thinking capacity was like 20 years different. She was a frightened little skinny child. And I was pretty well developed for my tragic life. And then was a selection, and they took her away to the chimney.

In the ghetto? There was a selection in the ghetto? Tell me about that.

They were constantly-- they put us outside. And the Germans one right, one left, one left, on right-- and they took them away. And she ran back to me, and they said to her, go back because you're going to see your sister tonight. You will go to school. Your sister will go to work. I never saw her again. Baloney talk.

What did you say?

Baloney talk.

Baloney talk. I don't want to say bullshit.

And so then it was just you by yourself.

Yes.

How long did you live in the ghetto?

Till 1944.

So almost five years?

Yeah.

That's a long time.

You better believe it.

There's a lot you must have seen when you were in there.

The winters were so severe, everything went against us, even the weather, even Mother Nature. We were so cold, didn't have much clothes to wear-- nothing. Nothing to warm up our place.



And what kind of food were you given after you finished work?

We got this little soup in the factory. And then we got a quarter of a bread for a week. But most people ate up the bread the first day. And six days, they would die from hunger. I was the one watch-- I watched my bread-- my sister's-- not to eat up at once. We were dividing it in pieces, so it lasted a little longer.

You must have always been hungry.

Hungry, cold, frightened-- what else? Is that believable, you're looking at a person what went through such torture?

And survived it.

To tell my story. I used to go to schools. They sent me from board of education to different places. I went to Tallahassee. I spoke at a session in Tallahassee. I hope it will never happen again.

Of course.

But you never know today.

Let's go back to the time when-- do you remember about when they took your sister? Was it early on? Or was it later on?

What did you say, the first one?

When did they take your sister? When did they select your sister, and you lost her? Do you remember the year?

No. I will answer you on that. I don't think we knew the year. We were living there. It's mind boggling that I'm still here talking to you about it.

What did the place-- when you were in this ghetto, did you stay in that one place all the time, all those five years?

The ghetto? Yeah.

What did that place look like? Paint a picture for me.

It was a different part of the city. It was the poor section. Before the war, I was never there.

What did the building look like?

Maybe building here-- a small building. One flight up.

Was it brick, or was it stone? Or was it made out of--

I think brick.

It was out of brick?

I think so.

Do you remember what the rooms were or anything and the landscape? How far did you have to go to go to work?

No, I didn't live too far from work. They made the big factory from a hospital. It was the biggest hospital of the city. And they converted this hospital to a factory. And that's where I was working. It was not too far. Some people had to work very far to walk. No, I didn't have too far to walk.

And did you have anybody-- after you lost your mother and your sister, did you make friends with anybody else in the ghetto?

When did I have time for friends? And when did I have the patience for friends? I had a child to take care of. I was a child myself. And I had to take care of a child.

Was there anybody you became close to after you lost her? Or were you completely by yourself?

Because you have to understand the life what we had. You had a friend. Where did you go with a friend? Didn't have money what to go to a restaurant, like here, what? Nothing. It's very hard to comprehend for somebody, the life what we had to answer you that question.

I was just wondering if there's anyone else who became close to? No. That's tough. That's very tough.

Right after the war-- it's a different story. Right after the war, I met the family. They met my uncle. And they call that my uncle's alive, and he is a leader for the survivalists in Germany. I was liberated in Italy.

You were in Italy when you were liberated?

Yup.

Oh, talk about that then.

The best people in the world. I don't know. Are you Italian?

No.

It doesn't matter what, but that's the truth.

So you're in the Lodz ghetto until 1944. What happened then?

In 1944, they liquidated the whole ghetto. They sent everybody out to different places.

And where were you sent?

Probably to Auschwitz. I don't know.

You don't remember?

In '44, the war finished.

No, '45 is when it finished.

'45?

Yeah. And they liquidated the ghetto. Do you remember, was it springtime, or was it summer?

I'm sorry. I just don't want to say something which is not-- which I don't know.

After you leave the Lodz ghetto, what's your next memory?

Auschwitz.

So you were in Auschwitz?

Of course, yeah. My number.

What's your number, do you remember it?

Yeah, of course.

What is it?

27753 A-- start with the A.

27753?

A27753 Here.

We'll film that later if we can, if you don't mind.

No. [INAUDIBLE].

How long were you in Auschwitz?

I think they liquidated Auschwitz because I think they realized they're approaching, and they didn't want to leave Auschwitz the way it is. I don't remember the year.

It's OK. I'm asking in general terms. When you go to Auschwitz, what happened? What do you remember from being there?

What I remember, were were standing in a line. They took off every piece of clothing from us. I was standing nude, freezing, and then they gave me a little shirt to wear. Then they put us to barracks. I was in the top-- three levels-- I was there in the the top level--

Of the bunk.

Of the bunk. And then the pieces like this opened on top. And winter time, it blew like hell. It was a very cold climate, Auschwitz.

So in other words, you lay on the top bunk, and above you, the wooden slats had these openings that let in the cold air?

Yeah. It was so cold over there. In Auschwitz, it was very cold climate. It was so cold, had nothing to wear-- the boobies were out, so nothing to wear. Hungry-- I don't know how I am still here. It's the biggest puzzle in the world.

Did they send you to work in Auschwitz?

In Auschwitz, they don't send to work. Till I came to Auschwitz, they did. We worked, and we made masks for the army.

What kind of things you made, mats? Oh, masks for the face?

For the face, for the army. Against gas or whatever that is. So this is what we did.

In the ghetto?

I don't know what the ghetto or not. No, not the ghetto. The ghetto, I was in a sewing factory.

Just for the coats? OK.

Yeah.

So for the masks, was that in Auschwitz?

I don't remember.

It's OK. But you do remember the cold. You do remember not anything to wear.

It was Auschwitz. And I was in the top because I was tall. I could climb up on the-- what do you call the [INAUDIBLE]?

The ladder.

On the ladder. And I was sleeping there. There were one, two, three layers of people laying.

And how many people would fit in that one bunk next to you?

On the one bed, you mean the top bed?

Yeah.

Four or five. If one turned, everybody had to turn. It was so tight next to each other. Let's say if I turned, everybody had to turn. And if I came back turning, everybody had to turn because they were so tight, the people. In one way it was good because it was warm body from the other. But second it was so tight, that we couldn't turn.

And this lasted until 1945, yes?

1945 in April I was liberated from the Russians.

By the Russians?

Yeah.

Do you remember when that happened, the specific days and what you saw and things like that?

No. They just came in, the Russians, and we knew there is something going on because the German commander was so nice talking to us. We knew something was going on. So then they left. They ran away-- the Germans. And the Russians came in. The Russians came in, it was awful for us too.

Tell me about it.

They molested most of the girls. And they didn't have what to eat, so we didn't have to eat. They didn't have.

Did anybody touch you?

No, thank God.

But others did?

Yes. Let's say there was a pump like this to turn for water. Whoever went for water, never came back alive. They killed the girls right away, the Russians. I hate to say it, but it was.

When was the first time that you felt safe? There was a train leaving for Milan because there were Italian people too. So I smuggled on that train with another friend from my city-- a girlfriend. And we came to Milan.

As if you were going home-- as if you were going back to where you come from?

No. I knew I had no home. I have no property where to go. But figure at least go away from the Russians now. We ran away from the Germans. Now I have the Russians. In Milan, the Italian people I consider the best people in the world.

So what experience did you have when you got to Milan? Tell me about the train too. Was it cattle cars? Was it a passenger train?

No. I smuggled on a regular train with another girlfriend, who we survived together.

Did you have different clothes, or were you still wearing the clothes you had in Auschwitz?

I didn't have no clothes. Who gave me clothes? Whatever I wore, I wear that.

So it was in your prisoners uniforms?

No, I don't think so because I would come on a train. But prisoners in the blue stripes, and no, I don't think so. I don't know what.

And when you got to Milan, what happened there?

I came with a boyfriend from Milan, which I met him right after the war. And he was a very nice gentleman-- blond, blue eyes, and [INAUDIBLE]. And he took me to his parents. And he wanted to marry me.

Was he also a former prisoner?

He was a prisoner of the war from Mussolini. He was fighting against Mussolini.

He was a partisan maybe.

I don't know what he was. He was a young man, maybe 22, like that.

Was he also in Auschwitz?

I don't think so. No, he wouldn't have to be in Auschwitz. He was Italian. I don't know. They were fighting against Mussolini. I don't know where, what-- I don't know too much about it.

Where did you meet him?

I met him because that time, by the Russians yet. They had a camp not far from our camp. But we were the girls only, and they were Italian men-- prisoners of war. They were prisoners of war. They fought against Mussolini. And then I went to Milan. And I was supposed to marry him. At the last minute, something happened. I don't know. And I ran away from Milan. I smuggled on a train with another girlfriend. And we came to Rome.

In Rome, we found already an organization which helped survivors. We didn't have a penny. We didn't have what to eat, not what to wear, and they took care of us. They give us a place where to sleep in a hospital. I was sleeping in the hospital operating room-- the operating lamp-- because that's the only place they had to give where to sleep. So me and my friend slept in the operating room.

How long did this last?

A while. And then we went with a Jewish organization which helped us. I really don't know.

Do you remember its name, the organization? No?

If I remember anything, it's a miracle, right?

In some ways, yeah, you're right. But nevertheless you've remembered a lot.

So two miracles, my age now and general that I remember it.

How old are you?

Me?

Yeah.

I'm 89.

Wow. You're doing quite well, let me tell you. Let me ask then about-- did you meet Italian people, who when you say they were wonderful to you--

Yes. Let's say I give an example. Of course, now I speak Italian-- I spoke very well Italian-- but through the years, I lost it. I had an address where to go. I didn't speak Italian. And the Italian person write the address. He couldn't explain me-- and I couldn't understand him-- took me where I supposed to go, and then went back where he's supposed to go. There's no nationality would do that, only Italian. I love the Italian people. I don't care for Polish people. The Polish people were not nice.

Did you have experiences of that?

Not me directly. I don't understand that they're going home Sunday from the church, they were taught to hit Jews. Then once I was just standing in line for a piece of bread. I was the daughter, and I had my younger sister. I was already almost next to the line to get the piece of bread. They pulled me out with my hair. I said, Mom-- I came home crying-- I was standing so quiet. I didn't say a boo. Why did they do that? Then my mother said, they recognized you were a Jewish child. So they did that.

And you never had-- you experienced that in Poland, but not in Italy, that sort of thing?

No, Italy. I love Italy more than anybody-- than anybody in any country, any nationality.

Tell me, how long did you stay there in Italy?

In Italy? Till I got the visa to come to America, maybe a year and a half or so.

So you were in Italy until 1946 or '47--

Yeah.

--something like that? And did you come to America from Rome?

Yeah. I did what I could to the Italian people. Like they would be-- we called each other sisters. I love it so much. I'm ashamed to tell how much I love it. I mean it, because you know what? People might think I'm a phony. If I got to tell them, they don't know my past. They don't know my life what I feel. If I go to tell them, I really like you so much, they will think, look at that. What is she talking? I have to be double careful.

Is that what the war taught you?

Who?

Is that what your experiences taught you?

I don't if that's what experience taught me, but myself because put yourself in my position. If I were to come to you and say, oh I love you so much. And you're so nice and Italian sister, you might think I'm a phony. What is she talking? What is she telling? So I could tell myself-- I would kiss every Italian person. But I am careful how I behave.

So that they don't understand you in the wrong way?

That's exactly. Very few people probably would understand me. But if I see that they understand me, I cling to them because I have no family-- nobody.

Tell me a bit about your life after you came to the United States. Where did you go? What did you do? What happened?

I have an uncle in Israel. I am the only living relative what remain. At one point, he wanted me to come and adopt me as his daughter. Then it became very bad in Israel. And he said, my dear child, I don't want you to come. You've suffered enough hunger in life. It's so bad now in Israel. I don't remember the years. I'm going to see what I can do. And he knew people from his home town-- whatever it is-- in America. And he wrote to them that I'm the only person from 150 people in my life, that he would like to have me there in Israel, but Israel is so bad. And I starved enough of my life, they should bring me here.

And they brought me here. They were very nice. The people were well-to-do. And then I had a boyfriend over in Italy. My husband was my boyfriend.

The one you married eventually?

Sure. I had my son with him. He died.

And his name was Mr. Fridman?

Yes. What was his first name?

Abi.

Abi, OK. And where did you meet him in Italy, in Rome?

Yes. But we come from the same city, but we didn't know each other because I come from a very big city.

Yeah, Lodz is a big city, yes. Did you come to the States together?

No. I came to the States first. And then I brought him. And then we got married. [CROSS TALK] I have one son.

What year did you get married?

In [? 1949, ?] I think.

1949?

I think so. I take it Mr. Abi Fridman was also a survivor?

From the same city.

From the same city. Was he also in the Lodz ghetto and everything?

Yeah. And when was your son born?

My son is 64.

He's 64 years old?

Yeah.

So that means he would have been born like 1950, 1951--

Yeah.

--something like that.

In New York.

And how did you make your living in New York?

When my husband came, he had a very good trade. And he got a good position.

What was his trade?

He was a foreman in a big factory. He was a very unusual nice person. And he died-- he was 52.

Very young. What year was this that he died?

I don't remember the years anymore. He was young.

So does this mean you brought up your son pretty much by yourself?

No. My son was already an adult. And my son is a very fine young man-- married. He's a very--

Good brain?

Smart. He's a good business man.

Have you ever been back to Italy?

Yes, I was once back to Italy on the way to Israel because I was never before in Israel. And I promised myself the first money what you're going to have, you go.

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

And my son was born in Lebanon Hospital in the Bronx. We were married in New York. I brought my husband from Italy. And we got married.

Did you ever go back to Lodz?

Lodz?



Yeah.

No. To Italy, I went back. I love Italy. I love the people. They are the best people for me.

What would you want people to understand from the experiences that you had? What would you want them to know? How should they read this? How should they understand what you went through?

Unfortunately, I was born in the wrong time in the wrong place, geography. I went through torture in my life. I was very young when my mother died in my hands from starvation. I was left with a little girl, as I said before. She clinged to me with life. But one day was a selection, and they took her to the chimney. Watch out for anti-Semites. Watch out what people could do to other people for no good reason, just for their nationality.

That's a hard lesson-- very hard experience.

Yes. Through the years, I was going to different schools. And I told them. They should see. They should know what people could do to other people. They should watch out and never listen to other people.

Is this still with you every single day?

I would say many times during the night I wake up. And I look around, where am I? But that will be for the rest of my life. I don't expect anything different. I try very hard to help other people. And I was going to different schools.

To tell children about these things?

To tell children and teachers what happened, to watch out, not to hurt people, for anti-Semites. What was my criteria? That I was born by Jew-- [AUDIO OUT]

So when you go to schools-- I'm sorry for the interruption here-- when you go to schools, you talk to people about the dangers of anti-Semitism?

Right. Not to hurt other people because if you cut my hand, it will hurt me just the same as anybody else.

Of course it will.

And the blood will run just the same.

I thank you today, Mrs. Miriam, for sharing your story with us.

And I will say I thank you for doing that to bring it to the world, that people should hear, and children when they grow up, they should hear never to hurt another person. Only if somebody did something wrong to you, is a different story, but not the way I lived with my life by losing my whole family. And I thank you very much for spending time with me.

It's been an honor.

Thank you.

Thank you.

I don't know how much to say thank you.

That's OK. With this I will end the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Miriam Dutkiewicz Fridberg on October--

Fridman.

Fridman, excuse me-- Miriam Dutkiewicz Fridman, on October 6, 2015, in Lauderdale, Florida. Thanks again.

And thank you for coming spending that time. And I feel it's very important that the young people should know what happened to us for no reason--

I agree.

--just because of my religion. And thank you very much, you young men and beautiful lady.

Thank you so much.

One second.

Miriam, tell me about the number on your arm.

This number was giving me in Auschwitz. I was standing in line, almost nude in the frost. My number is A27753. I repeat, A27753.