

OK, OK. So aside from reading a lot, was there other-- were there other things that you could do during this time? Did you have tasks? Did you help your mother at all?

My mother?

Mm-hmm.

No.

So who did the cooking and the cleaning and all of that?

My sister did most of it.

OK.

Yeah.

OK. So, yes--

If my mother wasn't there, my sister did things. She called me-- I was lazy all the time.

You were still a kid.

[CHUCKLES]

So are there any other experiences that come to mind about the occupation, the behavior, let's say, of German soldiers or of neighbors, the Polish neighbors, or anybody else during this time when you're all--

They--

--by yourselves?

When the Germans first came, some of them came to visit us. My father was still there. As I said, we always spoke German. My mother [CHUCKLES] never learned to speak Polish. We always spoke German. And when we went to-- there was a beach where people went to go swimming and so on. It wasn't a real beach, but that's the place where-- and if we spoke German and there happened to be some soldiers or some German there, they would come over and talk to us. Yeah, we had a few German soldiers who came to visit us, even when my father was still with us, and afterwards, too, when he wasn't with us anymore.

Mm-hmm.

But only the people that were not Nazis, you know--

Yeah.

--that didn't hate the Jews, right?

And was there a possibility for your mother and for you all to go back to Germany?

At that time?

Mm-hmm.

I don't think so.

OK.

Not at that time.

Did life change after Germany started losing the war for you, for you, your mother, your brother, your sister?

Goodness. There were so many different things going on that I would have to really sit down and think what-- because there's so many different things that were going on during a certain time.

Well, food might get worse. There may be less of it.

No.

You could see more--

We didn't think that much about food.

OK. So that meant--

We were never starving. We were never starving, let's put it that way.

That's huge. That's huge.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah.

There was always the big, dark, dark bread, which I'm always longing for [CHUCKLES] that we--

So you always had some? You always had some.

We always had something to eat, never that we were really starving.

OK. That's a big thing.

That's a big thing.

A big thing.

Right.

Did you end up seeing more soldiers coming back on trains, that is, more wounded soldiers coming through?

No, we never saw wounded soldiers, no.

You never saw that?

We weren't near any kind of train station where we used to live.

Was there a curfew?

A what?

Was there a curfew, a certain time--

Oh, yes.

Yeah?

Oh yes, yeah, yeah.

Every day?

I think so.

OK, OK.

Yeah.

Did you ever-- I already asked you whether or not you ever saw someone being killed again.

No.

But did you ever see any acts of violence after that?

I don't think so.

OK. Did you know that the war was ending? As the years went on and the months went-- the months and the years went on, did you have an idea that this is coming to an end and Germany is not going to win?

Sorry.

That's OK.

[CHUCKLES] Don't give me anything in my hand.

Yeah.

I [CHUCKLES] will move it. Yeah. No.

See, by the time you were 14 and 15, you're no longer a child, you know?

Right.

You're already in the middle of the teenage years, and I'm wondering how that 15-year-old girl experienced living in Ostrowiec.

I was in love with someone.

Were you?

Yeah.

Who were you in love with?

A Polish boy.

Really?

A Polish man, I should say. He was seven years older than I was. Yeah.

How did you meet him?

Well, at that time, all Jewish people were already gone, you know, weren't around anymore. And Else had friends that were more her age. And I saw this young man when we went swimming. And he jumped-- there was a-- not a tower, but street or something above where you could drop down. And I saw him there, and I kind of liked him. And Else's friend-- I don't know how it came. We talked about it, and I told her about this guy. And she said, oh, he's a relative of mine. I know him. So she introduced me to him.

What was his name?

Andrzje.

Andrzje.

Yeah.

And do you remember his last name?

Manowski.

Manowski.

Andrzje Manowski. Yeah. I never knew his parents. I never saw his parents. He never came to my house. I never went to his house. I only saw-- he had two brothers, one older and one younger, and they were both ugly, and he was handsome. That's-- [CHUCKLES] he didn't look like his brothers at all, anyhow. So what did you want to know next?

Well, I was wondering what was going through the mind of a 15-year-old, and you told me, at the time.

[CHUCKLES]

Yeah.

Oh, yeah.

Did it last long?

Until he went to the partisans. You know, Polish young men went to the partisans to fight the Germans, to train, to all kinds of things, they did. And, oh, I should say at one time, my mother, I think, had gone to Germany and sent some things over to Poland. And the partisans attacked the train and all things-- they took everything out and so on. And after a short time, we got information-- my mother got information that she should come and pick up things, her things. So somehow, some of the partisans realized that we're-- our stuff is there, on there, and they took it off and gave us information to pick it up.

That's interesting.

Yeah, very interesting.

Interesting.

So everybody knew us. All the Polish people that were in charge, they all knew about us. And when they saw the name on there, they knew to let my mother know.

And what about Andrzej, when he went to join the partisans?

I never saw him anymore.

Do you know if he lived or died?

No. I don't know if he ever survived it all, the war, or not.

Uh-huh.

I always think of that, and it's my fault that he went at that time.

Why is it your fault that he went?

Because I was too childish to accept being loved by someone. [CHUCKLES]

Oh.

Yeah. I was very much in love with him, but when he told me-- we always went for walks. We never made arrangements that were going to meet someplace, but whenever he walked that way and I walked that way, he just-- we got together and walked together. And at one time-- somehow, sometimes, he spoke also a little German, and I called him "you're crazy" in German, [GERMAN]. I don't know what we were talking about. And he said, [GERMAN].

Aw, he said, "I'm not crazy. I'm in love."

"I'm in love." So I made fun of it. I made such fun of it. And I said, who would you be in love with, da, da, da. And so I couldn't handle it. And he said, aren't you in love? And I made fun of it. Who would I be in love? Who, da, da, da? And I never saw him again. That's it.

Oh, no.

That's when he went to the partisans, and I never saw him again.

And you think this is your fault?

Yes. Maybe eventually he would have gone, but I would have had the chance to hear. Maybe he would let me hear from someone else. But when I acted like that--

That's a huge burden to carry. That's a huge burden.

But he was seven years older. He should have known I-- you know, that I loved him, but somehow, some way, you know?

Oh, we're not mind readers.

No.

We're not mind readers.

No. Ay-yi-yi. So I never knew if he survived the war or not.

Now, was he antisemitic?

No, no. He was not. There were some Poles who were not antisemitic. A lot of them were, but he was not, no.

OK.

He was a very unusual person, yeah.

So, yeah. So how did the war end for you?

How did it end? Don't know.

Do you remember?

There's so many things going on in between that I would have to sit down and think about what happened then. When did that happen? When did that happen? You know this?

Well, do you remember hearing that the war is over?

Somehow, we heard that the war is over. The funny thing is we were in part of the Poland that we did not want to stay when the Russians take over, you know? Because there was a war going on, the Germans and the Russians.

That's right.

And we did not want to stay with the Russians, because we heard all kinds of things, what the Russians do. They don't ask questions, they rape women, and so on. So we tried to get west, even if it was a German army transport that tried to get the soldiers someplace, you know? We just asked them if we could go on with them. They didn't ask questions. We spoke German. That was all important to them. So we got a little bit further west--

So you left--

--away from Ostrowiec.

So you left Ostrowiec?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

You left Ostrowiec. You left that hovel, [CHUCKLES] more or less, that you were living in, that room?

Yeah, we left that Ostrowiec. Yeah.

Yeah.

We already had left that before.

Oh, had you? And where did you go before?

Tschenstochau. At one time, we lived in Ostrowiec, and I was already a teenager, 13 or 14, and Else was older. And we heard Polish people tell us that the Germans want to send us away, the two girls, us. And we had no idea. You know, where would they send us? What would happen? So my mother packed suitcases for us and took us to the train station, and the first train that came, she put us on. And we ended up in Tschenstochau, a German city. And my sister was much older, found a room for us where we could stay. Eventually, she found a job. And that's where we stayed. And they didn't know about us, you know.

[CHUCKLES] One funny thing I should tell you-- in order to get enough food-- because food was always a problem-- the Germans advertised they're looking for people to feed mice that they had in little boxes. What they used them for, I don't know. They must have used them to do something. And they were in little boxes. So we decided we'd go and feed the mice-- the lice.

The mice?

Lice.

Lice?

Lice, in little boxes. They--

They wanted to feed lice?

Yes, yes.

That's crazy.

[CHUCKLES] Well, that's what we did. I don't know what they used them, for what exactly they--

Well, what did you get for feeding lice? Did they give you food?

Food. Yes, yes, food, extra-- certain kind of food, yes. So we did that, I think, one week, [CHUCKLES] and then we said that's enough. First they put one box on, you know, and it itches afterwards. Then the next time, two boxes, three boxes, four boxes.

So you have to put it on your body?

Oh, yeah. It was tied on about your leg here, you know?

And so the lice-- you were the food for the lice?

For the lice, yes. And the itching afterwards was crazy, you know? [CHUCKLES] So we did that for one week, and that was it.

That was it.

That was it.

That was enough.

That was enough, yeah.

Oh my goodness.

Yeah, so we got food, a special kind of food that you couldn't get any other way, you know?

OK.

But the lice was too much, you know? One week was enough. [CHUCKLES] Crazy things.

Did your mother and brother--

She wasn't--

--join you?

She wasn't with us.

No.

My mother wasn't with us at the time. It was my sister and I. Did I say she put us on the train?

That's right. That's right. That's right.

So we went Tschenstochau. My mother was still--

In Ostrowiec?

--in Ostrowiec, yeah.

OK.

So my sister, who was much older, always took charge of things, you know? She found as a room where to stay, and she found a job, and she got me a little, unimportant job, you know? And they didn't know that we were Jewish, naturally.

Mm-hmm.

And then eventually, my mother came back, and she took me to Germany to stay near her parents in Germany.

Ah-ha, OK.

Oh, I think she did that before, and because her sister married a Nazi, and at one time, she called my mother "you Jewish-something," you know, and then we left.

So you had gone back to Germany?

Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah.

And then--

And then we left again.

And then you left again.

Yeah.

OK.

I really don't know exactly how we left, you know, or how it happened, but I know we didn't stay.

OK. And then you're back in Poland. And you say that-- you said that you were frightened of the Russians?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. We didn't want to stay with the Russians. That's for sure.

So what did you do?



Well, eventually, the Russians came there anyhow, wherever we were, you know?

So did you run, though? Did you leave Ostrowiec? Did you leave Czestochowa?

Oh, yeah. We weren't in Ostrowiec anymore, no.

OK.

It was someplace in Germany.

Oh, as I said, German trucks of soldiers started who went west took us with them for a while. And somehow, my mother probably didn't agree what one of them or two of them wanted, and they put us out on the street, wherever it was, you know?

OK.

[CHUCKLES]

And that would have been your mother, yourself, your sister, and your brother?

No, my sister wasn't with us. No.

Oh, OK.

She decided to do something else.

OK.

And your brother was with you?

My brother was with us, yeah.

OK. We left him some place-- a safe place. I don't know if at that time he was still with us or not.

OK.

But anyhow, we all survived.

Well, you say that you were on the run and you were together with some German soldiers. And--

Yeah. They were on the truck transport to get west--

To get west.

--because they were fighting the Russians there.

And then they threw you off of there.

Yeah, yeah. [CHUCKLES]

And that was in East Germany?

That was in Germany someplace.

OK.

So there were some kind of hills and a few houses there and a house there. So my mother and I, we walked up the hill. And the woman was nice. You know, the family-- a German family, and they gave us something to eat. I always remember potatoes-- cooked potatoes, I think with the peel still on, with some white cheese and some butter. I still like that. [CHUCKLES] So we-- I don't know exactly how long we stayed there. But there's so many different things that happened during that time that sometimes--

I know. It can be--

I can't remember what comes first, what is after, what came--

That's not important.

You know?

I might be asking questions like that, but what is most important is what are the things that you remember, even if you don't remember them in sequence.

Oh, right. Yeah.

OK.

So you say the Russians eventually overtook that place, too?

The Russians eventually overtook that place. We were all sleeping in that house, on the floor. My mother, whatever she took, it was some puff. You know, the Germans have these-- what do you call them, down puffs--

Yeah that's right.

--that you roll up into a very small thing. And she always carried that with her--

OK.

--and soft pillow. And we slept in that house on the floor, all of us. And all of a sudden, at night, the door opened, and somebody put the flashlights on us. And we were all covered up. And that's it. The next morning, we found out those were Russian people who did that, were there. But they thought we're all children. You know, we were covered up to here, sleeping. And that's it. Now, we were in a Russian area, a Russian zone.

So, well, they weren't as bad as we thought at first, as we heard, that they would rape women here and everywhere. So anyhow, so we were-- had a room in German-- with a German family. And some Russian army officers also had some room in the same place. And it was all right, except one evening, they invited us to eat with them. They had food at the table. And all of a sudden, one of the officers-- usually officers-- got up and locked the door. And my mother-- [LAUGHS] so funny-- said to me, jump out the window, because [LAUGHS] she knew what would happen. And it was the first floor, but the windows were kind of high, you know? Because you have a basement there, and then the first floor. So she said, jump out the window. [LAUGHS] So I jumped out the window, and she said, and run. [LAUGHS] And then she ran out-- jumped out. We started running the fields, as far as we could. And all of a sudden, we hear a shot. And we said, oh my goodness, they're shooting after us, the Russians.

Well, we went as fast as we could, and we stayed out there all night, someplace. The next morning, we heard there was one Jewish guy, an officer with them, who told us they sent these Russians someplace else, that did the shooting, and we were safe now.

He knew you were Jewish?

Yeah, yeah, he knew we were Jewish. [CHUCKLES] And he belonged to the Russian army, you know? But that was quite [LAUGHS] an experience, to jump out the window and start running, you know?

Yeah.

Maybe they wouldn't have done anything, I don't know. But when he went to lock the door, that was a little too dangerous for my mother, you know?

Yeah.

So she said, jump out the window and then run. So we stayed out there in the field some place, all night. And the next morning we heard that they sent these officers away someplace else and we were safe again.

And then what happened?

What happened? Sometimes, something like that happens, and then it's normal again, nothing, you know? You just live from day to day.

Was this in a small town, in a village, in a farm? What kind of area was it?

This was a town.

A town.

Small town, yeah.

OK.

Near the German-Polish or Czech border, some place.

OK.

What did we do next?

Was it winter yet? Was it winter--

No, it wasn't winter. It wasn't--

It wasn't winter.

It wasn't really real winter, no.

OK.

What was the next-- no, well-- but--

Did you ever make it further west? Did you end up traveling further west?

Eventually we got to Wetter on the Ruhr, yes.

Oh, you did?

Eventually, yes. And my father was there already, and we didn't even know if he was alive.

Oh, my goodness.

And he ended up in Wetter before us. And he thought he would find us over there. And nobody was there. But we had friends in the next town which were Germans, so he went to them first. And they said that they saw us at one time during the war, that we came to Germany, and then we went-- disappeared again. So he knew at least that we were alive. And [CHUCKLES] the strange thing is that he was there before we.

Yes.

And we didn't even know if he was alive. As a matter of fact, during that time, Jewish people slowly came out of concentration camps from here and there, and they had started a Jewish community in Bavaria some place. And on the train when we were going west, we met the first Jewish people. We didn't even know if Jewish people were-- survived at all, anyone survived. And we saw they were shaved. You know, at that time, shortly after the war, they had very little hair. And we started talking. And they talked to us, and they said that there's a Jewish community that they opened up, and we should come with them. We could sleep there and we could get food there. And we did that.

So we found more Jewish people [LAUGHS] that were alive. First there was one-- I was-- we were the only two women, and then another girl showed up, and then another girl, you know? So slowly, the Jewish people that survived some place showed up there. Very, very strange time, all this time, you know? You didn't know how many Jewish people survived, if any survived, if our father is alive. And at one of these places, one of the men told us he was in the same barracks with my father, and at one time, they called my father out. They all had numbers, and by name. And he was the only one that was called out of the barracks. And they never saw him again. [SOBS]

So many different stories, you know? And they told us not to hope to find him alive because-- that he was called out, and they never saw him again, so they didn't know what happened to him. In the meantime, he was sent to a different transport. He was missing on the train, and they called him. So he came to a different camp. But we didn't know, you know?

Yeah, you didn't.

And what happened afterwards? We stayed there for a while in that Jewish community center. They found rooms where people could-- in German houses, where they could sleep. And my mother happened to get sick. After all the stress and all the things, you know, she got lumps under her arms, big lumps full of pus.

Oh.

She had that once before, after it started, all, with the Jews in Germany. And there, she had it again. And then it grew and grew, until they opened up, and all the pus came out. But she felt awful, awfully sick. And so that's how we stayed there. And that's how I got to meet my husband who I eventually married.

At that community?

In that community, right.

Uh-huh. And--

They had a piano there and I played a little bit, the piano, and a young man who had a violin played the violin, so we both kind of tried to find something that we could play together. And this young man heard this-- us-- me play the piano, and he came in, and he sat next to me. Every time we did get together and play, he was right there, anyhow. And that's how we get to know each other, and eventually, I married him. [LAUGHS] That's--

What was his name?

My husband's name? Mietek. I called him Mietek.

Mm-hmm, Mietek?

Which was-- in Jewish, he's really Moses, Moishe, you know? But in Polish, he was called Mietek, and I always called him Mietek.

And his last name?

Rechnitz.

Rechnitz.

That's my name.

OK.

He was a Rechnitz, right. I married him eventually.

Mm-hmm. And so how long did you stay in this community?

I stayed-- my mother said, you stay here. I know now you are with people that are kind to us, Jewish people, you know, and so you're Jewish girls, so you can stay here, and I try to get to Wetter by myself. It was also very difficult to get food, you know, and difficult to travel, because the railroad tracks were bombarded, were out, you know. You had to find all kinds of ways to get moving someplace. So I stayed there. And eventually, my mother got back to Wetter and my father was already there.

What a surprise that must have been.

What a surprise, yes. What a surprise. So it was the most amazing thing, because we didn't know if my father was alive, and I didn't know either. And I stayed there with another Jewish girl in one of the German houses. And the two of us tried to go out. Another couple lived up the street, Jewish girls you met another Jewish boy. And we were trying to walk there. As we walked out, a little yard in front of the house-- all of a sudden, I see a car driving down very slowly. You didn't see many cars at that time at all. And I-- [SOBS] I look up the street at the house as the car slowly came closer and closer. And I said, that looks like our car--

Ah!

[LAUGHS] --that we had before the war. And as it came towards the house, there was my father in the car [SOBS] with my mother. You cannot imagine-- you cannot imagine how that was--

No, I can't.

--since we heard that maybe is not alive, we shouldn't hope he's alive, and there, he drives in our car that we had before the war, and my mother next to him. Well, I was tacked to one spot. I couldn't move. And then I realized it's not a dream. It's real. And I started crying and screaming, Papa, Papa, Papa. And he came out of the car and Mama came out of the car. It's something that you can't describe. You just can't imagine the feeling, what it was, you know, thinking he might not be alive, because that's what people told us, then all of a sudden, he drives up in our car that we had before the war, and my mother next to him. It's impossible to describe what kind of feeling you have.

How long did it take before you could sit down and talk to one another?

[LAUGHS] Well, first I cried a long time. And then--

And he as well?

[LAUGHS] Well, he was not crying, but happy to see me. And then my brother-- we had left him someplace else when my mother and I tried to get further, to Wetter, because there was a German family where we left him, and they were nice. It was a nice place, and pleasant, so we thought we'd leave him there, because it's difficult to travel with two people, or one person, but more difficult when three are there, and try to find food some place.

So anyhow-- so my father and my mother tried to drive on, to see-- to pick my brother up, where he is, and I stayed with the friend that I had there in the same apartment while my father and my mother went to pick my brother up. And so eventually-- I have to-- I need this.

You're going to need that one?

I need to have something in my hand.

OK.

So eventually, they picked me up, too, and we all went to Wetter, the place where we used to live before the war. And that part of Germany was occupied by the English. You know, Germany was occupied some Russians, some Polish, all the way there, some English, and some Americans, and that part was occupied by the English. I hate them. I can tell you that right now. They're the biggest antisemite alive.

Anyhow, so when we got to Wetter, we found-- my father was there. And he had-- people helped him already. They knew that he had the business there. People found him that were his customers. And he started his business again. And he had bought a house that the Germans had sold. And the English took it away from him. They moved in. He could not move into the house. That was a house that he had bought, the Jewish guy-- the only Jew that came back to that town, but the English took it away. He couldn't move in, so we couldn't move in there. So when we got back, we moved in into another German house. The Germans still lived on the apartment. We moved in on the top.

So that's the English. And I still hate them to this day. I hate the English. They are the biggest antisemites in the world, even though the Polish were that big antisemites, too. All the Jews that came back-- and they knew that Jews were killed all over the world, you know? And they took away what he bought.

His property. His property.

His property, yeah.

Where was your sister in all of this?

She had met, someplace, a German girl on our travels, and she decided to travel with her, to stay with her. She didn't want to stay with us. My mother begged her, let's keep the family that we have together. But she was a teenager, 18 years, and she went on her own. So we don't know where she was.

But she knew your father was alive?

No.

Oh, OK.

Because she had gone off-- she was--

She had gone off, OK.

--with the German girl--

Her friend.

--someplace. We didn't even know where she was. We didn't know if she was alive someplace. She just-- grown up, 18 years old, and she didn't want to stay with the family. That's it.

Did your father talk much about what he had been through?

Not at that time when we first met him, no. [CHUCKLES] No.

You said earlier that he had changed when he came back, that he was not the same.

No, that was much-- that was later. At that time, he was still my father, the way I knew him, you know?

OK.

My brother wasn't with us. So when I met him, he was the father that I thought is lost. I didn't know if he was alive or not. And there he was with our car that we had before the war and my mother sitting next to him.

It's like a miracle, really.

It is impossible for anybody to understand, to imagine what that was.

Yeah.

It's undescrivable, the feeling, to see him.

So how did things go on? Did it sort of like pick up after the-- like the way it had been left off?

Well, eventually we got-- I stayed there while--

[DOORBELL CHIMES]

Who's-- who could that be?

Let's cut the camera.

Clara.

My son interviewed me a few years ago.

Did he?

And it's on the computer.

Oh, I'd love--

Four hours, and then another four hours, eight hours.

That would be terrific for us to be able to--

So you might want to see that sometimes. I might leave things out, and I wasn't crying as much then as I am now.  
[CHUCKLES]

OK. If your daughters have a way of sending it to me-- OK. All right.

OK.

So we were talking about-- you were talking about your father reestablishing his business. You moved into a house that--

Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

My father came back to Wetter--

To Wetter, yeah.

--where we used to live, long before we were back.

Yeah.

Well, he knew we were alive because we had been in the town next to Wetter. Our close friends lived there. So he knew that we are OK, we are alive, but we are not in Wetter. So he stayed in Wetter. And my aunt, my--

Elsie.

My aunt Elsie took care of him, of the household. You see, she was a fantastic woman, my mother's older sister.

Yeah. Was your grandmother still alive at the time? Had she survived the war?

My Jewish grandmother?

No, no.

No, no.

No.

My other grandmother-- I think she was-- yes, yes, she was still alive, yeah.

And your grandfather who you--

Yeah.

--liked so much.

Yeah. He was still alive.

They were both, OK.

As a matter of fact, when I got married eventually to this man that I met-- and the Jewish wedding is under a chuppah--

Chuppah.

--you know?



Yeah.

I did not invite my grandparents because of my grandmother, the way she used to be, you know. She knew we were sent out of Germany. She should not have believed in Hitler anymore, right? But she did, anyhow. So I didn't want her at my wedding. We invited them because I loved my grandfather when we had the reception afterwards, but not when I had the wedding under the chuppah.

Yeah.

So--

What year did you get married?

Good question. [LAUGHS] I don't know. [LAUGHS]

OK, OK.

My oldest son was born-- he was 68 when he died, recently, and my oldest son was three years old. He was 71. So it was 72 years ago--

OK.

--that I got-- [LAUGHS]

Let me see if I can count that back. So it would have been--

After the war.

'46.

'46? 1946?

I think it was 1947.

OK.

I think it was 1947.

'47.

Yeah.

OK. And did your father continue working in Wetter? Did he have his wholesale business again, the paper business? Or what happened with him? I mean, he'd just come back from a concentration camp.

Yeah. What exactly happened? I just don't know that part right now. I can't think of it right now.

That's OK. That's OK. Believe me, that's fine. In one interview, we will never be able to fit--

Get everything.

--everything in. You know, we've gotten a lot in. And there are so many different parts.

That's exactly it. My life is not a normal life. [LAUGHS] There's so many different stages, different parts to it.

So let's just ask this way. After the war, did your parents stay in Wetter?

They came to America eventually.

When? What-- was it 10 years later? Five years later?

No, we went to-- my husband and I, when I got married, went to Israel, and my parents came visiting us. But they did not want to come to Israel, because he could not have started a business there. So went-- they came to America, because my sister had married somebody who had a family in America from long before, a long time ago. So they came to America. And then my parents went to America. And--

Your brother, did he stay in Germany?

Yeah. In the meantime, yeah, he stayed with my parents, yeah, wherever my parents were, yeah.

And now, tell me-- let's go back to that question I asked earlier about your father and how he behaved differently towards your brother after he came back from the camps.

I think when he left us, we were still young, you know? My brother, unfortunately, was-- how do you say that? He didn't want to be that, but that's the way people are born, you know? He was-- I forgot the name, what you call it?

He was homosexual?

Yes.

OK.

Right, right. He was homosexual. And when my father found out that his only son-- he was-- he couldn't accept that. And he did not behave to him the way he should have, you know? To us girls, he was the best father you can imagine. Not to him.

Ah. Did he ever talk, then, later about his whole odyssey through the concentration camps?

I have the whole story about his-- he told his whole story.

He did? He--

Yeah.

He said it on tape?

Not--

Oh, he--

He had somebody write it down. He told somebody in German, and then somebody translated it into English.

OK.

So I have it written down here in English. But some of it is also on the computer, I think.

And did he ever tell you, or was it only in this special circumstance where someone wrote it down and translated it? Did he ever share it with you and your mother and your-- of he went here, and then this happened, and so on? Did he tell--

did he ever talk to you folks?

Not much, not much. We did not talk much about that. No, as if it almost never happened.

My goodness. Yeah.

Yeah.

When did you start speaking about such things?

To my children? Oh, they were much older, because my husband also went through it, you know? But we never talked about it when they were little.

Had he been in a concentration camp?

Yes, yeah.

Which one was he in?

Well, he tried to make believe he is Polish, not Jewish, you know? So a lot of times it wasn't as bad for him as it was for my father, because they were Polish people in concentration camps, too, not just Jewish people.

Yeah.

So it wasn't that bad for him as it was for my father.

I see. Was he in Auschwitz?

No.

Was he in Buchenwald?

Yeah.

He was in Buchenwald?

Yeah.

Your husband was in Buchenwald?

Yeah.

And your father? Do you know the camps that he was in?

I know he was in Auschwitz. I know he was someplace-- the camp was called Dernau.

Dernau?

And it was a starvation camp. They almost were all skeletons. That's where the Russians--

Liberated them?

Liberated them, yeah.

Did he have a number?

Yeah.

Your father had a--

From Auschwitz, yeah.

He did.

Yeah.

OK.

Would you believe neither my sister nor I nor my brother can remember what number he had on there? And even in his memoirs, he didn't put his number down.

[SCOFFS]

Isn't it something?

[LAUGHS]

I can't believe that we didn't think of that.

Yeah. Such things happen. Such things happen. Yeah.

It made such a big difference, and only in Auschwitz did they put the numbers down. There wasn't another camp that they did that.

Yeah. Do you know about when your parents moved to the States?

Don't know exactly.

Would it have been in the '50s?

It might have been in the '50s. Just, maybe even 1950.

OK. And did your father ever work again?

Yeah, they opened a television store with--

In the United States?

Yeah, with my brother-in-law. Yeah, Ben.

And where was this?

On, I think, Brooklyn Avenue.

So they all came to the Boston area?

Yeah, yeah.

OK. So your sister and your brother-in-law, yourself and your husband, and your parents all were in the Boston area?

Yeah, yeah.

OK. When did your father pass away?

[SIGHS] When he did pass away? What year? I don't know.

Do you know how old he was?

I don't know any years.

That's OK.

It's good if I remember when my children were born.

Yeah.

[CHUCKLES]

Listen, it's the hardest thing to remember.

[LAUGHS]

It's the hardest thing. And I ask only to get a sense of chronology.

Yes, I know, but you--

And I understand why it's hard. I don't remember-- if someone would ask me the same questions, I wouldn't remember.

No, you would have to sit down and think.

That's right.

Yeah.

Do you know about how old he was when he died, your dad?

He was, I think, 74 or something like that.

And your mother?

Mother was very young, only 65.

Oh, wow. Oh, wow.

Yeah.

Yeah.

She was-- she had already kidney problems before. When she was in the hospital when I was a little girl, they thought it's typhoid, it was kidney trouble she had, and they did not know.

Yeah, yeah.

So eventually, here in America, she had one kidney removed. So--

Have you--

She died young.

Have you been back to Germany to visit relatives there?

I went with my daughter, my youngest daughter knew it. She was 10, and we went to Germany with my mother, yeah.

And that was the only time?

That was the only time, yeah.

Did you go to Wetter?

Yeah, they lived in Wetter, yeah.

OK.

Yeah.

We've come close to the end of our interview. Is there anything else you would like to add to what we've been talking about?

Right now? I can't think.

That's OK.

There might be many things which I did not mention, you know? That's why I--

Yeah.

--I say it's a good idea when you listen, when my son interviewed me. There are four hours and then another four hours.

I think that would be very helpful for us at the museum to have both interviews.

Yes, so--

You know?

--any time you want to come and--

We will--

--listen to it, you're welcome.

We will find a way.

OK.

We will find a way. In that--

I wasn't crying. I remember when I listened to it, I wasn't crying at all, so--

That's OK. That's OK.

[LAUGHS]

I will then say, then, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Clara Rechnitz on December 12th, 2018, in Framingham, Massachusetts. Thank you again.

I thank you for coming to listen to it. I thought it will just disappear because nobody is interested.

We're very interested, very interested. Thank you. Thank you.