

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back. And I am the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. We are at Channel 4, and it's May 19, 1992. And our guest tonight is Jutta Lewkowicz. Jutta, will you tell us your story?

My story. My story starts, I was born in Dortmund in 1928. And I had a happy childhood. I went there to a Jewish school until 1941, when they closed the school, because we were not allowed to go to school anymore. And I remember a lot of good things. And I remember a lot of bad and sad things.

We experienced the Kristallnacht. I never will forget that.

Could you tell us about that? But before you tell us about Kristallnacht, we have some pictures, or we have a picture of your father and your little sister. Maybe you could tell us about that. We're going to have that on the screen. There.

That's my father and my middle sister Ruth at the age of two in Germany. That's the only picture that we really have of her, when she was a baby, or anyway as any baby picture. And then I have another sister. Her name is Renee. And I'm a fortunate girl, because we all survived the war. We all survived the war, and I have a whole family. My parents survived the war.

But let's see. I was twice they came from the Jewish gemeinde, from the Judischen Gemeinde, they came to my parents to save the children. And so my-- they twice I had the opportunity to go either to England on a Kindertransport, and the second time to the United States on the Kindertransport. The first time I couldn't go, because I got sick with diphtheria.

The second time it was a little bit sadder than that. I came home from school and I wanted to avoid these Hitler Youth kids. And they attacked me.

How old were you at the time?

I was at that time I think I was 10 years old or something.

They attacked me. They threw me on a cart, and they beat me up. And they threw me up in the air and then finally they dropped me from the cart and my leg got caught in a nail, and it ripped open my whole leg. And that was the reason I could not go to the United States.

And then we lived in a fairly nice neighborhood at that time. But then we all had to move into a lower class neighborhood. It was something like a ghetto, but it was not really a ghetto for Jewish people. It was a very low class of people lived, and that's where we experienced November the 9th, 1938, Kristallnacht.

We were all in bed. And all of a sudden, we hear glass shattering, screaming. And I mean, it was something horrible. We ran out of our bedroom. And all of a sudden, we heard a knocking on the door. And it was the Gestapo. They took my father. And they took all the Jewish men. And that was the first time I really heard of a concentration camp. They sent all the men to Oranienburg. And some never returned.

But my father was one of the lucky ones. He came back to us.

In what condition did he come back?

They interrogated him. And I mean he was-- physical, they didn't do anything to him. But mentally, it was a horrible experience. And then also the burning of our beautiful synagogue. We had, I remember the most beautiful synagogue we had in Dortmund. And it was--

And they burned it down?

It was burned.

And what happened to all the books and the Torahs?

Everything, everything was destroyed, and everything was burned. So--

We have a picture of the synagogue. Oh, it was very beautiful. Now, how did you get this picture?

A lady that survived the war, and a friend of hers, she was selling some furniture. And they found it in one of her drawers. And then they brought it to her, and then when I met this-- this lady was in the same camp as I was. And she said to me, I want you to have it, because you will treasure it.

And I really treasure it, because it has good memories, but very, very sad.

So after Kristallnacht, did the condition of the Jews change?

It's gotten worse. It's gotten worse. I remember after that, we couldn't even walk on the street without being attacked by a low class of people that lived in the neighborhood. My mother was attacked and clawed by a woman, no reason whatsoever.

She was her chest was bleeding. So my mother went to a doctor. And in order to get help, he said, you deserve it. You are a Jew. So it was bad. It was awful. And then we-- it was I think they closed the school. I couldn't go to school anymore. I went to a Jewish school in Dortmund.

And then afterwards, we had some private lessons.

What did your father do?

My father was a merchant, a Kaufmann.

What did he sell?

Textile.

And was he able to continue with his profession.

No. No, he was forced to leave that. And he had to work in a mining-- no. He worked a street, like on the street, sweeping and things.

A street cleaner.

Street cleaner, right. And then I remember after the schools closed and the city of Dortmund was hit by an air raid. I mean the street that I lived on was burning from fire bombs. So my father said to my mother, you know what? This is the perfect opportunity to go to a safe haven. So we registered in the school, and we said we were bombed out. We lost our possessions.

And fortunately enough, they sent us to Czechoslovakia.

The German government sent you to Czechoslovakia? They sent, because we were registered as Germans.

Not as Jews?

No, no. Not as Jews. We would have never gotten there. Because they said all the children, the women and children, would be sent to a safe haven. So we went to Czechoslovakia.

Wasn't that taking a chance to register as Germans?

No. Because you see, the whole city was in a turmoil. It was burning. Bombs were falling. So there was no rules, nothing. So--

It was chaos.

It was chaos. It was chaos. People were screaming. And so-- and then we went to Czechoslovakia, where we lived--

Before you talk about Czechoslovakia, what happened to your first house? Did your father sell it, or was it taken away?

Well we, it wasn't our own house. We lived for rent. But we had to move out of the better neighborhood into a lower class neighborhood.

All right, so tell us about Czechoslovakia.

And we went to Czechoslovakia. And then when you're Jewish and German at that time, you stay away from people that are Germans, and you don't mingle. So people became suspicious of us. And we confided in the people, the Czech people, that we were Jewish and they kept the secret. And then I don't know if you look long enough, they always find a reason to do something to you, to send you away.

So anyway they figured out, you're not socializing with the Germans. You must be a Jew. So, anyway, the Burgermeister found out something. And they came to my mother and they said, I'm sorry. But they suspect that you are Jewish. And in order to satisfy the Gestapo, you have to give one of your child up. So since I was the oldest one, I went back to Dortmund.

By yourself?

By myself.

And to whom did you go?

My father was in Dortmund at that--

Oh, your father was still here.

So I went to Dortmund and there I stayed with my father for a while. And then we were informed, and we were separated. My father went to a forced labor camp. And from there he went to Theresienstadt, and he was liberated there in 1945. And it was-- let's see--

So where are you? We're talking about 1940?

No, about 1942, I was sent to a forced labor camp. I had to work there. I was-- we were working in a factory where you had to spool the thread to weave something. But most of the time, we didn't work there, because we worked outside. Because the city was bombed. And they needed the bricks to rebuild a building. So we were sitting outside with no shoes, nothing, rain, snow, and no gloves. And we had to clean.

This is winter?

In the wintertime. We had to clean the cement off the bricks. And they had to look like new. If they didn't look like new, you were beaten. So anyway, that was the job that I had to perform there.

How many years did you do that?

I was in camp until-- let's see-- I was there approximately 2 and 1/2 years. And then after that, well it was a daily

routine. It was you went there in the morning. They sent you back. Then you used to get your bowl of-- I mean if you can call it food. It was just spinach soup with nothing in it. That only when you put the spoon in there, you could hear the dirt on the bottom.

And then and my weekly ration was 1 pound of bread, 1 pound of bread.

For a whole week?

For a whole week.

And then otherwise there was nothing else. I mean you drank water. We were 35 women in one room. And we melted snow outside, or when the faucets were frozen, we melted snow outside, and we took turns in taking a bath. So it was 35 women first, or 30 women first bathed their top, the upper part. And then 35 women in the same pail, you did the lower part.

So that was our bathtub.

How did you heat the water up?

It was, we had a stove in there. So we put the pail on there. But it didn't make any difference, whether it was hot or cold. You needed a little bit--

Did you have roll call? Did you have people supervising?

We had to assemble every evening. Yes, we did. And it wasn't-- I would have to lie that it was a terrible time for me. Because I was 14, about how old was I? 14 or something. But it was not an extermination camp. So--

But you weren't with your family.

No, I wasn't with my family. And from there, we were supposed to be sent to Theresienstadt. But thanks to the British Air Force, we never got there, because the railroad sidings were bombed. And the train could never leave. So I spent all that time in that camp.

Were you sick?

I became very sick, because, let's see. We slept in bunk beds. And the bunk beds were infested with bedbugs. And I had my-- somebody slept on top of it, and I was on the bottom. And each time the girl moved, I was showered with millions of bedbugs. I was-- and I had a habit of sleeping with my mouth open. So I swallowed a few of those.

So I became very sick, and eventually I went down to nothing. Let's say, I think I was about 65, 70 pounds. I lost my hair. And that was-- and we were praying and hoping that one day soon that we would be liberated. So, but it--

What about the supervision, the guards who took care of you?

The guards? I'm telling you the guards, we were not really-- the supervision was fine. We were not accosted by, and we were not beaten by anybody. The only problem we really had was with the Volksdeutsche, the Ukrainian. They were worse than the Germans, because it was when it was the food line, and they just-- if they could hurt us, they tried their best always to do something that we should suffer even more than what we were suffering.

And so I stayed in that camp for--

What was the name of the camp?

It was a forced labor camp, [? Sobetenhausen, ?] that's all. It didn't have a name. And from there--

Were only with Jewish girls?

It was most of them were elderly women, and-- not elderly women-- see, women 35 at that time. I mean for me if was.

For you. You were a child. Were you the youngest?

No. I was one of the youngest, yes. And we had other girls about 18, 17, and so that's about-- and you had the routine. What did you do? You played mental games. You talked about your family. You were--

Talked about food, no doubt.

Food, not so much about food, because when you do talk about food, you become hungry. So it's the best thing not to talk about those things. And you asked, what they did before and where or when they were picked up, or something like that. And--

What were the sanitary conditions like?

The sanitary conditions, if you can call it sanitary, was awful. First of all, we were on a second floor. And you had to walk down two big flights of stairs. It was a converted school. It must have been once a school, because you had these long stairs, and then you had to go downstairs to the basement-- I mean to the toilet. You had-- it's a latrine, without any doors.

And it was very messy. And many times I was called to clean this mess. You had to do that, or you had to peel potatoes or carrots. And if there was a carrot missing--

Oh, they actually counted them?

It's not. They suspect. They were watching you. So it was unbelievable.

So kitchen duty was not advantageous?

No. There was no such thing as kitchen duty. Because there in Europe, it's not like in the United States, when you can go to a supermarket and you can buy potatoes every day of your life. Over there, you had to prepare in the wintertime, in the fall for the wintertime. So they would bring truckloads of carrots, and you would store it in a cellar. And you had to clean those, and pick those over.

But that was the easiest things. So and then in 1945--

Excuse me, before you go further, we have two pictures from an earlier time, a family picture from 1940. Do you want to tell us about that?

1940. That was the last picture we took. Your family is still intact. You haven't been separated.

No, we haven't been. My father wouldn't want to take a picture. He's one of those people that never wanted to take a picture. So we went to a photographer. They were very nice. And they knew that we were Jewish. And as a matter of fact, the thing that my mother is wearing, it's just a rag. So she doesn't have anything behind that. It's not a blouse. It should just look pretty.

And they took the picture, and some friends in Germany, they had this picture. And they sent it to us, and we made copies of it. We are very thankful--

After the war they sent you?

Yes. So this was I think in 1940, if I'm not mistaken. It was just I think before-- I'm not too good with the dates anymore. So it was at the time when we were not permitted to go to school anymore. And--

Now we have the other picture of yourself.

Of myself? That was the last picture. I was, like I said, I was in hiding in Czechoslovakia. And that was the time when I left Czechoslovakia. That was the last picture in Czechoslovakia. I left, and then I went back to Germany.

But you have to get us back to leaving to hide. There is a period that we missed. You were in the labor camp. And how did you get into hiding?

No. The labor camp, I was first in the, no, labor camp was after. We were hiding, and then I had to leave Czechoslovakia to go to Germany. And from Germany, I was sent to the labor camp.

Well, tell us about the period of hiding.

The period of hiding? We were in Czechoslovakia. It was a little village.

You and your family?

My parents-- not my parents, my mother, my two sisters, and I. And--

Excuse me. Let's get a chronology. You were in Dortmund with your father. No, no. No. I was first we went to--

Oh, you went, you were in hiding, and then you had to be sent to Dortmund?

Then we-- I was sent to Dortmund, yes. And I, from Dortmund, I went into the forced labor camp, where I spent 2 and 1/2 years. And at the end of 19-- let's see in 1945, we heard already. I think it was about maybe March, something. We heard already the guns from the distance. And all of a sudden, the lagerfuhrer came, and said everybody has to assemble downstairs.

And we were supposed to be taken to a safer place. So the people, the women in the room, protested. And they said, we're not going to move an inch. We are here already for so many years. And we have survived. And we're not going to leave this room, because nobody is going to bring us to a safer place.

So we stayed in that room. But I was not liberated there. I ran away from camp, because there were two young men. They were also from Czechoslovakia. And they were-- one was a chauffeur and one was a mechanic. And they were working, and then the SS became afraid, and they were running away. And so they changed their uniform into regular army uniform, and they became one--

You mean labor camp uniform into--

No, no, no. No. It was the SS disguised themselves as regular army soldiers. And these two men, and they needed these two men desperately because they didn't have any knowledge about driving a truck.

These were two Jewish men?

Two Jewish boys. And so they were going, so they said, OK. And I went with them, because I knew eventually we would come back to Czechoslovakia, where I left my mother and my two sisters. But it wasn't all that rosy. So I remembered I'm sitting on the truck, back there. And it was a trailer. And it was surrounded by food. It was surrounded.

And there was this heavy SS woman was staring at me, and she was eating herself. I mean, she must have gained 100 pounds. She was eating and looking at me. So I planned. I said, my goodness. I'm so hungry. And I would like to eat something. In the evening, whenever we--

She wouldn't give you anything?

Nothing, nothing. She had such pleasure chewing and looking at me. I think she gained about 100 pounds by doing that. So in the evening, I took a little bit of the butter. I found the butter. And I took a little of the butter. In Europe, it's half a pound. I took about this much. I bit this much off. And it really felt good.

So then they went to Eschwege. And I think that we stayed there for a few days. They unloaded the trailer. And they found now the butter that I bit a piece off. So this woman said [GERMAN], the dirty Jew [GERMAN] bit in the butter. And I was called to the leader of the group.

And the guy took out a revolver. And he held it held right to my temple. And I was-- he just wanted to click it. And I would have been gone just for this little piece of butter. But my friend, Gerhard [? Blach, ?] who was desperately needed for them to escape, assembled some strength. And he said, if you do that, we're not going to move. You have to kill us too.

And he saved your life.

He saved my life at that point.

So and I wish I would know where he is, because--

You never teamed up with him again.

No. No, and then I finally made my way to Czechoslovakia. And I arrived there at the same place that I had left 2 and 1/2 years ago. And I didn't find my sisters and my mother. And I didn't know where they were. So then all of a sudden, somebody said they heard my name mentioned on the radio over the Red Cross.

That the parents of Jutta Rosner are looking for their daughter. And that they are now in Bad Nauheim. And so then I was elated. I parted there, said my goodbyes, and I went to-- it took me a while to get to Bad Nauheim because there were no trains. You had to walk. Then you had to ride on coal trains, and everything.

And you had a lot of people. They were looking for families. A lot of Jewish people were looking for their family. It was just turmoil, everything. So finally, my mother didn't believe that-- she had faith that I survived. And so she showed pictures of me to survivors.

And we have that picture. Let's get that on the screen and see what she looked like.

She showed--

Yeah, that picture again.

She showed that picture to survivors. And they said this is my daughter, Jutta. Did you see her? Did you see her, because I was told that she is dead. And nobody says. They said, no, I'm sorry. I didn't see your daughter. So then she showed the picture to Bernard, Bernard Lewkowicz in 1945.

And who is Bernard Lewkowicz?

Well, Bernard Lewkowicz, he said to my mother. No, I'm sorry. I didn't see her. But when you find her, I will marry her. So we got married. So, I then finally, I came home. It was the second day of Rosh Hashanah. I came home, in 19--

Home was where?

To Bad Nauheim.

Bad Nauheim. And this was 1945?

1945 I came home to Bad Nauheim. I walked up the stairs, and I rang the bell. My sister Ruth opened the door, and asked me if she can help me with anything. I said, Ruth. I'm your sister. And she started to scream, mama! Mama! De Jutta. Jutta is here.

And my mother came out, and she got a nervous breakdown. And she was very sick after that.

So and then-- in 19-- then--

Wait. Before we go any further, where was your father, and what happened to your mother and sisters during the time you were in labor camp?

Oh, I forgot to show you my Jewish star too that I still have, my Magen David. But anyway, it doesn't make any difference. So anyway, my father went to Theresienstadt. He was there for 2 and 1/2 years, almost three years in Theresienstadt. And my mother with my two sisters, they stayed in Czechoslovakia.

And then at the end of the war, before the end of the war, I don't know how it happened. They wound up in Theresienstadt. The war was not ended. They wound up in Theresienstadt where they found my father. And I don't know whether it was-- I really don't know how it happened. And then when they were all bussed back to- the survivors were bussed back to Bad Nauheim.

And did you have grandparents?

I had my grandparents. Yes, I had grandparents. My grandparents were fortunate in 19-- I think it was 1991. Oh, I'm sorry, 1941, when they said if anybody has a visa to go to Argentina, and they had to be 65 years of age, they could leave the country.

So my aunt lived in Buenos Aires. And my grandparents had a visa, received a visa. And in 1941, they emigrated to Buenos Aires.

Oh, what luck. They escaped the war. And the other set of grandparents?

They died before. And my grandfather died. And my grandmother died after the war.

So now you're reunited. You're a complete family. It's 1945.

1945. We are a complete family. We pick up our-- you can never pick up where you left off. You're not a child anyway. I was a child when I was taken away from my mother.

And you missed all those years of schooling.

I missed my schooling. I came to the United States in 1947.

Wait. Before we got to the United States, tell us what happened before you came to the United States, from 1945 to 1947. What kind of work? What did your father do? How did you all manage?

Oh, let's see. My father worked in the-- let's see the Jewish community office there. And you had all the survivors coming to Bad Nauheim. And because a lot of them were ill from the concentration camps, so they needed special baths, special attention. So they came to Bad Nauheim. And we were-- the Joint Distribution Committee, American Joint Distribution Committee supported us, and the UNRRA fed us.

And I worked in the office there. And my sisters went to school. And my husband, not then yet, was working for the



American army as a chauffeur. And in 1947, just we got married in May. And then we immigrated to the United States, which I'm very thankful for.

We have a picture of your wedding. And you could tell us where this took place.

Oh. That took place on Lag BaOmer May 7, 1947 in Bad Nauheim. It's my father who just passed away about two months ago, my sister Renee, my sister Ruth, my husband, myself, and the pretty lady in the middle is my mother, who is 86 now.

That was a very happy day 45 years ago.

It was very happy. And I mean I'm one of the very few people, and I'm so lucky that we all survived the war. My husband was not that fortunate. There were seven, three sisters and four brothers. The whole family, everybody was exterminated with the exception of my husband. And then his stepsister survived. But she had a very sad life afterwards. So--

Now, how did you get to America? Not many came in '47.

Well, they did in. No, in 1946.

That's right. They began to come. They began to come. And so we were just--

Well, why don't you tell the story that you told me before about the page?

Oh, I don't know. Well, I don't know if I could tell that about.

All right. That's all right. Just go ahead. But well, let's see. My husband worked for the Joint Distribution Committee. And at that time, it went on a quota system. And the Polish quota was Polish Jewish quota was very, very low. And so he befriended this girl in the office at the Council. And what he did, while he's talking to the girl, he pushed in the Jewish people that survived the war between the pages of all the others.

So that they at least could come to the United States. Because they had a very hard time. The German quota, it was easier to come to the United States on the German quota. Because--

Than the Polish quota.

Than the Polish quota.

And he was on the Polish quota?

Well, he was on the Polish, but he worked for the-- he didn't have any problems, my husband, was coming. But he helped a lot of other people that could not come.

Now, you came directly to Buffalo?

We came directly to Buffalo, not really directly, because we came to New York City. And you couldn't stay in New York City because it was said that you had to go, you can't stay in New York, and you can't stay in Los Angeles. So you had to go. So we saw somebody that we knew from Bad Nauheim. So my husband said, hello Art, where do you live? So Art said, I live in Buffalo.

So at that time, it was very, very hot in New York City. And we were not used to this kind of weather. So he said is it hot or cold in Buffalo? So he said, it's right at the Canadian border. It's very cold there.

So he said, I'll see you in two weeks. And that's how we got to Buffalo.

Isn't that amazing how people's lives are determined?

So, that's how we came to Buffalo.

And you knew no one besides this Art here?

No, no one. No one at all. And how was-- how were the beginnings? How--

The beginnings at that time, it was very hard. Because it was a time right after the war. It was very hard to get a job here, because it was always said veterans preferred at that time. I don't blame anybody, because after the soldiers fought, and they deserved to get a job. But for us, it was very hard.

So he started working at-- he worked 65 hours at Sattler's. And I worked at M. Wile's for a while at that time. My first paycheck was \$22. And I felt so rich. And it was a good feeling. It was very good.

Well, you were free.

I was free.

And safe.

And safe and I could practice my religion. I could go to Temple. I could-- I didn't have to be afraid. But the other thing I'm still afraid of nowadays is I think it is instilled from-- I'm afraid of the police. Anything that has to do with police, right away I get very nervous.

Well, you were traumatized.

It was-- and I don't think it ever will leave me, never. So--

I hope you don't get any driving-- any speeding tickets.

Well, it's not a speeding ticket, but I mean whenever something if you have to appear in front of a judge or something, I just become a basket case. And I think it's from the time, anything that you had to do with a police in Germany, it was right away Gestapo, and you didn't know whether you're going to come back or not. Not that I-- it's a comparison. But it's still--

Still a fear.

It's the fear. And it was-- I have a wonderful husband. I have two wonderful children, Rosalie who lives in Miami, Michael lives with his wife and three children in Buffalo. He's in business with us. And Rosalie has three lovely boys. And we have--

You have a good life, but you worked hard to get to that.

Yes, we did work very hard. But you appreciate things more if you work for it. It's yours. You know?

Do your children know your story, and your husband's story?

My children-- my children were brought up with our stories. They, from the first day they could understand these things, they were because they asked, how come I don't know daddy's father, or how come we're-- so we explained it to them.

And they know everything, everything. But they were the ones, especially my daughter, was always saying, mom, you should put this down. And dad, you should put this down. Because we're getting to an age where a lot of our friends are

not here anymore. And if you don't tell, it will be forgotten. And it would be such an awful thing, a sin really, to all the people that lost their life, the 6 million and not only Jewish people, but it has to be kept alive in the memory of each and every one.

How do you feel when you hear the revisionist talking that such things never happened?

I get very angry. I get very angry. But I don't know what really. I can't understand how anybody even can think it didn't happen. Where did the people go?

So maybe somebody-- maybe they need better education, maybe in this school. Maybe by telling, educating people and children in school, it will not happen that there is a disbelief, if you are brought up with certain things. Well, I just hope and pray it will never happen again. And I think one good thing came out of it. We have an Israel, and it will never happen again.

So we have now a country that we can go to, if we are ever told to leave. Because that's what we didn't have at that time. Because whenever I remember, see I was born in Germany. And when it said, what is your nationality? It was staatenloss, stateless.

But I bet your grandfather or your ancestors fought--

My grandfather--

In the German army.

Yes, my father, both my grandparents, my father's father fought in the First World War, and my mother's father fought in the First World War. And it's unbelievable that something like that did happen. It's a cultured country. And I just I don't know. It was a [? Heyman ?] that back. And I just hope it will never, never occur again.

Well, with your story and all the other stories, we have to just keep on with the education.

Yes. We have to keep on with the education. And we have to be a big supporter of Israel too. Because we can't let our Israel down. And I don't know what else I could--

Thank you very much, very, very much, Jutta.

Thank you for telling your story.

Thank you. I'm very nervous.

You're fine. You're fine. Thank you.