

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. It's April 10, 1989, and our guest tonight is Frances Leder Kornmehl, who was born in Tarnell in 19--

Tarnell.

Tarnell in 1925. Frances, will you tell us about your childhood growing up in Tarnell?

Well, I come from a very Hasidic home. I was raised in Bais Yaakov. I went to public school. And then I have to say this-- I was outstanding student in school.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I got two sisters and two brothers, besides me.

You were the youngest?

I made the third. I was the youngest. What should I say more?

Well, tell us what your father did, what your mother did.

Well, my mother was a housewife, and my father, he was in business with this-- how do you tell when you sell people for farms--

Feed.

Feed for--

Your father sold feed for the farms.

To grow this. And I had my oldest brother. And he was a manufacturer on Washington street. He got, like, a little factory. He didn't sew. He got people.

What did he make in his factory?

Shirts.

Shirts.

The finest shirts was in the city. The finest.

And he was married. He was 18 years older than me. He was married and had a child. He's well off.

And what kind of home did you live in?

I got a nice home. We were not rich. Let's put it that way.

But my father emphasized very much, because the way I understand what my mother used to-- my father comes from a very, very, very rich home, outstanding rich home. And that was in him. He wasn't rich.

He lost all the money. My mother used to say, after marriage, a whole bunch of thing she said. I don't even paid attention. I was a child. But he lost all the money.

But he still got in himself this that graciousness to live as much as he could. We live in a beautiful flat. Maybe he

couldn't have afforded that. This was this.

So you remember growing up, being happy, being comfortable, being loved.

I mean, I wasn't so comfortable. Let's put it. I like to say this. I wasn't so comfortable. But I didn't know any better. I was a happy child. Content-- very content. I never complained.

So in 1939, September 1, when the Nazis came into Poland, you were 19 years old.

I 13 years old. 13 and 1/2 years old.

13. And what happened--

I was November born. In November I was born.

And what happened then?

What happened? Well, the war broke out.

Could you continue with your schooling?

No. You see that it's not like-- when the Germans came in in 1939, right away, nobody could be out in the streets. They start shooting. Later, all the stores got to be closed, and to give up the keys from the stores.

To the Germans. To the-- when they went from one room [INAUDIBLE].

Later, they closed the temples, and nobody could--

So you couldn't pray any place. Informally.

Formally, yeah. Later, they catch people in the streets, and they took them to work. And they start shooting.

What kind of work did they take them to?

To dig holes for the army. I think so, those boys. I don't know what they did.

And what did you do? You didn't have school. And as little girl, what did you--

I was home. I was home. I didn't do nothing. I was home. And you have to go. Like you went for bread. They have to stay in the line.

Bread was-- food was rationed, and I presume you had ration cards.

Yeah. They didn't get any cards, because Jewish people didn't get any cards. They just got to go and wait till it comes your line, you got to buy a bread. Was everything-- everything was closed.

So it was disorganized.

Disorganized, closed. It's like a house. And the council was worse, and worse, and worse. And the shooting was more. And the killing was more, and more, and more.

Do you remember being hungry?

Sure, I was hungry. We never had-- we never had as much you should be not hungry. But you live in a situation where

you can go out, and you can buy just on a black market. And when they catch you, they kill you. They have no other way to do. Just to accept it, what it is.

What did your father do all day?

Nothing. Nobody could go out. He wore the thing for the beard to cover, to hide. And you know what they used to, when they catch a person with a beard and payos, you know what they do? They'd--

They would tear the--

Tear out. They, you know, bleeding.

You saw that.

I haven't seen, but it's what they did. That's what they call.

So what did you live on if your father didn't have any income?

He got a little bit money. Everybody.

So you went into your savings. He got money, a little bit. Everybody-- as much as we have, you treasure. You know what I mean?

Did you live in a ghetto at that time?

No. No. And a lot of people went to Russia at this time. A lot of people left Poland and they went to Russia. And like this, you live. You couldn't help yourself.

Just existed.

People don't understand this. You people don't understand this how it is.

And what happened to your brothers and sisters at this time?

My sister came back from Krosno. She live over there, you know. And she came back. And we gave her a room because we got two big rooms, and a kitchen on one side, and a hall, and here the bathroom. And we gave her one room to live.

Did she come with her husband, with her child?

Yeah. And she lived in one room. And we live in that middle room where the dining room was, the living room. We live in this. And the kitchen, you have to-- together the kitchen, and everything was together.

But there was always-- you was always afraid to go out. You wasn't sure when you got you're going to come back.

Sounds like chaos.

It's chaos as you hear they shot him, they shot him, they shot him. It's just like a uncertain.

Did you have a Judenrat in your town?

Yeah, this is the beginning now. Later, they gave us stars. Everybody used to have a star.

Who this "they," the Nazis or the Judenrat?

The Gemeinde.

The Judenrat.

The Nazis got nothing to do with this. They give out rules. And you wear a white band with a blue star. Everybody-- even when the child was two years old, when it was Jewish. You couldn't.

But you didn't go out much, because you were scared. You went out mostly for food, or to visit somebody, or somebody was sick. And that's what it was.

And later was a sickness, like a typhus. People died because--

You had an epidemic.

Right, because you got duration of the war there, and he did took it away. And it was very cold. Winters, they were very cold.

Did they ever put you in a ghetto?

Later.

When you say later, what year are we talking?

That was 1940-- '42. Beginning of '42. This time they made-- first they shot people. They took a massive people, and my sister. But then they took all the people out on a place, and they shot them.

Including your sister, and brother-in-law, and the baby?

That's what I understand, yeah. They shot them.

What happened to your other brothers, to your brothers?

The other brother came into the ghetto, but they shot him right away when the ghetto became. They took just-- they just without reason. They took people and they killed them. It's no reason. You know what I mean?

How did this affect your mother and father?

That's why I tell you. My mother got a heart attack. Effect everybody. But it was everybody, everyone who live was affected. And we just were the same. It was no difference. Just the same.

Like everybody with short sleeves, so you don't pay any attention, because you were and everybody was.

So everyone was suffering.

Everyone was suffering. And I told you this story about how the Gestapo came in. And it was Aussiedlung. I mean, when they took the--

Well, why don't you tell that story?

Uh-huh. In 1942 they built a ghetto. But before--

The Nazis.

Exactly. But before they built the ghetto, they took out the people before, and they kill a mess-- masses. They took them

in the-- on that cemetery. They took children, from a one-year-old, with the trees, and then knock off the heads, and the hands, and the feet.

They burn them alive. They put gasoline on people. And they were burning. And later, when they finished with this, and they killed, I would imagine, maybe 30,000 people, maybe even more.

How many people were in your town.

60,000.

60,000.

Maybe more, because a lot of them went to Russia. I don't know.

And they made two ghettos. And they came, like my mother, who was in bed-- not in bed. On the couch. And the Gestapo came in, with another one, what he shooting.

And he says, what's she doing here? And I told him, my mother's sick. I didn't know what to say. And he look at me, and didn't say nothing.

And my father was hiding because our-- the kitchen was separately. There was hiding over there. But they couldn't see. They could see him, because it was a glass thing, just a curtain. They could see him.

But I don't know. It was from heaven.

They didn't shoot your mother or your father?

They didn't shoot my mother, and not-- no.

They usually shot sick people, didn't they?

Exactly. And didn't shoot my father. And later, when they went out from us, they took out from other neighbors, and they shot them in the--

So that was like a miracle, wasn't it?

Right. Just like a miracle. I couldn't believe it. When I think about this now, how do we do? And I talked to him like I talked to you. Even I'm now more nervous when I speak to you, because I know. I was so-- I didn't know. I didn't know what I'm doing.

Innocence is-- brings out calmness.

Yeah, I didn't know what. And later, they built a ghetto. My mother died, because she got-- I told you. When she was sick, when she got a heart attack, it was before, maybe half a year before. I was going for the doctor. And I was going.

And then 11 o'clock in the night they could-- they would just kill me.

You had a curfew. You weren't supposed to be out.

Exactly. Nobody. There was a curfew for everybody.

Even for the doctor?

For everybody.

Did the doctor come back--

Maybe a doctor could have come. I would imagine this. But there was a curfew for everybody, because the Jewish people could only go out till 6 o'clock or 6:30. But the curfew was for everybody. Nobody could be on the street this time.

And that help it, but it didn't help very long, because she die. And later they built two ghettos, very young people, very kids, and very-- and for very tiny tots, and older people, they got a different ghetto. There was ghetto A and ghetto B. And I was in ghetto A, and my father was in ghetto B, but he didn't got no body. He was hiding.

So your brothers and sisters were all dead?

All go, and just one brother, then my oldest brother was in the same ghetto where I was. And You know, my father didn't got any food, because you couldn't buy anything. And when I went out, I was a Kommando, where I work. They took a dress, a blouse, and I give it to those people-- farmers. And they gave me food.

And I put in the food in me. And I was carrying in ghetto. And they could kill me for it.

They examined you, didn't they? Inspect you?

A lot of [INAUDIBLE] people, and they got killed. They shot them right away.

But I just got, look, I don't know how is it.

Another miracle.

That's what I-- I am-- it's such a miracle. I don't know how.

And later, I went to that fence, and I brought all the food to my father. And I didn't eat nothing. And my father says, did you eat something? I says, no. I ate everything, I say, ate everything. I just ate a piece of dry bread, and that's what they gave over there.

What kind of things did you bring him?

Everything what they gave me-- apples, bread, a cake. Everything what they-- I give everything to my father. I didn't even touch it.

And what kind of work were you doing, Frances? You said you were out in the farm--

I was a Kommando. They took one time [INAUDIBLE], one thing to do this, one time to do-- it wasn't--

So you worked for the Nazis, whatever they wanted to-- everybody-- not I. Whatever they give you, you got to do.

One time they took it-- you should make a sew. They show you how to sew. One time you did this, one time they-- it wasn't specifically one thing, till you came to the concentration camp, because they need people for everything, you see.

And I went through the fence. My skirt always was here. And I got-- I didn't get thread, just white thread. And I was swing the white thread this thing here. And I did.

And some days, the Lagerfuhrer, he was Jewish. And I told him my father is so sick. I have to go and wash him at the [INAUDIBLE]. He let me do. And I didn't come to work. I clean everything for my father.

Was your father really sick?

Yeah. Listen, in these circumstances we got to be sick. And I remember when I came, they says, look, you got such a little girl. And she's so good to you. And my children never come to us because it was danger to go. I didn't even realize.

You were really so innocent.

And I went through one time through a fence, and an other man hit me, and I didn't pay attention. I went to the temple in the destroyed, hiding myself, and went through, and brought my father food, you know. I didn't even know what I'm telling you.

When I came back from council and I was thinking about this, just maluch. Just angels. I don't know how I survived.

And I never was hit from a soldier. And I was in concentration camp. I was in Auschwitz. I was in [PLACE NAME]. Never, never a German hit me.

And I says this is a miracle, because everybody was hit. Everybody was beaten. And it's just God hold. I believe so strongly in it.

Frances, how long did you stay in the ghetto?

In the ghetto, a year, till it was judenfrei.

So all the Jews were forced out.

And they took all the Jews they took from ghetto out there, they took out from bunkers, the people, or they took him like this, and they shot them over there. And from ghetto, where they took all the people, everybody.

So was your father shot then?

I don't know what it was, because I wasn't there. He's not alive.

You never saw him again.

No. I never saw him again.

And you never met anyone who was with him at the--

No, because the whole ghetto was demolished. And when I came back, they told us, and thousand of people under the ruins, because they took planes, and the bomb everything.

You would see this ghetto. It's just ruins. And they say 1,000 dead people under those ruins. Just like a Warsaw Ghetto, because it was a very big city, a Hasidic city.

And they took us, everybody. And we was-- and the radio was playing German songs, like Schlaf and such a thing. And I saw kids, one, two, three, years, at most four. They turn to go in in a grave. Was a big hole. And alive they covered them with the dirt. And the radio was playing.

And when a child ran out from it, like two, three years the most, and they shot him. The kids some of them, some kids couldn't get out. And some of them yes. I don't know how they did it.

And they were shouting, and they took out the people from the hospitals, and from places. I don't know from where. And they were carrying, and the music was playing. And they took him on a cemetery, and they killed them.

And they shot people, just like this, like we sitting here, whether we have thing, and they just shot people.

Just arbitrarily.

Just shot the people. And a lot of people got their kids in their bags. And in the bags, they took the soldiers, SS, make like this. What's that here? And the child start crying, right? And they took hand of the child and they killed them.

You saw this?

Sure. I saw everything. I saw everything. That's why-- now I wonder what's going on. See? I saw everything.

And later, they took us with the-- we were those cattle thing to Auschwitz-- to Plaszow. And Plaszow was one of the biggest concentration camps-- I mean, in Poland. Thousand that die. It is made from a cemetery. And they made the barracks. And over there, when they came, they look over us. Everything. They still. And they shot a lot of people when they came into Plaszow.

Did you go with a group of young girls?

Everybody was youngest. They didn't took any other people. They didn't do.

But from Plaszow, not just from TarnÃ³w came. They came from whole WojewÃ³dztwo krakowskie, from all over, from Bochnia, from all over, people.

All the neighboring towns.

Oh, not towns-- big cities. This was a big county. One of the biggest of all. Half as much as Auschwitz.

But I wanted to ask you, Frances, when the city was judenfrei, where did you go then? Is that when they took you in the cattle cars?

Yeah. Judenfrei. And the last time, I hear, they took those older men, the Jewish police, and they shot them, because they organized this.

So even though they did their job, they killed them.

Yeah, they killed them all. That's what I hear. And in Plaszow, there was terrible too.

What did you do there? Did you work?

I was in [NON-ENGLISH], and work. And later, they give us [INAUDIBLE] to sew.

What is that?

Sew. You're sewing. Everything they give you. And I make [GERMAN], and I make from straw boots, and such a purse. They show it to us and we did it.

And is that for the residents, or is that for the German soldiers?

No, for the German soldiers, everything. Nothing was for the the residents. And they give you, I think, twice a week-- I just don't remember-- a bread. And they give you a soup. Everybody.

There was a barrack 300, and everybody got a bread once a week or twice, I think. I remember it. Twice a week, once a week.

And a soup. And the soup got meat with it, and ate it because I didn't need.



Because you were kosher and you didn't observe.

I was kosher in Plaszow.

And you observed that.

I say Modeh Ani in the morning, and Shema. I was very observant. Didn't know any better. I was conditioned.

That's how you were raised. Right.

Right. And I was looking good. I don't know why.

You didn't lose weight. You weren't hungry?

Oh, I was losing weight. But I mean it. We were singing, the kids. We had thing. And outside, there was-- you didn't know what tomorrow it's going to be.

You were always with people your own age.

We always with people, and everybody's in the same circumstances. And we got soap. They gave us soap. And later I found out that's from people, the soap.

We were trying to wash ourself. They give just a little bit of water. But they got a shower. Every week you could have a shower.

Did you have hot water?

It was hot. It was warm. Every week, just once we got, twice a week. That's all.

But you get used to it. You get used to it. How long did you stay there?

Over there, more than a year. Till November. And in November, they make--

This is November 1944.

'44. In November 19--

Excuse me. Let's get a time sequence. So you're in your own town until 1943?

'43. So you're there under very difficult conditions for four years.

Ah, yes.

And then you're taken away. Your whole family is destroyed. And you're in this concentration camp for a year, until 19--

In Plaszow.

In Plaszow--

--for a year.

--until 19-- November 1944.

Till November. I don't know. I don't remember what day it was.

Till 1944.

November. Yeah. In 1944 they make judenfrei in Plaszow.

That too.

Yeah.

How far was Plaszow from Tarnów?

About 80 kilometers.

So it wasn't that far away.

It was far for-- it's not America. It's Poland. You couldn't walk.

No.

Well, and over there they killed 1,000, and 1,000. Plaszow got maybe 600,000.

Killing by shooting.

Shooting, and beating, and dogs, throwing, and taking in the gas chambers to Auschwitz.

But Plaszow didn't have gas chambers.

No, didn't have, no. Burned them alive. They got in a graves, and they burn. They shot them and burned them. When who was shot was shot. Who was not shot was burned alive. And later I went to Treblinka.

And over there I was on a kojcs and took in-- first, when I arrive.

What is a kojcs.

When I arrived, they took us to the gas chamber-- not to gas chamber, to the shower. And we were asking. I remember everybody was asking. What are you going to do here? And we saw a chimney next to this. But we didn't see the ovens, just the chimney. The ovens were underground.

This is in Treblinka?

Right. And I remember those people says, well, from here you never get out anymore. Here you die.

Were you tattooed there, or was that in Auschwitz?

No, not yet. Not yet. This was in Treblinka. And maybe overnight, next day, they need-- the youngest people, they got lists. Everybody should go, and they put people. And people got-- they took off the clothes, and they were walking. And Mengele was over there.

Wait, Mengele was in Treblinka or Auschwitz?

Treblinka. Treblinka. And he took people on this side and people on this side. The youngest people--

He separated you.

Yes, he took them this way, and after 20, he took them this side. And those people on the other side, they went in the gas chamber. And us--

Excuse me, but Treblinka didn't have a gas chamber. Did they?

Treblinka, sure.

Yes.

Treblinka got gas chambers.

All right. Auschwitz is a working place where you were working. In Treblinka, so right away they took you over there, and the gas you. This is only gas chambers over there. And later they took us to Auschwitz. That wasn't far. That was like from Buffalo to Canada. There were paths, you know? They were for men paths, for women paths, for people where they got be transported to other camps. They were organized everything.

And over there, I was on the kojcs. You know what kojcs is?

No, what is a kojcs?

Breaches. And they got such a big spaces, and it was so cold, and--

Are you saying bunkers?

Bunker.

Bunkers.

But there's spaces. And it was open the windows, it was so cold. I was thinking I'm going to die. I wished I want to die. I couldn't take it anymore.

Well weren't-- didn't many people sleep together to keep warm?

Keep warm, but everybody-- but you didn't got anything.

What kind of clothes did they give you?

They took off-- they cut off the hair. And they gave you just like a thin dress. I mean somebody got a long dress, it was good. When somebody got a short dress, they were freezing. I don't know how you were alive.

What did you get?

I got a coat, a long coat, a Black long coat. No hair. Here's such a tiny thin dress. No hair. There was very cold.

And shoes without socks or something.

No shoes, they were holiday shoes.

Clogs.

Clogs, from wood. No stocking, nothing.

I bet that was hard to walk in too.

Where do you walk? You didn't have no place to walk. Except they took you out for counting how much.

For roll call.

Right.

How many times a day did they did they do that? They did it mostly in the middle of the night. They took you out. And later on, they gave you beets to eat, those red beets. Which was good, I mean it was a miracle it was good. Because everybody was hungry. And you could have as much as you wanted, which was a miracle.

And they tattooed us here.

Well, now we're in Auschwitz, right?

Yeah. And they tattoo us--

Could you lift that up and maybe the camera could focus in on that?

Yeah.

Can you tell us what is says?

And this is 27450.

I think you have to turn your hand over, so they could see, in camera number one, right.

Here, you see this number. And this one--

What's the letter there? This one--

2.

No, the letter here. Is that--

For Auschwitz.

Oh.

And that, now I know what it means. That means that I'm going to go to work. They're going to take us out to work. And they took us out, and that was in the evening. And they were counting us, and put us in those wagons--

Cattle cars.

--cattle cars. And we were till next night, at night, a day.

No food in the cattle cars?

No, nothing. And I remember we came and it was dark. And they show us rooms, you know rooms, barracks, but rooms. There were 4, 8, 6, 10, 20 girls in one room like this. That's with 200, double pritsches, two double, first one, 10, there are 20 girls. And we got straw sacks to sleep on it. And I said oh, my God, and a cover.

And a blanket too.

I don't know. It was kind of like a thin, but it was warm. And there was a stove, a wooden stove.

So the conditions were a little better already.

A little better. I was thinking that probably they give us this, and tomorrow they're going to kill us just. And then I went in. There was a latrine. You know what a latrine is? Where you can water, you have a toilet. You can wash yourself and drink as much water you can want.

Oh my God. I was thinking it's heaven.

Comparatively speaking.

That's heaven. And I remember, and they gave us a little bit bread once a week, twice a week, twice a week. And I remember I always said, oh, I can sleep as long as I can, and eat as much as I can bread and die. And that was my prayer every night I went to sleep. I couldn't take it anymore.

And at 5 o'clock in the morning, you got up. At 6 o'clock you went to work.

What kind of work did you do?

They're spinning.

Threads. Making thread?

Threads, that was going around this. That was cold, the Sudeten Deutsch. And the wind, you never saw such a wind, like a storm. Because it was in a--

Well, this is December, isn't it?

Yeah, it was in a valley, because the Carpathians there. And the mountains were all around. It was so windy. It was so stormy, you could hardly see.

You didn't have gloves or hats?

Oh, come on.

Nothing like that.

No.

You were always cold.

Very cold, till we came over where we work, and nobody wants to speak to us, those German women, but they used to work, German men and women, with us. And now I understand they probably say we are some bad people. They shouldn't speak to us. They're going to be punished, probably like this. I cannot imagine like this. And nobody spoke to us.

And every like 6 o'clock we came back home, because it's a half hour to come back. And there was warm in that thing, with the wood. And they gave us a soup. There was a special dining room over there, and gave us a soup. And the Lagerfuhrer was [NON-ENGLISH], a Germany, he was so crazy. He was so crazy. We couldn't even understand him.

He took-- you could see that he was so primitive, on such a primitive background the way he spoke, in his movement. He was-- he was so ugly. And with two SS girls, and they always was strict. He was afraid for them. But one was nice.

She was so delicate. But she got to do the same thing.

But one was terrible, a fat one. I don't know. I don't know. I wouldn't do to a rat is what she was talking, [NON-ENGLISH]. Such bad words she was saying. She was terrible. And like this till December, they was always like this. In December, they came back Volksdeutsche from Auschwitz.

And they tell us, and the war is going to be pretty soon over. And it's going to be over.

Well, before you leave the concentration camp, you say there were latrines and you could wash. What do you-- what do you do for drying yourself? That gave us--

You got a little towel?

They gave us little towels. That was heaven.

Compared to where you were before.

Oh, that was such a heaven, you know, that they gave us this. Yeah. But you got to wash with it by yourself. They give you one thing, and you have it for ours, and instead you got to wash it.

And they gave you soap too?

Soap, that soap, the human soap. But it wasn't warm water. It was lukewarm water, which was good too. It was water.

It was something.

It was something. And we didn't got any hair, because they cut off all the hair. You know? And we got the soup, we got a piece of bread.

And you are strong enough to work every day with these provisions?

Yes. Yes. Yes. I was a young. But we were singing in the camp.

To try to keep your spirits up.

Yeah, we was singing. You know how it is. We're singing and crying. We're doing everything.

Could you observe any of the holidays in any way?

We didn't know what's a holiday. We didn't know nothing. We didn't know then people exist in the world. We didn't know where we are. We looked out. We saw snow in the Carpathians, snow, tall mountains, a valley and grass, and our little camp. We didn't know what's going on. Nobody knew.

We just knew one road to go to work. And with the same road, we came back from work.

Now are we in Auschwitz now?

No. That was in Sudeten Deutsch.

Well, you skipped. You went from the first place to Treblinka.

From that camp , from the first place to Auschwitz. From Auschwitz, to Sudeten Deutsch.

Well, before you leave Auschwitz, you had told me story before that you were in the gas chambers, and then taken out.

That was in Treblinka.

In Treblinka?

Yeah, Treblinka's gas chambers. And later when Mengele took us on one side and the other side. And they took us to Auschwitz. So this was a sisterhood camp. It's just like a little border.

So from Auschwitz, you went to--

From Auschwitz, they took us to Sudeten Deutsch in the night. And we came into this little camp.

And that's where you worked in the spinners.

In the spinners, yeah. And later on, like April, end of April, we got up one morning and it got to be 6 o'clock at work. And they were counting us every day. We got up in the morning and nobody is here. None

Of the guards?

We're waiting. We don't see the [NON-ENGLISH]. We don't see the [GERMAN], that guy. He has always said, [GERMAN]. It was so funny. He was so crazy. I don't know when they put people in-- the craziest people. And nobody was there. We didn't know what's going on. We saw fire.

And we didn't know. We go out and we saw a German soldiers on the-- it was a [GERMAN] probably, they came back. I don't know. But they didn't do to us nothing. They were so occupied with themselves. They were so tired.

The guards?

And we was-- not the guards. They were soldiers from front. They came back.

So you're talking about your liberators now, the Russians.

Yeah, not the Russians. They were Germans first, that they came back. Next day, nobody picks up us again. Then we didn't saw those Russian soldiers anymore. They came soldiers with trucks, with everything, different soldiers, different-- they look different. And on a horse came a man with these stars.

An officer.

Officers, and he came in the first in that camp. He opened the thing. And he says, and he start-- he was so crying. I never saw a man crying like this. And he says, I'm a Jew, he says. I came from Russia. They killed my whole family. I fought in the war. Because he was in Russia during the war. He says, first he says, give a word, we should take off those masquerade, those clothes. We didn't got any other clothes. Just--

Did he bring clothes for you?

No. He told us to go-- those soldiers took us, so that [NON-ENGLISH], another little city, that was maybe five or six miles from our, there was a city. And we didn't see a living soul over there. Everybody was hidden, the Germans. Because they were afraid for the Russians.

And they took us in those stores. And we put on a dress.

Oh, you got dressed from the counter.

And we look in a mirror. We didn't know what a mirror was. I was-- oh my God, how we look. And we took a coat, and

pretty shoes. There was a miracle. And we just ask, are people in this world more? He says, there were a lot of people, they say, a lot of people they say. We were thinking it's a joke.

And later, the other guy said in Russian. He says, you better get out from here. Because you're going to be killed. You'd have nothing to-- I said, then where we should go, we're saying? He said, just go. Keep going. He thought the Germans would come out and there would be a battle.

Not the Germans. He didn't know if the Russians are going to kill us. You know, the soldiers, they was [NON-ENGLISH], or the Germans can come. They're going to kill us. You just better leave this place and go. Then we start going. Everybody was gone. We didn't know where to go. So we're going. We saw trucks. They took us with the trucks. We saw dead horses on the road. We saw cows on the road. We saw little houses on the road.

And one time in the middle, when we were sleeping in a house, it was the night. Oy. And then somebody goes-- I don't know-- from camp. The girl, she says, you know what? They shot over all those other girls. We better leave this place, and went away. And they were looking for us. I don't know who was this, apparently Germans.

And we're going, and going, and going, and going. At least we saw something. And we went in a house. We had a piece of bread with some jello, jelly.

Jelly.

And we didn't see jelly for years. We didn't know what it is.

Everything is--

Everything was so new. Everything was, till we came to Katowice. So a city, people.

How many people were you traveling with?

There were 300. But they were in groups, maybe mine was 100 or 80. Because every group--

Were you traveling by yourself, or was it with the Russians?

Not Russians, the girls. We just walk. Like you take a trip, just walk. You didn't know where you were. And we ask with trucks passing by. Which way to go. They say, go ahead there. Go ahead there. Some trucks took us, and they took us to further. And we just were walking. We didn't know where we were walking.

Now, I can tell you the whole is round.

So each night you would stay in a different house. Houses that--

In a house, with groups with all the girls we slept.

But where?

I don't know. On the road there were houses, empty houses when we're sleeping. We didn't know. I didn't even know what the place is. You went in. It was an empty house. It was dark outside. We were sleeping in this house.

So your destination was to go back home to your house?

Sure. Naturally. We were sleeping. Because how can you go without sleep? And what was to eat in this house, you took it, and you ate to keep up, till you came to a city in Poland, Katowice. Then we saw houses. We saw people, street cars. It was just a miracle, unbelievable.



You couldn't believe it that you see this. I remember when I was walking, and I was always thinking somebody wants to kill me. And I got this imagination maybe two months. I couldn't trust myself. I was thinking they're going to kill me in the back. You were conditioned to it. You saw so many things that you were conditioned.

You were so affected. You were traumatized.

Right. And like I went to Krakow, they took us with the trains for nothing, because we didn't get anything.

Who is they? The Russians?

No.

UNRRA.

The Russians, yeah, but they were under occupation, Russian occupation. But there was a law. Everybody that comes out from concentration can go without fare, just wherever you want. And I went to Krakow.

Did you think you had family there?

No. I never had family in Krakow. But you had-- so this girl, this girl, and this girl. When you're in this, you talk to everybody.

So went with your friends.

Yeah, with my friends. Later we depart. And later we come back. We was sleeping on the floor with them in the gemeinde, on the floor. And later, after a week, what I'm going to stay over the week and a half, I came back to my city. And when I came back to my city, I was sitting on the steps.

Of your apartment building?

No. From when I came out from the train, from the station. And I was so crying. And I saw everything to see. And I didn't know where to go. I had nowhere to go. I don't have no home. I had no relatives. I don't have nothing. And later, I put myself together. And there were five girls of us. But everybody was in the same situation.

But everybody think about himself. We didn't know where to go. And I went to my house, where I used to live in this apartment, my parents used to live. And I knock on the door. And I says, excuse me. Can I come here. I was living here. And she says, sure. She was very gracious. And she says, she wasn't Jewish, but a very gracious person. She says, of course.

And she took me in. It was so beautiful fixed up. It was a beautiful flat. But it was so beautiful fixed up. The Germans fixed up, because were offices. And there was across the hospital there. And they took this building for offices for the hospital, so big hospital [NON-ENGLISH] across this in a school. And she was so gracious. And I was crying. And she was there.

And because you see everything same, the same walls.

It was all familiar.

You're right. And I went to the janitor. And she used to live on the first floor. She went to give me something to eat. I couldn't even eat nothing. And I went back [NON-ENGLISH] because there wasn't a Jewish neighborhood. But I went later, because it was a better people, more elegant people, Christian took those places. It was a beautiful neighborhood.

Had anybody--

That was [NON-ENGLISH]. Then I went back.

Excuse me. Had anybody saved any furniture or any things from your parents' apartment?

Darling, there was nothing to see. You see, this way people can't understand. Nothing was left. Nothing was left. Nothing. You went. They throw you out. You went out with one dress, with a little bit from your house, with a little bit of clothes.

Nothing was left, nothing. It's just like a storm. Like you see a fire. You just run. Right? You see people, I don't blame them. This way, you see it doesn't affect people when they didn't live with it or saw it. As much as you read, and as much people write--

It's still hard to imagine.

You can't. I remember when I have written my first poem, the darkest night. And I wrote a lot of things about it, not as much me. And people came in. They say, Frances, how could you put yourself together and write this?

It was probably a good catharsis for you.

You didn't read this poem?

Yes I did.

Yeah. It was terrible. But I look at them and I says, and I think to myself, I breathe with this. I live with this. I was surrounded with this. This was me. I couldn't take my picture. You could read everything. That's why people don't understand this. Is you can put it on a paper. You really can. Because so many things happened.

How long did you live in your town?

In my town? A year.

And what did you do while you're there?

I told you. I worked in an office. And later, when they start being pogroms, and there was a curfew, and you couldn't go out anymore. There was killing around, very much [NON-ENGLISH] start killing.

Then I went to Oswiecim, when they took us to Germany.

Oh, that's when you decided to leave Poland.

And I came to Berlin, and later with [NON-ENGLISH], worked in the post office. I was writing. But--

We have 10 minutes.

Yeah, what do you want to ask me more?

So you were in the post office, and you worked for-- and UNRRA.

And they gave a job. They gave me [NON-ENGLISH]. For what, for food.

And where did you lived then?

In a barrack.

They had barracks for the displaced persons.

This was a displaced. I imagine the soldiers, German soldiers, the [NON-ENGLISH] used to live over there.

Now, then you had enough food and proper clothing, and warm--

Yeah, I got-- I was human.

And that's the difference between human and--

And I met my husband. And we--

Where did you meet your husband?

In [NON-ENGLISH]. And later--

In the post office?

Yeah. And it was more than a post office over there. And he was the head of it. I was under him. And his sister found out, and she came from Russia. And she was in Kassel. And she-- then his brother-in-law came. And she says, why you should be here come over to us? Then we're going to be together.

How far away was Kassel?

I don't know. How far away was Kassel?

400 miles

Oh, so it was quite a distance, 400--

Yeah, we went to the [GERMAN]. Yeah. And he was vote for a judge from the people. And I was doing nothing anymore. I was waiting to go to America.

You're waiting for your number to come up?

Yeah, America.

Were you going to go to America without him or with him?

Yeah. Yeah. But my quota was Polish.

So your quota was long.

I was never, they say 10 years is close.

So what? You thought that you would wait for the--

I didn't want to wait. But you see, then he says, you know what? You don't have to marry me. But I like you so much. And when you come, you can do whatever you want.

I like this man. And we came to this country.

And you were married?

We married here, in June.

You married here?

Yeah, Jewish, yeah. As you say 1947, 1st of June. And I came to America in 1947, the 17th of April.

You remember that. You have an anniversary coming up.

This I remember. Because this was such a happy thing. And I couldn't get out from this everything.

You came by boat, I presume.

We came. Ernie Pyle was the--

Oh, the Ernie Pyle.

And later, I found out that he was a soldier. He was a pioneer, and that's why they brought with him.

You never thought of going to Palestine?

No. I didn't want to go. Because I just went through so much.

You just wanted to rest your weary head.

I didn't know what I wanted, but I just to be alone, is just to be alone in the world is a very bad feeling, and be so young, not to just-- can't describe. Then I just, I don't know why. Because we was in the country this time. It was always so a house again. And I came here.

Did you come directly to Buffalo?

Right. Well, I came to New York.

New York and then to Buffalo.

Yeah.

What was your first impression of Buffalo?

Beautiful. The sun was shining. It was so pretty here. The grass, and those stores, the food stores. I couldn't imagine. And the clothes, and you could see the clothes in the windows, which was strange. It was everything so strange to me, was new. It was like new born and everything. It was like heaven.

Did you tell your children the stories?

No. No, I never. I tell you something. When my children were small, I was so soaked with the feelings, because I was so young. Then I could feel how they would feel. And I wouldn't want to take away their childhood. Because they wouldn't understand. And they would take tragically this. And I believe you don't tell children tragically things, because they're unhuman things.

Did you tell them when they were older, when they were teenagers?

No. My daughter was mad. I started writing poetry. And then I show it to them, what they think about that. And like this stuff developed. And they went to the library. And till now, I never told them. I told them I was in the gas chamber already. That's all that they know. Because when somebody tells you something or you read this, it's different feeling

then your mother tells you. You became like a guilt of you. And I didn't want them--

You wanted them to have a happy childhood.

A happy childhood, and no guilt, because it wasn't-- they're not guilty. And when they're old and they read everything and they see the pictures--

Did they ask you questions?

Well, I mean there was no conversation. Then they don't ask questions. I want to separate this from their life.

You want them to have a happier memory of growing up.

Well, I believe in a happy childhood. Yeah, I wasn't rich, but I believe a happy child was very important.

Frances, we have to conclude very shortly. Would you like to end with a message or remembrance of something specific?

Yeah. I would like it. You see, freedom, liberty is the most important thing in the world in life. In everybody's life, what's a child, what's a married person, or in any way of life. And that's why every human being-- was Jewish, every religion, every nationality, should strive to keep the liberty for everybody.

That's a universal message. We thank you very much. And I'm sorry that you had to relive those terrible years in giving your story. Thank you very much.

You're welcome.