

Manage-- I'll manage. Good afternoon. My name is Toby Ticktin Back and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center of Buffalo. Today, our guest is Rose Lewkowicz Meyers. Rose is a survivor. She survived many experiences at the hands of the Nazis, mostly in labor camps. And she's going to tell us about it today. But first, we'll start with a question about your childhood. Rose, will you tell us about it, please?

I was born in a small town in Silesia called Siemianowice. And I had two brothers. And I was the only daughter. My father and mother had a store, a men's clothing store. I remember even the street, on Ulica Wandy in Siemianowice. I spent all my childhood there. We were a very close-knit family. We went on picnics. We went to movies. We had family gatherings. And my childhood was very happy. Unfortunately, till the war came, that changed my whole lifestyle.

Can you tell us what happened in 1939, when the Nazis attacked Poland?

In 1939, I as being a youngster wasn't quite aware because for the summers, we always used to go away into the country. So I wasn't quite aware, when in Europe, girls were not allowed to mix into politics. Children, girls were not taught politics in school. So I was very little aware of what was going on till we moved away from Siemianowice, which I was heartbroken because I went to school there and had all my childhood friends there.

Why did you move away and in what year?

We moved away from Siemianowice maybe in 1937 or something.

Before the Nazis.

Before the Nazis came. And we moved to a small town, where my aunt lived, called Pinczów.

In Poland?

In Poland. And that's where as I said, that's where the Nazis came in. And that's where I first knew all about Nazis. And it was a horrible experience because the Polish Army resisted the Nazis. When they came in, people were shot in homes. And in the streets, they were laying dead bodies of people, and horses, and cows.

And some of the more religious people the German was hollering, halt. They start running. And they were shot in the street with their bags going to the synagogue. So then my parents had gone away from there. And I remained. So my parents was in a town called Krynica, which was a bathing resort.

Oh, they went to a spa?

To a spa-like. I remained there. And my parents took very long because you couldn't get mail, regular mail. So it had to be through someone who brought the mail. So it took two months to get a letter. But eventually, I got a letter from my parents. And they asked me if I could come. And here, Jews were not allowed on trains. And you had to wear the Juden band with the yellow star. So I said to myself, what can I do? I'll go on a train. But to cover up the Juden star, I took a cloth to cover, like, let's say, a shawl--

A shawl.

--holding it, hiding the Juden star so I could travel on the train because any other way, you wasn't allowed to.

So what year was this, Rose?

This must have been the end of 1931.

'39.

'39, excuse me.

'39.

Yeah, anyhow, I got to Krynica and lived with my parents there for a little while. And then I remembered, there was a horrible day, they announced over the radio that all the Jewish males should gather in a place.

Umschlagplatz--

Something like that.

A gathering place.

A gathering place. And my father had lost his leg in the First World War. He had only from here up, just past the knee. He was wearing an artificial leg, which I think prosthesis, or what have you. They took away his cane. And they chased the men from hill down. How he ever came home, he was beaten up and bruised. But he survived.

But then all the Jews had to leave Krynica. And from there, we wandered from one little town to the other until we finally came to Sosnowiec. And in 1941, there was a knock on the door. And three soldiers with rifles and the bayonets, they knocked on the door. And they asked for my name, Rose Lewkowicz.

And at that time, my cousin passed away. And we had a little girl living in our house, which wasn't even a year old. So my mother thought, she going to save my life. So she said to the soldier, but you can't take her. That's her little girl. And they didn't listen to my mother. They pushed her away with the butt of the gun, of the rifle. And they took me. And my mother followed down the stairs. And the soldier kicked her. And she fell down the stairs. And they took us and locked us up in a school.

Where had all young girls?

All young girls. There were no males, only young women. And we were on the third floor. And my mother could stay outside and call up because all the people, all the young girls gathered to the windows. But how much could you hear from the third floor? And she tried to tell me not to worry. But they wouldn't allow them to give us bread or anything. I didn't think at that time, we weren't so much afraid of bread. But we didn't know where we going, what's going to happen to us.

It was the unknown. And you were only 20 years old.

No, I wasn't. I was 18 years.

You were 18.

I was 18 years old. Anyhow, the men who was gathering us, it was like-- he looked to us like a man who was buying cattle because he was just gathering all those women. And naturally, I spoke perfect German. I walked over to him. And I asked him, where are we going? He said, don't worry. Don't worry. You're going to have it good. You're going to a place where you're going to work. And we're going to treat you well.

At that time, my brother, [? Yulick, ?] which was in camp Gross And I walked over to him and I said, could you please send me to the camp where my brother is? Could I at least be with him? So he says, I only have order for those camps who have the men. For people, I can only send you where you needed. But, he said, you're going to a camp. You're going to be six miles away from your brother. You probably won't see him. But if there ever is a demand for Gross I will.

Oh, here's the picture of your brother. Let's have a look.

That's my brother, [? Yulick. ?]

He's your older brother.

No, my youngest.

Your youngest brother.

My younger brother-- and I would send you there.

So when we-- after all, they put us in cattle cars. There were hundreds of women. We could hardly move. There was no water, no food, no nothing till we got to the camps.

How long did it take in the cars till you got to the camps?

I don't even remember anymore. I know, when we got out, we were-- breathing was an effort. And we came to a camp called Blechhammer. And we were not allowed to go to the dining room when the other people were there, the inmates, because they were afraid for us to contact and get some information. So they waited till the dining room was cleared. And then we were able to go in.

This is still in Poland?

This was already in Germany.

In Germany.

Was called Blechhammer. And we were there two days. And from there, they took us again. And then we arrived to the camp called Auenrode. In the camp, I was there for one month. At that time, I had to work in a room, which was called-- where we peeled potatoes and some kind of big vegetable. I don't know what they call them, like turnips or something. And we had to cut it with a big knife, and cut potatoes, and wash them, and put them in big barrels. And this was on cement floors. You had to wait there the whole day with water.

By the time you got out, you just didn't-- I never in my life-- I was brought up by a maid. Our maid's name was Elsa. She always hollered, I was her baby. I didn't know how to wash a handkerchief. And he had to put me to peel a whole-- not to peel, but to cut the potatoes in quarters, and put them in the water, and then wash it. I didn't know how to do it. And they said, if you're not going to do it, you're going to get killed. So you could--

You had to learn quickly.

You had to learn quickly if you wanted to live. Of course, by the end of the day, all you got a little bowl of soup. It was like water. But you had to fish for a piece of potato. But anyhow, there was almost till the end of the month. Because in the camp, there was a Jewish Lagerführer. A Lagerführer meant like a director of a camp. There was a Jewish Lagerführer and a German Lagerführer. The German Lagerführer was over the whole camp. The Jewish Lagerführer got his orders from the German Lagerführer. And the Jewish Lagerführer told us what to do. We had to obey without any hesitation.

Of course.

And he happened to be married. And his wife was with us. She came running. And she said, Rose, there's two transport of men with two women that going to [NON-ENGLISH]. Run in to the Lagerführer and see what you can do. They're go into [NON-ENGLISH] where your brother is. So I ran to him. And I said, remember, you promised me that is ever they're going to be an exchange, you're going to send me to [NON-ENGLISH].

He said, go get your clothes. I said, what clothes? Where clothes? I don't have anything, only what I'm wearing. So he says, OK. The men went by truck. And me and another girl had to walk for about eight miles, wooden shoes. And the clay was sticking to your feet. And you were walking like this. And he was pushing

with bayonet. Machen Sie schnell, machen Sie schnell. That means walk fast, walk fast.

What season of the year was this?

Oh, must have been fall. Anyhow, I said-- we were getting closer and closer. But I didn't know how far are we going. They didn't tell us anything. And I was already so exhausted, I didn't care if he shoot me or don't shoot me, even I wanted to see my brother. But anyhow, we came to a fence and a big sign, "Arbeit macht das Leben frei," which means, "work makes your life easy."

Easy.

Some easy. Anyhow, we walked in the camp. And I was amazed. That camp had the grounds were green, with nice grass. And there were benches. And the first bench I saw, I sit down. And I said, now, you can do what you want with me. I'm not going any farther. They walked away. And somebody came running. And they said, this is the camp. You don't have to walk anymore.

So I said, is there a [? Yulick ?] Lewkowicz here? They said, yes. I said, please, go and get him. And sure enough, my brother came. And I told, the heavens open up. I can't believe it. You can imagine the reunion. Of course, it was just tremendous I could be in the same.

There was 1,200 men and 16 women. We had to do all the labor in the camp for the men. The men were walked in the morning out to some place where they labored. And we were in the camp. We had to clean the barracks. We had to put straw when we-- because we had bunk beds. And the they were like burlap. And inside was straw.

Oh, straw.

And after the straw got ground up from sleeping on it, we had to put new straw in it. And then some worked in the washrooms, where you had to wash the personal clothes from the men and your own clothes. And I was, as I said, from-- well, I spoke perfect German. I was lucky. And I got a job in the kitchen. So that was already I had a little bit more food than some others. And a tablespoon of sugar sometimes, you could steal in because we didn't-- they said coffee. But this was some ersatz coffee. It was more like some chicory with water, like mud water.

Could you steal anything for your brother?

Once in a while, as I said, because I, being in the kitchen, not only-- we weren't allowed to do the cooking for the Germans. That was a German cook and a German lady. And she was worse than the Gestapo herself. You couldn't come near anything.

She watched you?

She watched every move but the main chef, he wasn't so bad. Once in a while, I got throwing a dog, a little scrap from the meat. Or when he wouldn't look, you would steal a little scrap or a little piece of roll, which was like you can't imagine. Because we got a little bread, which was for one week. One pound bread, that had to be for one week.

Oh, you told me the story about the mustard in the tin.

Yeah, but this was in another camp.

Oh, it's another one. Well, you'll tell us in a while.

So as I said, when I could grab a piece of roll or a piece of meat, I put it-- because the men came to a window. And we gave them the soup. That was the ration. It was a big dining hall. And everybody came to the window. The soup actually was, like I said, like if you see a puddle of mud where the rain gathers, and then you soup it up. And if you could find a little piece of potato, that was your good luck.

So when I know, I try to sort of manage when my brother came to the window to put a little piece of meat, a piece of scrap that I found, I would give to him. So I put it on the bottom of the soup. Because somebody would notice it, they'd said that's favoritism.

You'd be in trouble.

And I'd be in trouble. Or sometimes, they used to get big jugs of coffee to take for the men to go to work. And if I was fortunate to steal a little sugar and put it on the bottom of it, I didn't dare mix it. And as I said, my brother was brought up-- he grew up in Germany and brought up in German schools, where I had to change German school for Polish school. So he was maybe fixed the motorcycles for the Gestapos. So he would sometimes get a little easier work.

But at one time, there were one man out of camp, they were sent home for two days of furlough. This was in 1941, in the beginning of 1941. So my brother said to me, how could I go? He says, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to cut my finger off at work so they're going to have to send me home to a hospital.

So I said to him, [? Yulick, ?] please, whatever you do, don't ever do it because I'm never going to talk to you. Don't do it. You're going to be a cripple for the rest of your life. Because nobody thought that you're not going to survive. You always thought that you have a chance to survive. So he didn't do it.

But this one man that when he came back from his furlough, he found out that there were certain Nazis that you could buy them-- if you went to them and you give them gold, and jewelry, and diamonds, and money, then you could buy them out. So this one man was bought out by his wife. And he went to my parents. And he told them, if you have the money, and if you have the jewels, you could buy out your son.

Well, where were your parents at this time?

My parents were--

They were still home?

They was in Sosnowiec. At that time, we lived in Sosnowiec. So my parents paid whatever they had, the last of it. And they bought him out. But as I said, that was the end of my brother because he used to work in another city. And you had to go walk up the street and then go take the streetcar to the next city.

And you had a pass. If you walked the street, everybody had to have a pass, identification pass, with your picture and a Juden band. And he went to the streetcar to go to work. And they stopped all-- the whole street was closed up. And they grabbed all the people. And that's when they took him. And they shipped him to-- they took him to Auschwitz.

Did you ever find out what happened to him?

No. There were some people that told me that they-- there was one day-- because they had trickery sometimes. Because the young people, they seldom, really-- most of the time, first, they took the older people, and the crippled people, and the children. They went to crematoriums.

But the younger people who were able to work, they sometimes tried different trickery. So they told people who wanted to volunteer to go to a different camp to work. That what I was told. I don't know. And my brother volunteered. And they said that they took trolley little cars out of Auschwitz. And then they went around on a track. And they brought them right back, straight going to the ovens.

Oh, so it was a trick.

So how true it is, I don't have any idea, no papers, no affidavits telling me that he really died. I know, before, when I was still in [NON-ENGLISH] and my brother was home, he wrote me a letter. At that time, this was in the beginning of '41, he wrote a letter that he came from work, and the doors were broken open,

and there was no parents. Only the people were grabbing whatever furnishing was there. And everybody was stealing.

Your neighbors, your Polish neighbors?

Yes. And that my parents was taken in the selection to-- probably to Auschwitz. So when I got that letter, I fainted. And I was out for two days. And the girls told me, later on, they were poking me with needles. Because if you were out more than three days, then they give you-- in our camp, there was no concentration camp. They give you some pill to put you to sleep and that's it. If you couldn't work, you were no good to them. You had to work. If you couldn't do your work, that's it.

Oh, they had to keep you alive.

So the girls were afraid. They put all kind of things. They poked me with needles. And after two days, I woke up because I couldn't.

It was a tremendous shock you got.

Of course, I was crying. But that didn't do me no good. I still had to do what I had to do.

So you assumed that your parents were gassed. And you still have a question about your brother.

As I said, I used to walk-- after I survived, I went back to the city where we lived, in Katowice, which was near Siemianowice, and when I walked in the street, and I saw somebody in the back--

Oh, this is your family. What a lovely, lovely family.

Yes. But this was my older brother, who died before the war.

You look so much like your mother. What a handsome family.

But as I said, I used to follow people. And I tapped them. And I said-- and then they turned around. And I saw, it wasn't my brother. So didn't do me much good. Didn't do me much good. But anyhow.

I thought they had another picture of your family when they were forced away.

Yeah, that was the pictures they had to have. They were passport pictures. Because nobody was allowed in the street without an armband with the Jewish star and a small identification card, with your small passport pictures. And those pictures, I had for-- somebody gave them to me afterwards. I had a picture that my parents sent me to camp. It was one of those heavy pictures. That was my mother, and my father, and my two brothers, and I was sitting on a bench. And I hid it under that straw mattress and everything.

And when the war was over, and I had to try to go back where I came from, I was on-- and they were cattle cars, of course. And I had, I don't know, was a little bag. And I had two rags that I saved that I had to change clothes. And I had that picture. And somebody stole it. And I would gladly give him the two rags if I only saved the picture.

That's so sad.

And that was the end of that picture. I would have given anything to have it. But as I said, when my brother went back from [NON-ENGLISH], they started liquidating. After a while, they liquidated this camp. And they shoved us to another camp. So all the women--

Still in Germany?

Yes, these were all in Germany.

The camp where I was later with my brother was called [NON-ENGLISH] And I was there from about 1940-- '41, already, because I only was one month in Auenrode. I was there for from 1941 to, I would say, at the beginning of 1943, the very beginning. And then they took everybody. They said, they're going to dispose of the camp. But before I go on, I remembered one thing. We had a man who was a barber. And he had to shave and cut--

A Jewish barber?

A Jewish barber. And he had to shave and cut the hair of the Gestapo Wachman, who was the Lagerführer, which is like the camp director. But somehow or another, he got mad at him one day. And he said that he walked the grounds. And he whistled the Polish hymn, which is called "Jeszcze Polska nie zginela."

And he took that man. And he beat him up that you couldn't see no face. It was one blood of mess. It was just blood. You couldn't see no eyes, no face, no nothing, just one blood of mess. And they erected a cage in the middle of the camp. And he put him in there. And he made-- he called Appell. We called it an Appell. All the people should gather.

Oh, the roll call.

The roll call. And he said, look at this man. You see what he looks? If any one of you has the smallest thing, don't obey, that's what you're going to look like.

Oh, dear. Did had to survive, that man?

He survived, somehow. He was crippled for the rest-- I don't know, his face was all cut up and all crooked. In fact, this same Gestapo man-- where I was born in Siemianowice, when you were one year old, you went to the goldsmith and you had your ears pierced. And I had gold earrings with a little ruby because my birthstone is ruby. I was born in July. And my parents had my-- so in fact, as I told you, we had a maid by the name of Elsa. And I was more her baby. But my parents were in business. So when they pierced my ears and I cried, she fainted.

But so this German Gestapo man, they had big German Shepherds. He put the dog on me for one reason. And he bit me. And they ripped out-- because any piece of gold that you had-- and he bit me one ear. And they ripped out the gold from both ears. And I had those earrings since I was one-year-old.

Oh, dear. They could have just asked you for it.

No, I would have gladly given them. And I said, on top of that, you got a couple of whips.

What happened to Elsa? Did she ever--

Elsa? No, when we moved--

Did you ever find out?

No, I never found out. After the war, I went back to Siemianowice because I wanted to see once more the place where I grew up because I had a very happy life in Siemianowice. And I went to the place where we lived. And that was 50-- this I can remember. I can't remember the name because in our camp, we didn't have tattooed numbers on the hand. We had a name.

And when you saw a Gestapo going over there and you were supposed to go here, you had to ask, Number So-and-so ask permission to go by. He was over there. And maybe he's going to come by. And you had to ask permission to go by because the Gestapo was going to come by. But for the life of me, one thing the war did to me, I can't remember names and I can't remember numbers. If my life depended today to say the number that I had, I couldn't remember it.

You must have blocked it out.

There's something that, as I said, that it just-- it escapes me.

Is with you. So they took you from that labor camp to the new labor camp? They took us from that labor camp. We went to Gross-Rosen. And like I said, during the time we were in camp, they gave us medication so we wouldn't have any menstrual because they couldn't supply us with any Kotex or what have you.

Any sanitary pads.

So the whole time, we didn't have any period. But in Gross-Rosen, we were over 200 women in a room, because we waited there for another transport. And I woke up in middle of the night full of blood. The other girls were swimming with me in that bunk bed. But then it disappeared again. So from Gross-Rosen, they transported us to a camp in Czechoslovakia, which was called Schatzlar.

So that must have been a long cattle ride again.

Yeah, it was a very long. And we didn't see a soul. We didn't get no bread what we ate before. Because usually, as I said, what they gave us, this was one pound of bread for one week. Sometimes, we were lucky, we got a tablespoon of jam and one little piece of butter, what you get here, sometimes, a little square of butter.

Little pad of butter.

That wasn't butter, that was margarine. And this was for a week. That was it.

And you were supposed to be strong enough to work on that?

Oh, and how. You didn't work, you better believe it, that was the end of you because they said they can't waste food on somebody who can't do the work. So there, we went to Schatzlar. This was in Czechoslovakia. And when we got there, there was only women. We were 120 women. There were no men. And we had one barrack. There were three rooms for the 120 women. And of course, there was a Jewish cook and a Jewish Lagerführerin, which is, again, like a camp director, and the German Lagerführerin.

And she wasn't human. I never seen in my life a-- she used to say like this, my day don't start till I kick and till I beat you up. Till I beat you up and I kick you, then my day starts. She didn't care who it was-- over the head, over the body, she had a whip. And she-- whoever came on the head, she beat merciless, without no excuse. She didn't have no excuse.

Did she ever hit you?

Oh, did she ever hit me? I ran away because I always tried to hide, to get out of trouble. So we worked. And this was a Spinnerei fabric. We were making threads. The machines were almost as that bench. And there was one-- the Czechoslovakian people were working there. But they were civilians. They worked, they got their wages, and they went home.

I had to work on four machines. What was my work? I had to put special knots that the thread wouldn't fall apart. And then when the machine would ring, I had to service four machine. I had to run between the four machines. When the machine was ring, I had to take the pile of thread off from the machine. Then they would go to a drying room.

You had to work very, very fast.

And then on Saturday, on Saturday, we had-- the room was higher than this. The machines had transmissions way up on top. And I had the job to go way up on top-- now, I'm afraid of heights-- I had to pour oil in the transmissions. And there was a single ladder. And nobody was holding that ladder. If you fell down and broke your neck, so one Jew left, didn't matter much. But now, if I have to go someplace high, I hold on for my dear life.

Of course, of course.

But one day, she got mad at me. And she sent me up in the drying room. And she locked the door for, I don't know, six hours, or for as long as we worked in the factory. That was six to eight hours.

Must've been very hot if it was so high.

When I came out of there, it was so hot, my nose was bloody. And ever since then, it was-- any little provocation, my nose would bleed. Well, no reason at all. But as I said, she liked to torture girls. She picked somebody.

What happened to her at the end when you were liberated?

At the end, see, as I said, when we-- in this camp, there were only women. And on the outside, they told us, they were Frenchmen, they were non-Jews that were forced to come as laborers because there were coal mines in Schatzlar. But they lived by Czechoslovakian people. They went to work with-- I think with a guard. But they went home.

And after work, they could go where they want, where we couldn't go even outside the barrack with anybody. We always were watched. And towards the end, they knew that the Russians are going to free our area. So they played a roulette. We found that out later. The Germans made trenches around the camp and put bombs around them. And the Frenchmen came at night and took the bombs away. So they wouldn't bomb us out.

So luckily that one night, when the Frenchmen took the bombs away, that night, the Russians came in, and we were freed. So the girl who was above me in the bunk came running. She said, you know what? I found out where the Lagerführerin lives. I said, where? And the Russian soldiers used to come in to our barracks. I was very much afraid of them. I don't for what reason, but I was very frightened of the Russians.

And this one Russian, since I spoke-- besides German, I spoke also Polish. And between Polish, you could speak a little Russian, not much, but we told this one Russian soldier, you know, we found out where this Lagerführerin is. Would you go with us? And we'll get her.

So he said, all right. So two Russian soldiers, me, and the other girl start going. She knew. She found out. Some people went out of barracks. I was too weak to bother. We went to find where she lived. So some German's kids ran before us to tell them that some Jews are coming with Russian soldiers.

When we got there, we knocked on the door. And the mother of the Lagerführerin said-- we knocked. And she said-- we came in. And she said, we asked for her, and she said, she isn't here. I don't know where she is. And we were smart enough to know, the door was locked to the other room. And I said to the Russian, I think she's hidden in there. And sure enough, she was hidden in the bedroom. And the Russian got her out. And he said, I can't do nothing. But let's go with her. And we take her to the Russian kommandantur, which was like, let's say, like a--

The commander

--commander or what. So all the way, that's one satisfaction I felt. He had the bayonet, pushing her--

Instead of the other way.

--that she should go faster. That was, just for once, turned around. And when we come there, he was-- I don't know if he was, I never knew ranks of army, or soldiers, or what-- he must have been higher than an officer.

Oh, yes. This German Gestapo woman, one time, she didn't cut my hair, but she just took the scissors and pulled. And she cut out here a piece, and here a piece, and here a piece. Because at other camps, they

shave the women's hair all together. Our camps didn't. So when we got there, and he asked me question, and I told him how mean she was to us, yes, there was one time, one. So he said, here's a scissors, cut her hair. I was sitting there. And I was baffled. I couldn't do it.

One time, there was one incident which I have to mention, which was I'll never forget it. She wanted to poison us. So she locked the dining room. It was a big room with just benches and plain, makeshift tables. And she got a hold of rotten horse meat. But the windows and the doors were barred-- something, I don't know, some bars put across that we couldn't get out. And she made us eat the meat.

And naturally, we were very sick. And we were throwing up. And there were just a whole bunch of bathrooms, one next to the other. And we were staying next to the bathroom, and one over the other, we were throwing up. And then she made us clean the junk, that. Of course, some were sick for months. As I said, luckily, I don't--

She wasn't human, was she?

No, she-- as I said, we were in a lot of atrocities. But she wasn't human. I never came across anybody.

So the Russians took her there.

So the Russians, he said to us, look, don't worry, we'll put a-- you see, across the street, he said, there's a makeshift prison. We put her in there. And she'll have plenty of Russian visitors. And then we'll send her away. So what really happened afterwards, I have no idea.

What did you do in this labor camp, Rose?

As I said, in this labor camp, we had the Spinnerei factory, which we made the threads.

That's what you did?

Yes. And the threads were later on sent to other factories to make the uniforms for the Nazis. And as I said, on Saturday, and we had to-- some had to clean the floors in the factory. And I had to go way up there and put oil in the transmissions.

Did you have Sunday off?

No, we hardly ever had off. And then the director of the factory, he had a garden. And we had to go and weed his garden and clean his garden. So there hardly ever was. If you had an hour. And a drop of water was-- to wash your body with a drop of water was just--

Was heaven.

--something. I remember, one time, I cried. I said, I'm not going to eat. I don't want nothing. If I don't get a drop of water to wash myself, you could kill me right now. I can't go on anymore. Because people had lice underneath the skin. They were infested in your skin because there was not enough soap and waters.

You just couldn't keep clean.

So sometimes, even the girls had to cut their hair so short that there was only bare to the skin because you didn't have no shampoo. Who had shampoo? That was a luxury. In fact, sometimes, we used to kid ourselves because, as I said, our camps didn't have crematoriums.

So we used to kid ourselves, who knows, we might not survive. We'll meet each other like two pieces of soap on the shelf. Because we were told that in Auschwitz, that once the bodies were cremated, not only did they just cremate you, but the fat of the person was made into soap, the skins of the people-- some artists had to paint and make lampshades.

And you were told that in the labor camp?

The hairs were sent to make mattresses. The meat, if there was any meat of some people that died, they grind it up and make it for to feed cats and dogs. Every part of the human body was used. So as I said, I have no proof of that. But that's what we were told because one time, we had the transport of women, I think about 30 women, that came from Auschwitz to our camp.

And we were wild, but they were like animals let out from a cage that you keep overnight where don't see light or nothing. Naturally, they came from the camps where they escaped the crematoriums. Then they was telling us things that-- we always said, no, if we don't survive, maybe we'll meet as two pieces of soap on a shelf. Who knows?

Were you liberated, Rose?

We were liberated in 1945.

Do you remember the day?

I remember the day because the Russians came and said, today is one day, all the stores are ripped open. They ripped all the stores open. You can go and plunder. And everybody ran. And you know where I went? You won't believe. Everybody came, and they said, I'm stupid. You must have gone crazy since the camp.

I went to the factory and found a place with water. And I found a wooden little barrel or something, a flat thing, a utensil. And I sat and bathed myself. And they came home. One had one shoe. One had a stocking. One had a blouse. And they said, look, we got things. I said, I don't care. If I survived, if I'm going to have, I'm going to have. If not, I found a little water. I was able to wash. To me, that was worth more than any piece of clothing.

So when you were liberated, what happened to you then?

What happened? The woman, the Czechoslovakian woman that I worked at the machine that she worked-- I had to work, there were civilians.

Civilian workers.

She said-- she was a very small woman with a hunchback, I remember, but she was very kind. She sometimes used to put a little piece of bread. And she said, take it when nobody sees or different thing.

Oh, yes, in that camp, I have to tell it. I can't. My children think that those are tales. They can't believe it. And where we was in Schatzlar, there was a factory nearby who made mustard. And there was a girl, a young Czechoslovakian girl, who worked there. And she used to come to visit some woman on her break. So I used to sometimes see her. The only way I could see or talk to her was in the restroom.

So one day, I said to her, you know what? Bring a jar of mustard. She said, what do you need mustard? What you going to do with mustard? I said, mustard, it's more than diamonds. Bring it. But, she said, I'm going to get caught. I'm going to put in another camp. We're not allowed to associate with you. I said, I know. But put it on the window. If they catch me, I said, I stole it. They can only punish me. What can I lose?

Any drop of food was-- you can't imagine, a drop of food. Somebody throws away a crumb, you would grab it. Any crumb of food was, really, like you save your life. So she brought the mustard.

And like I said, we got one pound of bread. That was for a week. If you ate it before, you could go hungry. And how many nights you put your hands in your mouth and you cried because you were hungry and you were cold? Because you had the bunk bed and there was-- the mattress were made out of burlap. And you had straw in it and one black blanket, that's it.

What kind of clothes did you have beside the clogs, the wooden shoes?

Clogs, the wooden shoes. And they were murder because if it was snow or limey, you couldn't walk. You twisted your feet.

What did you wear? Did you have a coat or a sweater?

I don't even remember what we had. We had very little clothes. We had very little clothes. I don't know how we ever-- today, when I go out, when it's a little cold, I shiver, and I don't know how we ever went through it four years. Because from '41 to '45, I sometimes, I think I must have dreamed it. I pinch myself. Could it be? I myself sometimes now, I just can't believe it.

But anyhow, the girl brought the jar of mustard. And she put it on the window. And I stole the jar of mustard. And nobody caught me, luckily. And I brought it home. And we got one tablespoon of jam. And I put the tablespoon of jam in the mustard and mixed it up. And I was one who could resist not to eat the bread at once or twice.

So I cut a little piece and a little piece. I cried, but I wouldn't eat because I know if I eat it fast, I won't have for the rest of the week. So I put a little mustard with jam. And when I tell my children, they say, you must be crazy. Who eats mustard with jam? But that was the most delicacy you could ever think of, mustard with jam to put on.

Sure, it was more sustaining than your tablespoon of jam.

Yeah, well.

But did people steal from each other?

Yes, because anybody-- some people were so hungry, they couldn't resist it.

They couldn't constrain themselves.

They didn't do it out of viciousness.

No, I'm sure.

They were so hungry. Anyhow, when the war was over, this Czechoslovakia-- I weighed 60 pounds.

60 pounds. 60 pounds, that's like a young child.

And as I said, we were getting weaker. You didn't get any more nourishment. And so you could hardly sustain yourself. How, I think, just the idea that you thought, maybe I'll survive. I'll go home and I'll find my brother. Or you'll find somebody, that made you go. It's not the food or anything, just the hope that maybe you'll survive and you'll find somebody of your family. But anything else, the beating and everything, somehow or another, one tried to help the other.

And sometimes, with all that, sometimes, one of the girls was singing, or one was telling a joke, and you try to make yourself for an hour forget where you are. So she said, when the war will be over, I'll come and get you. Sure enough, she came with a little wagon, like you see the newspaper boys have a little red wagon--

This Czechoslovakian woman.

--this Czechoslovakian woman came with a wagon. And she kept her word, which I didn't believe. And she said, I'm taking you home. Home? Who? Who? What? What? That word home, you couldn't imagine what that word home meant, even. And she took me to her home. And she only had a kitchen and a bedroom. And she had her two daughters because her son-in-laws were forced to go to the German Army. And she took me to her home. And she said, you know, dear, you can't eat too much. You eat very little because

there are some kids that, after the war, they have too much food. And they died because their stomach couldn't take it.

Absorb it.

And so she gave me every day a little bit of food. And she didn't have a-- they didn't have bathrooms like we have here. So she sent her husband out. And she put a big tub, a wooden tub on the floor. She heated a big kettle of water. And she bathed me. Like a little baby, she bathed me. And she put me on a couch to sleep. That was the first time I really know what being covered with a nice clean cover and having a sheet.

How very, very kind.

And she said to me, you know what? She gave me a little basket because not far from her house, if you went down maybe two miles, there were farmers, Czechoslovakian farmers. She said, tell them that you from the camps. Tell them who they are. They'll give you a little milk. And they'll give you eggs. And they'll give you a little whatever they have in produce. And I'll cook for you. And I'll make you little bit by little bit to get on your feet.

Sure enough, when I mentioned I was from the camp, they were all very generous. Everybody would give a couple of eggs. One give a little milk. And one give a little piece of butter. They didn't have much because--

But they shared.

--but they shared. They gave. The Czechoslovakian people were very good. And as I said, little by little, she brought me where I could walk. And then she said to me, you don't know what you're going back to. If you want to, I'll adopt you. I said, thank you. You're very kind. But I can't. I have to go home. I have to see. I hope maybe somebody is alive. And then when we started-- because they had a certain amount of time to wait.

I remember one thing. We went to find the director of the factory, the one who owned the factory. He still owned it after the war. And he gave us some kind of statement that we worked for him in the factory. We thought, maybe, we're going to need it. He did give to those women who went. I still have it somewhere. I don't know.

But anyhow, then we found out, we can leave. And there were only cattle cars. And some cars stayed on the tracks for weeks. So you had to jump from one car to the other, which one was going. One went maybe a little while. Then it was stopped. And then it went again.

And it took maybe a week till I got back to the city where I came from. But I looked around and I didn't find anything. And where you knocked on the door, you couldn't find a room to live. You couldn't. It was very difficult. There were young men from camp and women that lived together. But I was afraid of it.

So how long did you stay in your hometown?

Somehow another, later, I found a place where there was a lot of families. In one flat, they lived three, four families together. And they took me in. And I stayed there.

How long did you stay there?

I stayed there for a while till I met a young woman that went through the same-- the different camp. And we sort of became friends. And then from there, they said, in Poland, there's nothing much. There started to be antisemitism. And some of the girls that came back from the camps, they went to claim their house that the Polish people killed them because they wanted to claim their homes.

There was one girl that was with me in camp. She went to a city, Kraków. And her house was staying intact. It wasn't bombed. And the janitor had taken possession of their house. And when she came home, and she said, I want my house, he killed her. So she survived four years in camp. And then he killed her for it

because she wanted the house.

So anyhow, then the people started to move from there to Germany. So I and one other lady, again, with the cattle car marches. I thought, we're never going to finish with the cattle car. We started to smuggle ourselves to Germany.

You just had to smuggle yourself? Wasn't there an agency that would help you?

No, no. At that time--

No help at all.

--there was no help. So we smuggled ourselves to Germany. And boy, for weeks, you stayed in the cattle car. Of course, you could buy, go out. And again, the trouble with water. I remember, we-- in a railroad station, a little bathroom with a cement floor in the winter. But one girl stayed outside and one girl was inside washing on the cement floor with a little water on the cold cement floor. How we didn't catch pneumonia, I don't to this day remember.

What did you do for food? You didn't have any money.

Oh, we had a little money.

Where did you get the money?

I don't even remember. As I said, some things, I wish I could-- somehow or another, I could remember. So we went into Germany. And then we lived in Stuttgart.

Oh, a pretty town.

We lived in Stuttgart-- me, and my girlfriend, and some other family. And then we lived in Stuttgart. There was already better there. Oh, yes, you could go. There were camps where a lot of people, Jewish people, and then the agency would give you food and money.

Right, the Joint was in these camps.

Yes, but we did-- I had so much enough, four years of camp. Other people were only two years or a year and a half, they went to the end. Four years of camp, I didn't. Couldn't go to the camps. So you could go to the UNRRA. And they would give you rations, so much flour, so much margarine, so much this. And somehow or another, we lived the best we could.

But as I said, there usually was-- one apartment had usually five, six families. You never knew what meant to have a room for yourself till way later. Way later, in Munich, I got a room by a German woman. And the Joint paid for me to go to a school to learn to sew. But that was much later.

And then, as I said, I found a second cousin who survived the camp. But later on, his wife had family in Canada. And they emigrated. They couldn't take him to Canada. So they took him to Buffalo. And later on, he went to the Jewish Family Service and asked if they could send for me. So I came to Buffalo.

So that's how you came to Buffalo?

Yeah, that's why I came to Buffalo. Yes.

What year did you come to Buffalo?

I came in 1949, in May 1941-- '49. That's right, May 18, 1949, I came.

So for four years after the war, after your liberation, you were wandering around--

In Germany, here and there.

--in Germany, and you never found anybody from your family except this cousin?

I always followed people because, as I said, I knew my parents weren't alive anymore. But I hoped my brother. And I followed people around. And then I tapped them on the shoulder. And when they turned around, they weren't him. So it was just--

Very sad.

--was just a useless thing. When you think of it, it's really a comedy. After being four years in concentration camp, all-- we had beautiful furnishings. We had a beautiful house with beautiful things. There's some things that stayed to me as vivid as the nose on my face, some paintings that we had in the house or some things that were. And they were all robbed. They were all gone.

And after four years, they write me from Germany that yes, for four years in concentration camp, we're going to give you \$1,200. I said, I don't want your money. I don't want your money. Leave me alone with the money. Give me one person that I have my own, somebody that I can call. Somebody had brothers, sisters. I didn't have nobody. All I wanted is to have somebody from my family. But unfortunate, as far as I looked, I couldn't find nobody.

Do you have any family in Israel who survived no?

So you raised a family of your own children and they don't have cousins?

Yeah, but as I said, I paid a big price for it because, as I said, due to the things that they stopped the menstrual period, I could conceive but I couldn't carry. I always miscarried. And I kept on. See, in the Jewish law, when you have a child, you give the name after somebody who is dear and who, to me-- was a continuance to me was having children that I could name after my parents.

So with my first child, I miscarried completely. Then when I got pregnant a second time with my son, and the third month, I was hemorrhaging. They took me by the ambulance to the hospital. And the doctor said, I don't know. It doesn't look good. But he tried everything. And he said, look, I did everything humanly possible. Now, it's up to God. And I had my second. And I had my son. And then every time, I tried for four years, I had one miscarriage after the other. So you have three namesakes in your three children.

Yes. And I finally named my-- as I said, my oldest son is named after my father. And my youngest son-- my second son, when he was born, the doctor told me, you can't have any other children because you had so many miscarriages, you lost so much blood. In fact, one time, I was so-- I looked I looked like a muselmann after a camp. A muselmann was somebody, he was, really, very skinny and very dehydrated.

A muselmann was the kind of person who was virtually dead.

That's right.

Oh, I see. On the screen, we have a picture of your parents. They look so sad there. When was that taken?

That was taken maybe in 1941 towards the end because they had to have passport-- those were two passport pictures put it together in one.

But why did they need passport pictures?

Not passport pictures, there was passport pictures taken on an identification card.

Oh, was it for their identification card?

Yes, you couldn't walk in the street without identification card or without a Juden band with-- you had a band. And on the band was sewed on a star, a Jewish star. And if you walked-- when I left, there wasn't a ghetto yet. So when they walked, you had to have on identification card.

How did you get these pictures?

There was my cousin's, a sister who survived. And she had the first picture and this picture that she gave-- somehow or another how, as I said.

It must have been a happy day when you got those pictures.

Yeah. And as I said, so I had them made into those pictures. And then she even gave me the picture that-- where my brother is very little, my oldest brother. Because I said, my younger brother was born in Germany, in Leipzig. So this is, to me, the biggest treasure I have. In fact, when I came to the United States, when I told you, the boat ride must have been too much to me.

Oh, 1949.

Yes, because the day after I arrived here, I had-- I don't know, in Polish I know what they call it. My intestines twisted over. And they had to rush me to the hospital. In fact, at that time there was a Dr. Stone here in Buffalo.

Oh, William Stone, Dr. William Stone.

Yes. And my cousin, when he brought me to him, he said, there is no time to take her, to call an ambulance. By the time we call the ambulance, she'll be dead. Because my intestines all twisted over. And they would have all twisted together. And I would have died. So he called. Fortunately, he lived upstairs of his office. He called his wife. And he said, take her because there is no time.

And at that time, there lived also a Dr. Goldberg, who was a surgeon. He operated on me. And Dr. Stone was a Toronto Jew. And he spoke Yiddish. And he said, during the operation, while I was under anesthetic, I spoke to my mother. He said, there was something-- he said, he never came across such a phenomenon. He said, he saw me trying to hold somebody and talking to my mother throughout the operation. So apparently, subconscious or I don't know if there is such a thing--

Yes, I'm sure.

--as a world beyond, maybe I had nobody, my mother was staying near me and talking to me throughout the operation.

And you survived.

I don't know how. Sometimes, even to this day, I don't know how I survived. It's just a really strong will. But I survived. And afterwards, I said to myself, well, I survived. And where is somebody? There's nobody there.

Do you tell these stories to your children?

I do. In fact, when my son, Bill, was little and he used to stand up in the crib, he used to say, somebody, anybody. He wanted to get out of the crib. So he used to say, somebody, anybody, he used to hear me say. So he used to holler. And when I tell him today, he thinks that's a big joke.

Do they believe the stories that you tell them?

Yes, they do. But my daughter starts crying. And she covers her ears. She says, how can it be possible? How can anybody live through such a thing? When you remember it, this was even before I-- just before I left to the camps, when the Germans came in, when you talk to them today, they say, we weren't that brutal. They went into hospitals where women had newborn children. And they opened up, like on the third or fourth

floor, they opened up the windows. And they took the newborn child and threw it out through the window.

And when you tell it to them today, they say, oh, I wasn't a Nazi. Nobody was a Nazi. Nobody-- everybody was good. And everybody was. And everybody was good, and how come those atrocities happened? It just didn't happen-- it didn't fall down from the sky.

Can you hear stories or read stories about the war?

Yes, because I want to. Because you see, you were not allowed to have any newspaper. We had no radio. We had nothing. So from one camp to the other, you had no knowledge of what's going on. You wanted to know what was going on. And look, my father had two brothers. All right, one passed away before the war. But my father had another brother. And I had cousins. My mother had-- they were five sisters. Nobody survived. I'm looking for cousins. I'm looking for somebody. Why am I one person alone? Why did I survive? What for? All right, I'm glad and thank.

To tell the story, obviously.

You know, I'm glad that I have children. But when I was bringing up my children, I wasn't-- when I see my daughter, and my daughter is married and has two grandchildren, she's a patient mother. She sits. And I never had patience. When they started crying, I couldn't take it. I was pulling my hair. How could I be a good?

You were traumatized.

I didn't have the patience that a mother should have to children.

That's quite understandable.

I didn't know. I didn't know what to do. When I first got married, I didn't know what it means. When I first got married, I said to somebody, how does it look when water boils?

You never had any experience.

I didn't know a lot of things you had to learn. And you didn't have nobody. Somebody could go to a mother, to a sister, to a brother, tell me how to do this. I didn't have anybody. Everybody was in the same rut like I was because everybody-- or you were too sick or like my husband used to wake me up sometimes in the middle of the night, and I was screaming, and I didn't even know why I'm screaming.

I sometimes even now wake up that the Gestapos are knocking on the windows, and I'm looking for a corner where to run away. And I see no corner where to hide or where to go. Is it ever going to end? Or sure, you some of the things. It's like you cut your finger. At first, it hurts very badly. But then it heals and it's not so bad.

Some of the things are not as painful. And I want to know what's going on. Because like I said, I didn't know what went on five miles away from me, or what went on in that camp, or what went on in that camp. So I'm curious. I want to know. And maybe, somebody in that camp survived that would know. Maybe there was a relative.

I hope a miracle happens, Rose. I hope one of these days somebody surfaces. You read about these stories and hear about these stories.

Oh, that would be the biggest gift God can bestow on me. I don't know how many years God will grant me. And it would be the biggest gift that God can bestow on me to find somebody that will say, I'm your cousin.

I can't believe it because my mother had one uncle, which I loved, one brother, which I loved very much. And he was a big, tall man, very broad-shouldered. And somebody told me that they had to torture him to kill him because he was so strong. I don't know where he went, or where, or what. So as I said, he lived in a

small town. And so in the country, he was somehow or another stronger and bigger. And so they told me, they had to torture him. He had maybe eight children. But whenever he came to our town, he always had candy or peanuts.

Maybe one of these children will surface. In the meantime, all I can say is so many thanks for telling us this story. And we hope you will come to the archives.

I hope it helps to enlighten somebody else. And I only hope to God that people will be smart enough to stop atrocities in the future, that. Because I think everybody should reach out to anybody. And if there's understanding and love, maybe with God's help, never something like this will happen again. That's all I can say.

I can't add anything but amen. Thank you very much.

You're welcome.