https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I am the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo, New York. We are a Channel 2-- I'm sorry, we're at Channel 4. I saw the number 2. And it is Thursday, May 16, 1991, and our guest this evening is Lola Swede.

Lola is from Poland. Lola, will you tell us about your childhood?

Well, I was born in Poland, of course in a little town, called Mielnik, near Kielce. And in 1933 we moved to LÃ³dz. In LÃ³dz, I started to go to school.

How old were you then?

When?

In 1933.

I was about six years old. And then, 1939, when the war started, Hitler came in.

Wait. Before we get to Hitler, tell us about your childhood, about growing up.

I had a very normal childhood. I came from very religious parents. My father was a rabbi, but he didn't practice. He was a businessman, actually. But he had a title of rabbi. And just normal.

And what was his business, Lola?

Dry goods.

Did he do it in the city, or he traveled?

Yes, traveled in the city. And it was OK. We had nine siblings-- eight sisters, one brother.

Altogether you were nine.

Yes.

And you were comfortable. You had a good life.

A very, very happy life. We were very happy. I was.

And what kind of school did you go to?

I went to public school. And then, in 1939, my schooling was interrupted, because the German came in. And couldn't go to school anymore.

Do you remember that day, September 1 19 --

I will never forget that day.

Could you tell us about it, please?

I remember before the Germans came in there was bombing. And we were very afraid. And we knew-- I didn't know, but my parents sensed, everybody sensed that it's no good. Maybe they knew--

From the news, probably.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

Yeah, from the news. I wasn't aware. To me, it was more curiosity, where, what kind of people and everything. But it was bad. We were afraid.

And then they later, I think September 7, they came to LÃ³dz.

The Germans came into the city?

Yes, and they were marching in front of our-- the street. And in fact, I went down to see.

And every day was a different restriction. We couldn't walk on the sidewalks. We had to go down if the soldier was walking on the sidewalk.

Did you have to wear armbands?

Within a couple of weeks we had to wear armbands with the Jewish star, yellow Jewish star.

And you didn't go to school and your siblings didn't go to school. So what did you do all day?

Oh, nobody did anything, that everything was-- the stores were closed. It was terrible. It was very bad. There was no schools for anybody.

But then, within months, they started to gather the people in one place, and they made a ghetto. And in the ghetto, we-- me and my friends, a few friends, we formed a little group, a club. And we were teaching each other. And somebody had books, and some people were reciting. You know, whatever we could.

So you resisted in your way.

Keep up. Yes. Right.

It kept up your morale.

Whatever we could to keep up.

Now when you said that you lived in the ghetto, does that mean that you left your house, or your house was--

No, we didn't have to leave. We were in-- the ghetto came to our neighborhood.

And you stayed in your own apartment?

Yes. We didn't have to move.

Did you have anybody else?

My parents, and my sisters, my brother and--

Did the Germans make you take anybody else into your apartment?

In the beginning, when they sent people to the ghetto, my parents took in some relatives-- at least two families. It was very--

It was very tight living conditions.

Very tight living, very bad, congested.

And what did you do for food if nobody worked?

Well, we got the card, little stamps.

Oh, a ration--

Yeah, rations. And the rations started almost immediately, almost, when the ghetto was still open. We couldn't get much. So we were hungry.

So you were hungry.

All the time. Hunger is not the word, but starving.

Starving. Starving. Could you sell the things in your house to other people for food?

When the ghetto was still open, we used to go to this market, and a lot of people, gentiles, used to come and buy from us clothing, jewelry, whatever we had. And then, when the ghetto closed, we couldn't get out anymore.

Rumkowski was the head of the ghetto. He said any valuables what we have we could bring and he'll buy it from us.

And I remember we had this gorgeous painting on the wall. My mother took her pearls and whatever there was, and we gave it to Rumkowski, and almost for nothing.

And what did you get for it?

Some money, and we could buy something.

You could buy food. There was still a free market? Food came into the ghetto?

Well, yeah, in the beginning. But each time it got worse and worse. They started to ration almost maybe within months. Like twice a month we got-- I don't remember how much we got. Maybe one loaf of bread for two weeks.

Per person, one loaf of bread.

I don't think so. It was like we would bring home a bread for everybody. It was just ounces per person.

And no meat, and no chicken, no vegetable.

Chicken, I didn't have chicken for-- I didn't remember how chicken looks like. We had some meat. It was horse meat, actually, they gave us.

And the bread was-- used to be so heavy. We couldn't even eat it. It was not anything like we would see here. It was like glue. But we had to eat it.

You had to eat it.

Yeah.

And what did your father do during this time?

My father took sick right away. He, in 1942, already-- I'm jumping a year. Nothing. My father, actually, when he was still alive, he didn't work yet, because they didn't have work right away for everybody.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

But then, a few weeks after the ghetto closed, I received a letter from Rumkowski. And he--

Rumkowski, the head of the Judenrat.

The head of the Judenrat.

The Jewish Council.

And I remember some words still, and I probably will never forget it. He said, he's inviting me to work as a volunteer, and I'm very privileged, because he think that I am-- like the-- he said [POLISH]. It was Polish, who understand. That means the "golden youth." And it's a privilege to go there to work.

And I showed this letter to my father, and he advised me to go to work. It was a straw factory.

In the ghetto.

It was already in the ghetto. It was in a school building. It used to be a school, and then it was converted to a straw factory. And from straw, we used to make long, long braids, with very long braids. And from those braids another department would make shoes for the German soldiers. And they were shipped to the Russian front.

And you were not paid for this.

Yeah, we were paid-- very little. Like if you worked, you got paid. We did get paid. Very little.

And were these only young people, young girls at that time working?

At that time there was not enough work for everything, for everybody. So maybe that's why he said I was privileged.

How did he get your name?

I have no idea. I wonder sometimes.

So you were the only one in your family working?

At that time, yes. But then everybody had to go to work. If you didn't work, you were sent out from the ghetto.

So what kind of factories did they have in the ghetto?

They did have dresses, bras, everything.

And all this merchandise was shipped out of the ghetto.

Shipped out for the Germans, yes. Everything. Shoes.

They say that the LÃ³dz Ghetto remained open longer than any other ghetto. What do you mean by "open"?

Well, I meant that it wasn't destroyed, that the people were not taken out of the ghetto. Was that because of Rumkowski's [? drench ?] with the Germans?

I don't know what you mean. After the war?

No, during the war, that was the longest lasting ghetto.

No, no, no. No, no. Not open.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

Not open, but the longest-lasting ghetto.

Yes, yes. I thought you said, "open," like you--

I'm sorry, no, no, no, I didn't mean that.

Yeah, that's true. I think it's true.

Because of Rumkowski's dealings with the Nazis?

But I don't know. I don't have the statistics, but I think it's true, because we were working for the Germans. So it was a good idea on Rumkowski's side, because he suggested this. Why should you kill all those people. They can be useful, productive.

So did you and all your siblings work?

Everybody. My mother. If you couldn't work, you had to leave. They said--

Now what did your mother do?

I used to go and get--

Straw?

--rags. Not straw, rags. From the rags, she used to make braids. And I would take back the braids because she was afraid to go out. She wasn't so young. But you know, so I would go bring her those rags and take back the braids. And that's how she survived.

And she could eat. Because if you didn't work, you didn't get money, you didn't get those stamps to buy the food.

And what did your brother and your father do?

My father, when he was-- he died in 1945 of starvation.

1945?

'42. Excuse me.

'42.

Yeah, 1942 he died. He just got sick. He--

Didn't have any more strength.

He couldn't walk anymore. He went to bed and never got out.

That must have been very-- a tremendous tragedy in your family.

Yeah, so he died. And by that time I lost already a sister of starvation. She was the first one, Joseta to die. She also worked in some factory, but she couldn't work too long. Her feet got swollen, her whole body.

And she died of starvation.

Yes.

Were any of your siblings married?

No.

They were too young.

And six weeks after my father died, my brother died too.

Oh, your brother died too.

The same story.

Also from starvation.

Same story, Yeah.

Must have been very hard not only for you, but for your mother. So you worked in the ghetto until what year?

I worked at the straw factory. And then I don't really remember what happened, why I stopped working at the straw factory. Maybe--

Maybe there was no more work.

--they didn't need me anymore. I don't think so. Then I was sent to work, actually, for Rumkowski.

Oh, for the Judenrat.

Yes.

And what did you do there?

I was working in his office as a page girl, and the underground-- he used to live there. And I think he adopted a little child. So they would send me for milk. Whatever they needed I was very often, like, in the kitchen, I couldn't go any farther than the kitchen. If they needed me, I went for the milk, bring back some other [INAUDIBLE].

And he had a beautiful garden in the back. So they sent me to work in the garden.

Was this a vegetable garden?

Yes.

Could you take any of the vegetables for your own family?

I did take, but I-- so they would-- if I would be caught, I would be sent out. I risked my life.

You were very cautious.

I did take home some potato, or carrot, or whatever I could to bring home.

And then once, I remember, they brought in a lot of-- I mean, loads and loads of gold.

Gold?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

Gold. Gold pins, gold rings, gold earrings. I mean it was like a house. Big like a house, like a mountain.

What you say "they." Who brought in the gold?

People. I wasn't allowed--

To Rumkowski's house?

I came-- no, not to his house. On the premises. Was outside.

Oh, outside.

And I was working there, separating the rings from the earrings, from--

So that was for the Germans.

This was everything, Jewish things I found-- Stars of David's.

And once, I remember, I looked at this little pin. It was like a safety pin, gold, made from gold. There was a little key. There was a heart, and the safety pin, and a 13. A 13 is supposed to be lucky for the Jewish people.

And I was admiring it. And my boss was watching me. He said, would you like to have it? I said, yes. He said take it. And this little pin I gave to my sister, and she went to Auschwitz, actually, with this little pin.

You don't have it anymore do you? No. So this was all gathered together from the Jews in the ghetto, I presume, and then sent over to--

Not from the ghetto. From all over.

From all over, and then sent to the Germans.

You wouldn't believe, that could be so much jewelry, a lot of jewelry. And some other time I would come to work, and there would be a load, a mountain of shoes. They probably brought it during the night time. And then we would try to pair up the shoes, and put them together, and put them on the side. And that's what I would do for Rumkowski.

And those shoes were also for the Germans?

Probably. The gold too.

So you worked there until when, Lola?

I worked there until one day Rumkowski came and he wanted to see the people. And he said he has two men in his office. So the girls in the office said, why don't you go where the guys are working, and the other people at the-- there was a sheet metal too at the same premises.

The factory.

So I said, fine. So then, when he's through with selecting people, who-- he said he has two men in his office, I'd like to hide. I said, all right, so he just bad luck. He changed his mind. And he came instead. Instead of the office, he went to the factory. And I was standing there. I was trapped. I couldn't run away.

And he came up to me. He said, why a pretty girl like you is working here in such a place? And I said, well, I'm working here. I'm happy here. So he had his people with him, and he went to this guy who was in charge, and said give her a nice

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
job in a kitchen.

The kitchen was a good job to be. And I was very happy, of course.

Could you take any food back to the family?

But I never got the job. He left, and they send me to a different place.

Oh. Who is the "they"?

The guy who was in charge, a Jewish guy.

A Jewish person.

Oh, yeah. The Jewish person. I forgot his name, who was in charge of labor, like a minister of labor.

Labor management.

Yeah. And he send me to a factory where they were working-- making bras and girdles and stuff. And they showed me how to work on a machine, and I did.

And that was hard work?

It wasn't hard work, but I had to cross-- the ghetto was divided in two, and they built a bridge, a wooden bridge, to go from one side to the other. And when I had to cross the bridge, underneath the bridge was a German soldier. He was very known there. He had red hair.

Oh, he was known. Oh.

And any time, at any given moment, if he felt like it, he could shoot somebody crossing the bridge. And I had to cross the bridge twice a day.

So that was very frightening.

It was very frightening, yeah.

And how long did you work there?

Until they closed this factory, and then they sent me to another factory for children's clothing. And that was my last job.

And did any of your siblings work there?

No, everybody had a different place.

Everybody had their own job.

Different-- yeah.

So when you say that was your last job, when are we talking? What year?

I'm talking now, my last job was 1944 in September. They said they're-- they didn't say they're liquidating the ghetto. They're going to send everybody out.

Where did they say you were going?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

To work, to Germany. Pack everything, all belongings, all the food. And we couldn't resist anymore, because we had a lot of roundups in the ghetto. And like I would go down, but my mother and my younger-- I had three younger sisters. And she would hide them there. [CRYING] She would hide herself with the children.

Once I remember, it was a-- everybody had to go out on the street.

For a roll call?

Roll call. No, to-- like a--

A roundup.

--roundup.

A roundup.

And whoever they took, they took. And we were still lucky. They didn't take us. And we didn't know what to do. The Germans left, and we were just standing for hours and hours. We were afraid to move.

And my mother was with her children on the attic. And it was so quiet, nobody would even move, or talk, or anything. And she was sure that she was left alone. And when we came back, she was so sick. For months and months she wouldn't talk. She couldn't talk. She was very sick.

She was traumatized.

Yeah.

Maybe she had a nervous breakdown at that time.

And then she got better. And then, after this-- this was 1943. In 1944 there was the end of the ghetto. And we were about the very first to go. We just gave up, already. It was no sense anymore to fight to hide. And we knew it's the end of the ghetto then.

Now did you have family other than your--

We still had my brother, one of my sisters. And my father was dead already of starvation. They died. But everybody else was still alive. And we went to Auschwitz.

And did you all go together.

We went-- where?

To Auschwitz.

Yes, we did. They took us on the train.

What was that like? The train?

Horrible. A lot of people, people I didn't know-- men, women, children. Everybody was crying.

And you took suitcases with you too?

They told us to take all the possessions, everything.

I remember some Polish people, guys, were working on the top of the train. I don't know what they were doing, making. The train ready to-- for the transport. And they were saying in Polish that the Jews are going to be fried.

And you heard that?

I heard it in Polish, and everybody heard it. They were making fun. It was very funny.

When you were in the ghetto, did any of the Polish non-Jews try to help, or hide, or--

In LÃ³dz was very difficult. But I know of people that a lot of-- they were saved by Polish people. Quite a few.

On the other side of the ghetto, I guess.

Not from LÃ³dz. After the war I met. I didn't know about it. It was very hard in LÃ³dz. There was nowhere to run.

So then you're on the train. And how long are you in the train?

Overnight. I don't know the time we arrived in Auschwitz. I couldn't tell you that. It was maybe eight hours, 10 hours.

Did you know where you were going?

No.

No.

They told us we're going to work.

And when you got there, did you know that it was a concentration camp?

I didn't know what it was. I had no idea.

Did you see the sign, "Arbeit macht frei"?

We saw the sign. We read the sign. And we were greeted with music. We heard in the distance. I didn't see them, but I heard music playing.

We were very confused. Everybody was crying. And you know how they said, raus, raus, raus. Everybody out, fast, fast. And we just, they pushed us out like things.

Like cattle.

Like cattle. Just we had to jump out from the train so fast. And then they told us to line up.

But in the train, did you have food? Did you have--

We had our own food. They told us to bring our own food. Bring everything what you have-- food, clothing, pictures, jewelry, whatever you have. Bring everything. We packed everything.

So you had a lot-- aside from people, you had a lot of possessions.

But we weren't hungry. Believe me, we knew.

I remember, my younger sister she was blond with braids, gorgeous. And I tried to talk to my mother. She was crying.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
And I said, look at her. She'll find-- some German family will take her in. Look at her. She's gorgeous.

And we got out from the train. We had to line up. And I came upon two soldiers. And one soldier told me to go one way, and I didn't know where I'm going.

And I knew-- I saw my mother. And I thought, in a way, I was happy. I'll be with my mother. And then I heard a voice say halt. That means--

Stop.

--stop. Stop. And he said, komm zurÃ¼ck. I went back. And he looked at me. He said, Maedchen, wie alt bist du? Girl, how old are you? And I was lying-- not much, but I don't know why, but I said, I'm 19 years old. I'm neuzehn jahren.

So he looked at me, and he said [GERMAN]. Are you telling the truth? I said, yeah.

And you were 18.

I was 18. And he sent me to go straight on this side.

Then I looked around. I saw my mother. And this I'll never forget until I die. My younger three sisters were clinging to my mother. They looked at me, and I looked at them. Like, we said goodbye to each other. I knew I wouldn't see them again.

Were you with your other sisters, your older sisters?

Yes, our sisters. We got together. And one of my sisters, Bluma, she was begging. She said, please, let me go with my mother. And just because she wanted to go. They wouldn't let her, and they just pulled her away from my mother, and she was crying, carrying on.

I said, when we were marching already-- we didn't know where we going. But then we found out we're going to the showers, to take showers. And I said to my sisters, you know, I think we died, walk into hell. And I said, why did I go to hell? I didn't hurt anybody. I couldn't understand.

Seemed like another planet.

I just-- I couldn't understand.

How many sisters were you with, Lola?

We were four sisters.

Four sisters, including you.

Me, including myself, yeah. And they took us to the showers. And we had to undress naked in the line to go into the showers. And there were soldiers watching us, and making fun, and like with a stick, touching our body, whatever they wanted to. And it was very scary.

And they took us into the shower, shaved us off.

Your hair? All your hair?

I was shaved.

With a regular shaver?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

With a shaver, yes. And then they gave us clothes. It seemed like, I don't know if it was purposely, or it just happened. Like short people got long dresses. Tall people had short clothes.

And you couldn't exchange?

Well, among us we did, if you wanted to.

Like they were making fun of you in that way.

I don't know. It's just that's the way we walked out. And when we went into the shower, was shaved and showered, and then we went out through another door, and when I met-- we didn't recognize ourselves, our sisters. We just we didn't recognize ourself. But we just--

And where did they take you from there?

From there, it was already dark. It started to pour. It was raining. We were shivering. And they took us into a building. Was like a-- without a roof. And we were standing all night, and crying, and the rain was pouring on us.

And I remember some girls came in. They were wearing those capes. They were like kapos, or--

Were they Jewish girls?

I think they were Jewish. And they said, we're very lucky we didn't go on the other side, because you see the smoke. If you didn't see it, you pay attention tomorrow. Everybody who went the other way will never come back, they told us.

And then I told one of the girls what happened to me. I almost went there. And she said, you know who-- actually, this was Mengele.

Oh, Dr. Mengele, who made the selections.

Dr. Mengele, yes, when he told me to go the other side.

He gave you life.

Actually, he gave me my life.

The irony. Did he wear white gloves and have a dog.

Yes, yes. But I had no idea who--

You didn't know who he was.

No.

What month are we in? This is 1944.

This is 1944, September.

So it's still fairly warm.

Yeah, I remember a sunny day as we were leaving the train. It was very bright and sunny. But the night was cold, and it was raining, and we were shivering, and crying, and screaming, and we didn't know what happened, where are we.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

And where did they take you from those--

On the next day, on the morning, they took us to a--

A bunk? A block?

A block.

And did you have to work?

No, not in Auschwitz. I was 10 days in Auschwitz. During the 10 days, we had about three roundups. Each time Mengele, and his friends, some other soldiers--

Came into your blocks to choose people.

They didn't come in. They called us out. They everyone chased out. Take off your clothes, naked in the street. And they would look us over. And I passed each time.

We were four sisters. We used to stand five in a row. And there was another girl who was a very dear friend of mine. She was clinging to us. And twice she passed. The third time she didn't make it.

But you and your sisters made it all the time?

Yes, oh, yeah. And then finally they shipped us out from Auschwitz after 10 days. There were guys working, doing with stones something.

In a quarry, maybe?

No, in the street. So they told us, you're so lucky. The farther you go from here, you're better off. You're so lucky you're leaving Auschwitz.

So you went on a train again, I presume.

Then they put us on a train. And we were eight days and eight nights, 200 girls. And about 67 per box-- of those cars, the cattle car, boxcars.

Did you have food?

We had no food, no water for eight days and eight nights. They took us all over to France. Nobody wanted us.

Did you stop? Did you hear them negotiating?

They stopped. They took us out. I remember in a town in France who were French speaking. And we went back.

Once, the train stopped, and somebody got out from the girls. And they told would give a bucket. And she got in some water for 67 girls, one bucket. And everybody was trying to grab some water. And nobody had a drop of water because the water would spill.

And one night I remember the train stopped again. And the Red Cross sent in for each girl, a sandwich. And that's the only meal we had, eight days and eight nights.

Wonder how the Red Cross got involved?

I have no idea.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

So that was the only meal you had.

Only meal.

Did you all survive?

We all survived. Finally, after eight days, we came to Bergen-Belsen. That's where this train stopped in the woods. And the soldiers opened up the door, and he said, oh, my gosh, you're all alive. Can you walk? And we said, yes, we can walk. And we had to walk a few miles, and they took us to a camp.

In Bergen-Belsen we were sleeping on the ground on straw tents. It was already cold. Very little food.

Did you have roll calls there?

Every day. Every day. Every week we took us. They took us to a shower. And this, we were very much afraid of showers. The soldier were watching us with dogs.

And after six weeks, again we had a roll call. And they didn't let me through. My sisters were-- they were-- you know, sometimes he, this guy, a soldier, Gestapo, I don't know his rank, he didn't let me through. And I tried to get to my sisters, and he caught me, and he said, you belong here. And then I tried again. He slapped me.

And my sisters were ready to come to me because they were allowed to stay. But I couldn't leave with them. So I motioned to them, don't. I'll try again. And I tried again, and I got to my sisters.

What did it mean to get your sisters. Did you have to go over something?

Well, there was a line again. Always lines. We were standing in lines.

So you had to sneak in in some way.

Sneak through. What I did, when he was busy, they were busy selecting, I went at the end of the line, and I just went through. And I was lucky this time.

Lola, when you were--

This was in Bergen-Belsen.

--in Bergen-Belsen, when you were in Bergen-Belsen those six weeks, what did you do?

Nothing.

No work at all?

No work. We were laying on the straw. And we weren't even allowed to go out. We got once a day a bowl of soup. That's all we got.

So it's winter time now. It's still 1944.

It was 1944 still, probably October already. I don't remember the dates.

No, of course not.

It was probably October already. And this roll call went--

At that time, they took us to a different place, just the girls who were selected to leave. They told us, you're going to work. And that was good. And so I already was with my sister, again reunited with my sisters. And they took us to a different tent, just us. They selected-- I think, yeah, 200 girls.

And they took us to Salzwedel. This is not far from Berlin.

So you went on a train again.

On a train again.

And how long was that?

I think a whole day, or maybe more than a day. And came to Salzwedel. And we went to work, ammunition factory, which we were since October till we were liberated.

And when were you liberated?

April 15.

A day that you won't forget. And who liberated you?

The American Army liberated us.

Before you get to that, will you tell us what the conditions were in this camp, in this new camp where you were working?

The conditions in this camp weren't too bad, because we went to work. And we-- the head of the camp was very good to us. He was a general, I think. He was very good.

In fact, one night I remember he called a meeting, and he told us that the whole camp is mined now. He had some visitors from Goerensburg-- oh, Nuremberg. I'm sorry. Nuremberg. And they told him to blow up the camp with us together. And he said, I wouldn't do a thing like this.

This was almost the end. He was smart. The end of the war. It was about a month before the liberation.

So he said, I cannot do this. Those girls worked. And he fought for our life. And he told us this. But we don't know what's going to happen, because all those soldiers went back to Nuremberg. But they never came back. The war came to an end almost.

And when the Americans liberated us, he did not run away from the camp. He stayed with us. So he was captured by the Americans.

And you testified that he saved your life--

Not just testified. They took him against the wall, and they were ready to shoot. And a bunch of girls, including myself, went behind the-- in front of the rifles. He said, you'll have to shoot us first. This guy, thanks to him, we're alive now. We told them, the American soldiers, the whole story. And he was arrested.

And his wife-- we knew his wife because she used to come to camp. And we knew. They were walking together. And she petitioned. Because then the Russian took over, and the Russian took him to jail. I don't know how it happened, but that's how it was. And she said, would you sign-- would you sign, everybody sign that we want them to be alive. He was good for us.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

Do you know what the end of that story is?

No.

No. Do you know his name?

We didn't follow up. No.

It's an interesting angle here. So what happened when the Americans came into the camp? What was that like?

Wonderful. Wonderful. They just was nice. They took us to town. Take whatever you want to clothe, whatever.

And then there were a lot of French soldiers, POWs. And they said they'd like to take-- they used to work with us in the factory. They were our bosses. So they knew us. They said, we'd like to see that they don't get hungry, they don't eat too much in the beginning. So they used to cook for us light meals and see that we don't get sick, and we survive. And we did survive.

So those 200 girls survived.

We had one casualty, actually two. One girl died of natural causes. One girl got shot because we were working with bullets, and she put in a bullet, the machine. It was a kind of a machine that weighed the bullets. And bullet went in her direction, and was [BOTH TALKING]

Must have ricocheted--

Yeah. And she got killed.

Oh, that's so sad, after being through everything.

Yeah, she was from Greece.

So you and your three sisters were still--

Yeah, I forgot to mention that I had a accident this--

In the ammunition factory?

In the ammunition. My arm got caught, and you can feel this here.

Oh, yes.

Both bones were broken.

And nobody fixed it.

Yes, they did. They took me to town, to this doctor. I remember that he was short, gray hair.

This was with the Germans?

With the Germans, yes.

They took you to the--

Yes, and I remember they walked in in a waiting room, and all the people in the waiting room were afraid to look at me

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

because I was wearing this coat with the stripes.

The concentration camp--

And the way he put my arm together, both bones here were broken-- completely broken. Like I had to hold it like this, or otherwise my hand would--

Would be limp.

Not limp. Fall down, or fall apart. It was terrible. And they put a cast on my arm, but it wasn't good. I felt when they put the cast on, my bones, they just fell out. It was a terrible--

So it wasn't done properly.

Yeah, so they wanted to break the bones and put it together again, but I said I don't want.

Do you have pain from that arm?

Yeah, it's hard for me to make certain movements.

So the Americans came in and liberated you. And did you stay in the camp or were you sent some other place?

We stayed in this camp about a week or two. And then they took us away to the same city where the Germans German soldiers used to live. And from there we went our way. We stayed maybe two weeks, three weeks. We just left wherever somebody could.

And where did you go? We went, because first, the Americans liberated us. Then the English took over. And then the Russian took over. We didn't want to have any part of the Russians at that time. And when we heard that the Russians are coming here, everybody left. So I went to Braunschweig-- Brunswick.

Was there a DP camp there?

No. They took us to a little camp, and there was a little village they took us in the woods. There was a little-- some housing. And they put us in, maybe 30 or 40 girls.

The British?

Yeah, the British. Right.

And they took care of you there?

They took care of us.

And how long did you stay there?

Two months, three months. And then we were free. We were going places. We had no money--

But your life was so unsettled. What did you know-- how did you know--

Very confusing. Very confusing.

So where did you go after that?

We just were traveling, looking for relatives. Some found, some didn't.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Did you find any relatives?

Cousins. I found some--

Talking about cousins, we have some pictures of your family here.

Yeah, found some cousins. It took a while.

If you look at the screen, Lola, maybe you could tell us about these pictures.

Yeah. This is my grandfather.

And when was this taken?

This was taken in the '30s. My grandfather died in 1938, I believe. This picture was taken-- it was a candid shot, because he would never allow to take a picture of himself because he was so religious. So some gentile, I was told-- it's before the war-- took a, when he was walking on the street, he took a picture of him. And when he died, he released the pictures and send to his sons. There were more sons than daughters. About two daughters I think he had. And to the children.

And then we got a picture too. And I remember. But our picture didn't survive because we went to Auschwitz.

After the war, one of my cousins went to Russia. During the war they escaped to Russia, and they took some pictures with them. That's why I have this picture.

Oh, so they sent you a copy of the picture.

Yes.

Now what happened to your grandfather? Did he die before the war?

He died in 1938, yeah, before the war. Yeah.

And we have another picture coming up.

This is a son of my grandfather, a brother to my father.

That's your uncle and your aunt.

My uncle my aunt in France, in Lille.

Did you know this uncle?

I did not know him, but I remember pictures of him.

Did your father look like that?

Somewhat.

And did they survive?

So I pretend that's my-- no, no. There's a big story about him. Two sons and a daughter survived. Two daughters, actually. One lives in Israel, one lives in Washington, DC, and two brothers.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

One of his sons was working in the Israeli embassy with the ambassador to France. He's still alive. And the other one was a rabbi, I think, in Brooklyn. He died a couple of years ago.

So these are your cousins that you're talking about.

This was my cousin, but her children. But Perla, her daughter who lives in Washington, told me about it.

And did they die in the camps?

And she told me how she-- ah, yes. She told me. He was very known in his town. So one day, a neighbor came. He said, you'd better take the children and run, because tonight they're coming to your house. And they'll take you out.

So my uncle, he told his children, to the same, maybe the same person who came, he said, I can, if you'd like to hide in my house, it's OK. So he said, if I'll hide, if they won't find anybody in the house, it will be obvious that we're hiding.

So he sacrificed himself. He sent the children to this lady. And they stayed. And they took him out.

And that was the end. But his children survived.

Yeah, so she has a lot of pictures from before, from the cousins and family. And one of these days I'll go and see her. I hope I'll recognize some people.

Maybe she'll have pictures of your family among those pictures.

And we have another picture.

There's another picture I think. Yeah.

What is this picture about?

Well, these are cousins. They used to live in Belgium. They're all cousins of mine.

From your mother's side? Your father's side?

My father's side. I have two cousins from my mother's side. They live in New York.

And they all survived the war?

No, none of them.

Oh, none of them.

None of them. Such gorgeous people.

And how did you get this picture?

A cousin of mine came from Israel to visit me, and she brought me those pictures. She knew all the names. I don't.

Now these were cousins--

In Belgium.

--who lived in Belgium. So you never got to see them, then.

They used to come and visit, but I don't remember. I remember them, but I couldn't identify them.

And we have the last picture here. One more.

Well, this is also-- she is my cousin. And she used to-- this was in Paris. And she used to work in the government in France, in Paris, before the war.

And did she survive?

No.

So she went with the French Jews to her death, right?

Yeah.

And did he survive?

No. None of those people survived.

So from your whole family, who survived, actually?

None of my uncles. A cousin's children. Children of the--

And your three sisters.

And my three-- four of us, yeah.

The four of you.

One died. My sister Bluma died here in Buffalo.

So how long did you stay in Europe then? Let's get you after the war now?

In Europe we stayed-- I met my husband. I got married. I had a child in Frankfurt. And then my-- when the Israel State was born--

1948.

--my husband said-- 1948. At that time, my daughter was born. We couldn't move, go with a child. But she was old enough, a few months old. We went to Israel. My husband said he has to help. And he went. He enlisted in the Army.

He was fighting in the War of Independence?

Right. The war was actually over, but the war in Israel was never over. So he enlisted. He was in the Army. And then we went back to Europe, in Austria.

Were you sisters still in Austria?

My sisters were already-- one of my sisters was in Israel, and another sister was in Buffalo already, and one in Canada.

So how did they get-- tell us the process. How did they get to Buffalo and to Canada? Did they come through HIAS or through Joint?

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Actually, my sister, Regina, she had a relative here in Buffalo.

Who wasn't related to you?

No, her husband's cousin. So that's why they came to Buffalo, and that's why I came to Buffalo.

Oh, I see. And what year did you get here?

1954.

And was that hard, to get adjusted to your life in Buffalo in 1954?

I was happy to be here, because I was reunited with my sister. I was very happy then.

So you had one child then?

Yeah. And then I had three more here in Buffalo.

Thankfully. And what did your husband do? What did you do those [INAUDIBLE]?

First he went to work. I don't recall where he was working. Then we went in our own business, grocery store. Opened up a grocery store.

He must have worked hard, with little children.

Very hard. Very hard. The children hardly knew him. Grocery store, delicatessen. Work a lot of hours. And we made a good living. I mean, we make [BOTH TALKING]

So you worked hard.

Very hard, yes. And then I went to school. I became a hairdresser, which I liked to do. I had my own shop.

So you succeeded here in America, and you raised a beautiful family.

Yeah, yes. I have four children, four daughters. Two grandchildren.

Two grandchildren. Wonderful. Did you ever go back to Europe?

No, I never wanted to go back. But now I really would like to go back to Auschwitz, but--

To Auschwitz.

Yeah.

Why would you want to go back to Auschwitz?

To see-- my mother's ashes are there, my sister's ashes. To say a prayer.

To say a prayer.

Do you think you'll be able to?

I don't know.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

It takes a lot of strength.

I don't know.

Do you tell your children the stories of your life?

No. That's why I came here today. It's somehow, it's a lot easier for me here, because I-- no, they ask me questions. And after 10 minutes, I said, let's stop. Some other time. I cannot talk.

It's just too difficult. But growing up, did they ever wonder why they didn't have grandparents?

We never talked about it. We never talked about it until they could understand. It was hard for us to talk about it.

You wanted to block it out, of course, and get on with life, I'm sure.

Of course, six years of miseries like this, you cannot put in in a half hour, an hour. A lot of it get lost in the memories. Maybe just like to forget a little bit.

Are your children named after the family members who died?

Yes, my oldest daughter is named after my husband's mother, and then Helen is named after my mother, and Sari is after my grandmother. And Marci actually is named after my husband's father, because his brother had a daughter too, and we decided his father should have a name.

Yes, so you--

Her grandfather, Marci's grandfather. So Moishe.

Moishe. So you have a remembrance in that way. Do you, in conclusion, do you want to say anything? Any specific message that you want to--

Well, the message, it's clear we should never forget or forgive. I don't know. It depends. I would never forgive the people like Mengele, Hitler, and stuff like this. But the new generations, they have to live.

They didn't know about the war or participate. But if you met a German, a German young person, what kind of feelings would you have?

I don't know. Like I feel now. I'm shivering inside. I'm shaking. Maybe I don't show it, but hard.

It's hard to go back on those stories.

I'll never forget. It has to go through. And even it's hard to tell.

But the stories have to be told.

It has to be told. It took me years to come down here.

Yes, I know. We were very appreciative.

And just each time, I just denied. And I finally said, all right, let's do it.

Thank you, very much.

OK.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

Thank you.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.