

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center here in Buffalo. We are at Channel 4, and it's July 27, 1992. Tonight our guest is Helen Bittner Weissbart. And she's going to tell us about her life as a child and a teenager and thereafter.

Helen, you were born in Sambor, Poland. Will you tell us about your childhood?

Yeah, I was born in a town near Lemberg in 1925. It was a town about 32,000 population and about 7,000 Jews. And I had a good childhood. There was two of us, me and my brother. My brother was older. I grew up comfortably and went to public school. And then I went to a Jewish high school till 1939.

Before 1939, what did your father do?

He was a businessman.

What kind of business was it?

We had a fruit and candy store. And my parents used to provide the town with fruit from other countries. My mother was the business person. And she was used to travel a lot.

Did you have grandparents living nearby?

I had only one grandfather till the war.

The others had died?

The others died, yes. I remember my grandmother as a child. I do remember my grandmother. But they used to live in Lemberg. But we used to come once in a while. We used to visit them. The grandfather who died, who was killed in the war, he was a rabbi.

And he was killed by whom?

When he used to come to our town-- so the rabbis from the town used to greet him at the train.

So he must have been very respected.

He was very respected. He had a yeshiva in Lemberg. He was teaching other rabbis to become rabbis.

So he was quite a scholar. Now we have a picture of your family. And it's on the screen. Do you want to tell us about the picture?

This is my father and my mother. And I'm sitting on a chair. And my brother, who was born 1921, he was the older one. Just two of us.

What was his name?

Izak.

Izak?

Izak Bittner. And my father was Lazar. And my mother was Miriam. And I remember when we made that picture. My father had two brothers in America. So he sent them the pictures. I remember it like today when we made the pictures.

Where were your uncles? Where did they live?

They lived in New York.

Are you still in touch with that family?

They are no more around. I met one uncle when I came to America. He was still here.

So you still have cousins probably?

Yes, yes, we are in touch.

You're in touch. Now we have another picture of you as a teenager. Where was this picture taken?

This was shortly before the war. I was already in high school. Our town was on a river the Dniester. And I remember the picture was made by a friend of mine in the bushes on the river. [LAUGHS] This was a friend of my brother's back from Russia.

I see. And how did you get this picture? Was that sent to America too?

No, this friend came back from Russia. And he had that picture. And he gave it to me back because I don't have no pictures from my family, from myself, nothing left. So I got it from my friend.

You got it back. So now we'll go back to 1939, when the life in Sambor changes. Tell us about it.

The first thing happens-- when the war started, the Germans came to us. But didn't take too long because they made a [INAUDIBLE] with the Russians.

A treaty of some sort?

A treaty of some sort, right, and they moved back. And the Russians came to take it over. And this was the time when I was still in school.

Was life normal more or less?

For some people, yes. For us, happens was not because my parents were business people. So they had some problems because of that. They couldn't get jobs.

My brother, I remember, was trying to get a job. So he had to lie to them that the father was a working man because once they found out that he was a businessman, so they had problems. But otherwise, the school--

You continued with your schooling?

Yeah, our school was changed to a Jewish high school. So the main language became Jewish.

So you left the public school? You weren't allowed to go to a public school. Is that it?

No, this was in high school already. I finished two years when the Russians were there.

Did you have enough food? Or was there enough to eat?

It was shortage. But after what you went through after that, you don't remember. It was still good times.

Now, when did that change?

When the war started with the Russians and Germans. And the Russians started to go back. And the Germans were taking it over.

And we're talking about 1942?

1940, '41.

So tell us what happens in 1941.

Oh, when the Germans came, I was a child at home. And we didn't know. We didn't know it's going to happen so tragic because they just start to tell us stories of what's happened on the west. And we just couldn't believe it.

Who told you the stories of that?

People were talking that the Germans are killing and the Germans are killing people. So we start to think about what to do with ourselves. Meantime, till you turn around, there came the first action-- came when the Germans started in September.

Would you describe what an action is?

They coming mostly at night. And they start to knock at the doors and screaming to the Jews, get out, and collecting all the Jews in one big place. And it depends-- sometimes was going on for a day or two, sometimes it longer. And they were taking people to jails. And by us, we didn't have camps. Everybody who was taken went straight to death.

Where were they taken?

They kept them for three days in the fields. And they collecting them all of them together on big trains. And they bringing them to the place where they were killing them.

So your parents were not taken away in the first action?

In the first, no. First was my brother, taken to a camp in Lemberg. This was special for men only. They didn't take women there.

They were looking for working people. Professionals, they used to call them. So people didn't believe it-- didn't know what's wrong with that. So everybody said, as long as they need us to work, I'm ready to go. So a lot of people volunteered.

And your brother volunteered?

And was one of them.

And did he work? Did he have work?

They took him to a place like to build furniture, to make chairs, tables. But as long a person was strong enough he could hold it, they letting him work. But if you couldn't, so they isolated them in a place in a cemetery.

There was a Jewish cemetery on [NON-ENGLISH, PLACE NAME]]. And when my brother was there, there was a lot of Polish women that used to travel. We used to pay them. And they used to bring food to them.

So I asked one of them how to get there. And she told me. She gave me the direction. And I risked my life. And I wanted to see my brother. That's all what I had.

So I came to there. And I found a Jewish policeman in the street near the lager. And I ask him if he knows my brother.

And he felt sorry for me. He realized what I'm doing. And he told me where I can find him.

And the road took me through the Jewish cemetery. And I came there. I was walking there. And all of a sudden, I heard somebody calling me by my first name. And I looked at there. And there sits a few Jewish boys from my town. They recognize me. And you couldn't recognize them. Only by voices I knew who they are.

You mean they were suffering from--

They were isolate to die.

They were starving?

Starving. So they start to call me by my name. And I got so frightened. And they start to run with the-- the way I was walking. They start to run after me. And so I threw them everything what I had.

That you were taking for your brother?

That I wanted to give to my brother I threw it to them, just to let me go.

What was it? What were you bringing for your brother?

Some bread for my brother. When I came to my brother, I was empty-handed. I didn't have nothing for him because I just-- it was a horror.

And then what happened after that?

I came to my brother. When my brother saw me, he got so hysterical, he start to scream. What you doing? Just two of us are left, and you're risking your life just to come to see me. Why you doing that?

I said, I have to. I came to save you. I brought you bread, but I gave it away that bread. And I just couldn't hold that bread. I couldn't hold it. When I saw their faces, I just couldn't hold it.

Now you devised a plan with your brother to save him You had --

And then I decided to-- we discussed it for a few minutes. And he told me where they taking them to take showers. And they were walking them on a [NON-ENGLISH].

On a main street?

On a main street. And I went back home. And I told my parents that this is the only way I can save him. No, there was no more my parents. I'm sorry.

Well, what happened to your parents?

This was already when my parents were gone.

They took your parents?

When I brought my brother back, my parents weren't there already.

Let's go back a little bit. What happened to your parents?

When I went the first time to my brother, my parents were there. And then it was an action when I had to go back. And then it was an action. And my parents-- we were supposed to go to hiding. My parents decided that we should not go

back together. We should not go hiding together.

So my mother decided, you have to go wherever you can go. Run in some place to the river, wherever, and just let's not be in one place together because we had to save my brother. So I went to the river, on the Dniester, the place where you saw me on the river.

Yes. And what did you do there?

And I was there in hiding for two days and two nights. I didn't know when to go back. But I thought that it was-- in the beginning, it was a lot of screaming. You could hear screaming from far away. You could hear guns shooting. But then it quiet down after two days.

And then you went where?

And then I risked myself. I couldn't stay on my feet anymore because I was laying all the time in the bushes. And I went back to the city. And I came back and--

Your parents were gone?

There was no mother, no father. There was nobody left.

Is that when you decided to go back to save your brother?

And then I decided to commit suicide. But my friend opened my eyes and says to me, you have to save your brother.

That's when you went to the river you had told me before, to the waterfall [BOTH TALKING]

And I wanted to commit suicide, but he didn't let me. He said, you better-- somebody has to save him. Yeah, but the will to live was stronger than anything else. So I went back.

And a week or two weeks later, I went back to Lemberg to bring my brother. And we made up that when they will walk him to the shower, [CRYING] I was holding the raincoat on my arms. And I threw the-- he was walking on the corner. And I stood right in front of them. And I threw the raincoat over him. And I [SOBS] took him out

You took him out, and you made believe you were part of the population? And so you walked through the main street?

And I brought him back. It took us two days to get back because I couldn't take him on the train. He looked too terrible to go on the train, so we walked for two days till we got back to ghetto. And then I went to the hiding place.

Where was the hiding place?

The hiding place was in a village near Sambor. It was about 20 kilometers from Sambor-- Kalinov.

Was this the hiding place of the peasants?

This is where the people that promised my parents that they're going to save the children-- they promised, and they kept their promise. So in the beginning, the conditions were very bad. They couldn't--

What were the conditions?

They kept me in the attic, in a-- if you know what it means, a village in Poland. There was homes that they built of straw and very, very bad conditions. So I was there in the winter, in the summer, for two years.

With your brother for two years?

No, my brother just came. And he couldn't take it there. He was there for a month and a half, something like that. The ghetto was still open. And he said, I cannot live like that. There is still freedom. He was so frightened from being closed in that he just couldn't take it.

So he went back?

He made my life miserable there. And it was miserable without it too. So he decided that he is going.

I remember there was a dog downstairs. And he was afraid of the dog. So I said, I'm not going to take the dog away from you. You better don't go because the dog will bark. And he said, don't worry about it. The dog let him go. The dog didn't bark. And he went. I never saw my brother again.

Who lived in this house, Helen?

They were the parents, father and mother. They were farmers. And they had two daughters, two girls. One was 12 years old, and one was 10 years old. The parents had good ideas. They meant it well. Excuse me. They meant it well. But it was very hard.

Because they were so poor?

The fear was terrible. That's all what you heard all day long on the radios and in the streets. If we catch you keeping a Jew, you're going to die together with your children, and your house is going to be burned. So the people had a very hard time to--

To survive.

--to survive.

Do you think they would have wanted--

And I went through hell.

Do you think they would have wanted to turn you in?

They would turn me in, but they were afraid of-- if they would say something, they will get killed.

Oh, that they'd get killed.

Of course. If they would catch me, if they would throw me out, they would get killed.

So they had to keep it quiet. Nobody in the village knew you were there?

After the war, I found out that her family knew. Her mother's family knew about it. But I didn't know about it before.

Now, did you have enough food to eat? How did you get food?

Living was hell.

Describe it. Let's hear it.

The mother was trying to get rid of me for a while. She was giving me poison to eat. And she wasn't giving me food at all. But I helped myself at night. I used to go to the downstairs there, where they had the animals there, the cows and the--

The cows lived with them? They lived in the same house with the animals?

Next door. I would just opened the door. So I used to steal the potatoes from them. And I used to steal the-- how do you call it?

Eggs, milk?

[NON-ENGLISH] you call it. They used to steal the vegetables, whatever, the cabbage from them. I used to pass-- sometimes I couldn't steal it, so I didn't eat. I looked terrible.

I think we have pictures of your family. And maybe you could tell us more. We'll get the pictures here on the screen. Who is this?

This is the mother of the woman that kept me in her house.

And what's her name?

Kasia.

Kasia.

Kasia. Katarina.

Is that picture from 1942 or 1943?

It looks like this was from that time, yeah. I just got it from her daughter. She's no more alive.

And then we have two more pictures of the daughters.

This was Stasia. They were two-- those two girls saved my life really. It was a unreal story. You see, they went--

Well, let's get the other picture first before you tell us. The other daughter-- who is this?

This is Janka. I never saw her again because she's in Poland. But Stasia I met.

So tell us what they did as little children.

They both tried as children-- I don't know if today you would find two kids that could do something like that. They had a very hard time. They had to go to school. They wanted to play. But they did remember that I was there.

And what did they do?

They used to steal food for me. They used to bring me something to eat. They used to give me once in a while water to wash. Once in a while they used to take the barrel downstairs to clean up for me. Once in a while they used to come and sit with me for this. But this was two years.

Two years. And you never left that house for two years?

Two years. Two years of hell.

You never left the attic?

Well, I left when they had a-- one day, they came with two Germans. They had to give them a part of their house to live

there, two German women. They used to work as teachers in the school.

The German women?

Yeah. So they had to share their apartment with them. So they took me to a neighbor in another village that they trust her. And there was even worse. There I was laying in where they have the ovens where they're baking bread. Under the ovens, there is a place where they're keeping wood in it. There I was for a few months, laying there.

And you couldn't leave at night?

I could not leave it. The only time at night that used to let me out to go to the bathroom.

For how long did you stay like that?

For two months.

And then they brought you back? Stasia brought you?

And then they brought me back. They brought me back. And that's-- it was a horror.

Oh, it sounds terrible. Did you teach these girls? Did you play with them?

Well, when they used to come to me, they were two kids from a village. They didn't have too much knowledge. I came from a town, from a high school-- a high school student. So I used to teach them to read, to write. I used to teach them to sew, whatever I could. I used to tell them stories. That's why they liked me. They enjoyed my company.

Stasia, when we met now, she said to my friend, she says, we never could understand how dear is life that she could live and went through hell like she did. They always used to ask me, does it pay to live?

Because your conditions were so awful.

They could not understand it. But I said, this is the only thing in my life what I want, to see the world, to know that Hitler will be dead, that I will live through Hitler.

Did you know what was going on in the world?

Nothing. If I would know that there is a camp, there is place where they're keeping Jews, I would maybe go. I didn't know from nothing.

You were so isolated.

Completely isolated. I thought I'm going to be the only Jew left.

Were there any neighbors who knew you were in this house?

There was one night. The parents had to go to the town to get some-- the father decided to get some papers for me, just to put me on the train and to get rid of me. So they went. They had some relatives that they thought will get her papers for me. And they left for a day or two. So Stasia said to me, come down. You will help me to make the food for the cows.

So you were, what, about 16?

I was 17 or 18.



And Stasia was what?

12, 13. So I went down to help her to make the food for the cow. And they forgot to close the door.

The two girls?

Yeah. And all of a sudden, a neighbor came, a Pollack. And he came. He gave me a first look, and he knew who I was. And we got very frightened. The kids started to cry hysterically. And he says to me, I wasn't here. I didn't see nothing. Just please forget about it. I wasn't here. I didn't see nothing.

That was to save his life as well.

And so we didn't trust him. But we didn't have a choice. Stasia was afraid to tell it to her father when they came back.

Did she ever?

No.

No, she didn't tell her father?

But he told the father. [LAUGHS]

Oh, the neighbor told the father.

A few days later, he took him out for a drink. And he says to him, I didn't know that-- I thought that you were so-and-so, but I see you are a nice guy.

Oh, for saving somebody?

Yeah. He said, but you're keeping a skeleton in your house. I looked like a skeleton. If they're going to see her after-- this was already the time when the Russians start to get closer to us. And after they would see her, they will kill you, just by letting her suffer like that. He said, you don't worry about it. I will help you.

Oh. And what did he do?

He didn't do nothing. The only thing is that their land was next to each other. So I was not so afraid to go in the morning in the--

Fields?

In the garden where they had the potatoes, where they grow. So they used to let me out sometimes in the morning to get fresh air and to get some color.

Did they fatten you up a little bit?

This was already about two, three months before the end of the war.

So tell us about liberation. How did the war was over?

Oh, the planes started to fly over us. And everybody was running and hiding. And I was standing in the street and screaming, come on! I'm here! Throw me a bomb! Come here, because we couldn't wait.

Anyway, when the Russians start to come back-- and it was a very long, long time because they was on the border between Czechoslovakia, Hungarian. And the German Army was running away. And they needed time for themself to--

so they were trying to fight, to hold onto that place for a longer time. So it took a very long time. But finally, the family ran away.

The whole family?

The whole family run--

And they left you in the house alone?

They left me alone because they were afraid of the Russians. They had a German background. The grandparents were German. This was a German village.

Oh, they were Volksdeutsche?

Volksdeutsche, right.

The mother and father were both?

No, just the mother-- the father was Ukrainian.

Oh, so they took their two girls and--

They went with the children and they left. And I was left all alone.

This is 1945. Do you know what month in--

1944.

Do you know what month this is? Is it in the wintertime?

This getting closer to May, June, if I'm remembering. I don't really remember exactly, but I know it wasn't cold. It was too warm.

Did you have enough clothes to wear?

I was naked. I didn't have nothing. I had one robe on me.

Did you have shoes?

And this was full of holes. No shoes, nothing.

Underwear?

Slippers. [LAUGHS]

Nothing.

It was nothing

They didn't leave any clothes for you--

Nothing.

--when they left? No? So what happened then with you? You were all alone.

I went to the town.

How far away was the town?

About 20 kilometers. And when I came closer-- when I was going on the road, there was holes and dead people all over. But I was going like blind. I didn't see it. And I was used to seeing death. I saw too many deaths before. So I didn't pay attention. I was just walking.

And when I came to Sambor, all of a sudden, I see people standing in the street. And everybody looks at me. And I thought because I look so terrible, so they looking at me.

But then somebody-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. What's happened? What's happened? How did you get here? So I said, I walked. He said, there is not one living soul passed by here. You're the first one to go through. I said, why? He said, because the whole road was with mines.

Oh, had been mined. And how did you avoid the mines? A miracle?

God was with me.

Isn't that amazing?

I was the first person that they saw walking through.

So you're there. Did they take care of you? You were the only Jew left in the whole town.

They didn't know that I'm a Jew. Nobody knew who I am. But I wasn't interesting. I was looking for my brother. I wanted to see if I can find somebody from my relatives.

And I went to the city. The first few days I had horrible days because they said that a boy by the name [INAUDIBLE] is alive. And I thought that's my brother. And I thought it only-- [CRYING]

Was it somebody you knew?

Another [SOBS] man. But they--

And he was saved in the town?

No, he was in the partisans.

[INAUDIBLE]-- I met my friend too. He had the same name as my brother. So they didn't know. They thought that's my brother. So I met some friends from my town. And everybody was naked. There is nobody to help somebody.

Everybody was so damaged.

Everybody was left alone. But they shared as much they could. I met the first Polish girl from my town, from my school time. And she says to me-- this was a horrible thing. She says to me, you know, I liked you always. I'm glad that you are alive. But too bad there is too many Jews left.

Oh. That's how she greeted you?

That was my first friend that I left. And then I start to go on with my life. I met some friends. I didn't stay too long in my town because I couldn't-- it was too many memories.

Did you go back to your house?

No, I did not. There was nothing to go for. And I went to Lvov, to Lemberg. And there was a lot of people from my town. They moved there too because not everybody could stay in that town, because it's empty. It was terrible.

So we went there. And I start to make a living, if you can imagine that. I was selling cigarette. And I learned to make shoe polish.

You made shoe polish? How did you do that?

Somebody gave me an idea in Lemberg that I will go from house to house and collect shoe boxes because there was no factories that made shoe boxes.

Shoe polish boxes?

Shoe polish boxes-- I was going in the morning collecting shoe polish boxes. And then they told me where to go and to get paraffin and where to get wax and all the ingredients what you need to make. And I lived by a super from a building. I had a room there. And I made a deal with her to be a partner.

Oh, and that's how you would pay for the room?

I paid for the room. I shared with her half and half. And that's where I start to make my first money. And then I was buying cigarettes from Russian soldiers. They were selling carton cigarettes. And I was bringing to another town. Till, of course, for about a year-- no, maybe less, till my husband came. Not my husband-- my friend. He was from my town.

He was from your town?

Yeah, and he came on the Polish side. He went on the Polish side. And he wrote me a letter. Why you sitting there? You're suffering. There is here much easier. Because Lemberg belonged to the Russian, and all the Jews moved on the Polish-- so I didn't have--

I wanted to get dressed. I wanted to have something to wear. I just couldn't go like that. So I thought this is the only place where I can make a living. Then I found out there are other places too. So I moved on the Polish side. And for a short time, we got married.

So you were very young when you got married?

Yes, I was--

19?

About, yeah. And I had a son by 20.

Oh, you really were young.

Yeah.

And how long did you stay in Europe?

A very short time-- we went in '46. My son was born in '46, in the beginning of-- no, no, wait a minute. Wait. I'm sorry. Again, I'm mixing up. I left immediately after the wedding. In November '45, I got married. In December, we were already in Germany. My son was born in Germany.

Let's just go back a little bit. You had a wedding. Was there a rabbi?

[LAUGHS]

How did that come about?

That's a good question. We lived by Germans in Katowice. And they had windows with white, sheer drapes.

They used as drapes?

I used the drapes for a--

For a veil?

For a veil-- she allowed me to use it.

Did you have a white dress too?

No.

And who officiated?

There was a rabbi. There was a rabbi in Gleiwitz. There was a rabbi who came. But that dress was the--

That was your wedding--

Yeah, from a drape.

Did you have a party-- a kiddush and food?

We had some cousins on my husband's side that they made a celebration. It was cute. It was nice.

So then you went to Germany. And from Germany?

We went to Germany. I was trying. I tried for a while. I had a cousin that came back from Russia. And she was a professor. She was teaching in Breslau. And I was trying through her to find my people, the people that I was in hiding. But there was no way to find them. And from Germany we went to Israel.

In 1946?

In '47.

So you went illegally?

I went illegally.

Illegally.

We came to Israel when it was still Palestine.

How did you get to Palestine if you went illegally?

My husband was working for the Sochnut.

For the Jewish agency.

And my husband was working with-- if you know Sprinzak.

Oh, with the Speaker of the House.

The first speaker.

The first Speaker of the House.

My husband was his right hand. And we came through him. He helped us. And Dr. Hoffman from Sochnut. My husband was wearing the English uniform.

Anyway, we had a little child, a little baby. My son was six months old. And my husband was always on the road with them, always traveling, bringing the [NON-ENGLISH] to the borders, to France, and through Italy.

So what kind of boat did you go--

It was a Greek boat from Marseilles.

And was that an illegal ship?

No, we came as tourists from Belgium.

Oh, you were lucky then, to get that kind of treatment.

Yeah, it was it came as -- And the papers went immediately back to bring some more people in. Yeah, we were sitting in Marseilles for six weeks to wait for the papers to come. Everybody was using papers like that.

Sure. And then what did you do in Israel-- or Palestine?

My husband was immediately taken to the war.

Oh, the war broke out?

Immediately. I was left alone for all the time till the war end.

And did you know anybody?

I lived in Holon, separated from everybody else. There was another war.

Another war you went through.

You lived in Israel, so you know that.

So you went through two wars in your young life.

One after the other.

Did you have any friends in Israel, Holon?

I had, but there was no way to get in touch with them because I had a child, and I was in Holon. That was where they gave me an apartment. And I was lucky in that point that I met very nice people, Jews from Syria. And I learned once Hebrew. Of course, I forgot. But the first moment when I walked in there, they spoke Hebrew or French or Arabic.

So you had to learn quickly.

So the first thing when she says to me, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. You know when you see that. And she explained it to me what that is. And the language came so easy to me. After two months, I came back to my sister-in-law. She couldn't believe that I spoke Hebrew.

And how many years did you live in Israel?

13 years.

13 years and then you came to America?

Then I came to America.

And you had a daughter in Israel or a daughter in America?

My daughter was a sabra, yeah. My son was born in Germany, but my daughter was born in Israel. She was eight years old. And my son was 14.

Oh, so they probably remember their childhood in Israel?

Of course. My children speak Hebrew.

They speak Hebrew. And you lived in America. And something very exciting happened to you last year.

Yes.

So tell us that story.

It was last year. I was here visiting in Buffalo. And I'm getting a call from a friend of mine, that he read the Jewish paper, Forward. And there is an announcement in the Jewish paper that [? Stasia ?] Mykytka looks for a Heike Bittner. This is my maiden name. Nobody knows me by that name because I got married immediately after the war. I was never, ever registered by my maiden name.

So how did this person in the newspaper--

Because this person is from Sambor.

Oh, my goodness! [LAUGHS]

So he read the paper. And the first thing was, he was very, very nice about it. The first thing, he called her up. And he let her know that I'm alive. He didn't know where I am, but he said, don't worry about it. I will find her.

He lives in Brooklyn. I'm not in touch with him. But we know each other. We know about each other. So it didn't take him long. He found my son. And he found me. And I called her immediately, of course.

And where was she?

And three days later she came to visit me.

And where does she live?

She lives in Dayton, Ohio. And she's a sweetheart.

And what happened to her after the war? You said she and her sister and her parents ran away.

They got lost from each other. They couldn't find each other in the war. The mother went someplace else. And the father separated.

She went on the American zone. And the other sister was on the Russian zone. So that's why she couldn't get out from Poland. They took her together with other children because they were children.

They were orphans, weren't they?

Orphans-- so they took them to America.

And what year were you talking about? When did--

'46, '45. '45.

So here's this Volksdeutsche Polish Christian coming to America as an orphan.

She with other children-- Ukrainian, Jewish, and other kids, whoever was left alone.

And what happened to her, very briefly?

She met a young fellow on that trip who was the same way, an orphan. And they fall in love. And then they got married. They took him to Korea. They went through a lot. And he became a doctor-- not so easy, but he did become a doctor. And they have two children. And I'm very, very happy. I'm very happy that I found them.

And we have some pictures of her and the reunion.

That's right.

That's your friend, Stasia.

That's Stasia.

--who saved you and fed you in hiding.

Oh, she was a darling.

And that was taken when? Last year in Buffalo?

No, this picture is taken in Florida.

Oh, she came to visit you in Florida?

She came to visit me in the winter. She was by me in Florida.

How very nice. And now we have another picture. I guess that's her-- oh, what is this?

This is her aunt in the village in Kalinov with her two sons. She sent me that picture to remind me of that house where they used to live. Her house looked like that. And all was-- it was all them. But this is her mother's sister.

It's her aunt?

Yeah.



And what happened to her sister, to Janina?

Janka lives in Poland. She is married. She has two sons, both doctors. She herself is a teacher. And she says to me, Helen, thanks to you, I became a teacher, because she was the one that listened always to me when I was teaching them. The older one didn't want to listen. So I said to her, you're going to be a teacher. And she always remembered that I told her she's going to be a teacher.

So you greatly influenced her?

Yeah, and very close, very happy with them.

And now there's some other aspect of this Stasia story. Tell us about this.

What do you want to say?

About Yad Vashem.

Oh, it started from that Stasia was looking for me. She couldn't find me. And she didn't know what to do. All of a sudden, the Christians, the one that saved the Jews organized. And they came to know HIAS. What organization was the one that start to help them--

HIAS.

--to find the people?

Right, HIAS.

And she wrote a letter to them. And this you have that letter from. And she wrote a letter to them. And she wanted to find me. And through them, that they suggested-- they wrote letters to Israel. They wrote letters to Poland all over.

And did they suggest that she put--

And they suggested her to write to the Forward. And because of their suggestion, they got this from the Forward.

It's a wonderful result. And now she wants to make her parents Righteous Gentiles with Yad Vashem?

Now she is-- because the way she was trying to get me, they have everywhere-- they have letters. So now I got a letter from the Yad Vashem.

In Jerusalem?

From Jerusalem-- and I have the copy with me. And they want to put her in the-- how you call it?

In the Forest of the Righteous Gentiles?

Of the Righteous Gentiles.

Just Stasia?

No, their parents' name plus Stasia and Janka.

Oh, the whole family--

The whole family.

--because they saved you?

Of course.

So you will help her?

I would like to do this very much because they really earned it.

Yes, they saved you.

You have to understand that they were two kids 10 and 12 years old. And child is a child, could open just once to say to somebody one word. And I do feel obligated at least to thank them the only way I can because sending packages is not good enough for that.

Which you do, I understand.

What I do, but it's not good enough for that. And she really cares. She would like at least to memorize the name of the family.

Wonderful. I'm sure that you will accomplish it.

I would really like to do that for them.

Talking about family, we have a little bit of time left. So let's have the pictures of your family. Tell us who this is here.

This is my son. He was at a party. My son is now 46 years old.

And his name is?

Is Louis Weissbart. And he's a businessman. He's an engineer by profession, but he became a businessman. And he's here invited to some [? parents. ?]

And this is my daughter, Bernice, with her son, Harris. Harris is 15 years old. And he wants to become an astronaut.

Where do they all live?

And he's very good and made very good science. He's in gifted classes. He's a bright, bright student. And they live in Florida.

And your son lives in Florida too?

No, my son lives in New York.

I see. So you have to go from place to place.

And this is my son and his daughter. You wouldn't believe it. This son has a 25-year-old daughter.

It's hard to believe.

He was 20 years old, the same thing as his mother. Was 20 years old when his daughter was born. And she is going to be a lawyer. She studies in Hollywood. She wants to be a lawyer of movies.

For movie stars, for movie actors and actresses?

Yes. Her husband is a screenwriter.

Oh, I see. So they live in California.

So they live in-- first she went to Yeshiva University in New York. But because he got a job as a screenwriter, so.

So she got a good education?

Yes, she did.

And the last thing you want to show us is how you remembered your family. Now, what do we have here?

This is the memorial place in Miami, Florida. And you have there the names of my parents. It's Leizer Bittner, Miriam Bittner, and Izak Bittner with my brother. And the mother of my husband is Bernice Weissbart.

Oh, I see. Your daughters named after your mother-in-law.

That's correct. And my son is after my father.

So that's your family. And now you have the reunion with Stasia. And is there anything that you want to say in conclusion?

I wanted to say there is so many to tell about our lives, what we went through. I just-- it's very hard to tell the stories what we went through because it's the past. But we cannot forget it. We always live with it. And I would just like to memorize them and to have them always to people to remember and never to forget what's happened to us and what's happened to our family.

And you survive for this reason.

My mother had eight sisters. There was one brother who died, but there was eight sisters.

Nobody survived?

Not one living soul.

Did anybody survive on your father's side?

There is a second cousin.

So this was a large family.

And my father had brothers and one sister and had five brothers. And there is nobody alive. And how can till today still be people to say that never happened? Where are my cousins? Where are my uncles and aunts? Not everybody can die for typhus what they say.

Thank you very much. Thank you for telling us your story.

Thank you for having me.