

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Helen Waterford  
March 12, 1992  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Helen Waterford, conducted on March 12, 1992 in Chula Vista, California on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

## **HELEN WATERFORD**

### **March 12, 1992**

Beep.

Mrs. Waterford, can you describe for me how rescue efforts worked in Holland, and in general how that differed from other countries in Europe if you can address that.

I know only after the war what had been. During the war, you practically knew nothing because if you went to the places who were supposed to know, you heard only you shou--you should do what you are told. We don't know what happened. We do not know what you should do. We cannot give you any answer because we do not know. This was the official. Uh, but private was, I don't know when that, when that start, but I do know that very close friends of, of ours came to us in um 1942 in July, that they had a, a um, a few people who offered to help. And this was a small church of blue collar workers who needed their goal to help Jewish people who needed it, to take in, in their homes as far as possible, and we naturally said we do because by that time we were already ordered to come to the uh train on the 15th of July, 1942 at night, and we would report would be brought East, that was on this letter, to work. So, this didn't, we didn't like that sort expression what was supplied in the uh, the Jewish the Jewish people who were in charge of that didn't help us at all, so we were very happy to accept the help of this group, and they did help. We have the first thankful to those people.

What did you and your husband decide to do? Explain to me about how big your family was, and how you, how much you knew of what was going on, what fear you had, and then what you decided to do with your child.

Now we uh we had no idea. Like everybody else. We only knew since we came originally from Germany that practically all the people who had lived in Germany, Jewish people, were not there anymore. They were taken, they were taken by train or, or whatever, and nobody had ever heard anything from them when they were gone, and nobody knew where they were. So this was already enough for us to decide that we would do anything, and take any help. The first thing we did was that my husband uh discussed with a doctor if he could get his um his um now I, I don't know the word anymore, uh removed appendix...yes, his appendix removed even that appendix was fine, and when he woke up in the hospital, there were more lost appendixes, so this would since we had to be at, at the 15th at the station, that was a few days before war?? so we had time with the doctor

thing uh, uh that this telling what he had done, uh, took two weeks time and then we should come again. So, in this two weeks we, we were using because um, I had heard that the Jewish Council was hi-hiring people for all kinds of work, and all those people were um on a piece of paper at that moment free of deportation. Our family was my husband, our little girl which was at that time for years old, and at me, so we decided to do all that and I, I went around and I got a job which made us all uh available not to go, and we could stay, the, the time, there was no limit. So, uh, he, my husband came home, and we thought maybe with the job I have, it would be, we would be helped at the time. I worked at the, at uh, at uh old people's home in the kitchen, and um, I worked every day, and I cooked for 40 people. I liked it, I liked the work, and it seemed to be safe. And one morning after about 6 weeks working, I came at 7 o'clock, and the doors were open, and all the people in there were gone. Was a terrible, terrible frightening room, every room was looked for probably for valuable things, I don't know. I saw what had happened, that most of the people wh, who couldn't walk and were taken in, must have been taken in -----, I didn't be-believe what, any word anymore, I run out and run home, and I knew what I, what we had was not safe, the piece of paper.

Describe to me what you and your husband decided to do with your daughter.

This same man who came just, I talked about before, which came just after that has happened to us, he um, he told us that our friends, and our friends told us -----also, they had a daughter, she was about 5, 6 months older than ours, and we were, the mother of the child, we were friends from school in Germany, so we all knew each other very well, and they had, they, they told us that they had made the decision, and the child is already gone, and he and she and his mother who lived with them was um gone. They would be going that -----lead into wherever they were safe, where they were supposed to be. We never, we didn't hear anything, and that was all right. We, this meant that we will try that for you too if you want to give up your child because three of you cannot be in one part. You have to give your child to somebody, and uh, a day later you said he had somebody, as we found out much, much later, that was his sister, this man's sister, that was Joe Fishman, he's still alive, and uh, that's where they, where they took our child, and they were very, very helpful that they got the bed and the toys and the clothes and everything there already, that when she would come ----- foreigners, strangers. And then he was trying to look for us for a place, and that took a little longer, maybe a month, until we found the first place to go, so called underground. It was never underground, it was always in an attic.

Describe what your daughter knew about hiding, and how difficult it was for you to part with her.

My daughter didn't know she was hiding. As I said, she was not five yet, and um, we, my husband and I had more than a year ago decided, since we knew of children transports from Germany to England, maybe that would be one day possible, so we would give away our child anyplace we knew where she would be welcome, and why should she maybe not have to die when she could can live a good life, we have a family in the United States who were only too happy to take her, so we decided that we that to make it to her for her hard not to kiss her anymore, not to have her too close physically, both of us did that, and uh and it has helped her because when, when we had the, the time that she had to leave, and we told her she was a outgoing child, she would uh go and visit a, a couple, and they have no children, and they would so much like to see her, and she, she was and she always liked to visit people, so when those other people came, they talked to her, they too, and they came on a Sunday afternoon, and uh we didn't know their name, we didn't know where they lived, and she saw them, and we told her "These, those are the friends who would like you to see where they're living. They, they have no children. And she went with we too, we went with her to the, to the streetcar, and we said goodbye, like that, no kissing, nothing. Then comes afterwards, and this is very personal, and uh, it's ridiculous to say that it's difficult because it never changes. It never changes for all those years because it was '45 before we saw her, before I saw her.

But you rescued her.

In that way, I rescued her, yes. We rescued her, my husband and I we did that. There was no arguing about it, this was just one way to do. If we want her to live.

We have to reload.

Beep.

I'd like you to describe for me what it was like to live in hiding. How restricted you were, how you felt, were you afraid?

To be in hiding, I don't think that anybody can be trained for that because every, every situation, since you are in people's homes, is different. So the first place where we were was uh a bungalow where downstairs a young couple with two small children was living, and on the 2nd floor, the mother of one of them, and she was alone, and she cooked for us, and we had to bring beds, metal beds, they had to bring them there because they didn't have beds for us and we were in the attic. This was the situation, we came and they were a kind of primitive people, but, they, they meant well, and, and they got some money that was helping them too, but uh, we would, we would have

stayed the, the uh, there was really no connection to talk about with, with this old, now I say old lady, she wasn't as old as I am now, and uh she wasn't uh, she wasn't interested that we were there, but uh, it came the -----when there was a holiday, and there was a little special meat or so available that we didn't even get it. But that was not important. Important was that all of the sudden, they said to Joe Fishch, that they cannot stand it anymore to have those two people around, and he has to get them, us out the same day, and not the next. So, Joe, that was, Joe was a hard-working man, he did this, he found places, sometimes, not, not the right ones, and we only could stay there a day or two because the people who were hiding us got scared because they were so o-o-openly in the newspapers, "He who hides Jews will be treated like the Jews." It didn't say a word about killing or anything because at that time we did not know what was happening. We did not know. It was known to uh the British and the Americans. Governments. But we, the people, did not know. And um, so we, we, we came to places where we were very short, some of them maybe with 4 weeks and then they got scared, and some of them was very, very lovely people, but they couldn't work anymore, they were so, so much afraid. Until we got to Holland??? and uh, we were there in a bungalow where there was a mother with three teenage daughters. Was nice and roomy bldg, and we had in the attic a small room. We were there for a long time, till the end until we were found, and we were very uh we could be alone in in our room, and my husband, for the time we lived there, more than a year, he was writing, writing books, always a pencil, and in school, with those blue school, blue school papers. I have all those things but uh there is not too much interest in there because he wrote only about what he would wish for the country, Holland, he felt very close to Holland, and um, the whole world and the hu, hu, hu the human, the humans, what they would do when the war was, the war when the war would be over, and he was sure already for years that uh Germany would lose, and even when it looked on certain times that it was impossible because uh they were um practically in all of Germany, in all of Europe, every country bes, besides two or three, were not under the Germans, but he said the Germans will lose, and from this view out, he had articles about uh economics, about religions, about anything you can think of, philosophy, former philosophy, and help was that the people who were helping us to get to the place, that every two weeks, one came, and here the whole list of books he wanted for his writing, and they all came, every two weeks when we also got our food um slips, how much the food was for any person in Holland, how much they could have, and all the people who were underground were supported and were helped with those coupons, because every month the uh, the places where they were uh, where the people could pick it up themselves, they go in and they took out what they needed, and it was every month another place, and they never found who did this for more than two years--was really remarkable, and the woman who had us there, she, she needed, otherwise she couldn't have fed us at all because everything which was edible, everything needed a piece of paper and a coupon. At that time I was still smoking, and I was making from one cigarette, I think three

new ones, and uh so uh, and I we got, we got a package, I think, well my husband didn't smoke, so it wasn't very nice of me that I was smoking in that little room but I thought at that time one couldn't live without smoking. And uh he was writing and, and on the second floor was a woman who lived there with her mother, she was a seamstress, a very nice, very nice person, and I sat very often downstairs with her because she very seldom had clients, and when she knew then there will be coming, and uh, I learned how to make, I think, seams, was, but that was about all. She didn't let me do so much.

What were the rescuers like, and why do you think they did it?

What do you mean?

The people who hid you, what were they like? Were they all different types of people? And why do you think they did it?

Now the others who were before we were in Holland did not know where we were, naturally, they were glad they were rid of us. The people in uh Holland, this was a woman, who uh told anybody and I, I heard from the top floor always when people came with anything to do in the house that she told and that her husband had left her when her youngest child was a baby, the baby was mean--in the meantime 15 years, but she told various, she had a hard life. I'm sure she did. She did it probably to get some money, but we didn't have to pay I mean a outlandish amount, but we paid about what, what she what she spent and a little bit more. She was a, was a very decent, but she, but she needed it.

Was she afraid? What was she risking by doing this and was she-----?

Everybody thought, everybody, and you can read about it, that the people who were hiding the Jews would be treated like the Jews, so they were scared, and the more things got bad for the Germans, though, the more they got against to-----, to take people in. Um...Political we didn't talk much with, with this woman. There was not much interest in that, it was that she was a poor woman, and uh she had that house, and she was, didn't belong to her, was rented, but she made something on the rent from the people upstairs, and she got our money, and so she could get her children to at least to a high school.

Did you know about persecutions in this period of time while you were hiding?

No, um, we, we heard one story and that was the saddest of all. This Joe Fisch, who had uh at that time, I think, three children and his wife was pregnant. He took people into his house when he had no other place anymore, and they wouldn't have, there was nowhere to go. And uh, he had a man at that time, I think it must have been in -----oh, 1943, late 43, that he had a man in his house with all the other people and the children that um, he was from the Spanish war on the black list of the Germans, and he had for a few days no place to go, and he was from Holland originally, and so he took him in, and that night, they came and emptied the whole house. The chi--the neighbors took the children, but um, everybody else who was in there was two, two people I knew very well, I had sent to Joe, to Joe Fisch, if he would help them. They were there because they had not, they had no other places, and that man, and he and his wife. And they were brought to um, I don't know, they were brought to prison, I know, but when they found out that his wife was, was pregnant, they sent her home, and the others, Joe came to Dachau, and that, from then on he lived through the whole war in Dachau. He was a cook there, and he weighed maybe 250 pounds when he came out, so um, he had other problems.

We have to reload.

Tell me when it's getting too...

Okay.

Sound Roll 2; Wentworth Films; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; March 12, 1992; Chula Vista, CA; Camera roll 3 is up; Sync take 3 is up; We're continuing interview with Helen Waterford.

Beep.

Okay, paint me a portrait of man named Joe.

Joe Fisch was uh like many, many people are in, in Holland, white blond hair, but tall, husky guy, and uh this part of Holland where we found the friends, and we found most of the places where we could hide, and where he brought some of his people, and that was the churches. Um, he was uh, he was um, a carpenter of starting out, but when I met him, he was already um in connection with children's' uh all kinds of difficulties with children, and the children, and he was uh, he had a some, a completely different job above his, where he, what he arranged originally, with uh schooling. And uh, so he, he, he was uh, this church was a quite liberal, and uh, but they were not very rich,



and he was not very rich, but he was uh, a friend. He and his wife came very many times at night when you are not allowed to be on the street, and took things which were needed for our daughter, or which we would need when we could go to the first place, and uh, you know, beds and linens and all those things. We couldn't carry anything when we were going. When we were going we had to take off the sta--the star, and go by train, and there were very obvious, very difficult because there were others looking for younger men, and my husband was never asked for any identification because we had none. And everybody had to have identification. Joe was, for the people he helped, more than a father, more than a father, because really, he had their best things in t--on his mind, what, what should be done, and when he was arrested, his best friend took over like nothing, and this best friend was the gardener of the city of Zan--Zandarn, and uh, he had a library, and he brought, what we found out a--afterwards. The books my husband wanted, he all had them at home. He had a tremendous library, and a very, very highly intelligent man. As I said, he came every two weeks, and we were looking forward when he came because he brought with him his uh, what he thought about what was going on, and he was also listening to the um British BBC, which was forbid, forbid, forbidden, because they would kill you when they knew, know that you have left the radio on that station, and he told us everything, anything, what he heard, and he was the first one who told us in July, 1944, that by that time, one and a half or two million Jews had been killed in Auschwitz. We had no idea. We had never heard the name of Auschwitz, and I think practically all the people who had nothing to do with uh the Nazis or whatever, didn't know. So, but he told us that. That helped us later on to get a, a better picture, when we were arrested, where we would be going.

How many people did Joe rescue, do you think?

I don't, you see, only the ones I know, I'm sure he had many, many more. Um...but how many? It's, it's, it's Doris, and it's me and it is the friends in I, I, I introduced him to who had three daughters. All three daughter, no, yeah, the third, the third, uh the oldest daughter was in his house when the um, when, when the, when they were all arrested there, so the oldest daughter up to that point, she was, she was with him, and she was taken to Bergen-Belsen, where she found her mother, and the mother and this daughter came out, at least six months before the war was over, on a changing of prisoners of Germany and Jews.

Why do you think Joe was arrested?

Now he, at first he made us open the place to do the, to, to go and hide. We wouldn't have known anybody.

Why do you think he did it?

Bec--Oh I know why. Because he, he loved people. He was a, a, a basically very, very good man. There, uh there was nothing wrong in any way to complain ever. He was a fantastic hardworking man, and loving man.

Was he risking not only his own life--

Oh sure.

but his family's.

His family too, but, but he's not the only one who did that for us. The family would have suffered already the first days when they were arrested, but uh, nothing would have happened to his wife, and nothing did, but he would, you don't know, when you do that, but he, I think he didn't even think about it. We have other friends who risked, risked everything. We did not come from this place, from him, they didn't know each other. We brought them together, and the two of them really did got more groups, and different kind of people. The other men had all our belongings, but most important thing were our books, and he had uh, uh clothes, the, the first thing you would need if you have nothing. That's what my husband said. If he takes it, it will be right, and uh, so he had, he went then and what went when Joe was, Joe was arrested, or was gone, he came in by himself to go every two weeks to my daughter too, and in summary, he made our daughter, his. A wonderful man.

Did you get news about your daughter while you were in hiding?

Uh, not pers-personally, but everybody, would say at least every two weeks sometimes, yeah. Yes. No, we got those pictures they had made, but we did not want any other contact. We had no contact or any really before she was gone, and we did not want her ever to feel that she is homesick for her parents. She should forget it, and she did. That this is a, a um, maybe one, some of the reasons that she maybe forgot it for a long time, our relationship, and this is, this is what we did because she would not call it, uh, that we saved her life at that time, and, and much later, but what she called it abandonment. And she's not the only one. There is a very big literature about children who were brought by their parents to other people, they always said that they were abandoned.

Tell me about getting arrested.

Oh it came very suddenly and unexpected because the, the more than a year we were in that house, I was only one time out to get a tooth pulled at night, and the dentist was more excited than I was, he was shaking until he got the--I don't know what he thought, what he had to do with--But anyway, we, we didn't get out and we, we could hardly look out of the window. It was on a Friday morning, and it was the twenty-fifth of August, the same day that Paris was liberated by the Allies. We didn't know. That was the day we were arrested, and uh, we li--as I say--we lived on the top floor, and we heard a knock on the door, not a kick, a knock, and here were two men, not in uniform. Found out later on that there were two men downstairs on each side of the house. Those two men uh that that we were under arrest, they knew our names, nobody in that house knew our names, and um, they would come in and they looked around, and then they saw a picture of, the last picture we got from our daughter on the wall, and one of them said um, "If this is your child, if you have other children in hiding, we, we suggest you take them with you because you are brought, you will be brought to work, and we'll take care of the children while the parents are working. And uh, then we were both found out if we had any money on it, and we had, we had money on us, but they didn't even find it. And uh, they also said, they looked in the drawers, we had very little clothes. Just absolutely necessary, and they said, "Take a coat, take winter clothes with you. Where you are going, it's very cold." Now that was true. The other thing of the children were big lie???

Wait, we have to reload.

Beep.

Explain to me what happened to the people who were hiding ---- when you were arrested. Now the woman who, who whose house this was um was not seen when the, after the man must have been downstairs. I did not see her, she not show up, they were not there. She never said goodbye or anything. The only one who came was the seamstress, and I had a pin, a coral pin I was very much attached to and I put it in her hand, and we said goodbye. So um, she was gone, but I went to her with my daughter after the war, was one of my first visits to, to go there with the train and visit, and um, the first thing she said, "I'm sorry, but the Germans told me I could use all your things," that means um, bedding and uh, uh blankets and uh everything we left there, because we went without anything. We knew we would be killed, so why should we take something with us we would not need, and maybe one day we could get some way escape, and this would be just not necessary, so we went without anything. So, she, that's what she said to me. And at that moment I was so, it was so upsetting to see the house and all again, I forgot, said, she said, I said, "Forget about it." I had

no bed. We had, my daughter and I, we had nothing. But I said, "It's okay." Afterwards I thought, "Why would the Germans say that she could take all that?" The only reason could be that she told them. And that she uh got money for it because, because that's why they -----all your children because they got the money for each head. But uh, I don't have any clue. I only didn't go anymore there. Not ever. But that uh, I think, that they would give it to her, sometimes I think maybe it wasn't it even true. Maybe she used it and it was gone in the meantime, or she stole it, I don't know. But I didn't go there anymore.

Okay. Now describe for me the transport to Auschwitz, and also the things that you and your husband did, the cutting up of the money, the little bits of resistance that you did.

I like to talk about this experience um with the students because I most, I al-always go to universities and sometimes to um, to um schools who are just next, next year going to the university, I don't know, and I, I, I tell them that I say that very, very uh clear and maybe it seems not absolutely necessary but you should know because hardly ever anybody has talked about it or has written about it, we were a-arrested, and we were brought to Amsterdam, that's where we originally lived, and we were brought to the Gestapo, which is the, where the police or the SS and we were separate taken into another room, and we were asked. We found both after, we found both of us did uh what they wanted to know the most: Who brought those coupons because I just had gotten new coupons for the food, and uh it was must have been lying there. They didn't never find the people who did every month enough for the nearly 20,000 Jewish people who were in Holland underground, who had to be, had to have it, otherwise they couldn't have lived. So, that, they asked both of us, and we didn't even answer. And who brought us um, who brought us the coupons, and uh, who looked after us and who brought us to where we are. Those were the questions first, and uh we didn't answer. So, this, this took a few hours, and when we were brought to the regular jail in Amsterdam, which doesn't exist anymore, we found it after, I found it looking afterwards that it was a very nice place, I could have stayed there during the whole war. Was clean and nice. But we were only there about two nights and then we went to the camp which did all the train, the trains all going to the East went to, how could I ever forget that name?

Westerberg.

Westerberg, thank you. Westerberg, the train went took us to Westerberg. Westerberg when I saw it, now that was, as I said, in August of 44, was not what I had expected. It was huge. It was huge, and I saw the Jewish, the Jewish police for the first time. I didn't know that something like this existed. And the women in, in greenish uniforms, Jewish women, and uh, we were there only 3

nights when, when at the same time in Holland the um they know that the allies were trying to come into the Southern part uh of Holland to get the Germans out, that was known. We didn't know, sure. Took a long time until I understood where that all was. And uh, the uh, the uh man working on the trains had arranged with uh whoever, that they would they would start uh start to put the work down the moment they were knowing that the Allies were coming. So the Germans knew that there would be no trains going, and so they did in three days empty practically all of, say that again, Westerberg, gee, I have a block. The um, in three days, there were only about 400 people left from the thousands and thousands, so we were in the first train, which went as we found out, not when we came there, but maybe a day or two later that we were in Auschwitz. So the trains where the regular, as I understand, the regular camp cars, there was no seating in there, nothing, it was naked. And the only thing was the little um, a little thing like this for maybe 175 people to use. And uh, otherwise people, a tremendous amount of, of, of luggage. They took anything with them that they thought because there had been quite some time, in, in this camp, and uh they, they took sewing machines with them, everything. And there was, were really, you couldn't, you could not sit on the floor. You had to stand, and we had to stand three days and four nights in that little basket where we, for the, whatever had to be used couldn't be used anymore. You couldn't even get to it. So after a few hours, was very, very bad, and I, but it didn't change, and we were going and going, and some two or three times, they opened the doors, and the people all yelled for water, and uh, they didn't, they didn't understand the situation. They thought they would be brought water. As soldiers came in and took our, whatever, if we had rings on or something, and the, and then they wanted money, it's the second time I know they wanted money, and we didn't give them money. We gave them just some change or whatever. We didn't, and uh, we arri--we arrived all the, after all that time, probably in physical and and other kind of ways changed. We had changed into another person. And uh, when we arrived the there was a little something which looked like a station, and there was a name of uh, not Auschwitz, starts with a B.

Birkenau.

That's right, Birkenau, B-I-R--Birkenau, never heard anything. At Birkenau is uh is German, and it's a name of a tree. Not that A-U, but Birken, and uh, when we got out, jumping down, and the people all wanted to keep their luggage, and then there started the first fighting between uh Jewish prisoners who had blue and white striped uniforms, who took all that what they brought, very fast, had to go very fast, because it was a very long train, impossible to, to think how many people were there. We asked one time, one of those prisoners that didn't even answer when we asked, "Where are we?" Because we had never heard Birkenau.

All right, we're about to run out.

Beep.

Just tell me the incident on the train and why you did it.

We had money in, in a money belt, both of us, we always carried it, since we were underground we had both have, you never know. So uh, we took that out and at night, and we cut bill after bill, I don't know anymore how much it was, but it was all the money we had, and uh, I don't know. So we, we tried to put it into very small pieces, I don't know why we bothered because the floor was not good, so we did that all. It was the hardest job, but I guess it was harder to make the money with working than to get rid of it that way. Because it hurt, and uh, but we, we thought that they shouldn't get it because the soldiers, they kept the money. This was the thing they could, were allowed to keep because afterwards the uh, the uh luggage, that was a big ----, that was the biggest. The whole camp waited for that, for each train, that they got food, and they got clothes and they got jewelry, and anything. And uh the people who worked in the, in that dept, they were after a few months they were changed and killed, and when they, when they were found selling those things, and they did, I don't know how they did it, but they could change it with anything, which was someplace available. I never knew how much was available in Auschwitz, if you had something. I found it only out by the, by the reading, by all the books I have in German and in English.

Tell me how you asked them where you were.

Yeah, I asked one of those blue and white striped, "Where are we?" He didn't answer. Didn't answer. They were glad that the food came, but uh they didn't, they were Jewish, just like us. And they came one day like that too. But in the meantime they had a, a very good job, everybody would have given his right hand to have such a job.

Tell me about the selection. Why did you, are the shoes making too much noise Brett, her shoes?

Mine?

Yeah.

Oh.

Yeah, that's fine. Tell me about the selection.

Uh, it was, when we come, came out, we were separated, men and women. And uh, so I was, I uh in the, in the pl-uh train, there was a woman standing next to me the whole time, and she had a child, like our child. And uh, she said, "When we were arrested, somebody said we should take our children. And we took our children out of the places where they were hiding," and uh, gee, I thought that could have happened maybe to us. But we, we didn't even consider that. So this woman and her little girl and I, we were in one row walking up when we saw the end which was very, very long because that that whole train along we had to go and uh, we saw at the end, a man, a extremely well-looking man, this I have never forgotten, in his uniform, very elegant and and uh, when we came, the three of us, and he asked me, "Is this your child?" And I said, "No," he made a move to the mother and the child to go this way, and to me, this way. That was all. And I was with other people finding out after a while that they were the ones who were supposed to go to work eventually, and uh, that was the reason they looked comparatively young, I wasn't young at all. I was in my middle thirties. I was one of the oldest, and they were very young, and uh, we came to a an place where there had been some trees, there were no trees in Auschwitz anymore, there were just some leftover I don't know. So, there where we were told to wait. And then there I saw my husband, and my husband was also on this good side, and we talked for a long time. We always thinking that we would be together. Then they called the women in to a large bldg. We were very close to this bldg and we, that was the last time I saw my husband, ever, and I do not know when or where he died. There is a chance now to find out, that's new because the government camp kept all those things, I don't know for whom, where it is known, I don't know, thousands and thousands of names or millions of names, I don't know. And the Red Cross ----- will take care of it. It will take maybe ten years. So I told my daughter she should do that. I would not be living anymore until this answer would come. So um, we were in there, and we, the first thing was that we were lined up on the lo--on long tables, and behind there, there were girls, young girls, all had black hair, looked very, very nice, their hair was, was just perfect, and all of them were wearing black silk dresses, but not the same. They were obviously hand-made the way they liked it. And uh, I thought those were Germans. They were not...they were criminals. And uh, they put the name in the book, and maybe those books are now open to us, and uh, they gave you the tattoo, and uh then you went to another part in this huge bldg, and uh, there were more of those women. The same type, and uh they said very fast, very fast, was always fast, fast, fast, fast. We had to undress completely. And with that undressing, I had a wedding band somebody overlooked it there and she just put it with her hand out, and it was gone. I still thought they were German. They were not. They were prisoners like we. They were only younger, and probably and longer there, long

experience, they know. So um, I had very good shoes on. Walking shoes, and I must have kept them for that day, and with us, and with us in the train were the, were Anne Frank, her mother, her father and her sister. And when I saw them again in this, in this hall, there was a mother and the two girls. Now I knew the Franks very well. I didn't, I did not know that they were still alive. When they were disappearing at the time when we all were invited to come to the train, they had prepared, and they had this well-known uh house ready for them to go in. We didn't know where that was. They were all of the sudden uh not there anymore, and we only knew two things--maybe they had gone to Switzerland, some people had a chance or they were underground, and here I saw them again for the first time. Um, Mrs. Frank had very uh shoes like mine too, and one of the girls said to her, "I would like to have your shoes." I heard it, and she said, "No, no, I need my shoes." And she said uh, "I give you mine." Oh, but a funny way. And she said, no, no, she said, "I bring you every day soup for your two girls." That's she, that's changed shoes, and she did. She never got any soup. So, another girl came to me and wanted my shoes, and I didn't want any soup. I said, I, "No, no, I don't give up the shoes." I should have thought by that time that there must have been prisoners. Otherwise I would have just taken them away from the -----, but uh, they leave me alone, and I had those shoes oh at least half the winter, they were still, I mean I could wear them, but they were not so good any, anymore. But um, yeah, the next half of the winter, I had no shoes. But um, we, we were then, then uh when uh we were naked, and we got shaved, our hair and body, and the head, and then we were brought into the shower, which was a regular shower. We didn't know about other showers, and then we were outside. It was September. It was about the 8th of September, something like that, and uh, we were wet. We had nothing, a towel or anything. And then they threw each of us a dress. They didn't look for the size and they didn't look for if it was wool or if it was a thin summer material, you got one dress, and then you had to try to find somebody who wanted to change with you, and uh, the size and with material maybe, and by that time, we had never been allowed to go to the toilet, latrine it was called. We were not allowed to go to the bathroom or anything. So, um, we were brought into a...

We have to reload.

Beep.

I want to ask you some general questions about your sense while you were in various camps, if this is, you don't have to be camp-specific. Did you ever catch a glimpse of your reflection?

Of my what?

Reflection. Did you ever see what you looked like?



No. There were no, was no mirror. No. We looked at each other and the ones without hair, they usually, you know you look like that. And that was all.

Can you tell me what sensory things you remember, like sounds, or smells, or the things that made the biggest impression you.

The biggest that was the uh chimney, which was very close to the barrack where we were, and that was spewing fire, fire. Twenty-four hours. In the, the, in the daytime, you only saw the smoke. At night it was fire. And uh, about the third or fourth day, I started to walk around. We didn't work. We couldn't stay in our barrack. We had to be out, so I just started to walk around, and while I approached a man, the only man I saw, uh to tell me where we are, I don't know, he was well-dressed comparatively, he was a prisoner, and he spoke Polish, and I couldn't speak Polish, and uh, I asked him where we were. And he said um, "Auschwitz," he knew that. And uh, I say "What is this?" And he said, "You see, you cannot get out of Auschwitz any other way but through this chimney. This is our trip to heaven." And I thought, "Don't know what kind of a man this is." I thought about it later much more because there was no man walking around. It must have been a prisoner who was uh quite a high rank. Prisoners had very high ranks. Uh, this you don't know when you are there because they don't come to you. But uh, the uh, he must have been there to look for a girl. This is the only way that, the only interest they had to walk through a woman's camp, and there was a new group just had come, and they were, you know, certain ages anyway, but uh, this was very clear when he told me what, I understood it, but I didn't tell my f--the people I was with. That wasn't necessary. It was enough I knew what and, were not even sure, and uh, what this was not changing. The, the roughest time was uh the two uh daily uh that we had to be counted at about 5 o'clock or so in the morning. We don't know, our watches were already long gone. Uh, and uh when we were awakened, we had, the way we are, we didn't have to wash, or we didn't have to change clothes or shoes, or whatever. We had to uh come to a, a roll call, in the morning and in the evening. And that roll call never ever and I guess if you have talked to other people, never ever functioned. If they had uh 976 on their book, there were maybe 850 or the other way around, and then the girl who had to do that, she was the, the uh, older, the elder, of the of the uh she was a prisoner, of this barrack, she got more and more nervous, because very short, short of that, one of the uh, of the officers, is who, I don't know what they were, I don't know anything different in uniform. I, I never learned it before or after the war. I was never interested, but he was something higher, and he got very angry that it never, that it never was came out right, so sent, they had to search the whole barrack, and as I said, in every barrack was, were about a thousand people. So, he, some people were hiding at that time we had straw mattresses, which was luxury. So we

were hiding under that in the corner, and if you are, it's understood, ----- it's very difficult to climb up there and to find the people. Some people had died. But I know that one time, I knew I had the Scarlet Fever because it was in in the camp in Holland, so I knew looking at my stomach it was Scarlet Fever, and I was afraid that somebody would see me, that they would uh do something with me which I wouldn't probably like. Still have not exactly taken it that that everybody who was sick would be killed. I, and I think it took a little longer that it goes into one's brain. But I stayed always in the corner in the third bunk under the mattress. And I saw them searching, but they never came up there . That was the first illness I had there. There is no, there was no so-called clinic or whatever.

What acts of resistance did you see in the camp of any sort?

Nothing. Nothing.

What about mental resistance?

How do you resist mentally in such a case. The only way to live, to be, not even if the, the, the only way to be is to do what is asked from you, and it is stupid as a one person to do something. That is because the, the woman who is in charge of the barrack is the first one who will punish, be punished, so she will do something that you don't do, because she is afraid also. No, I thought it would be--I don't know and I've never read that anything like this happened in the barracks or anything like that. Never. I haven't read any, and I have all those besides the ones I have read and I don't know.

What about religious or spiritual resistance?

Uh, there's no resistance. This is not a resistance, but I saw in on Jewish holidays some women who knew, who kept ----- to pray. That's not a resistance. This is for people who are very religious, nat-natural. I did not see any resistance...in that camp. And later on where we were in the factory. One time in the factory, but that was, that was not person to person.

What was that?

Was a woman walked out at night on New Year's night and the guards, we had 4 soldiers, for the whole camp and 4 women soldiers. That was all. And, uh there but, I guess they were drunk or some--and she thought it was snowing so much, she could go out, and she went out, and she

thought if she knocks on a house and says where she comes from, she was uh, they would take her in ba-ba-back home. But she was ----- . That was all. That was all I saw.

So she escaped and then got recaptured? Was she punished?

Uh, they, she was sent, officially it was said she was going to a larger camp than that at the factory, but I know she was alive afterwards. So they didn't do anything anymore. They couldn't send them anymore to Auschwitz. There was no uh, uh burning or anything anymore after November the first, 1944.

What do you think keeps you alive? What choices do you make while you're in the camp.

Now at first, the, I think the, the greatest and the most important choice if you wanted to live, that you do want to live, that you do anything, which makes it possible to live. And I, I was not in doubt, I was, that I wouldn't live. I thought I will, which is uh, you know, stupid. But I, have, I was convinced. So at first, if you are in the, in a, in a large group of people, I, I, I was always short, I made myself shorter, to be in the middle, not in the front, not in the back. I stand uh, that the others are taller. I haven't had experience with that, but I thought there is something, because people in some way, who stand in the first row or in the last row, they, they were picked for things, which maybe were not very pleasant. You don't know it. It, this is that uh instinctive uh that's all I can say. Not smart or...instinctively you say, I don't want to be seen, they don't and should send me, see me.

What other choices do you think helped you?

I think uh, that the most important thing was my child. That I wanted to come back to my child. So, but I did fought, I do not, I cannot take any credit. I did as little as possible to that somebody would say, "Oh that woman...", you know and everybody knows. That was not, I didn't, but uh, this was important, I was always thinking of my child, of my husband where he would be, and...May I tell a little story? Uh Sunday afternoon was--

We have to reload.

Yeah.

Beep.

Okay, you were about to tell me a story.

Yeah, uh we were working in the factory uh twelve hours, night or day, and then they promised us they would give us one extra portion for night or uh, I had nothing better to do at night, so I I was working nights. But, the Sunday afternoon was free for everybody. As far as you can, uh, you sit on your mattress if there, as long as there was a mattress, by the end, then there were none anymore. So um, and the group of Dutch women, because that's how I came, with and that's who were my friends. We sat together and talked about lots of things. So, one uh, one day I have never forgotten. We were thinking, when we come home, we didn't say if anymore because we knew in the factory there was no gas, and uh, we would not be gassed. If we would get sick that's another story. So if we, we thought we would, we would come home. What would be more difficult? To find your children or your husband? Now, everybody was very frank. You uh, you didn't talk, take, tell stories in those situations. And we were maybe 12 or 13 women. Most of them had children in hiding. Not all, but most of them. And uh, of the, I think it was 13, that the uh, when we were finished telling what would be harder, I think the, I think you know the answer because uh only one woman said, "I love my little boy, and if I don't see him again, it's very difficult, but if my husband is not there, I will lose my mind." She was the only one. She did, after the war. She did. But uh, all the others said they had more, more than one child very often, it it's a piece of uh you lose your husband it's, it's terrible, it's your best friend, and it's the closest person you have. But losing a child is physically in every way very, very painful.

Now let's go back to the selection when you, what did you notice about selection, the age groups, and tell me a little about that.

Now that, uh, at first the age groups, the older, you see, you don't have a long chance to look what's going on there. It's not right in front of you. You have to walk a little. Be, be, be, you are stopping before, you're stopped before you come closer. You don't know what's going on. But it is, old, little older peo-, older people I would think, we had one old per, old, old lady, she was ten years older than I was, so she was in her middle forties, but extremely good-looking woman. And there was no question, she ca, came with us, and she came out at the end. But um, the women with children, that, when they had children, there was no help. They had to go both. And uh, but you are so short in contact what's happening, you go to the other side, and you only think. All there with the children, there are in, they will be taken care of. That's what we thought, all of us. So, when we, when we got away from this place where we lost practically everything, practically, and um, when we came to at night into a barrack, we uh, there was hard-hardly any room, so we were

ten people in one, six people bed...bunk, whatever you call it. And we all had to lo-li-lie one side, and we all were deadly tired, and from the trip??? and all that, so we all did sleep, but it wasn't long. Uh, maybe 3 or 4 hours when the light went on, and we had to go to the famous roll call. And there were every day, and there were every day, there were pain, it's painful. That didn't change, but after a few weeks, we got some work to do, but it was not the work that they kept us for, we found that out later, we had stupid things to do. We had to go to the so-called woods and cut out some grass, and put the grass in front of the soldiers' houses, that they could have flowers in front of their houses. Things like that. It was, it was, had nothing top do with what we thought, and uh then after uh

What did they have in mind for you?

What, that one day we uh, we uh, while we were in this first um

Birkenau.

No, no, no, no, in the first um

Work camp.

Not the camp but the uh, the, the

Registration area

No, not where, where the barracks were, in a barrack, uh, two times afterwards, where what we knew by then were uh, who shall live and who shall die, and to, to two of those, there were just, the whole the whole uh barrack, every barrack, was for day, for a lot of times, you couldn't get out because something was happening in the other barrack. We didn't know what. So we were all locked in. So when we were asked to get out, and all the others were inside, then we knew what was happening. So, uh Mengele was always there. I don't know why he came always to us because there were at least 24 doctors who did the same thing. So um, we had to take our dress off, put it over our arm, outstretched arm, and the in the nude we had to walk in front of Mengele, and Mengele said, this or this also, the one place you had to go back into the, the uh barrack, into a certain pla-room, and the other, you go to another place. The other place was always, I, we, they went in the barrack, they were picked up very soon, and they were killed that same day. So this was how they cleaned it out. People who, who after a week or two weeks or three weeks started to

get very thin and very down, very down, they took. So the third time when they did it, he counted out 300 people, and those 300, and Mrs. Frank was with me at that time, she, she was in the same barrack, but I mean that she, she was in the 300 with Arn, with Ann, but the other daughter, I didn't see. So, we came into another place, barrack, and we spent the night there, and the next morning Mrs. Frank and her younger daughter were gone, and somebody told me that she did not go without Margot, her older daughter, so she, well, thought the same way we, we thought, we are going to work. Around amount of 300. So she disappeared, and she must have gone into any other big barrack, and nobody knew who she was and nobody cared. And uh, by that time, we all, already had all kinds of lice and things. So it was no, well, it made no difference. So we were going, this same day then, by train to Czechoslovakia. That was the factory who had asked for 300 people. This is the way it was, I mean we didn't know, but there are many books about this system that the German uh took into their fac-their factory, people because they had no men anymore. So they took women. And uh, they had to be a place ready where those people could stay, and a lot of factories were given, uh taken away from their owners in Czechoslovakia and around, and some German trust, trustees come, and they take over the factory, and they get all those people to work, and they pay so much, they have to pay for the food of those people, was about 50 cents a day. So, they had uh workers, but certainly, I don't think that the workers were worth 1 cent. But that's besides the point. And uh so we worked and I got my night shift, and uh, we were working twelve hours without, without food in between.

-----have a tiny bit. Tell, define for me Kapo.

Uh, the Kapo is a prisoner, and he's in charge of a group of people. Uh, I knew what the first -----, that the, the Polish -----police, I know what the ----- was but I have forgotten it. Uh, but they had to keep the, the men, they were with men, really under because the men had uh sometimes hard work, impossible work for them because they were so weak.

We have to reload.

Change film, camera roll 8 is up; Sync take 8 is up.

Beep.

Mrs. Waterford, when you were in the work camp, in the factory, there was an incident where an SS came up and asked you about your crimes.

Not an SS.

No?

No. Just tell me that story as though I don't know it.

Yeah, the uh, we would, we had all kinds of different work that was still in Auschwitz, but, yeah, I think so. No, I don't know.

It doesn't matter-----.

Yeah, so, yeah, yes, uh, I, we had to do, we had a something with two wheels, how do you call those?

Carts.

Cart? Okay. And we had to coll, uh, collect in there stones or something, and all, we walked by one of the, the uh German woman, whatever they were, in uniform, and um, anytime you had to bring this in and come back, and you walked by, so I thought she looked very nice and young, and I said to her, uh, "This is good work we are learning here, we can use it when the war is over." She looked, and because I spoke German, and uh, she, she said, "Yeah, that's right, that's right." So, uh, I came back the next time and um, she said uh, I said, "How do you like your work?" "Oh, it's okay, okay." They hated it in the village. (laughs) There was nothing going on for the young girl, and uh, then she came back, and she said, "Don't you like it?" I said, "I wasn't asked." She said, "What do you mean, you were not asked. You were a criminal. Look at your clothes." I never thought of that. I said, "Those are not my clothes. And I was not a criminal, I'm a Jew." She, she went, she took about 2 steps back, and uh this was all. She didn't know. That's, that's what they knew, that we were criminals, and we looked it, we smelled it. I don't uh, but uh, I, uh, I said one more thing the next time I came by. A friend of mine, she came with her little cart, and I said, "Look at this lady. Her father is one of the richest men in Amsterdam. And she has an M.D." "Oh," she said, "don't tell me such stories." So, they didn't want to know. It was true.

Tell me, there was a time after liberation when you were hungry and walked up to a Russian soldier. Tell me that story.

Uh, the war was over at the place where I was on the 9th of May. That was the last day could be because the Germans were still doing something. So, uh the ga--the gate was open and the Ger-the

8 Germans who were in there for 1200 women, at that time we had maybe lost 150 who died, and we, we buried them with our hands. There was nothing. And uh, I open, I walked out. The, the place itself was terribly, terribly dirty, and there was nothing functioning anymore, there was no food for days, and I mean full days no food, and uh, everybody had diarrhea, and never made it, so it was very, very dirty, and uh, so what, I walked out and the first thing I saw were the uh, the fl, the flowers, the little white flower, oh, in May. Under a tree, there are little white flowers, they are here in the United States too.

Mayflowers.

Not mayflower, but the, may, may mayflowers? Yeah? And uh, and I hadn't seen that, so I threw myself in there and I smelled them, and they were wonderful fresh, it was wonderful. So, I went, went into town because we were always, every day going through town and the people there knew us, and uh, I went into a, a sausage ----- a store I had seen every day, and I always wanted some of his sausage, so I walked in, dirty, and all I was, and smell it, and he, I said I would like, I said in German too, "I would like to have some sausage. I wonder if you could give me one." He said, "No." So I walked back into town, nearly into town, and here was a Russian, and he had a piece of black bread in his one hand, and he had a chicken leg in his other. And he was a very tall guy, and I said something like that, and he looked at me, and I said, "-----." He gave it to me, understood me perfect. Oh, it made me so sick. The next night I was terribly sick. Shouldn't have done that naturally, but who can, who can say wouldn't do it, would think of that what could come later, but um, I didn't stay long. The, the, the um, director of the factory came without his pin, was an, that he belonged to the Nazis in a blue suit, blue, elegant suit, and he thanked us for our work, and uh, he told us we had to wait until the International Red Cross would come, and pick us up and bring us to our countries. Now, the uh International Red Cross had been there just before Christmas, and they were, they, they the rumors what they had in their, in their trains when they, where they came with was tremendous. Everybody knew all the things who were for eating in the train, and we got the first day, we got some sugar, loose sugar, but we had nothing to put it in, so we had it in our filthy smelling hands, and we ate it, and the, the, the thing that came right after that was a, a can of, of sardines, and it was one can, and it was opened, it was for two people. This was it. The next Sunday, we got peas in some kind of a so-called soup. I don't know. But, uh, well there were four women who came with that, and uh, in green uniforms, and they marched with the woman who was in charge. By, we had to stand in fives as always, and uh, I wa--I was in front, I wanted to be in the front, and uh, there were tel--they were tel-telling, uh the woman who was in charge was telling her, "Here, look at those people. They are so filthy, and they don't want to take showers. We showed you the beautiful new showers we have, you saw them, you saw how clean it



was, they don't go in." She forgot to say that they don't -----was no open. We couldn't go in. And that's what you have when you are, have Jews. They don't want to wash themselves. They are filthy dirty. And that woman did not come, the women who walked by did not come up and ask "Why don't you wash yourself?" They believed everything. So this is the International Red Cross, who has now all that what my, where my husband died and all that. I don't know, and I will never get it.

How does your experience make you feel about humankind?

Oh, I believe like Anne Frank says, if you, I don't know if you remember when you read it, I believe that people are basically good. I do. Honest. Honestly. People are basically good. If they do something, they are stronger, stronger things come up in their life which makes it more important to be a good Nazi because they have a good time, and as a man, you can have any woman you want, and uh, you get beautiful uniforms, and everything. So, a lot of people fall under that and fall with it. Now, I think basically we are good. I believe in it.

Do you see survival as an achievement?

No, I don't know. I don't think that I did anything more than any uh, uh awake and sincere person would do. I try not to fall into the eye of the enemy, and uh, I don't do dumb things, who, who maybe, I think I have to do because it's so bad here, but that wouldn't make any sense. What is one life when they kill them twenty four thousand in 24 hours, every day? What is one life? Nothing. So, no, I thought afterwards when I have my child, I am needed.

Beep.

Mrs. Waterford, what were your losses and what were the things you gained from this?

Naturally the losses are, that I lost my husband, and it took me 13 years to get married again. And even after that time, every night I had nightmares that he maybe would come back, and what I would do in this case. I never told him. But it was terrible, the thought. I hadn't thought so much about that before I was really married, but uh, this is a great loss, and uh, I have learned what people like me, like you, like anybody can do to each other, and there is nothing they cannot do. Can do anything. This is what I have learned. But it isn't, basically, there are not, they don't come into the world covered with sin. I hope that no-nobody's religion is in any way uh against what I say, but I believe that we are good and only want to be good. A lot of things prevented that we are

not good. And if there are things involved to other people, this is the greatest, the greatest terror I can think of. Because we were really degraded in every way. Even a, even lying that we could, we don't want to wash ourselves, we love to go around stink, stinking like that. All those things, nobody would, with a normal way of thinking would do that, but all the people who worked for the fascism, they did it wonderfully. Just, they don't have to be belonging to them, but it was wonderful to know that there is a group, or a large element of people who are lower than I am, than we are. That's wonderful. Don't help them to get up. No, this is I have learned, and I uh, it makes me very unhappy. But, one person alone cannot do that, and uh people who have gone through exactly the same thing I have, uh, and they talk about, I guess you know better than I do because I'm never together with any people who have the same experience. The thing is that they are crying, crying, "What, look what's done to me! Look what is done to us!" That's terrible, I know it. I know everything. I know it, and when I speak to the students, I never talk about violence. They can see enough violence on TV. They don't need me. I do not say that. I say what Anne Frank said. That I believe that. And I think it has helped me through my whole long life afterwards. And I, I find it absolutely wrong only to talk what happened to me and I lost my father, my mother, my 16 cousins or whatever, it is terrible. But it's terrible to listen to it also. Can't we make peace with ourselves? Can't we? Let me, let me, let me accept that it has existed, and it has, but you cannot carry it with you all your life. You have to say, yes that has existed, and I will every time when necessary, when I see it's necessary, talk about it, but now I have a new life, and I want to make the best in my new life. This is what I tell the students, the women.

Now just tell me, seeing the patch of Lilies of the Valley. As though you didn't tell me before.

Okay. When uh, when I walked out of the gate, gate was open, and our people have, Ger-German people have left, and left the uniforms out there, and uh, I was not interested in taking a uniform out, but, but the people really wanted it, and uh, very close to the entrance was a big tree which I never had seen, and un-under this tree were the Lilies of the Wally, Valley, so beautiful, so white, I had forgotten that something like this existed. There was no way of bending down and, and rip them off, I wouldn't do that, so I put myself into them, and I still feel this feeling. Wonderful.

And one other thing. Describe for me Dr. Mengele.

Now I talked about Mengele and uh, I didn't know that he was the head of the people. The uh, head of the doctors, and that he had uh fantastic ideas, what he thought he could sell uh medically, and uh he would be a big man. The greatest man ever because he had so much material. He said it himself, how much material he had to find out what's wrong with twins, and how can you maybe

change the color of the eye from one color to another over tw-over over twins. I mean those were very important. But, he uh, he really thought this would be, what he was doing was really uh searching for help, but there's nothing, not one thing, and was uh, many people he killed because absolutely unrealy uh the, cutting this out, and cutting that out. There's nothing in that he thought anything new.

What did he look like?

I said before, and I will always say, excellent-looking man. Very, very, very uh friendly uh looking. And I mean he, he didn't talk or loudly, he used just the only question asking me if that was my child, and that was all, but (laugh), you know, if you don't know what he is, and it takes you about 20 years until you really know who he was, and who all the others were, there are a lot of books and they're about the doctors, and they all go to, to the same, and uh, then I learned. I learned a lot of things afterwards. So much.

We have to do on other thing. We have to record just the sound of this room, so you just have to sit very quietly, and not -----.

30 seconds of room tone for Helen Waterford.

Tell me when you start.

Now.

Thank you.

Your welcome.