

OK. Today we want to give you a chance to tell your experiences before, during, and after the holocaust.

Yeah.

We like to begin by just asking you to identify yourself presently.

OK. I'm Lori Price, geboren Suss, born in Gelsenkirchen, Westfalen Germany.

OK. And you tell us a little bit about your life there in Gelsenkirchen.

Now in Gelsenkirchen, [GERMAN] my parents and myself lived in a small apartment until about 1939, when the Jewish people became orders to move out from those apartments and into Jewish houses.

OK. Before we talk about that part of your story, could we just talk a little bit more about what it was like before '39. That is, what do you remember of your childhood?

What I remember of my childhood, my father had a barber and beauty shop, and a very good going business on one of the main streets in Gelsenkirchen until about 1929. Then when the crash came, we had to relinquish part of the business. And my father found a smaller shop. And myself and my brother.

You had one brother?

I have one brother, yes. We are still going to a school. And we had to attend a Jewish school. We could not go into a Christian school. But my brother started to go to gymnasium from the fifth grade on, until 1936 when they did not allow the Jewish students to continue at the gymnasium.

So by 1936, my brother had to interrupt his studies there. And my parents found for him to go to learn gardening in Dusseldorf. I remained at home, and continued my schooling. I got out of school, what actually was only the grade school, what they call here grade school in 1936.

So how old were you at that time?

15.

15.

Going on 15.

So you were born then in 19--

'21.

'21.

Right. And from that time on, well, I did not want to stay home. I wanted to do something. I found a job in a Jewish family as a babysitter. This family moved later on to Dortmund, and I went with them. They had by that time, a two-year-old boy.

And I worked for them until the baby was about 3 and 1/2. Then I changed jobs. I came back home, and found a job in another Jewish family, since to learn any profession was impossible. We were very restricted.

Now that was '36, '37. By 1938 and '39, of course, it got worse, the Jewish questions in Germany got worse. Naturally in 1939, we had the Kristallnacht in Germany where all the Jewish businesses were demolished. The synagogue was

burned.

How did you respond to that? Do you remember what your feeling was when that happened?

Well, no. We were very frightened, because we didn't know what was going on, or what would be coming. Then in '39, after the Kristallnacht, my father or all Jewish men were arrested. They took them down to jail. And there were quite a few restrictions on them naturally. My mother went to visit my father. We were not allowed to go or I was not allowed to go.

And we were frightened to death because we didn't know what will happen. What would be? There was not so much hearsay, but it frightens us enough to see the brownshirts and the demonstrations of the Nazis in the streets.

What were the brownshirts?

The SR. And of course, also there were demonstrations from so-called communist parties, the workman's, and the situation was really very, very frightening. Newspapers wrote different articles, the smearing of the words, Jude, and juden raus, and things like that. Naturally that got worse.

Going on the streets, well in a town where you knew almost everybody, and a lot of people had been your customers, they shook their heads. But a lot of them were afraid to talk to you.

You mean those would be non-Jews?

The non-Jews were afraid to talk to you, because they were afraid for their own lives. One would tattle on the other. And there were things either they brandished them as communists, or they were just plainly afraid for themselves too. So, coming to the conclusion that we should be a little bit careful.

When the war broke out in '39, of course, then rationing started, and the Jewish people got maybe a little bit less to eat than the Germans did. And one thing brought the other. No way of being able to work freely or earn money freely for to make a living and feed your family.

My father had lost his barber shop. We had lost quite a bit. My mother was working in a big Jewish store. But also there, the situation got very scarce. And I can remember that my parents wouldn't talk much about it, because in those years, parents were not as open to children as they would discuss things today.

So I remained at home until 1940. In 1940, there was an opportunity for me to go to Berlin to a Jewish school as kindergartering. And I took the chance and went to Berlin. That lasted from August 1940 until December.

You were a teacher at kindergarten?

No, I was a student.

You were a student.

But the Nazis closed the school.

So was the atmosphere different in Berlin than it was in your town?

Yes, in Berlin, the atmosphere was different because it's such a big metropolitan city. And over there, the Jewish people were maybe not as much in the focus than in a small city.

I see.

But then in 1940, we were students from all over Germany. And we got already the news. There they had started to

evacuate some Jewish people. What started first in middle of Germany, the Rhine, main part. And from hearing this particular, I had one girl what was in school with us, what got a notice. She had lost her parents. And I believe she had a sister. They were gone.

What had happened to them?

They took them to a concentration camp.

They took them to a camp, and this is 1940 then?

That was 1940 already. Now, when they closed the school, I didn't want to go home because to a small city, there was nothing actually to look forward to. So I stayed in Berlin and started to work in a factory. But by that time also, the bombardment of Berlin had started.

Since we were living with a Jewish family, and we had separate cellars, it was quite often during the night that the sirens would go, and we had to march down into the cellar. Jews down there. Don't you dare come here. Things like that, from the so-called Aryans.

Down in a special place?

Down in the special area, where we should sit. But we had to go to work the next morning. So much sleep we didn't get.

After the alarm upstairs, again, maybe another hour of sleep, and then out to work. This was going on in 19-- like I said, 1941. I remained in Berlin until the end of 1941. When my parents became the notice for evacuation, I was not 21. And the law in Germany was by then that you had to return home.

So I had to go to the Gestapo and get a special permit for to go home, because Jewish people could not travel anymore. They gave me the permit that I could go home. When I came home, my parents told me, well, you are lucky. They have postponed the evacuation until next year. That meant 1942.

So here, I was home again. What's to do? I did not want to sit home and do nothing. So I applied for work at Krupp in Essen, 17 kilometers from my home town. I went to work there. And Krupp had one department where they made false teeth. So the Jewish people, they were working at this department. And I worked for Krupp from November of '41, until almost to the day of the evacuation, until the end of January of 1942.

Do you remember any personal feelings and experiences that occurred in that time? What was it like for you?

Well, it was always the same fear. We lived with the fear because by that time naturally we wore the star. You had to make sure that you found a place in the train where you could sit undisturbed, where maybe you wouldn't see a Nazi, and they would tell you, Jude go raus. And after 8 to 10 hours of work, it was quite tiresome.

Winter time, it was cold. It was snowing. And we got ground down. Food was in short supplies, like anything else, like clothing or anything else. And then we lived with the fear tomorrow they would come and get us.

So you had that fear? You had that sense that they might come and get you anytime?

We had the fear they might get us any time, because see, of the arrest when they had arrested my father, good they kept him a week, and let him go. But this was enough to put the fear in us.

When was your father arrested?

My father was arrested in '39 right after the Kristallnacht.

I see. Like I said before, and then they let them go after a week. Now my father, like I said, he was a barber. He could

not shave with a disposable razor. He had to have a straight razor. He came home with a big beard. When my mother saw him, she screamed because he had maybe aged 10 years.

Well, in the end of January '42, they gave us the notice where we had to be on the next day. We could take with us one suitcase.

This is for the whole family?

For the whole family, for all the people, that were being evacuated. We had one big place where they crowded us all together. The Nazis would come, raus, raus, raus. And had as much to this place. And there we sat.

All of us had tried to get some warmer clothing. We did not know where we would go. But warmer clothing was very well in order, because we knew we might go, or had an idea we might go to a place where it would be a lot colder. We were lucky. We did not been transported in [? feed ?] wagons. They transported us in regular train wagon.

So that we were very fortunate. We had one bakery at home what were Catholics, and they provided us with ample amount of bread. And well, they did have-- my hometown, then all smaller towns around there and including one group from Dortmund also, what all had been put on this train.

What were the conditions like in the train?

The conditions on the train were actually normal, I would say. We had places to sit. And we were not overcrowded. So you would call this normal, at least, for a train ride. But where were we going, we didn't know. SS was on the train, naturally. And once in a while, they would come. The train would stop. They would check. But in general, they left us alone. They did not harass us or do anything to us.

Until we came finally to the end of our journey. Where are we? Riga, the train station in Riga. It was about 40 below, very, very cold, and here we get the greeting raus. Dirty Jews, raus, raus, raus!

So all of us tried to as fast as we could get out of the train. And there they stood there with dogs, machine guns. And we found out we couldn't take anything with us, except what we had on us, and maybe a backpack, what was on our direct person. But nothing, our suitcases, we could forget about it. Yeah, you get this later. You get this later.

We still believed we would get them later. We started marching. Where are we going? It was quite a ways from the train station to where they would place us. We finally arrived at some big doors with barbed wire fence. We didn't know where we were, or what this was. Then we stood all there out in a big place. And we found out later that it was the Appell place.

Pardon, the what?

The Appell place in ghetto. To the right of us, there were rows of houses and with barbed wire, and also on the left. Well, we saw coming into the ghetto there was one building. We found later out that was the Kommandantur. And looking further down the streets, there were small houses. A few people we saw there. But we still didn't understand where we were or what, until the Nazis gave us the orders for us to find some quarters.

The scramble started. Because living a normal life and being as a family, we were used to having at least one or two rooms where we could shut the doors. Well, we had to forget this. We had to share one room with a small cooking place with another family. Here was my father, and my mother, and I, and I can't remember how many more people were there.

Your brother was not?

My brother had left already in 1936, and emigrated to by that time Palestine.

I see.

He was very smart. He came home one day and said to my father, I am going. My father was very upset, and wanted to tell him he couldn't. But my brother was 16 years old, and he decided I am going. And he did.

OK.

So until it took us about three days for really coming to reality what was happening to us, that we were behind barbed wires, and it was very, very cold. We had to find some material to get some heat, and trying to get something, and see if we find something to eat. Also what they give rations, we hadn't talked to people. We didn't know what was. And we had to order them. Every day was Appell.

We had to be out at a certain time at the big Appell place for being counted, and the selection started. The older people, you raus, you left, and this would go on for about an hour in the mornings. So until they had already weeded out sick people, and maybe younger ones what they could select for work.

The fear here was again. We lived with fear.

You knew what happened to the others that were chosen for the other right path?

The answer dawned on us very quickly, because the people, the elderly people, we didn't see anymore. So a presumption was that they are gone. They had taken them. The younger people we had hoped they would stay alive, until then we found out later what they had done. They had already organized some workplaces in Riga itself, and they took those people by [NON-ENGLISH], and brought them to those work places, mainly men.

And selections were going on quite frequently, because they had to weed out the older people. They had to make room. And children, well, the children they left at first alone.

They had to make room for new people coming in.

They had to make room for new people to come in. Also, there were already people what we found out after being above this first shock, we found out that there were already people from other cities. There had been people, I believe, the first ones were from Prague.

Then we found out that my father's brother and his family was there, included his wife, a son, and a daughter. They were there. So here, we had some family. But we couldn't help much each other. My little cousin lost her mind. And they killed her. They took her, as far as I know to the cemetery out there in the ghetto and shot her.

Her brother and father got evacuated to one of the outside work places. What had become of my aunt, I don't know, if she happened to die in the ghetto or outside of the ghetto, I have no idea. Then they evacuated my father. They took him to one of the work places. And we had words from him, because there also were people going from the ghetto working out there, until they could make room enough for a new transport to put them permanently out at a work camp.

So was that the last time you saw your father when he was transferred?

No. No. When they finally had room enough, they also took my mother and me to the work place. And the work place was at the airport. In Riga, what the Germans had occupied, and before this it had been in Russian hands. And they had done a little bit of destruction there.

They needed us to-- cement some runways, mixed cement, unload some bricks from a barge, and do general hard labor work.

So, you actually did hard labor?

Yes. We did hard labor.

Your mother--

Oh, yes.

--and your father?

My parents too. They had us at the place, what became later the concentration camp, where men and women were separated. Men were on one side in barracks, and the women on the other.

When it became concentration camp, we had Appells every morning and every evening when we came back from work. From there, they would take us by [NON-ENGLISH] to our workplace.

What year is this?

What year?

1946, no. Pardon me, 1942. OK. So this lasted for quite some time that we were first in the work camp. And we had the possibility even to cook a little, so we could be like a family, and my father could come to eat. But then it changed into the concentration camp, of course, it changed. The picture changed completely that we couldn't be with the men together anymore. We couldn't.

We saw him at the men's camp on the barbed wire fences. But this was all.

Then later on, the group what worked at the airport would get a camp where we were separated from the main camp, and had a place on our own. All those workers would work at the airport. What was very good, because over there we had quite a few luxuries. For instance, like a hot shower. And we could sit on a table and eat, and the men could come and visit. They could be with us, and things like that.

But there was going word along that they would evacuate a group of men from the ghetto to our camp. And since we had actually quite a bit of freedom at the workplace, that we were not working by that time under SS, but civil workers, so somebody had chosen me to work at the office, to make out payrolls. And I had the opportunity to hide something, if I wanted to.

Now this man from the Riga ghetto had not much memorables left, except maybe a few pictures from their family, their children. And they were afraid before they going to send them to the camp that they would lose everything. So they begged me if I would hide some of the pictures. I agreed to this. I did.

With me, was one other girl, what had a 16-year-old daughter. And she did the same thing. She would hide some of the memorables of those people. Only to my misfortune, one fellow got caught when they came back from work. And the Nazis in the ghetto found a note what contained my name.

They got to the ground out of it, and found out then they were two girls by the name of Laura in this group of workers. So the order came to bring us both into the ghetto, to the Kommandantur.

Well, the other girl didn't have not the faintest idea why she was there or what was going on. But I did, because I had done something which they didn't like too well. The Kommandant asked me questions, what I had done. And I played a little stupid.

So he asked me also if I knew that somebody else was hiding some documents. I said, I have no idea. Because I could very well implicate a mother of a 16-year-old girl, since we knew some punishment would follow if I would have admitted it.

Well, the Kommandant had a very good day when he questioned me, because my punishment was to separate me from my parents, and bring me first back into the main concentration camp.

Well, I was heartbroken, because the feeling was that I wouldn't see my parents again. And my feelings didn't betray me at all. I was at the main camp. And by that time, they took me to work at a AEG, Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft.

So this is the break, and this would be the last time that you-- what was actually the last time that you saw your parents then?

The last time I saw my parents, we had when I was about from the camp from the Luftwaffe where we worked to the ghetto, that was the last time I saw my parents.

I went to work for AEG, and I contracted a bad cold and got hepatitis.

So here you were really alone and you were ill too as well.

I was alone and I was sick. But I was very lucky. One of the SS women we had in the main camp, Miss Kova, took quite a liking to me. And she protected me a little bit. Well with her protection or whatnot, I was transported from work into the ghetto lazaret. We had a lazaret in ghetto with Jewish doctors. And they're supposed to take care of us, with as little medication that they had, but they did.

I was for three weeks in the lazaret. So I was very fortunate I was alive. I got over hepatitis. I got transported back to the AEG and worked there. We made transmitters for cars. We rewired them, the generator.

Generator.

And also we had quite a few children with us. And by children, I mean under 11 and 12 years old. But we were very fortunate that the children would go to work with us, and there was an order as long as the children were working, they could not be eliminated.

We had our Lagerälteste, Rosanov Tally, she was a very wise woman. And she saw to it that if there was a possibility that everybody would go to work, so not an unexpected razia, why is they in bed? Why is this there? What is [NON-ENGLISH]? So that we could be protected, we were 500 women in this camp. The children would every day go to work with Us.

Even if they didn't work, they would sort nuts, and brackets, and things like that. But they were working. We had heard there would be an inspection. So everybody was on their toes, and trying to do the best we could, keeping up with the work, and getting those kids busy. She found that the inspection came. And we were all very, very afraid. Would they take the children or not, because the mothers were with them?

When was this? Do you know about the date?

That was in 1943.

'43.

The kids were with us. Well, the kids were very fortunate. They were all busy, and they could not be taken. Of course, I did not mention that I had witnessed, when we were first in the concentration camp, that there had come a transport from Poland with little children. And we saw the tragedy what happened, that the kids were taken from their mothers.

And we found out then the next day that the kids and those mothers what did not want to let go of their children were shipped to Auschwitz. See? By that time, we had already had communications, more or less, with some of the kapos in KZ, we knew them by name. And they would tell us something, and be careful what to do, and they helped us a little bit.

Maybe they had a piece more bread, so we could get this, and things like that.

Did you get any news about your parents?

Once in a while, I would get some news over one of the so-called kapos, were also either political prisoners. Some of them had mellowed in the time, and they would help us a little bit, or let us at least know what was going on. Yes, once in a while, I got word from my parents. They were alive, and they were all right. Naturally, they were worried about me.

But there was no way that I could get out and go back to them. I had no chance. Like I said, the children were safe with us. They stood with us until we were freed of the concentration camp. None of the children from our camp got lost.

And this camp was-- did you tell us the name of this camp?

No. It was [PLACE NAME]-- was the name of this particular camp that we were in. But then of course, I was separated from my parents, and was working for AEG, like I mentioned before. And working for AEG naturally, we had also now one of the SS men there had fallen in love with one Lettish woman. And he wanted to bring her into the camp. Marie was her name.

And oh, Marie was all for it. She had gotten dressed first in several clothes, what came naturally. It was all clothes what they had stolen from us. Since by that time, we had already our beautiful striped dresses. And here she came one day in boots, in a skirt, in sweater, in gloves. And she started to imitate one of the SS women, Miss Kova.

Oh, she wanted to be just like her. Well, since [? Miss ?] [? Kova ?] was talking to me and she was furious how Marie acted, how he ever could bring her in, but at this time, I think the Kommandant looked very favorable on it. They had to have women, and this one was very handy. So they allowed her to be an SS woman. Worse than anybody else because, well, she was from Latvia. And she wanted to show off what she did for the Germans.

She didn't impress us too much. And she did not have the guts really to be forceful to us, because this would go back to Miss Kova, and Miss Kova would know how to handle her and complain, since [Kova was the girlfriend from the Kommandant, she would complain to him, and this would go around then, and it would wind up with the SS man, Bruno, that he should do something about his girlfriend and keep a little bit in line.

Now this went on for a while. Until for all of a sudden, Marie is gone. What happened? There was somehow a fall-out and if my memory is right, I think they had transferred him or wanted to transfer him, and they had no more use for her. So one day, we came. We went from the camp where we were stationed at AEG, across the street where the factory was. And there is Marie in civil clothes.

So they had gotten rid of her. And we were very happy about it. Coming back to the camp itself, I mentioned before we had 500 women.

Yes.

And we had received a transport of Hungarian women. They came quite late to the concentration camp. If my memory is right, in Hungary, they started to evacuate the people quite late, beginning in '44. And they bought those women in. Well, they worked with us for a while. But then there was something, if they wanted to go somewhere else.

And they were very specific with the Hungarians. They asked for the Hungarians. And most of them disappeared, and were never heard of.

So, do you know what happened to these?

Well, I presume that they had taken them either to Auschwitz or Treblinka to those concentration camps, to the death camps. Now, we did not have the death camp at our site, but people would die of starvation, and weakness, and no medical attention, and whatnot. Sure.



So the conditions weren't--

The conditions were atrocious like everywhere else. We were not-- and so far we were only better off because we had a little bit more hygiene in our camp. We had access to hot water where we could take a bath, what was a very big luxury for all of us.

What kind of food did you have?

Well, food we had at the last stage, we had chicken feet, what would be cooked for us. And the smell alone was enough to make you throw up. But what are you going to do? You have to live, or want to live, at least, even if you don't know for what, or what the future will bring. But every day, you stay alive is a day won.

So we try to eat if we could. I had also contracted a gallbladder problem in the concentration camp, and we were suffering with that, and frequent colds, and the usual sickness you would get with the lice, and all the good things what came with the [NON-ENGLISH] in the camps.

We are kept at this camp. I was in from AEG until it started to get where the offensive would start.

What--

The offensive, the war would come closer. What, if I remember right, was about August or September 1944, when it started in Russia. The Russian troops were starting, was on the border. And we were at work where the restroom was half a stair down, and we stood by the window and heard Z-Z-O-O-O, the airplanes. And they were starting to bombard there.

Until the Germans got the idea they had to do something, because according to the Geneva conference, the concentration camps had to have lit towers. They had to have the lit watchtowers so they would not be bombarded.

They did hold fairly well to it, that there were not a mistake and maybe a bomb would fall on the camps down there. But the Germans got frightened. So by the end of '44, the exact date I can't remember. They started to eliminate camp after camp.

And from what we had heard, that some of the outsides came [NON-ENGLISH], and a few more had already been either completely eliminated or only were working with very few people. A lot of them had died. I did not mention that I had seen, when I was in the main camp, back to the main camp, that they had brought in my uncle, my father's brother, from an outside camp.

He was sick. They called me, since I knew some of the [NON-ENGLISH] who were working in the infirmary. I knew them. They told me, listen, your uncle is here. I talked to my uncle. And I had promised him the next day I would get some bread to him. Well, the next morning when I inquired about my uncle, he was dead. They had eliminated him during the night.

But what was that experience like for you to hear about that?

Well, it was naturally very tragic for me. See, the way the concentration camp was built, we had the latrine in the women's camp was built where we could see over to the men's camp and to the end of the infirmary. And we saw quite often some coffins standing there early in the mornings. So they were there for some reason.

I had been in the infirmary during my stay in the main camp. And the one night, there was a baby born. Well, this particular SS man, Wiesner what I testified against, came in. There was a doctor from [PLACE NAME], a Jewish doctor, and a Polish doctor. And I got up from my bed and talked to the doctor.

I said, what's going on? Oh, that's none of your business. And you better stay back. What was good, because when

Wiesner come in he saw me that I was out of bed, and he inquired what is she doing there. And the doctors mentioned my name, and said, oh she just got out of bed, but didn't give any other details.

What had happened that they must have induced labor or the woman had gotten into labor. The baby was born. And we heard the baby cry. Well, after a while, there was no more crying. And since I was nosy and wanted to see what was going on, there was a trash can. And there was something rolled up in a sheet in the trash can, what could have been the form of a baby, because it sure looked like it.

And they had killed the baby. So things like said pray on your mind. And we knew exactly what was going on. We had, for instance, one girl was like the Lageralteste in the main camp over the women's barracks. She had the Appell sheets and all this, and would call out the names from everyone what was in the barracks.

She became very friendly with the cook of the camp. Well, she also became pregnant. Everybody had the hope when the Russians were coming close that we might be freed. And she would be free and could have the baby. But it didn't work out this way. As I stated, when they started, the Russians started to bomb, the Germans got frightened, and started to eliminate the camps.

They started by groups or in any way they could transport us. Now for us, they had foreseen we would go by ship, by boat. Naturally, it was quite a preparation to transfer us. And most of it would go in late afternoon or at night, until the ship was-- the boat was full. They had finally decided they would transfer us to Stutthof, which is by Danzig.

Fine. We had some military boats with us. And later on, they had told us that one or two got sunk. But we made it through to Danzig. And we'd been brought to Stutthof.

Our whole group, from the AEG supposed to go from Stutthof to Thorn, where the AEG had another workplace and a camp. In Stutthof, coming down there, they had to put us in barracks. And since we were too many, we had to share one bed with three other women. That means four to a bed.

So if anybody knows what a military barrack looks like, or a military bed, I can't imagine how those skeletons of us would look and infantile sleeping in one bed, if you call this sleeping.

And then there were interruptions, where they would tell us we had to either stay out at the Appell place in front of the barrack for hours, or they would get us out maybe at 5:00 or 6 o'clock in the morning for some reason unknown, stay out at the Appell place, no time to use the bathroom, out. And we stood in the cold, things like that.

Now, I mentioned this woman that became pregnant.

Yes.

She had her baby in Stutthof. And from what we had heard, it was a very healthy baby. But mother and child both didn't survive.

Then I had not heard from my parents, and didn't know what had happened. But we knew that from hearsay, that they had eliminated a lot of people over 50. So--