

We started by groups, or in any way they could transport us. Now, for us, they had foreseen we would go by ship, by boat. Actually, it was quite a preparation to transfer us, and most of it would go in late afternoon or at night, until the ship, the boat was full. They had finally decided they would transfer us to Stutthof. It's 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 out to Stutthof. Our whole group from the AEG supposed to go from Stutthof to Thorn, where the AEG kept as a workplace in the 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, can imagine how those skeletons of us would look in infantile sleeping in one bed, if you cause a sleeping.

And then there were interruptions where they would tell us we had to either stay out at the appellplatz, in front of the barrack, for hours. Or they would get us out maybe at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, for some reason unknown. Stay out at the appellplatz. 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, from hearsay, that they had eliminated a lot of people over 50.

So one morning, before we went to the appell, I wanted to find out what had happened to my parents, since there were some people that had come earlier to Stutthof, and I knew they had been in Riga, too. And I questioned them if they had seen my parents, and they gave me the correct answer, that my parents had been eliminated both at the same day in Riga, before they emptied out the concentration camp. And by waking up the next morning, I had gray hair from shock.

So you still had these feelings, throughout it, all these terrible things that you saw? It seemed like you weren't dulled. Your emotional life wasn't dulled. You were still experiencing these things.

You were experiences every day. Because don't forget, you would come into the barrack and would see somebody had died. Well, you would sit right next to it and eat. So those experience you had every day of your life.

For instance, the elderly were with us, and we had to try with our might, if we could spare a little bit of food, to keep them alive, at least as long as possible, because we knew we didn't have any way out. What would happen? None of us had money, or at least we were not aware of it, if there were or some still had something hidden.

Some of the Polish people, they did do very smart, but we were too stupid. We were not raised to really understand that atrocities like that could happen. Since the German people, there is a little different. The Polish people had seen pogroms. The Polish Jewish people had seen this. They had lived, more or less, even without fences, but they had lived in ghetto-lie situation. We had not.

So we were not so much aware of it that you could maybe hide something in a piece of clothing, if there was a possibility to get a piece of bread or maybe an onion or something. When we were in Stutthof, well, we got the water soup and the piece of bread, and this was all. In Stutthof, for the time we did not work until they started to transfer us to Thorn. When they brought us from Stutthof to Thorn into the camp, the same group, about 500 women, we started to work again at the AEG.

Well here was the situation a little bit changed, because we had quite a ways to walk to the place where we worked. It was where we could observe a little bit what was going on. There was an airport close by. And since everything had to be camouflaged, or also the lights had to be very dim, but we knew there was an airport.

And then we had a little contact. Once in a while, when the SS people were with us, would not look too close, we could maybe get a word in from the civil workers that were there. We talked to them, if it was possible, and they would let us know what was going on politically. We had heard, when we still were in Riga, about the uprising at the Warsaw ghetto. We thought it was crazy.

You thought it was crazy that they rose up?

Yes, because we didn't understand how can Jewish people do this? How can they? Where did they get the courage, the weapons? How can they? This was an impossibility for us to understand.

Now see, at the airport where we were working, there were also working Germans from the Luftwaffe. And we got our nose. Always they left the newspaper very inconspicuous some place, and we grabbed it and would read it, would hide it on us until we would be in our barracks at night and would study what was going on, and things like that. So we were yes and no a little bit informed what was going on during the war. But the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto was something else, impossible for us to understand.

Was there a feeling of pride in the uprising?

Yes, there was a feeling of pride, but on the other hand, still there's disbelief. How could it be? How could it be? Since we were so pressed, we're sitting ducks in the camps and didn't know what will happen the next hour to us.

Yeah.

So it was hard for us to understand. Time went on. And when we came to Thorn, well, here was from November till January.

14th?

1945. In January of 1945, as you know, the offensive started from Poland. In the camp, we had the little communication going there with the workers, and they would let us know what was going on. Some of the guards spoke Russian. And there were some of the Latvian workers, they spoke Russian. They would communicate. Some spoke German. We would try to have an idea every day what we heard, what had naturally been discussed in camp.

Also, we had typhoid in the camp. But as I mentioned before, the name of our lageralteste was Naphtali. She was very smart. And she saw to it that no harm would at least come to those people. It was possible to soften the SS a little bit so nobody got killed because they were sick.

Well, we had gotten provisions. Instead of giving us a little bit better to eat, no, they would dig out spaces in the ground and put straw in it, and put the potatoes and rutabagas and carrots and whatnot, would put this in on the straw. Put straw on top, put pipes in the middle, and put straw in the pipe so air would filter very slowly to it and cover all this food up. Because they are afraid, in case of us being cut off, that there was still some food in the camp that could be used.

So here we were with the water rations and the little bit of bread. The rest of it was supposed to have gotten for us most of us [GERMAN], like sausage and margarine and jam. That was very much been taken from us, and they got booze for it and whatnot.

Who provided that food?

The Germans had to provide food.

Because you worked in the factory?

Yes. We had to have at least some food because otherwise we would not be able to work.

What were the things that you built in the factory?

We made generators for LKWs and also for the smaller cars. And we did, naturally, more damage than we could if we-- we would go to it and we wouldn't wire them too correctly.

But they would bring them in big things like this, where we couldn't lift, and had to clean them and revise that and rewire them, and things like that. Oh, we did all sabotage. Before they started to transfer us from Riga to Stutthof, there were a few escapes from the camp sites, where people had been bought out from the concentration camp to a workplace and been taken back in the evenings. There were few escapes. So there came an order, they would cut our hair. Until then we still had hair.

So what did they do? The men, they cut only a piece out in the middle, and the women were shorn completely. From that time on, there was a saying, that the word fell about 60%, because our morale was broken and we would not work anymore. We could have cared less. When we were in Thorn at the camp, like I mentioned, it would go on. We would work every day, to work and come back in the evening, going in the dark and coming back in the dark. And we would observe a little bit what was going on at the airport and by the sites, and if we saw people or military or what.

Well, it came to the 25th of January, if I recall right. We went in the mornings to work, and around noon, the SS men appeared at the factory. We didn't know. Or we had some idea what was going on, but we didn't know what would happen to us. We had seen that morning, when we were going to work, there was no light at the airport. And we were very shocked about it. What happened? Why is there no light? Sure, we had heard the airplanes. We had heard the bombs fall. But why was there no light?

The SS men had come and had told the people down there we had to go back to the camp. They had to bring us back to the camp. This was around noon. It was going to the end. They had tried to communicate with Danzig what to do with us, because we were, in turn, what was actually doing the war time in years where the Germans had occupied it. It was a military town, completely stacked with military forts. The whole town was very well-known for it. Even in war time it was well-known that it was a military town.

They had heard that the Weichsel, the river, was undermined. And it had to be crossed until a certain time, otherwise they would bombard it and that would cut off the transport and everything from Poland into Germany, back to Germany. So when we came back into the camp, the SS had gotten very busy. Oh, they were busy burning all the records we had, everything. Because naturally, they had records of every person that was there.

Then they would give us some rations for to carry with us, So proviant, what they had-- so-called proviant, what they had. Some jam and some sugar and some bread they would give each one of us to carry with us, packing up. Then they made sleds, and on the sleds first they carried their personal belongings. Everything would be loaded. What are we going to do with those people from sick bay? Well, naturally, they have to go, because they were afraid. They didn't shoot nobody. Nobody got shot from our camp. We took those people with us.

At nightfall, they had it sorted all together, and they started to shoot out the lights from the towers, and we would start on our walk. But I want to mention, a day or two before, there was one girl who had a little help from outside, from a friend, a foreman, where she worked with. He had helped her escape. They had cut a hole in the barbed wire and out she went.

Well, the Nazis were very upset about that, but on the other hand, they were very afraid of their life. And they didn't search too far, because they knew if they would make haste, they would be caught. So on the 26th of January, they took us out from the camp and we start marching.

What was it like for you then when you were marching?

Well, the question was, is there hope for us? What will happen? Where will we go? You have to understand that we had a lot of people, women, from Vilna with us, and children. And also, I would say at least 1/3 were elderly people, people start in their 60s and not all into good health.

But our commandant had the order to bring all of us back to Stutthof, not to eliminate anybody on the way. So when we started working, first we didn't see nobody because most camps were always outside of populated area. But we were on our march maybe three, four hours.

All of a sudden, we get company. Everybody is running. Come finding out, there had been a whole battalion of Latvians, Lettish soldiers being stationed somewhere around there. And the civilians started running, "the Russians are coming, the Russians are coming."

So the marching got a little difficult. But we passed some place out in the country, and we saw a hay wagon. Well, the commandant says, anybody that can't walk on that wagon and you make the horses. So kids and whatnot went on the wagons. We made the horses. We had also carried their belongings on the sleds.

Well, he had found out that the sick ones, something had to be done with those, because we were holding them up and marching, and it got slower and slower, naturally. So he ordered the suitcases thrown on the sides and the sick ones on the sleds. And you carry them if you want to take some with you. You be the horses. So we did.

We waled all that night until the next morning. We came to a paper factory. It was already deserted. And the Germans decided we should have some rest there, so we did. Now, here we were already in Poland. This was Polish territory. And all of a sudden, those Polish people came out. They all spoke Polish.

By that time, I didn't understand any Polish. Yiddish I had learned in the concentration camp, but not Polish. So the Polish women were going a little bit in the back. And the SS were marching the women, were marching the carbines by the side. They were marching. They didn't have no strength whatsoever, less than we had. Because with us, it was the force. We want to live. With them, well, the uncertainty maybe. What will happen to them?

So they've gotten slower, too. When we arrested there that paper factory, well, I can't remember really how long we were there-- several hours, half a day. We waited until nightfall again because we had to meet the deadline for crossing the river.

Something happens there, what was very astounding to me. The shoes I had worn were no more shoes. And one of the SS women gave me a pair of shoes with wooden soles to wear. And I survived. I could walk again.

It came on then commander was given the marching. Rouse, everybody rouse. And groping again and let's go. So we were marching again. Now, I won't forget this, that Sturmbannfuhrer is up there in front-- the machine pistol around his neck, fur boots, a fur coat on. And I think he had gotten a little delirious already, because when he talked, he would say he didn't care anymore. He want to get this over with. He was walking. Maybe he had the little Schnapps to drink. He was walking a little quicker. But they all were getting to the point where they were very downcast and didn't know what would happen.

Well, here we were. We got thinned out a little bit. Some of the women, I didn't even suspect that had hidden at that paper factory. How many, I could not tell because, well, we were not allowed to leave the place where you were walking in and maybe going a little bit to the back and finding out. But when we came, finally we made it over the bridge and we came into Bromberg. With all the military was running and the civilians running, we thought something must be going on. Maybe they were all running for their lives.

They left us at the train station with the SS men. They are to watch. And he had to go and find out what to do. All of a sudden, there appears an LKW to my left, and there are a couple of soldiers in it. And they kept hollering, idiots, where you think you are going? There is no way. Everything is blocked off. You can't go nowhere. Where you think they lead you to? There is no place where you can go. There is no train. And here we were standing at the train station.

Well, the SS disappeared. Obersturmbannfuhrer disappeared to go to make that phone call. We were standing there, and this LKW was hollering at the SS woman, you are idiot. Get the hell out of here. You think you will-- go. So here they are. We had two with us. They threw their guns down, hopped on that LKW and hollered at us, you are free, and

disappeared. Well, we were not-- per se, we were not free because there were still some SS men watching us.

But I was friendly with one girl who was from Riga. And I told her, listen. If we are going, I will not go in a big group if we disappear. If you want to go with me, fine. But I will not go with a large group, because first, we didn't know what language would we hear. The second, two people might have a bigger chance to hide somewhere as a group of 10 or 15 women.

Right.

So finally she agreed with me. She said, OK, I'm going with you. So some of the girls, like I mentioned before, the SS, they were tired, frustrated, didn't know what to do. They had been ordered not to shoot. They stood there, cold, miserable, and more miserable than we because they were not used to hardship like we were. So the girls said, talk to them. You don't see anything. Let us go. Let us go.

So they turned around and we went. We left. We found a big apartment house, and so light in a cellar. And I told the girl I was with, I said, let's go down there. Let's see. Maybe we can hide. Well, here we were clamping down those cellar stairs. Boom, boom, boom, boom. And we found out people were living down there in the cellars, because also their housing was very scarce, and they had taken some cellars left in there. And then also, air raids. So they were fearful for their lives the same way. Those people first got scared stiff. They heard somebody talking. They heard somebody coming down there.

In Germany, it was the same thing. They were afraid for their own lives. Couldn't trust nobody. One would tell on the other and whatnot. The totalian regime was there, and they had to fear for their lives. But they finally decided they wanted to see what was going on, and they found us. Where are you coming from? What happened?

What language were you speaking?

In German. They were Belgian German. And the first they did, they gave us something hot to drink and to eat. But we were more dead than alive. We needed also a place to stretch out. From the cellar, there was another stairs, what would lead into the house, into the apartment house.

Well, we asked them, is there anywhere we can hide? Is there anywhere we can sleep? And they told us, well, go up there and see what you can find where you can sleep. Well, we didn't care much where we would sleep, as long as we could stretch out.

So I believe we went either second or third floor, up there, and laid in front of an apartment door. Stretched ourselves out and slept marvelous. We didn't feel anything, it was hot or not hot. We slept. But in the morning, we woke up and we heard people behind the door, and those people had hurt us that night before, and we were scared stiff to come out and see what was going on. So down the cellar we went again. We were very fortunate. In one of the cellars lived a man and his wife, and he had worked at a women's clinic down there. The doctors had already left. The woman's clinic was untouched.

And since he worked there as maintenance man, better said, well, he knew his way around. The first thing he did, he gave his wife what for, that she had not taken us in and had given us something to eat. Then he provided us with more food. And then he said to us, listen, I have been outside and I have seen. So we asked him, have you any idea? Because we came in a group of women.

Did you see anything? Did you hear anything? He said, yes. They had taken the women about 30 kilometer from there into a barn. The remaining SS men and the commandant and his girlfriend and the rest of the women, they had taken them there. And they had told them, now, if the Russians are coming, you tell them that you are political prisoners.

And they disappeared. The Germans disappeared. They had found out there was no way they could take us back to Stutthof. The men would help us-- was maintenance men-- took us to the clinic. And finding out later, those women that had heard us up at the apartment, they are cooks at that clinic, and there was plenty of food to eat. I mean plenty. Those

women would cook. All the proviant that was there, they would use. The woman would start cooking. Oh, we were safe at that clinic. It was warm. It was clean. We saw beds with white sheets, and we thought we were dreaming.

Was this a happy time for you then?

God, happy time, can you imagine? We were free. We didn't see the Nazis anymore. And we had a bed with a white sheet, and warm. And so we asked the men if there would be a possibility that we could take a bath. He had already seen to that that the women were there let go of some of their clothes, and he provided us with clothes or what we needed.

The women from the barn, what happened to all those women?

The women eventually got freed.

OK.

Yes. But I believe they were liberated by either the Polish army or the Russian army, more likely by the Russian army because they were the first ones who were coming. Now, we stayed at the clinic. He made us a bath and really gave us a piece of soap. Now, we saw a piece of soap-- we hadn't seen, I don't know, in three years? A real soap. So we got cleaned up and we told him to take our beautiful striped dresses and put them in a furnace because we had enough of the lice. So he did. He burned the dresses and we had some civil clothes.

And they started to feed us, but we were smart enough and realized that we could not eat as much as our eyes were seeing. We could eat only very little at the time. And I remember that one night, I got up and went into the kitchen and got a bowl of pudding. My friend said, are you crazy? What do you want? I said, I might be hungry. I want a little bit of that, eat tonight. And sure enough, we ate some in the night. But we were very careful not to eat too much since we knew our stomachs couldn't take it.

Was that the main thing you wanted to do, to eat? What were some of the--

Sure. And you see food that is naturally, where you had nothing to eat but water soup and a little bread with jam on it. Actually, your eyes get big when you see all of a sudden that much food, what you haven't seen in years. Maybe you could remember the taste but didn't have it. So that's all what everybody was dreaming of. If we ever get free, we will eat this or we will eat this or we will buy this. How and when and where, that was not the question. We would do this and that. That was the hope of us.

We stayed at this hospital, and the second night we were there, we slept like we didn't hear absolutely nothing. People from the other side of town had come in. The hospital was crammed full, because the Russians had come closer. They had invaded one part of town already. They came into the hospital. Didn't do us any harm whatsoever.

The Russians?

The Russians. And they had the orders. They came and they left, because this was the fourth troop. The first ones would come, and they had to stay with their battalion. They had to go further. They couldn't do anything until the Polish army was following them. We stayed there. And then I had mentioned to you before that they would ask for people to work.

And we volunteered because we felt like we have to do something in return. Those people have helped us. They saw to it that we were safe, so we had to do something in return, maybe earning also some food for helping them because they were sharing what they had with us.

So we went to work. What was the work? They wanted to clean out a four-square block school, what the Germans had first used for a lazarette. They wanted to have this cleaned out so they could bring the wounded there before they would put them safe on transports for the inland closer to a big hospital. And we started to work there.

Now don't forget, this was still the end of January of 1945. The war was still going on.

Right.

When the Polish army was coming in, we found out that there were some Jewish soldiers in between the military. And they were very shocked to see Jewish women, because they had seen them on their way back or coming in to Poland. Everywhere they found a concentration camp had been deserted, people taken out.

So to their surprise, when they found us, they made sure that we had enough to eat and that we had a place to stay and that we were dealt with humanely. So they helped us quite a bit. And then they did not want us to stay there, but there was a possibility. They tried to help us to either stay with the military, wherever they would go, as civilians and take care of us, or see that we would reach eventually a place where there was already a Jewish committee.

But they took still several months before this could be accomplished, since we had been behind the front. And then sometimes it was also dangerous. But we stood in with them, and we stood with the civilians, what would help out with the wounded soldiers.

Now, the scene changed a little bit later on because we helped out in a lazarette was under Russian supervision. Some of them were prejudice of race and some of them could have cared less because they have had their own share of tragedy in their lives.

But we worked our way through until the front got away from us. We stood behind. And here was something to see. Again, how do we survive? So we had to figure out what to do and which way to take. Now, people were trying different ways, and the safest way was to hop a freight train and see if we could [INAUDIBLE] Lodz.

Right.

Because there had already been some people in Lodz that had tried to open up a Jewish committee. And eventually, we did this. We hopped the freight train and went to Lodz.

When you say we, you mean you and your companion?

Yes. And also, there on the way, we met a few more people. There were some girls from Riga left, and we all met again, and then we hopped this freight train. I remember there were coats on one train, and overnight it was an open wagon. We hopped on there and we made it. Finally we reached Lodz.

And so they remind us of the ghetto in Lodz. Still saw the bridge there. There was an overhead bridge on one part the ghetto of Lodz. And to our surprise, there were already some people, some Jewish people that had found their way back in search for family.

They were Jewish people living there actually?

Yeah, there were some Jewish people already living there, because don't forget that all those places had suffered quite badly through the war from the bombardment. And where they found houses, safe where they could live, well, they went there and inhabited them. That was just plain. There was no question, yes, can we? Or no. Or can we afford it? They went and there was no question, how paying or not paying. They lived there.

So how did you finally leave Lodz?

Well, Lodz, of course at that time, we were thankful. We tried, and we finally found the committee. And we finally were able to get some papers, at least some type of identification paper. And they were still war on, but maybe some normality for us. We felt some normality going on there.

So until all this, then I met few Jewish people. And later on, I also met my husband in Lodz. Got married there. And I remained in Lodz until '46.

And then in '46?

1946, we went illegal over the border into Germany, and I went back to my home town.

What was that like?

Well, of course I was home. And I knew I had still relatives what I was searching for. I knew two sisters of my father might be still alive. I had no idea that they had taken them to Theresienstadt. But they were alive. They survived. So I had family. I was home. And I felt like, well, I have survived so far. I came through the war, more or less if you call it healthy, but I survived.

You survived.

Right.

How did it change you? How did your experiences change you to think?

Well, I tell you, the aftermath came quite later when we returned back to what was normal life at that time in 1946. So here I was home for getting legal papers. I had no problems whatsoever. I went to the police precinct, where we used to live, and I told the policeman, I am so-and-so. We lived at such and such place. My parents were so and so. He said, just wait a moment.

He bent down and got out a book. And he said, yeah, this and this and this, fine. What do you want? So I told him what I was after. He said, OK, wait a moment. It took me about five minutes. I had all the information I wanted. Then I went across the street and there was the registrar where my parents got married. So I went there.

And I told the fellow there, listen, my parents got married here at such and such date, such and such year. He said, would you please wait a moment? He went into the back room, came back with the book, gave me my birth certificate and the certificate for my parents' marriage. So I had already my legal papers, because there later on came a doctrine that you had to get married for making it legal in Germany.

Well, at that time, I had two children and I had no legal marriage papers, so I had to remarry in Germany. But I needed all the legal papers there, and I got them very fast. So there was still some civil life going on even through all the war and whatnot. My home town has suffered. One part of the town has suffered quite a bit, got all bombed out. And then other part did not, luckily.

What was it like for you to return to this town after all that had happened?

How could I live there?

How could you live there?

I tell you how I could live there. But first, I had to find communication with my brother, what I had when I was in Poland. I had already written to him in Israel. I had communication with my brother. But by that time, you could not emigrate to Israel. Where would I go? I was not smart enough. Then there were DP camps opening up.

So this was the alternative.

I didn't know there was other life than going back to your hometown and starting over, trying to start a life there. And then also, don't forget, I had hoped that maybe I would find something, what belonged my parents, what was mine rightfully. Literally, I didn't find anything.

Our time is almost at the close. I suppose it's important just for you to tell us the final part of your move out of



Germany.

OK. My sister-in-law's father, Peretz Naftali, was the first minister from the Israeli government. Went to the first congress in Geneva, Switzerland. And he had seen to it that we would get immigration papers to Israel. Then in 1948, my husband, my family--

By then you had--

Two children.

Two children. Emigrated to Israel, and we lived in Israel for eight years.

And then from there?

From Israel we came to Dallas.

So then when did you arrive in Dallas?

In Dallas we arrived 1955.

And you've been here since?

And I've been here since.

OK. Basically, we finished your story. Is there anything else that you think of that you want to tell us for this testimony about your experience?

Well, there are so many things still to tell for the testimony, for what I have seen in the ghetto, in the concentration camp, but it would take such a terrible long time. There should be, actually, another taping made on that-- my way through the camps, what I have seen there, the atrocities I saw in the camps itself, like the hangings, the shootings, the selections, things like what we have seen in the camps. But this would take at least another three or four hours, without an end really to talk.

There are always-- some things would come into your mind. For instance, when I was in the main camp, in for the amusement of the German that were there, they brought in what they called in Germany asocial women, what were prostitutes and political prisoners and whatnot. They built a barrack for them outside from our compound.

And here, one day they bring those women in. I can't remember if there were maybe 25, 30 of them. More of them were prostitutes than anything else. Oh, they thought they'd do the German men a favor, so they would have some women for them. All right. But they were so wild, horrible. They had been in prison. They were horrible. They would steal food from each other. They would beat each other up. And in the mornings, we were all witnesses of that. We could see them. They had to be out on stand appell, as we had, to be counted.

One morning, one comes out. And nothing is looking out but the slits of her eyes and her mouth. They had beaten her up real good because she had stolen a can of food from another one. One of them, she went into the men's camp.