--about teaching English on board, the one about the name of the ship is secret--

Yes.

You do remember that?

Yes, I definitely do. We are--

Don't tell me because I want to ask you about it. [INAUDIBLE]

Wait.

Where we going? You know? Where we going? To Alaska, you know. We didn't know. We were not sure what's happening really.

OK? Ruth tells a funny story about teaching English that you weren't supposed to know because it was the middle of the war--

That's right.

--what the name of the ship was or where you came from.

We never knew the name of the ship.

So what was the thing she wrote on the board?

She said-- we always were asking, where are we going? And they would say, oh, to Alaska. What's the name of the ship? Secret. Ah. Everybody said, look, you know what the name of the ship is? Secret. We didn't know anything else.

And we had no idea where we were going. Or-- all I knew is, yes, America. I mean, that much I knew. There were the American troops and American soldiers. It's got to be. No matter what they say. You know.

Describe for me what it was like when you passed the Statue of Liberty that August morning.

Oh, my God, there was a moment like I had in Rome, the realization that came to me, like I said, being born again and live again. It was a moment that I never forget. [PHONE RINGING] Can you stop here?

Sure.

Well, she's coming, great.

Yeah. And would you do me a favor please? Take this off. I don't want to get-- I don't want to be-- wait a minute, no, she's coming in and she has to come through the door.

That's OK. We can stop if we have to.

OK. I'm so sorry about that.

No. No problem at all.

So OK, we were--

OK. Let me get-- you rolling? OK. Talking about what it was like to come past the Statue of Liberty.

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OK. We had a rabbi from Czechoslovakia. And he got up and he said, we have now that we're passing the Statue of Liberty, we're entering America. We all want to pray. And we all did. He said Shehecheyanu with us.

And the moment I saw the statue. I knew my life had changed. I knew I was becoming a mensch. I was becoming a human being, a person, again. And I was looking forward to that freedom.

It was such a cherished feeling that can't be described. I was so grateful because that represented to me America. The Statue of Liberty was America. And it was the people that had just liberated me. So my prayers of thanks were very profound and very deep. And it still is to this very day.

Sure.

We all felt that way.

Unfortunately, the next day, things were not so good when you were taken over to Hoboken and sprayed with the DDT.

Yes, we come into a situation that wasn't too pleasant. But nothing can compare that with all we had gone through. Naturally, it wasn't comfortable. And we were fearful still. And it awoke memories. But we took this in as a procedure, as a necessary procedure, that had to be done.

Was the train ride to Oswego difficult for you because--

Yes.

--of the symbolism--

Yes.

--of a train ride to a destination where you really don't know where you're going?

Precisely. In fact, it was very traumatic for me. I was scared to death in the train. In fact, I remember looking-- the first thing I come in, I wanted to see where the doors were really to run out. I wanted to be near a door. I don't know why, but--

Ruth was passing by. And, in fact, I remember grabbing her hand and just to hear her voice and to be encouraged that she was wonderful doing. She was really like a mother to us.

What was your reaction when you got off that train and saw the fence around the camp?

Of course, we didn't like it. We did not like the fence. But I said to myself, this is how the military is. That's a military camp. Don't forget. All have-- I mean this is the way it's set up, and it's supposed to be that way.

I talked myself into it not to be afraid of. But it was frightening at first. And when we looked at it, we just-- it brought back memories. And it was an eerie feeling. But we were in America and everything.

And the camp itself is very pretty, especially in the summer.

It was nice. It was a nice camp. We were-- of course, we were in the barracks. We had our part of the barracks. And I married there.

Before we get to that, tell me about your initial reaction when you first want to the mess hall and you saw the food and--

Oh, my God, my first breakfast was like what? Six, seven eggs I had. I had all the bread I could-- even on the ship too, I

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took all the bread and put it under my pillow. My pillow would become bigger and bigger every day. I would leave the bread there because I would hoard bread something awful.

I wanted bananas, a lot of bananas, and eggs. And I couldn't believe that I could get so much, you know. It was so overpowering, this food, the bread and the milk and the cereal. And I had big breakfast the first day. I remember at least seven eggs. And I took all the bananas I could eat.

I would just hoard the bread something awful. I would not want to give up a crumb afterwards, even it was old. This was going on and on. And then, of course little by little, after we had our regular meals day in day out, it subsided. But the first week was a case for any psychiatrist.

Tell me-- you still have a teardrop.

Oh, I'm sorry. [LAUGHTER]

Tell me about the barracks where you were living.

Yeah, we had military barracks that they made us-- converted for us. We made it prettier. We made little curtains. And we put pictures up. And we cleaned them. We made them nice. And it was becoming home like atmosphere. But the fences were not happy. We were not happy with it.

And you finally are with the man that you love and you want to get married.

Yes.

But nobody knows if you're allowed to do that.

And matter of fact, they told us that it can't be done. And after talking to Ruth and Ruth calling God knows whom, she pulled all the strings she could to Washington. And then we were-- it was decided, yes, we could go to the outside. We were given-- my-- Ernie and I were given permission to go to the city hall. And we were allowed to get our marriage license. And that day was the 17th of August, 1944.

And there were lovely pictures of you. And you look like a radiant bride.

I was happy, yes.

But you didn't have a wedding dress. What did you do?

Ruth got a dress for me. I believe it was-- yeah, it was her dress. And she had her mother come to bring me something to put on the head. There was no veil available. And we went to the field to pick flowers.

And with that borrowed dress and the veil later on that her mother-- it wasn't a veil. It was-- she called it a gossamer. She was knitting it. With this, I got married out in the open, on the big camp grounds, the military camp grounds, where we had a typical Jewish wedding with a canopy.

There were two rabbis from Europe, Rabbi Sharabi from Czechoslovakia. There was another rabbi. And then was an American rabbi who married us, who had the cup kiddush for us.

It was a big party for the whole group of you.

Oh, the entire-- everybody that could came out. And we were all happy together. We were, in fact, like one family anyway because we felt very close to each other. We've gone through a lot, and we enjoyed being together. And--

And you almost weren't able to pull it off. You almost were not allowed to get married.

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Exactly. It was also a struggle to get the permit. But Ruth did it. She come through with it.

You had to stay in quarantine for a month at the camp.

When we arrived.

Yeah. The first month you were there.

Yeah.

Now you didn't have any other family here. But there were like family reunions at the fence, right?

Yes, there was. There were two cousins of my father that came to see me from Brooklyn. Ruth and Anne came, Ruth Goldstein and her sister Annie. And they came to see me.

And it was a fantastic reunion because I've never met my cousins. They saw my picture in the newspaper, in the Yiddishe newspapers. And they said when they looked at the name they said, oh, my God, this is the girl our father sent every day over to Germany. That's Manya. She's alive.

So the boss of them came from Brooklyn. They made the trip. I think it was an overnight trip or something.

But they weren't allowed into the camp.

At first not, but then, yes, later on. I don't know how we met. But later on, yes, they were given permission. So I had my cousins for the first time that I saw here in America.

What do you remember of that first open house when the quarantine was lifted and people from town came in to see?

Well, we had visitors that came in from town. And we made friends with a lovely couple, Mae and Tom Thompson. And they had a little boy, Barry. I wished I knew what happened to them because they were the most wonderful family that were with us together. They would visit us, and we were allowed to visit their home too. So we had struck up a nice beautiful friendship. And there were from Oswego.

Great.

Yeah.

For the youngsters, people who-- you were 20 at the time, is that right? For those younger than you, it was great because they were allowed into the public schools after a month. And they got to go to school. And they lived almost a normal life.

But for folks who are your age and older-- you were a newlywed. You had no place to go for work. That must have been difficult to sit around all day.

It was. It was very, very difficult because we were eager to start our future, a new life, and begin to live like normal people. To us, it was normal that we were in a military camp and not able to make a living, not able to make money again and have jobs and just start already. We were so eager to start. And it took a lot of patience for our part to overcome that.

And most of all, we wanted out. We wanted to be able to go wherever we wanted to go. And it was not even-- it was not even sure that we were able to stay because the rumors had it that we were not possibly-- not being able to stay in the United States, that they would have to send us back. And we were very much aware of it and afraid of it.

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And many people even said, oh, I'm not going back. I kill myself before I go back to Europe. And that was on our minds heavy. And didn't let us become really happy.

Was it especially difficult for your husband to not be able to go out and support--

Oh, extremely.

--his new family?

Extremely difficult, because he was young and eager. And he had saved his life out of a war, of a terrible, terrible ordeal, where his mother also was killed in Auschwitz. And he knew that. He wanted to start and something awful. He was really very impatient.

At Fort Ontario, there were classes in beauty culture and secretarial skills for the women and carpentry and auto mechanics for the men. Did you participate in any of those?

I remember participating in the productions of making a show for our people there. It was a little operetta that somebody-- Abeles, I think composed, Charles Abeles? Or-- yeah. He was from Vienna. And, of course, he kept on doing what he always had done. He was making shows, I suppose. So we were part of it too. And we prepared and worked on it.

There was a tremendous cultural life in the camp--

Yes, it was. And there was always a play or opera going on.

Yes, it was. You bet. Even so, we had a tremendous amount of languages spoken there because we had people from everywhere.

Do you remember any of the songs from The Golden Cage, the opera that you produced there?

Some of it, yes. It was quite a production. It was a lengthy production. And it was a good one too.

There was Milkovich, who was the opera singer, who was from the Zagreb opera, who sang with me. And we had done like a love song together. And then there was the rest of the cast. There were-- I remember Inge from Vienna, Inge Spitz was her name. And there was Adam Munz I think was there. And-- oh, a lot of young people. We all participated and were very eager to bring that show, you know.

Why was there such a vibrant cultural life in an internment camp?

The spirit was there. We wanted to become ourselves. We wanted to be our-- we wanted to forget as quick as possible. Nobody sat around-- not many people could hear from speaking of the past. Most of the time we never did. I mean, it took us a long time.

And we wanted to forget as quick as possible. People, yes, were eager to-- with other words to become menschen again, to become a human being, to look and channel the thoughts away from the horror that has begotten us, that had gotten hold of us and that had made us no humans.

Was there any antisemitism or anti-refugee feeling that you felt from the people in Oswego?

Not really. Not I did, no.

It must have been tantalizing-- is that a good word-- to be able to taste freedom for six hours a day and to see it through the chain links, but not really be able to participate in it?

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Yes, it was. I remember looking out desperately and saying, oh, dear God, I would so cherish the day where I will be going out and go anywhere I wanted to and feel free and feel good and be happy. That was my feeling.

What do you remember of Eleanor Roosevelt's visit to the camp?

Oh, she come to the camp. And she congratulated me for my wedding. The wedding had taken place, my marriage. And she congratulated me. She talked to me a while.

And she visited our synagogue, our little place where we were praying, with us. She was a very gracious, lovely lady. And we found-- we felt so honored that she came to see us. We felt very special by her visit.

The winter in Oswego is normally very difficult. That winter of 1944, '45, was especially harsh, wasn't it?

Yes, it was. It seems that it was almost a year like, nine months winter. It was cold and icy. And I was looking forward. I was kept on saying, with Gods help, I will go to a climate where I will never see a winter again. In fact, it was so cold.

And that's probably why you live in Los Angeles now.

That's why I'm here, yes. [LAUGHTER]

There was a suicide at the camp during that harsh winter.

Yeah.

And then there was that awful coal accident.

Yes, I remember that.

That really plunged the whole camp into almost a group depression. Is that accurate?

Yes, it is very true. We were all very affected by these incidents because it was close to our hearts. We had made it out of hell. We had come so far. We had struggled so much to be alive. And then the life was taken. It was a personal loss to each one of us. We all felt the same way.

Remember, we were not the same people as we once were before that think, well, this is life. This is happening. We took it much harder. And we took it-- it was, in fact, very difficult, I remember, to overcome that period. We were all involved in that as if it would be our own family happen to us.

Franklin Roosevelt died in April of 1945.

Correct.

In addition to the grief that everyone felt because of his death, it plunged you into uncertainty for the future again.

Yes. We were in shock. We knew with his death-- he was the one that brought us over-- we probably would have now a minimum chance of staying. We had hope that the president would follow through. He brought us. He certainly is not going to send us back. He's going to fight for it. We had a feeling.

But when he died, that feeling left us. I remember we were put in a terrible depression. At that moment, I, was in the hospital with my daughter. I had just given birth to my daughter. And it was terribly, terribly depressing to me to have my baby. And I made up my mind right there and then that they would have to force me to leave America. I would not leave it.

Now that I have a baby, I have a child. I have a responsibility. It was doubly hard for me. And I remember that we were

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in mourning when the president died. We all mourned.

Let's take a picture a tape change.

Mhm.

OK.

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