

That's good.

It really has come in handy. Hides all this equipment. Is the mic OK? It's not hitting?

No, that's fine, very good. The camp really could not have run without the help of the Jewish and some Christian agencies, is that right?

Well, they were very helpful, all of them. Everybody came because this was the first group of refugees many of them had seen. And everybody came and wanted to do whatever needed to be done. So they got a lot of assignments. They took care of a lot of the cultural activities, and sent money in, and fixed up rooms. They fixed up club rooms.

One of the club rooms was called the Club of the Lonesomes. And we had all kinds of musicians and singers come up here and entertain, although we had our own singers. But people came up-- Regina Resnik, the Metropolitan Opera singer, came and many others-- Molly Picon came. Had all kinds of wonderful singers.

The wind is blowing.

Let's just move it a little bit.

OK. Go?

Yeah.

December 23, Dorothy Thompson from NBC, the Blue Network, came up and paid a special visit and did a special broadcast. Why did she do that? What did she say? Tell me about it.

Well, she didn't actually come up. It was held in New York. But we did have remote control. It was Christmas. And she was asked to do it because we wanted to get as much sympathy for refugees as possible. And she did a wonderful broadcast, saying, in effect, something that the Talmud says all the time-- he who saves a single life saves the whole world. And she was saying, it's only 1,000. But those 1,000, for them, this is life. We've rescued them.

The winter was so harsh. It's hard to imagine when you look at it how pretty it is today, but the winter was so harsh. There was a suicide. And then shortly thereafter, there was a coal accident that claimed a life. And it really plunged the camp into a collective depression, if you will. Didn't it? Tell me about it.

Right. It did. It did. The suicide was very tragic because the woman carried the guilt of having left her first husband and two little children. She had fallen in love with this very handsome, charming man and had two more children with him. But the guilt, and then the depression, and then the horrible snow drifts all around apparently became too much for her. So she took a huge bottle of aspirin, we understood, and died, but died, also, in the snow in the frost.

And the death from the coal, they used to bring the coal in and stack it high. And then the snow and the ice would freeze it together. And the men really didn't know how to shovel snow. And this one man, [? Brucheler, ?] shoveled the snow, making a kind of tunnel. And then the sun began to melt some of the top coal and fell on him. And he was killed. And it did, it threw the whole camp into a deep depression.

It was also depressing when FDR died in April.

Well, that was-- it was depressing all over the country because so many people-- my own father wept. We all felt our father, our savior had died. And here, they held special services. They sang songs, the songs for the dead, and held speeches. They really felt that the man who had saved them had died.

The camp brought up, the government brought in a psychologist, Dr. Curt Bondy, who was a fairly distinguished psychologist at the time. And he interviewed a lot of the refugees and came up with some pretty startling, but obvious

findings.

Yes. He said that the only way to prevent more suicides was to let them go out and work. Let the men who wanted to work go out and actually work. And the country needed workers-- chefs. When they would read the newspapers, there were ads for chefs paying \$500 a month, which in those days was enormous. And yet, they were not permitted to go out and work. So that was a very troubling thing. But in the end, the end was so good that all of that is now ancient history.

The work was such an important issue, though, because some people didn't want to work. Some people came and thought they were guests so they didn't have to.

Of course. Of course, you had all kinds. Yes.

And then some did get to work at a Birds Eye plant.

That was once they were allowed because the farmers in the area were outraged. Their sons had been drafted or had enlisted and were in Europe fighting the Nazis. And here were men willing, wanting, begging to be allowed to work in the plants around here. And they were not permitted because of this bureaucratic problem, whether they were enemy aliens or not.

There were Nazi prisoners of war here and Italian fascist prisoners of war. In fact, all during World War II we took in just this 1,000. But we took in over 200,000 Nazi and fascist prisoners of war. They were allowed to go out and work. And they were given the usual amount, which was about \$0.80 a day. But they were also given food and board. But the men here and the women who would have loved to go out and work were not permitted.

Joe Smart resigned as camp director at the end of May and formed a friends committee. How effective do you think that was?

Well, I think what he did was important. And I think what everyone did was important in helping the climate in the country because people realized, how could you send back 1,000 people? Here we were, an empty country, 137 million people then, and we couldn't absorb 1,000 refugees?

So what Joe did was important. What all the organizations did, the newspapers, editorials began to be run all over-- all of that helped. And in the end, it was President Truman himself, as a Christmas present, who said that the country would now allow DPs-- Displaced Persons-- to come in under the quotas. They never changed the quotas. But that the first displaced persons who would be allowed in would be these 1,000.

Let me take you back a little ways. All this time, you're shuttling back and forth to Washington with your job at the Department of the Interior. And then Congressman Dickstein, a New York Congressman, wanted to hold some hearings about the 1,000 came up here and actually held a day and a half or two days of hearings here in Oswego. And you orchestrated all that. How did that work?

Well, that worked fine. We had all our little boys dressed up in Boy Scout uniforms. And they marched with flags in front of the congressmen to show--

Why'd they do that?

Well, they were members of a Boy Scout troop. And we had very good Boy Scout troop here. But it was also to show them how American our kids were already. And then we selected various people who were articulate. And Ralph Faust was one of the witnesses who spoke. And the president of the Oswego State Teachers' College spoke and spoke brilliantly. And some of the refugees spoke.

What was the gist of what everyone was saying?

Well, they would be asked questions. And the refugees, especially, were asked, would you fight for the United States?

And of course, they all said yes. The war was still going on. And the educators told the committee how wonderful these youngsters were. One of them had, on D-Day, the president of the college said, he spoke before 400 students and held them spellbound, telling them what it was like to be here and know that the war in Europe, at least, was over. It wasn't yet over in the Far East.

Several of the refugees even volunteered to go into the army while they were here.

Yes, yes. And they weren't allowed. But as soon as the war was over, some of them did. Not the war-- as soon as the camp was closed and they were allowed to leave, they volunteered.

Dickstein's subcommittee said, yes, we should let them go and be admitted into the country. And everybody was up again. And then everybody came back down because the full committee said no.

Right.

It was a roller coaster here. It must have been hell.

It was. It was exactly that. It was a roller coaster. One day, they were sure that the camp would open, and they would all be free, and they could live with their relatives, or wherever they want. And the next day, word would come, no, you have to go back to Europe. The State Department said, you have to go back, and the Justice Department, even the Treasury Department. Because when they left Europe, they signed a paper, saying that they would return when the war was over.

But none of them really believed it. And in fact, they were told by some of the people who were selecting them, oh, this is just pro forma. And none of us could believe that they would go back. But it was a very tough fight.

OK. We're almost at the end. In July of '45, the Gripsholm left with 45, 50 or so Yugoslavs who did want to become repatriated. Why would some go and nobody else went, even though they were offered the trip back?

Most of those who went were not Jews, who had family in Yugoslavia, and felt safer. A few, some, were Jews. But most were not. And who understands these things? People feel very much attached to their roots. They thought they would go back and begin a new life. But it was a handful. They were all offered the opportunity to go. And they didn't go.

One of the things I noticed that's very interesting-- all the pictures from 1944 and '45 of the refugees, all the men are wearing ties and suits. All the women are dressed in dresses every day. Despite the fact that they had no place to go to work, they still got dressed every day.

Right. Well, this was very good for their morale. We had classes going on all day long in all sorts of things. Organizations like ORT, the Jewish world ORT, came in and taught the men carpentry and taught the women how to become hairdressers, and manicurists, and seamstresses. And the men learned a lot of professions. Men who had owned department stores in Europe learned here to become carpenters, and in fact, when they got out of the camp went to work at menial jobs because that was the way you survived. They had lost everything in Europe.

OK. One more location and one more question over at the marker.

OK, Ruth. It was October 25, 1981 that you came up and had a reunion up here and you dedicated this monument because there was nothing here prior. Tell me real briefly about that and why this was put up.

It was the idea of the women of the Syracuse pioneer women-- they are now called Na'amamat-- who came to me in Syracuse one night and said, we learned about this whole camp. We didn't know anything about it. How would it be if we tried to have a reunion? And I said, wonderful. I'll help you in any way I can.

And so we had this really wonderful reunion here. And we raised money and built this monument. And various people spoke. We had all kinds of ceremonies.

And then the monument stayed. We hoped it would remind people of what this camp had meant to 1,000 people. And to our horror, it was then decimated. And it was defaced. And the word Jewish was scratched. And it was chipped off here.

But I think it's very good that it's left this way. I think people must know that there is always danger, there is always evil in the world, and that we have to keep fighting for the good. And this monument, to me, represents the good and the fact that we have to keep fighting to keep it good. OK.