Oh, yes.

And Leon.

Oh, yes. He's cute.

And then we go to Salt Lake City to talk with Joseph Smart.

Oh, and so I couldn't. I see.

And then we're going to meet--

He must be quite elderly too.

Yeah, sure. And then we'll meet-- who will we meet-- Ralph Manfred, who's going to be in Chicago. So we're going to meet him there.

Oh.

So it'll be fun.

I see.

Yeah. OK, I think he's ready for us.

OK, ready.

OK, let's just start walking. Steffi, that August 5, 1944, that morning when you arrived at the camp and saw this six-foot-high chain link fence, three strands of barbed wire on top, what was your reaction? Well it's not exactly what we had expected. It was ah, there's a fence. What's happening? Is this a camp? Or what are we coming to? It was a little bit of a surprise, I might say.

But well, there was much excitement, though. And as we came up and through the fence and into the camp itself, there were many people, lots of excitement. People were given sheets, and towels, and assigned to their barracks, and the suitcases gathered, and all types of things like that. There was much hustle-bustle about.

And what was happening at the fence? People from Oswego were at the fence at the end?

Well, at the fence, at the part of the fence that was near the town itself, people, in the following days and weeks, came to see us, to see what had arrived there in their small, peaceful town. And they were very friendly. And they wanted to see who we were and what we were. And they brought little gifts and I think some food. And things were exchanged over the fence. And as much as people could talk English at the time, they talked to each other. And it was quite an interesting experience.

Well, why don't you walk over here with me? This barbed wire is so reminiscent of all the hell that was going on in Europe at the time.

Right.

It must have really upset some people.

It did. It did upset the older section of the people, and especially, the ones that had actually been in concentration camps. I, luckily, was not one of those. But that was a little bit of a shock. But I suppose it was explained later that this fence

was there and the barbed wire not to keep us in or the others out, it was there. It was an army camp. And I don't think it was put there for us.

So I think, as we came into the camp, and life evolved like a little community of its own, people started to forget, especially once we were allowed to come out into the town. We had a quarantine of four weeks or so where we couldn't go out. And that was a little difficult.

There must have been family reunions at the fence because some people had relatives in the United States.

I believe so, yes, whoever had close relatives that they would come to the fence in those days. And then later, they came, actually, to visit in the camp. We had also a couple of people who visited us, an aunt of my mother's and so on.

OK. Do you want to change microphones or just hook up the? Fine, let's just keep going then.

OK. The first Sabbath here in the camp must have been really special after all those years on the run. Most of the residents were Jewish. It must have been quite special.

Yes. Yes, of course, to be together again, and to be able to demonstrate openly that you're Jewish, and be able to follow your religion, and be able to pray according to your own heart openly definitely was extremely special.

And Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur just a few weeks later.

Yes. Yes. Well, everybody-- like in a larger community, everybody celebrated in their own way. People were not all-- not everybody knew everybody. You stayed within your barrack or with the people that you had made friends by that time, which were not all that many. And as I always say, this was a little community of itself and by itself and was not necessarily so that everybody knew everybody.

On September 1st, they ended the quarantine.

Right.

Do you remember what happened that big opening day?

Well, everybody got passes then and was allowed to go into town for a length of six hours. And of course, people were anxious to go out and see. And it was a big event.

Do you remember when people came in from the outside? There were 5,000 people here that day.

I must tell you-- well, the day you say we arrived?

No, no. On September 1st.

On September 1st, I guess they came in and we went out. And yes, it was a looking each other over, I suppose.

One of the big events--

Just hold this. You just--

OK. One of the big events was opening up the Oswego public schools.

Right.

That must have been quite special for you. You had not been in school for a while, right? Tell me about that.

That was the most special event for me, when the schools opened up for us. And especially, Mr. Faust, the high school principal, personally came to the camp and spoke to all of us and said, you must come to school, and resume your normal life, and learn what we learn here in America, and become American students, and so on. And it was a whole new idea for me. At that point, I hadn't thought that I would ever go to school again.

How long had you been?

I was a little bit beyond high school age.

How long had it been since you were in school?

This was 1944-- six years.

Wow, that's a long time.

Six years, I got pulled out. I was meant to continue my schooling in Italy after we had gotten out of Germany. But that was not to be. And so I didn't go to school all the war years until we came here. And then thanks to the community of Oswego and Mr. Faust, especially, who really welcomed us and begged us to come and to do everything possible, so my girlfriends and I got together and said, OK, this is really what we have to do.

Do you remember taking the tour of the school the day before school opened?

Yes, I do remember that. We were taken around and shown this new building and this new concept, which was different. The whole high school concept was different for us than what we had experienced in Europe. At least I had gone part of my high school experience in Germany. And the whole setup is different. So this was a beautiful school. And we had assembly. And we were very impressed with Mr. Faust. He was an elegant and a nice man. And we all looked up for-- he was God for us, what can I tell you?

You spoke a little bit of English already.

Yes.

So you had a special role. What was that? And what did you do?

Well, I helped Mr. Faust in setting up, I suppose, the different students in their different grades because, obviously, we were all different ages and had all different school years behind us-- some more, some less, and so on. And he had this tremendous task of putting these youngsters into his school and fitting them into the right programs. And succeed he did. And we were happy to give him a hand wherever he needed it.

One of the junior high refugee students was even elected class president. And you and several of the others made the National Honor Society. You did pretty well as a group.

Yes, I suppose we did. We were anxious. We were desirous to learn. And we enjoyed it. It was a wonderful experience. And we were propelled forward. And I myself, together with five other in my group, actually graduated within one year. Mr. Faust made it all possible because we took various courses in one year that usually takes three and four years to take.

That must have been a proud day for you.

It was. It was. We took the Regents exams, the New York Regents exams. And again, we had to get sufficient points in order to achieve this and to be graduated from Oswego high school. And we took language exams that Mr. Faust ordered from Albany. And we got enough points. We passed the exams. And there we were at the commencement exercises in Oswego. It was wonderful.

Great.

It was a great day.

Let's change locations for the next question.

OK.

Are we out of frame? OK.

OK.

Tell me about the reaction of the people of Oswego. Was there any antisemitism that you felt at all?

I personally never experienced any of that. I don't know whether it was really antisemitism, or anti-foreigners, or anti a lot of people suddenly having invaded this peaceful little town. I don't know. But I heard about it. But I certainly never experienced it in any way. It's such a beautiful day today here. But the winter time that you spent here was awfully rough.

Oh, yes. Yes.

Tell me about that winter of '44, '45.

Those winters were not easy. The wind was blowing from the lake. And it was ice bitter cold. And the snow was on the ground high. And the icicles were hanging from the overhanging roofs of the barracks. And it was a different experience. We went to school bundled up, and big boots, and so on.

You weren't used to the cold weather coming from--

Not that much, not that intensely, let's say, and that much snow. So it was cold, all right. But fortunately, the barracks were well-heated. And we had no problem that way.

Good shot, Steve?

Yeah, why don't you just move just a little farther this way, and that'll be great. OK, that's good.

OK. OK?

OK, give me two seconds.

Sure. Take three.

OK.

OK. When you were living in the camp, you were so close to the real freedom. You could see the houses just outside the fence from the fort.

Right.

It must have been tantalizing?

Well, it was. But I personally, I was young. And I had hopes. And I knew, someday, we would come out of this somehow. And after all, I tasted a lot of freedom by being out every day to school. I almost led a normal life by going to school. Most of my day was spent in Oswego and in the school. And coming back, I was intent on doing my homework

and preparing myself for the next day so that I really had no time to think about that.

And being young, you know, someday, there will be something else. And we didn't know what and how. And of course, you got caught up in this insecurity that pervaded the atmosphere by not knowing, will we be able to stay in this country or will we go back? But as I say, I could not let that rule my thinking. I was too much occupied otherwise.

Was it more difficult for your mother and your mother's friends--

Absolutely.

--who couldn't leave to go to work or anything?

Absolutely, absolutely. For them, it was more of a confined feeling. They did go out a little bit to town to look around, to shop a little, and so on. But it was not a normal life, really. You couldn't make a living for yourself. And after a number of months, and especially not knowing what the future would bring, the, at that time, older people were very concerned. And there was much nervousness about it.

Do you remember that after six months when you were in the camp, the newspaper that was published here at the camp, the Ontario Chronicle, ran a contest--

Right.

--and asked some of the young folks to write essays on what it's like to be in America for six months.

Right.

Why don't you start on a two shot, Steve, and then just go in during the question?

OK.

OK. Do you remember that after six months in the camp, the Ontario Chronicle, the newspaper that was published here in the fort--

Yes, yes.

--ran a contest for the youngsters to write an essay about what it's like to be in the camp for six months, what it's like to be in America for six months. Do you remember?

I thought that something was written in school or something. I don't really--

It was in the newspaper at the camp.

--I'm sure that you're right.

You won third place.

I did?

You did. And I have your composition here.

Oh, really?

I wonder if you would read part of it here for me.

OK. It's titled, "Since 6 Months, I'm in America." Sometimes, when I start to think how much I have changed in these six months I have been in this country, I really wonder what will have to become of me after a couple of years on American ground. Yes, I must have changed quite a bit, as everybody, Oswego citizens, and even Fort Ontario inhabitants, consider me as an American girl. More than once it has happened to me that on my entering one of our buildings, somebody has said, most politely, in a very gentle English, good morning or good afternoon.

Read this part too.

All right. I have learned to love this country, its people, and its customs. And my greatest wish is that one day, I can speak of it as my home. Well, and indeed, I can.

That's a pretty good composition in a language that's not your native tongue.

Well, thank you. I always enjoyed writing. I guess I started then.

OK, good, Steve.

OK.

Let's change location.