

Oh, you have to actually-- yeah. Actually--

So I listen to it--

--somebody--

--and I type it up.

--and type at the same time. Yes.

Yeah. So I play secretary. I do it myself.

Oh, God, yeah.

Yeah, so it's tough.

Yeah.

This is now a lovely park for the City of Oswego baseball fields. What do you feel, though, when you come back and see it now? You can probably feel the barracks around you?

Yes, indeed, I see them standing all around us, over there, and along the lake, where the mess halls were. It certainly looked different. And it was like a little home away from home at the time. And you had friends in various barracks. And you went to eat in the mess halls for a while, anyway. So now it's wide open spaces. At the time, it was a little town.

You were telling me an interesting story earlier. Do you want us against the fence, Steve?

Yeah. Will that be better?

Let me just move the camera.

OK.

OK. You were telling me an interesting story, earlier. At one point, a New York newspaper came up and did a story about Oswego. And your picture appeared in the New York newspaper.

That's right.

And then you started getting letters.

Tell me about that.

Yes, that was a very flattering picture. I was young. And no sooner had that picture appeared in the paper, I started getting letters from fellows in the army, servicemen all over, primarily in the Far East and also in the States, who wanted to come and see me, and who started to write to me. And a couple of people came to visit me.

But one particular young man started corresponding with me practically on a daily basis. We had these love letters flying back and forth every day. He was first stationed in Hawaii. He sent me, from there, a hula skirt. He sent me a blouse, which said, "aloha," all over and so on. And then he was transferred to Guam. And he wrote me every day. And I wrote him every day.

And it really kept me going. It was my-- I was looking for those letters, every day, when I came from school. And

almost without fail, there would be one. And then he was worried that I would be sent back, because I had written him what our situation was and that we came here under the promise of going back.

And he wrote me. He said, I am going to come home, and I'm going to marry you. And then you'll be an American woman. And you won't have to go back.

And you had never met him?

I had never met him, I had sent him a picture of myself. And I had gotten a picture of him but only after months and months of correspondence. But he wrote lovely letters. And it was ever so nice. And then, one day, I came from school, and I had a message to come to the administration building across this playground. And one of the ladies, there, told me she had a message from the Red Cross, about this young man, in which he asks for an emergency furlough in order to come home and marry me.

Oh, my.

He wanted to come. And he had asked for this furlough. And they asked me whether I considered myself engaged to him, which was really not quite the case. And I had not really lived. And I wanted to go out into the world. And I wasn't ready to settle down.

He didn't tell you that he was going to do that.

Well, he just had said, someday I'll marry you. But I had no idea he was going to do this. So this was really quite a shock. And by that time, our hope was very great that we would be allowed to stay in this country. And I responded that I didn't think it was necessary for him to take this emergency furlough and marry me in a rush, because I do think we'll stay here. And I'll still be around. So it was really quite--

That's a funny story. In December of 1945, in the beginning of December, you still didn't know where you were going to be.

Right.

The war was over for several months, already.

Yes.

And you were still here.

Right.

What was that like, month after month, with no future in sight?

Well, I don't recall exactly which month, we learned that President Truman had been able to get it through Congress that we were going to be allowed to stay in this country or rather to re-immigrate and come into this country as legal immigrants, rather than as guests of the United States, which we had been up to this point. So I think this came out, maybe, in October. I may be wrong. I'm not sure. But of course, one was anxious now. The closer something like this comes.

Well, let me ask you this. Before you heard of that.

Yes.

And here it is, month after month after month of still living here.

Yes.

And still the government is saying, you're going back to Europe.

Yes.

That must have been challenging.

Well it was very difficult for the middle-aged group, at the time, because 95% of whom had no intention of going back and wanted to stay here, had sons in the army fighting for this country and other relatives and so on. And they were really hoping against hope, at the time, to stay here. So it was much upsetness about for that reason.

There must have been some party when you heard about President Truman's decision.

Yes. Yes, indeed. Yes, it that. That was finally our release. And then things really moved quite quickly after that-- amazingly quickly. Just as efficient, I had always said, as the government was to bring us in here and to set up this camp, including markers on each individual door within the barracks, quite equally efficient it was to then get us out of, here, with immigration officials coming in here and drawing up the papers, et cetera.

And now, 40-some-odd years later, most of you folks, who were young at the time, have made incredible success stories of your own lives and made wonderful contributions to American society.

Yes.

What does that say about what happened here and what didn't happen in a bigger scale?

Well, certainly, the younger folks, then, which is my group, now, for them, it was a terrific foundation. They went to school. They learned about American life. This was their first step in the right direction. And the older people, at the time, well, they learned the language much more fluently than they had known it when they came. And they were already on American soil. And I think it made it a lot easier to get a start once they came out of here.

When you think of the whole Oswego experience, though, aside from, obviously, you're grateful, tremendously grateful to the US government.

Right.

But is there also a little part of you that says, my God, only 1,000?

Well, of course. You feel, like you say, you're grateful. And at the same time, you feel a little guilty. Why me and not all these thousands and millions of others, who might have come and could have come? And we were the selected few.

It makes you feel guilty. Because some suffered a lot more and were not able to come out. That's the pity of it all. But that's how the cookie crumbles. And it's sad. It's sad that so many had to give their lives. And I have very close relatives, myself, that never made it. My mother's brother and his family, his wife and two little children, perished in Auschwitz.

Even though you're grateful to the government for your rescue--

Yes.

--are you angry that the government of the United States didn't do more when it possibly could have?

I don't think I'm angry. That's the wrong word. Because I know what the laws were. It was difficult. It could have been different. And in retrospect, it's always easy to make judgments. I'm sure some things could have been handled differently and more people could have been brought into this vast country and room would have been there.

But how much was known in this country of what went on in Europe at the time? I don't know. But those were difficult times and different times. And people were just not aware, I believe, for a great part.

Super. Let's go on over to the marker, and then that's it.

OK.

OK. One year after you arrived in the camp, you were still here with no prospects of getting out to real freedom. Max Sipsper, the cartoonist in the Ontario Chronicle, did a cartoon, here. Tell me about that.

Right, it shows us, on August 5, 1944, arriving in New York Harbor and everybody enthusiastically waving toward the Statue of Liberty. And then underneath is the separate picture of someone, here, on approximately where we are standing, right now, sitting, facing the fence and facing this beautiful lake and the lighthouse and seeing, through big binoculars, the Statue of Liberty in the far distance. Meaning that even though we saw the Statue of Liberty, as we arrived, it is now pretty far away from us. And we can only see it in the distance somewhere.

And that pretty much said what you all were feeling.

That's what it was. We were in America. But we were removed from that freedom that we were all seeking.

OK. Super. Let's set up the final shot. We can walk in and talk.

Get ready. Go.

For many years, there was no indication, at all, that the Fort Ontario refugees were here. And they finally erected this marker a few years ago.

Right.

It's been vandalized now.

Yes. That is really a shame and most astounding that something like this should happen here. But it just shows what the world is like. And maybe it's a good thing that, with all good intentions, there's always somebody who has other ideas.

And it's very nice that they erected this, in our memory, so to speak. And it shows all kinds of thinking. And maybe that's a blessing in disguise. Let's hope so.

OK. Wonderful. That's great.

OK. Do you recall if the train came in here, at the lakeside, or somewhere else?

I believe it was here. I remember there was the rail, and there was an incline as we approached the camp. And there was the fence as you said earlier. But it didn't seem-- it looked different. Everything looked different.

What are you feeling, now, when you look around you?

Well, I can't believe I'm here, again. It's quite an experience to retrace your steps and to come back to a place, where you were over 40 years ago, of which I think a lot and speak a lot. It's part of my life. Even though it was only a year and a half, it played, obviously, a great part in my life, in coming here and being here and going to school and making friends.

And especially Mr Faust, whom I'm going to see later on, who is a very good and close friend of mine. And now, to actually be here, again, is quite wonderful and very emotional for me. It really is.

Well, good, I'm glad we were able to get you here. It really did play an important part in your life.

Yes, it did. It did. It really laid the cornerstone to everything that followed for me business-wise. I got into the business world because of what I initially learned in Oswego High School.

And it's the beginning of my life here. It plays a very important part. It's part of my youth. When I started living a little bit and have other young people around me, which I didn't have when I was interned three and a half years in Italy during the war.

Did you ever get to go inside the fort, itself, and see what was doing in there and what that was all about?

In those days?

Yeah.

I guess we went in, once or twice, at the beginning, and heard about it but not that often. It's certainly a historical spot and really presents to me all Americana and is part of this country's background.

Super. Very good. Thank you so much. This has been great fun.

Well, it was fun for me.

Well, good, I'm glad.

Thank you for having me.

Oh, my pleasure. This has been great.

I will look forward to hearing from you.

It'll be a while. But I promise, I'll let you know.

Let me know in plenty of time, so I can alert all my friends all over the country.

I promise. [BOTH TALKING]

In fact, today, I have sent tapes to certain people. Some people don't catch it in time and so on. And then it's good to know, so that the people that do know make tapes.

Sure. Of course.

And I myself, of course, so let me know.

Of course.

Well, it's certainly been an interesting experience.

Well, good, I'm so glad.

I'm so happy to be here.

Well, good.

And I wish you good luck--

Well, thank you. I'll need some.

--for this monumental--

I need some good luck, sure.

--undertaking.

I think maybe I can go run in and see if I can find Adam.

You want to--

I don't know if he's speaking right now. Would you like to wait a while and see if he's around.

All right. All right. What do you do? You're walking in? Because I'd like--

You want to get--

I want the camera.

OK, let me go get that.

I'll go get it.

Oh, I'll get it. It's in my car. I'll drive here, and then I'll drive around and right into the fort and see if I can find Adam--

OK.

--and bring him out. And maybe we'll see if we can have a little reunion right out here.

That would be great, yes.

And then we'll get you over to Mr Faust's house. I'll be right back.

All right.

I'm going take these with me and put them in the car, so we don't lose them.

OK.

I'll be right back.

All right, Paul.

Let me get this mic off you.

Yes. I guess now.

It sounded great. Yesterday, this wasn't working as well.

No?

Yes. Perfect. You're monitoring.

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