

LENA LEVINE

00:00 I was born in Warsaw, Poland in {????} . My family had four sisters and two brothers. My maiden name was Lena Majnen and my parents names were Efram and Shana.

Do you remember the names of your brothers and si~ter~?

My brothers were named Mendal and Aaron. I had a sister named Freda and a twin sister Sara.

Did you go to public school?

Yes. And I went to high school. My father wanted me to go to college. I was never too fond of school, as I always would have liked to be doing something else. My father was very educated, a Rabbi.

In school, did you associate with non-jew~? I don't remember, I think so.

Did you lead a comfortable life?

My father went to America after the first war as a delegate from the Rabbi's association to ask for help. They wanted him to stay. My brother was fanatical about religion and did not want my father to decide to stay, because the children would lose their religion. When my father returned to Europe, I was married. I married a man in the jewelry business in 1924.

05:00

At that time, a lot of people went to Belgium because of the antisemitism. My husband had a friend there, so we went.

How was Belgium?

Very comfortable. Like a little America. In '34, war broke out and my father wrote to see if he could come to Belgium. The war was not yet in Belgium. [At this time I had 2 children].

Could he come? No.

What happened to hi_ and your f~mily? I know they were destroyed.

Did he spend time in Warsaw Ghetto? I didn~t hear.

When did the jews begin to feel pressure in Belgium?

In 1940, we started feeling that the Nazis would conquer Belgium. My husband wanted to go to Switzerland. To cross the borders. But we didn't want to take that chance. We stayed in Belgium and my husband [found a house in which we could hide]. We just didn't go out.

Was it your house?

No. We had to leave our house. This is when we were hiding. We were on the outskirts of Brussels.

10 : 00

There was a [cousin?] woman who had permission to visit because she was a doctor and they didn't take doctors.

Did you pay this woman to bring you food? Yes.

Was she Catholic, or Protestant?

She was very religious. She wrote a book about saving a Jewish family. For two years it was okay. Then she was sick and her daughter came. Two years later we had a feeling something would happen, and we decided to leave. The day before we were to move to a new place, we had suspicions, fears. My husband took the children and said that we must separate. He left with them and said he would be back. That evening I could not even move, I was paralyzed. When my husband came back, I heard a jeep. Then I went into the bedroom [or the bathroom] and heard something. We then heard knocking at the door.

Did the SS man pick up you and your husband? Yes.

But not the children? No. They were with another family.

Did the children remain with another family throughout the war? Yes.

15:00

What happened to you and your husband.?

They took us to a camp in Belgium before they took us to Auschwitz. I will never forget what we saw there. But we didn't know what was going on. What we saw on the train was terrible. My husband said we should not cry, because our children were saved.

What was on the train?

People dying. It was unbelievable to understand. When I came out from the train, I didn't know what was going on. I thought we were going to work. They pushed me one way. I didn't see my husband anymore.

20:00

I saw a young woman with a child. I told the German that I wanted to stay with people I knew. He pushed me to the other side. I asked people, "Where are the others from Belgium?", because some had been there for two years. And they said "What are you talking about? Do you know where they are? [can't understand next line]"

Then I found out that my husband was sent to Bulow and he was in a camp. Some German took off a my necklace and almost choked me. Then they cut my hair. They started to give us soup but I couldn't take it. The ones from before said if you do not eat it you will become a [??]

25:00

I saw a woman who was so hungry she would do anything. I could control myself. First they took her to work. With me , I believe it was just luck. When she came back from work she was so hungry that I gave her half of my piece of bread. You see, I could control myself. My children were safe.

How long were you in Auschwitz? One year. Before the Americans came to help.

Did you ever work?

Yes, I worked on ammunition. I met a man who knew my husband was still at the camp. I don't know how I survived.

You had something to live for.

Yes. That's the only thing. But my husband had that too. He was alive at the Big March. Something happened to his foot.

Was it every morning ,when you were standing [??], when they did the selections?

Yes.

Did you work on ammunitions for long?

Not too long. A few months. I went with a Belgian woman { on the March }. I told her that we had to go.

What happened if you couldn't go?

It happened. But I kept going. I told her "come, come." She didn't survive.

Did she die on the Narch?

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les .

What time of year?

I don't know.

Was there snow on the ground?

Yes.

Did anyone not go on the March.?

Yes. A lot stayed behind and they survived.

How many days were you on the March?

Three or four days.

30:00

Do you remember where you were liberated?

Yes , I remember. Neuremburg. I remember when I saw the first American.

Was there any food on the March? I don't think so.

When you got to t ? Robinsburg ?] did you get food?

I think once or something. I never think about food. When I came back I weighed 80 pounds. When I got there I weighed 106 pounds

Sometimes I think that is why I survived. Some people couldn't resist without... they had to eat.

When you were liberated you were living in a hospital? Yes. It was marvelous . Wonderful.

Were you ill?

A little. My stomach. On The March, we went through water and people were drinking it. I still have my dignity. Even now.I couldn't do that.

So, you feel that you were not sick because you did not drink the water on the March?

Yes.

[After liberation] I went to Belgium.

By train? By plane.

35:00

Did you look up your children?

I found friends at the airport. A Belgian man who was in business with us was there and the children were there.

So they were no longer with the same family? No. My daughter was sixteen. She was the mother of the family.

Did they recognize you?

My older ones did . But not my little boy. My reunion was very sad.

My daughter met an American boy. She had put something away[in hiding] and she went to pick it up after the war. He was there and he said, " Do you speak English?l~, and she said, "Of course".

When I came, they got married. That's the way I came to the United States.

When did you find out about your husband? Did you know he died on the March?

Somebody told me.

Did you stay in Belgium for a while before coming to the United

States? Yes. I had merchandise and I tried to sell it. I never got my original property returned. They gave us some[restitution].

40:00

Were you able to sell your property before coming to the United States? No. The man who [? takes care of those things ?] was Danish. I had the suspicion that maybe he had denounced us.

How was life in New York? I was working. Then I got an apartment. I was introduced to my second husband. We were married twenty years.

Where are your children? Two are in New York. One in Phoenix.

How many grandchildren? Seven.

Do you think this tragedy could happen again? With the world situation as it i~?
Who can tell. It could happen in Germany. I think it could happen anywhere. Don't you?

The German jews were so happy there. Israel wants more jews to come... but they are German citizens.