

Good morning, Mrs. Nelson.

Good morning.

We would like you to tell us when you were born, and the town you were born. Please tell us.

OK. I'm Mollie Nelson. I was born in Poland, MÅ,awa, August 5, 1920.

Can you tell us your maiden name and the names of your parents?

Yes. My maiden name is Malka Bressler. My father's name was [PERSONAL NAME] And mother's name was [? Eta ?] Bressler.

How many sisters and brothers were there in your family?

We were a family of 9.

Can you tell us names of your sisters and brothers?

Yes. My little sister was, her name was Rivka, and then [? Hinda, ?] [? Tamela, ?] Yanke [? Josela, ?] [? Loka ?] [? Lila, ?] in Yiddish you say [YIDDISH].

That's fine.

Then myself, [? Malka. ?] [INAUDIBLE]

That's fine. What kind of schooling did you have?

I had public school. And I was going to start a gymnasium. But then the war broke out in September 1, 1939.

When you went to school, did you associate with non-Jewish children at all?

No, just Jewish.

No? Was it Polish public school?

It was Polish.

So the neighborhood you lived in was mostly--

Jewish. In the beginning it was Jewish. But in 1937, we moved. We had our property. And we sold the property, and we moved to a new neighborhood. It was Jewish and non-Jews.

Did you have any association in this neighborhood with any Polish children?

Well, yes. I was going to school with them.

Did you ever feel persecuted or--

Yes.

Yes.

I was persecuted.

So tell us what happened and how did your family feel about the war coming in the prior years to the war.

Before the war, my father, we had a-- my father was a cap maker. And every few weeks, we were going out like we were renting a-- [INAUDIBLE], this from Gentile, the Gentile had it. And my mother was always going. Here, they call it a flea market. It was on Tuesdays and Fridays.

But when we went out to different cities, it took a week, starting Monday and my mother and father came back on Friday. Once in a while, she took us when we had vacation from school. This was till 1939. And the war broke out.

I remember MÅ,awa was near German border. Well, the first bomb fell on our city. I remember when the first Friday, we were running, myself and my sister, and two more, were running from our apartment to the streets-- in the town. And Polish soldiers stopped us. And asked me where to go. He wants to know someplace. And I didn't know where. He was going to shoot me. I said, I don't know where it is. He finally left.

Then I remember the Germans coming to each of the houses. They were taking-- they needed all kinds of linens and dishes. They took away from everybody.

Was this the Germans that did that?

Yeah.

So when you were invaded in 1939?

Yes, ma'am. In 1939.

What was your father's occupation before the?

A cap maker, a cap maker.

[? A cab ?] maker. And you had a comfortable--

Yeah, we were comfortable. We weren't rich, but we were not too-- just comfortable.

So how did-- then things continued with the German invasion. How did things go?

Well this was till just a few months later. It was in 1940. We had to go to a ghetto. Everybody, from all the oldest neighborhood, had to go to one place with a ghetto. And I remember when we moved into the apartment where we lived, they made a-- erected a wall.

I lived in a street with all the synagogues, all the synagogues. There were about three or four synagogues or five.

Was this still in your town?

Still in our town. And they erected a wall. And they put some broken glasses, so if somebody would go out, they hurt himself. And we were there until 1942. It was very bad. We didn't have enough food, they didn't give us. And a lot of people were going out outside, bringing something back. They took it away. And then they were killed.

How many did you live in an apartment?

How many?

We had to there were a lot of -- from they brought from other towns, because MÅ,awa was not a small town. So they

brought from the smaller towns to our town. We had to take in, I remember we took in about three people-- one elderly gentleman, and two more men, three.

Did your apartment fall into the ghetto area?

Yes.

It did?

Right there. Our apartment was right in the ghetto area, not far from the wall.

So you had to take in these people?

Yes we were sleeping on the floors and everything else.

Can you describe to us how life was in the ghetto?

I cannot describe, because it was bad, very bad.

Did they distribute any food at all?

We had to wait in a line for a loaf of bread, a long time. I remember my mother was going out to the bakery. She was waiting in line, till it came to her, she didn't have anymore. So a lot of days we went without any food. We just--

Was there any kind of work? Did any people work?

Yes. They took some young people out to work.

Did you ever?

No. I didn't work.

No, you never worked. So you were in the ghetto from 1940 to--

Till 1942. In November the 15th, November the 15th, before November 15, they took our parents, the children under age of 14, they took them to a-- I don't know how to say it. But it will make the flour, a mill.

A mill.

A mill

A flour mill.

A flour mill. They took all the fathers and mothers and children under 14 to that, to the flour mill. They kept them overnight, through the night, and in the morning we saw them walking all together. That's the last time I saw them.

Do you have any idea where they went?

They went straight to the gas chamber. They took them on the trains, are not regular trains, but the--

The freight train.

Freight trains.

Freight trains.

They were on the freight trains.

How long after that after that that you were--

After that, it took I think a day or two they took us, same train. And we arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau the 17th of November.

Were you together with any of your sisters or brothers?

All together with three sisters, two more sisters besides me. So younger went with my mother and father. We arrived in Birkenau. I remember, at night, at evening, evening. And they took us through to washing, to a big place, a shower, to take a shower.

Shower.

We took off all our clothes and a shower. And then they gave us some dresses, and some underwear. But I think what I couldn't understand, they took away our bra, brassiere.

Oh, yeah.

So when after this, we went. They assigned us to a block, so was one, two, three beds. I told her my sister, Helen, the Jewish name was [NON-ENGLISH], but in English Helen, and I told my other sister, Hindola. I said, you watch. And I'm going to do something.

At night, everybody slept. Because I knew if you don't have, it's very hard for a woman without a brassiere. It's cold. You can have as many clothes on, but you don't have this, it's terrible. So I said, I'm going to do something. You watch me. I took a blanket, and I throw three pieces. Then I to draw a string, and stretched it out and tied it. Oh, it was cold. Because in the morning, we had to go out to work.

And we didn't want to get separated. So we all got together all the time. But it was not-- we were not lucky. Because there were three different kinds of work. There's lighter work and harder work. And we worked together all three of us. We had to-- they assigned us to make highways.

But it took from my younger sister just two days, because we had to go out so far. And we were wearing from the Holland-- the wooden shoes. Some were open. Some were closed and tied.

My little sister had those tied shoes, not open. So she was a very delicate little girl. And her skin was rubbing in the back of her-- she couldn't put it on in the morning. And the zahlappell came. The third day, she couldn't put on her shoes. So I said, Hindola, take mine. Try mine. She couldn't, and my other sister too, told her to take mine. She told us, you go out to work. I'll stay just today. I'll go out the next day.

We were famous for three sisters, so the SS lady who was at work, she was watching us. She knew that we are three sisters. So she comes to me, and she says, where's your sister? I said, [NON-ENGLISH], she has little poor-- her skin is rotten. She couldn't put her shoes on. And she will be back tomorrow.

And she told me in German, [NON-ENGLISH].

Could you translate it?

I will. Yes. I'm so sorry. She's such a beautiful girl. Because she knew when she stayed in the block and she couldn't go out, every day was coming ambulances was coming to take all the dead and the sick people, and she knew that I won't see her the next day. So I couldn't work-- I mean, I had to work. We worked on the highways. We were putting stones,

and rocks, and everything.

It came [NON-ENGLISH], we're coming home, usually we're coming home, so you had to stop at the kitchen, outside the kitchen before you went into the block. That evening, I didn't stop. My sister didn't stop either. We ran up out to the block. And I was hollering, Hindola, Hindola. And a girl from our hometown that she was [? stubendienst. ?] [? Stubendienst, ?] she didn't have to go work outside. She was making the beds. She was like a maid.

And she says, you don't have Hindola no more. She voluntarily went to the-- to the ambulance. And that's the last time I saw her.

And we know where the ambulance went, right?

Straight to the gas chamber.

The gas chamber, yes.

The lady who told us that you don't have no more Hindola, they needed another girl to help them make the beds, and sweep the floors there. And she says, I'm going to try to take you out. It was good, so I wouldn't have to go outside in the snow and the ice. So she promised me. So one morning, we was staying almost by the gate to go out. She was running with another SS lady. And she pointed at me.

She's a [NON-ENGLISH] girl. I'm a clean girl. And she's [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] means that I can work hard.

Diligent.

She took me out to the block. It was very good because I didn't need to go outside no more. At that time, I can keep myself clean. The thing is a lot of people didn't take care of themselves. I mean there was no-- there was no water.

No sanitation.

No sanitation. I remember it was winter time and we didn't have no water. But there was a well. It was frozen. But the snow, what I did for my sister and myself, every night when we came home from work, I took first place, we were shaved twice. They shaved our hair twice.

What I did, I took off my. We had little babushkas, white. I took off the babushka from my sister and myself. And I went out in the backyard. And was washing it in the snow. And I hang it up on top of my bed. So every morning I had a clean babushka to put it on. That's why they took me out in the block to be a maid there.

Well, I had my sister still going out. I want to do something for her. So I thought, there was not enough room for another one, because everybody was healthy. But I took her out, to be on the outside, like to sweep outside. That's OK, so she could come inside. I was bringing out food, and I washed her clothes and everything. So she was feeling better also.

Did you have a little more food during this time?

Yes. At that time, I had more food. I can cook a little bit for ourselves. Yes. And every Thursday, came a big truck with food-- bread, margarine, all kinds for the kitchen. So we maids, we had some aprons. We had aprons, and then we put the bread and everything in take it in the kitchen. So we had enough food. They gave us some some food.

But when you were making the beds, was this in your block, or was this in a--

In the block.

In the block.

In the block. I was making the beds for everybody.

When you say making the beds, what was there? It was--

[LAUGHS] Our beds. It consisted of straw underneath, a blanket on top. No. No, we didn't have no pillows, and a blanket to cover up. That's all.

Did you have individual beds in this working camp?

Yes, individual.

Individual.

Very narrow beds, but individual beds.

Yeah. Can you remember the number of your lager that where you were in, in Auschwitz?

No.

No.

No.

So how long were you in this position?

Till '44, in 1944.

Were you always in this position, cleaning the barrack?

Well, for a year and a half, till '44. In '44 they took us out from the-- I guess the war was coming to an end. And they didn't want us in the same--

Camp.

--camp. So they took us out to take us-- when was this? In '45, block 45, he says. All right. And they want to put us on a train. But it was full. They were trying to take us to different concentration camps. But everything was full. There was no place for us.

So we were walking day and night. We were sleeping in the fields. We were sleeping on the steps on the German houses.

Were the guards with you?

Yes. Oh, yeah. The guards were with us. So whatever we can find some food, a potato, anything, when we stopped to relax a little bit, so we cook the potato. A lot of girls ate raw potatoes. I couldn't do it. I couldn't eat it. This was May 1945, we're going day and night for months. We came to Ravensbruck.

And I remember it was 12 o'clock. We were walking, and an SS on the horse stopped our guard. And they were talking. As they were talking, the guard on the horse disappeared. And then our guards told us, you see the white flag over there? I'm going to leave you. You go over there. And you're going to be--

He was a kind man.

Yes. You're going to be deliberated. So I told him, he's a kind man. You see, they had to be some kind people, otherwise we wouldn't be alive. So I told him, I remember in my own words, I told him come with us. And these over there were Americans. We were liberated by the American forces. We told him, come with us. We'll tell them that you were kind.

The minute I turned around, he disappeared. And we were liberated, unexpectedly. But it was May 1945.

This was near Ravensbruck?

Ravensbruck.

Ravensbruck.

Yeah.

And they were the Americans then that liberated you?

Yes.

How did you feel?

How did I feel? I don't know. I remember I had a little potato, I had some rucksacks. I don't know how in English is the-

A knapsack.

A knapsack, yeah, I had a potato and something else. I threw away right away. And we start walking. We went into the German houses. We told them that we were just liberated from concentration camps. Would you please give us some food and some clean clothes. We can take a bath. They did. They did. They gave us food. And we changed clothes. They gave us clothes. We didn't have no clothes.

And from that time on, we were walking day and night, also because there was no transportation to go back to Poland. Till-- we're walking. It was still deep in Germany. And we stopped. We stopped. It was we saw a camp, and Italian soldiers. There were soldiers, the Russian--

Russian army?

Yeah. They-- there were soldiers. They were Italian soldiers. They were in Russian camps. Because they were also prisoners. Prisoners of war. And we stopped there for a little while. We were there just about a few days. Then somebody told the Russians that we are Jewish, and we just got liberated from the concentration camp. He came, the one night, yeah, I remember the night.

He came over, and he says, there's no place for you. I know how much you went through. And he tell us to go. Tomorrow morning don't stay in the camp. And so we went. But we were walking. There was no transportation to go to Poland. I want to go back to MÅ,awa.

Finally, we came to Warsaw. And we walked. We slept at night in the houses, in German house. Yeah. And then in the daytime, we walk. You came to Warsaw.

How did Warsaw look? Was it bombed?

It was bombed, yes. Bombarded everywhere. And even from Warsaw to MÅ,awa was a long way. We walked again till Breslau. From Breslau, I don't know how in Polish, now Breslau. We got acquainted with two men that were also in concentration camp. And they were-- they lived not in my home town, but near, the town where Premier Ben-Gurion

was born, Plonsk.

Yeah, they said, I'm going to Plonsk. And I told them that we are from MÅ,awa. Come on. We'll take you. And they took us there to Plonsk.

So how did you go, also by foot walking?

No. They took us by car by car.

By car?

Yes. They were already in business after the liberation. They took us by car. From there we go walking, my sister and I, walking in the evening. It was still light. And we saw a man. He had a horse and buggy, stopped us. And he said in Polish, [POLISH].

Could you translate that?

Yes. Are you [POLISH]? Bressler is my maiden name. And in Polish [POLISH] too, is [? Bressler ?] plural. You're alive? Yes. Where do you want to go? Why did they ask us? See, my mother and father, they went out of town like a flea market. We hired those people that have the horse in the big buggy to put the--

Oh, so they remembered you?

Yes. They recognized us. But he had-- he said do you want to go to MÅ,awaÅ,? This was on Friday. And I said, yes. But I've got a sister. I mean my sister was right there. But I've got just room just for one person. So Helen says, well Malka, you go. So I went. He took us. He took me Friday.

When I came to MÅ,awa, all the people that were liberated, was on the Russian-- MÅ,awa was under Russian occupation. They gave everybody-- all the houses was bombed. People who lived there, so they gave them a hotel. They lived in a hotel.

So the gentleman who took me to MÅ,awa pointed, here's the hotel with all the liberated people. So I came in. And my husband is from-- in the same old town. And my sister was still Plonsk. So it was on Friday. And he was already-- he had some paperwork. He was a shoemaker. He was already well off. And he didn't let me go back for my sister.

He said, wait till Saturday. I go back with you. So we went back and took our sister. After about three months, I married my husband. But he had already a wife. He lost a wife and four children. I married in 1945. Sukkos, September.

How long did you stay in MÅ,awa?

How long? Till one night after we got married, till one night a few Polish soldiers came in, knocking on the door. They took my husband out, and two more men that were liberated also, took them to a park. And they wanted money. They wanted money.

If you're not going to give me the money, we'll kill you. That park, it used to be a park before the war. But then the war-- I guess Russian soldiers were killed there. So they made like a--

A memorial.

Memorial. That's where they took them. But my husband was a little older than the other two gentlemen. And he was smarter. And he says, come on. I'll give you the money. So he came back. We gave them all the money we had. And that night, we still have some money left. We hired a [? plane, ?] and we in and out, we left the same night.

Where did you go from there?



I go back to Germany. I couldn't stay in Poland.

Were you in a DP camp in Germany?

No.

Yeah.

No, in a town, [NON-ENGLISH]. At that time, I was already pregnant. I was pregnant. And now we went back to Germany. Actually, we went to Berlin, and from Berlin we were in the DP camp. Then from the DP camp, we were in another camp. They opened a new camp in Germany. We were there not long, a few days.

Then my husband had a nephew. He found out that we are alive, and he came and took us to Germany, to [NON-ENGLISH]. The name of the town. And that's where I had my son was born in Schwandorf. The town that his nephew took us was a small town. I wanted to have my son in a bigger city. So we had him in Schwandorf.

And you lived there for a while in Schwandorf?

We lived there from 1949, when a friend of ours, a neighbor left for the United States. And my husband had an uncle, he had one aunt in Kansas City, Missouri, one uncle in Saint Louis, and an aunt in Chicago. And the gentleman who left for the United States told him if you going to be in Chicago, I haven't got the address but find out whether there is a Springer, named Springer, lived there.

Sure enough after he left, after a few weeks, we got a letter from him. And that's fascinating because he was in the back yard where he lived, and he was talking that there is a [NON-ENGLISH]. My husband's real name was [NON-ENGLISH]. When we came to the United States, the uncle said, nobody could pronounce your name. I picked a name for you, Nelson. So nobody from our friends know the name. So the gentleman told him that I have a neighbor, a friend of ours his name is [NON-ENGLISH], but he's got an uncle here.

And he said, I'm his uncle. So it started. We got letters. And that Uncle called the aunt in Kansas City, Missouri and Saint Louis. Aunt from Kansas City brought us to the United States. And there was a that uncle, the aunt's husband, worked for a big company, a grain company. He was a German Jewish man. And he sponsored us to come to United States.

When we came, he told, bring your nephew and your niece to me, and I don't want you to go to a Jewish Federation. I'm going to take care of them. So he found my husband a job. And after, I didn't know ladies work here too. After two years, I went to work. My husband couldn't make a living in the beginning.

What kind of work were you doing?

I didn't know the language, the English language. I went to a factory for making coats and suits. And I was there for 30 years finally. After about 10 years, I was supervising, management till 1982.

Wonderful. Wonderful. And you lived in Kansas City?

In Kansas City, yes. Yeah. I was educated in Kansas City. And our son lives here in Phoenix, Moon Valley. We have two grandchildren. The girl is 17. The boy is nine. He's the only--

He's the only child. Yeah, he is in the car business.

And when did you decide to move to Phoenix?

My son lives here already eight years. And he wanted us to move to Phoenix. He says, why are you sitting over there?

We have just only one son. But I told him I've got a sister. I've got a sister in Kansas City.

Well, she's still--

The sister you came with?

Yes.

No I came before my sister. We came to the United States two days before 1950. My sister was still in Germany. But we had to wait five years to become a citizen. In 1955, we arranged for them to come. They came in 1956 with two sons.

So then always because we were together all the time, we were never separated. And in Kansas City we lived just a block apart. And--

I bet you miss her.

Yes. We call each other each Saturday evening, or Sunday. On Saturday, I call her that next Saturday. She calls me Sunday [INAUDIBLE]. She's got two sons.

I hope you enjoy living in Phoenix.

Yes. We love Phoenix. So my sister didn't like us to go. But I said, Helen, we have just one son. You got two sons here. And she doesn't want to leave Kansas City. So we came here, I we love it. We love it.

Mollie, we appreciate you telling us your story. It's a very heartwarming story. And I hope that it will help future history and historians to hear your experience. There's one thing that we worry about and we wonder if something like this could ever happen again.

It shouldn't happen. You have to be on the watch. You never should let it happen again, never [NON-ENGLISH]. It was a terrible war.

That's why it's important that you tell your experience and that other people may hear it, for the people who have to catch it won't go through, that it should never happen again. We never knew that we're going to be liberated, never. Never in our lives. They prepared already before they took us out. They prepared already the poison bread. But they didn't have a chance to give us, just a sheer miracle. You never knew that we were going to be alive.

Like every month, when we went to work, every morning, we had to take a big wagon, to take back to the camp, so many dead people. I remember one lady, a teacher. We were in the camp. In the morning we go out. She was kind of a frail lady. So she wouldn't stand up. And I hold held her one side, and my sister on the other side. But she couldn't walk. She couldn't pick the hard rocks, and with the shovels, and she was frozen to death.

Coming back to the camp I brought her back, a dead person. it was not just only one, every day. So it was a sheer miracle that you're alive.

Did you ever witness any personally where you saw people being killed in Auschwitz?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

I remember going day and night before the liberation. We were two sisters. We were two sisters, and two other two sisters. One was running for-- I don't know how to say it in the United States-- [NON-ENGLISH]. How would you say?

It's like a here a cantaloupe on the field, she was robbing for it. He shot her. It was just a few hours before the liberation.

I witnessed it myself.

She was trying to pick it from the field.

From the field. She ran out from the line. And I said to my sister, don't you go. She was going to run too. I said, don't go. Don't go. I didn't let her. I held her back. There was a lot of incidents.

During the evacuation, when you were walking a lot of people perished?

Oh, yes, a lot of people perished. They couldn't walk so far. Their legs don't-- they couldn't.

Did the SS man kill any that were weak and tired?

Yeah. That's right. He killed them, right where they were sitting, on the spot.

The one particular man that was so kind, was he kind in other ways too? When he told you about the white flag that you will be liberated, was he a kind man?

Yes. Yes I forgot to tell you. Before they took us out from Birkenau, we walked in German [GERMAN]. It's a--

Cabbage?

Cabbage.

A cabbage.

[NON-ENGLISH]

We walked a bit. We had some boots on, the--

Like galoshes?

Galoshes, big ones.

Yeah. Stomp on the [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah.

Yeah.

At that time, from Birkenau, we were walking every morning. And that's where we saw all the trains coming from Litzmannstadt and from Hungary.

With more refugees?

Yeah.

Yeah. And every morning was the bombardments. And when the siren was--

Sounded.

--sounded, we had to run back to Birkenau. And we were already laying, we were laying by the gate. I got a shrapnel right here from the bomb.

How were you treated? Were you treated for that shrapnel?

No. That's why I have a little hole. It was never treated.

It just healed up?

Just healed up by itself.

And you never got an infection?

No.

You're lucky.

Lucky.

And so this one German, was he with you for a long time, this one German guard?

No, no no. No, no. They were changing guards all the time.

Only during the evacuation?

Yes.

When you saw these transports coming in, you of course, knew what was waiting for them.

Yes, we knew exactly.

And did you ever see any of these people in the camps that were coming in with the transports?

No, no.

No?

No.

Well, thank you very much--

You're very welcome.

--for telling us your experience.

I must have missed a few things, but that's all I can remember.