

How about you? You want a level in the audio player?

No. I already checked the level.

OK. My name is Michael Weiss. And we're here with the National Council of Jewish Women on the Holocaust archive project to interview Mrs. Sally Rettman, who was a survivor of the Holocaust. I want to thank you, first of all, Mrs. Rettman, for participating in this very important project, which will someday have, we hope, some historical significance. Before we begin, I'd just like to get some background information on your current life, Mrs. Rettman. Would you tell us your name, please, and where you're living right now.

My name is Sally Rettman. I live in Cleveland, University Heights.

Where in University Heights do you live?

On Faversham.

And are you married, Mrs. Rettman?

I am married. Yes.

And what is your husband's name?

My husband's name is Jack.

And is Mr. Rettman a survivor also?

He's also a survivor from the Holocaust. Yes.

OK. And did you meet Mr. Rettman after the war or before?

No. During the war. We know each other before the war, but we got married during the war.

Oh, so you've known him right through the Holocaust up until the present time?

Yes.

OK. Well, we'll get back to that in a little while. But first let's get some more background. Do you have any children?

I have two daughters.

What are their names?

My older daughter's name is Leah. And the youngest one is Shirley.

And how old is Leah?

Leah is 37, and Shirley is 32.

OK. Are they living in Cleveland?

They both live in Cleveland, both married. Leah has two children, and Shirley has three children.

So you have five grandchildren?

Right. Lovely, too.

You don't look old enough to be a grandmother.

Yeah. Thank you.

If I'm not being too impolite to ask, what age are you?

I am 61.

You're 61 years old? You look much younger than that. On that note, why don't we get to the gist of today's interview, which is the Holocaust and its effect on you and your family. Where are you from originally?

I'm originally from Poland, from a city by name Bedzin.

Can you spell that for us, please?

B-E-N-D-Z-I-N. Bedzin.

It's pronounced "Benjin" in English?

Yes.

Where is Bedzin?

It's in Poland. It's close by Silesia. It's not too far from the German border.

OK. Now you were born there. What year were you born?

1923.

OK. Is Bedzin a small town, or what we might refer to today as being a shtetl?

No. I wouldn't say a shtetl. But it's not a big town like you would say here in this country. It was around 80,000, the population.

Was there a large Jewish population in Bedzin?

Very large Jewish population. It was like maybe 80% Jews.

OK. Was Bedzin a-- would you call it what we would call a suburb of a larger city, or was it--

No. No, it wasn't.

It was an independent city on its own?

And independent city, it was not a suburb.

OK. And it was located in Silesia, you said?

Silesia, yeah.

Is Silesia a state?

It's a slonsk.

Pardon me.

Slonsk. Used to, before the First World War, used to belong to Germany.

OK. So this had been part of Germany before World War One? And after World War One it became incorporated into the nation that we now know is Poland?

Poland, yeah.

OK. Now, did you speak Polish or German?

I speak Polish because I used to go to Polish school.

OK. So your native tongue is Polish and not German.

Polish. Yeah.

You were born, again, in what year?

In 1923.

OK. And in 1923, when you were born, do you know what your father was doing for a living?

Yeah. My father was in the textile business.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have six sisters.

You have six sisters? No brothers?

No brothers.

OK. And did your sisters survive the Holocaust?

Three of them.

Three of them survived the Holocaust?

Yeah. My oldest sister and my youngest one.

OK. And you lost three of your sisters during the Holocaust?

Three. Yes.

What about your parents?

My parents perished during the war, in Auschwitz.

Your father, what was your father's name?

Avrum.

Avrum. And what was your maiden name?

Neier.

How do you spell that?

N-E-I-E-R.

Your father was Avrum Neier.

Yes.

And your mother's name was?

Maiden name?

No, what was her first name, her full name?

Leah.

Oh, her name was Leah?

OK. Your sisters that are still living, are they in the United States today?

Yes. One is in New York. My oldest sister lives in New York, and my youngest one lives in Chicago.

OK. Were you-- you were one of the middle children.

I was the fourth one.

You were the fourth daughter. OK. And did you go to school in Poland?

Yes. I was in school in Poland, and I finished Polish school.

OK. You went to a Polish, what we would refer to as a public school?

Public school, yeah.

OK. It was a school that was open, then, to the general population. It wasn't a religious school.

No. After the public school, we went to private, religious school.

And when was that? How old were you when you began at the private, religious school?

It was different. Some children started by age 10, and some by 11, and some by 8, depends.

So in other words, public school lasted until you were about 10 years old?

No. Public school we went from 7 to 14.

OK. But you began private school--

Around 10.

Around 10 years of age?

Why did you start going to a private school?

Just for Jewish education.

OK. Now did you-- do you recall where you lived in Bedzin?

Yes.

Do you recall the name of the street?

Yeah. [POLISH]. That's mean [POLISH] 19.

That was the name of the street?

Of the street, yeah.

Do you remember the address on the name of the street?

Yeah. Yeah. 19.

19?

Yeah. The building was 19.

Have you been back there since the war?

I was back there in 1945, after the liberation. But I didn't go into the house. I couldn't go in. I was a very short time there, maybe two or three weeks.

OK. Well, we'll get back to that in a moment. You were a while a young woman by the time Hitler came into power. Do you recall your first knowledge of Adolf Hitler?

Yeah. In 1939, in September-- I think it was in September, when the German walked into Bedzin.

Into Bedzin?

Yeah. And we had to evacuate from our house, because our house was a corner house by a bridge. And it was dangerous, so the Polish soldiers came in and told us we have to leave because we have to demolish the bridge. The Germans shouldn't be able to come in. So we evacuate only for two or three days. We came back, which was-- that time, the bridge was damaged. A little bit our house was damaged too. And we stay in our house maybe a few months.

After that, we have to go. We were shipped to the ghetto.

OK. You were shipped where?

To the ghetto.

To the ghetto.

Which was in a Polish section.

Was that a Polish section of Bedzin?

Yes.

OK, but let's go trace it back a little bit. How old were you in 1939?

16.

OK. Was prior to 1939-- of course, we know that Hitler came into power in 1932, I believe it was in Germany-- were you aware of Adolf Hitler at that time, when you were younger?

A little bit, not too much.

You don't recall your first-- the first time you heard the name Adolf Hitler? It meant nothing to you?

I remember my parents used to talk, you know, what's going on in Germany. And they were a little bit scared because he was so powerful. And at that time, they took a part of [PLACE NAME], which was Poland at that time. So we were scared a little bit they shouldn't go farther. And didn't took long in 1939. The second day or third day during the war the Germans were already in Poland.

OK. So you recall prior to 1939 that your parents expressed, at least to each other, if not to you, some concern about Adolf Hitler? That's right. Right.

OK. So by 1939, you were already aware?

Completely aware, what's going on.

You were aware of Adolf Hitler's threats to the Jewish population? OK. Do you recall any incidents prior to 1939, in your home or outside of your home, of antisemitism?

Yes. Because in 1938, it was short before Christmas, the Polish people were also not this nice to the Jews in Poland, especially in our town. They used to put all kind of signs on the Jewish stores-- don't buy by the Jews. And we start to feel a little bit this.

OK. This was prior to 1939 then?

Yeah.

Were these the first episodes of antisemitism that you can recall?

No. It was before also. Like one incident in 1938, it was like us little pogrom. And there was a lot of fighting in the city. And I remember, my mother was in a different town. It was a little bigger town, like Katowice. And my mother was supposed to arrive in the evening, and we had to send our maid with our janitor from the house to pick up because we were afraid to go to the station.

Why were you afraid to go to the station?

Because there were-- the Polish people were not as nice to us at that time.

You stated you had your maid and your janitor. Were these people that worked for you in your own home?

Yes.

OK. Were they Jewish people?

No.

Was there a lot of resentment, did you feel, in Poland because you were Jewish and because you had non-Jews working for you?

I was maybe too young to feel that way. But later on, during the war, I did.

Did you ever meet the people that worked for you after the war or during the war?

No. Not the ghetto.

So once the war began in 1939, you lost track of these people. Do you recall their names?

I remember our maid's name was Mania. Yeah.

And how long did she work for your family?

12 years. Yeah.

So you pretty much knew her most of your life.

That's right.

And you completely lost track of her?

Completely.

And never even heard from her after the war or since then?

No.

You don't know if she's living or dead today?

No, I don't.

OK. What kind of a textile business did your father own? Was it a store or a manufacturing business?

No. He used to have people what they used to sell to private people. We used to have this in our house. Yeah.

So he worked out of your home. He didn't have a store front?

Right.

And how long was he in that business?

As long as I remember.

And what happened to that business in 1939?

Everything was taken away from us.

OK. You were 16 then. Who took it? Who did you think took it away?

When we went to the ghetto in 1940-- no, pardon me. We went to the ghetto in 1945-- '43. The beginning of 1943, we went to the ghetto. But when the times when we used to live still in our house, we were only allowed to go out, like, to 7 o'clock. Jews, the business, everything was taken away. So we had this little bit of merchandise we used to sell and make a living from that.

So that between 1939 and 1943, you were still living at your home?

No, 1943 we were out from our home to a section where all the Jews have to be together in one section.

OK. But before 1943, you were still living at home.

For a very short time.

OK. Where did you go? Did you go directly from your home, when you left your home, to the ghetto?

No, not to the ghetto. We went to sections where all the Jews were concentrated, before we went to the ghetto. And to the ghetto we went in 1942.

OK. So that after the war began in September 1939, you left your home.

Yeah.

Do you recall what date you left your home on?

You mean the--

The date of the year, 1939?

This was in the summer time in 1942-- '41, end of '41 and the beginning of '42. We used to be in a very-- you know, this was like the slum section in our town.

That's where you were forced to move to?

Yes.

OK. Now when I used the word forced, were you forced out of your home?

Yes.

How were you taken from your home?

We had to move out, leave the furniture, everything, just whatever you can take out.

How was your family instructed to leave the home? Did police come into the home?

Police came and said you have to leave in a certain amount of hours. And we left.

Do you recall how many police there were?

I think at that time, in the house was, like, three or four policemen for the whole building.

Were these uniformed policemen?



Uniformed police, yes.

Were they Polish or German?

German.

They were German officers, German army officers or German policemen?

German police.

Were they-- do you know what division of the German government they represented?

No, I don't.

Storm troopers or-- you didn't know what the--

No. I don't remember.

OK. So these German officers told you you had so much time to leave your home?

Were you allowed to pack your clothing or belongings of any kind?

We are only-- that's what we were wearing on our body. And we try to take with, a little bit bundles and things like that. And we went to a small apartment, where we were, like, one of two or three families in one house-- one room.

Do you recall where it was went you went?

Yeah. We went that time-- you mean the name of the street?

The name of the street.

It was very, very low section. And the Polish people moved out and moved in in our house.

So that prior to your being moved there, there were Polish people living in--

In our home.

OK. In the home you moved to.

Do you know what became of the home that you lived in before the war?

It's still there.

Do you know if other people were moved into it or began living in it after you left it?

Yes. They're still there.

Were there Polish people living in it?

Polish people occupied the whole building.

Did you own the home?

This was our own house, yeah.

Your father owned the home?

Yes. This was my mother's parents' house.

And was it a private home or an apartment building?

It's an apartment-- was like 23 tenants. It's a big building.

And before the war, you received, or your parents received rent from the tenants of the building?

Yes.

Were all the tenants of the building Jewish?

Yes.

And they were all forced to leave?

Yes.

And your father, as far as you know, was never offered any compensation for the building?

Nothing. No.

OK. Now the place that you were sent to, was it also an apartment building?

Yeah. It was a very small, little-- small little houses, very small.

So it was you and your mother and--

And our sister-- all my sisters. And one sister was married with a child. She was with us too.

So you had-- let me see, that would be six, eight, nine-- nine adults and one small child?

Yeah.

And how many bedrooms was the apartment that you moved to?

One room.

One room?

That's all.

One large room with--

One large room.

Did it have a kitchen or--

Everything in the one room.

Was there a bathroom in the apartment?

Downstairs on the courtyard.

And do you know how many other families lived in this building?

There was maybe 10, 15 families.

And they were all Jewish families?

All Jewish families.

Were they families, from your prior apartment?

No, mixed.

So you didn't know a lot of the people that you were living with?

That's right.

OK. You lived there for-- until, you said, about 1942 or 1943.

Yes.

OK. While you were living there, were going to school?

No. School, the minute the German occupied our town, the Jewish schools were closed. We didn't have no schools anymore.

And you weren't allowed to go to a public school?

No.

OK. Now tell us what a normal day was like in your apartment, that one room that the nine of you shared.

It was not easy because it was everything so crowded. At that time, the Germans opened some factories, where we were working, were forced to go to work in the morning. We used to sew uniforms for the German soldiers.

When you say "we," who are you referring to?

All the young people had to go to work.

OK. And that included you?

And the sisters.

Your sisters? All five of your sisters?

Even my mother went to work.

How old was your mother at that time?

My mother, when she was taken to Auschwitz, she was 48 years old.

And what year was that?

In the '43.

OK. So she was about 47, 48 when she was put to work in these factories sewing uniforms. Were you paid for the work?

No.

What did your father do?

My father was already dead at that time, passed away.

Oh. When your father pass away?

In '42.

And how did he pass away?

Sick.

And do you know what kind of sickness your father--

No, I don't remember.

Do you recall, was he sick for a long time?

No, he was a young fellow.

How old was he?

Maybe two years old from my mother.

And it was just a sudden illness that took his life?

Yeah. Was it a heart attack or something of that nature?

We didn't know at that time.

Were you able to take your father to a hospital or a doctor?

No. No. Do you recall-- it must have been quite traumatic for you, but do you recall if he-- did he pass away in the apartment or outside?

In the apartment.

OK. What did you do when your father passed away? Was there anybody to call?

Yeah. We had the Jewish-- how you call this? Like here, the Jewish Federation. So we had the-- like, they call it the gemeinde, the Jewish gemeinde. And this was-- we still buried him on the-- a matter of fact, my grandma passed away at that time too. And we buried her on the Jewish cemetery.

OK. Where was the Jewish cemetery?

In our town.

Was it near the area where you were forced to live?

Where I used to live.

OK, where your original home was.

Yes.

Were you allowed by the authorities to go to the cemetery?

Yeah. Yeah.

To bury your father?

Were you religious, observant Jews?

Yes.

I know that there's quite stringent requirements as far as burial in the Jewish tradition. Were you allowed to follow those?

Not exactly.

OK. I know, for instance, the sitting shiva for one week-- were you permitted, were you able to sit shiva for your father?

We were allowed, yeah.

So for a week you didn't go to work?

Yes.

OK. And then--

Not exactly a week, maybe we were sitting maybe two or three days.

How did you support the-- or how was the family supported during these years?

It was very hard. We used to sell. We had a little bit jewelry. We had a little bit clothes. We used to sell this. And this is the way we survive.

Who did you sell to?

Some people came, and so even we used to sell this to the Polish people. They used to say, now it's our turn to have this stuff. So we sell this sometime even for food.

Was that your only source of income during these times?

Yeah, only the-- only way.

How did you obtain food and necessities?

It was very hard. From necessities was-- the only necessity was, that time, food. That's all what was on our mind.

So you weren't so much concerned even about what you might have considered necessities before the war. It was just

you filling your stomach and getting something to eat?

That's exactly.

Were there grocery stores?

Used to be, but not later on. The Jewish people didn't have no business. They took away all the business from the Jewish people.

So where did you get your food?

There was a Jewish gemeinde, where used to give some rations. Like, we used to have some potatoes, some flour, and things like that. And where we used to work, once a day we used to get something to eat there too. Yeah, like a slice of bread and a black coffee, at work.

The Jewish gemeinde then, is that-- am I pronouncing that right?

Yeah.

Was that a quasi-governmental unit?

That was only by Jewish people.

OK. And were those the people that you always took your problems to if you had any?

Yes.

Who were the people that were in this organization?

Most of it were the Jews, like intellectual people and people what they were a little bit on the higher level, what they could get in touch with the German. Because if the German need something, so they always used to get through the gemeinde, not to us. See, like dealing something, everything went to the Jewish gemeinde.

Were they also able to get money to you or--

No. No money. No.

What happened to all your belongings at the house that you left? You just left them behind and never--

Never.

--never saw them again?

No.

Do you recall, how many times a day were you able to eat in those days? I'm talking about before you went to the ghetto.

Maybe twice a day.

And what did your meals consist of?

Soup, piece of bread, maybe once a week a piece of meat, if we were able to buy someplace.

Did you have cooking facilities?

Cooking facilities? Yeah, we had a stove.

OK. Now then in 1943, I take it that this area that you're describing to us was not called a ghetto. Or was it?

In 1943, we all were forced to the ghetto.

OK. So you were taken from this place in Bedzin and taken to--

The ghetto.

Was the ghetto in Bedzin also?

The ghetto was outskirts of the city. OK. I'm calling it-- it's Bedzin.

Bedzin, yeah.

OK. In the area you were living in prior to being taken to the ghetto, were you allowed to leave that area during the day or night?

Yeah. Yeah.

So you could go outside of that area freely, to and from?

Freely, yes.

OK. Now when you were taken to the ghetto, how did your life change?

We went to work in the same place, but we were only allowed to go-- like for instance, in the morning, we had to be on a certain place, concentrated. And we went escorted by police.

Were these German police, Polish?

All German police. Yeah.

All German? OK. Was your family unit still intact at the time you were taken to the ghetto?

Sometimes.

What do you mean sometimes?

Like for instance, in the Jewish gemeinde, we used to have also the Jewish police. And the Jewish police sometimes used to take, sometime in the ghetto, to keep order, sometimes they took us to work too. Because without escort, we were not allowed to go to work. And you were not allowed to leave the ghetto. This was the place only for the Jews, which were the facilities in the homes were terrible.

OK. Did your family live together in the ghetto?

Yes.

So it was, now that your father was gone, there was your mother and your five sisters?

Yeah. And one married sister with her husband and the child.

How old was the child?

The child was three years old.

OK. Did the husband survive the war?

My brother-in-law survived the war. Yeah.

What about the child?

The child and my sister, not.

So he survived the war, but his wife passed away during the war. OK. Did you live together in the ghetto?

Yeah.

And again, would you describe the quarters that you were given.

Like, for instance, before we went to the ghetto in 1943, at that time I married my husband. So I was not with my parents, with my family I mean. I was living with my husband's family, also in the ghetto.

Did you marry your husband before you went to the ghetto?

Before.

OK. How old were you when you married your husband?

Not quite 20.

OK. And was your husband living in the same building you were living in at the time you married him?

No.

OK. When did you meet him?

In 1941, because my husband was-- when the war broke out, my husband was in the Polish Army. And when he came back from the Polish Army after the war, so we started to date each other and to see each other. And we decided in 1943 we will get married.

So you got married prior to going to the ghetto?

Yeah.

Did you know at time that you would be going to the ghetto?

Yes, we knew. A matter of fact, when we went to the office where we the guy what gave us the license, marriage license, we were escorted also by the Jewish police because this was already out of the Jewish section.

OK. So prior to going to the ghetto, there were already restrictions on your right to travel around.

Absolutely-- certain sections only.

When you say you went to get a marriage license, were you required to get a civil marriage license?



Yes.

Rather than just a religious marriage.

Yeah.

OK. Do you recall the date on which you were married to your husband?

In January 1943.

And then when did you go to the ghetto?

Three months later.

So that you were married and living with him at the time that you went to the ghetto.

Yes. I used to live, at that time already, with my husband's family.

Oh. So you moved in with his family? Did he have a large family?

Yeah, in the ghetto. Was a sister with her husband, and a brother, an older brother, and my mother-in-law, my husband and myself, his uncle with his wife and two daughters. We live in one room.

Again in one room.

Right.

This was before the ghetto?

This was in the ghetto.

Oh, in the ghetto. What kind of a room was it? Was it an apartment building?

No, it was straight with the ground. It was like a shack.

A little shack?

Yes.

Were there toilet facilities?

No, in the field.

Once you got into the ghetto, how did life change for you and your husband from what it had been?

It changed drastically because it was everything so combined. And that's all what you saw is only one street. And the ghetto from Bedzin and Sosnowiec was not too far away.

What's Sosnowiec?

Another city. Yeah. They used to call this twin sister city. And the house where we used to live was like in a valley, down. It was terrible. There was no facilities whatsoever.

Were there other houses or shacks around?

Around, yeah.

And Jews were living in all of them?

Yeah. Some people used to make little shacks, just from a piece of metal and two, three mattresses. And it was a room.

You mean, people used to tack these together themselves?

Together.

Were all the people living within this ghetto Jewish people?

Only, yeah.

Only Jews?

Only Jews.

OK. Do you have any idea how many Jews were living there?

It was quite a big amount of Jewish people because, at that time, when we went to the ghetto, it was a lot of people and a lot of young people sent out already to labor camp.

OK. During the time that you were moved out of your home, between 1939 and the time you moved into the ghetto, did there come a time when you actually feared that your life was in danger?

In the ghetto, yes. In the ghetto when we lived, we saw our life is in danger because we sometimes didn't know what day the Germans would come and start to arrest us. Because, like for instance, they used to say to the Jewish gemeinde, I need today 150 people, young people to send out to labor camp.

Who, the Jewish gemeinde?

The Germans said this to the Jewish gemeinde, because they didn't come direct to us. So you never know what date or what night they will come and drag us out from the bed and go. Many times we used to go, and instead of to go to bed, we went to the bunker.

What's the bunker?

Bunker, we were hidden there.

OK. What were you hiding from?

From? Because at night, when they come into the house, they would take-- see, young people, they would take us out. And they would send you out, and you didn't even know where.

Who would come and get you?

German.

There were German soldiers again?

Soldiers, yeah.

They spoke in German?

Only German, yeah.

Did you understand any German?

Yes.

Did you have any conversations with a German soldier?

No. No.

You never, for instance, saw a German soldier standing somewhere and began a conversation with him?

No. No.

Why not?

Because we were afraid.

What were you afraid of at the time?

Because he was always with his gun in his hand. And if you would say one word what you're not supposed to, that's it. This was the end of it.

You didn't speak any German or understand German?

I did understand. I speak a little bit, not too-- not fluently, but I understand.

Did the German soldiers ever speak to you?

No, just they came in and then they say, in German, hurry up. Get dressed. Out. Out.

Macht schnell?

Macht schnell.

OK. So basically, their vocabulary, as far as you're concerned, was pretty limited to--

Exactly.

--to giving orders or things of that nature. You just told us that the Jewish gemeinde was told to gather up so many Jews every once in a while. Did you know where these Jews were going?

We know they go, some to-- some of them they were sending to labor camps. Some of them were sending to Auschwitz-- depends.

When was the first time you learned of Auschwitz?

The first time-- when I went to the ghetto, I knew already from Auschwitz.

How did you first hear of Auschwitz?

Because my mother's sister, which is my aunt, she was sent to Auschwitz. Yeah.

Did you know what became of her?

No. I knew when she went to Auschwitz she is not anymore alive.

OK so that, even at that early time, you knew that Auschwitz meant--

Death.

--potential death.

That's right.

OK. How did you learn that your aunt went to Auschwitz?

When I learned?

How?

How? My aunt went with a whole shipment of people to the station. And the Jewish police used to see on the trains written, "Auschwitz."

Oh. So that's how you knew where they were going. It was on the-- the first cab, the destination was Auschwitz.

That's right.

So was there any communications between, say, your immediate family and other members of your family, say cousins or aunts and uncles?

No.

You were unable to communicate with anybody?

Even if you had relatives in a different city, you never were able to communicate with each other.

You had no way of writing them through the mail.

No. No mail. For Jewish people was no mail, no telephones, nothing.

No telephones, uh-huh, so that most of your information, I'm assuming now, that most of your information then would have come through word of mouth.

That's exactly.

Now, when you went to the ghetto, you stated already that you continued working in the--

Yeah. The company what used to call Rossner.

That was the name of the company?

Company, yeah, Rossner. And we used to work there. We used to make uniforms.

And you continued doing that while you were in the ghetto?

Yes.

And was your mother still working at the time?

No.

Where was she?

My mother was just in the house.

She was allowed to stay in the house?

Yeah. Yeah.

Did there ever come a time when members of your family were taken away?

My sister what is now in Chicago, she was taken to the labor camp before we went to the ghetto.

Oh, so she didn't go to the ghetto with you.

No. She with us when we left their house, our private home, to the Jewish section. She was taken from there because each family had to give, at certain times, amount of people for the labor camp. Each family has to give somebody. So when the police came, and she was in the house, they took her.

The police came to your home? This was in the Jewish section? And they-- do you remember what they said to you? Were they speaking in German or in Polish?

In German. In German.

And they conveyed to you that they wanted to take one member of your family?

Yeah. Yeah.

How did you select a-- did you select a member?

Because she was in the house at that time. She was the only one there, so they just took her away.

Took her. That's right.

OK.

And we know she was sent to Greenberg.

Where is that?

This is not too far from Breslau. It was--

Is that in Poland also?

No, this was in Germany. Yeah, this was in Germany.

So Greenberg's in Germany.

Yeah, Greenberg, Silesia.

How did you come to find out that she ended up there?

Because from that camp she used to write to us, to the Jewish gemeinde. So we knew she is there.

How did she-- I mean, she actually wrote letters to you that somehow--

Well, letters-- she sent us, maybe altogether, maybe two postcards.

How old was she at the time?

She was, at that time, 14.

And you were-- she's your younger sister?

Yeah.

OK. Now, in the ghetto, you were together with your husband and his family?

Yeah.

Were they working also?

No. My husband was working.

Where was he working?

My husband used to have a little factory. He used to make all kind of tools for farmers. But when the Germans came in, they took away the factory, and he had a Treuhander.

A toy handler?

A Treuhander. This means he was only allowed to work, and the Treuhander used to take care. It belongs to the German. Yeah.

Were you paid for the work that you did?

My husband used to get paid. Yeah.

They paid him in Polish currency?

No, in German.

In German marks?

German. Yeah, marks. And he used to work there. He used to go-- this was outskirts of the ghetto.

So that was outside of the ghetto.

Yeah.

How did he get outside of the ghetto?

Also by police.

So they had escorts, kind of.

Escorts, right.

Was the ghetto enclosed?

Enclosed, yeah.

How was it enclosed?

With wires. Yeah.

With barbed wire?

Barbed wires, yes.

Were there soldiers at all times?

No. No. Because we knew we were not allowed to get-- because if you get out of the ghetto, you would be shot.

Well, were they-- in other words, they were watching outside the ghetto.

Absolutely.

Were there searchlights or spotlights?

No. No.

Do you know of anyone who tried to escape from the ghetto?

No.

Nobody tried?

No because we went to work, and we came home from work. And this was the end of it. Yeah.

So you just-- basically it sounds like you lived day to day.

That's exactly.

When did you finally-- did you finally leave the ghetto?

The ghetto was, in 1943, it was the final cleanup of the ghetto, the final solution.

OK. You just used a very important term, "final solution."

Because at that time, it was supposed to be the whole ghetto and the city, judenrein.

Judenrein? You're saying rid of Jews.

That's right. So my mother was in the bunker at that time with her sister and the child. And they all were taking out from the ghetto, from that bunker. And they were sent--

Where was the bunker?

In our house, under the floor.

Was this a bunker that you had dug yourselves?

We had did ourselves this. Yeah.

And you thought you could hide there.

Yeah.

But the Germans found it somehow and took your mother, you said, and your sister?

And the child. Yeah.

Where were you at the time?

By my in-laws.

OK. And what about your other sisters, where were they?

My one sister, my oldest one that she's from-- what lives now in New York, she was at that time working on a night shift. So when she found out in the morning, when she came home, the bunker was emptied out, she was hysterical.

When did you see her then?

The following day.

You saw your sister the following day.

The following day.

That's when you learned that your mother had been taken away?

Yeah. The whole part of that ghetto was completely wiped out.

It was completely rounded up?

Yeah. Where did your sister stay after that?

She came with me to my mother-in-law, which we decided at that time, we will go to the Jewish gemeinde. And we will register ourselves, we would like to go to Greenberg, to the same labor camp where my sister younger is. So my husband, my sister-- my oldest one-- we went to that camp. And we were there working because we didn't have anybody anymore in the house.

But you went to the camp at Greenberg?

Greenberg Schlesien. Yeah.

OK. This was after your mother was taken away?

My whole family.



OK. So there was now only you and your sister left, of your immediate family. Did you know what became of your mother at that time?

No. I know everybody went, that time, to Auschwitz.

And was the sister that was taken, she's gone too? She's--

With the child?

Mhm.

Everybody.

They're dead now?

My sister, the youngest one, which is a twin sister from my sister from Chicago, she's gone too.

OK. They were, the ones that-- the mother and the-- your mother and your sister and the small child that were taken, you never saw them again?

No. No.

You never heard from them?

Never. Only my brother-in-law survive, my sister's husband.

He wasn't in the bunker at the time?

He was in the bunker, and he went to Auschwitz. But he was working in Birkenau. Which he was working, he survive.

Oh, so he was taken with him but managed to survive? Have you ever thought about why he survived and the others didn't?

Because they took him to work. And my sister didn't want to give away the baby, so she went with the baby. My next sister older from me, she didn't want to leave my mother. So she went with my mother.

Mhm. Mhm. So the only reason your brother-in-law survived was because he was a man and could do some work?

Work. Not everybody survived. You work so long till you-- as long you can take it.

Now then you went to the Jewish gemeinde to try and get out of that ghetto. How did the Jewish gemeinde get you to Greenberg?

There was-- I had to wait in Sosnowiec, where was a place where we were waiting for certain groups to go in certain camps. So I was sent there. And I stayed there with my sister and my husband for three or four days.

In Greenberg?

No.

Or in Sosnowiec?

In Sosnowiec. And from there we found out in two days is going a shipment to the Greenberg, to the labor camp. And

we went there because I knew my sister is there.

So while you were waiting in Sosnowiec to go somewhere, whatever, any place that became available, I mean was-- you knew that you would be safe in Greenberg, or did you think you would be safe in Greenberg?

I know my sister is there, and it's a labor camp. And as long I would be able to work, I would be alive.

So did you work in Greenberg when you got to Greenberg?

Yes. I work in Greenberg.

Was Greenberg a ghetto?

No, it was a factory. It was a factory, and it was a big camp. We were like 1,500 girls there.

So you were staying in a-- was it a concentration camp?

First it was a labor camp, then became a concentration camp.

When did it become a concentration camp?

Because there was a camp for girls and men. My husband was in the same camp. But we didn't see each other.

You were separated from each other?

Separated, yeah. But sometime at work, when he passed through in the factory, maybe I saw him. But we were not allowed to talk to each other. And that time, my husband-- they took all the men, and the shipped to [NON-ENGLISH], to a men's camp. There where my husband was transferred.

From Greenberg?

From Greenberg.

And from that on, I didn't hear till I was liberated if he's alive or he's dead and what happened to him.

Do you remember when he was transferred out of Greenberg?

He was transferred out from Greenberg, I will tell you exactly. It was like in '44. In '44, yeah.

How did you get from "Soskowitz"-- am I pronouncing that correctly?

Yeah, Sosnowiec.

Sosnowiec-- to Greenberg?

By train. We were waiting there for a whole group. And we went, I think, maybe 150 people, maybe 120 people.

Just crowded on a train?

Yeah.

What kind of a train was it? Can you describe the train for us?

A plain train. It was not like a train, you would say, a train with seats. It was--

Just a car, an open--

A car, that's right. Not open.

OK. But it was-- there were no seats in the car, right?

Yeah, right.

And how many of you were on the car at the same time?

We were maybe 40, 50 people.

Men and women?

No.

Just men-- or just women?

Separate.

OK. So they separated you before you arrived at Greenberg.

Matter of affect, in Breslau, which is one station before Greenberg, we had to change. I don't know why, but we had to stay there and wait an hour. And my husband saw me from far away. And he said something to me. Came a policeman-- that time, the first time my husband was hit from the policeman. He hit him very--

Your father was hit by--

My husband. Yeah, he was hit by him because he said something to me.

You saw this happen?

Yeah.

This is where again?

In Breslau. Yeah.

On the way to Greenberg?

Yeah.

So you were on separate cars, and then you had to get off the car to get onto another train.

That's right.

And you never found out why.

No.

But while you were there, you were able to see your husband in a distance.

That's exactly.

Who hit him?

A German police.

German. OK. Did he hit him with his hands?

Yeah, with his hand.

Did you fear that your husband was hurt?

Absolutely. I felt very bad.

Was he knocked to the ground?

No. He just gave him twice over his-- in the face, straight in his face.

Punched him in the face just for talking to you? What were your feelings at the time?

Very bad. I cried myself.

Were you angry, or hurt, or scared?

I was angry and I was scared, that should nothing happened to him. Yeah.

Are we going to go onto another tape now? I know you just tapped me on the shoulder. I don't know if I should go ahead or--