https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

I'm Sylvia Abrams. Today, we are interviewing Eva Sands, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section.

Eva, you told us how your aunt found you after you had been left with a family during the war and of the changes in your identity as you had to again resume a Jewish child's identity. When we picked up on the last tape, the family had moved to Frankfurt and had adopted you. And your name was now Eva Scholz. And you were telling us about being the only Jewish child in school in Frankfurt. What do you remember about the family's condition, the daily life as a survivor family there? And how were they making a living as far as you knew?

Well, what happened since they couldn't go either to Israel or America and there really wasn't any other place for them to go, as I said, they stayed in Frankfurt. They started a small business, a nylon stocking factory, a hosiery firm, and actually, did very well. It was the first hosiery firm to be operational after the war because so much was bombed out in Frankfurt. So they did quite well with it. And they got re-established in a way in Frankfurt.

But they always wanted to leave. And the big dream was to go to either Israel or America. Israel was almost out at that time. They just didn't permit people to come in. So they thought they'd like to go to the United States.

Growing up in Germany was-- I guess I became Germanized. I spoke perfect German. I went to German school. I had a German nurse. We had Christmas, again, because of the German nurse.

As a matter of fact, when I was eight years old, my new mother sent me to a convent in KÃ¶nigstein, which is near Frankfurt. So I spent a year in a Catholic convent again. So again I was Catholic. [LAUGHS]

Do you know why you were sent there?

Well, my mother Esther thought it would be a very good education and it would be good discipline. Because what had happened is I had a new "sister." She had a new child. And it gave me a lot of problems to deal with that, I guess.

Was this her natural child?

That was her natural child. And it was a very sickly little child. And my new mother spent all her time with this child. And I just was sort of cast aside, and I wasn't important anymore. And I knew I wasn't her child to begin with, you know. She really wasn't my mother.

So in order to show my anger, I felt that I should have been left with my real mother who loved me and where I was the only child. I really became a very stubborn little girl. And they called me Little Ram, as a matter of fact because I was just so stubborn.

And so she sent me to the convent. And I loved the convent because I think it brought me back to sort of order and discipline that I was used to. And I could pretend that I was back in perhaps the atmosphere I was used to being in Poland.

Did the people in the convent knew you were a Jewish child?

They knew I was Jewish. The Mother Superior, Mata Raban knew it well. And she said it was optional for me to go to mass or not. But I chose to go. And I loved going to mass.

And it made it-- I guess I was still confused, but somehow since my parents had sent me there, I thought it was all right. And I felt very comfortable taking this on again, except when I came home on weekends. Then I was Jewish again. So-- [LAUGHTER] Well, thinking back, I think my mind did a lot of over work time just to rationalize all this confusion.

The family didn't stay in Frankfurt. Where did they then go?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

Well, no, they stayed in Frankfurt for some time, as a matter of fact, in 1952. As I said, I had a lot of German friends. But the family-- all of our friends were Jewish. We almost formed our own little ghetto right in Frankfurt, not geographically, but socially, because we felt that we never knew who anybody was. And who knew whether they had been our enemies? And it was a very uncomfortable feeling.

I felt that we should be good citizens and be part of the community. But there was no way we could be thinking back because it was so unnatural for us to be there. And we only trusted other survivors, I suppose.

And I think that I was living a double life at the time. When I was in school, I pretended that I was just one of the girls. I didn't tell anyone the story. I felt it was blemished somehow. I was ashamed of it.

And I've thought about it recently. And the only way I can explain it-- and I think that-- my theory is about all survivors being so hesitant about telling the story is not just that it was painful to tell it but because it was almost a shameful thing. It's a shameful thing to be a victim.

And I think that perhaps some sociologists who could study it could see what it's like for victims perhaps of kidnapping or of some other terrible crime, or of rape. They are probably very hesitant to speak about it also, not so much because of the pain, but because you have such rage in you. It's so shameful to be a victim, to be helpless in a situation.

And I felt that I didn't want anybody to know about my past. I didn't want them to know that I was an orphan. That was a terrible thing. And so I pretended that I was just part of this perfect little family. I had a little sister, Minka. And I had two wonderful parents. And most of the time, I didn't even say I was Jewish. I said I was an atheist. That somehow made it more comfortable for me to rationalize everything. It was very confusing, very confusing time.

Then in 1952, the family moved. Where did they go?

In 1952, we moved to the United States the first time. And we were very excited because we had heard so many wonderful things about the United States. And I felt for once I would love all the people there, and we would be so happy.

And I think as a child, I also felt that I wouldn't have any more problems with my family. I wouldn't be angry, and I would be a good child, and so on. And that it would just be a new life for all of us. I wouldn't have to live in this confusion.

And we moved to New York and stayed there a year. And my parents had a very difficult time. They couldn't adjust that well. They didn't know the language. They had no means of support. They kept the factory in Germany. Some other people were running it.

And they stayed a year there. And we moved for one year to Canada. And again, it just didn't work.

So that you then this was two more moves for you as a young person.

Oh, yes. In those formative years, when you're a teenager and you're just so anxious to be part of a peer group and be accepted. And so we were one year in the United States in New York and one year in Canada. And being in New York, I was so happy. I was just so happy to be in the United States. I wanted so badly to immediately become an American and speak like the American and act like the Americans.

I loved everything about it. It was my dream country. And I was very sad when we left. And I said, one day I'm going to come back.

And when we went back to Germany because my parents felt they would only go back temporarily to Germany. They left all their things here and that they would work a few more years, because after all-- oh, I forgot to tell you that 1950, they finally managed to get my cousin, Naomi, back to Germany. And we were all supposed to live in the United States together because--

So what happened to the Aunt Rivka? Did she--

She was still in Israel. No, she stayed in Israel. She had her own family then. But my new mother Esther felt that they could give Naomi a better future.

And so she was sent to be part of the family too.

Yes, so this was a very traumatic thing again because--

Now, was she adopted by them also?

She was also adopted. So at this point, they had three children when they came to the United States. They had another child here, a boy. And so they had four children. And they really felt that it was so important to have security.

And they had to provide for us. And they had to give us an education. They had to give us a good education somehow. They owed it to us. And so they went back to Germany. But at this point, I was given private lessons. And then I was sent to school in England, to boarding school.

So how old were you when you went to boarding school?

I was 15. And I was there for three years. Well, I was almost 15 actually. I wasn't-- I was 14 and a half. And I was there for three years.

And where in England was the boarding school?

In Hove, which is a sister city to Brighton. It's near London, as you know, by the beach, very cold.

Was anyone aware-- was this a school where there were other Jewish children?

Yes.

Was this a place where you could resume your Judaism?

As a matter of fact, it was a Jewish school. It was an Orthodox Jewish boarding school. So here I was again going from convents to an Orthodox [LAUGHING] Jewish school. And I learned a lot about Judaism because at this point, my mother, who liked to direct things, decided that it was very important for me to know my roots and to really-- we were not religious at this point at all. And it was very important, especially since we were living in Germany again, that I would have some proper Jewish identity and learn all about Judaism.

And so this was to make up for the confused babyhood?

Yes. And all it did I think is add to the confusion because I did not like to have religion shoved down my throat. But I did learn a lot. And I learned Latin. And I learned French. And I learned some other things. And it did not make me any more religious. On the contrary, I think whatever vestige of religion I had I think sort of went out the window at that point.

But it did give me a better understanding at least. And it did give me a sense of identity. I learned something of the history of Judaism, which I had never really known.

The interesting thing about all our moves is that since I moved to different countries, Germany, the United States, Canada, and England, and it turned out that all schools were covering the same period of history at that time. So I learned about the American Revolution from four different standpoints. And that was very interesting because it makes quite a difference from which side you look at it. The English certainly do look very differently upon the American

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
Revolution than we do.

So did you graduate from the boarding school then as high school?

No. I had one year left. I was taking I took my GCEs, which is the General Certificate of Education. It was a very good school. And. I learned a lot. And I also was taking piano all this time. And I guess I was pretty adept at that.

My mother decided that to finish our education-- we were both-- my sister and I, my cousin Naomi and I-- were both in the boarding school together. That reminds me, I told you I tried so much to fit into this German school when I was still in Germany. And I had sort of made a little niche for myself. And I had my little friends.

And here is this little wild creature that comes from Israel, speaks no German. And my mother, again, directing traffic decided that I should take her to all my friends. I had to drag her along everywhere and be with her all the time and introduce her as my sister. And she was a head taller than I was. I was very little for my age-- I remembered something.

And I was so ashamed of her. She was just a little wild creature. She really was. And she shouted and was very uncouth. And here, I was so civilized. And I was very embarrassed. And I never did like that girl from the moment I saw her. [LAUGHS] What I remember remembered is actually that-- can I step back?

Absolutely.

1945, in December of 1945, when we arrived in Berlin, I don't know if it was the trauma or just the general conditions of all the refugee camps. I contracted diphtheria. And I was very, very ill. And I was put into the hospital. They had no medicines for me.

And I didn't know the language. I think that was a very, very frightening experience. I was put into this hospital with people who didn't know how to understand me. I was five years old. I was very, very ill, deathly ill. And my aunt didn't stay with me. She came to visit.

The only thing they could give me to try to cure me was to give me cigarettes to smoke to try to burn out what was obstructing my throat. And I've told the story since that I was smoking cigarettes when I was five years old. [LAUGHTER] But you see, I think what happened is that that's when I got closer to my adopted mother.

That was the breaking point because I had no one else, you know. I had just lost everything. And I was in a place that was foreign to me. I was deathly afraid. I was very, very ill. I didn't know the language. I was afraid of these strangers and these people.

The only contact I had to even my past was this lady whom I hated. And I better begin to like her. So that's when I started calling her first Nosik and then Marysia.

And then the first time I called her mother, I will never forget that. I think I had to sort of dig it out of me. I just-- it was the hardest thing I've ever done is to call her mother. I didn't want another mother. But I called her mother finally. And, of course, then it was a little easier until I found out she wasn't. And then by that time, what was I to do?

But my mother decided to send me to school in Switzerland with my sister, Naomi. And here, we were--

You've been the three years in England and just about to finish and off you go to Switzerland.

Naomi was two months younger than I. But she was a head taller. When she came to join our family, it was again mass confusion because she was only two months older. How could we possibly have this perfect little family ordinary family if she was two months younger than I was? We had to somehow fit her in.

So since I knew the language, and I was educated, and she wasn't, and I knew how to play the piano and all these other little things, I was going to be the older one, you see. So here I was this little shrimpy thing. And she was this tall thing.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
And I was older than she was. And I had to wear all her hand-me-down clothing. And it was very confusing. And we started living this all these little lies because we tried to be an ordinary family.

So in 1957, we went to school in Switzerland, to a proper finishing school. And I was there for a year. And it was the French-speaking part of Switzerland. And I'm very grateful to my parents that they afforded me all these things. And they truly were good to us.

And in case I haven't mentioned that, I should mention that because in their way, these were all relics of people thrown together after the war, you know. My mother, Esther, probably would never have married this man if it weren't that the war came up. And these were all survivors who tried to find each other and establish some sort of home again.

And so we were not an ordinary family. We were always at the tops of our emotions. There was a lot of sentiment, a lot of drama in this family. It was not a quiet family. And all these children who didn't really-- who didn't have much in common, who came from different countries now, and different backgrounds. And then there were the German governesses and the finishing schools. It was all such a contrast, such dichotomy.

At the school in Switzerland, were there other Jewish people there or not?

There were some others. But I really didn't identify with them.

So here again, you were to resume a cosmopolitan identity, not a Jewish identity.

Yes.

Tell how you came to Cleveland.

Well, there was a-- I had always wanted to go back to the United States. And the years dragged on. And my parents became more became more and more entrenched in life in Frankfurt. Their factory was doing well. Their businesses were going well. And they were able to afford these schools for us and other things.

And I saw that they would never leave. Even all their belongings were still in the United States, but they were never going to leave. And I said, I am leaving. I'm not staying here. I will not make this my permanent home. I can't, and I will leave.

And so I said, I want to go to college in the United States. And my parents said, we can't let you go by yourself. You're 17 years old. You can't go away by yourself. What will people think? And how can a young girl travel by herself?

And I said, I will be fine. I've got to get away from all this. I don't want to see these people. I don't even want to see these survivors. I don't want to see this country. I don't want to be a stranger in a country. I want to be someplace where I will just be accepted for myself and that it doesn't matter where I came from. That's how I imagined this country to be.

And it is. And it is that. And I wanted to live in the United States. And so we fought.

I was a very stubborn child. I had the usual problems growing up. And there was a teacher, a professor, at the school in Switzerland who knew how much I wanted to study here. And he-- I had only heard about Sarah Lawrence or Barnard or so on. But he said, look, there's a wonderful university in Cleveland, Ohio.

I said, Cleveland, Ohio? Where is that? I only knew Chicago, Los Angeles. Chicago had the gangsters. And Los Angeles had the movie stars. And New York had all the rest of the people.

So he said, oh, Cleveland, Ohio, has a wonderful school, and you'll love it there. Let me apply for you. So he applied. And they, I guess, were anxious to have foreign students. I took my college boards in Switzerland, and I did very well.

And so he applied. And they accepted me. And then that summer, it was nothing but battling with my parents. And they

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
send all kinds of emissaries, other people. And they said, after all these things that your parents did for you, how could you do this for them and go away by yourself? And so on, all the drama in the world. And I said, I am leaving.

And so then finally, about July, they said, all right, there's nothing we can do to convince you. Go. So I wrote to Sarah Lawrence and I wrote to Barnard. And Barnard accepted me. But they said we have no dormitory space for you in July, maybe in February, but come anyway.

And my parents said, absolutely not, you are going to live in a dorm if you're going. Well, I packed up my things. And I went-- my mother practically didn't speak to me she was so angry. And I was so stubborn, and I came to Cleveland, Ohio.

And I arrived-- took a train from New York to Cleveland. And I arrived in-- I don't want to make this long, but I arrived in the Terminal Tower. And I thought the whole city was underground. I said, where did I go?

But I loved it from the moment I was here. And the second semester of school, I was going to transfer the second semester. I didn't want to stay here. But I met my husband at a mixer, Barry Sands. And from then on I stayed on.

And the people were wonderful. And I loved Americans just as I knew I would love them. And I still do.

And in what year did you get married?

Got married in 1961. And I went back to Germany during that time. And I could go on and on.

But what happened is that all the years that I was married, I always remembered this wonderful lady who took care of me. And I always wondered what happened to her. And I had this terrible guilt that I never thanked her.

She did everything for me. And I never even got to thank her. I didn't know whether I could do anything for her. I wanted to see her. But how would I do it?

Everyone I spoke to, all the Jewish people said, don't go back to Poland. You can't go back to Poland. Because after the war, it's true that a lot of Jews were killed in Poland by Poles because they would come back to reclaim their possessions. And a lot of the bad people would just kill them, even after the war. And there was this general fear, and you didn't want to go to a place where you had so many sad memories. But I guess I just thought it was one of those things that I could never do is to go back.

My husband, who is a very straightforward and uncomplicated and fearless person, said, let's go back to Poland and find her. I said, Barry, I don't even know her name anymore. I don't know where I was. I don't know anything. The only thing I have is this picture.

And I asked my mother what the lady's name was. And she said she couldn't remember. It was something with an S.

So we went to Frankfurt. And we took my father's car. And we took the two children, who were about 6 and 8 or something like that at the time. And we--

What year was this when you decided--

1976. And we went to Poland. And first, we traveled through the little town where my mother's family-- where my father's family was from, my aunt's family, and then all the other little places. And finally we got to Warsaw. And I knew that Pustelnik was the outskirt of Poland-- of Warsaw, excuse me.

And so we went through there. And I would stop every time I would see an older person who might have gone through the war. I would stop. And I would take out this picture. And I would say, do you remember this lady? And I had made copies of this picture. And nobody remembered anything.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

And so we felt we were on a wild goose chase. But we kept continuing and continuing. And a few times people would say, oh, yes, we do remember. And we would go and follow up the leads. And it turned out to be nothing.

One time, we met an old lady. And she said I remember it very well. I didn't remember what my name was in the war even. I thought that it was something like Aniusha maybe. But I wasn't sure.

And she said, yes, it was Halinka. And I remember the story of Halinka. So my heart just beat fast. And we went to this place. We went over these-- with this car over these meadows and woods, and we took-- packed all these little Polish children into the car with us. They were going to show us where this person lived who took care of this Halinka during the war.

And we got there. And the lady opened the door, and she said, Halinka. And her face kind of sank and my face sank because we both knew it wasn't that.

But what had happened is that we-- I knew that there was a fence around this house. And I didn't think that this was the house. But we thought we'd check it out anyway. And she had a picture of Halinka there. And true, Halinka was my age. And she had saved Halinka. But I wasn't Halinka. And it was a very sad realization.

And then another time, we ended up in Warsaw, just following up all these leads and going to all these people. And they all wanted to help us. But they knew nothing. And finally, we were ready to leave Poland. And it was very sad.

And Barry said, let's go back one more time to Pustelnik. I said, we've been everywhere, and we can't find it. Let's forget it. I can't take any more.

We had also gone to the cemetery where my father had been killed. And I was-- it was terrible because I had no tears. I had no tears. I felt nothing. I just went through the cemetery. And I remember that there were just a lot of chestnut trees. And I just walked along. And the whole thing just didn't make any sense to me. I had no feelings. I was numb.

Anyhow, we went back to Pustelnik, to go back to Pustelnik. We went through again. I said, the only thing that I for sure is that I know I was baptized. There's got to be a church nearby. So we went looking for a church.

And the church that was nearest to Pustelnik we walked in. And there was a man working in the garden. And we asked for the priest. And he said, I'm the priest. And he went in with us. It was a young priest, and he was very, very nice.

And you see, I don't speak Polish very well anymore. I understand everything, but I don't speak it very well. So communication was a little bit difficult. I could understand if he didn't understand me. But it was hard to communicate.

I showed him the picture, told him the story as best as I could. And I said I know I was baptized. Could we look at the baptismal records?

So we looked at all the baptismal records. And we didn't find it. And I thought-- I didn't understand it. But then we didn't know the name. I knew it must have been after '42, between '42 and '45.

So he said, look, this story intrigues me. And if there's any way that I can help you, I'll help you. Please let me keep a copy of this picture. And I will do a sermon on this Sunday. And I'll see what happens.

So meanwhile, we left the country. We went back to the States. All of a sudden, I get a letter from the priest a very short while later. And he said he preached the sermon, told the story, showed the picture at the sermon that Sunday. And in that congregation that Sunday was the brother of Maria Zaider, who doesn't live in that town anymore.

And he was all excited, you know. He came to see the priest afterwards. He recognized Maria Zaider in the picture. And all of a sudden, I started getting all these letters from Poland. In my history, those three years that were just missing out of my life started coming back to me. And I got pictures of all my relatives in Poland. I found all these pictures. I didn't have any pictures of myself at all.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

They had taking all these pictures of you during those years when you were there?

Yes. Yes. And it was incredible. You know, I didn't know how to read Polish, but somehow I read the Polish letters and I understood them. And it was like a piece of a puzzle.

There's the one with the bow you didn't show-- this one. Who is this?

This was an uncle. And here's another little one.

That's with a neighbor child? Or another relative?

This is a little friend. And here's another little one.

You must have been very loved by these people. They took so many pictures of you.

I was very loved. And it was just the strangest thing to have this puzzle come together, these pieces of a puzzle. And then I made plans that I would go back and visit the next year.

Now, I found out that my name was Anya, Anna Maria, during the war. The very strange thing that always amazes me is that I had named my daughter Annette when she was born. When she was eight years old, she decided that she liked the name Anya. She had heard it someplace. And she insisted on having her name legally changed to Anya. And then when I got these letters from Poland, I realized that my name had been Anya too. It was very strange.

Did you then get to meet Maria Zaider yourself. I went back to Poland. And I got to meet her. And it wasn't of course anything like I expected because it never is.

First, there was the language barrier. Her son was still alive. He was living with her. Here, I was this almost middle aged American woman. And here she was an old Polish woman living in another little village by then.

And I wanted to tell her so much. I wanted to talk to her about so much. I wanted to thank her. I wanted to have the same feelings I'd had all those years. But we had this communication gap.

I mean I could understand when she talked. But I had to speak really through her son. And her son, I really didn't find that pleasant. He used to get drunk quite a bit. And I think the war had done a lot of bad things to him. And so it wasn't as satisfying as it should have been.

Oh, I was delighted to see her again, you know. I started doing what I could for her financially after that. But there wasn't anything-- I could no way repay her at all. And I don't think she expected it, you know.

I think she would have loved for me to stay there. I was only there for a few days. I really couldn't stay longer. I couldn't take it. It was-- it was uncomfortable for me to be there. I didn't belong there anymore.

And that realization was painful too. I felt that I wanted so much to be again that little girl. She wanted me to be that little girl again. We wanted to make up for lost time, you know. She would have liked to hold me again. And I so craved for her to hold me all those years, all those years.

And it just wasn't the same. And we sort of played a little part for a few days. And then it was over. And we both knew that we had to get on with our lives.

And, of course, then we stayed in correspondence. And I knew that I probably could never come back again. I had seen her. I had thanked her. I talked to her. And she was still alive. And I thank God for that. And we had to go on with our lives.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection
There are not too many people who have gone through the circumstances that you have of being a child sent out like that and being reclaimed who were able to complete the circle by meeting the person. It really is extraordinary.

I'm very grateful for that.

And you still have contact with your adoptive parents in Germany and still consider them your parents.

I do. And my father has died since. My Polish mother died last April. And her son died two months ago. So that part is over too.

And so you Aunt Esther who became your mother is still--

Aunt Esther, she's still in Frankfurt, yes.

When did she tell you the story in a complete fashion?

She came here one time in 1977. And she had this great desire. I think she always felt that I should write a book about it. And she said, you have got to listen to this story from beginning to end. I feel that it's important that you know the whole story. And I want you to record it so that you have it for yourself and your children so that what happened. And she actually-- we did tapes of it. And there are about six tapes, the whole story. Excuse me.

And you said that you listened to them for the first time through in order to get ready to tell what happened to you?

I could not listen to them. So many times, for instance, I had heard that I had a little brother before I was born. And that I had a little brother after I was born. But what had happened is that, I guess, when my father married that second wife and they were asked to give up their child in order to live, to hand it over to the Germans. And they refused. And that's really why they died.

But I had heard this so many times I couldn't remember it. And I still-- after I had the tapes, they've been sitting in my drawer now since 1977. That was the year after I went to Poland. I think going to Poland was very cathartic for me.

And I think that my mother, Esther, felt at that point that she should just tell me the whole story. It sort of broke something. And she needed to release it. She had to tell me.

And so we had this tape. And as I listened to the tapes, I remember how emotional it was. But I remembered nothing afterwards.

And I did not listen to those tapes again until last night. I couldn't. I didn't want to. I felt I should. I just couldn't.

I think that so much of what we all went through-- I always felt that I was very lucky. I had so many people who loved me. I've been so lucky. And yet, I was unfortunate. I had many mothers in my life. They were all good to me. But the loss of these mothers was also very hard, of course.

And I don't know if it's better to have had many mothers and lost them or to not have had any mothers. I don't know which is worse. But I do feel fortunate that people were so good to me.

When you look back over the experience, when did you tell anybody about that you had been a child hidden during the war?

I didn't tell anybody for many years. I remember when I was here in college, I didn't tell a soul. I didn't tell my husband, I think, till after we were married. I couldn't. As I said, it was painful.

And then even when I told the story finally, it was as though it happened to someone else. I had no feelings about it. It was a very matter of fact thing. I thought that I was very well adjusted because I just pretended it happened to someone

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.

else.

I never felt that I had the right to feel sorry for myself. And I guess I really don't feel sorry for myself. But I'm able to come a little bit more to grips with my feelings now, which I couldn't before. I blocked it off. I blocked the fact that I was an orphan. I blocked the fact that I lost my Polish mother, my real mother, of course. I blocked--

In fact, I had great anger against my real parents for having given-- put me into this world. I thought, why were they so selfish to put me into this world? How could they do this when it was so terrible out there and to put me through all this?

But yet, I felt it all happened to someone else. I'm very well adjusted. I'm not that person. I don't want to be that person. I don't want to be a victim. I want to get on with my life.

But it doesn't work that way. You have to work it out. You have to say, yes, it happened to me, and I'm that person.

You've become very active in the Jewish community. Do you think that was because of what happened to you?

No. I feel a bond. I don't think it's because of what happened to me. But I feel a bond.

I will never think that Jews are any different than any other people. I don't think they're any better. And I don't think they're any worse.

I think we Jews have just as much right to live and be ourselves and practice our religion and practice our customs if we want to and be religious or not religious. We should have as much of a right to it as anyone else. I don't think we're any better. I think there are good people among us and there are bad people among us.

And I would do just as much for the rest of the community. It just so happens that I think I am Jewish. And I do feel a bond with my ancestors.

My ancestors had to leave Spain during the Inquisition because they were exterminating Jews then. And they settled--trekked through all of Europe and settled in Poland and were exterminated there. I'm not going to just give in to that. I am that person. I feel that-- I feel a kinship with all people. And I feel that it's so important for people to be able to make a choice.

I always ask myself, what would I do if I were old enough? Because I didn't play an active part in the war. I was just really a passive person. I was knocked around, passed around. I couldn't be brave. I couldn't save anyone.

And that's why I was hesitant to even have this recording made because I thought I did nothing. What is this story, you know? I had nothing to do with this, except that I was passed around. I was at the whim of destiny really.

But I feel that-- so often, I ask myself, what would I do if I was old enough? If I were old enough to be in that war, would I have saved someone? If I were Gentile, would I have saved a Jew? If I was an American now and let's say that there was an extermination of Blacks, would I put myself on the line, risk my life for a Black person? Would I have the strength? Would I know what to do that is moral and good?

And how do people know it? And what gives them the strength? And what makes some people be good and some people bad?

You seem like a very hopeful person, even though you had to go through all these adjustments and all these identities. When you look back over the era, what do you think would be the best way to commemorate it?

I think that's hard to put into a sentence or two. I think that we do have to remember it. As I said, I've tried very hard to forget it. I think so many people try to forget all the terrible things that happened. We say, no, it really didn't happen. It couldn't have happened. Even now when I see movies of it, I said there is no way. I have German friends now here in Cleveland. I have good German friends. And I know they're good people. And how could there have been such

https://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection

inhumanity?

But I think that on a one-to-one basis, people are good. I really must believe that. I think you have to believe that. And you have to tell your children that. And you have to tell your children that they too must try to do the very best they can and to act with their heart and not to think of other human beings as being inhuman. And so I feel there is hope. But I think that there should be a feeling that there are more things we have in common than things that separate us really.

I think you've told us an extraordinary story. And your hopefulness at the end of it really is a message for everybody else that we can all take with us that people can bounce back from this kind of an experience and make an extraordinary, wonderful life for themselves and their children.

This is Sylvia Abrams. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Eva Sands. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media.
It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.