

We're going to continue now. And when we left off, you were telling us about your father's illness. And the doctor was able to come to see him.

Right. We got a doctor into the ghetto. And he treated him-- not so much with medication as with a diet, a strict diet. And we happened to-- my mother took very good care of him. And she got him over the illness, surprisingly, because there really wasn't that much-- no X-rays were taken. But it was strictly by guess, by symptoms that he had, that the doctor knew what was wrong with him.

And you were able to--

And by--

--get the food--

--very strict diet.

--which must have been not too simple.

Not easy, no.

That's right. And did his health improve, then?

It improved, yes.

I see.

Besides that, he was a smoker, a heavy smoker. And the situation we were in, it didn't help by him to cut down on smoking. Instead of cutting down, he smoked more. So that didn't help his illness either.

And the ghetto--

But he did get better.

The ghetto in Warta was the local Polish Jews--

Also, I have to tell you this. While we were in the ghetto in Poland-- in Warta, they took, one day, for no special reasons, they took the 10 people from the Jewish community-- the rabbi, the cantor. They took the more prominent, the leaders--

Jews.

--the leaders of the community-- my cousin's husband-- there were all 10 men, and hung them in the square. They chased us all out. We had to watch, his wife. And at that time, they had-- they have three children. One is still alive in Israel. I just saw him. And I had to tell him the whole story. He says-- he's my age. This is-- his mother is my first cousin.

See, my first cousins are all much older than I am because of my father's family, him being the youngest of eight. So their children are my age. So when I saw him now, he almost forced me into-- I didn't want to tell him about his father. But he said, I'm old enough to know about it. And I want to know.

My husband held me back. He says, don't tell him. Please, don't tell him. And he said, yes, I want to know. Anyway, one son and a daughter, the little one, that-- the older brother that is in Israel, never met, was born after he had left for Israel was with her in Warta and her husband because they also were from there, of course. So they were hung.

And she hid in an apartment in a cellar. But they got ahold of her. And she had to watch while her husband

was being hung. And they left them hanging there for a week. And we had to go out every day to look. And when people fainted-- and I did too, I believe, I remember now-- you were just slapped a few times to come to. So that was already--

Was there any--

--getting better now.

--any reason that prompted them to do such a thing?

No. No, there had to be no reason. The reason was that they were Jewish--

And this was the--

--and to show the rest of the Jews--

--this was the Germans?

--what they are-- oh, sure--

The Germans there--

--what they are capable of doing.

Oh, so that made--

And that's how they kept everybody in line, by telling them, look, you open your mouth. And I am sure that they didn't do anything against them. It was just to show what power they had. And this was their way of showing it.

Whatever leadership there was had that horrible end.

Yes. It was--

Yes, the-- all the leaders of the congregation. And you know. Right.

Was food adequate in the ghetto there?

Not adequate. We managed. Again, it was farm country. I guess my aunt had some connections where she could get.

Was there any kind of a Jewish council set up before or after this incident?

I don't really think a Jewish council, no. You see, what happened to-- nobody wanted to really be a leader because they were-- everybody was afraid. Everybody was afraid of their own life. We-- everybody became very self-centered because everybody wanted to survive. Now, it became a matter of survival. It was-- everybody was fighting for their own life.

Down, down to the work.

To the point where sometimes, people did very strange things to their own people, just to see if that would give them a better chance of survival, like stealing bread from you later on in Auschwitz.

How many people-- it had to be a fairly small ghetto in Warta--

Very-- yeah, it was a small place.

--because it was so small.

Very small.

And so that there would be a certain, you'd think--

Closeness. --smaller, that there'd be a certain closeness--

Yeah, everybody--

--about it.

I'm sure everybody heard everybody else. They knew each other because even in Cleveland, you know a lot of people. But this was smaller.

Were there any religious services there or secret prayers? Any--

Not that we took part in, no. No.

There was really no organized life.

We were not seeing it anymore, no, no. You were afraid to meet. That wasn't permitted.

So it was just--

Oh, you couldn't. You weren't allowed to. There were no radios anymore at that time, no newspapers. You were already kept in the dark. You didn't know from day to day what was going on.

What was going on.

You had no idea.

At all. And-- well, this was-- we know now, it's in the area between regular Poland and--

Yes, in this part that they were going into take a Germany.

The Third Reich. You're right in the part next to it.

They didn't-- they hadn't yet. But that was supposed to go into.

Are there any other special things that you want to tell us about this particular time there in the ghetto in Warta that comes to your mind with the family and this?

Well, we were there till '42, I believe, when they had selections. That was going on constantly, where they took old, sick people. I mean, they would make selections. That means they would come to each door and said Juden, raus. That means Jews, out.

That meant you went into the square. It was a little square, like in these little towns. And then they selected who was going to live yet and who was going away. At that point already, there were-- I suppose, they had already the ovens. I had no idea yet what went on. I had no idea. And neither did my parents, I think.

But gradually, there were fewer people left.

Yes but they were taking away the old, and the young--

Real young.

--and the sick. And we didn't know where they were going to. But nobody ever saw them again. But you were so-- your mind wasn't clear anymore at that point. You were hungry a little, you were imprisoned. You didn't have the right clothes anymore to wear. You weren't free. I mean, you were kept like an animal more than a human.

More than-- yes, I can understand. What, then, changed that ghetto, then, to the next place, the next transition?

Didn't change. We had another selection overnight. And we were all pushed out. I mean, they just deport you there. They knocked on the door, Juden raus. I mean, you were sleeping with that on your mind constantly. You didn't know which night was going to be your night. So this one was a big selection.

They kept-- everybody came out into the square there. And then they selected. Now, you didn't know one part was going right and one part was going left. You really did not know which side was the better, just when you saw who was going to one side and who was going to the other side, you had an idea that the one side was the healthier, younger. The other side was the older, sicker, very young children.

So you had an idea that one side wasn't as good as the other. But you didn't know what they were really going to do with that other side. So you were selected. You were standing there like a herd of animals. Excuse me. Were selected by their looks or by their weight because they're going to the slaughterhouse. So they wanted the better ones for that and the worst ones for whatever.

So at that point, your family was together, you're going to the square.

This point, we were still together. But at that point, we were separated. I went with my sister and my mother into a church. And my father was taken away from us. Where he went to-- he was a young looking man, good-looking man, healthy-looking man-- at that point, he was feeling much better already. And they felt that they could get some labor out of him yet, some use.

Now, we were-- my mother was all gray at that time. Women didn't tint their like nowadays. So she was all gray. She was prematurely gray. I don't even remember her black hair. And my sister was fairly young yet. So there was a child, a gray-haired woman, and I went with them automatically, even so I looked pretty healthy.

You were about 12 years old?

At that time I was, when I went in '42-- no, I was older already, about 19? How old was I in '42?

No, about '20, '23.

I was born '23.

Yes, you were. Yeah.

Yeah, time flies.

Yes, yes.

Even when they're bad. So we were taken into that church. Maybe I was 18. Maybe it was in '41. I think it was in '41. Because '42, I was already in Łódź. And I stayed there two years, you see. Years, I get them a little bit mixed up-- '41. So we went into that church where there were no windows, no facilities-- bathrooms-- no water, no food, no air.

And we were being thrown in there like-- worse than animals. The conditions were unbelievable. There were a few pails that people used. And we were in there for quite a few days.

They threw some stones through the tinted windows, like a church, to let some air in because the doors

were bolted so we wouldn't escape. Where would we go to anyway? Who had the strength to go at this point? Who had the energy? I mean, who had the mind to go? Where did we run to? Where would we go? We were surrounded by them anyway. But they still bolted us.

They brought us in some pails of water that then, later on, the pails were used for other purposes. The smell, you can imagine, people were getting ill. People were dying, I think, even. It was horrible. That was already below dignity, I mean, that a human being could live that way.

Animal.

They made another selection, believe it or not, out of that church. So now, we were going on another selection. My father wasn't with us. We didn't know where he was. They made another selection. And I took my mother in the middle, my sister at one end, and I, and one-- I figured, they see us young people, they kind of-- and I'm trying to get through the door this way.

They tore me away, spin me around that for a couple of minutes, I did not know where I was absolutely. I was a blank. I was spinning around myself. And I did not know where I was, what was happening to me. I was completely out of it. I even remember now still how out I was, I mean, like I was in another world.

And I was standing in front of an SS man at that point. And he happened to be from Bremen. And I asked me, when he saw my face, probably, the expression on my face. And he heard me speak German. And he asked me where I was from. I said Hanover.

Oh, he says, well, we are taking you now to, to Łódź, we have somebody walking there as a secretary for Rumkowski, who was the leader of that ghetto in Łódź. I come to it later. She is from Hanover. Do you know her? And he mentioned her name. I said, of course, I do know her. And he says, oh, maybe she can do something for you there.

I said, would you maybe do something for me? I have a mother and a sister in the church. Could you put in a good word and let them out? He says, I'll do my best. I'll try. I'll see what I can do.

Imagine this. He's from Bremen. We were neighbors. All of a sudden, he was very nice guy. And he says, but I can't do it right now. We'll have to wait. I'll see what I can do. I'll try my best. Meanwhile, I was shipped to a place by bus or by whatever. I don't remember. I suppose by bus.

You alone?

Alone. And I come there and who is there but my father? And we fell around each other and cried. And he asked where my mother was. You know I've never cried?

Well, it's sort of good to get it out.

Anyway, so I told him the story that he promised me that he will try whatever he can do. And of course, needless to say, he didn't do a thing. We were then shipped-- I never saw them again.

You never saw mother--

There was-- never.

--sister?

That was it.

But you were with your father?

Yes.

And the two of you?

We went into-- we didn't know. They shipped us again into the car, the--

The cattle car.

--the cattle cars, and with oh, about 65 people in one cattle car. We were sitting with our legs spread. And another person was sitting like this. And this is how we were sitting. We didn't know where we were going, of course not. And we were sealed in. Then they would stop on the way, and take off the seal, and bring in a pail of water, without cups, without anything. And people would fall over it. And it would be all spilled on the floor. And they were standing there and laughing. They thought it was funny.

How long a trip was it?

It was quite a long trip, I think about two days they took us around. And we wound up in Litzmannstadt ghetto.

That was in Łódź?

Yeah, Łódź. And I did get together with this girl from Hanover. And she did give my father a job in the kitchen. Her brother was there too. And they were pretty good to us, I must say. Some people have some grudges against them. But to us, they were good. You can't be good--

When you say good-- they, Inge, you're speaking about--

These two people, the brother and the sister, the one-- the German that mentioned this girl that is a secretary to Rumkowski--

From Bremen.

--who was the leader, the Jewish leader of the Litzmannstadt ghetto.

I see.

And they killed him eventually when they liquidated the ghetto. I come to it later.

Yeah. And the ghetto was a very-- one of the largest.

That was one of the largest ghettos. But my father worked in the kitchen.

Did you have a job there?

I had a job. I worked in a factory. We made ammunition. I don't remember what the factory's name was. People ask me, I don't really know.

But right there in--

We were taken in the morning on trucks, not buses, trucks. And we were shipped there. And you were standing there bent. And you were working your few hours.

Did they take--

And you get a slice of bread.

The trucks took you out of the ghetto to work in the factory?

Yeah, yes, yes.

Brought you back.

Yes, yeah.

Yeah. How long a time would you say that was?

Oh, we stayed there in Łódź in one little room that was about half the size of this.

Your father and you?

Yeah. And not bigger than half of this. And my father worked in the kitchen. And because he worked in the kitchen, he brought bread home, some potato peel, and some used coffee grinds.

Grounds.

And I made-- and I had a machine-- I don't know where I got it from-- to grind it again together. And I made patties. And believe me, we were-- people envied us because I had connections. And I got to grind a potato peel. And that was our supper then.

Isn't that something?

But that was something already to look forward to, at least you had something to put in your mouth. And you got a little piece of bread a week. So I always left mine for the last part because I had something that made me-- I guess that made me go on living because I knew there was a piece of bread waiting for me. So I always kept it for just before we got a new piece instead of eating it immediately.

You held it-- you put it in reserve.

I held onto it-- I-- exactly. Exactly, yeah. Just--

Well, that's good. It's good to know where your next piece of bread was coming. And you had it--

Yes, right.

--set up. Was there much life? Obviously, if you were working, in the hours you were not working, was there anything to do with the other--

Well, I mean, the conditions we lived in were horrible, horrible, with bedbugs. And it was a bed made out of two by fours. I mean, it wasn't a bed on straw mattresses. And again, I mean, the conditions, of course, were terrible. But you somehow managed, also because you were young.

That's right.

I could never be a girl again.

And how did Father manage to feel then?

Somehow, he did all right.

He did?

Yeah. Yeah. He was happy to have me yet.

Sure. But his illness didn't come?

No, it didn't. No, it didn't reoccur.

And you were then in the Łódź ghetto--

For two years, we were.

--for two years. Yeah. So now, it's up to 1943.

'42.

'42?

Yeah.

I see.

We went '41 to Łódź. We came into '41-- '42 into Łódź. We stayed in Warta one year about. And we came into Łódź in '42.

And you were there?

They made a big-- of course, they liquidated the ghetto because the Russians were getting now a little bit closer. So they shipped us out. And I had a dream in the ghetto. And I told my father about it. And I never had a dream. I mean, I'm not dreaming about things that are coming up. I'm not-- what do you call it-- people that know the future, that can--

A fortuneteller.

I'm not. I can't predict future. Thank god. I don't want to. But I had this dream that we were going on-- again on these boxcars, in these boxcars. And we were shipped to something. And I saw the wire. And I saw the gate. And I never even had heard of Auschwitz, never. I didn't even know it existed.

But you had--

When I got there after, again, two days being, they were just riding around with us. They didn't know where to take us to. They wanted us further-- the furthest away from the Russians because they were getting now-- they were involved in the war already too. And when we got out of these cars, wagons, I said-- yeah.

So I told my father after the dream, I said-- and they separated us there. Wait. And I said to my father, if they separate us, the two of us, I'll commit suicide. These were my words. And I never had in mind to commit suicide. I wanted to survive. Of course, everybody wants to survive. But this is what I-- these words I told him. And when we got to Auschwitz, this is exactly what it looked like in my dream. And they did separate us. And I did not commit suicide. I still kept on living.

Did you see father?

I saw my father one more time. I stayed only in Auschwitz for 10 days, luckily, because I was not aggressive enough to survive Auschwitz. You had to really go for it. You had to-- when they brought in the soups, the women already outside fell over that canister.

Now, I would not do that. I would just laying on my little-- there were cards that five of us on one card were laying, no blankets, nothing. By that time, already, we went into cold showers when we got there-- cold showers. We had to completely undress in front of the men and go into these cold showers. It was-- I tell you, the--

The shock of that.

--what they did to us or how they treated us was-- it's-- when you talk about it-- when I talk about it now--



my kids don't even know half of it because we never talked about it in the beginning. Now, lately, it's coming out. Maybe it was wrong.

They were standing there, and laughing, and making fun. There were some older people, some heavier ones. And they made fun of everybody. And you felt like you were just dirt under their feet. And they put us up in these blocks. They were called blocks. And they put us on these. There were three-- I think three stories of these cards.

Of bunks.

Yeah, bunks. But there were bunks, five to a bunk. So one was-- bit like sardines, one was with the head over there. And--

Just like sardines.

--just like sardines. And then one pot of soup a day to each bunk, without spoons. So--

It's difficult to imagine.

And one slice of bread. And if you didn't hide it well enough, it was gone. That's what I wanted to tell you. You had to actually put it under you while you slept or they would-- well, people were hungry. When you're hungry, you do a lot of things to survive hunger and thirst.

And then we had to go to the toilets, if you can call it that. They took us certain times. They didn't ask us when you had to go. You just had to go that time, regardless. All night long, you couldn't leave that building. So they-- of course, Auschwitz was really already. I didn't know. And I still didn't know about the gas chambers, believe it or not.

When you were there.

I did not know. Some people already saw the smoke. And they kind of ask. Now, people were-- people's head were shaven. When I got to Auschwitz and saw these women running around in torn clothes, wooden shoes, those-- you know those wooden--

The Dutch shoes.

--Dutch shoes? I couldn't wear them. I always held them in my hand because they were rubbing my feet. Only when we went into these toilets, these houses, outhouses did I put them on because of sanitary reasons. But otherwise, I always had them in my hand. And then we stood every morning to be counted at 5 o'clock in rain, snow, no matter what. We had to stand there till they counted us. And they counted us over and over, even so the amount was right, just to keep us there, just to make us more miserable than we are already, hungry--

The hunger.

--thirsty, cold, no underwear, no comb, no toothbrush. I treated my animals better than I certainly did.

I'm sure. When you were there, did they provide for any work to keep you busy? Or you just existed?

No, we just existed.

I see.

We just existed.

But you say you were in Auschwitz only 10 days.

For 10 days. While they were taking us again to-- they never told you where they were taking you. They gave us little undershirts, these white little undershirts that men wear. And of course, I'm tall. They barely covered me. And this is how we were marching outside. And as I was marching, there was a whole group of girls.

The other side, men were marching, carrying brick, bricks on their shoulder. And I saw my father. And he said-- called out to me, Inge, keep on going, hold on to it. And I called out in German, Papa.

And a German SS woman-- I mean a German, of course-- SS woman came up to me. And she said something in German to me I couldn't possibly tell you in English. I mean, I could if I wanted to. But it's too nasty and too ugly what she said, if I wouldn't keep my mouth shut, what she would do to me.

So that was the last time I saw my father. And then we went into another bathhouse. And we were shipped to Bergen-Belsen and not knowing, again, in cattle cars. But never did we know where they were taking us or were we going to live or not.

What would be at the end of the journey.

No, no.

Was that just the women--

When we-- yeah.

--that they took? That you were with at that point?

This part, yeah. I don't know how many we were. When we came to Bergen-Belsen, it was not a concentration camp. It was a prisoner of war camp.

But did--

And it was very near Hanover, not far at all, 75 kilometer from Hanover. And it was in beautiful kind of a forest surrounding area. They put up tents for us. They didn't know where to put us. And we were standing there. And they treated us very nicely. They were not SS. They were the army, German Army.

And they-- I don't know if they just acted that way, but they were surprised to see the way we looked. And they were surprised we didn't have a comb or toothbrush. And some didn't have hair. I was the lucky one that they left me my hair. But I didn't have a comb. So I wasn't that lucky, really. How can you live without?

Don't know.

And they did not know where we were coming from. Now, I don't know, as I said. I don't know. Did they pretend not knowing? Or did they really not know? They were very nice to us. The head man, the officer of this whole outfit there, we called him father later. But you know what? They shipped him to the front because he was too good to us. We were put up in tents. And they put straw on the--

This was in 1942--

This was in 1944--

--still?

--September, before the High Holidays. In September before the High Holidays-- I remember because they made a special dinner for us for the High Holidays. They were that nice to us.

That was--

Because they were not the SS or SA.

Your accommodations, they became a little better, though.

Well, weren't too bad because it reined in. But nobody was mistreating us, mishandling us. Nobody was kicking us around. But then we had a very bad storm one night. And one of the-- some of the tents fell apart or blew down. And he came himself, this officer, and saw to it that we were taken care of. And they-- as I said before, they took him away because he was too good. They found out about it. And he was too good.

So I was working in the Brotkammer. That means I handed out bread to the prisoners. Later on, because I had met a girl in Auschwitz-- I fainted in Auschwitz. When I was separated from my father, I fainted for the first-- I never did before in my life.

She brought me to, this girl, also a prisoner. She was from Łódź. She was born there. And we are still in contact. She's in Australia now. And she brought me to. And we stayed friends. And when they ask, who speaks German? I did not raise my hand. She says, raise your hand. And she pushed me kind of because I wasn't-- I was very shy.

You didn't know if it'd be good for you or bad for you.

I didn't know, right. You never knew. So she says, you know it. She pushed me out. And they talked to me, asked me where I was from, and where we're coming from, and how come we look that way. And they have no idea what this is all about. And you didn't know how much you should tell them. And you never knew what they were really having in mind. Anyway, they put me up in this-- where they-- where I dealt out the bread to the prisoners and so that I had a little more to eat already, you see.

That was your job then.

It helped. That was my job with some other people and all kinds of prisoners, as a matter of fact, even non-Jews-- Polish political prisoners were there. And that's where I learned a little Polish because I had to in order to communicate with them. I learned Polish. So I do understand it. And I worked there. And this girlfriend that I had met in Auschwitz worked in the kitchen.

And she brought me in some potatoes. And we cooked a little soup. And an SS woman came in on us and found it. And I was beaten so badly for these two potatoes we had hidden. That's unbelievable. I got sick right after that. And I had typhoid. As we were liberated, I was on my way to recovery already. There we were only from September till April. We were liberated in April.

So it was through the winter, this one?

'43, yeah.

Yeah, it was--

But we were put up already in different buildings later on. They took us-- and our-- yeah, and I forgot to tell you that they had, by that time, liquidated Auschwitz because the Russians were very close. So they liquidated completely. They closed it up. They emptied it out. They took people wherever they could take them to walking or shipping, like us.

We were the lucky ones. We ended up in Bergen-Belsen and weren't there that long. If we would have lasted longer, I don't think that many would have survived. But it wasn't that long anymore.

We stayed-- Auschwitz was liquidated. And Kramer, who was the leader of Auschwitz-- I don't know if you heard of this name. It's spelled K-R-A-M-E-R. He was brought into Bergen-Belsen. And then, of course, the whole thing turned around into a concentration camp.

Oh. And then he-- so it was right at the end that Bergen-Belsen--

Was towards the end. Yeah, it was the end of '44, that, the later part, the very later-- last part of '44 that he came into Bergen-Belsen. And they were starting already to build the gas chambers there, which we saw later on half-finished. They didn't get them done with them.

When the liberation had--

Yeah.

--come.

After the liberation. Yeah, we were then later put into barracks, wooden barracks.

Were you aware at all that there were liberating forces, that the armies of liberation were--

We didn't really know much. We only knew that there was a lot of bombarding going on. We heard that Hanover was that close. We heard them going over us. And the earth was shaking. And we heard the bombs falling. And so we knew things were at a standstill. There were some action going on.

Were you-- did you have any idea or question whether they were friendly toward you or unfriendly? Or you felt that that was the rescuers?

Oh, well, we knew once the Americans or the English would come, that that would be it.

You were aware?

Oh, sure. We just didn't know how much time they would need.

And then it was actually in April.

April, yeah. I was-- as I said, I came down with typhoid. The whole-- I mean, everybody had it. Almost everybody had it. Some didn't survive it. I had-- because of working there, I had some connections with a doctor, a Jewish doctor, that worked in the hospital, the so-called hospital for the prisoners.

There wasn't much medication around. But she had some shots that she gave to people that she knew. Of course, it's always who you know. So she had given me some shots. And I had a very light-- I mean, this was called a light case. It wasn't that light. But it was much lighter than some others had it. At least I survived it.

Which-- that was the important thing. Thank goodness. Which group, what army group of liberation--

The British, British--

The British, I see.

--liberated us. And I was lying there on my bunk, half-dizzy still from the sickness. I hadn't gotten up yet. And I heard them say, ladies and gentlemen. And I looked around. I didn't know they meant.

So welcoming.

It was such a-- I knew a little English. I had-- we knew that we were going to emigrate, you see. We knew we had family here. But it was just a matter of time. And there wasn't enough time left. We wanted to go into France and wait out our time till we could get into this country. It wasn't that easy to get into America, either, you know.

I know. It's another story.

Yeah, that's another story.

Well, after the liberation, can you tell us something about that, how things were turned around?

Well, of course, the English came in. And they had a lot of cleaning up to do. And they made a few mistakes with the prisoners. They gave us food that we were not used to. And a lot of people died of diarrhea-- I mean, dysentery, a lot of them because they gave them those cans of soup. And people didn't know. They just hungry. When you're hungry and thirsty, you don't care what it is. You eat chocolate, which was too heavy.

Was too much.

Too much, too fat, too greasy. And a lot of people died from it until they caught on that this-- they had a big job to do. There were a lot of-- how should I say it in a nice way? How can you say what was around that they had to clean up in a nice way?

Well, just say, whenever you want to.

Bugs, lice, body lice-- they had-- they came in with masks on, with suits that would--

Prevent their contamination.

--prevent them from-- yeah-- being contaminated. So they sprayed us with all kinds of powders and put us into baths to clean us up. They couldn't take us into any other housing. They would just-- whatever we had on us would have been taken with us. And that was no good.

They really did a fantastic job. They were hard-working boys. Day and night, they worked. But-- and then they switched us over, they-- after they had us all cleaned up. And they took us into the officer's barracks, where the German had stayed before.

The German officers.

They were already brick houses. And they burned down Bergen-Belsen. And I went to see when they burned it down. They poured gasoline on and burned it down. And there, what else could you do with those? It was all--

Wasn't fit for a human--

--infested.

Yeah.

--living hell.

So and then we lived there in Bergen-Belsen for a while after the war.

And you recovered from the typhoid.

I recovered from it. I got-- as soon as we were liberated, I got out of bed. And we went over to the officers' barracks. We were all moved over. And I stayed there for a while. And everybody kept on saying, you're from Hanover, why don't you go back? Why do you stay here? You don't have any reason to be here.

Were you afraid to make your own decisions at that point where--

Out of-- yes. Yes.

--you wanted to go?

I was lost. I was-- I didn't know what to do. I really didn't. There was no closing. There was no-- and I had no directions where to go. I had-- I wanted to find somebody. I didn't know how to go about it. I did finally get in touch with the Red Cross. They were looking for family members, you know. I did have--

And they helped you with the search.

They helped me with the search. But they didn't come up with anything. And then I finally got in touch with family here through another cousin who didn't want to give me the-- I don't for what reason she didn't want to give me the address. Maybe she thought that she would lose out on it. But she did give it to me because I didn't remember. I knew I had family here. I knew I had family in Israel. But I didn't write. My mother did the writing. So I didn't remember the addresses.

But I did get a hold of them. And they sent us papers. I went into Hanover one time. And when I passed our house where we lived and I passed the business where my father used to be, I couldn't stand it. I went back to Bergen-Belsen. And I stayed there a little while longer. And then again, I went in. And this time, already, I looked for a room. And then they had to give you rooms. But as a--

In Hanover?

Yeah. Not a whole apartment, of course, they were short on.

Yes.

So I lived with a German family. I had my own room.

Did you know them?

I worked for the Jewish--

Had you known them before?

No.

They were strangers.

And I worked for the Jewish Family Service there. It was like Jewish Family Service.

Yes. Well, I was going to ask you, did you hear from the Joint Distribution Committee--

Oh, yes. Sure.

--at all? And did they help you?

Oh, yes. They sent packages. And we distributed them too. Well, I was working in that office.

My question is, though, did they have any contact with you when you were still at Bergen-Belsen, the Joint Distribution Committee.

I think they were started-- after the war, you mean?

Yes, yes.

They started working already on-- of course, they knew that people wanted to get out. So I don't know how soon after the war they started working. Also, the HIAS-- have you heard of them?

Yes, I was going-- that was my next question.

Oh, OK.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, did they help you, then, when you were back in Hanover?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

They helped you locate?

I don't know. I don't know if we came over by the Joint-- I mean, we were helped by the Joint or HIAS. One of them took care of us. But they were doing the same job. Both of them were doing the same. But we had to wait till our papers-- it took--

Cleared.

--a certain amount of time. They couldn't just take us and send us. We had to have an affidavit. We had to go through the whole examination-- physical and otherwise.

And the papers had to come from--

From America, yes.

--from relatives.

Now, they did get some people out without family here. But if you had family, you had to go through the family.

I see.

They had to take care of it.

Was there any help at all from the UNRRA, the United Nations relief organization?

I don't remember that that much.

So it was really the Jewish agencies--

Yeah, more.

--that helped more? And then you did get your affidavits.

From my cousin.

The cousins.

Meanwhile, I had gotten-- well, no, we got it after we-- I met my husband in Hanover.

And you were working--

Because I worked in that office.

--at an agency. You say it's the equivalent of the Jewish Family Service.

Like something like it, yeah.

You were helping to get people located.

Yeah, well, we got the food packages. And we distributed them amongst our people. And also, we did other kind of writing letters for them to join to HIAS and trying to get in touch with people.

And you were writing in German, I suppose, you communications.

Yeah, right.

Yes, that's the only language at the time.

Did it seem to you that there were very many Jews that had come back to Hanover?

They weren't all people from Hanover. They were mostly Polish Jews that ended up in Hanover. Too many-- I didn't see too many people that were born in Hanover that actually came back to Hanover that I met there. They were mostly Polish Jews that came from different camps and settled in Hanover.

And my husband was liberated in Dachau. And he heard about his brother, that he was alive. And he was liberated in Bergen-Belsen. So he went on a train to Bergen-Belsen. Meanwhile, his brother had found out that he is in Dachau. And they crossed.

They crossed.

So the friends that they went to, my husband went to Bergen-Belsen and said, stay here till your brother comes back. Because somebody will tell him there that you're here. Otherwise, you're going to again miss each other. And they did get him.

Where, actually, did you meet your husband?

In Hanover.

Oh, then from Bergen-Belsen--

Because I worked there, I knew a lot of people. They all came in there. And we met. And in Hanover, we got married. And in Hanover, my oldest son, Michael, was born.

I see. What year?

And he was born '48. We got married in '47.

I see. And did the brothers meet then too?

Yeah. They finally met. And he got married there too, in Bergen-Belsen yet. He lived in Bergen-Belsen. He stayed in Bergen-Belsen until they emigrated. They came here about five weeks before us.

When you were married, then, your husband and you were able to find quarters together--

In Hanover, yes.

--so that you could start--

Also with somebody. You never could get your own whole apartment because--

But it was better than the small little room and living room with the--

Yeah. Well, one room-- well, it was-- it's a widow. So we had the use of--

What kind of work, then, was your husband able to find?



He had-- before I met him, he had gotten a truck from the government. And they gave him some-- how do you call it-- [GERMAN]-- I can't think of the word because we don't use this kind of a-- a special permission to get a truck. And-- because things weren't that available. And he got that.

And he transported people that wanted to go between Hanover and Bergen-Belsen. He put two benches in. And so he made a little money this way. And then later on, he got our business back, my father's business. I got it back. Yes-- part of it, not the whole. I had to share it with somebody. They put a wall. And half of it, I got back. And so we did half-- but not men's clothing that much anymore. It was more like notions, and odds and ends, and fabrics.

It probably wasn't a whole lot of merchandise.

There was no merchandise. My father's merchandise was gone.

No, that, I'm sure.

That they had taken out. That was-- no.

Of course.

But we did get-- not that much because there wasn't that much around.

Civilian life had--

But, of course, because we were survivors, because we were-- we had already a committee there, you see, for our people.

And who was on the committee?

The committee was our People

The Jewish people?

By our people, yeah, survivors, part of them. And they were the leaders of that. They organized it. And they saw to it that we got whatever we could get on merchandise, that we got food stamps, food stamps, also those for the truck, like you got food stamps, you got stamps to buy a car or a truck. Because without that, you couldn't buy it.

And this committee then, were they--

This committee took care of us, really. And that was really founded by people, our people that had a little bit extra energy and saw to it that we were taken care of after all this.

And they worked with the local representatives.

They worked with the local German government.

I see. And they were your representatives speaking.

Right, exactly.

Did it have a name--

And they saw to it.

--or a title that you called it?

It was called--

It wasn't the Judenrat, necessarily.

Oh, wait a minute. No, no, no, no, no, no. It was called KZ-Ausschuss. That means concentration-- KZ is the abbreviation for concentration. Ausschuss, which means-- it was-- I don't know where they got the name from. But that was the German name for it.

I see.

So they saw. They were-- see, we were-- the Jewish Family Service did one thing. We distributed the food, and the clothing, or whatever anybody-- I mean, the US sent a lot of packages. And we distributed amongst our people.

Now, they did other things again. They were strictly working with the German local government, the local government, not the-- the city government, to see to it that we would get places to live, if we wanted to start a business, to get a place, to get the merchandise, whatever. I mean, not as much as we wanted, but still more than the German.

It was beginning.

And that we would-- also they worked a little bit with the immigration. They worked with government more.

Kind of all the bureaucratic--

Right.

--red tape and everything.

They worked with them.

All the time this was going on, you were-- were you and your husband anxious to stay in Germany? Or did you-- was your preference to leave?

I was anxious to leave. I was anxious to leave very much. But then we had gotten the affidavit from my cousin here, who had-- he has meanwhile passed away, but his wife is alive. We had an affidavit. But meanwhile, Michael was born. And he wasn't on it. So they had to send us another one. So it took a little longer. So we stayed there till '49. We got married in '47. I stayed, actually, from '46 in Hanover till '49. But I was very, very anxious to get out.

I see. So then you got the affidavit for the three of you?

Yes.

And you were--

And then we went through all the examinations and things-- first in Hanover. That was did we-- had we paid off all our income tax and that kind of-- oh, yes. Oh.

You wouldn't think.

And I tell you, they ask my husband, it's unbelievable. They had an interpreter there because it was all in English. And they said in German, and they ask him, was he ever arrested? And he said, no. He says, didn't you have a car accident on that and that date? He didn't kill anybody. It was a car accident. He slightly pushed somebody because it was on a icy road. But he was never arrested. And they had that on their records.

That's before computers.

And yeah, I tell you later what I have in my mind.

Then when, actually, did you get to the United States?

In '49, September '49. September, it must be our month. I don't know.

That's sort of the change of seasons. I know what you mean. And--

September.

--your cousins were here in Cleveland.

Well, we start-- our little one got very sick on the boat. He got the measles. And he was only a year and a half old. And a doctor took very good care of him, the American doctor. And we were in a hospital part. I had to be with him there. I slept on a little baby mattress next to him because they didn't have enough nurses. We came with army carriers. We didn't come exactly on a love boat.

So we-- the men were in one part of the boat, the ship. And it was rocking pretty good. It wasn't anything too sturdy. It was General Hershey, I think, we came on. And they were in one part of the boat, where there were-- they had put up hammocks where the men slept. And I was with another woman with children in a cabin. And then Michael got sick. And they took him into the hospital. And I was with him there. And my husband could come and visit, of course.

Yes.

Well, I think for now, we're going to stop--

And then we-- oh.

--again. And we'll get the rest when you land, obviously.

OK.

Good.