

I'm Sally Weinberg. Today, we are interviewing Betty Berliner, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section. Betty, when we left off, we were discussing how you were in hiding. You were telling your story about you, your sister, and your nephew. Would you like to continue?

Yes. I will. It was 1943, July 25. My brother-in-law went out from his hiding and went to get something because we were running without money, without anything. He went to the place where he trusted the people. And three boys, two of which were sons of that particular family, caught him. And they took him to the Gestapo. They took him to the Gestapo. This was on a Friday morning.

And as the Gestapo took him out to be shot, he ran. And it was near the Jewish cemetery. And he ran to the-- I mean, he-- through the gate to the cemetery. They couldn't catch him. So they took a dog. And the dog jumped over the fence and caught him. And then they came and shot him on the cemetery. I knew exactly the date. And I-- this-- I didn't know.

The incident I didn't know until that day evening, the man where I was hiding came upstairs. I was making something for them. He walked in to me. And he says, did you finish my shirt? And I said, yes, I finished it because I never sewed on Saturday or did anything. I mean, this was the day I didn't do anything.

So I said, yes, I finished it. It's Friday. I don't work tomorrow. So he said, OK. Well, now that you finish, I'm going to tell you something. And he looked at me. He said, I'm going to tell you, your brother-in-law is dead. And he thought that I'm going to fall apart right then and there. And he will have to.

And I looked at him. I said, how do you know? He said, because I know. I know when it happens. He gave me the names of the people. And he said, they caught him. He was going there. We know what for he was going, and took him to the Gestapo, and that's it. He said, that's all I can tell you. I said, well, that's enough.

And he said to me, what are you going to do now? I said, do? I have nothing to do. We going to survive, I'm sure. Don't worry. He said, well, I just wanted to tell you so that you know. I says, OK, thank you. I thank you for telling me. And he walked down.

Oh, he brought me also dinner at that time. And he left it. He went away. Well, after he left, and I didn't see anymore his face, I just thought that this is it. I mean, there is no way I can survive. Because here we are, the two of us, with a child, without a penny, without any means.

And I could not believe that the people will actually believe us that we will-- if and ever that we survive, that we will give him whatever we possibly can. It was the worst. I mean, when my sister was taken, it was enough. But this was already the last straw. He was the-- I knew I have somebody to go to, to talk to, to ask, to be answered. This was the finale.

And here we are, two-- my sister is younger than I. And we have a child. And we both gave ourselves a word, that whatever happened, if ever he is caught and we can run, we will never leave the child alone, that we both going to go with him, whatever happens. And here I am. It was like, where are we going to go?

And now, we have to run if the people were-- the people that he trusted so much took him, what are they going to do to us if they know If they find us? So we had to make a plan to run again. And this was the time when I went to a place where they would never even think about.

There was a young woman that we knew through the boys when we were hiding. And she was-- her mother was willing to let us into the barn. And this was the time when there was sickness in the family, some epidemic. And I didn't know, but I had no choice anyway.

And they would bring once a day there some food. And the child was hungry. And I had to give him to eat. So I used to spit on the spoon, and take some straw, and clean it off. So this was the hygiene that I can provide for him. And we were there. Meanwhile, my sister was also away. And she went to a place. And she told them, look--

You left-- you went your separate ways?

We was-- absolutely. We had to separate because we were--

You took the child and she went separately?

Yes. That time, I took the child because she had to go. You see, I could not recruit anybody to save me. I couldn't do it. And she-- first of all, people knew her. And for one reason or another, she had a way of asking, something I could not do.

So she went to a few places. And she got a place that-- oh, and the lady that we were hiding there, she said, just let it go over a week, 10 days. And then you can come back with a baby, but one only. Meanwhile, my sister-in-law's friend was hiding someplace. She took him to hide someplace. She put him away.

Who, the boy?

A man, yes. And my sister found out where he is. And when she came there, and he says, they don't want me. I am-- I have nowhere to go. Please, take me. She says, you know-- she says, but who cares? Wherever we going to hide, come with us. So he came also. She says, what am I going to do with him now?

Now, how old was he?

He was, oh, 26, 28, who knows? I never knew the man. So she-- when she came to the lady where we were hiding steadily, she told them about him. She says, well, I'm not going to put him on the attic with you, she said, no. But if he wants to lie over the barn, let him lie there. I cannot. I'm not going to be responsible for him. He said, sure, just leave me there. And once in a while, give me something to eat. Whatever I have is yours. And he did have-- I don't know what, money, he did.

And she put him there. And there was another person in that house, which wasn't the easiest time for us. But at least-- what should I do? I should find a place for myself and let him go and be killed? So he was there also, lying there. How do we communicate? There is no way.

But we had to say something to each other. So as the roof from the house-- the roof from the barn come against the house, I had that little knife. And I carved out a little hole between the boards so it isn't visible outside, but he could hear us. And we could hear him. He said, oh, that's great. At least we can talk. He said, I was lying there like a dog, never saying a word to anybody. So here, at least, we can talk. OK.

We realized that the cow has milk. My child never got a drop of milk because the quart milk what she got from the lady was not enough even for her children. So why would she give it to our child? But as it happens, the cow had to have a baby. So there was no milk. There was nothing. We made plans for the future.

While I was there, I said, you know what? When the cow has the baby, about three, four days, the milk is no good. It's like cheese. However, after this, they will come and milk the cow. You will have to do something to milk at least a little flask, a bottle from-- a medicine bottle.

He said, how am I going to get the bottle here? I said, wait a minute. How am I going to get the bottle from you? We have to make a hole between the two-- between the roof and this so that we can push through that bottle. He said, I have a knife. I said, I'm going to start from here. And you start from the bottom. And maybe, we will make enough room for that flat bottle to go through.

He said, what am I going-- but you have to milk the cow so early, before that woman comes and so that she doesn't know that. Daytime, you can't do it. So this happened. We-- I went downstairs one night in the dark.

And I asked her if she had maybe a bottle or something. I need a toy for him. She says, oh, yes, there is a medicine bottle, filthy. I says, that's OK. I'll wash it out. And I clean it out. And she gave me. So we tried the width of the bottle, if it going to go in. And it did.

So heaven opened. We had a little bottle of milk every day for him. So when she went to work and she left-- because for the day, the woman would take the cow out to the pasture. So she would-- when she went to work, she would leave us a piece of bread, and water, and whatever she had. So we would take that bread and have the milk for him. And this was like a godsend gift. I mean, this was really his vitamins, his everything that we could think of. So this was that time.

It was on-- again, on August 29, exactly-- oh, meanwhile, I was in one place. It was the mayor of the village at his son-in-law's, which were a duplex, one-- a house next to each other. I was there only for one purpose. They needed sweaters so that I can sit behind that wardrobe. They don't have closets like here. So I was sitting behind that wardrobe and making sweaters all day long. Nobody would come in. And at night, I would go sleep on the attic. And it was fine just for a very short time.

That was your payment, making--

That was my-- oh--

--making the sweaters?

--the greatest payment I could. I didn't have any money. So while I was sitting there, I heard horses and a carriage come into the back yard-- to the front yard. This was early in the morning, I mean around 9 o'clock. I dressed quickly. I mean, I put my skirt on and the blouse. And I looked out. And I saw the Gestapo coming to that mayor's. But I was afraid because this was-- they call him a Kokot, a crazy man, whoever he found for shooting practices.

What was his name?

Kokot.

How do you spell that?

K-O-K-O-T. I mean, this was probably the name the people gave him because he was a terrible thing. Everybody was afraid of him. And I was standing by the window. And I saw him coming. And something, that fear, I said, oh, my god, I hope they don't come to look for me. But I'm alone. So that's one advantage. The baby and my sister is still separate.

So I stood by the window. I opened the window first. I said, just in case, maybe I can jump. It was-- the house was on a little hill. As I am opening the window, the man, the owner-- I mean, the son-in-law of that mayor opens the door. And he says, Gestapo.

And I flew out from the window. And the Polish policeman saw me jumping out. But I guess he knew-- they knew each other, didn't say anything. He said, a split second later, the Gestapo was in his room-- not for me. They told-- somebody told the Gestapo that he killed a pig. And he has the meat, which was against the law because everything belonged to them. And he didn't share. It wasn't a registered pig. And he couldn't. But he did it. So they came unexpectedly to catch the meat. They would have caught a piece of meat.

But I was out. Again, I'm barefoot, white, black hair, it's summer, and everybody is so suntanned, and everybody is in the fields, and I'm alone. Two houses away from there, I knew, also, they would take me in only occasionally to make a few sweaters and send me off. But it was heaven because I ate.

Not only did I eat, but the boy where my sister was knew where I am. I would eat. Let's say they would give me soup, and maybe something else, and bread. I would take the bread and get it in a package. And through the window up from the attic, I would lower it. And he would come late at night and pick it up to have enough bread for my nephew. So this was a double.

And I knew that they are there by daytime. I opened the door. I walked in. And I swear to you, she knelt and made a cross. She says, what are you doing here?

Who said this? Who was it?

The daughter of that owner from that house. I said, look, I know nobody saw me. I didn't see anybody. Maybe some-- nobody's-- however, the Gestapo came over there, you know where. And I have to go in the field. She says, what? Do you know how many people out of? You can't make 10 steps and somebody will spot you. I said, maybe you have an old skirt from your mother I will put. She said, and what about your face? What about everything? Where are you going?

I said, I have to go someplace. And she started to cry. She said, you know what? I was never confronted with this. But god help me, I'm not going to let you go out. Go upstairs on the attic. I'm going to close the door from here, from the house. And again, the door over there is open. I'm going to put the highest ladder there. You hide. If they come, I didn't see you. I looked at her. I said, you really mean it?

What was her name?

[? Kasia. ?] I said-- she said, don't ask me anymore. Go. And she was alone. She cooked for the workers. Because for lunch, they would take all the food out to the fields. And she was alone. Well, another miracle, I'm alive, safe. They all came in the evening. She didn't tell anybody. She didn't. And they all knew me-- I mean, the sisters, they-- even her children. But she didn't say anything.

The next day, one of the sisters came up. She says, I'm so glad that my sister had the right idea to keep you here. She said, you know why? They came. I said, I heard already. My sister's away. And they tell her that they came to look for something to the mayor's son.

And she said, this is it. I mean, I was just listening if they caught you. No nothing, not a word. So she tells the woman. She said, please, go out and listen. If they-- she came back. She says, well, they were looking for a pig because he killed a pig and he didn't tell them. They didn't catch anybody or anything.

She said, well, that was my relief. But at night, I-- the next day, I came there. And I told. She said, you don't know the day, the hours what I went through, the night. I didn't believe him. I thought, maybe they just telling me that they didn't catch you. Anyway, I'm safe. I'm here safe.

Now, the war with the Russians goes bad. The Germans are crazy. Not only the Germans, but they sent people behind the lines. Those were Ukrainians. Those were some Russians that became Volksdeutsches, that they believe in Germany. And they ready to do whatever. So they would send them behind the lines to see what people are doing.

Then the sabotage started. Some groups, some Polish groups, the AK or the other ones, would start sabotaging the German Army. And they were-- I mean, they didn't have too many people to keep everything in order. So they sent the Ukrainians and the other nationalities, whoever may be, Bulgarians. And they would send them out. They would come to every house, look. Before they walked in, they would throw that belt with-- because they had an automatic gun.

We lie on the attic. It's a hot day. All of a sudden, I hear a knock on the door. Well, we are paralyzed immediately. And I hear talking a very poor Polish and a poor German. Who is there? She was very-- something. She said, nobody, I'm alone. He said, do you have children? She said, yes, they in the fields.

And also, we still had that time the Count of Potocki, who was the biggest one in Poland. He had his greatest-- his kingdom was in Lancut. His palaces were in Lancut. His mother was a Habsburg from Austria. His father was a big shot in the Austrian regime that time. And they had 365 palaces in Poland. But this was the domain. This was everything. They had things that the whole world didn't have. In fact, now, it's a museum. So he was still there under the Germans. And they went to work for him.

He was still-- the mother wasn't, but he was. So she said, they working there. And then over there. And I'm alone. And he said, you don't have an attic? She said, no, because really, the entrance to the attic was like a curtain, not a big thing to find. But no, she said, the house isn't finished. I have nothing. They looked around. They walked out.

After this, she came, and she fainted on the attic. I said, by god, you came to faint? She says, I felt that this is the end of me. She says, you heard about it. They caught in a different village four Jewish people. And they killed the family of four together. And they buried them together, which is the worst thing that could happen. And she told us.

She came from church one Sunday. And I saw her walking. Through all this, we learned to look through a crack. And I saw her walking. And her shawl was falling off. I told my sister, there is trouble coming. Before she was undressed completely, she came upstairs quickly to tell us the good news.

And the normal question was who did they shot-- the Jews or the people? And she would say, both. Oh, my god. Well, this was a tragedy. Nothing we can do. And she-- so she-- after-- the same week after this, she came and she said, I saw my kids and myself dead with you together. I said, don't worry, never-- it will never happen. They go crazy. The war is coming. Apparently, they-- we didn't know-- no news, no newspaper, nothing.

You didn't know what was happening with the war?

Nothing. We didn't know of the invasion. We didn't know of anything.

And what-- when was this?

This was 1944 already, summer, the summer of 1944. OK, we alive. And this was about June. July 27, somebody was walking by. He says, do you hear the bombardment? Do you hear the cannon? She says, yeah, but who knows? They probably have maneuvers. He says, yeah, maneuvers? It doesn't look like maneuvers. That was two days ahead of time.

Then Friday, it was raining, pouring. And I see through that crack. She said, something is going on because so many German soldiers are walking. I said, where are they walking? She says, take a look. They covered with trees. They covered with branches. I said, what, the German soldiers?

She said, don't ask, but listen. You can hear the bombardment. I said, I can't believe it. But anyway, I was more scared. Then I didn't know what to do. Where am I going to go? So this was Friday. And it was pouring. And I heard the cows made such terrible noises. They were in the fields. I said, they must be afraid of some. Something is going on.

My nephew, for one day, she said, maybe he wants to go to the other attic, to that man, for a relief. And he said, send him. I'm sitting. He will sit with me. And we did. This was Thursday. Saturday morning, I woke up. I hear noises-- I mean, noises, runnings, the road is-- like cars, and trucks, and everything. And it was something. Again, it was pouring. It was a terrible storm.

And I walked to that hall. And I said, do you hear? Well, he said, I'm-- all night, it's going on. I don't know what we going to do. I said, I'm afraid that something-- the war is right in our back. He said, I don't know. But all night long, I couldn't sleep. And I heard the noises because we were not too far away from the main highway. He said, it's something is going on.

I said, oh, my god. And then while we were talking, puh-puh-puh-puh-puh. I said, oh, my god, it's shooting around us. I said, look on the attic. I see. It went through the attic and through that straw. He said, as long it isn't fire, don't worry. I said, so what am I going to do?

The first thing, the woman came running because she already saw what's going. I said, the first thing what you have to do to me, go to the barn, put him in a sack, and bring him here. Whatever will happen, will happen with all of us. I don't want to leave the child alone. He has to be with me, whatever. She said, OK. She went. She took her pail and something. She brought him in in a sack. He couldn't walk because he didn't walk. So he couldn't walk. He could only sit.

What do you mean?

He couldn't walk-- stand up and walk, he couldn't. And he was like a-- he weighed maybe-- at that time, he was at that time already six years old. He weighed maybe 20 pounds, maybe 25 pounds-- I mean, skin and bones. So she brought me the baby. We sit on that. And the-- here, he said, this is heavy artillery. And all, I look. She said, come down, don't be afraid.

I says, oh, no. Not now. She says, take a look wherever you can. Look at the Germans. They go, they don't look at anybody. They torn up. They filthy. I mean, this was something that I could not imagine, the German Army, filthy, torn, and torn shoes. She said, you should see, some walk barefoot. And everybody is camouflaged. I said, OK, well.

In-- her son came running from somewhere. He says, boy, the Germans are going back. The Russians are coming. What? The Russians are coming. But they don't know. Because they might go back. Please, please, sit. Don't be afraid. And here, the shooting goes through the roof, back and forth. And I don't have nowhere to go. But I said, we're going to sit right here. We're not moving anywhere.

This was Saturday all day long. We went to sleep quiet-- quiet. It wasn't quiet. But it was still. You didn't hear anything. Sunday morning, I hear a scream. The Russians are here. I said, what? He said, the-- and she came running up the ladder. And it was like-- I can't describe the feeling. This was the time to hug her, to kiss her, to-- and it was the moment that I couldn't even say a word.

It was like-- it was Tisha B'Av. This I knew. Because that man kept a Jewish calendar. This is how I know when my brother-in-law died and my sister. Those are the two dates that I keep up. And it was Tisha B'Av. And I was-- she says, well, don't you understand? The Russians are here. You won't have to be here anymore. Not a word-- my sister and I were completely numb.

She says, I understand. I'm going down. I have to see. I says, go down. Listen. Because they might go back. Please, don't say anything. Because this is war. This is for real. She went back down. And I guess she was also sort of expecting more than she got.

And I-- as long as I was with it, and later, whenever we met, I always made sure to tell her my feeling. She says, don't you worry. I understand. I didn't-- I thought that you were going to scream. You're going to be happy. And here, I saw, you just couldn't even move.

What was her name?

Stanislawa. We called her aunt because in case somebody hears us, that his name was J³zek, also a Polish name, in case, we say sometimes a word that this is the-- it has no connection. My name was Ba³ka, which was close to my-- I still have friends that call me no other name but Ba³ka. And my sister's name was Maria. So we had to remember those names sleeping, and eating, and everything so that we don't, God forbid, just in case. So everybody knew us by those names.

So Sunday, when I-- she said, you have to come down and see. Because the Russians are-- caught a German. And they have him on display. I said, never mind, not I. I am not going to see them like this. And I am afraid. I'm not afraid of the German now. And I'm not afraid of the Russian.

I am afraid of the enemies within, that I don't know who is my enemy now. Who will want to finish me off as though not to be a witness for the future? Not that I did it to anybody. I could not take to be-- to go and say, look, you killed my sister. I couldn't do it-- or my brother-in-law. I could never do it.

Those people ran away, naturally, as the Russians came in. But I was still terribly afraid for the child, mainly, and for us because the times were so uncertain that all I wanted-- after we were-- that particular Sunday morning, I was five days sitting on the attic, not to make a move because I was afraid for the local people, for the people that knew my brother-in-

law and sister, for the guilty ones. I was afraid. So we were sitting.

This was Monday morning. Nobody worked. It was chaos. So the son of our lady says, I have to go. I have to go to the city, see what's going on, see the Russians. I mean, everybody-- they came out. I said, if you go to the city-- I was dreaming out loud. I said, please, look if there are Jews. Go around, snoop around. Don't make any noise. But just listen if there are some Jews. So he went to the city. And we sat there.

And the emotions, the dreams, it was almost like a let-down. I was dreaming, when the war is going to be over, I'm going to walk out, and everybody is going to be there. I mean, my sister is going to be someplace. My mother, my-- everybody-- if I survive, why not them? So it was-- I said, who could be there in the city?

She said, look, we going to find out soon enough. So he went to the city. He comes back. And I said, tell me, are there Jews? And he said, well, there is a Jew. I said who is the Jew? He mentions a name I never heard of. OK. The next day, we sent him again. Go to the city. Maybe people like us are hiding and they afraid to come out. Go.

He came back. He says, oh, there are Jewish boys. There is a Jewish villa. They took over. I said, who? My sister said, wait. If there are such-- and he mentioned whose home they took over-- she says, then we're going to go home. But let me see if this is true what he says.

Early in the morning, she got up. And she went to the city. She went to the city. She went straight to that house. And sure enough, there were six Jewish men. Who are you? One is from-- each one was from a different part of the country. However, they all hid in the city, on the-- in the middle of the city in a bunker.

They were all hiding?

All hiding. So they-- who are you? Where are you coming? She said, well, I have a sister and a child. And we are waiting until we save enough to come-- and they said, what do you mean save? You free. She said, anyway, my sister is still afraid. And we have to come very early in the morning because we afraid. We afraid to walk. We have a child.

He said-- so they said, you want us to come out? And she said, oh, no. I don't want anybody to know where I was. We going to come in our-- in the right time. Don't worry. This was Wednesday. And then she came home.

And she said, yes, they are. And she described each one separately, how they look, and what they are. And they all were in a big ghetto in Rzeszów. And they-- and then they were hiding in a bunker that they needed instruments from the front to listen where they are hiding. That's-- they had an engineer there. And they made a hiding place for 50 people with food, water, and everything. Yeah. But they did catch them.

What town was that?

Rzeszów. That was a big city. It was a ghetto. And my husband was there to the very last minute. So she describes everybody. And I said, OK. Is there a room? He said, yeah. She said, you know how big the house is. And there is another family that came-- father, mother, and a daughter, all the people that we knew very well. I said, that's all I want to know, if there is somebody. So the next early morning before sundown, we dressed up. We took the child. He couldn't walk. We took him on our back.

Why couldn't he walk?

Because he didn't have any movement. If he walked a few steps, he was falling.

Because of sitting for so long?

Of sitting and he wasn't nourished. He-- it was a miracle how those bones kept together. So we came out. We brought him to the city. And she says, let's go straight to that house. We come to the house, I look around, there are two Russian soldiers with two bayonets on the-- not guns, but the rifles. And they standing by the door. I said, oh, my god, for this,

we had to come here?

She said, my-- I talked to him yesterday. I said, what happened? She said, wait. It's early. Let's see. Maybe somebody will come out from that building. And we hide again, hide in a little-- the way there. It was a garden. And we stood there. I said, god, if somebody will see. And walking-- it was market day. I saw the first cherries. He didn't know what a cherry is. And instinctively, I walked over to buy cherries for the-- and then I realized, I didn't have a single penny. So I quickly turned around.

But people stopped and looked at us, actually stopped and stared at us because it was a unnormal scene to see me as white, pale white, like a-- anyway, we didn't pay attention. I said, just keep going. The Russians were everywhere.

So this was a terrible-- and as we look into that-- behind the fences and look, she sees one of the boys coming out. She says, that's the one. I said, go ask why. And she walks to the-- they had gates. He walks.

And she said, what is-- he says, oh, my god. We-- a major came here. And he took over the quarters because it was a beautiful villa. He said-- and with the majors, they have to stay on guard. He said, come with. I was still afraid. He said, don't worry. Believe me, we are here. So we walked in. And while we there, a woman comes with two children, also somebody that we knew very well. She survived.

From your village?

No, from a different one. She survived the same way we did. But she was in one place only with the two daughters-- didn't move. The people took them. And they were there all the time. So and her husband happened to be in Russia. So she said, oh, I'm so glad. I see a face, a woman, a child. OK. We walk in inside. I say, where are we going to stay? So each one of us got-- I mean, family got a room.

And that old couple with a very sick daughter that had typhus while they were hiding, she said, she had such a fever that they warmed their hands over the steam that was coming out on a attic, on a barn. But she survived. She survived. And so did they. The old man lived to a ripe age of 101 in Israel.

So I was so happy to see them and everybody. She said, you can-- the rooms were tremendous. She said, you know what? We will take just one room. I, my sister, and the baby, and she and her two daughters, she says, who needs more room? We're going to have plenty. That's what we did.

So we have a home, a home. On the floor, nothing. The skirt and the blouse I wore wasn't already mine. It used to be mine, but then I gave it. They gave me only to go to the city. I didn't have anything.

OK, but we have things hidden in another village. Like my nephew's bedroom set, she gave it to a organist. They were very close friends. So she-- pictures that I have, she left the pictures there. She said, if ever anybody turns up, even if I'm not here, please. This is the only thing that they will have. Give it to them. And that's what I have.

Now, who said that?

The organist-- my sister gave it to them.

Your sister?

Yes, my oldest sister. Your older sister. So we told the boys-- well, there were some beds, like army cots, because I guess the army must-- or the officers were there, the Germans. So we had where to sleep. And the first night, fine, we slept there. The next day, we have to-- I mean, you're dead without a penny, nothing to eat, nothing.

So the boy said, don't worry. We have money. OK. Give us some money-- I mean, lend us money. Go to the market, buy whatever you want. And whenever you going to give us back. And what a pleasure, maybe one of you can cook. So at least we will have something to eat. OK. And so it start our friendship. I mean, really, my husband and one of his

friends were like brothers all through the time in the--

Your husband was in this group?

My husband and my sister's husband was also in that group.

And that's how you met your husband and how your sister met her husband?

That's-- exactly. My sister was married before me. And she went away. By then the invasion was on. The concentration-- this was in 19-- we were freed in 1944. The war was still going on. But this part of Poland was under the Russian occupation. So we were free.

This was-- if they would go at least 100 kilometers so that Warsaw and Łódź, hundreds of thousands of Jews would have been saved. Because at that time, they started to take them to Buchenwald, to Dachau, to all those places. But we were free already. So we started a household with that lady and the two daughters. And we were always together. And young people, our--

How old were you by now?

By then I was already--

1945?

--yes, I was already 19 years old, and young. And for one reason or another, we were never sick. We were never sick. The only thing, when I started to work, I had-- I bought a pair of shoes that didn't fit. I had all kind of-- but nothing in comparison to other people that were almost like rabid from lying, from being wet, from all kinds of things. We were OK-- and the child.

Meanwhile, the room, there is a Jewish major, a Russian Jew. And we talk here, not knowing that he is sitting there. And one of the boys whistles the Hatikvah-- unconsciously, whistles it. A knock on the door-- one of the men, they walked in. He says, the major would like to see you. OK. I mean, they walk in. And he looks at them. And he said, are you Jewish? He said, sure. We are Jews. We just got out thanks to your army.

And he said, what did you whistle just a little while ago? He says, I have no idea. I whistle all kinds of tunes, he says, but one particular. I know, it must have been something that you whistled, this. He said, what did I whistle? And he started. He says-- no. Oh, yeah, Hatikvah. He said, oh, so you do remember that you whistled the Hatikvah.

And the tears start coming out. He says, I hear that you have children here. He said, yes. He said, I'm walking from Kyiv. You know how far this is? I haven't seen a Jewish face. I was in betar when I was yav big. And the Hatikvah, that's what made me aware that you are Jewish children. And he said, where are the rest of them? He says, walk into our quarters. And you will see them. And he walks in. And I was there with my sister.

This Russian was a Jew?

That-- yes. And he looks at us, he says, Jewish children. And ah, he says, what do you need? What do you want? Do you have somebody to do what they did to you? I said, no. No, I don't-- please-- thank you very much. But what do you need? I said, I really-- we don't need any. Don't you need food? I said, well, whatever we need, we can get.

So a little while later, a man walks in with all kind of cans, with the best what to them what they had in the fields-- pork and you name it, the best. And he said, at least something, let me do because tomorrow, I'm leaving here. I am going to the bigger city. I am going to become the commander of that city. Please.

So we said, no, we really don't want anything. We don't want to start anything. We want to stay here as long as we can. And then we going to keep going. We're not going to remain here. And that was it. So this was. And so we started. We

weren't long there. We went to Kraków. When Kraków was freed, this was already in 1945. We went to Kraków. We had an apartment there. My sister was married, meanwhile. And she went.

She got married in the little town?

Right. And meanwhile, she moved away to Kraków the first. And I was with a child, naturally. My husband had a way of being with my nephew like two brothers. I mean, he had brothers his age. So it was love at first sight. And he would walk with him. And he would talk with him. And he would-- I mean, they were inseparable.

OK. My sister was married. And she went away. So my nephew liked more my sister because he was always with her. I was like a stranger to him, only in time of those interval visits, then he saw me. But she was like his mother. So she was married. And she went away.

And I saw that I'm going to have something to do to make him aware that I love him as much as she and that I am the same system. However, it was very good that my husband-- that time, he wasn't my husband-- that he was very close to him and sort of like a comradeship, that he would go with him wherever he would ask him to go. So this made my burden so much easier. And it was a tearful say goodbye to her.

And I told him, I promise you, we going to move too as soon as times are a little bit quieter, I'm going to move. I'm not going to stay here. OK. So we moved to Kraków. And my husband and his friends moved. They took an apartment. And then I moved with him.

And I told my sister, you have nothing. Don't feel bad. After all, I'm the older sister, and you younger. And you go with your husband. I'm free. And if I will never get married, it's no big loss. I have the child. And I'm going to take care of him. So don't worry. Meanwhile, Auschwitz was open. The war-- this was 19-- June-- May '45. The war was over. And my brother-in-law's two sisters survived in Auschwitz. And they came back. One was a young girl.

Came back to where?

To Kraków. One was a young girl, his younger sister. And one was an older sister. I mean, she took care of her so that she hid her wherever she could to keep her alive. And when they saw what's going on, she was hiding because they took them out from Auschwitz. And they were walking towards Germany. So when they came to a farmhouse, she took the sister and hid her and herself in someplace.

And when the war was over, she came back. And she was looking. She found out that her brother is alive. So they were together. And the younger sister remained with her brother because she was going to look for her husband. They were separated in Auschwitz. So I told her, you see, the best way, after all, you have to have your sister-in-law home. And I am with him. You have nothing to worry. This was in Kraków in the summer of '45.

Then we went to German-occupied through the Russians Breslau in Germany and Wroclaw in Polish, a huge city in the Lower Silesia, huge. And we went there when it was practically still burning because there was a big resistance. But Kraków was already-- the Russians were snooping all over. We had to go down. And we were afraid. We didn't-- we always were afraid, maybe they will come back. The uncertainty was so much so that we never trusted anybody for a long time.

So we came to Wroclaw. And we took an apartment. And that lady with the two daughters came with us. Wherever we went, we were together. And her oldest daughter got very sick. And this was in November. And December 15, I was married to my husband, which was to mine.

I told him, you probably fell in love more with my nephew than with me. He says, it was part of it. And they were really-- an up today, they are probably-- no father could care more about a child than he cares about my nephew. And of course, this was him. He knew that this is his home. And he is his uncle. And I'm his aunt. And my sister was also there. But it was only visits. The home was where we were. And so we were married the 15th of December.

Where?

In Breslau, in Wroclaw there. We had a German rabbi. I still have the German ketuba. And we had a store there. And I was with him, with the child. He went to school, of course. Oh, that's it. And he was in school.

And from there, we went away again because this was in 1946 in summer. Because the Russians started again to snoop. Whenever I opened a door, a Russian would be there. And I was scared to death. So we went. And the Haganah at that time started to work already behind the scenes, paying off the border patrols and taking masses of Jewish people through the border to Czechoslovakia to the DP camps in Germany, to the American-occupied parts.

So that was another ordeal. One night, we went there. We couldn't carry much. My nephew had measles at that time. My husband had to carry him. We went through the border. And the people from Czechoslovakia are probably the nicest ones in the world. They wait for us. They gave us whatever they could. And that's how we came through Austria to Germany, to a camp in Germany, to a DP camp. And from there, we came to the United States.

And how did you happen to come to Cleveland?

Well, this was-- we came through HIAS.

The HIAS.

Or the UNRRA-- U-N-R-R-A. This was-- we were there. My husband took mechanic lessons in Germany. And they thought that Cleveland might be good because he has mechanical abilities. And this-- we had nobody here. So this is how we came through the Jewish Family Service.

And what year was that?

1950.

In 1950?

Yeah. My son was meanwhile born over there in the DP camp. And in 1950, June 9, we came to Cleveland.

And how did you manage to get along in Cleveland in the United States?

For four weeks, we were sitting in a hotel room on Prospect. Thanks heaven, the hotel is razed already a long time, which should have been before we came. But anyway, we were there in one room, all four of us. And then we got an apartment off of Kinsman, 142nd, on top of a garage, a converted garage. But that was fine.

And we-- my husband got a job. For four weeks, he studied the map of Cleveland and everything else. And he knew the city already. And the landlord then gave us that apartment as talk to my husband-- of course, in Yiddish. He said, what can you do? And he said, I took some auto mechanic courses. And I would-- I love cars. And he said, oh, wait a minute. One of my landsman has a place. Let's-- come on. This was after an accident I had. I fell through the roof. But that was fine.

So he took my husband. He went there. And he talked to the man. He said, sure, you can come Monday to work. He didn't ask him, how much or what? And we were living. This is 140th and Miles. And we were living 142nd off of Kinsman, which he walked the first day, the first few days.

He came there and dressed like who works in a-- but he looked at him. And he said, look, I know you won't work here. But just the same, I'll give you a job. You just came. You have a wife and children. I'll give you a job.

OK. He took off the watch and the ring and put on a overalls. And he started to work for \$0.75 an hour. He didn't know that. A week later, he found out at \$0.75 an hour. But that was fine, as long we didn't have to go to the Jewish Family

Service to get the \$22 what was coming to us as refugees for four people.

You didn't want to do that?

No, you kidding? Under no circumstances. They didn't find us a job. But that man did. And you want to know something? My husband is still with him-- that long. And we bought a house. And a year later, we bought a two family house off of Kinsman. And I had-- in 1954, my second son was born. And then we moved from there shortly.

How did you manage with the language? You didn't know English?

No. We didn't know English. And it wasn't like it is now for the refugees, you have class. We went-- somebody who lived in the apartment where we lived, a Jewish man, told us that Harvey Rice on Buckeye has night classes. My husband had a car four weeks later, naturally. We had a Mercedes in Germany. So it was no big deal to have a car. But he needed a car.

So he bought a car in the place where he worked. And we had a car right away, which others didn't know how to drive and didn't have a car. So we met some people. And we had already a way to go to a park and not to sit in that horrible apartment. But that was fine. My husband told me, the first time in his life he saw me crying was when I walked into that apartment.

Well, Betty, you certainly had a very interesting interview today.

Thank you.

I want to thank you for telling us your story of how you survived, how you and your family survived those horrible years.

Yeah. This is just the beginning. But anyway, in freedom, the beginning is wonderful.

And you're happy to be here now?

Oh, my god. My nephew went to school, went to college, went to the army. He is a lieutenant colonel in the army now. I mean--

And you're very proud.

Well, naturally, very proud, and love the country more than probably many, many, many--

You appreciate many things that others don't.

Absolutely, absolutely, much more so than anybody else.

Of course. I'm Sally Weinberg. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Betty Berliner. I want to thank her very much for this interview. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section.