

And you were telling me that-- when we were speaking before that it was in 1943 when you were in the labor camp-- I presume it's just about a year, not quite-- where your troubles were just beginning.

Yes. Well, we stayed there in this labor camp, in that one barrack until they built more barracks. We were-- we saw that they were building more barracks. Of course, we didn't know why or what. But as it turned out, this later became a concentration camp. And they built enough barracks for 1,000 women. They brought women from all over. And they made it into a concentration camp.

At that point, we were guarded by SS. And it was all completely fenced in. And as I said before, we worked in the same place, under the same conditions. We continued working. Only until-- when the war was ending, nearing to an end, did they stop making the material.

And they were starting to bring in old uniforms, German uniforms. And we then had to clean them and mend them. And they were being shipped back. This is the only thing that changed, as far as working. Now, when it became a concentration camp, they, of course, cut down the-- on the rations-- different food, which was very little.

What kind of food did you have before? And what kind of food did you have afterward?

Well, I believe I said what we had before. So it's no use going in to it.

It was the breakfast, and the lunch, and the dinner that you described.

And here, now, it-- no more potato or-- no more occasional potato, I mean, during the week. The only time we ever got a potato and, once in a while, a piece of horse meat was on Sunday. That was the big feast. But we were fed basically just that soup, again, from the pumpkin soup and these terrible, terrible dry vegetables, with full of sand that crunched, and a piece of-- a chunk of bread.

While we were in a labor camp yet, as I described before, I had my little sister. And she was a growing child. So my sister and I-- my-- next to me, the younger sister decided that maybe we ought to give Frances a little more. We were then getting once in a while a ration of margarine.

And we decided, maybe we ought to give this extra little piece to my sister. She was a child. And so we made a plan that we're going to feed her separate. Have her eat separate. And we will eat separate. And this went on for not too long because my sister got wise to it. And she refused to do it. She did not want to do that. She says, I know why you're doing this. And I cannot eat your food. At one point, my sister also said to me in Jewish, oh, would I love to play with a doll. She was a child. She was just a child.

Was she working and had the same schedule as you?

Yes, yes, she was--

Were you near one another?

--very determined. And we tried to help as much as we can because she was a child. And in concentration camp, as I said, the rationing of the food became much worse. We were cramped more women yet into one room. There were bunks three high. And my sisters and I wound up in one bunk. There were three of us.

Did you have your own bed?

Bunk.

Bunk, right.

Yeah, with a cover, a blanket, and a pillow, and were constantly ridden by the bugs. We couldn't sleep nights. It was just terrible no matter what we did. We were able to keep clean because, as I said, this factory where we work-- where we worked was a factory where they were producing materials. And they had soap. After this was woven, it had to be washed. And it was a very rough liquid soap. And we used to steal some of it to bring home and so we can cleanse ourselves with it. And life went on like this until 1945.

Right before 1945.

Yes.

Let me ask you a couple questions. Do you remember, were your guards German? Or were they--

Oh, yes, SS.

They were all German guards?

Definitely, yes. They were German guards.

Were any of the guards--

With ammunition, of course.

Were any of the guards ever civil to the prisoners?

Yes. Yes, some of them were. Some of them were very compassionate. And some of them were ruthless. And life went on like this pretty much towards the beginning of 1945. Where we were located in Langenbielau, there was-- not too far from there was a very high mountain. It's called the Zobten. That was the name of the mountain.

And we started hearing shooting. We then realized that something is cooking, that perhaps, the Germans are being driven back. And perhaps, perhaps, we are going to make it. And we will be liberated. But at that point, if someone would have said, I'll bet you a penny you'll make it, nobody would have believed it, even though the will to live was great.

By then you feel that people--

And we were so young, but we never believed we were going to make it.

That numbness that you had described before was--

It's just-- it just went on for six years with so much misery, with so much loss. But then we started hearing this shooting. And at night, we actually could see flames beyond that mountain. And that took two or three months. As it turned out, it was the Russians that are approaching. And they just couldn't break the enemy.

And I and my sisters in the camp where I was in and the camp where my husband was in were actually liberated the very last day, May 8 of 1945, when the Russians came in. So the men threw open the gates. At that point, the German guards left. They fled. And when the men realized, before they even saw the Russian occupation come in--

What did you think when you saw them flee?

Well, we were all very confused, like we didn't know what to do. There was fear. There was joy. There was just very mixed emotion. There was-- it's very hard to describe, very mixed emotion. And the men threw open the gates. And they started running towards the women's camp, which was quite a few kilometers. And the women also did the same thing, open the gates. I just sat there totally numb.

My sister Esther broke out with a few women. And first thing they did was to go and raid a butcher shop, places for food. We were hungry. By the time my sister returned with a sack full of food, my husband was already there. The men came running to their women-- to sisters, to mothers, to wives.

And when my sister came home with that food, my husband said to her, stop, you cannot eat this. She brought home bacon and salami. You cannot eat this. We can't eat this. And my sister got very angry at him. She says, what do you mean? I finally can have food, and you're not going to let us eat it? What's the matter with you? How mean can you be?

He says, now, look, our stomachs are shrunken. Our bodies are not used to that kind of food. If we'll eat it, we're going to get sick. He finally let us have a little piece of bread and a bite, each one of us, of salami. He says, that's all you're going to get. And that's all I'm going to get-- nothing more. My sister was furious at him.

And as it turned out, he was absolutely right because the people that did eat all broke out with typhoid. Afterwards, many died because they ate-- they devoured the food too soon. The system wasn't used to it. And we then were liberated by the Russians.

Let's go back for one moment.

OK.

Did you think you would survive?

No. No, as I said before, didn't. At that point, we did not believe.

I don't mean that. I mean, during the time of the labor camp and the concentration camp, did you think you would see the end?

No. No. It was already dragging on, as I said, for so many years. And you more or less go along with a routine, cold, no shoes, one garment to wear. You washed it out and you sat in the blanket while it dried. Your feet were sore. Your feet in the winter froze because there was no shoes. And you just go along. But you just don't see the end because it dragged on for so many years.

Did you expect help from the people you were with or from anyone? What was the relationship-- besides your relationship with your sisters--

Yes?

--what was your relationship with the other people? Was there--

With the inmates?

With the inmates, yes.

Everybody was in the same predicament, everybody.

Were they a source of support to one another?

Yes, that's what we did. We sat nights in the dark, even after lights out. We sat in the dark, and discussed, and made plans, and mostly talked about food-- what we used to eat, and what this tastes like, and how this was cooked, and how this was made. That was the most important thing. And god knows who is left. And we were sure. At that point, I did not know that my mother was shot. I did not know where my father is, still hoping, but knowing that most probably, we'll never see each other. So a lot of the will for life and survival was gone.

Were you thinking about the Jews in Palestine or in the United States at all? Did any of this--

We were thinking--

--or the Russians?

Yes, we were thinking of people all over. And at that point, I don't think that we could imagine a normal life, people leading a normal life. We just couldn't. Because maybe, people that were a little older, maybe they could.

No, you.

That young started living that kind of a life, never having really a youth. Me being the oldest of the three of us being together, just couldn't imagine a normal life again.

Do you think you thought more about your past than your future?

Yes. We did think of the past. Because at that point, as I said, the future was very bleak. So we mostly talked about family life, about holidays, and mostly about food, mostly because we were always hungry. So we mostly talked about food.

What did you think about when none of the outside world was helping? Did you talk about that at all?

We did. We must have talked a lot about it. And we-- at that point, I don't think that we were thinking about America coming to aid or the Russians. The Russians even-- it was remote coming to our aid because we knew then that there is a war going on in Russia also because of the uniforms that we were fixing. And we, at that point, understood very well German.

We could hear the-- overhear the German authorities talk. And the German people that we worked with were telling us bits and pieces. So we knew that there is a war in Russia too and that they were losing the war. So at that point, we did not know who was going to come and liberate us.

How did they were losing the war? Because of hearing this?

When we started hearing those rumors and overhearing the guards. And then finally, hearing the shots, as I described, and seeing actually the red sky at night, that we knew that someone is coming. But we had no idea who is coming to liberate us.

And the fact that it was taking them so much time, you figured, they were losing.

Yes. They just couldn't break through. They just couldn't break through.

Did you have any feelings about God then? Was it spoken about?

Yes, yes. Even though I was brought up in an Orthodox home, we start-- this feeling and belief in God started to fade because according to the Jewish religion, they say that the good people are made to suffer for the bad. And we felt at that time that my mother, and my father, and my grandmother, all the good people that we knew were taken away. So we are the bad people.

Evidently, we didn't deserve any better but to be punished like this and go through this hell. So how are we going to survive? I mean, we're evidently not worth to survive. And because they say that in-- according to the religion that if the pious people are taken away, they're taken then. They go to heaven. And they're spared the misery. That's what we were talking about. As I mentioned before, I had a very good Jewish background and learned. So this is-- and there were a few women that were older than I was and my sisters. So they knew a little more. And this was the belief.

But were there some-- or was there any self-appointed leader or group-appointed leader of your barrack?

No. They were always appointing. They always chose rough, tough-- either women or men.

Who were they appointed by?

Germans.

The Germans appointed the leader?

Yes, by Germans. By the way, I forgot to mention that my husband's sister, the one that was hiding with me at the outset, when I said, she was lucky enough to be chosen to work in the kitchen. So once in a while, she stole a little bit of extra food and gave it to myself and my sisters. So we were always grateful for that.

So they identified the rough, tough person. And that was the one who was your leader, your drum leader.

Yes, they were the lazy-- the liaisons between the Germans and the-- yeah.

All right. And tell me about the liberation day and anything else you would like to share with us about those years.

Well, liberation day was a very emotional day. We were crying. We were laughing. It was-- finally that we-- really, it was unbelievable that we're-- the fear was still there. It was unbelievable that we were finally liberated, there was no guard, and that we are actually free. But where to go? Where do you begin?

At that point, we slept at night yet in camp. The following day, we were told by the Russian authorities that we are allowed to go out and occupy a room by the Germans. And the Germans were told to let us in.

And I remember my sister's remark when she-- the first night when we slept between sheets and in a real bed between real sheets. My sister said, I will never, never forget this day, the feeling I'm actually sleeping in a clean bed with sheets. Then we start-- I started a process of finding, trying to find relatives.

Before you tell me about that, which of all the experiences that you had gone through do you think was the most painful to you?

There are so many. Which of the experiences? Actually, each one was painful, one more than the other. Initially, it was the very first one, the very first chuck was losing our father. Then little by little, I guess, it was less painful. As things went on, it was less painful. As I said, when I was standing, facing the wall, and told that I'll be shot, it's just-- it's calm, much calmer than I am now at this moment.

So it's hard to describe which are happening was the most emotional. They just happen, one day after the other. It was very little rest in between. And you get used to the troubles. And they become not less painful, but easier to deal with because you just expect them, that tomorrow is going to be another problem. And you're going to have to deal with it. And perhaps, you'll make it.

The many beatings that you got, the many punishments, the kneeling for hours on pebbles just to instill the fear in you-- my sister being caught stealing several potatoes and getting 50 on her behind with a whip from a very powerful woman that injured her kidneys. And at that point, they cut off her hair-- the pain of that and not being able to help. So it's hard to tell which one happening is the most-- was the most painful.

It was just a combination. And they were easier to take as it was coming. You just expected them. You knew. You never know what disaster will strike strike next. But you just knew it was going to come. As long as it lasts and we were there, it's going to come. And that's why I feel that this should be told for generations to come to know. Because I think I'm running a little ahead of myself.

No, that's all right, at your pace. If you wanted to, go back to the liberation and when you came here.

I am now 59 years old. My sister, who is the youngest, is 53 years old. We have the feeling, always had the feeling, that we are not going to live a full life because somewhere along the line, it had to affect us mentally, physically, that we cannot possibly outlive a full life. I had always a fear of raising children for that reason too. I was afraid that they're going to be orphaned at a young age.

And that's why my sister being the youngest and being 53, how much longer will there be people around to tell the story? I mean, face to face. And I want you to know that a few years back, I would not have been able to tell this story, sitting here and telling it.

But the older we are getting and realizing what is being-- what literature is being passed around that this never happened, and order of people, and our children, and our grandchildren, and everybody to know that it happened and that it can happen at any time, any place, if people let it happen. This has to be told.

And I think that the organization that's sponsoring this is doing a phenomenal job, that this should be preserved and be told so that people never forget what happened. No one is safe. No one is safe if-- there is always another crazy man that can organize something like this. And if the time is right, it can happen again. Sometimes, people blindly lead a madman. And there's many mad mens, we know. It can happen again. And we have to see to it that it doesn't happen, if it's possible at all to prevent a future Holocaust, not just of Jewish people, of any people, of any human beings. Excuse me.

And this is why it's-- I never was really sure that I'll be able to do this. But you gave me great encouragement. And somehow, it seems I made it through. But then I'll go back to what happened after the war. We were able to find my brother. We found that my one uncle that I mentioned at the outset is-- my mother's brother is alive and that my uncle from my father's brother-- my father's brother is alive, and just a few cousins that I mentioned. The rest were all gone.

Fortunately, my two sisters, and my brother, myself remained intact. We were one of the very few fortunate families. We lost our mother, and father, and all our loved ones. But we tried to build a life from then.

We did not-- my husband, and I, and my sisters did not remain too long on the Russian zone. We realized that it's not good. And by then, we found out there were centers that were set up that you can find out. And you were listed. Always, wherever you went, you listed-- no matter where you went, you listed your name, where you're from. We were able to find out that my brother is alive, that he survived.

And so we started. And he was on the American zone. He was liberated by the Americans. And we smuggled ourselves over from the Russian border. You weren't allowed to do that to the American zone.

And there, we started building a family. I became pregnant and gave birth to my oldest daughter in September of 1946. And she was the first one, first baby. And there were all the cousins, and second cousins, and whoever was around was there at the birth, at this joy. My children--

But where were you then? What city were you in then?

In Weiden, in Oberpfalz. And that's where I stayed until I came to the United States, by the way.

And what year did you come here?

In 1949, May of 1949.

Was your husband working then?

In Germany?

Yeah.

No. Well, we just doing a little market to try to make a living. And my children say-- and particularly my oldest daughter that was born in Germany-- she was two and a half when we came here-- she always says, we are miracle children because the Germans tried to extinguish our parents. They made it. And as a result, we are miracle children.

And we stayed in Germany until 1949. I had an aunt here and an uncle that sent us papers and signed for us. And we came to Cleveland. And we've lived here ever since. I then had another child, our Penny, seven years-- when my oldest daughter was seven years.

I was afraid to have more children, as I said before. I was always afraid that they'll become orphans at a very young age, that we are not going to make it, that I went through too much to be able to outlive a normal life. But I'm here.

And my husband started working when he came here and working very hard. He was a painter. He started working for a painter being here just a few days. I went to work after three days, worked in alteration. We worked awfully hard because we recognized that this is a country with a lot of opportunity. And you just have to go and get it, work hard, be ambitious. And there is an opportunity here.

So we did work very hard. And then my husband, a few years after that, went in the painting business himself. I worked along with him. I worked for-- he always worked from home. And he had a very nice business here in Cleveland with a very-- pretty good reputation.

And as I said, then Penny was born seven years later, after Linda. And then four years later, my-- our son Jerry was born. And we educated all three of our children. We're very proud of it. Each have a degree. Linda, the oldest, has a teacher's degree. She's a teacher. Penny has a master's degree in clinical psychology. And our son Jerry is an attorney. He just graduated a year ago from Toledo, I told you before, from law school, passed the bar, got married in January.

And we are very grateful to this country. I-- my belief is, and we very often talk about it, that people that are born here, a lot of them do not appreciate this country at all. They don't know what a wonderful country this is, to be able to vote-- the joy for us when we became citizens and were able to vote. And I want you to know, I have never missed one time the privilege of voting.

And people really should know what a wonderful country this is. Nowhere does a person have the opportunity to do things as you have in this country. And I just hope that what I've done today, that it will be of some use, mainly to make people aware of what happened and what can happen. And try to prevent it, if possible at all.

And thank you is almost too meek a word to say to you for what I know has been difficult afternoon for your expression of your soul, of your hurts, of a life that you certainly weren't entitled to have to have. We do appreciate it. We do care a great deal about you. And I hope that-- and I know that your understanding of the record that you have just submitted is a great one, a one with a great deal of love and compassion for your fellow man and for the people who love you dearly. And we want to thank you.

I thank you very much for taking interest, taking your time to do this. Because without people like you, this would not be possible to put on record. I want to thank the studio for allowing us to do it also. Because one person alone cannot do these things. You have to have help from all sides. And as I said, this is the country that these things are possible to do.

OK.

And I thank you again. And can I give you a kiss? Thank you.