

I'm Lee Rosenberg. Today we are interviewing Helen Feig, a Holocaust survivor. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section. Helen, let's go back now to the labor camp where you said you were sent from Auschwitz. You were about to describe the living conditions there. Would you do that now?

Right. Well, when we arrived to this labor camp, we were 500 young women. There was maybe two or three mothers, which they were not picked until the gas chamber. And they put us to work. Some of them they picked to work in a munition factory, where they were making bombs. Some of them were put to work in the kitchen, like the mothers, like cooking. Some of them were made to work outside.

And it was made to do Schützengrabens. You know what that is? No. OK, Schützengrabens is where you hide yourself when the bombs come down. You make like a-- how shall I call that? That's one thing I don't remember how to say in English, Schützengrabens. It's where you hide yourself.

Like a ditch in the ground?

Like a ditch, when the bombs come. Now, Lübberstedt, where I happened to be, was right near Bremerhaven. Now Bremerhaven, it's what the boats are picking up. It's a port. Hafen is a port. And it was always day and night they were bombing the city of Bremen, the Hafen, the port.

And the most of our time, we were in the bunkers sleeping. Now Schützengraben means the bunker, OK? I couldn't catch it before. We were sleeping on the bunkers the most of our time, not in the room because the bombs were coming so fast that the minute we just put our head down, or sometimes we didn't even go to bed. We used to get one piece of bread. That bread had to last us for two days, sometimes for three days.

It was called an [HUNGARIAN]. An [HUNGARIAN] means, in Hungarian, a portion. If you left that piece of bread, if you went to sleep, you put it under the pillow. This you probably heard already. If you did not carry it with you under your arm, you didn't have it.

That was like losing God knows. If you have a diamond, if you lose it, you're not so touched. OK? And we used to get the black coffee real early in the morning, before we went out to work. We were also, before we used to go to work, we had a Zahlappell. They counted us.

And we used to go to work hungry. We had to sing. And I didn't sing because I couldn't sing. I knew-- I don't have my parents. I lost my parents. I don't have nobody. Why shall I sing? So I used to do with my lips, pretending I'm singing.

One day, one of the SS ladies, her name was Mary. She saw me. She started hitting me because I'm not singing. I'm supposed to sing, and I'm not singing. She disliked me. She hated me so much because I happened to be afraid for her, that she shouldn't kill me.

So then we would go to work. So I happened to work a few days in a munition factory. And I realized that one-- the girls are getting-- their hair is getting to be red. And some of them really got tuberculosis also from working there because it was so strong it went in on their lungs. So somehow, somewhere, I looked out for myself. And I figured I'm much better off to work outside at the bunkers, even if it's cold outside because it was going on the fall of the year, then working inside. Because I'm just going to have my hair red, and I'm going to get sick.

So somehow, somewhere, I pushed myself in that I didn't show up in the factory to work. And I worked outside by the bunkers. So as I worked by the bunkers, we happened to have a Jewish girl. She was a kapo. You know what that is? OK.

They were under the supervision, under the SS. And they were Jewish girls, just like me and anybody else. But they were doing their rules. They didn't-- I mean, they didn't care.

So this Jewish girl, who happens to be a Hungarian Jewish girl from near Budapest, she happens to be a real

religious girl. And she was really mean to us. I'm talking to the other Jewish girls. So that-- we had to give her part of our margarine, which it's a very small amount you get two times a week to put on your bread. We had to take that margarine and give it to her.

She had more food than we had because she would get food even from the SS people. They would give her food, that they should make her mean and cruel to us. You know? So anyway, after our day's work, and we had a lunch, OK? They gave us breakfast. We had black coffee. Lunch, we had a soup.

In that soup was all kind of a stones and vegetables, and maybe sometimes a few pieces of horse meat. And I'm not talking pieces to bite. I'm just talking which it was cooked in the soup. OK? We didn't know what it was, and we didn't care as long as we had something in our stomach.

At night we would have a piece of that bread, which we used to get for two days or three days. And we used to get the black coffee also. So everybody, I mean, got skinny and skinny. Every day you lose another pound and another pound. And that's how you keep on living.

By that time, we reached a middle of the winter already because-- they had nothing to give us to eat anymore, the Germans, because they were going down, not up. They know already they lost the war. We didn't know, but they knew. And they had no way-- I mean, there was no way for them how to supply us with food.

Well, one story which I didn't tell-- I'm coming to this story. It was right before Christmas. And we are walking to work. We had a big walk to work. I don't remember how many hours we were walking.

They had no more gas for the trucks to pull the munition for them. The munition was pulled in in another bunker, where they put it away. So they took eight girls, and I happened to be one of those eight girls. And we had our rope on our shoulder. And we would pull the truck like an animal, like a horse.

And we had no shoes. I happened to have a pair of shoes from-- which I took along to Auschwitz. And when I arrived to that labor camp, I think they took them away from me. So we had those wooden shoes. I don't know the name of them.

Clogs.

Clogs, whatever they are called. You know, when they came out in style in this country, I wouldn't allow my kids to buy.

I fell under this truck. It was snowing outside, and I fell down. And I hurt my back. And I'm suffering as of today from that fall. And the German came over, and he said like this in German, [GERMAN]. They were expecting me to be dead.

You know what that means, [GERMAN]?

You are not dead yet.

I'm not dead yet. I had to pick myself up. There was no excuse, if I can or I can't, and put my rope on and just pull that truck again and again. And if you were sick, you were afraid to tell them you're sick because they could have sent you to the gas chamber. I mean, you just didn't tell them you're sick.

It was very, very cold in the month of December, the month of January. It's just as cold like it's right here in Cleveland. They had big snows, you know. We had no gloves on our hands. We had a dress. And we had those Clark's shoes.

And I don't remember what for as socks or stocking, whatever, something we had. I don't remember what. And I mean, there was no place to get a rag or to get anything. My hair was still very, very short. And I happened to take along a nightgown from Auschwitz, which was my own nightgown.

And it was very, very bitter cold. So I took that nightgown and I sort of made-- I had like a babushka on my head, you know? And one day, they noticed that I have on my head a gown. And I'll never forget it. It was on a Thursday morning.

And I used to fast Monday morning and Thursday morning because I didn't have what to eat anyway. So I figured if I'm going to fast, at least I'm going to pray to God because in Europe, if you're used to fast Monday or Thursday, a half a day, religious people thought that that was something in me yet.

They took me, three SS ladies and one SS man. They kicked me down three or four steps, and they hit me in my head, in my eyes-- I was black and blue-- in my back, with their feet they kicked me. They hit me. They didn't even know where, but all the four of them on me because I had that little nightgown in my head, made as a babushka. I folded it as a babushka. And they took it away from me.

And after that, I said, God, I'm not going to fast no more. I didn't do anything wrong. Why am I punished? Why am I punished to be hit yet. It's not enough it's cold, I'm hungry. I gotta be punished yet, to be hit. And again, they noticed me. Wherever I went, I was afraid for them. They always had such a look on me, like they hated me.

And I was afraid that they shouldn't kill me. I mean, you know, so I always tried to avoid them, not to see me or not to do this to me or not to do that to me. Now, we had some girls from my block, which I happened to be in my room. They came, and they used to sneak out at night and take in some potato shells from the potatoes. The dirty shells, and bring them in in the room and eat them because we were very hungry.

OK, I did not go out at night. I was afraid. I didn't. Sometimes they got a potato or two. Between the garbage, which we picked up. And one day, the SS came in to inspect the rooms because they had to be cleaned. The rooms were clean. We cleaned it ourselves. And she happened to walk in. And the girls happened to have that potato shells and a few potatoes on the table.

She took the two girls, and she shaved their heads as much as the hair they had already grown from Auschwitz. She broke their bones they got punished because she found that in the room. And that's all a true, true story. See, I guess I didn't have to write no notes because if I would have write a note, I would have mixed myself up because I remember everything. Those two girls happen to live in New York City. They are both alive, which had happened to them. That.

And they came also, not from the same hometown, just about two kilometer from where I come. Now, what else would you like to know about the labor camp?

About this Labor camp. Were-- tell me who ran the labor camp. You keep mentioning the SS.

Yes. Who ran the labor camp? There was a leader. He was an SS. And there was one SS lady. But she was also-- they used to call him the commander fuhrer. That was the name of it in German. And then was the ladies. The ladies-- we had no men in that camp.

There were only women in this camp.

No, no, no. they had Wehrmacht. They had-- while I'm talking, just women were in that Labor Camp. Yes. But they had men also, which they were Wehrmacht. They were like around the camp that somebody shouldn't run away.

Guards.

Guards, like yes. Yes. And they used to get delicious food, cooked food. And you know.

And this camp was located--

In Lübberstedt, that is near Bremerhaven, the port, the port of Bremen.

Is it a city, though?

Bremen?

No, the city where the camp was.

No. I really don't know what it was because we were in the mountains. And after the-- before the liberation, they took us away in trains. Well, they put us out because we were supposed to be taken away before they saw already that the-- I mean, there was nothing to do for them anymore.

They couldn't make the munitions anymore. They had enough put away. So like they would take us, a bunch of girls, and tell us to go in-- and that was in the spring of the year of 1945. We should clean pick up sticks from the branches, which they were falling down from the trees.

Like, I could eat. It's impossible to believe it. Like, you kids are eating chewing gum, and you're chewing on gum. I would take a piece of-- I don't remember what's the name of this, from a tree-- something grows on a tree. And take this piece from the tree and chew on it and think it's food. For a whole day, chew on that piece from that tree.

It had some kind of a-- I got a feeling of the taste while I'm talking to you. I don't know what it was, absolutely no. I know one thing, after the liberation I was 80 pounds. And that's very-- I looked like an 80 90-year-old woman. That's how I looked.

Were you aware of any civilians near the camp?

No. I never saw any civilians out around or near the camp. No, no. We were not allowed in town. That was all the way out from the city. I never saw the city. No I don't know--

And there were no civilians that worked in the factories with you?

No. No. No. Well, excuse me. In the factory, they were working. civilians. But they were also Ukrainian, and Poland, the ones that were also taken away from the homes. They were there too.

But they did not live in the same camp, where you live.

No, they did not live in the same camp. In that camp, nobody lived just us. Now, which I did mention to you, I did mention that to you before. We had to change the sleeves. But I don't think that that was taped, when we were talking about it.

Yes, about the sleeves. Yes. Yes. Now, aside from the times that you fasted, you said that this was a religious observance that you used to do at home. Were there any other religious observances that you had, any holidays or any services, anything at all that you--

No. No. Even on Yom Kippur, we went to work. We knew when Yom Kippur happens to be. Or Tisha B'Av, I happened to be already in Tisha B'Av, in camp. No. No, we didn't know anything. We just knew one thing, when Christmas came we had to sing the Christmas songs. And many, many times it comes to me, when I hear the Christmas songs in television, and the same melody goes in in the German Christmas songs, which it goes in the American, comes to me back sometimes the memories.

All right, now how long were you in this camp, Helen.

In this labor camp? Well, I'll tell you exactly how long. I was three months in Auschwitz. The whole time I was in the camp was one whole year. So it happened that I happened to arrive there-- I left, I think-- I left sometimes in July, end of July I think I left this camp, or maybe in the beginning of August. It's very hard to remember dates. It's impossible to remember dates.

That's when you arrived in Lübberstedt. And I stayed there-- I should say, until a month before the liberation. Because before the liberation, when they already saw that the war's being finished, the war is being taken over. They had no more food to give us. They didn't have no more work to give us. I mean, they saw already. There was nothing for us to do there.

Everything was arranged by the Germans. I mean, they had tremendous good heads to do it. They didn't need nobody's help. They arranged it for other camps too, not just for this particular camp, that they're going to take us by train. And they were going with us by train back and forth, back and forth. Because wherever they wanted to go, there was no more place.

So first, they picked out the sick-- excuse me. They picked out all the sick people first. And they took them down to Feldafing. You know about Feldafing?

OK. They all took them down to Feldafing. Excuse me for a minute. Now, I don't happen to be sick dear. I don't know. God just gave me enough strength that I happen not to be sick.

But my hands got frozen. My fingers got frozen. I still cannot pick up something hot. If I have to touch something hot in the house, it's terrible. And I did make myself mittens in the camp. I don't know where I got ribbon. And I made myself two needles from wood. And I made my own gloves.

Somehow, somewhere, I don't remember where I got it, but I got it. But my hands are still frozen. And my back is never going to be good because I heard that. I mean, I damaged it in camp there. And I never got any money, like I told you, because I took out \$360, and I didn't have the right lawyer, so I don't get paid for it-- nothing.

After that, they took us to a--

You said they took all of the sick people.

Yeah. They took all of the sick people out. They took them to Feldafing. Then they took us, the healthier people. And they took us. They took us, and they went with us back and forth, back and forth. The train started to be bombed from the Americans, from the English people. And there's another very interesting story, which I have to tell you, which it happened to me, but how good God was to me.

We were going in this wagon, And the same wagon where I happened to be was bombed. Excuse me. We are 50 girls in one wagon. We were 500. And I just recall and remember that our wagon got bombed and there is a few girls, which they happen to be friends of mine.

Like one girl got bombed, and she got right on her head. And she couldn't work. So I ran for a blanket to get for her, that I should take her out from the wagon because there was some other girls. Some of them were dead. Some of them were wounded. And some of them, the hands, some of them the legs, which I have two friends of mine. They live in New York City. They don't have just half of their arms. Half of their arms were bombed.

I have another girl, which she happens to be with me. She's in Israel. She has one foot, one foot. It happened to her the same train. I happened to be in that train.

I had a big piece of fire on my heart. And I took that big piece of fire, with my own hands off my heart, and I throwed it down.

And as I saw, my best friend, which she happens to live in New York, is wounded in her hat. And she said, well I cannot walk. It's my legs. But it was not her legs. She was wounded in the head. And because of the head, her blood was running.

And I was running to get a blanket. And it was getting already pretty late at night. And I mean the SS died too there. There was, I mean, it was no picnic for nobody. One of the Wehrmacht, as I took the blanket, and I said, well, I got to take off my friend.

And he said to me-- I'm going to say it in German because it's much better-- he said [GERMAN]. And he gave me a-- how do you say that?

A slap?

A slap on my face and on my head. And I grabbed the blanket. I did not leave him the blanket. And I took her out from that wagon. I carried her out, and I did not leave him the blanket because I needed that blanket for her for at night and outside.

And as I carried her out, I found a Wehrmacht. And he happens to be an American. He was born in Germany, and he was an American citizen. And he went home before the war, and he couldn't return anymore. And he had all the equipment. He took out the scissors, and he cut out her hair. He cleaned out. He bandaged her.

So at least she-- you know what I mean? At least he saved her life. And we stayed in that field overnight. And then they said that the ones that are wounded, they should stay there. And the ones that are not wounded, they're going to take them with them. And they are going to-- you know.

So I did not want to leave that girl there because the ones they left them there overnight, they died at night. It was still cold outside And they were wounded, and nobody was there. There is a whole grave-- graves of them people. I don't remember the place where it happened. But some of the girls know what happened, that they buried those people. Not we buried them, the Germans buried them.

And there were still German officers who were still in command?

Yes, there were still German officers because the ones they died, they died. Some of them died too. And the train took us. The train took us, and we went-- we were supposed to go to Hamburg-- excuse me-- Hamburg, Germany. And we were going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. But we didn't know anything what's going on. I mean, nobody told us. But we were just seeing that ourselves already, that we are going, coming and going in the same place.

So anyway, then we found out that the biggest two boats were drowned, German boats. I don't remember the names. I did remember the names. And they put in not just Jewish people in those boats. They put in Polish people. I'm talking Ukrainians, some of those which they were also taken away from home. And they drowned the boats with people. Now, we missed the boat.

When we arrived there, we missed the boat. The boats were gone.

Where were the boats going to?

The boats were going underground. They drowned the boats with the people.

Where were the boats headed?

Oh, they headed? I'll tell you where they headed. I found that out after the liberation. They headed to the Mare Baltica.

Mare Baltica is the-- I'm trying to think how do you call this in English. The mer-- it gets like-- the light is-- at night you have light too. How do you call that water? I can't remember. It's called Mare Baltica. I remember it in school when I learned about it.

And well, I don't know how to say it. OK, somebody will pick out the word by the tape. And there where those two boats were drowned. I found that out after our liberation already. We lived in that place. And the people were still coming out from the water. The water was throwing out the dead people.

So the boats were headed--

The boats were headed, and we were late. We missed the boats. If we wouldn't have missed the boats, none of us girls would be alive.

This is another country, or still in Germany?

No, everything was in Germany. Then they decided-- oh, yes, then-- before that was already before the liberation. So they saw already that the train cannot go because they are bombing the train. So after that, they took us and we had to walk. They did not put us on the train. After the train was bombed, they did not put us on the train no more.

So the train was bombed. And they started going with us, walking. You know, walking, walking-- as you walk, you find Ukrainian, Russian. You talk to them because at that time, we still knew a lot of languages. They tell us, why do you go-- still going with the Germans? The war is almost over.

Oh, when we heard this, we figured somewhere, someplace they're going to stop with us. And wherever they're going to stop-- we were talking to each other. We are not going to go with them no more. We are just going to tell them that the war is over, and we do not want to go with them. That's what happened.

They took us in in someplace in the woods. And we had to sleep there because it came at night. It was very cold, and it was raining. And I remember we had some blankets, which we took along from the labor camp. And we took the blankets. And we slept outside, and we made a fire outside to warm ourselves up.

And I don't-- I don't know how we were able to do all that. And they came next morning, a SS woman. And they were already dressed, not with SS clothes. They were dressed with civil clothes. I mean, they must have carried around with them the regular clothes.

And they told us that they would love us to come with them in this and this place in this and this mountain. And they got so much food there and so much clothes, they're going to give us food, and they're going to give us clothes. And we were already split in two parts. Because-- I don't know-- one part went this way, and one part was this way. So we told them like this. We are not going no place out of those woods.

And we told them, the war is over. We do not have to go with you no more. And you have no right to do anything with us anymore. I don't know how the hell we were not afraid to tell them. We didn't know-- I mean, we didn't see if they have any guns with them anymore.

And they were begging us we should still go with them because they're going to give us all the goodies. And believe me, I'm telling every word I'm saying is the truth, the honest, honest truth. We did not want to go out from those mountains no more.

And we said, well, we're going to stay here until we're going to find out 100% that the Germans put down already the rifles, that they are not anymore under-- we are not anymore under their supervision. That's what we did.

We stayed there about three days in those woods. And they kept on coming and going. And then they ran away. And then they ran away already. We didn't know anything about them. OK, we had to eat something. I mean, we were hungry. And we had no food. OK?

So what we did, we started going out. That was not in Lübberstedt. That was someplace-- I don't even know what it was, OK?-- where we were put down. We started going out to the farmers, to the German farmers. And then like I told you, one sleeve is different than the other sleeve. But the Mogen Dovid, they know who we are.

They gave us to eat. They made us sandwiches. They gave us milk. And we took it back to the other girls because we lived there with sharing. Was not existing that I have to eat but you do not have to eat. If you had a few girls-- I mean, not for everybody. I mean, you made yourself like a sister, like everybody had a sister, or just close people.

And I did that with another girl, like two of us. The other girl lives in New York. And we needed matches very badly because we were outside, and we didn't have no matches to make a fire. And it was very cold at night. And to make something to eat for ourselves. So I saw a station, some-- I got liberated by the English people, not by the American people.

So I saw-- someplace I saw an English soldier standing guard in the front of a building. And I walked over to this English soldier. And I spoke at that time, five or six languages, maybe more.

And I tried to show him with my hands. And I used every language. I didn't know English. He didn't know what match. I couldn't say matches. And I couldn't tell him that we are a bunch. I'm with Lady so and so. So I told him, Jew, Jew, Jew--

So he understood. So he made us we should wait. He was on guard. He couldn't move. So we waited.

He called out, one of the-- after he was over, he called out a Jewish boy. This Jewish boy was speaking Jewish already. And we happened to tell him-- I asked him for matches. So he knew. And he said, where are you? Where are you girls from? What are you coming? And so and so in Jewish. So I told him, we are living already for three days in this and this mountain, hiding from the Germans. And we have nowhere, no place where to go.

And there were-- we are 360 ladies because we lost the rest of them. They died. We lost the rest of them. 140 were gone. And there is nobody to take us over. And there is nobody to do with us something. So he told us to wait. So we were afraid to wait for him to go with him in the Jeep. We were afraid.

So we started walking back. As we walked back, it didn't take too long, he came out, and he found us, all of those girls there in those woods. And he took us in. He called up, and they came with a big truck. And they put us in in some kind of a school for overnight already. And they even gave us their care packages, which they would get from the army. And we stayed overnight there.

And then they arranged-- there was a summer resort place, and it was near Neustadt. Neustadt was also-- I don't know if you know about it. It was also in Germany, and it was also a camp. But they put us in in little summer homes.

And they were giving us so much, very little to eat. OK. But they had already fields there, like we were able to go out and pick peas or beans. It was from the Germans, but we didn't steal it. But we were allowed to go out and do it.

And we start sewing in the-- after the war I'm talking. That was not in the war yet. OK? And so we would sew something for girls, which they had like-- they had boys, which they knew, and they gave us food. By hand we were sewing. We had no machines to sew. And we had no clothes what to put on. We had nothing.

So as we were walking, one day we were walking, we saw a big place with sheets. So we took a few sheets. From those sheets we made dresses. And I even came home. I had a beautiful suit. It was a linen suit. It was made from sheets. And it was all sewed by hand together.

And then we stayed there until September. I'm talking after the liberation.

Yes. You stayed in this--

In this summer place. And after that, end of August the beginning of September, something like that, after this, they picked out all the [? sick ?] girls right after the war. This I didn't mention. They took them to Switzerland. I mean that you all know. After that, they told us, if we want to stay in Germany or we want to go home, wherever we want to do.

And this is the English were in control of that place. This was the English-- of control.

Well, I happen to know I have no sisters, I have no brothers, I have-- my mother and father is not alive. I

mean, I'm going to think, but nobody is around. So I didn't know what to do. So those two girls were with me. They were much older than me, but they are friends of mine. They decided that I should go home with them.

So I did go home, and I stayed six months. And I came back to Germany. And I met my husband in-- I mean, if this is necessary to say.

Sure.

I met my husband. I did know his whole family. OK? But I never met my husband. I met my husband, and we got engaged. And I came over to Germany in 1946. I came back. I was just for a few months in back home. I came over, and I lived in Germany.

But when you went back home--

Right.

--and you realized nobody had come back--

Yes, I realized that.

--what was the last had heard from your father or about your father?

I didn't hear nothing about my father. I just heard so much about my father, that one of my cousins, my father's first cousin happens to be in a labor camp in Kasho. He found him in the ghetto. And he would take him food. Then I found two other people, which they came from the same place where we came.

They climbed out through a window, and they ran away from the ghetto for someplace. And they caught them, and they brought them in also to Kasho in the ghetto. And they saw my father. And I don't know up till today- I know my father is killed. He's not alive. He probably was killed in Auschwitz. They took him to Auschwitz like they took anybody else.

I keep the same yahrtzeit. I keep my father and my mother's the same day because I don't have another date. I mean, I never--

You don't know.

Who would give me the date? Who would I ask for the date?

Yeah.

I mean.

All right. So now the summer that you spent then in Germany, before you went back home, you had mentioned that you weighed only 80 pounds.

Right. That was right after the liberation. I had no hair yet. I had a little, little, very short hair. And as we walked with those coats and those funny dresses, and you could have swear I'm 80, 90 years old. And I was very young yet.

Otherwise, physically how did you feel?

I was OK. I mean, I was weak. I was hungry. But I was not sick, except that I hurt my back. And I'm still suffering from that.

Did they give you any kind of medical treatments while you were there?

No. I didn't ask for it because I didn't want to make a big issue out of it. No, I didn't get no medical treatment.

So you just regained your health, your strength.

I regain my health, and I came back. And I went through plenty when I went back to Germany because things were very rough, things were very bad. I had family in America. I had an uncle here. And I asked him for help, so he would send me a few dollars. I'm talking after the war already.

But when you-- now, when you left Germany and you went back to your hometown, how did you travel to go there? By train?

OK. I traveled like this. We went by train. We arrived in Czechoslovakia. We were in Prague. They put us up for overnight. We were in Pressburg for overnight. We were in Budapest. And as being remembering Budapest, I was never in Budapest before. And I remember that my mother had a sister in Budapest.

And I remember the school. She used to be a supervisor in that school. And so I went there to the school. I remembered the address. And I left the girls. And I started going along, a young kid and with subways, and Budapest, very big city. And I found the school. And the school was all burned down. It was all bombed.

But somebody told me that my aunt lives there and there. So I went all day. I came back in the middle of the night. I did find my mother's aunt. And I saw her.

And then I stayed in Budapest. The school, which we all stayed in, was called [NON-ENGLISH]. There where everybody was staying, whoever came back from the war. And they had names.

You know Harold Foyer? You know him. I happened to stay in the line for food. And guess who I saw? Harold Foyer. And I was able to tell him about his sisters, that his sisters-- I found his sisters in Neustadt, in camp. I found them in a list, that they are all alive. I was able to tell him.

And then I went-- we stayed there until we got home. Somebody from my hometown saw me, also walking in one of the streets. And he took me home. He paid my fee, and he took me home from Budapest. And when I arrived to my hometown, I'll never forget it. That was on a Friday noon. And I came home, and I went to take a bath. And in our house a gentile was living. It was one of the worst feelings a person could ever have.

And one of my neighbors across the street, one of the girls, she came home way before I did. And she called me in. And she gave me to eat lunch. She had baked fresh challahs. And she had a delicious paprikash, chicken for Friday for lunch. And it was so delicious. And it had such a taste. And I figured, gosh, I never ate this since I left my mother, you know, and all that stuff.

And then I had my cousins, which the cousin, which I happened to be in Auschwitz with, she was home already too. And her brother was home, and my father's another cousin. And everybody made like they called it a kolkhoz. There are like 16, 17, 20 people lived in the same house because they were afraid to live alone, that the gentiles should not kill them. I'm talking after the war.

And so they said, well, I'm a cousin, I mean. And they wouldn't even let me go to live with no-- I was planning I'll live with some of my friends. I couldn't have lived in my house because the gentile picked up-- took a big broom to me. I walked in the house just to see the house. Then I went back, and I had a beautiful coat with a mink collar, which my uncle brought this for me in 1937. He paid at that time, was brand new, \$150.

I also had a raincoat. They used to call them a trench coat. That was a very big thing to have in those days in Europe. And I went back to the guy where we left the clothes and the cow and so on. And he took a shovel. And he said to me, get out of here. If not, I'll chop you up. And I didn't get nothing.

Then I went in my house. I asked the guy where my parents used to live, I'd like to go in. And the whole

basement was all chopped up. We had put away, stored there, silver and linen, you know, in our basement and all covered up. Then I had the jewelry. My mother had written the jewelry in our backyard, her jewelry and her girlfriend's jewelry.

Then another lady came and she said, no, take it out from there-- I wish she would have never taken it out-- and give it to this and this lady. This and this lady is going to hold it. And if you'll come back, she'll give it back to you.

I went to get my jewelry to this and this lady. She said, well, I got nothing. The Russian took everything away from me. But she found my father's watch from Russia. He brought us from Russia, from the First World War. She gave me that back. And I don't have it.

My husband gave that watch to a friend of his, and I don't have it. One day, she came in, and my husband and my cousins had a big grocery store back home in Bechkef. And they had a bar. And she came in for a drink. And she had my mother's ring on her finger. And the minute she saw me, she ran out.

And I got so stiff that I couldn't grab her hand and take off that ring and then go back to her with one of my cousins and take away-- she had jewelry, which I happen to know, from three Jewish families. And I never saw her after that. If I ever would go back home, I would walk in in her house, if she is still alive, and I would have searched for that jewelry.

So you never got anything back.

I never got anything back. I never got anything from my parents. The only thing which I got from my parents, somebody found in our house two little pictures, one picture of me and one picture of my mother. And I never have any of my father. I don't even have a picture. Because there was a picture in this country, and they put me in \$5 in a letter, and somebody took the picture with the money. So I don't have another picture of my parents.

So then you lived in the house across the street from your own house.

No, I didn't live. I just walked in there to have lunch. I did live in-- after the war, I did live in Bechkef with my cousin.

So you left the town then.

Yeah. I left the small town. It was just two kilometers. I used to go by it almost every day. But I never walked in in the house anymore.

After that.

No.

And then you went to Bechkef. And how long did you live there now?

Oh, just a few months.

And who did you live with?

With my cousins, with my Cousins.

That they came from that town?

Yeah.

So you lived in their house then.

We lived about 16, 17 people. I don't even remember.

And then what were your plans? What were you thinking at the time?

Well, my plans were like that. I had no business to go back. I hated it. Every time I had to go by my parents' house, I used to turn my head and cry. And I had made up my mind that as soon as spring of the year will come, I'm leaving. And that's what I did.

Spring of the year, we left, 17 young people. We left. We went over the borders, from Hungary to Vienna and so and so. We just left. And I arrived to Germany. And Germany, I lived in a small town first. And after that, I got married. And I lived in Wolfratshausen after-- I got married in Wolfratshausen. After that, I lived in Frankfurt, in Frankfurt am Main in Germany.

With your husband.

With my husband-- and I came out from Frankfurt.

And did you know that you wanted to come to the United States?

Oh, yes. Because I had my-- my mother's brother was alive. And I had my cousins. And that's the only family really I had. I had no any other family. And I did get married in Germany in 1948. I got married, and I came out to 1949. September the 17th I came out to this country.

Did you have any help from--

No, no.

-- from the Joint Distribution.

We didn't have no help from the Joint Distribution because my husband had family in Cleveland. And they sent us the papers. And they sent us the tickets. And we came out. And I went to work. And my husband was working for his family for a while. And then he became very, very ill. And he had to go in a sanatorium, what also came from him from camp.

He was in a sanatorium in Colorado, in Denver, Colorado. And I got pregnant. And I happened to know that he is sick, but I didn't know he was that sick. So I gave birth to my son. And after the bris, he had to leave. And he went in a sanatorium. For two years he was there. And I was left here with a child. And I did not take no help from nobody because I happened to work, and I had a few dollars. And I would refuse to take any help.

I did not want to have a black ticket on my record. So I lived six months in Cleveland with the baby. And then I lived with my family for almost two years in Allentown, Pennsylvania. And then I came back here. And we started from the beginning, like newcomers.

So when you arrived first in the United States, in New York?

Right.

And how long did you live in New York? Just a short time?

No. I didn't live in New York. I lived in Cleveland.

You came directly to Cleveland.

I came directly to Cleveland. But then my husband got sick. I lived in Cleveland for after that, after my son was born. And then I lived in Allentown for about two years because I wasn't able to support myself. And I didn't want to take no support from nobody.

And you had relatives then in Allentown?

Yes, I had the relatives there.

Uncle and cousin?

Yes. And cousins, right.

So they helped you get settled at that time.

Right. Right.

And then you came back to Cleveland after your husband was released?

Yes. We came back after my husband was released. We came back. And we even had a business before he left, before he left to Colorado. And they took us with money. We had nothing. We just started again. He started working on a job. And somehow we-- somehow we had luck. OK?

Were there any agencies here who helped you get started?

Nobody helped us. I did not go to no agencies. I don't even like to talk about it because I did not want to get help. And there was no agencies. You know what they used to do? When my husband left, that made me very mad. My baby used to cry all night. And they would-- 8 o'clock in the morning, they would come call me. They're going to come and see me.

And I had to sleep in the morning because my baby was crying all night. And I refused them to see them. And I didn't take any help. And I didn't want any help. And I had family, and I had my own money, which I saved up. I was working until the last minute I gave birth to my child.

And we are not that kind of a people. I mean, you know. And then we just went in, worked ourselves up, and we went into business.

Did you talk to anybody about what you had gone through those years in Europe?

No. I did not talk to nobody. I'm going to be very honest with you. In fact, one of my cousins told me that she never heard me talking until I was not at the Holocaust in Jerusalem.

In 1981.

Then after that, I start talking about concentration camp. My own children-- to my son, I did talk once. And to my daughter, I didn't even talk because I couldn't talk. For years it was in my heart, and I couldn't talk. It's the first time I really and truly gave out my story.

Did you join a synagogue after you were living here in Cleveland?

I joined the synagogue for 34 years right away.

As soon as you came here.

Right.

How did you feel then about being a Jew in the United States, not knowing the language?

Well, it was very rough, and it was very hard. In the beginning right after liberation, I didn't believe in God. And I said there is no God if he did what he did. But slowly, as I came back to this country-- in Germany, I didn't write in the Sabbath. I didn't cook in Sabbath, which I still don't do. I mean, I do write. I don't cook. It

came back to me. Somehow, somewhere it came back to me. Yes, I did belong to the synagogue right away.

And did you become active then in the Jewish community right away?

Yes, I became active in the synagogue. And I was active in the synagogue. Then I got sick with my back, and I just couldn't do things for other people. I was lucky that I did things for my own family. And I do have-- I am a member, a Hadassah member. But there was times which I couldn't even get up in the morning. So I couldn't take big jobs, big responsibilities.

I did do-- I did help for-- with money all the time, never refused, never, never. You know what? I found a bill, which you're not going to believe me. I was going through papers when my children moved out, and I'm going through papers. I found a bill from 1960, when the Kol Israel became an organization-- from \$10. More I have, but that one is-- and that was a lot of money in 1960, \$10.

That was-- a Jaeger happens to be in my house. He was hanging drapes, something he did. He asked me. And after that anniversary, the 25th anniversary, I brought it downstairs to show my husband. I have more than one. I'm just telling you.

So you became active with the community--

Yeah, I became active. Right.

--right away.

Right. Right.

All right. We're going to take a short break now. And then we'll come back and talk some more.

Fine. Fine.