

I'm Judie Wayman. Today we're interviewing Olga Lebovitz, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section. This is tape number 3.

At the end of the last tape, you were telling us about your niece, and how you finally found somebody who had talked to his wife and they were willing to take your niece, so she wouldn't be--

Right, his name was Flora Lazlo, in case anybody from my home town will know that who he was. He was the head of the property owners schedules he kept. And we agreed that he lives on the other side of the city, where definitely nobody knows our child, my sister's little girl. And we have to change her appearance, to cut her hair. She had pigtails.

We cut her hair. And they will call her Kato Kovach. We agreed on everything. And that she is a niece of his wife. And they will send-- there was a convent. They will send her to the Catholic school. So we had a week to teach the child what's going on. She was very bright, and she already had a taste of this thing because before that, at 7 o'clock, we had to be in the house there was a curfew.

So she knew that she is Jewish. She knew that she was in danger. And we taught her that only for a short time, until everything is safe and we are going to get her. All the furniture we packed up, and clothing. My sister's dowry linen, everything. And we sewed into her little coat on that fur, we sewed in my Cleveland aunt who is now 88 years old, who brought us here, her address, and my brother's address in Israel. And we told the child that to watch that this coat she always has. And after everything settles down, she knows how to write, or to ask a grown-up when everything is safe. And these people will get her if we don't come back, or if we can't meet.

She understood that. We practiced. We rehearsed. And she knew it. So a week later, we packed her up. And we took her to the other end of the city. They gave her a little room. And they didn't have children of their own. And they came from another city, Debrecen. He was a Nyilas. I don't know what is Nyilas in English. He was a prime Nazi.

And we agreed. We knew each other for eight years now. And I dealt with him. And he gave me forged papers for a certain amount for Jews. So we were really in close touch. And he was a nice old man. And I trusted him. So we were taken a day or two later to the ghetto with a few belongings. We took our best belongings. But that was already very, very sad times.

So in the ghetto, we made up the beds. And we were very happy that the child isn't with us, because lice were already. Next week already there were lice, all kinds of people came and the closeness, and uncleanliness, which was just terrible. I saw my mother always at that little water. There was a little-- washing something, washing herself.

So one day my sister said, I can't take it. We have to see how the child is doing. Olga, you must get out from the ghetto and see her. I said, OK. That's no problem. There was a policeman I knew for a long time. I said, listen, Janusz, I have to get out. OK. I close my eyes. When something goes out, you go with that, and I close my eyes. So I walked out of the ghetto, took off the yellow star. And run straight to the other end. This was really at the other end because the ghetto was far, far out to one side. And he lived on the other side, over the bridge.

And I went straight to their house to see the child. She lost the weight. She didn't look good. And I said, I would like to talk with her alone. And she said, Olga, I am very unhappy. I always hear them arguing about me. And the lady always says that-- and they didn't put her to school yet. Her hair was cut. She says, I always hear she said, why did you take that Jewish kid? Who wants that? And I don't. So I hear them arguing about me. It is not good. I am very unhappy.

I said, you must stay, sweetheart. You must learn to suffer. Because where we are there, there's no place for you at all. It is dangerous. I don't know what will follow. So she stayed. And I said, how is the child? She said, oh she is happy. We are going to put her next week to school. And of course, she is longing for you and for the family. And it was already dusk when I left.

And I was coming against, try to come against the houses, the wall, not to bump into. And the city was already changed. A lot of Hungarians came into it, and then the Germans were there. And it was dusk. I was walking. We had the middle,

just a few steps from the former office. There was we called a pathway, a [NON-ENGLISH]. I was there, and into I bumped to a former neighbor, Buchbauer was his name, a German, a murderer just a few houses down, who knew me since childhood. And into him. And he hollers, Jew! Jew! Help! Catch her! Jew!

And I started to run into that pathway, the [NON-ENGLISH], up the steps. I had never been-- of course I crossed the every day but there were steps up in there, somebody must have lived there. And their doors weren't closed. I went from one door to the next, to the next. It was dark and I hid behind the curtain. And I looked out. And hundreds of police running up and down, looking into it was stores, were all the way stores. Just in the middle and the two ends were nobody thought that I was going on.

They looked into all the doorways, passageways. One stood here, I saw her with my eyes. I know her from my street and I saw her. No Jews were anymore in town. Everybody was in ghetto. I know that I must go back to the ghetto, because it will break my parents' and my sister's heart. If I'm not coming back, they will know what happened.

So it lasted-- I have nightmares about it. I'm still running. I'm afraid of that place. And it was very dark already. And heard shouting at the other end. It was about a half a mile long. They said, no, no. You must have made a mistake because she isn't here. So it cleared out, and I went to another room, not a soul in the house. Then I heard voices. So I backed up where I came from, and down the steps. and against the wall, and another street. [NON-ENGLISH] was the name, back street to the ghetto.

OI climbed the fences, and my parents were thrilled. I told them that yes, my sister was right. The baby isn't too happy. But we have no other solution. So one morning they came that-- and he was even this Flora Lazlo came once to visit us. And he brought us food. So he knew which part of the ghetto we are in. So once there came the news that the freight trains are here, all washed up, and is ready to take us.

So the asked us to pick whatever we want to, because that was a trick. Also they knew that we are taking the most precious things. You see, this is the most painful part of my whole life, many tragedies, many pains, but nothing like with the baby. This was our first grandchild. And I was careful with that. I knew that it would be better if somebody would save her.

And then my sister who wasn't 30 years old yet, she has a good chance to survive, whatever will happen to us. So I did what the common sense told me to do. And it didn't work. So they announced that to pack, and that was the trick that they knew that you are packing the best things. So they won't have to go to search through the leftover, and they knew that this is-- because the things already, the jewelry gathered.

But we still always had a little something we will take it with us. And as we were packing comes a big policeman. He still looks to me like 20 feet high. And on his arm is our child. He says, this child belongs here. We said, yes. And of course, the baby was very happy to see us. And they say, OK. We understand that she is a Jewish child. We didn't caught or anything, no formal, he left. Here it is. Here it is for you.

So the child told us the story that in the morning, he knew everything what when. He knew that when our ghetto is being packed. So he said, take the Jewish child. And they called this police. And said, here is a Jewish child. Take her to this ghetto.

I think this is the only good thing that that man did in his life. Because had he not sent her but got rid of her later, I would have gone mad probably to search for her for the rest of my life, thinking that she is alive. And if just one hour later, this police would drop her off in another part of the ghetto with anybody else, she would be shipped anyway by herself for three days and three nights in the freight train. And I wouldn't know what happened to her, because by the time we came back, the world has changed.

The Russians lived there. And he escaped. And I was looking for him a couple of times. Nobody could find him. So the only thing that really kept my sanity, and that she reached us in time. So I know where she is.

So your parents and your sister and you, and--

All five of us, all in the train. Yes, my mother just wanted the little layers, which was up there was a little window. And we arrived to Auschwitz. And even then, I went. Because right away, as we arrived, the prisoners attacked the freight trains to clean, it brush it, clean it, and ship it back the trains. I said you are here prisoners. We have a little girl. It is everything. We have a little girl, a six-year-old. She was seven by that time. She just had her birthday in April 28. I said, what can I do to save anybody? What is the fate of a child?

And he was already probably so bitter being there for years, he was a Polish I heard. I talked with him in German. And he said nothing will happen. And yet again, I said let's hide the child. We didn't know Mengele is waiting for us, and separating us, and there is no hiding from us. So we hold her, and he cut me off. And they went on the left-hand side. And I went to the right-hand side. And then I noticed that a little pillow I carried on with me, a little pillow, and there was in it my something, a little jewelry.

I said, oh my God. I left the pillow is with me, and the child can use it. It's for her. And I wanted to run over. And the German with a big whip, go back. And I looked at him. He looked like my brother. I thought that my brother is pushing me back here. He looked exactly like my oldest brother, Ernest. Still think that for a second, he said back there, with the whip. And when I went back there in the line, my sister kept asking me. She thought maybe I can help her. With me, they felt safer.

And they saw that how he chased me with the whip there. And I showed her pillow that I wanted the baby to have the pillow. So when I went back, my future sister-in-law and my girlfriend, we were together scouts, Girl Scouts. She said, why did you want to go back there? Don't what is that? No, I said, no. What is it? They said, they are going to die.

I said, how do you know? They said, here is Mrs. Katz. She was taken away in '41 to Poland and she escaped. And she said every mother with the children were killed. She already talked to them that what is going to happen. So that the young and strong and healthy ones are going for forced labor. And mothers with children, they didn't want the mother, how young how beautiful she was, to cry and to make a commotion of separating. Take it. They took them.

I said, what are you talking about? I said, that's where my sister is with the baby.

So your sister and your niece and your parents also?

My parents and Mengele had this big whip, and lashed it out, and caught the man by their throat. And I said to my father, because in the freight train, my father was apologizing all the way for three days, three nights. When the door opens, escape. You must escape. Somebody has to survive to tell the world what happened. And I loved you all the time. And I made a mistake. And please escape. And I said, Father, I love you too. I always loved you.

And when I saw that they are gathering the men, I said, please go to that side. So that they wouldn't, I don't want to see them that they whip you or something, because he was just talking to me, telling me that you must survive, do everything because you will, and you will. And he went on the other side. And my mother and my sister and my baby, and you know what happened on that side. And now my sister-in-law taught me, that my husband's sister, that what is going to happen to them, and really what happened when they shaved us everywhere, naked, and everything this Mrs. Katz said, yes.

That's what happened in Poland, exactly this. They separated the young ones for work. And in an hour or two or three hours later, he said you see that big, big smoke? Say goodbye to them. Because they might be your parents or your family? So they didn't-- that's how it was in Auschwitz.

How long were you in Auschwitz?

I was just for a few weeks.

What did you do there?

Nothing. Nothing. I did nothing in Auschwitz. We were there in the lager, six of us, on a pritsche, on a wooden thing, three stories. And we were in the middle, about six girls. Like sardines to put together, and we had to turn obviously at the same time. And I tried to be next to my sister-in-law because I thought the closeness was unbearable. And I heard that I was very lucky because. In the very, very first shipment I was, who they shipped out from Auschwitz to forced labor to Germany, because nobody went out alive from Auschwitz.

What did you do all day in Auschwitz?

We stood appell, in attention, mostly. That was in rain, in cold, and unshaved, you know and naked, without underwear. And the first two days I think which I hated most always, dirt, I was very, very scared of the smallest. This way, I think the first two or three days we all were menstruating. And all were bloody, and dirty, and filthy, and smelly, without underwear, without a piece of paper or anything. And go to the latrine. We were really just tortured. I imagine while I was there, never worked.

And once in the morning, once in the afternoon, to be sent to the bathroom, the latrine they called it. It was a piece of wood and you had to sit on it next to each other. And we heard the stories that many times just for the fun of it, they turned over on the two sides and everybody fell into it, and they found their deaths there. So it was a scary thing.

And when I was chosen with the girls on this side, my sister-in-law begged me. I was Berkowitz. She was Lebovitz, my husband's sister. She asked me to change with her, so I stay. I said no. This time was enough for me in Auschwitz. I can see that I will never survive. Because they fed us something which stopped our menstruation forever. Until we were there for 13 months, we never again menstruated.

Matter of fact when I came to America, and I told my doctor, then Dr. Picard-- Gustav Picard, I said, you know this happened. He said that I am imagining, that I'm dreaming. And people didn't talk about their experiences. I said, yes, if I tell you that none of us, they couldn't afford us to-- they had already an invention. So there isn't such a thing. I said, so I didn't want to change because I knew that I won't survive in Auschwitz.

Once I saw an old lady. I said, oh, maybe there is a chance that my mother survived, when my mother is younger. And I went to talk with her. She was a French woman. And I said, how come, in German, I said, how come that you survived? You are an old lady. She didn't have teeth. And she says, how old am I? She was a doctor of mixed marriage. 31 years old, three years from Belgium or France. She was in three years in Auschwitz. And she looked like 70.

So I said to my sister, no. She said, but you are going to the gas chamber. Everybody says from here, only one place out. I said, so what? We have to go sooner. I was very determined.

So you went with a group that was shipped to labor.

So they put us, yes. They put us into a little room with shelves. We sat on it, and everybody thought the gas will come very soon.

From there though, you sent out on, you said a shipment out to Germany.

Yes.

In forced labor.

Next day they put us into a freight train, and it's very clean. And they gave us bread and some margarine, so some rations. And they told us, look. you are going to Germany to work in factories. And until you are working and workable, you have a chance to survive. Our freight train had a very nice German. That was the first in all the five years since we were occupied by the Hungarians that first was a humane person, this German soldier. Who said, you just have to watch very much to stay alert I always, and to stay healthy.

Don't eat when you are suspicious. And that was the least trouble. Because I was a poor eater all my life. So he taught us

all the way, the whole night and day, until we arrived.

Do you remember his name?

No. He didn't introduce himself. But he gave for one girl a cigarette, who was desperate, and with who I was sleeping for I think for months. She sold her bread for the cigarette. And this soldier gave her a cigarette. So he was really a human being. Who said that this is the first time that from Auschwitz it came out anyone. And I know that you are going to work in factories. And I know you will have a hard time. But watch out. And if you stay healthy, who knows?

What did you do in Germany?

I was working in a munition factory, ammunition factory.

Where about?

The name was Peterswaldau Nach-Rachau. It was close I think to Strasbourg or something, about 65 kilometer as we marched.

Was it all slave labor?

All slave labor, yes.

And how many people were working there?

1,000 Jewish prisoners were there. 1,000 Jewish.

How many hours a day did you work?

Pardon?

How many hours a day did you work there?

Well, it was dark when we went to work and it was dark when we came home. I don't think that we had a clock. But--

What was home like? What was home like? You said it was dark and you came home.

Home, yes we went from the camp, from the concentration camp. We marched to work to the factory, which was about three, four miles.

Which concentration camp were you in there?

In Peterswaldau.

That was the name of the camp?

Yes. That was the Peterswaldau concentration camp. And there was a factory. I think it was about three, four miles. Because we were pretty tired walking eins, zwei, drei, vier. And we worked a different thing. It was an ammunition factory. And the camp was a former schloss, schloss which is a castle. It was a former Austrian or what kind castle, where prince and royalties lived before. So the Jews were in the backend and the thousands of were housed there. And in the front were non-Jewish political prisoners. But we never had a chance to mingle.

But in the factory, next to me was a Czechoslovakian non-Jew, who a man, who I talked with whenever I could, a few words to exchange.

What were the people like who were in charge, the factory owners and all?

Well, who were in charge, I think they were in punishment if they had to work with such a low class people like us, Jewish prisoners. I think they were here for punishment really who worked there, non-Jewish Germans.

Do you know who owned the factory?

I was working in the-- in the Hoffman, Hoffman Salle. Hoffman. A big, big place. And there also we got two tickets, one in the morning, one in the afternoon, to go to the toilet. And that's where I was beaten up and damaged on my left ear, when we motioned with a friend of mine went to go, so we can talk a little bit in the bathroom. So we walked there. And we were not very careful to look if there are any empty places to go into.

And we started to talk. We were so hungry to talk. To tell each other or to cry on each other's shoulder. And SS watched us, not so much-- the workers were very good, the German workers. Because I think that they were kind of a slave that I said. That was my impression. But the SS were watching over us. And we are not to talk, and not to waste time. And so an SS came in and said, what are you waiting for. I said there is no empty place. He opened and there was. It wasn't full.

And first she beat up my friend terribly. She was bleeding all over, stepping with the boots. And then I came. So she was dancing on my leg, I was lying on my right side, and she was just jumping, jumping, on my left. And I said, I am not going to let you destroy it. You won't hurt my brain. And I was very, very ill really for a long time.

Did you have to continue working, or did they give you any medical care?

No, I was taken to the krankenstube. There was a sick room. When we went back in the evening to the camp, to our camp, I was taken to the krankenstube. I couldn't hear, and I was in a daze for a few days. And then a fellow who had a priority, a Polish Jewish girl, she came. And she said, Olga, you have to come out. But I had high fever and the doctor didn't want to let me out. No, she said. I need her she has to come. She's all right. She is just pretending. She is all right. And she said Olga, you better come.

So I did what-- I didn't know what is good for me. She took me out. And next day, the whole krankenstube was taken to Auschwitz. So God was somehow with me. Because her name was Jetta. And a kapo she was, a kapo, but a very good girl. We were very good friends. And evidently she heard that what is going to happen to the krankenstube. And I went back in the morning to work. And I was lucky.

I had another friend once, I was put to a very big machine. And I was very tiny, very fragile, couldn't eat that mess, and always picked on it. And the girls were around me when I left it over, and they grabbed it. They knew that Olga is always that I don't finish my food. So once I was given a very big machine up to here in oil, working, I don't with these parts, and pushing the big machine, and with the foot, with the leg.

And when we went back home, you called the concentration camp, I told this friend, Eva [NON-ENGLISH]. She said, what is it, Olga? I said, I can't go back anymore. I went down. We had a lot of water, cold water they gave us. It was December. And I took a shower and stood in the window. I said I want to catch pneumonia and I want to die. I can't kill myself. There is no way. She said, no, no. What is it? And she said, you know what? We are making a pact. I taught her what to do with the big machine and she taught me what I have to do with the-- she had a sitting job there.

And when we start, we were ready. She said, OK, I will go and take your place, and you will go to take my place, say that the master told you. Really there wasn't-- and I sat down and I knew exactly when it's coming on the running thing, when it came to me what to do with it, and send it, and she took over that heavy job with me. Her name was [PERSONAL NAME] Eva from Kassa. She was there one of my closest friends.

And without a word complaining, she continued to do that until they replaced. Then it has changed. They placed us then they needed 50 girls to a very delicate job. There came a lot of SS and doctors. We stood in appell, the 1,000 of us. And they picked 50 people who had very narrow, long fingers, and good eyes. And we both fell into this group of 50 people. And they took us to-- we understood the dangerous, very delicate, then we learned that nylon that we made parachutes.

We didn't know, because we just made parts. And if we did a good job, we got toothpaste and toothbrushes. And for the rest of the term, that's where we worked. And we had to connect things, and concentrate. It took about five minutes in the morning or more to concentrate until we saw that line. It was much thinner than a hair, and they said that only a certain amount of time people can take it and then it gets to their hearts, and they have to choose.

But the war ended before that time it was over.

During that time, did you have any thoughts about the Jews and the rest of the world? Did you have any thoughts about the Jews or the rest the world, what they were doing, what they weren't doing?

Well, we were very happy when bombing came close. We were very happy, because we knew the bombs won't take parts. It will kill the Germans, as it will us. But we watch not to laugh, not to be happy that the enemy, which is our friend, came over. But the rest of the world, we really thought that the world had stopped. We thought that every Jew is in the same position by now. That why America doesn't come to our help, we thought about it a lot. And when the bombing came, we thought are they the Russians or the Americans who are coming to our help?

This was already '44, January, February. It was much too late already, much too late. We were getting very weak, very disgusted. Most of our friends died. We were taken back to Auschwitz. They went crazy. The girl under me who slept, because we had shelves, one morning she was lying there. I said, work, didn't you hear the whistle? Get up. She said very politely, I'm sorry, Olga. But today I can't go to work because my husband will worry where I am. I must go home.

So there that's where she was. She went crazy, like so many other people before. And this is so it took a toll on us, and the food, and the typhus. At one time, they brought horses, dead horses from the front to us. And I just happened to go down to bathe. Because when the water ran, they knew that Olga Berkowitz-- everybody said, Olga Berkowitz is taking a bath, because the cleanliness kept me alive.

So I went down, and I saw these wagons. And with these bones, and what is it an open-- open--

Open wounds?

--wounds with that blood, ugly, terrible. And I went up. I said, girls, some meat came. Some terrible meat. Please don't eat. Don't eat it. Remember the German what he told us almost a year ago when he brought us here. And he said then when you see something very suspicious. I was done and nobody do. Better to be hungry. We know already how to deal with that. We won't die. We can live another, live another, not to eat it. And those who were eaters and very hungry, the bigger the person was the hungrier. And they ate that. They got typhus, because it was a rotten thing.

It was smelled when we came home from work. We smelled already a big distance away, the big smell. But most of us didn't eat that. It lasted for about a week and we didn't touch it.

We've got to move ahead quite a bit now.

Yes.

How did you find out you were free?

Well, it was already in the air, I think. Because about three or four days earlier, they didn't send us to work anymore. They said they will evacuate us because the bombs are coming closer. They will evacuate us deeper to Germany. But it was our luck that they didn't, because most people couldn't walk anymore. And they were shot on the spot. So we were just staying there in the camp. And on May 8, I think, in the evening, the Judenalteste, the Jewish head of the camp, came into every room. We were 200 in our room.

And she came in and said, the war is over. An SS came, and she said the SS kept on saying, you know that I was good to you, and I never hurt you. I didn't know her because she was in charge for another part. She was a red-head SS woman.

And this was already late 8:00 in the morning when we woke up. We went out very cautiously, and looked around. There were really no Germans anymore, no SS people. But we heard shootings, ambushing things.

But who liberated you?

The Russians. I said the first person who frees us, I will kiss him like the first soldier. But it happened to be that they were sick looking, sick looking, terrible. They weren't informed really that what it is all about. They just told them to come in here. They saw 1,000 young girls. And they were hungry because for a year or two they were already in the front, in the army. They really wanted to attack us. So I was very unfortunate to be freed by the Russians, who were now a danger to us.

What was the first thing you did when you were liberated? Well, we went, because we were in Peterswaldau Nach-Reichenbach, which was 5 kilometers from us, and that was the main place. The two were really sister concentration camps. There I had a cousin with whom I got in touch. And also two friends who lived now here in Cleveland. One is Jolan Fersen, and there is Leah Klein. Their name was Weinberger, and they came from Chop, from my father's hometown. And I knew them from home.

So I wanted to go there to be with them, because my cousin sent me a pair of shoes. Were you able to do that then?

Pardon?

Were you able to find them and go there?

Yes. We found them, and they said to move there, because the Germans left their houses, and there are a lot of empty houses. So 14 of us, 14 friends, we already had a pact for months we practiced that if our camp is going to be burned, because we heard that the war is ending, and the bombing is coming closer. We said, we won't give up. We have to leave. And we organized, the 14 of us, a secret team that if they want to burn the camp or they shoot us, we knew exactly which place we will-- and the covers, and to make from the sheets, whatever. Not sheets, really the blankets. And to go down.

Maybe not all of us will survive. But if one of us survives, it will be worth it. And that was the pact. We studied at the gates that we are skinny enough to go through, and to go through what is on the prison windows?

The bars?

The bars. Yes. And you will be here. You will be here. We were beautiful organized, three sisters, and then two sisters, and a girl named Little Olga, [NON-ENGLISH] Olga. So these 14 of us when we survived, we got together and we went into Reichenbach and got into a German house. And we stayed there for about two weeks. Or a week.

Did the Russian soldiers attack any of the girls?

Well, we always were together. We were holding our hands. Nobody left alone, and none of us were. But many, many, many girls were attacked. Many girls didn't mind if the Russian was handsome and had food. And I don't even blame them. But--

How long were you at this house?

I said two weeks, but between one and two weeks.

Where did you go from there?

And then we started that we are going home, further into Czechoslovakia. We wanted to go into Czechoslovakia. So we went through the border to Czechoslovakia. And really, nobody, the Czechs already were brainwashed by that time by the Germans. They were since '39, till '44, '45. They were under Germans. And that was the only weak part I think that



they were very easily brainwashed to be Nazis. And now they are communists. That's why they are struggling so much.

Did you go back to your home?

Well, that's really a long distance. We went to Czechoslovakia. And we went down all the way to Pozon, Bratislava, the 14 of us. And we were waiting for a train to go to Budapest. From Pozon, and both cities are on the Danube, on the edge of the Danube. And that we were waiting. Every other day came a train. So we were investigating which train all 14 of us, very dirty, very filthy.

Where did you go?

Pardon?

You're talking [CROSS TALK].

Just at the station, at the railroad station.

Where did you go from there?

Here, as we were sitting there, in a place on a little meadow, it was May. The 14 of us always together. One girl with a man, a Jewish man who already-- as a matter of fact, we had two Jewish men, very, very weak. And some of the girls knew them. So they joined us. We were 16 of us now. So they went to investigate that when the next train comes came a big handsome-- this is an experience I wouldn't miss to tell you, Russian soldier, and started to talk to us.

Who are you? And we didn't answer. We are not talking to Russians, because he might take us, all of us, to his Russian soldiers. And he said, where are you? What's the matter with you? Why are you so filthy? What is it? Are you hungry? And then he said, [NON-ENGLISH] something like then that's Yiddish [NON-ENGLISH] there. For heaven's sakes, something, are you Jewish children?

I said, yes, we are Jewish. Who are you? And he was in a big position, a captain. He said, oh my God. Started to cry, started to kiss us. He says, look children. I am a Jewish man. I suffer maybe. Stay here until evening comes. I am coming back here for you. And when our friends came to tell that the next train. We said, we are not going anywhere because a Jewish soldier is coming to get us and we were so tired. We didn't know anymore if we are coming or going.

So evening, and we said, oh, he never will come. He came with four soldiers on their backs, big pails of food and plates, and everything. He said, you are not going anywhere. I got you a house in Bratislava on [NON-ENGLISH] 26. He took us to a castle. They were converted Jews who survived the war. A whole castle where a beautiful meadow, and he promised them, because food was very scarce, to feed them with their best food if they keep us, the 16 of us.

And we were in beautiful rooms. He said, I won't let these children to go anywhere until they are not on their feet. So they kept us for two weeks, until almost the end of May. And she had a piano, Mrs. Farago. She played the piano in the evening. And we were singing. And he was singing. And he told us stories. He fell in love with one of the girls, beautiful Rachel. But the girl with this boy, who she went to investigate, they already liked each other. And unfortunately, she married him. And he was a very unfaithful man, a very bad man, and Rachel committed suicide.

Four or five years later, she became a fashion designer in Hollywood. She came to America. She was very beautiful, gorgeous, unbelievable beautiful black hair and gorgeous, deep blue eyes. And he was cheating on her openly with her clients in Hollywood. And she killed herself in New York. She came up to New York to see her sister. And went to a hotel or whatever. And she took sleeping pills. She had already a little money already, she made a will drafted to her lawyer into the mailbox. And went back, couldn't take it. And altogether she was always very nervous in the lager, a high tensioned girl.

Where did you go after you left the castle?

And from the castle, we went to Budapest. And there everybody, many people met brothers, sisters who survived. There were plaques with names, survivors. My name was there already. It was already organized that who is what, where. And I stayed with this little Olga, who was my very closest friend. She lives in Israel. I visited her now in my last trip. I came back two weeks ago.

What were your plans for the future?

From now on?

No, at that time.

Then? I wanted to go home in the hope that somebody survived. And in Budapest, I stayed with my cousin's wife. My cousin was caught [NON-ENGLISH]. I stayed with my cousin's wife. And all of a sudden-- and I met girls from my hometown. They said, Olga, we have good. The Jewish organizations give us money and clothing. And I think that I became disturbed by that time. I was very exhausted, very tired. And I kept on. I hear myself saying that I have to go home. I have to go home. My parents might be home. I think this was a bad dream.

And I heard someone who knew me say, Olga, what are you talking about? Come on, please shoot me. I said, don't touch me. Don't touch me. And she told the friend that she was staying with here. You see this was our town, one of the smartest girls. You see what happened to her. And I just wanted to get away on the train and back. And on the way home from Budapest, and they said, don't go. It is Russia. That part is Russia. And Russians are not better than Nazis. It is terrible. You will never get out. I didn't hear it.

So halfway home, we got papers that free traveling. Halfway home, I started to think. And I asked someone, tell me, were you at home? I said, what is at home? She said, nothing. It is a ghost town. Nobody is at home. A few of us, and I said please tell me. And then it started-- my head started to clear. I said, maybe I would have been better off. But maybe. And I went home.

So my youngest brother was at home. He came in with the Russians. The Russians already in '44, October, came into my home town. And he came with them after them. He was hiding somewhere. And he was at home. And a Gentile family lived in my house, in my father's house, rather. And they had a 19-year-old daughter. It was arranged with a neighbor, non-Jewish people, nobody is at home. This family they have nowhere to live. Let them live in your house.

And because when my brother came home, he put the other people who occupied my house, my parents' house, and then they talked him into taking this family, with the thought that the 19-year-old girl and my brother was 22, 23 by that time. And they really backed up. She is his wife now. By the time I came home in June, early June, I was here again a not welcome person, because they got used-- my sister-in-law and her mother, her father was taken away by the Russians. And the little girl, a six-year-old little girl, they occupied the house. And they had an affair I imagine with my brother.

And they cooked for her and for my brother and everything. So I took my oldest brother's room, and I had to ask her when I can use the stove to cook. And my husband who I was dating him before he was taken away in 1942, he came home two days late after me. Because every second day came a train. And we agreed that there is nothing else to do but to get married. And he moved in to my room where I was. And he said, wait a minute. This is your house. And we have to tell them to get out. And we will live in the house.

And my brother said, I can't do it because I'm going to marry Irene, and I can't do it. So one day we took this room's furniture, my brother's rooms furniture, and we moved out of the house. And we took the good stove, and the summer kitchen stove we left there. And we moved out. And I became pregnant right away with my son.

We've only got five more minutes.

OK. And I said that we have to leave. So in 1946, January, I was six months pregnant when we escaped through the Russian border to Czechoslovakia, which took weeks and weeks and up to Czechoslovakia to Prague where I had a

cousin, and to Leitmeritz where I had an uncle. And we lived there. That's where my son was born next April, in '46 April. And we applied to America. And I wrote to my aunt. And she sent papers. And we waited for the quota. In 1949, January, we came to America right away to Cleveland where my aunt lived, and lives who is now, God bless her, 88 years old, and two Cousins.

And that was in 1949, January 24 when we arrived here.

You had mentioned to me earlier before we started the taping about a meeting at your house 20 years ago.

Well, yes.

Can you tell me about that please?

Nobody talked about the Holocaust. It was a no-no subject. Nobody talked about it. About 20 years ago, I invited this Leah Klein, her sister, other friends to my house. I said, look 20 years later, why do we hide it as if it was a sin or a shame? I want to bring it out to the open. Nobody talks about it. Nobody will know what happened. Nobody believes that because when once my husband talked about it, they said, oh it isn't [NON-ENGLISH] at all. So we were waiting in line for butter, and for sugar. They didn't understand our plight that what we went through.

And these girls, they all disagreed with me, because I was ahead of my time like my mother was. And they said, oh, we are all raising children. We are busy and the men were busy making money. I said, money, what are we going to tell when we go to the other world? What did we do about it? What did we say? Nothing that we made money. And that's how it was, Judie, that they didn't want to talk about it.

Then about 13 or 11, 12 years ago, a friend of mine here, Ruth Marmorstein said to meet a doctor-- now what's her name?

Rabinsky?

Yes.

Leatrice Rabinsky.

Yes Leatrice, I really met her. Then everybody was talking about it. It is almost like it was commercialized. She asked me to speak a few times, and I did lecture a few times at the Beaumont school. And I went to school in Villa Maria College. We also lived in Erie, Pennsylvania. I attended Villa Maria College. I wrote a couple of essays, and Dorothy, Dorothy, she was the dean, Sister Dorothy who got an interest in me.

She talked with me. That was when President Kennedy, the first Catholic was elected to President. And she inspired me to write. And I wrote a couple of essays which were taught until four years ago in every Catholic college as the subject of humanity, those two pieces of mine. In the last four years, I am not in touch anymore with college. I was still, Sister James Francis was my very good friend. She was my English teacher.

And it was so new. Nobody knew about that. It was a novelty. And when this, my friend Ruth Marmorstein told me to talk about that. And when I went to in a church, I spoke. The children, they liked that. I saw in their faces that they liked these horror stories. For them it was a horror story. For me it was pain. And the girls at the Beaumont school, where a friend I belong to a writers' club. A friend of mine, her children attended Beaumont school.

And I gave there a couple of lectures. The children asked me if I was raped. They wanted really adventures. I said, no, because we were lower than animals. They didn't consider us. We were in the concentration camp. Then I decided to stop. And the more it was commercialized, Holocaust, Holocaust, the less I wanted to talk about now. When I was ready, and to bring it to open. And now I think it is overdone. Films are made, in my opinion, by people who are not qualified for it.

And it is overdone. Apparently, people talk about it. And--

OK. I wish we had more time. But they're opening the door. So we're going to have to sign out now. And I wish we had another hour. My name is Judie Wayman. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Olga Lebovitz. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section.

Thank you. I hope it will be of some lesson, which I feel that the world didn't learn a lesson. Nobody taught a lesson.