

I'm Sylvia Abrams. Today, we are interviewing Bella Lebowitz, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section. Bella, you were telling us about your experience in Gleiwitz labor camp, where you were seven or eight months. What happened to the camp in January of 1945?

In January of 1945, all of a sudden, we started hearing something that the Russians, the Russian army is coming closer. And we will have to pack up and go someplace else. And, of course, those were rumors that somebody heard something or somebody told somebody something, but we were not sure. Just one day, we got a strict order to pack up, and we are going to leave like the next day on a train.

This is the order, everyone in the camp?

Everyone in the camp. We were not told where we are going. We were not told what we are going to do or what our next-- what our next future will be or something, nothing.

Did you have any idea of what in the war could have caused the move?

No, we just suspected that because we heard bombardments. We heard shootings. We heard all kinds of things in the air. And we deducted. Some things-- we were not that dumb. We deducted that the Russian army supposedly is coming closer.

And, of course, one evening, we just had to pack up. And it was snowing terribly. It was cold. It was bitter cold, in January. And in that region, it is very cold. And we just had to pack up.

And we did not get to a train. We had to walk. We walked about 2 and 1/2 or 3 days, not knowing where we are going. Just we walked, and we walked, and we walked. And some people just froze to death. And some people just couldn't walk any further. And we walked and sometimes the whole night through and end the day through. And from all the people, a lot of them were missing already because they fell by the wayside. If they couldn't walk any further, they were shot to death.

The German guards from the camp were walking with you?

Yeah. Yeah. Each few people, there was a guard on both sides. And we were marching, just marching.

Did you know in what direction you were going?

No, we didn't know. We had no idea. We had no conception where we are going or what is going to happen to us. So we were walking for days, and we didn't know where we are going.

And like I said, a lot of people froze. A lot of people got shot. A lot of people just fell from exhaustion. And so we walked.

And we finally, came into some barn. They put us in into a big barn. And that was sometimes in the middle of the night.

And I have no idea how much time passed from that time that we came into that barn to the next time that we had to go and board the train. And those were trains that they were open wagons like for cattle. And that's where they stuffed us in.

Was your labor camp the only group that got on this train?

There were probably much more someplace else, but not on the same-- not on the same march. But then they connected some trains, some wagons from other places. But we could not communicate because we were just locked in that train wagon like cattle. And we couldn't hardly move.

And so we were on that train maybe two weeks maybe 2 and 1/2. I don't know exactly because we had no

conception of time. The snow was falling. And we didn't get nothing to eat. And we just ate from one another the snow that was accumulating.

So that's for water.

That's right. And there was a lot of people dead in the wagons. There were a lot of people that went crazy, you know, that just were completely incoherent already. And so I don't know exactly how long it went on. But one night, I just jumped off the train.

What made you do it?

I guess I couldn't take it anymore. The worst thing is that you were afraid to step on a dead person. And I guess it's just-- so I jumped off the train while it was going.

Did anyone jump with you?

Not with me. But I met up at the jail with other people that jumped off too. And I jumped into the snow. I mean not planning anything rationally too much because from a moving train that went so fast at night, it's not the wisest thing to jump. But I guess there was just not too much rationality to any of it. So I jumped off. And I don't--

Where were you? Do you know where you were?

I didn't know where I was. I didn't know. I had no idea exactly where I was because I had no idea anything what was going on.

It was so horrible that I remember seeing that one lady, and an elderly lady she was-- I mean not too old. She couldn't have been too old because she was in the work place. But she must have been older than me. She might have been in the 30s or something. And she asked for water. She screamed at to the guard that at least we should get some water or something to eat, that it's impossible. And he shot her right between her eyes.

And I guess that called it out or something. I really don't know. But I jumped off. And I-- and I heard shots. I don't know if it was at me or at somebody else. But just the sound of a bullet whistled next to my ear.

I really don't know what happened. And I don't know how long I was laying there. And I don't know what happened then to the train. But it went by.

And probably hours later, I got up. And I started to walk in the snow. And I walked not on the tracks, but next to the tracks in the snow. So a little-- it was sort of behind trees, not to be seen.

But as soon as I came out, I came out to some village. And it was a street. And as soon as I came out on that street, I tried to knock on a door to some people for some water or for some food. And good enough, they probably called up the police or the gendarmerie, because gendarmerie were-- you know gendarmerie is--

Yes, yes.

Sort of a police.

Yeah.

It must have been a very small village also. And they came and took me to their sort of a police station it was.

So the local police in this village came and arrested you?

Yeah. And they arrested me. And well enough, it must have been some time in the afternoon because I don't know exactly how long it took. I had no conception of time or anything. But till the evening, there were three more like me that--

That they rounded up and also jumped off?

Yeah. Yeah.

From the same train?

From the same train. It was not exactly from the train. That's how I know that they connected other trains because they were people that I did not know, people that I didn't know. And they told me that they were going also on a train, and they jumped off. And that's how I found out that they connected some trains from other places that came together. And so--

And were these also young women? Or they--

No. It was two-- one girl, a young girl, and one elder person, and one young boy. He must have been-- I don't think he was-- maybe he was in his early 20s. But he looked like a young 16-year-old or something, very thin, very run down, very-- it was terrible to look-- like a skeleton.

And then, they kept us there overnight at the police station. And then in the morning, they didn't know what to do with us. But I suppose they communicated with some higher-ups.

These were German police? This was a German village?

Yeah. They communicated with somebody. I don't with whom. But they must have communicated with somebody. And then some police-- not police, there were like highway patrols or something, I don't know, came and picked us up the next morning.

Afterwards, you told me you learned that this was someplace in the Sudeten?

Yeah, that's when-- just a moment. That was-- I'm not there yet, OK. Not there yet because they picked us up in the morning all four of us. And those must have been like highway patrols or something, I don't know.

But they took us to a place, it's called-- and that was the first place that I know that I remember what it was called. It was called Olomouc. And that was in Sudeten. That was already-- but before that, where they took us, that was a jail where there were Czech guards, Czech guards. And that's how I found out that we are in Sudeten already.

And that some Czech guards brought us a blanket and some food, some bread and some food that night. And then it took another day or two. And they transported us that to Olomouc. And that was the first place-- that was again to Germans. There were again Germans.

We were happy already that we were here by the Czechs. And they were more people like. They were not like animals. They were more like people. They brought us a blanket because they saw how we shiver and how cold we were and how hungry we were.

But then some SS people picked us up from there and took us to Olomouc. And that was again a-- I don't know what it. It was a police station or it was some kind of a place where police-- where a jail like. It was a jail like. And we had to stay against the wall. And they looked us through. And they did all--

They knew that we have nothing and that we can do nothing, that we were poor slob that didn't know-- could hardly stay on their feet. We could hardly stay on our feet. But yet they made us go through all that stuff again.

We had to stay against the wall. And we were sure that we are going to get shot because we broke the law.

We jumped out of the train. We committed a horrible crime, like according to them. So we were there maybe four, maybe five days. I can't remember exactly.

Did they feed you?

Yeah they gave us some coffee and bread in the morning. And they gave us some soup in the evening. And that's about all. So that I don't know, four or five days we were there.

And then they see-- they-- we had the feeling that they don't know what to do with us. We were oddballs. We were some kind of a people that didn't know what to do where we belong.

They didn't expect any prisoners to run away.

No, they did not know what to do with us. So one day we were supposed to leave, and we didn't leave. And so I don't know exactly how long it took, maybe four or maybe five or maybe six days. And then they finally sent us off with a guard to Brünn, that was in Bohemia to a jail, to another jail.

So each time you were in the town own jail of these little places?

Yeah. So we were in Brünn there in the jail for about two weeks. But, of course, we were separated because they put each one in a different place. We were not together anymore. Although we didn't know each other to begin with, it was sort of easier to bear when you had somebody in the same situation, from your own people that you thought that they are.

But there in Brünn, they separated us, each one went to a different, they call them, cells. Anyway, I was there for about two weeks. And there I had it kingly because the people, those were political prisoners.

So they were political prisoners in this jail in Brünn?

Yeah. And they were ready to share everything with me. They fed me. I couldn't believe how good I had it because I got food. And one gave me a sweater. And the other gave me a shawl. And they gave me socks. And I was warm. I was not cold anymore. And I thought I'm in seventh heaven already because I had it so good. So after two weeks they took us to Prague.

This is the four of you? They--

Yeah. And in the meantime, they had some more. So it was a whole group already maybe of six or seven or eight people.

All who had run away from trains--

All different--

Even from a train or a different train?

Each had a different story from a different place. One was walking, fell over on the sidewalk, and they picked him up. And there were already different, completely different stories to their situation.

But they took us to Prague on a train and also put us in jail. And I don't know if you heard ever, in Prague there is a jail that is called Pankrác, that certainly the people that murder or they do certain things that is not humane, and they put us in there. And we were there maybe for a week or so.

And from there, they took us to Theresienstadt to Malá pevnost. Malá pevnost was a jail I don't know if you-- nobody should really be interested in those things. But it was a very well known place that Maria Theresia had built for really the worst kind of-- what do you call-- the worst--

Kind of criminals.

Criminals. The worst criminals that exist should be put there. And it was a jail that it had those thick walls, like this. And it was surrounded with water.

So you were all put in there because you had tried to run away rather than in the camp at Theresienstadt.

They didn't tell us why.

But that you assumed that must have been--

Assumed. They didn't tell us why. But they put us about six women, those six women, because the boy that I said was so emaciated, he went someplace else into a cell. But us 6 women put in that one cell. It was Cell 61.

And we at first were just six of us there. But at the end of three months, or 2 and 1/2 months, there were 60 of us in that room. 60.

Were you all people who had tried to run away?

No. No. There were all kinds already. There were all kinds that they had picked up. One was shot. And one was-- one had frozen off feet. And one was-- there was all kinds that you can think of and all different stories. Each one had a different--

Were you ever allowed to go outside--

Never.

--during the-- whole three months you were in the cell?

2 and 1/2 months it took, I think, because with all that time-- see, I can't pinpoint exactly the time. But I know that February, from the time that I jumped off, it was February the 14th. Somehow I got wind of it from the guards or something that was February the 14th when I got into that jail in Theresienstadt, in that--

So you were-- it was a good almost a month that you were in all these other little jails along the way?

Yeah.

So February the 14th, I was there. And I was there till May 5. So I don't know how much that is, but that was the time that I was in that cell without seeing the daylight or-- we didn't even have windows. We had little holes up there, like this--

Like the air vent?

Yeah. That's how much daylight we got in from the outside.

Who were the guards there?

Germans, SS.

Did you see the Theresienstadt concentration camp as you came in there?

No.

Or not at all? No, absolutely not. May the 5th, when the Red Cross-- when the Red Cross came in because they got-- that cell that we were in was sort of communicated to somebody because in that jail period there were a lot of political prisoners that were not Jewish. Most of them, as a matter of fact, were not Jewish.

They were just politically interned there because they were against the Germans. And those were Czechs.

And they knew about this cell what's going on there because we had gotten just twice a week to eat in that cell, twice a week. And what did we get? We got a ration of bread, and we got some black coffee and some soup. And that was the twice a week duration of that.

And most of those 60 people could hardly stay on their feet. As a matter of fact, they couldn't. Some of them died. Some of them just couldn't stay on their feet because the end of the war was 8th of May. But the Red Cross got us out the 5th of May already and took us to the ghetto in Theresienstadt, from the jail to the ghetto.

The Red Cross liberated Theresienstadt before the official end of the war.

Yeah. So they took us from the jail to the ghetto and tried to give us medical help because everybody was-- everybody was absolutely not human anymore.

But anyway, in that period of time, like I said, all we had is very little daylight. There was just-- in that little window up there had also those crates-- you know, those--

Bars?

Bars. Yeah. And we were never let out from there.

What was your physical condition by this point?

Like I said not being able to stay on my feet.

You couldn't stand up.

I couldn't stand up. They took most of the people out on stretchers. And some of us could walk with the help. But most of us were taken out with stretchers and helped by the Red Cross people.

When they came and liberated you, were you aware that meant the end of the war?

Yeah. Yeah. They told us. They told us. But while we were there in those two-- how much was it? 2 and 1/2 months or something like that. Through the bathroom-- there was a bathroom to that cell. Don't ask what kind. But through that cell, there was a bathroom that had, excuse me, sort of a window. Because the walls were so thick, so you couldn't see the window. But it went out, and you could hear.

So from time to time, somebody stood on the other side and asked some questions. We didn't know. We couldn't see who it is. We couldn't see no face.

But most of the people that were in the cell with me were people from Poland. And I was the only one that could speak Czech. And somebody spoke Czech. So I was the one that listened to the questions and answered them.

And sometimes, once in a blue moon, somebody threw in a bread through that hole in the bathroom. I never saw the face. I didn't know who it was. But when we got a bread or two, we, of course, shared everybody. And that kept us more or less in better condition than we would have been without it. It could happen sometimes once a week. It could happen sometimes twice a week, and sometimes not, not at all.

And you never knew who this person was?

I never knew who this person was. But after we were liberated, after we were taken to Theresienstadt, a lady came to the ghetto. And she was asking who is Bella Jaeger.

Your maiden name was Jaeger.

Yeah. And I got scared. And then I came forward. And I said, it's me. And she said, she was the one who threw the bread.

Oh, and you got to meet her.

I'm sorry.

She must have been a very exceptional person to be brave enough to throw the bread to you.

Yeah. And that lady, she was not Jewish. And I was not able to stand up yet. And I was not able to-- I mean, I was not in a condition to plan anything or anything. But she just told me that she was the one that spoke to me and that she was throwing in the bread.

And I don't know how long I was there in the ghetto because there, of course, there was already food. And they cautioned us not to eat too much because some people ate too much at once and they got sick, and they never came out alive after the war already.

And so I was there probably two weeks or three weeks. And then that lady came to visit me again. And she brought me a couple of change of underwear and some couple of dresses, a sweater, some shoes. And she even brought me a little luggage, like to put-- she brought it in--

The suitcase.

The suitcase.

Who did it turn out she was?

Pardon me?

Who was she?

She was a political prisoner, that she was-- she was just a human being. She was a human being. She didn't tell me too many details. She just said that she was imprisoned for political reasons and that she got packages from home. And she tried to organize some people that brought in bread from the kitchen and that was she was able to help us.

And she had heard there was this cell--

And she heard that about that cell. She did not really elaborate much about herself. And I was not that alert to ask too many questions. But I was most grateful for what she brought me, clean clothes, especially underwear that I was-- I didn't know that that exists anymore. And I was very grateful to her.

And then, after a while, when I got back on my feet a little bit, I started out traveling to go home. Of course, the traveling was very, very complicated because some tracks were bombarded. And the area was liberated by Russians, not by Americans. In Theresienstadt that was all Russian soldiers. And you were scared to death.

At first, we didn't know. But then we got warned that we should be careful where we are going. And you had to go through very difficult times. You didn't have no papers, nothing. And each couple of steps of the way, everybody asked, who are you? Where are you going? What are you doing?

So we were scared to death it starts all over again because we didn't have no identification. And as soon as we put on civilian clothes, we were just like everybody else. Of course, there were differences in many ways if somebody wanted to look into it. But if somebody just stopped you on the way and wanted to know who you are.

So it was very hard to travel. And it was very hard to get anywhere because there was no straight communication with the train because some tracks were bombarded, some-- so I started out about after three weeks to try to go home. So, of course, it was-- first, I went to back to Prague.

And then you had to wait until-- I didn't have no money. So whatever-- the Red Cross had given each and every person some paper and some money, but not enough to make any great headway. So from Prague, when I went back to Prague, there was already a Jewish organization, some Jewish organization that tried to help, some--

Was the Joint or UNRRA?

That was the UNRRA. They tried to help some people. But you had to stay in line. And you were sick of lines. And you didn't want to see. So it was just horrible, what can I tell you?

But anyway, I got-- with my little suitcase, I got from town to town until I got to Bratislava-- that was Pressburg in Slovakia-- because I wanted to try to go home to see if I can find anybody or anything at home. But what happened to me in Bratislava shouldn't happen to no human being.

Again, because it was after the war, and you were supposed to be free, and you were supposed to be happy that you are free, but I didn't know if I have anybody, if I'm alone in the world or something. And traveling in that train to Bratislava, there were Russian soldiers. And when I got off the train, I want to take my suitcase and I have no suitcase.

So again, I remained-- and the pain was so great, that almost greater than in the first place that it can happen even now, after you're free already. And I was so in seventh heaven that I have a change of clothes, clean clothes to change. And all of a sudden, I remained without anything because they stole the suitcase from me. So I was again without nothing.

And here I am in Bratislava. And I don't know where to go. And I don't have a penny to my name. But anyway, this is what happened.

And then I found out that in Bratislava, there isn't much help. But there is something, a little place in a temple that they did help some people. And I went there. And I got some money to go further on the train because you had to tell where you were going and where you're from and all those things. And I tried to tell my story in short where I want to go. And whatever little money I got there, I went to Budapest because I heard that in Budapest there are still some Jews left.

And you figured you'd find out where your family was.

I find somebody from the people that I knew while I was there. So sure enough, I came to Budapest. And I heard that one of my sisters is alive. But she is in Romania. Somehow or other, she wound up there. I don't know how. Nobody could tell me exactly how. But I heard that she-- they saw her there, that she's alive.

All right, I came to Budapest. And I went to look for some people that I knew. And well enough, I came to-- I knew a lawyer by name Dr. Stein. They were a very religious family. He was a lawyer. And they belonged to an Orthodox temple. And I was friends with their children during the war while I was in Budapest. And he helped me with the papers.

So I came there. And I found the lady was there. The man was not. He died in the meantime-- in the war somehow or other. But she was there with a sister-in-law. And I could stay there as long as I wanted because they accepted me like I was their own because there were very few left from their family.

So anyway, there I waited out for quite a while until I heard from somebody from mine because every day you went out to-- there was a Jewish organization. And I can't remember the name of it. But everybody that needed help, everybody that came back from the concentration camp went there to find out-- that they put out lists every day, somebody's--

Was that the Joint that did that? Or you don't know?

I can't even tell you if it was the Joint or who it was. But it was a Jewish organization. I don't remember. It escapes me. I can't remember the name.

But I read lists every day to see, to find if somebody from my family is alive. And I went day after day there. And I found a cousin from another town that is alive and then another cousin. And then they knew about some other people that remained. And this is how I started out my after the war.

I understand.

Yeah. And then, of course, somebody looked for me. And somehow or other, we communicated. And we found each other. And that was in Budapest.

And then a brother-in-law of mine that my sister was married to, that they had children, but his wife never came back. And the children never came back. But he was somehow in Russia and became a soldier in Russia. I don't know how he got there because first, he was in a work camp or something, and they took them to Russia. And then he became a Russian soldier, or a Czech soldier in the Russian army, something like that.

And that brother-in-law, he went to Prague. And he took me with him because I was his wife's sister, younger sister, because-- so anyway, he took me to Prague. And he got-- he had some kind of privileges as a soldier that he got an apartment.

This was already in 1946 then?

That was in 1945.

Still in 1945.

Still in 1945. But he got me an apartment there on his name because he had the privileges to go to an office to get something done because it took forever for us plain human beings to get something. But the soldier, he had some kind of pull that he got an apartment. That was left by the Germans when they were fleeing from there. So I stayed in that apartment.

And then-- and then he went and he got-- that was in Prague. Let me-- I have to clear myself-- that was in Prague. But that was just very temporary, see? That was not-- it was impossible to get something. It was just temporary for me to stay someplace.

And then he went to Sudetenland. That was Podmokly, a place where he got an apartment for-- a permanent apartment that the Germans left when they were fleeing. And there were empty apartments. But him, as a soldier, he could get it on his name.

And that's where I stayed until I communicated with one of my sisters, and then with the rest, until we found each other. It took time. And then we all stayed in that apartment.

Before you go on with what happened to you as you found each other--

Yeah.

I want you to take just one minute-- I know it's very painful-- but to look at the period of the Holocaust and what happened to you in these different camps and in this prison.

Yeah.

Did you really think you'd survive?

No, I never thought I will. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I can survive.

What gave you--

It didn't much matter. It got to the point where you didn't care.

What do you think gave you any strength?

The hope that it's going to be-- that you're going to see somebody of your family. You were afraid that you were all alone in the world, that nobody is left from your family. You were somehow hoping against hope that maybe it's possible that somebody else from the family is still alive.

So you think the hope that you'd see the family is what kept you going.

Yeah.

What about faith in God?

Of course, I was very religiously brought up. And that never left me. Of course, I had faith in God. But I always asked the question, why? If there is a God, how can he look at this, what's happening to us, and let it happen?

But you ask the question, and then you always came back like you were brought up, that you're not supposed to question God. You're not supposed to question him because he has his ways. And you don't know why he does what he does.

But I guess I was not smart enough to figure out. It's just survival instinct for one thing. And hope was another thing that--

So you never lost hope that you'd see some of your family?

That I never lost. I always hoped that someplace somebody is alive because I especially hope for my younger sisters that somebody is going to stay alive.

Did you expect help from anybody? When you told the story about the lady and the bread, did you expect anybody to help you?

In that cell?

Yeah.

No. No, that was just icing on a cake, if you can call that. You were so grateful. You thought it must be an angel-- somebody, an angel on the other side of that wall because we stopped expecting that there are human beings that can be human beings.

So when something like that happened that lady gave us the bread through that hole, we just thought that this is something from God. It's not that this is expected of anybody because those people that surrounded us sure wouldn't think of helping us.

What about the other countries in the world? Did you ever wonder what happened to all the other--

Yeah--

--world powers while this all happened to you?

Of course. Of course, we wondered. Of course, we asked questions ourselves. And between us, we talked. How is this possible? How can it happen? How can the world not-- sit by and look on what's happening and

not do anything?

But the answer was that because we are Jews. And nobody cares. That's all.

Did you wonder about Jews in Palestine, what was happening to them?

Yes. We were wondering very much. But we didn't know nothing. We didn't know. There were bits and pieces, always something flying around. One said something. And the other they heard.

But you could not take that for granted because we didn't see any print. We didn't see any concrete things, just bits and pieces that were flying around, that the Russians are coming closer, and that they are going to liberate us. And the Americans are coming from the other side, and they are going to liberate us. And it's going to be this and that. But this, at the end, that kept-- might have kept us going a few days longer.

You told me such amazing things that happened to such a young woman. What of all of it was the most painful?

The most painful of all that? The most painful of all was staying naked there and being surrounded by the SS. I think that the most gruesome, the most horrible thing that can happen to a young person.

Were you able to-- at the liberation, which you were just telling us about, did you have any thoughts about the future?

You mean in a negative or in a positive way?

Or positive, however--

In a positive way?

Either. Maybe you were negative. I don't know, whichever one.

No. At times, you were thinking, no, I don't want to live in a world like this. And at times, you thought, well, maybe after all this, it's going to be better.

And that was what you tried to hold on to?

Yeah.

Let's go to the new life you've rebuilt. You're with us today. You told us at the beginning about what a nice family you have. Let's take from there, after you were liberated by the Red Cross, your brother-in-law found you. And you found your sisters. You also told how you had to recuperate and that took quite a long time. Where did you go when you found-- how many sisters did you find?

Three sisters. One was an older sister that had a family before. She was married and had a child. And she came to us. And they tore her child out of her hands. And the other two sisters were younger than me.

So the four of you were reunited after the war?

Yeah.

But you didn't stay in Europe. And you didn't stay specifically in Czechoslovakia. Where did you all go then?

My sister, the older sister got married. And her husband's mother still lived in France, in Paris. So they went to Paris.

My younger two sisters, the one that were younger from me, also got married in that apartment that I told you in Podmokly. They also got married. And I was the last one to get married.

When did you get married?

I got married in March 15, '46.

Did you marry a survivor?

I married a survivor. Yeah. We knew each other when we were about 12 or 13 because I was in the town where he lived visiting another of my sisters that was married there. So we were children. That was many, many years ago.

But then, he went to school someplace to a yeshiva. I don't know. He was in Galanta or where in yeshiva. I don't know. You know what a yeshiva is?

For sure.

And we didn't see each other for many years because-- it was just briefly as children. I knew his sister. We were friends with his sister. But anyway, after the war, he was looking for me, supposedly. That's what he said. He was looking for me. And he found me. And that was in '45. That was in sometimes in July or in August of '45.

And then, like I said, I went with my brother-in-law. And we lost each other again. We didn't see each other. But then he came after me. He found out where we went-- where I went and where I live. And he came to look for me, and he found me.

And in the meantime, my two sisters got married in that apartment because my brother-in-law, like I said, he was like a father to us because he was married to my older-- one of my oldest sisters. And he was much older than we were.

So after my sisters got married, one went to France. And the two younger ones, that they got married in that apartment, got different apartments where they went to live with their husbands. And I remained in that apartment that my brother-in-law got me in. And then my husband kept coming and asking me to marry him. And I thought about it for months and months. And then in March of '46, we got married.

And then you did not stay there. You where did you then go?

In May of '46, we left Czechoslovakia. We went over to Germany because we were planning to go to Israel.

And you told me you did go to Israel. What year did you go to Israel?

But we planned to go-- after we were married, we planned to go illegally to Israel. But we came to Germany. And there was not very possible-- it wasn't very possible to go illegally. So we were waiting. We were waiting to go to Israel. And as soon as Israel became Israel, we went there. We went there in August of '48.

And what year then did you come to the United States?

In '57.

So you were in Israel from '48 to--

To '57.

'57?

Yeah. And you came to Cleveland because you had some family here then in '57?

Yeah. Yeah. My sisters live here. And my daughter needed medical attention. And we came here because of

that.

Did you ever talk to anybody about your experiences through the years?

Oh, just bits and pieces, but not extensively because everybody has probably his own story to tell. And who's interested in somebody else's?

When you look over all the things that happened to you, what would you feel is the message that you would want to leave from this experience for the future?

All I would like to leave is a human being should be a human being and not an animal. And one should try to help another person, not degrade them and not make a-- not have that power to make another human being as low as an animal, that he shouldn't-- I don't know if you understand me what I mean. I mean that one human being shouldn't have the power over another human being to degrade them that much as I was degraded.

And that would be your message for people that they shouldn't act this way?

Yeah. Nobody should act inhumane.

You've told us a terrific story, an amazing story of courage and of a young woman who came out of a terrible experience and has built a wonderful life. I want to thank you very much for sharing it with us today. I think it was a very important thing that you did.

Thank you for listening to me.

You're welcome. This is Sylvia Abrams. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Bella Lebowitz. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section.