

All right, Ita, we're here at this last part of the tape now. And you had told us about your bout with typhoid when you got to Bergen-Belsen. But if you'll forgive me, I want to sidestep that for just a moment because during the break, you said something about your sister going-- returning to your home in the suburban Sosnowiec, in your city. And I thought it was of such great interest that maybe you would tell us about that first, to interrupt the story for a moment, please.

Well, right after the liberation-- right after the liberation, my-- everybody wants to go to see their hometown. It was only a natural instinct. And I was very ill. I could not go there. Abscesses from the typhus left me so--

Is this the part where your mother went back?

No. That was before. That was right at the beginning of the war.

What is it that Mother told you? Tell us about that, please.

Mother said-- we buried everything in a cellar, dug a hole. Yeah, I know. Yeah, I think it was in the apartment building where we lived. Each one had a locker. I believe it was there. Yes, I believe it was there. And she dug a hole there and put all the valuables in there.

And she said, whoever lives through the war, take it and do with it whatever you can. But somebody took it out before. I think it was my younger sister. I'm not sure. I'm not sure of all this. I know that my oldest sister went after the war to Poland. And she could find nothing there. She found a picture or a scarf, I don't know what.

I remember, also, during the war, my mother put into-- dug out cold storage and put two fur coats in there, somewhere in a store. I remember, it's like a dream, in a butcher shop by somebody. She put fur coats. She wanted to have that.

Oh, I also remembered things like when the war started, my father wanted to go to Russia. He figured, we going to be safer there. Listen to this. So he packed up. He put money in the heel of his boots, a lot of money. And he went to Lw³w, which is Poland occupied by Russia in Lw³w. It was called Lemberg-- Lemberg, yeah. No, was it Bialystok? One of those cities, he went to.

And he thought he was going to open a store there, and do business, and then come-- and bring-- and take us over there. But the living conditions there were so bad. There was no food, no lodging, no houses. There were so many people that came. They were called Brzeznikis, Brezniki, or something-- newcomers. Nobody wanted to-- needed any more people in that city. And he couldn't do anything to get us over there. But he was under Russia.

And my mother was home with us. And one day, she said, I'm going to get your father. Because he couldn't see. So she was always afraid. And you had to cross a border, the Russian-German border in Poland-- become a Russian-German border. So she was-- she had a very bad feeling. And she said, I am going to get Father back home.

I remember like now, she left in the morning. And she was wearing a sports-- like a car jacket, a car. And the buttons here, she took little watches, she put in there so she could have trade-off. And some money, she took. Because the Russians like watches. Anyway, and she went over. And as she was crossing the border-- that was right in the beginning of the war.

As she was crossing the border from Germany, German Poland to Russian Poland, she met people on the borders. And they said, your husband is not here. He went home. Listen. So my mother never did go any further. And she turned around.

And the same night, the same night, we were at home yet in our house-- that was in the house in the city-- now, I remember-- we were sitting, the children and my oldest sister. And both parents were gone.

Mother left in the morning. And Father left few weeks ago. And we hear a knock on the door. And at night, you couldn't-- and there was Daddy, came home. And then maybe an hour or two later, there is another knock on the door.

And my mother came back. And there we were together again.

Oh, thank goodness.

Yeah, but what if they did-- that was right in the beginning, when the war started. You could travel. You could still go-- the Russians-- the Germans didn't have the hold yet of the country. It was early. Later on, you could not go anywhere.

I see. Well, now, we're getting toward the end of the story. But go back, if you don't mind, then, to Bergen-Belsen.

Bergen-Belsen.

And unfortunately, you got typhoid. And your sister nursed you through.

My sister nursed me. If it wasn't for my sister, I would never be here speaking to you, never in a million years. I was very, very ill. And there was such a horrendous condition in that hospital. But after the war, they saw-- the camp was occupied by German soldiers. And there was a doctor there, a German doctor.

I remember, he made a speech just before the liberation. He says, well, we don't have medicine to cure you with. But you have to cure with your heart. This was-- he gave that speech. We were almost-- we couldn't believe it.

And I was in that room with all these sick girls. They were all so sick. And my sister was the nurse for them. But what could she do? Well, they had to go practically to the bathroom with the same bowl that they were eating from.

Oh, my.

There was just such a bad conditions there. When my sister went to pick up the soup in the kitchen-- and that camp had a lot of Slovaks and other non-Jewish people in there too. And the camp, that hospital was a little bit it-- was called Revier-- Revier, they call the hospital Revier. It was a little bit off, away from the main camp. And when she had to go for the soup, she had to go through a little forest-- a little forest, a tiny, small, little forest, and then continued to the kitchen. Well, they robbed her on the way.

Who robbed her?

The Slovaks, they robbed the soup.

Oh, my.

Then she had to take a whole company of people to bring the little bit soup for the sick people. It was no-- it wasn't safe. You were not safe to tell anybody that you have a piece of bread in Bergen-Belsen because they would kill you for it. And I have seen people eating people--

You have seen it?

--myself, yeah.

At Bergen-Belsen?

In Bergen-- in Bergen-Belsen, they had-- the work consisted of taking care of the dead people. This was the work, the only kind of work in Bergen-Belsen. So today, you saw-- I saw these people put a strap around the neck, and just drag that person, and then stay-- put it in front of the window. They were just--

Stacking.

Stacking them. I called staple because that's a German expression. So they were stacking them by the window. I look

out the window, I saw dead people laying there. They couldn't even bury them. And the one that was pulling somebody else today, they pulled him the next day somewhere. That's the way it went.

It was really a death camp.

It was a death camp. It was a death trap. It's what-- they didn't have to burn them. They just died. And I was so weak, I was just laying in there and looking out the window till just after the war. Then I started coming to myself a little bit.

Yes. Can you tell us something about the liberation? When you were lying sick there, in there.

The liberation, I was lying sick. And another thing--

Did you have any idea that the war was coming to an end?

Yes, we had. First of all--

Were there radio announcements?

--the Germans left the camp. The Germans that occupied the camp, that there were-- and all of a sudden, Hungarian soldiers appeared. And it was the funniest thing because we knew it. They were the Volksdeutsche.

Farmers?

No, no, no. A Volksdeutsche is a native Polish person that became German. OK? That's a Volksdeutsche. He's not a real 100% German, made over. They're the worst kind. They're the worst kind.

And there's the Hungarians are occupying the camp. So we were very leery. And first of all, we couldn't converse with them. But in the camp where I was, in that room, there were Hungarian girls. And they heard [HUNGARIAN]. So what they do, they ran out of the place.

The girls did?

The girls, I saw it. And they said, [HUNGARIAN]-- that's a little bit bread. And they shot them-- those.

The Hungarians?

The Hungarian soldiers just kept shooting at them. And we begged them, don't go out. Don't go out. Finally, they got rid of them too. And I remember, there were-- after the war, they--

When you say, they got rid of them too--

I don't know how they got rid of them. They must have run away.

The Hungarian soldiers?

The Hungarian soldiers must have run away. But they caught a few of the Germans. And they were riding them around the camp after the war.

Now, who was them?

The English or our people.

Oh, yes.

We knew already. We knew. Once the Germans left that camp, people were aware that--

But the first ones that came were the Hungarians?

The first came the Hungarians. And they stayed there for a couple, three days.

And then when did the Allies?

Then they disappeared. The Allies did not come in till--

That's all right.

--till maybe a week or 10 days after they occupied it. They were afraid to go into the camp. They were absolutely petrified. There was such a sick hole. They stayed outside. They threw in-- threw us chocolate and cigarettes through the barbed wire. But they were actually afraid to go into the camp.

Well, at that time, were you still confined to that?

I was already-- Or did you have strength? You could walk around?

No. I was beginning to walk, yeah. I was doing fine.

Well, just the joy of knowing. How did you know?

We were liberated. We were liberated. There was no Germans around. You could walk from camp to camp to camp. And what happened? I want to tell you. There was a Dr. Lieberman in my hometown. He was a baby doctor. And he was a marvelous doctor. And he was our doctor.

And he was especially the doctor of my middle sister. She had always tonsillitis. She had bad-- that's how she got killed in Auschwitz because she got a tonsillitis. She got fever. And they selected her for the oven. But he loved her. He was really-- I think-- he may have been in love with her too. But he was a little bit older.

And my sister decided, after the war, she said, let's go and see what's going on on the other camps, the men's camp. There were men there. We never saw men. We're not allowed to go. Well, we go into this little room. There's the same bed bunks. It was a room full of doctors, all doctors, and among them, Dr. Lieberman. Would you believe that?

They were from prisoners there?

Prisoners, yeah, they were prisoners there.

From various places?

From various places, but the whole room was of doctors.

Oh, my.

And we go walk into that room. And they're all laying. There, we were all sick. And Dr. Lieberman is there too.

And you recognized each other?

We recognized him. My god, my sister didn't know what to do. And he gave me a kiss. He kissed me. I got lice right away from him. It was so-- yes. He had a beard. But what could you do? We were used to it. But it may sound like an incredible thing. But it was common, everyday living--

I'm sure.

--over there. And that's why the typhoid survive so well there. And my doctor-- my sister says in Polish, Dr. Lieberman, what can I do for you? He says, Sala, go and cook me a certain soup. Cook me a soup he liked-- zalewajka. It's like cold soup, cold potato soup, like vichyssoise almost. He says, cook me a zalewajka.

Was-- the weather was warm already then.

We put in a potato and a little bit sour cream and spices.

Sound so easy to get.

I don't know where my sister got it. Wasn't maybe the real original. But quickly, quickly, ran to our camp. And we cooked up a little potato soup for him. And by the time we got back, he was dead. I've never felt worse in my life. I cried so much for this man because he was in our house very often.

Yes. Oh, my. Did you find other people there in the other camps that you knew?

Other than him? Oh, well, when we stayed in the camp, then they took us out from that horrendous place. And in Bergen-Belsen, there was a station where the-- barracks where the soldiers used to live, out away, about three miles away from that.

Where the German soldiers lived?

That's where we-- they took us there after. We could-- they took us out of there because this was a death. Most of the people wound up in hospitals. And the ones that were capable of walking out went into those barracks.

And the people-- which part of the Allies is it who--

English, English, the English. There, they came already. But you know what they did? The worst thing that they could have done to us during the war, when they occupied the Bergen-Belsen. People are funny. They want to live regardless, at any price.

Fight of survival.

And they want to eat. There's no question about it, I've known. Instead of-- when they occupied our camp, and they've seen that all these Muselmann, skeletons are laying there, half-- 95% dead, what they should have done-- but they was an army.

Listen, you can't tell the army what to do. Have nurses and give the people just a drop of milk or a drop of tea, slowly, slowly bring them back to eating. What they did? They opened the army rations, those big cans of pork and food. And they were feeding it to all these people. They were running two bowls, three bowls they ate. And they died.

Oh, it was too much all at once. And you think they might have known--

It's a after care.

--scientifically.

Scientifically, you should have take those people, and caged them, and give them drops of food like a bird, a little crumb of every day.

Like a newborn learning to eat.

But when they opened that C rations there, and the fat, and the meat, and all they ate it, and they died like flies. They ate a bowl of that and died-- oh, hundreds.

How did you know how to pace yourself then with the food?

I didn't eat. And my sister prepared for me. I was still sort of convalescing. And all I could eat is a little farina.

That's a good beginning.

If she had it. So she fed me. So I-- and I didn't eat that stuff. I was not able to. But they crawled in. And they got themselves. That was very bad. There was no reason.

But gradually, then, you got your strength back.

We got out of there very soon.

Well, how did-- was there organization?

Yes, organizations-- I don't know. I think bosses came in, army trucks.

Did you have papers that you showed the liberators? Did they know you or anything?

No. They looked at us, they knew who we were.

Is that right? They didn't know if you were Polish or anything.

Who would be in a camp like this voluntarily?

Well, that's true. But I mean, from where your origin came from or whatnot.

No, they didn't ask for it. And then we registered. And then when we went to the other camp--

Yeah, now, what is the other camp?

The other camp was where the German soldiers used to live.

Yes.

The barracks.

Yes, you went to the barracks.

Those were nice clean. We stayed there. And then we started registering. Wherever you went, we started registering, putting our names on, that we are alive, that we here.

I see.

Committees were formed.

Yes. And who was this information being given to?

It was given to-- mostly sent to America, I believe, or other camps, and compared. And there was lists and lists to go through. And here--

But the--

And new rabbis came to give speeches. And we gave letters and names. I always remembered, when I was-- as a little, little girl, that I have an uncle living in Cleveland, Ohio.

In Cleveland, Ohio.

I always knew that. So when a rabbi came to speak, we gave him a little letter. And I said, well, two nieces are alive. And there is the such and such name. And my uncle lives in Cleveland, Ohio. And his name is Max Kolt.

K-O-L?

K-O-L-T.

Well, were these people necessarily from the Joint Distribution Committee?

Most of them were.

I mean, did you know what organization they came?

No.

You didn't really care what organization they represented.

I could care less, no. But then while we were living there in Belsen-- that was Belsen, not Bergen-Belsen-- my sister went to Poland, like I told you. She-- from there, she-- because I was feeling better already, she could. I wanted to go in the worst way. I wanted to go once more to see my place of birth.

She said, no, you can't. Because I really couldn't. I was very ill. And we had to smuggle through the border from Czechoslovakia to Poland. It wasn't just free-going. And she thought she may be able to sell our apartment. But she never did.

But she got there. And she saw the original big--

She saw the building. And she went in. She wasn't--

And survived the war, the building.

It survived the war. People live there to this day. And she came back. She says, you missed nothing by not going.

Oh, she did come back.

She did come back. Oh, sure, she came back. She tried to get a lawyer to have our names and that we're alive. Because they were selling some properties representing themselves as relatives of-- a lot of property was sold under false-- so at least, that's what she did, anyway, when she came back home.

So as far as you know, the property--

Is there. My niece was there last year.

Oh, really?

She went with the young second generation.

Who owns it now or what?

The government.

The government, oh, so they took it over.

Yeah. They-- my niece was there last year. She went with the second generation to Europe.

Oh, of the Kol Israel?

Of Kol Israel second generation. She went. She went to-- they arrested her.

Oh, that's right. Now, did the-- was there any help at all given by the United Nations, do you recall?

Oh, yeah. They were--

What was that like?

--they have kitchens set up. And they have magazines of sugar, and chocolate, and candy, and food, and clothing. And my god, Americans have narrow feet. I found that out because the shoes were long-- not new shoes, mind you. And those young kids' shoes, I would imagine-- school-- saddle shoes.

Saddle shoes, yeah, that's really funny.

I couldn't get into a pair of saddle shoes for the life of me. And I was not big then, I was very little. But I have wide feet. And these are long things. I said, boy, Americans much have long, thin legs. And they do-- narrow.

Well, many of them. So that there was some assistance from the United Nations?

Oh, yes, all the time, all the time.

And this was when you were in Belsen?

In Belsen. And then they had raids again. We just raided-- they raided the camp.

Who raided it?

The English. I don't know who. It's somebody. They wanted to send us to Sweden.

But had the-- this was before the armistice had been signed?

After, after the war. We were in that camp. And after the war, we were in the camp living as DP-- displaced people. And they wanted us to go to Sweden. They had better hospitals there. And they wanted to send us because there were a lot of us. And we didn't want to go to Sweden. We wanted to stay in Germany to see if we find someone. Our all object was to get well and start looking for the people.

Yes, for the family.

And here, they're going to send us. This was like another world. So we started hiding again.

Oh, my.

We hid not to be sent to Sweden. And then they sent us to two other camps, I was, displaced person camps.

I see.

I don't-- one was Diepholz. And the other camp, I don't even remember. But it was--

Did the HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society--

Yeah, the HIAS was there. I was aware of them.

Yeah, were they-- did they help in any way to try to help locate the family?

Well, HIAS and all this was together the Joint Distribution because they are-- of the lists and of the committees. And that was-- it was done in such a way that--

Then how long a period of time were you in these various other displaced persons camp?

I can't believe I don't remember, I'll be very frank with you.

This was-- these were--

Not too long.

These were camps in Germany?

These were camps in Germany, but they were not--

And it was May.

--concentration camps. No,

I understand.

It was already regular camps, better.

Survival camps.

Yeah, survival-- DP camps, they called them. And not too long-- there was months, maybe close to a year or so. I don't remember.

Oh, you remember the seasons.

Because that was 1945. That was all 1945 now-- in 1945. And then I found-- an uncle found out in Munich that we live in somewhere in Germany, Diepholz, in one of those camps.

Oh, you had an uncle in Munich?

Oh, yes.

I see.

See, another bunch of people-- my mother's two brothers and a sister survived-- and a brother-in-law, Uncle Viktor.

They were the people who were taken away from the--

They were the people that they went to working camps. I never heard of them. Then they survived in Poland in some

camps, in all kinds of camps. I cannot even remember. But they came to Munich. And they settled in Munich. And then they heard that we are alive. And they knew there were two girls. So they send a shaliach, you know what they send?

Yes, I know a shaliach.

A cousin and somebody else.

An emissary.

An emissary. And you know what? We were situated near a highway. And you could see, every day, people coming, and hugging--

And claiming.

--claiming, and discovering. And my poor sister, she had a husband. She knew he was alive. But he died in Warsaw. They took him to clean up the Warsaw ghetto after the-- and they just killed him there. And she was expecting--

That was the older sister who was married--

Right.

--before the war.

She was expecting her husband. She was standing on the highway all day long. Oh, I felt so sorry for her. And my cousin's husband came, and-- that one that worked in the kitchen, her cousin-- her husband came in.

And other men came. And my sister was waiting, and waiting, and waiting until someone told her, don't wait. He's not here. He's not coming. And then the cousin came from Uncle Viktor. He sent the cousin, somebody else for us to come to Munich. But that's a story in itself. It was far. We--

In the little bit of time that's left, we do want to hear about your coming to the United States. But we want to hear about Munich first.

OK. I'm going to say, I'm going to make it very quickly. We came to Munich. And it took us seven days to travel from wherever we were to Munich because we just hitched a train. And we were on coal trains, right on top of the coal-- black and dirty. And oh, it was just terrible.

But in every city, we stopped, we went to the governor or the mayor of the city, we demanded food. We didn't ask, we demanded. And when I went to the train station, somebody stood at it collecting tickets, I said, go to Hitler or go gamble to Himmler. He'll pay for you for that. And finally, we made Munich. And seven days, took us to get to Munich. That was with the same country we're talking about.

I realize. And your sister and you went together to Munich?

Yes, yes, yes. And you should see, my sister was carrying. After the war, she collected canned goods-- a sackful like this. And I called one the grandpa and one the grandma, two sacks. I said, what are you dragging? We have food. She was so afraid that she was dragging all this. You could get her up. She was just picking it up. We were sitting on the train and coming. In every city, we demanded food-- or cards, or ration cards.

And you got it.

Oh, god, we got it. It was good to be free.

Yes. Yes.

And in Munich, we stayed there a little bit. And then I went to DP camp in Feldafing. And from there, it didn't take me long. I came to the United States because I--

Who contacted Uncle, then? Was it the letter that you gave the rabbi?

No, this uncle was also a-- no, I tell you about that letter, about the rabbi. We sent a letter to Cleveland with the rabbi that came to speak there. And apparently, my uncle Max that was living here, he went to hear this rabbi speak. I don't remember.

And while he, the rabbi was speaking, he took from Hotel Cleveland downtown, he took a piece of stationery and wrote a letter to us. And I received that letter in Feldafing. I want you to know, I understood from the letter that this hotel belongs to my uncle.

Wonderful. You couldn't wait.

And I-- wait, I ran all over the camp. I showed them, look, I got a letter from my rich uncle from America. And look at the building he owns. It was so funny when I came here. In 1946, I was in Feldafing in the DP camp. And from there, the children started. They started getting the children out of there.

But you were then--

I was 18.

You were 18.

I was-- I just made it. I just made it.

What teenage years you had, goodness gracious.

Yeah, I-- if had been 19, I couldn't have come with the children. I would have come probably with the grown-ups. You had to be under 18 in order to come with this organization.

So your uncle signed for you? Or what is the organization? Tell me about that.

My uncle didn't. The child's-- World Welfare-- World Children's Welfare.

Oh, I see.

That was only for children. I never mentioned that I had an uncle because I could never come.

I see.

They would make me wait. And I wanted to get out of Germany. I don't know why. The people didn't do it so well that stayed after the war. And anyway, I came-- I left Germany. I went to a camp, Prien, for children in 1946, the end of 1946. And I stayed there. Then we went to Bremerhaven and came to the United States in '47-- 1947 February.

Oh, your sister-- what did she do then?

Oh, my sister stayed in Germany in Feldafing. She married. She married a man that she knew from before the war.

From the hometown?

Yes, my hometown. And I knew him too. And they had a baby. As a matter of fact, they had the baby before I left. My

niece was born December 1946. I saw her, she was six weeks old. And when she came here, she was two years old. And my sister is here. She was in New York. And I carried on, I said, you must come to Cleveland. You must come to Cleveland. Why? I said, you must come to Cleveland to be with me.

But we have a gap, though, now, you got to Bremerhaven.

Bremerhaven, I came to New York.

Yeah. Well, do you want to tell us anything about the trip over with all the children?

It wasn't-- it was a very bad trip, to be frank with you.

Really?

I lay in bed sick like a dog.

How many children were on the--

Oh, there were not only us. There were Polish children, Czechoslovakian, any country that you--

I understand.

When we arrived at the--

Were they all Jewish children necessarily?

No. When we arrived at the New York, at the harbor, there were-- each organization was standing there, waiting for their own.

I see.

You see?

And they claimed their own, the churches, organizations, or whatever.

Yes. So which organization there--

I came with the Jewish Children's Bureau.

I see, oh.

The Jewish Children's Bureau. And they claimed us. And they had a building there.

How many would you say that they claimed? How many Jewish children were there?

I don't know. We were quite a few, quite a few. But you see, when we got there, they took half of them to Ellis Island. And half of them, to that-- they had a home, a building there just for transient-- for us.

So we came in there. And I stood there. And I said, this is the room for Judy and Ellie. And Judy and Ellie were on Ellis Island. I didn't know. And when we came into the room, there was a double bed. And on each bed, there was apple, and an orange, and a piece of candy. I thought it was lovely.

That's a nice welcome.

And a friend of mine that came with one boat previous to mine, a month before, left me \$5 and a box of candy.

Oh, how nice.

That was really nice.

But did you know at that point you were coming to Cleveland? Or how?

Yes, yes, we knew because we were in Bremerhaven and Prien together. And I met all these-- a lot of kids from there too.

I see.

Yeah. But one boat came, and another one, and another one. Depends the boat.

And how did you get from New York to Cleveland?

To Cleveland?

Did you select Cleveland then?

No. No.

You mean, it was just sort of beshert that you got it?

No. When I finally got to New York, I told him, I have an uncle in Cleveland. They were very happy to hear that. And then I got in touch with my uncle. And he was--

Thrilled.

He was so thrilled. And my aunt has two sisters in New York-- older ladies. They bought me a suit, a beautiful suit. And they took me to Rockefeller Center, to Radio City. And they--

Did you know some English then?

No, I talked Jewish to them. Oh, I tell you about English. And they gave me a very good time-- older-- two older ladies. Maybe they look old to me then. I don't know. Well, my aunt is gone now. And after that, my uncle got in touch with the Jewish Family Service here, the Jewish Children, and he says, he's going to take me lock, stock, and barrel. I can come. And he's guarantee everything. Terrific.

Now, your uncle was relation--

My father's brother.

Your-- oh, yes.

And when he came to see me--

You must have been very relieved.

He was sitting like you are sitting here.

Oh, really?

I was-- oh, when I came, they wouldn't take me-- send me directly to my uncle. I went to the Belfry. I stayed there for a little while. But they had to find out, to make sure that I'd be happy or whatever. And he came to visit.

And check your health, perhaps.

Yeah. Well, he came to visit me. And there's my father sitting in front of me. He looks so much like my father, was-- it was eerie. And I was coming from the steps. And I look, I said, my god, it's impossible. He looked a little bit older. He was a little bit-- but he was sitting so I would look at the face. Well, there was some reunion. And then I went to my uncle's for a little visit. And they finally got together. I lived with my uncle. But when I was the first time with my uncle's house, he has three--

Did he have children?

He had three sons and a daughter. And the boy stood up. And I came in. And I was sitting there on the sofa. And I talked to them in Jewish. And they say, speak English. Well, I looked at them, and I said, well, it must be-- what's the matter with them? How can I just speak English like this with magic? I couldn't speak English. Well, they said, you don't speak Jewish now. You speak English. And I did six months later.

That's wonderful.

I did. I went to school.

Your English is marvelous, of course.

I went school. I went to school. They did very good. They got a Mrs. Mendelson was here at one time. I don't know. She was affiliated with the Jewish Family Service. And she gave us lessons in her home pronunciation, enunciate.

She an older woman?

No, she was a young lady at the time. And she was very nice. She took-- a few of us girls, we used to go to her house.

Oh, that was wonderful.

And she lived in University Heights. And then all these girls that came together, we're still together to this day. Then I went to school.

The girls that came over on the children's ship with you?

No, that came in 1947, beginning of 1947. All these girls were-- we have a club. We're still together to this day.

Oh, isn't that-- and how many of you are there?

Well, we had 12 or 14. But one went to Detroit. And one went to-- one went back to Europe. She married a doctor and went back to Europe. But we still have the same club.

Oh, isn't that-- well, and you met on the ship coming over?

We met right after we came here to this-- we were very lonely when we came here.

Oh, I can imagine.

Absolutely. I was so lonely. And I went to school. And I carried that dictionary with me wherever I went. And I hear a word, and I look it up. I didn't even know what I was looking for, to be frank with you. And It was very difficult time. So we sort of-- who-- we knew each other, we were together. We can't-- no matter how far we lived, we used to get

together.

But were you from different countries in Europe?

No, most of them the same-- Poland. We were all Polish.

So when you got together did you speak English or Polish?

Polish, Polish. Today, we don't speak Polish-- only once in a while.

I know. You have to-- the language that comes easier.

I don't have who to speak Polish to. I can speak it. But it was one girl that I spoke Polish to all the time, but she moved to Detroit. So that's that.

Well, it's better.

With Rose Klepowitz, I speak Polish, at least.

But at first, you have to.

We got to get out of necessity.

Yes. You needed each other.

We needed each other.

And that's wonderful.

We needed each other's support. And then we were-- all went to John Hay High School. That's another thing that brought us together.

And you were in the same class?

One class-- little, big, huge, Greek, Italian-- every nationality imaginable was in that class.

And at different grade?

No one grade level. They didn't teach us anything. Well, you went to another class for other subjects. But the English there was the simplest form of English that you could teach, and everybody the same, a little bit reading. And she brought facts, like anniversaries and birthdays and connected things-- sort of made it pliable.

Yes, so that you could--

Yeah, made it not so hard to understand.

That was everyday English that you needed.

Every day--

How to get--

--every day.

--on the buses, streetcar.

The buses are a great help for a newcomer. You read the ads and you know. I mean, reading the alphabet, Latin is still the same everywhere. So if you read, you read, you read, you read long enough.

Did you then graduate from high school?

No, I didn't. I went to John Hay. And then I went to Heights High. And like I told, you in Heights High, I just felt like I was ancient. I was a grandmother to these people there.

Oh, you'd been through a lot.

I felt very out of place. I was so unhappy. And I was very good in math. So I went to my social worker. I had a social worker in the Jewish Family Service, Jewish Children's Bureau.

And I discussed it with-- she says, you are so good in math. Why don't you go to a business school? So there was this school, East Cleveland School of Business. And said, you don't have to be with all those little kids. To me, they were babies-- not from looking, not from the physical appearance, but here.

Yeah, they had a very protected life by comparison.

Right, like my children today. And I said, I can't communicate with these. They don't understand me. I don't understand them. And that was the truth. So I went to this business college, business school, business college. And there, they zipped me through really fast.

And you were still living with uncle?

No, I left uncle.

Oh, really?

I didn't leave uncle. I left auntie.

Oh, I see, auntie. And you--

But we were on good terms to the very end. He passed-- my uncle passed away about in 1951, when I was married, the first year I was married.

Well, then you went out on your own. You got your own apartment.

I went to a foster home. I lived with a-- in a foster home.

That was also through the Jewish Children's Bureau.

Right. You see, when I lived at my uncle's, he was wonderful. And she was nice too. I can't say. But my aunt was under the impression that I didn't need anything. And I did have needs.

And anyway, to make this long story very short-- I don't want to talk about-- she took me in one day into the room. And she says, Ita, the next time you go to Mrs. Meltzer, which is-- and I go-- I went there every month-- your social worker, you tell her that Uncle and I are willing to feed you and give you board. But we cannot afford to dress you. And they promised to.

Every time I needed something, my aunt ran up to the attic and brought me an antique thing. And I was going to school. And I was-- and the girls-- so it was very-- the situation wasn't there. She didn't have money for clothes for me.

So when I went to the social worker, innocently, I told her just what my aunt said. I said, Ms. Meltzer, so and so. Well, I've never seen a social worker hit the ceiling like she did. She was very unhappy with the situation, she says, because I know quite well your uncle can afford it. She took me out the same day in foster home.

Oh. And that was a better?

That was a better deal for me. It was more-- I worked. By then, I worked already.

You had a job?

I had a job. And I worked. And I paid my--

Your board.

--my board, whatever they asked. And I could come and go as I please. And then and there, my uncle again called on me. And he says, Ita, you working now, you're supporting yourself. Why don't you come and live with us? And you save the money that you pay out. I said, I rather pay the money and be independent. They're very nice people. They live Cleveland-- they live here in Cleveland. They're still here, my foster parents.

Yeah. Well, as you look back at this point, before we go on a little bit, the fact that you thank the good lord you made it through-- not everybody did, we know so many did not-- is there any-- how do you sort of feel about that? Do you have any other things you try to?

Now, I'm happier than I was before because I have grandchildren. And I have something to look forward to. And I adore them. But a life, to be alive necessarily is not such a great thing.

And many times after the-- I questioned the fact that I was alive. Why? I had no-- you have no one. You have no relatives. You have no father, no mother. I have one sister. She has her own family. And I questioned the fact that I was left alive very often. But here I am now. It's too late to question anything.

Yes. Yes. Yes, just the thankfulness.

The years have taken care of themselves.

That's right. I think that's a good--

That's life.

--a good attitude.

And now, I have grandchildren. I adore them. And I see them. And I love them, and something to look forward to.

And that's-- yes. That's-- I think what we all--

That's a chain.

That's right, the chain of the generations.

That's right.

So we hope that each generation will get better.

I hope they never have to go through what we did.

Never, ever, ever.

Not even in the wildest, never. People should be so aware.

Do you have any comments you care to say about the Jewish community in the United States?

I think the Jewish community is OK today. But they were very negligent in the years back. I have a feeling they could have done more than they did.

But history is telling us that that's--

When you heard that they-- yes, well, history-- look at it. They're opening the archives now from Roosevelt's time. And what you read is scary.

That's why this project is underway now before too much time elapses.

Because they could have done more. They could have done more. They could have done it sooner. I don't know. We said-- we used to say in the camp, if they were crawling on all fours, they should be here already. That was the standard saying.

Of course, it was the government. It wasn't the--

Oh, sure, sure, sure.

--individual people. You should not-- if you see anything like this, any wrong like this being done to anyone whatsoever, it should not be allowed. It should not be because that's like a sickness, bad sickness.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about those years?

What should I say?

Or did you think that the outside world could help?

There's so much more I could tell you, but I'm trying to condense it in a way.

Well, you're doing--

Because I'm just going to just rattle on without--

--just fine, really. Did you ever think that, somehow, finally, that the war would be over and that--

No.

--that the Allies--

No. No. I didn't.

But by the time you got to Bergen-Belsen--

By the time-- Bergen-Belsen was such a horrendous experience-- not Bergen-Belsen itself, which was bad enough, but the traveling, the train ride. You cannot imagine what a person-- what can become from a person within a week or 10 days. It was only 10 days or three weeks. I don't remember exactly.

When they used to kick us out from the cattle wagons-- in the middle of February, I washed myself in a lake, in a frozen lake. And I loved it because the dirt would eat you up alive. I mean, this was what killed the whole thing, more than any dirt, that Bergen-Belsen, that Bergen, that hospital, those people there. People became animals. That's all. And that's bad. I have seen it. I have seen it.

Do your children-- you haven't shared too much of this--

No.

--with the children at all.

I have never shared anything with-- I am sorry that I didn't. But I just could not. They know because they were-- when they showing QB VII, two of-- I was home by myself. And my daughter called me and says, Mother, please don't watch it. I said-- I read the book.

What was that, was that the-- oh, QB VII.

QB VII-- I read the books. So I was-- and I could. But when I saw it in the movies, I was home by myself. And I was screaming bloody murder. I was screaming because no one was in the house. I really got-- relieved myself, in a way. But I never told my children very much because-- they know, they suspect. And if something shows on television that-- they call me, Mother, don't watch this, Mother-- like I was such a--

It's nice that they want to be so protective.

They want to be so. But they still don't want to know anything. They cannot imagine that their mother went through such hell.

Went through such things. No, I--

Yeah. But they still try to play like a piece of china, which I am not, far from it.

Oh, I can see what you mean.

But when you were working on your own then, Ita, how much longer was it before you met the man who became your husband.

Oh, I met Jack and I-- well, when my sister came here, she finally consented to come from New York here. She wanted to stay in New York because my brother-in-law was a tailor. And now, there, he could find work. It was the center. And finally, she came here. And she was in such trouble, god. She was so angry at me that I made her come here. But things turned out OK.

He got a job.

He got a job. And he opened his own business. And he's doing very well.

Oh, good.

And then I got married. And we all doing OK. But she was very unhappy that I made her come here. And I wanted somebody here so bad, someone that--

Everybody needs someone.

Yeah. I used to come from school, from high school. And first of all, I walked around like a dizzy lady. People talk to me-- school is so different here than it's in Europe that it's unbelievable. In Europe, it's the schoolteacher that goes from

classroom to classroom to classroom. Over here, it's the people, the pupils.

The students.

They run like crazy in the hall. I used to get dizzy. And they talk to me. I didn't know what they were-- so I used to come home with-- and then, again, they give you an assignment for six weeks. And I copied everything very-- and I asked my cousins on the telephone-- my aunt, I could not ask. And what do I do about this?

Were they close to you in age, your cousins?

No, they were all married and with children. But he says, Ita, I've been out of high school for so many years. I don't remember this. And I don't remember. So I had to get together with my own girls. And then we could discuss. If she couldn't explain it to me in English, she could explain it in Polish.

Yes, so you would know.

That's why we clung together. Because I realized, I was in the-- I can't call my cousins because they have families. And they have their own problems. They didn't want to know for mine at all.

Well, and they couldn't help you that way.

And then they went out of school for so many years.

Did you have any kind of religious education when you came to Cleveland?

In here? No, no.

After all, your uncle perhaps belong-- was a member of a synagogue.

We belong to Warrensville Center. And I took my children to Sunday school. But I never seen-- my cousins belong to a - Rabbi Silver's temple. I was there for two bar mitzvahs.

I see.

Yeah, very. And they teach them really nicely there. They know as much as--

Yes, they do.

And I sent my kids to yeshiva, said, that was the biggest mistake because they didn't understand anything. Really, it's too religious for them. And they don't understand.

And what language of instruction was that?

In Hebrew, only Hebrew.

Hebrew or Yiddish?

Yiddish, Hebrew, or whatever. But I had-- I don't know, I guess it's in me.

Well, it was from your background.

From your background, right. Today, I wouldn't do it. Today, I would send them to Temple Emanuel. I would send them to Rabbi Silver's. Because they do learn a lot. They do.

Well, the methods--

The methods have changed too since. I didn't go here to Hebrew-- I was too busy trying to make a living--

Oh, absolutely.

--and trying to get myself married.

That's right. That's right, and establishing.

My sister came in from Germany. And I was 21 years old. She says, my god, 21 years old and you're not married yet. I had so much fun. I worked in an office, promised myself, when I came to this country, I will never work in a factory, that's for sure. So I worked in a office. And I did fairly well. And I got married.

Bookkeeping?

Bookkeeping, yeah.

And then I--

That's a good background. You can always do something with bookkeeping, no matter where.

And I was-- then I was selling real estate. That was recently, already, 10 years ago.

But you haven't been back to Poland at all?

No.

No?

And you know, I have no desire to go there. I have absolutely no desire, not even Germany. No Poland, no-- I went to Israel and I went to South America. My husband has relatives in South America. We always hunt for relatives. And I go to Canada. I have-- my mother has two brothers and a sister in Montreal. So we go there a lot.

The history of our Jewish people is one of-- I won't say flight, but moving around.

Moving like Gypsies.

You never know.

Look at us now. I have family and relatives in Montreal. I have relatives in South America, whereas at one time, I was able to walk to all my relatives--

Yes. Well, it's--

--to see them.

--quite different. Don't forget, we're approaching the year 2000. It's quite different. Before we close, Ita, is there anything else that you would--

I can't think of anything.

--like to tell us? You feel as though you've covered--

Pretty well.

--the story?

Covered all the bases.

Yes.

You can never cover the whole story--

No, no.

--unfortunately.

No. But you certainly have done a wonderful job of recall.

Thank you. I have such a jumbled mind right now, such a jog in my mind.

Well, I can understand. And it's been quite an ordeal. And we thank you very, very much--

You're welcome.

--on behalf of all the project.

I've done it the first time. And I think it's the last time.

Well, it should be the last time. But it's recorded. Even though it's the last time--

I'm going see myself.

--it will be for the future. And that's the whole--

I know. That's why I agreed to do it.

--the whole benefit is.

I've never-- this is the very first time I opened myself that much.

As one of our instructors told her, it might be late, but it's not too late. And that's what we're trying to do.

No, its better later than never. Right.

So we thank you very much, Ita.

You're quite welcome, it was a pleasure.

And I'm glad that we accomplished what we have--

We sure did.

--today. And thank you, people in the television industry, for doing this for us.

That, it's very nice of them, really.