

Over, here.

Right. Right.

Good morning. I'm Lissa Keller. Today, we are interviewing Eva Reis, who is a Holocaust survivor. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, the Cleveland section. Good morning, Eva.

Good morning.

I would like you to tell us your name--

My maiden name is--

--your maiden name as well as--

--Eva Reis.

And your maiden name?

My maiden name is Hershkowitz.

And please, tell us how old you are.

66.

You don't look 66. And where do you live?

That's 3914 Silsby, University Heights.

In Cleveland, Ohio. And do you work?

No, I don't work.

OK. You did work at one time?

Yeah, I used to work.

OK. What did you do when you did work?

A dressmaking.

And you still do a little bit of it at home now?

A little, just a little.

OK. You are married.

Yeah.

OK. And your husband is living with you on Silsby Road. And your husband is retired, I understand.

Yeah, he's retired.

And he was also a tailor?

Yeah.

OK. And do you have children?

I have three children.

And what do they do?

One is a lawyer, one is an accountant, and one is a social worker, the daughter.

And they live here in Cleveland or elsewhere?

No, one lives here, the youngest.

The youngest one lives here. And he's employed by the?

The Jewish Federation.

The Jewish Federation. As a social worker?

No, he's accountant.

He's an accountant for the firm. And the other two children are not living in Cleveland?

No. One is in Columbus and one in Seattle.

And you are a grandmother, I understand.

Yeah, two.

And one is being--

Coming soon is coming.

--expected any time?

Yeah.

I would like to know a little bit about your childhood, your lifestyle, and your family, living network. Tell me what your life was like before the war. I want to begin with 1939. I understand you lived in Poland. And how old were you when the-- how old were you when you-- in 1939?

On '39, was 21.

You were 21?

Yeah.

And tell me, the country that you lived in was Poland.

Poland.

And you mentioned that it was a very small town.

That's right.

And the population was about 2,000.

2,000.

And the percentage of Jews that lived there?

Maybe 10%.

OK. Near what large town was it?

Kielce was the name.

And it was near?

Kielce, Warsaw.

It was near Warsaw?

Tell me what your town was like, what it looked like, what the industry was.

It was just a farming town, about.

It was a farming town.

We had a store.

And you had a store there?

Yeah, a grocery and materials.

Fabrics?

Fabric, yeah.

OK. A grocery and fabric store. So it was a general store.

Everything was in the store, yeah.

You said it was about 10% Jews in the town. Tell me about your family, how many people there were in your family.

Oh, there was 10 children-- five sisters and five brothers.

OK. And you all lived together at home.

But I-- when I-- before I was born, one got married.

OK. So you were the youngest.

I was the youngest from ten.

And of course, you weren't married at the time.

No.

Your family lived together, the married as well as the not married in the same town?

No, not the same town.

You lived near each other?

Yeah, eight miles, 20 miles away.

Eight miles away from each other.

Another town.

Another town, but all within a 20-mile radius?

Close, yeah, 20.

OK. How did your family make a living? What did your father do?

He was in egg business. He had a store.

And the store was--

Wholesale.

--a wholesale store in the town.

Now, eggs wholesale.

Eggs wholesale?

Yes.

What about your mother?

My mother was a housewife.

And she helped in this business?

Yeah, in store.

OK. Would you describe your family as well-to-do, comfortable?

Yeah, we had everything what we needed, not too luxury.

OK, you were comfortable.

Yeah.

You were able to supply the needs for the family.

Yeah, food and clothes-- clothing, and everything.

Did you help your family? Did you help in the business at all?

No, I went to school. And then I went to my sister to learn tailoring. There was no place in our city where to learn.

So you really learned from one another, from a family member what you thought you would do for your life, for your livelihood--

Sure.

--which was tailoring?

Tailoring.

And you said that you were-- went to school at the age of seven, I believe.

Seven, we started.

That was the kindergarten years as we have them here in the States?

That's right.

OK. And before that, you were at home?

I was home.

Tell me about your family's life. Who made the major decisions, father or mother?

My father, my mother.

Both did.

They was together.

OK. I want to know about the kind of family life that you had, how you got along with your brothers and sisters.

Oh, very good. Yeah.

It was a close family?

Sure.

OK. How did you and your family get along with friends and neighbors, both Jews and non-Jews?

Oh, it was very nice.

It was a little town.

We never had a argument since I remember.

That was-- everybody knew each other in the town.

Yeah, right.

And there was a good camaraderie in the town.

Yeah, sure.

What was a typical day for your family?

We used to have a field from a little farm too. And I used to go to the farm where we hire people. And I used to watch them as they worked in the field.

As they worked with you?

Summertime, yeah. Wintertime, we used to read books.

In the house.

Stay in the house.

Were you-- how religious was your family?

Not too much, just in the middle.

Was there a--

Not too Orthodox.

Sort of a Conservative family?

No, was Orthodox, not too much.

On the reform side of Orthodox. Was there a shul in the town?

Yeah, they build a small shul before the war.

So your 10% of the population was Jewish?

Yeah, everybody give some contribution and they build a shul.

I see. I see. Did you attend the shul-- or your family-- on a regular basis?

Just the parents and the brothers. We girls didn't go to shul.

The girls did not go.

Not the girls.

Was this a daily shul attending for the parents and the brothers?

No, every Saturday.

Only on Saturdays.

They used to have in the morning Saturdays.

And on Friday night?

Friday night, yeah.

Friday night and Saturday.

And Saturday-- and the holiday.

And the holidays.

Sure.

OK. What do you remember about holidays? Particularly, was there a family gathering? Was it a happy occasion?

Sure. The sisters used to come, the brothers. We used to be together.

Everybody was together at that time.

Pesach, Passover.

From the short mileage, eight to 20 miles around, everybody came to your house--

Sure.

--and went to shul, and then celebrated the holiday together.

And grandmother, I had.

Did Zionism or other political organization play a part in the life of your family at all?

Oh, we used to be an organization, Jabotinsky-- I don't know how you call it-- Betar, we used to belong.

What kind of organization was that?

This was like for Israel.

OK. There was-- and did you belong? Did most of the other Jews?

Yeah, we belong, the younger people-- not the older.

Most of the population, most of the Jewish population belonged?

Yeah, the younger.

Were you a member of a Zionist group?

We used to be when I was very young, yeah.

And did socialism or any political organization play a role in your family life?

No.

You did not-- that was not part of the life?

No, I didn't have-- my father didn't belong.

Tell me what community organizations you and your family belonged to.

Just to this. There's no organizations by us.

Your parents did not belong to anything?

No.

Their life was in the field, and in their daily making a living--

Yeah, really-- yeah, the business.

--and the shul on Friday and Saturday, and the holidays together.

That's right.

What was the main language spoken in your home?

Yiddish, we speak and Polish. We knows Polish.

And Polish.

Yeah.

And what kind of books were there in your home? You mentioned that you read in the wintertime.

Just Yiddish books.

Yiddish books?

Yeah.

Was there a theater in your neighborhood, a concert hall, museums?

No.

It was too small?

No, it was nothing.

What about the nearby Warsaw?

Oh, there in Warsaw was.

Did you attend anything that was theater or concert?

No, it was too far from us.

I see. I see. So this was not part of your life?

No.

What kinds of entertainment did your family have-- or sports or entertainment?

Well, soccer, we had. We used to have to go--

Soccer, did you say?

Soccer, we used to play a lot.

The family?

It was eight miles from us was a team.

And you went to watch the sport of soccer.

We went to watch, that's right.

Did your family go on vacations?

No, they came to us. It was a resort.

You were the vacation.

No, the people was--

The other family members--

--coming to us, was a resort.

You did not go away anywhere, you or your family?

No, they didn't go. No.

I want to talk about you, personally. How do you remember yourself in those days? What kind of person were you? What did you look like?

Oh, I was happy. I went-- I always used to-- I learned tailoring. And I used to help my sister. She had three kids.

You were how old when you started the tailoring? You went to school at seven.

Oh, I was about 15.

About 15?

Until 14, I went to school.

And you learned the tailoring, you were a happy person.

Yeah, I was always happy.

You went to school and you were healthy.

There was no high school, just seven grades.

Seven grades. So at age seven, until-- for seven years.

14, that's right.

Your outlook on life was a happy one?

Yeah.

Everything looked rosy?

It was happy until the war came.

Did you have hobbies, something else?

Just tailoring was.

So that was your talent and your hobby was tailoring.

What did you think about yourself? I want to get a picture of the kind of person you were. Were you sensitive, brave?  
What kind of person were you?

I always liked people.

You were an outgoing person?

Yeah.

You liked people?

Sure.

You were a happy person who didn't--

I was happy.

--you were not a shy person.

No.

OK. You're not shy now.

No.

You're your own person. That's right. Tell me other memories that you had from your childhood before the war, anything that you remember about your life, about yourself, about the way you felt about your life in general.

It was always worry about the war, I was worried.

You were worried about the war.

Even I was a child, yeah. We used to tell stories. We used to read the Jewish news. Was a Polish paper. They used to write stories about gas they going to throw on the people. And I was maybe eight, nine years old. I was always worried when the war broke out.

So that's about 19--

In '20-- '28.

--26.

Yeah.

And at that time, the Polish--

The Polish--

--and the Yiddish papers mentioned antisemitism.

Yeah, but the gas.

What did they say?

And about they going to throw gas in England. Was an article I remember, I never forget, I read in the Jewish news, how they going to kill people with gas. It was stick always to my mind since I was a child.

And so you were concerned about that?

Yeah, I was afraid. Yes.

Tell me what schools you attended. Were they particularly Jewish schools? Or did Jewish and non-Jewish children attend the same school?

No, we went-- we was just 10% Jewish. We all got together and we went there.

Everybody went to the same school?

Yeah.

There were no Catholic schools separate?

No. When they had prays, they used to have prays. The priest used to come. He was a nice man.

To the school?

We used to-- we went out for an hour home. We went home. And they had their prays.

I see. You were not part of that.

No, we were not.

The Jewish children went home.

They told us, if you want to stay, you can stay. If not, you can go out, run out.

I see. I see. But there were-- so each one--

Yeah, the priest was--

--chose what to do.

--and we know the priests like I know my parents.

And he was--

They used to be together.

--a nice-- a friend?

Very nice man, yeah.

Who were your friends? Were they Jews and non-Jews?

Jewish and non-Jewish, yeah.

There was a friendly atmosphere? You got along with your friends?

Oh, yeah, yeah, always. We never had fights.

What did you enjoy doing? I know you enjoyed tailoring.

I used to like geography in school.

Geography.

Used to make maps. Yeah. History wasn't there. I didn't like too much. Now, I like history.

But you liked--

And now, I like history. I couldn't understand. They didn't explain right.

In the school. Do you think it was a good school?

Yeah.

You learned in the school?

Yeah, sure.

Do you think you led a sheltered life?

No, it was all right.

You were friends with everyone, you were outgoing.

Yeah.

What kind of plans did you have for your future? I know, the tailoring was one of your plans, to learn that trade.

Yeah. Oh, plans, we couldn't make plans because soon the war broke out, and that's it. Couldn't do much.

You did not have any plans for the future?

No.

You had a fear, you say, of what might--

That's right, the war, always.

What do you remember about antisemitism from those days? Up to now, you have not said anything particular, other than the newspapers that you read.

We had a teacher in school. And she used to tell us-- I was maybe eight-- 11 years old-- that you better go to Israel. They're going to kill you like the Arabs kill the Jew. In '49 was the pogrom in Israel. And she says, I wish they would kill you, everybody. And we went to the governor in another city.

This is something she said in the schoolroom?

In the school.

And then you went to the governor.

Yeah, went to the governor. We protested. And they throw her out, the teacher.

Now, the governor's position in your village was that of a person who could--

Not in our city, we had to go about 20 miles.

I see. I see. And complain about it.

And they throw her out. Yeah. Because she shouldn't talk like this--

Was this the only--

--when the children was in school.

--the only experience that you had with antisemitism at that time?

Yeah, that's it. Yeah.

If the Nazis had taken over your country by this time, did your non-Jewish friends and neighbors continue your friendship?

Oh, yeah.

They continued their friendship with you.

Sure.

Did they make moves to help you?

Yes, some ways, they help us.

Did you find that other non-Jews were on your side helping you?

They was very nice to us. And they suffered too because we had neighbors-- they took our kids and they killed them, the Catholics. They killed them for nothing, nice boys. We was raised together.

These are non-Jews that you're talking--

The Nazi came, yeah.

You're saying that the Nazis came and killed children that were not Jewish.

Sure. They took-- they was accusing them that they're not good for the Germans, our neighbor's kids, nice kids.

They were befriending you.

They went to school with me.

And they accused them of being friends with you.

That's right. No, not with us, just didn't like them.

I see.

They select people and they kill them.

Jews as well as non-Jews.

Yeah, non-Jews.

What do you remember about the beginning of World War II?

I remember when they started to throw the bombs. When we was in the house, they throw a bomb near the church. They almost ruined the church. There was a big hole. We went. Everybody went to see how the bomb make a damage near the church.

What about people? Were there people injured as well?

No people, no. It was just the building. Yeah.

What made you aware that there was a war? The bomb, of course, certainly.

Oh, we hear, the September 1 in the morning, 6 o'clock, they start to throw bombs.

OK. So that was your first awareness that there was a war was the throwing of this bomb?

Yeah, sure, yeah. We hear on the radio. Hear on the radio.

OK. Were there, at that time, changes in the non-Jews' actions and attitudes toward you?

They were scared too. Everybody was scared.

Did they behave any differently toward you?

No.

They were still your friends the same as before?

Yeah, they were friends, sure.

Were there any open acts of antisemitism as the war continued?

No, I don't remember, not in our city. Did any non-Jews try to help Jews at this time?

They try there. We was-- we didn't need the help beginning because we was in the house until '42. And we used to go to the all kind work they took us and dig ditches into the field, to help take off the corns from the field--

Now, this is the--

--during the war.

--Jews as well as non-Jews?

Non-Jews too.

Everyone in the village or many people in the village were--

That's right.

--put to work in the fields?

Yeah. And shoveling snow. We used to shovel.

So at this time, there was no separation between the Nazis' attitude toward Jews or non-Jews.

No, they--

Everyone was treated--

--more on Jewish, less-- a little bit less non-Jewish.

I see. And once the war started, tell me how your life changed.

Oh, we didn't know. We used to go to work every day. We was worried about food. We start to worry because the German took out the food. The rays-- they give you your cards to go to the store.

You had ration cards.

Ration, that's right.

And you were given so much per person or per family.

That's right. Yeah.

What kind of amounts were those? Were they sufficient to keep you?

Bread, they give cards, and was no meat, eggs, we could buy because the farmers used to come to our city. We didn't have much problem. The biggest city was worst.

I see because you were near the--

That's right.

--production of the fields.

The fields. We have our--

You had your own.

--potatoes we had and corn.

And this was not taken from you. You were able to keep this for yourself. So you did not have a problem with food?

No, we didn't have much problem with the food.

What changes did your family make because of the war?

The war-- my fair mother died-- was before the war, my father in '41, he died.

Before the war?

There was going around sickness, typhus. Thousands of people was die.

Now, this was in what year?

In '41.

And this was your father?

Yeah. He died. [INAUDIBLE].

And he-- what-- there were many people in the city that had--

Typhus. It was going around.

--that died from it.

What thoughts or feelings do you remember having at that time?

Maybe-- I don't know. Maybe was very worried-- what's going to happen to us?

Did you plan any kind of action?

Escape, no.

You just-- you decided to stay and hope for the best.

To stay, that's right.

Did you have discussions about what was happening with other people, family members?

Yeah, but we couldn't help. We just was stuck in.

You felt you were trapped in the situation.

Yeah, we just trapped. How did you feel about the future?

All of us, we couldn't think about the future.

It was a day-to-day?

Nah, day-to-day was.

And hope.

Was the temple still-- the shul still existing at that time?

Yeah, was a shul.

And you still attended the shul?

We used to go. And another thing, people was moving, came from other cities. They escaped. When they saw it, they came to us. And they took the shul to live there, didn't have rooms.

So it was living quarters--

Yeah, for--

--for many people?

--escaping people.

From further away. These people come from cities?

From big cities.

Big cities.

Yeah, in the south. So the situation in the big cities was much worse--

Was worster-- didn't have food. They had to escape.

I see. And they came to live--

From small towns.

--and managed to live, and survive, and use the synagogue as living quarters.

Yeah

Looking back, what happened to your family when the Nazis entered your town?

Oh, the Nazis came. We went to camp. This was in-- it was a-- they cleaned out, no more Jewish people. They throw us out from the house. This was in October '42. They took every Jew from the city. And they took them to another city, to a bigger. And they put them on the trains. We escaped-- me, and my sister, and my brother. We didn't go with the people. We escaped middle of the night to the woods.

Let me just recap that. When the Nazis entered your town--

The Nazi was around, they were. They gave us-- just were staying alone.

And the people were put on the trains at that time?

I didn't see this, yeah.

And you said you managed to escape?

Yeah, we were ran away to the woods, my brother, me, and my niece.

You went to?

My sister-- and we ran away. And we were staying in the woods about three weeks.

About three weeks.

And then we was hiding the day. We was-- a farmer took us in, took him to the house. What happened to the other members of the family?

They went with the trains-- Auschwitz, who know?

What made-- what made you decide not to go on the trains?

I know, some-- the mind sometime tells you not to do some things. I thank from God we--

And you managed--

--we got to live.

And you managed to live in the woods for three weeks--

Yeah.

--and stayed with a family.

When we was traveling, we went to farm middle of the night. We went out. And in the day, we were sitting in the woods. And then the farmer took us at night. We went to beg for food. They give us food, the farmers.

And they took a chance--

Yeah, they did, yeah.

--on helping you.

To give us food. And I left a sister. She was nine month pregnant in the house, and a nephew, and they went to the train, the whole family.

They went to where?

To the train, to Auschwitz, who knows? Don't know what's happened to them.

The two-- there were three people who went to the woods?

In the house then, my sister, and my brother-in-law, and--

And you were the one that--

Me, my brother, and another sister, and a niece escaped.

Escaped.

They didn't want to go. And I says, I don't know how. Somehow, yeah.

What happened to them?

Who knows? They went to Auschwitz, they kill them-- or Treblinka, maybe.

When did this happen?

This was in--

You were in the woods with the farm at night.

They told us, they said, you have to go out, judenrein.

You mean, they came to the farm.

For us, to the house, everybody has to go out. But I stay in the house. And they said, we're going to send us for work, they used to tell them. And me and my sister says, no, that's not true. They're not going to take us for work. And we ran away.

And we were sitting in the woods for three or four weeks. And then we couldn't stay in the woods, was crying both me and my sister. We couldn't stay. It was impossible because it was raining. In the night, you went for food.

And what are you going to do when it comes snow? Was full time. And then my niece husband took us to the city, in a bigger city, where my sister used to live. And we was legal. And we went in a house. And we were staying about two months. And again, they making judenrein.

They came to that house as well?

And everybody. And came an SS man. He says, how come you're here? How you came here? And where you was hiding? We says, we was in the woods. And he stick a gun, my sister. And I was standing. Hauptmann was his name, SS man. He let us go. He says, OK, I'll leave you.

And then next day was-- again, they round up all the Jewish people. Then they sent again to the train. And we was hiding. We went, was-- in the bottom was like a swimming pool. They sit there. And upstairs, they was hiding in a room. Was 10 people--

In the room.

--my brother, me, my sister. And the niece's husband bring us food. He was legal. He was allowed to stay.

Why was he allowed to stay?

Because he was helping them something. They need people.

He was working for them.

Yeah. And he was a-- and we say-- he came once. He says, you know what? He's coming a man. The name is Mr. Flemming. And they have a camp, Kielce HASAG was the name.

Kielce? Say the name.

Kielce HASAG, Kielce.

Kielce.

This is where husband was born there.

Spell that for me.

K-I-- I have it here. I mean, I put the Kielce HASAG. I just put-- here you have. And he says, they're going to take people to work to Kielce HASAG. All hiding-- the people should come out from the hiding. We take us-- you with trucks. We couldn't believe too.

And I said, we can't live like this. How long you can live? You don't have nothing. And the room like this, small-- a half in this, we was living by about 12 people. Was nowhere where to go anymore. Because they cleaned out all Jewish people. And they catch you, they kill you. They killed my brother-in-law. He was hiding in the woods.

In the woods?

Yeah, they kill him. You see, we hear the stories, the brother and my niece's husband came. He told us, they kill this one, they kill this. I said, OK, we have no choice. We have to go to a camp. And the Flemming save our life.

Tell me how that happened.

They took us to the Kielce HASAG. We was working. We were staying two and a half years.

At this camp?

Yeah, he saved us. When I see him, I would give him a big reward. We don't know what happened to him. He was very good to us.

How did he? What did he do for you?

He give-- we had food, we had where to sleep, we went to work every day. First one was a shoemaker place, tailoring shop, and was a dressmaking.

Did he assign different people to these-- to this work?

They ask you what profession you have. They just didn't took you. They ask if you know sewing, if you know-- saying butchers, they took, and shoemakers, they make a-- how you call it--

And you worked at that kind of trade?

--a corporation, yeah. And he was the boss. And he wouldn't take us to the camp. They would kill us when they find us on the second floor in the swimming pool. Downstairs was like a mikvah, you called this.

Yes.

And the soldiers was-- the SS was downstairs. And we was upstairs. How long you can live like this? You couldn't live long. He save our lives.

So by assigning you to different work and giving you sufficient food--

Yeah, then we lived through.

--he managed to.

Yeah. And I was working by ammunition too. The beginning, I worked by ammunition. Then they took-- they make the camp, the corporation.

And you were at the camp for two and a half years?

Two and a half years, until '44.

So the first thing was the cleaning out of the Jewish population. And you decided to go to the woods?

Yeah, we ran away. We didn't go there.

And at night, you went to the farmhouse.

Yeah, for food.

And then there was the hiding places and then the transfer to the Kieler HASAG camp.

Kielce, Kielce-- that's a city.

Kielce HASAG.

Yeah.

After that, where did you go?

After this, in-- from 1944, the Russians started to come closer to the HASAG. They took us out again. And we was working by ditches, big ditches, maybe six feet deep and wide, maybe about five. Because when the Russian coming, they should fall in. They cover this with grass, with everything.

It was just a camouflage?

Yeah, this was a defense was. And we was working there by two or three months. And then later, we stopped working because winter started to come. We couldn't work over there. And they send us to Tschenschow-- Czestochowa, where we-- Czestochowa.

What is that near?

This was a camp near Kielce, between-- there wasn't far.

OK. So that-- all right.

And the ditches, they done. This was over 1,000 people from our camp. And we was in Czestochowa until 1945, like now. The 16, they sent us again to Germany. The Russian start to come again. We saw the Russian coming. And they took us on the train. We couldn't go out. They got stuck.

The train got stuck?

A soldier was sitting on the train, took us to Bergen-Belsen. Took us five days.

To get to Bergen-Belsen?

Four or five days. I can't remember how long. It was little-- just pieces bread, was no water, nothing.

This was on the train--

Yeah.

--for a period of four to five days?

For four or five days. How many people, roughly, would you say that were on the train?

Oh, was about 150 people was taken. But they give you-- where put the cattles in, they closed the trains, they put us.

There were people from all over that were on this train?

Was in another camp too, Skarzysko maybe, Skarzysko.

So several camps were liquidated?

Yeah, they don't wanted the Russians, they should catch us. And they took us out.

And then?

We couldn't go out there. And the Russians, they throw away the munition, the German. And the Russian come, we saw the Russian coming in the train, and they took us to Bergen-Belsen, took us again four months.

For how long? How long?

Four months until we got liberated.

And at Bergen-Belsen--

Bergen-Belsen, we staying six weeks.

Tell me about your stay at Bergen-Belsen.

Was terrible. We were sleeping on straw with lice, excuse me, terrible. It was terrible. We had no hot water, nothing. You were standing outside to wash yourself. It was open, like faucets supposed to make a line. And every refugee went to wash. There was no food. You got a piece of old bread in a day and a little bit soup.

And they wake you up 4 o'clock in the morning to stay outside two hours for the Appell. They count you every day. Lots of people couldn't stay there, died, fell dead. It took us-- with our showers, we came out with the wet hair. And the hair was-- it was with icicles.

How old were you at that time, Eva?

I was about 24--

24.

--in Bergen-Belsen.

What did you do there? Did you work at Bergen-Belsen?

You didn't work. No, just waiting to die.

Every day?

Yeah.

How were you treated by guards, camp guards?

The guards wasn't bad. They didn't do nothing to us. The guards was good.

The food rations, you've told us about, the-- you were not-- the guards-- did any of them try to help you?

The guards was mad. They said, verfluchte Hitler on the train. For what were they doing this to people? They didn't like. The guards were-- they put the German.

But they were still the guards?

They had-- they was watch. They didn't do nothing to us. They didn't hit us, nothing.

But they each day would distribute the food. The guards took care of that and saw to it that you were awakened?

It was woman, no. They just woman, 50,000 woman was in Bergen-Belsen.

Women were separate from the men?

Yeah, we didn't see a man. The woman took care.

And they were not cruel, they were--

No, they didn't do nothing to us.

Did you have any contact at all with the outside world?

No, we didn't know nothing.

You were closed up in Bergen-Belsen?

The woman that took care of us, they said, the Russian already in Berlin be here. They-- pretty soon, they will be here-- the Russian or the American, who know?

What kind of interaction was there among the fellow prisoners, among the people that were with you?

The first thing, everybody was thinking to have a piece of bread. You didn't talk much. We were skinny like a stick. In eight days, we lost maybe 50 pound. I had just bones on me. We couldn't walk. There was no food.

During the day, you stayed in this?

Yeah, in the barracks-- barracks was.

And you just did not do anything, you simply stayed there?

No. And then later, there came a man from our Kielce HASAG, says, everybody from Kielce HASAG, they should stay in a line. We're going to take you to work. They took us out to Berga, was a camp to airplanes. And they bring red airplanes. And we took together the airplanes, the parts to match. And I was painting the airplanes. The woman was

painting. And there was people from France. They put together the airplanes. They was prisoners too.

How did you get from the camp to the place of work?

They took us out. Because they know we used to work in Kielce HASAG.

Now, was this--

The men came in our camp, from there.

--walking distance?

No, on trains.

They took you each morning?

Yeah.

And then you returned at night?

Yeah. They took us on buses to the factory. We was working four weeks. And then came the American planes. And they start to throw bombs. We couldn't go to work anymore. Then they took us again another camp, in Landsberg maybe here. Landsberg, we was there in bunker.

This is after Bergen-Belsen?

Yeah. And we was in bunkers, laying, dark because no windows, nothing, like in a cellar dark. There was there--

No light at all?

No. They give us-- just cooked potatoes, and was eating. We got sick-- stomach was running.

How were you-- how was your health at this time? How was-- what did you think about?

It was terrible. I was think I'm dying any minute. You couldn't live. And then finally, they took us with the train again. And the train got stuck. And we got stuck on the route because they throw bombs, the American. And we-- they took us out from the trains. And we walk and walk. And we was sleeping in a ditch about two nights, I think. We had covers.

How many people were?

Oh, it was maybe about 1,500, I think.

1,500.

Another camp too, they put together.

And you were saying, at night--

We're staying in the ditch. It was raining terrible. We were soaked. There's no place. And then we walked, we walked. Finally, we came near MÃ¼nchen. MÃ¼nchen, they throw bombs again. And we was laying in a field. The sun finally came out. Was no rain. And we started to walk again. We couldn't walk.

And then they took us on a horse and wagon, about 20 people-- me and my niece. We couldn't work. Was thinking they were going to kill us. And finally, they came. We came to Allach, near Dachau. And a white flag was hanging already.

We saw soldiers. We didn't know it's American. Who knows? I didn't see American soldiers.

You couldn't tell the difference between them.

We were sick, so sick, we didn't know. The Red Cross save us too. They started to give us food, the Red Cross. And finally, we got liberated by the American. This was the 29th of April, '45.

1945.

The four months was the worst one, in Germany.

Tell me more about your feelings and how-- did you think you were going to survive?

No, never.

Did you--

I had in mind, I hope I lived through, and I'm going to eat a whole bread.

Did you call on God to help you at this time?

Oh, sure, we was praying every day when we wake up. Every morning, they wake us up 4 o'clock, 3 o'clock to stay outside, just to count.

This is at Bergen-Belsen--

Bergen-Belsen.

--to count how many. You were not in a ghetto then, actually.

No.

You were in a camp, in different camps.

In a camp. It wasn't in a ghetto.

In the camps, was there any kind of religious observation? You said, each morning, of course, you woke up--

We was praying.

--hoping.

Hoping that we lived through.

Were there any group religious observations when a holiday-- or when you thought there was a holiday coming?

Yeah, we was keeping just in yourself.

Within yourself, it was each person?

That's right.

Personal prayer for each person. You were able to leave the camp and work. Was this because of your age? Was this because you were lucky?

Yeah, that's right.

Was this because you were healthy?

They select young people.

Young people were selected. So your age was a big-- an important reason--

Sure.

--that you were selected to work. Did you-- were there most of the people who had ability to work at certain trades and young people, they were selected. The others, of course, were not selected.

To Auschwitz-- we don't know Treblinka or Auschwitz. We don't know.

What was the attitude of the non-Jews as they saw where you were being transported, as you were walking along, this huge group of 1,500 people? What did the non-Jews think about this?

They did not show the people. People couldn't see because there was middle of the night, they took you-- all this at night. People didn't see and didn't hear. They just took you on the train. And that's all. I was lucky did not go to the train. Because I was always-- we was escaping. We didn't see nothing.

There was never any-- it was never seen-- this large group of people was not seen by the non-Jews of the surrounding areas?

No, not-- I don't think so.

OK. There was no communication at that time with the outside world?

No.

No radio, no--

No nothing.

--newspapers, nothing at all? Were you ever aware that there might be an underground or a way that you could be saved? Did you ever think about?

No, not in our place.

To what extent did non-Jews help the Nazis persecute the Jews? And then the other question-- how did the non-Jews not help the Nazis persecute the Jews? You had mentioned that if you were helped, it was the danger of their lives.

Yeah, that's true. They couldn't do much. My sister was hiding by a farmer. And somehow, with her neighbor-- she didn't want to come to Kielce HASAG. And she-- they took them in '43 was. They took her out. And the farmer came.

And the Landsmann escaped. He's still alive. And he-- they sent him to four years in jail. My sister could live. She didn't want to come in camp with me. She says, they're going to kill everybody. I said, I don't care. I'm not hiding. I don't trust nobody myself. I want to be-- what happen with everybody, I want to be. And she got killed.

She was killed with the farmer that was--

The farmer kill, I don't know, and we know who. He was a friend. He used to give-- we give him away lots of things

because we knew we were going to have to leave the house.

Was this farmer-- did this farmer in the--

Oh, sure, I know like I know.

This was somebody that was part of your life before the war as well.

Yeah. Maybe he was afraid. Who knows what happened? And the neighbor tell me. My neighbor is still alive. He tell me what's happen. I wouldn't know.

In the camps that you were in, was Bergen-Belsen the worst of the camps?

The worst, yeah, Bergen-Belsen.

Tell me about your arrival at Bergen-Belsen What was that like?

We came middle the night. We was thirsty terrible. I took snow, was eating. And we walk maybe five miles from the train.

From the train to the camp?

They took us in a shower, give us a shower. I was thinking they were going to kill us in the shower. Came out, and took us with the wet hair outside. And we had the icicles on the hair, was standing maybe four or five hours.

This is at your arrival in the camp?

Yeah, in Bergen-Belsen

Food rations were very limited.

Very limited.

Sanitation was nonexistent.

Horrible.

You lost 50 pounds in a very--

Oh, I was like a-- just bones I was. I couldn't walk from here to here. Yeah.

How did you manage, do you think, to live through that time?

I'm wondering myself what's happened, how I lived through.

There were others who were in similar physical condition that you were in who didn't survive.

No one survived. They died. They start to eat a lot. This killed them.

You mean--

Even they were liberated.

--after the liberation? Tell me about that.

This was terrible. The stomach, this killed.

They ate because--

When you-- you couldn't eat. Stomach was--

Shrunk?

Oh, sure.

How did you manage that when you were liberated?

I was eating very little. I was sick too, I had typhus after the war. They make-- the American came. They make a big hospital in the field near Dachau, Allach was this. And they start, little by little, to feed the people in the summer must have been. And lots of couldn't pull through.

How many people were liberated at that time, do you think?

Oh, about 4,000 maybe.

And how many survived after liberation?

Maybe 3,000. Yeah.

You had the discipline, then, even though you had the hunger at the time of liberation.

Yeah, actually, you have to discipline yourself. If not, you couldn't pull through.

And the facilities at that time, the Americans did what they could for you?

Oh, yeah, they did a lot. They save our lives, the Red Cross and the Americans.

Did any friendships develop in the camp? What kind of attitude was among the people for you to the person who laid next to you or who sat next to you? What kind of relationship?

You couldn't talk, everybody was mad. You couldn't talk because everybody was the same situation. They was thinking about the food. How do you-- how are you going to live through? And somebody saw you have a little piece of bread bigger, oh, you have more bread, jealous-- got jealous.

There was not a companionship? It was each person for himself?

Yeah, each for himself.

Each to survive.

That's right.

There were no, so to speak, leaders who boosted your ego, who talked, and said, this will pass, this will end?

No, no.

Were there children with you in the camp?

Was a few children-- one little boy lived through. He was five years old.

At the time, he was five. How do you think he?

I don't know how he lived through. He came because he was lucky somehow.

And in your immediate barracks-- and I'm talking about Bergen-Belsen at this time-- in your immediate room, which-- how many people do you think were in it?

Oh, no, a barrack was maybe 100 people.

And the size of that barracks?

Was a long building, like the whole length. Just straw was on and no cover, they give you. That's all, nothing more. Nothing-- you didn't have clothes. You were wearing four months the same clothes. You couldn't change.

What were the clothes? What were you wearing?

Was terrible. They took from the dead people, they give us what they killing in Bergen, in Auschwitz, in Treblinka. They bring to us the clothes.

I had a fur coat, was-- I was lucky because it kept me warm.

You had a fur coat?

Yeah. a fur coat from someone else.

I'm surprised at that because how would they let-- the guards allowed you to keep the fur coat?

They give us.

They gave it to you.

They took off everything. You went into the shower, you was naked standing. You went to the shower. When you went out, you had a bundle with clothes. I was lucky I had my shoes. They took away my shoes. I don't know how lucky I was. I guess I was.

And in that bundle of clothes?

Was underwear, and the wool dress I had, and wool pants, and a coat-- and a fur coat.

And a fur coat in the bundle of clothes? And this--

Yes, we had bundle. Or fit or not, you didn't-- they didn't care. I was lucky it was-- fit me.

It was warm?

Yeah. Keep it going.

And you had your shoes.

Was no good, you couldn't change.

No one at that time who was not as fortunate as you, and didn't have as warm a coat--

You dry no good.

--tried to get the coat from you?

No. No, no.

That was yours.

Yeah.

And neither guard nor person who was with you tried to take that from you?

No, nobody steal, not from me. I didn't have this trouble.

I asked you about friendships in the camp. Did you not feel, perhaps, there was a closeness between you and someone that was there, that kind of relationship did not develop?

No, but just to-- no, no. I know the people in our camp. We used to say, hi, how you been? That's all.

Did you think you would survive?

I-- the mind says, yes. And like I saw, I have just born some, I said, how I'm going to live? I can't even walk from here to the door.

How did you think, not being able to walk five feet, that you would survive?

This was worrying me.

What made you think that you would survive?

My mind was working that I have to survive somehow. I don't know, but thanks god I did. They took us on a horse and wagon. And to the end, we couldn't walk. And they took us to the camp I was liberated. And the soldiers ran away. Soldiers was nice to us. They suffered the same like we.

They did their duties.

A lot, yeah-- a lot was very nice.

You have no feeling of-- you have a feeling of-- no feeling of animosity toward these soldiers?

No, not too much the soldiers. They was trapped too somehow. This-- it was the Holocaust, look the Hitler what he's doing. They were mad.

Were there atrocities at Bergen-Belsen that were put on you by-- they were not put on you by soldiers, the atrocities?

No. I didn't see that much.

OK. Yours was just a day-to-day life--

Yeah, that's right.

--if it can be called a life, with very little food.

But the food was just bare.

We're going to take a break soon. But before we do, I want to ask you one question that you might keep in mind. And that is that-- what gave you strength and hope-- God, trust in the future, friends?

God, I believe, I think.

You felt there would be a-- you would be saved?

Yeah, really, yeah.

Were there many people who felt the same way that you did?

Yeah, lots of us, we believed.

You just--

We was talking, God, give me to live. I'm going to live, they said.

How many-- were there fellow victims who helped you and others to hold on? Did you join in your belief in God helping you with someone with you or talk to someone and say, we're going to pull through this?

Yeah, we used to-- my niece, I had a niece too with me in Bergen-Belsen.

She was in the same room?

She died after the war.

I lost her.

She died after the war was over?

She got tuberculosis.

And she did not survive it.

Yeah, we was together.

Did you expect anyone to help you?

After the war?

During the time at the camp, did you expect anyone?

No, no.

It was you for yourself.

Just you live for yourself.

And what about after the war, did you expect help from anyone?

No, I didn't know even if my brother is alive when I was liberated. We didn't know each other about half a year.

You were a family of 10 children total. And you say, there were two that survived, your brother and yourself.

Yeah, my brother and a niece, the oldest niece.

And the oldest niece. What were your thoughts at that time about what the Jews in Palestine did or did not do?

No, we had no idea.

You did not think about that at all?

No.

Did you think about Jews in the outside-- outside of your immediate world helping you? Did you have any thoughts--

No, no.

--what they should be doing at that time?

We was thinking on-- we couldn't-- didn't have mind that somebody is help. We saw what's going on. There's no hope for us. Nobody cares. We was talking somewhat.

You felt the world was not--

That's right, against us.

--involved in what you had?

Yeah.

We're going to cut now. And we will be back shortly in just a few minutes.

All right. Yeah. Thank you.