

We are back with Eva Reis. I would like to know, Eva, how you found out that you were free, where you were at the time.

They came-- it was a rabbi, Rabbi Smith in America. He came to our camp. And he called us outside and told us, we liberated. And then we can go where we want.

What camp were you in at that time?

This was Allach. That was near Dachau.

Near Dachau?

Yeah.

OK. The rabbi who was an American?

Smith, Rabbi Smith.

He was in the American service--

American Army.

--the army. How did you feel?

I didn't know what to do-- to cry or to laugh. We didn't know the difference almost. We was used to this life.

You were used to your life.

Yeah. Yeah.

So what were your feelings when he talked to you, when he said that?

First thing, I got sick. They took me to the hospital, it's the American put on a-- how you call this, in a field, a hospital.

They had cots in the field?

Yeah.

They had--

Everything, beds.

--place where you could lie down.

Oh, beds, was a regular hospital. They covered like with-- how you call it? Outside was.

It was outside.

Oh, sure. In the fields, they built a hospital. How you call?

I see. I see.

Like a portable hospital.

Like a portable hospital.

That's right, a big one. Oh, was tough.

And so it was put together very quickly.

Yeah.

And beds were--

The soldiers was helping.

The soldiers helped to build the hospital.

And the Red Cross did, yeah.

And how long did it take them to build this hospital?

I don't know. I don't know, maybe a week, I think, because they took us out. They select.

And you were put into the hospital and you got sick, you say.

Yeah. I was sick. I wasn't so bad like other people. I could walk around help other people. They told us, if you can help, help the other people. Was clean.

How many people were liberated?

Oh, about 4,000, I think.

And you helped--

This was one camp.

Where did they get the medical help?

The American. All of these people--

They are Jews that they bring.

--American Red Cross. You were sick, you say. But you were not as sick as some of the other people.

No, not so bad.

What--

I didn't have fever.

You had typhus?

I was just-- what I was skinny, how you call this, dehydrated?

Emaciated and dehydrated.

That's right.

And the food you ate that slowly.

Slowly, they give us.

Which was a very important thing.

We was hungry girls. When you start to eat, it was no good. You was vomiting.

Yeah. Your stomach was at a point where it couldn't accept the food.

That's right. And I cannot-- I want to say, I had my niece. They took out my niece. We couldn't find her. They took her away. He was sick. I was together with her. And then I tell you what was happen with her.

He couldn't-- they took her to München, a hospital. We couldn't find her. Finally, a neighbor came. And she told me that here and here is your niece. Go by to see her before she die. And I was glad I found her. We wouldn't know where she disappeared. And two weeks later, she died.

This was after liberation?

Yeah. And his sister couldn't see her. She was--

How old was your niece at that time?

21, she died. She was in Munich. And they put her in a Gentile cemetery. And I said, wait, I'm here. I went away for the weekend. I was there a day. And later, she says, I'm not going to live. I'm going to die, I know. I have tuberculosis. She must have cancer. And finally, I find her in a Gentile--

Cemetery.

--funeral home. We took her out to make a funeral. My sister didn't see her. She's always upset because she couldn't see her after the liberate. Her sister was a-- is a Polish girl. In Warsaw ghetto, she lived through.

The Warsaw ghetto?

My niece, yeah. Oh, yeah, she was.

There were very few who did live through the Warsaw ghetto. That was a handful of people.

No, they take you-- took her out to Ravensbrück, was a camp.

Ravensbrück.

Alice Pollock, she was a Gentile. When she-- they know she's Jewish, they would kill her.

And she was able to--

She was working for somebody--

She was able to--

--as a Gentile, lived through.

What was the first thing you did when you were liberated?

I start to work.

To work?

Yeah, they had a shop.

No, no, this is when you were liberated, when you found out.

Yeah, that took me about a month. And I start to work, some little by little, a tailoring.

This was-- how long were you in the hospital?

Oh, about four weeks.

And after that, you started to work?

After, work this.

Where did you find the work? How did you know where to go?

They had a shop. They need clothes for the people. And I went in. And I used to help them.

How was your health at that time?

It wasn't bad. Just I was skinny. I couldn't walk much.

You were able to eat a little bit more?

Yeah, little by little.

And you had recuperated somewhat.

That's true.

What was life like immediately after liberation?

It was nothing. We didn't have clothes. We walk around in pajamas. When we was liberated, took off everything. And they make a big pile. And they burn everything because it was there--

Full of--

--lice.

And so you had some kind of pajamas that you could wear?

They gave us pajamas. Everything came from America. Yeah.

What was the reaction of the people who liberated you when they saw?

It was happy.

No, no, the soldiers, the Americans, what was their reaction?

Oh, they help us a lot, yeah, they were very happy, nice people came.

What did they feel when they saw what you had gone through?

Was cried a lot, yeah.

There were Jews and non-Jews who participated in liberation?

Yeah, very nice people came.

How-- you said it took about four weeks for you to recuperate before you went to work. Did you try, at that

time, to find family members and friends?

We couldn't. There was no telephones, was nothing.

Was there any kind of communication from other camps, lists or anything that were available to you?

Not right now, took about a half a year.

You didn't go home after that?

No.

Have you ever returned--

No.

--there? Do you ever-- going to go back to Europe?

No, I never was in Poland back.

Did you make any effort afterward to find out what had happened to your family?

Yeah, I find my brother. This was about three months later. My brother came.

And how did you find him? How did that happen? I can't remember even what's happen. He came. I hear he-- and I find out my niece. And it's the niece what she was in Warsaw ghetto. I found him.

And how-- your brother came to you?

Yeah, my brother came.

So he found you?

Yeah.

Do you know how he knew where to find you?

It was a list somewhere.

I see.

They put out lists where the names.

Where was he liberated?

Czechoslovakia, I think.

So a list was available to him, and he found you at that time?

We was together until '45. Then they took us four months and we didn't know each other.

You didn't know where you were-- where each of you were. What countries did you live in after the post-war period? You lived--

In Germany.

Only in Germany?

Yeah.

What were your experiences in Germany? How did you feel as a Jew living in Germany at that time?

We had a camp. We didn't got too much to do with the German people.

You were individually separated from the--

Yes, from the camp.

So you didn't have much to do with the German population?

No, not too much.

You didn't know how they felt or how they acted toward you?

No.

So this was the organized Jewish community?

That's right.

With-- in München, but no mingling with the citizens of München?

No. We used to go to München every week by train.

Well, what kind of attitude did you find among the people there toward you?

People later was nice to us. The German people-- lots of people say they didn't know about nothing, who know? Didn't do harm to us after the war. In Poland was no good. My husband has a cousin, he went to see-- my husband, he wasn't married this time.

He says, he wants to go with his cousin to see Poland, find the family. I said, no, I'm not going. You want to go, go on with your cousin. The cousin went-- or he was married already, I think. Because and he went in '46, people got killed. Was like a pogrom they make, my husband said.

After the war, you mean?

Yeah, in '46, two days before my daughter was born.

Where did you meet your husband?

In camp, we was together.

You worked together, I believe you said.

Yeah. I was a ladies' tailor and he was a men's tailor.

And you were married when?

In September '45.

Of '45?

I didn't know where he-- if we was together. We were separated four months. They took us from one camp to another, from Allach to Feldafing. And he was there. I didn't know if he's alive. He didn't know if I was.

And then how did you meet again after the war?

And then we got together. And they put us together from one camp in another. And there was my-- he wasn't my husband, just friends, like you see.

Yeah. so you formed a friendship which turned into your marriage?

That's right.

What were your plans for the future? During-- after the liberation, when you began to work again, what did you think about what you were going to do with your life?

We couldn't plan nothing. We got married. We were sitting in Germany four years until '49. Our daughter was born in Germany. We came to Germany, she was almost three years old.

You stayed in Germany for what period of time?

Until '49.

Until '49.

Will be 36 years now when we came. And then you--

In March, we came.

You came and you decided-- you came directly to Cleveland?

Yeah.

From München?

Because I had an uncle--

You had an uncle here.

--my mother's brother. They knew. I told them. They asked me, you have somebody--

To go to.

--sponsor you? I said, yes, I have an uncle. And they sent us to him.

Did you get any special help from the Joint Distribution Committee, the JDC?

They give us the Jewish Federation, I think-- not too much. They give us the rooms and they paid the rooms. And they pay, I think, for one month rent. We didn't have much help.

That was in Cleveland, you're talking about.

Yeah.

Did you get any help from the United Nations?

No. We didn't have. I don't know, maybe they pay for the ship. Who knows?

You don't know who was responsible for that?

I don't know. I don't know who paid for the--

You don't know who funded the--

--trip to make.

--trip from here, from München to here? Do if you got any help from the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society?

I remember, somebody came, and they bring us food, and dishes, and everything. Was before Pesach.

You don't know who that was, though, what organization?

No. I don't now, not sure, something.

OK. What happened when you arrived in the United States? You came to Cleveland, someone put you up in rooms, gave you dishes, and so forth.

No, first, we were staying with the aunt, eight days, that's it.

And then what happened?

And then the-- from the Jewish Federation, they give us rooms. Was hard to find rooms. Was worse than to get a job, the rooms.

You had an apartment at that time that was with someone?

Yeah, we was living on St. Clair, 106-- was a big apartment, lots of refugees they put in there.

Were in the same area.

Were 20 families, I think.

Did you talk to anyone about your experiences at that time?

No. I couldn't talk, no way. People couldn't-- wouldn't believe, even some people couldn't believe. How you live through? You couldn't tell how you lived through, you had so bad time.

Looking back, going back a little bit, as you look into your mind and into those times, what was the worst experience that you had, the worst mental and physical experience that you can remember during the war?

This was-- the worst thing was in Bergen-Belsen, when they took us there, was terrible. Was 50,000 bomb this camp.

50,000.

And all come-- from America was people, and France, and Belgium, we couldn't speak to each other-- from Hungary was, from German was. And there was no men, just women. And I hear another side was men because my-- the friend find two brothers in Bergen-Belsen. And I ask her, how come you find a brother? Was a men's camp too like this.

Which you did not know at the time?

She didn't know, no. She saw, she-- they was just crying when they saw each other.

When you were here in your first apartment on St. Clair, you said, you didn't talk to anyone about your experiences because you didn't feel that anyone would--



No, they going to believe this.

How did you feel, at that time, within yourself when you were here?

Wasn't-- we couldn't-- my husband couldn't get a job beginning, was bad. We didn't have nothing. We came with nothing.

When did he get a job, how much later after you arrived?

Maybe a month, two months later.

And that was tailoring?

Yeah.

And he did that his whole life, the tailoring?

He was a tailor in the old country. Yeah.

Did people want to learn about what you and others went through when you came to the United States? Was there anybody that you could speak to?

Some people want to listen. Other didn't want to even. They always ask, how you live through? Can this be true? Like this-- you stop talking. What are you going to tell people?

You felt that they did not understand--

Yeah. That's right.

--and could not understand.

No.

So you just didn't discuss it.

I didn't discuss. I didn't talk.

Did you join a-- excuse me-- did you join a synagogue?

Later, when-- oh, we used to go, was on Lakeview, was a school for children, our daughter used to go. I can't remember that. Yeshiva there.

How old was she at that time?

She was in four years just there.

Four years old. So you didn't join a synagogue. But you went to the school where there were other people who-- were there other survivors at this school?

Oh, a lot, yeah, lots of them.

Did you talk, then, to people who had lived through this same thing?

Yeah, we was talking. We got together. Sure, we always talk.

And you compared who was where, and there was a release.

What camp, and where you was, how you lived through-- yeah, to each other. To people that didn't have the experience--

Could not.

--you couldn't talk to them. And we joined-- we used to go to temple every Saturday because we wasn't a member. Like now, we are a member already.

How did you feel about going to synagogue and praying?

I like it. Yeah.

You felt that God had saved you?

That's right.

That it was because of him.

Yeah.

Why would he choose you instead of other people or in-- something that you can't answer?

Something you can't explain. It's pulling you to go, to-- I don't know. They used to select people to send out. I always said, I'm not going to go. As long as they don't bother me, I'm not going to stay if I stay.

I make up my mind. My niece says, let's go, let's go out from the camp. Let's hide. I said, not me. I'm not going. I stay here. It's going to be with this-- with all, I'm going to be together with all people. I don't want to be separated because there was no life to go away and hide.

You felt safer in the camp?

Yeah, safe.

Than alone.

Than hiding, hiding was no good. My sister got killed. She was hiding-- and all the sisters, four sisters.

When you joined a synagogue, as you said you later did, why did you join?

Oh, we had the kids you felt their son was born in two years later. And he was six years old, we had to send him to a religious school.

So it was because of the children that you joined?

Yeah. We used to go to shul.

Was your rabbi helpful or comforting?

No, we never talking to rabbi, no, never. We didn't mention it.

What role does the synagogue play in your life and in your family's life?

Yeah, I like it. I enjoy it.

Do you feel--

Makes me feel like--

Comfortable?

Yeah, like I owed them something because I was safe.

So you feel an obligation--

Yeah, to go.

--to go. And also, I think you mentioned before, you have a comfort there.

Yeah, I relaxed. And I listen to the rabbi talking. And I pray. And that's it.

It's a good feeling.

Yeah, it makes me feel good.

Does your husband join you at the synagogue?

Not always.

But you go--

Sometime, he goes.

--go by yourself if you he doesn't?

I go by myself. Yeah.

This is a very important part of your life?

Yeah, this came to me. And I feel good now, better then.

Better than if you didn't go?

Yeah.

You get a certain strength from it?

Yeah, I thinks the-- a lot enjoy.

How do you feel as a Jew in the United States?

I'm happy. Yeah, I'm happy I came here because we couldn't live like this. In Germany was no-- we had a little room with the daughter. And our bed was in the room and a stove with the wood. We couldn't find wood even to make food for the kid. We didn't have a Frigidaire. We didn't have nothing.

If conditions had been better in Germany, would you have stayed?

No, I couldn't stay there. No.

Was there any thought of coming to somewhere other than the United States?

My husband wants to go to Israel. I said, no, I don't want.

Why did you not want to go to Israel?

Because I have nothing.

You felt there was more here?

I'm empty. What I'm going to do in Israel? There will be like in a camp like we used to hunger-- have a hunger in camp. What I'm going to do?

You wanted to go somewhere that was established?

Yeah.

Are you active in the organized Jewish community today?

I belong to the sisterhood.

Of the temple?

We belong to Cedar Hope in the Cleveland-- American-- the Daughters of America and the cancer research.

You go to-- you have quite a--

Yeah, go out.

You like that?

Yeah.

Makes you feel good?

Sure.

You're an active woman.

Yeah, I go-- always go places.

And I am very, very grateful. And I have my own personal God to thank that you are here.

Thank you.

And I can't tell you enough and deeply enough how glad I am that you agreed to the interview today. This is Lissa Keller. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Eva Reis. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, the Cleveland section. Thank you again, Eva.

Thank you too. Thanks.