

OK, Celia, we were talking about Italy. Now, you're in Milano and on your way through the underground.

Yeah, the underground brought us out to Milano. And there, we stayed about five weeks. And then the UNRRA supported us. Even in Germany, before they took us out to Milano, to Italy, the UNRRA supported us. And we had there-- it was a whole city where the camps were. It was in Windsheim.

And I was-- they-- we had a post office. And we had almost practically everything. But the UNRRA fed us and the UNRRA clothed us. And once they came down, I was head of the post of the DP-- post office camp-- the head of the post office in the camp. And I worked there until I decided that-- the UNRRA was there.

Like I said before, they clothed us, they supported us with food and with everything. But then they signed up the people who had relatives in the United States that they signed up the people who wanted to go to United States. They came to United States when they start the transport. I couldn't remember that I have an aunt here in the United States.

So I decided-- and they told me-- because I worked very closely with them, they told me it will take too long to stay in Germany and to wait until all those people who has affidavits, who has relatives over here, first, they will go to United States. And then they will take those people who doesn't have nobody over here.

So I decided, I'm going to Israel. So then they gathered us. The underground took us to Italy, like I said before. We traveled on foot first from Germany. They took us by boat and then in rubber boats. And then we went over the hill. We came to Milano. From Milano, we stayed about five weeks. And then they took us to Cremona.

And there, I joined the Mizrachi again. So it was like a kibbutz. These-- we been together-- it was about 14 months I was in Cremona. And from there, I signed up to go to Israel because I knew, if I can't go to America, I'm going to Israel. So I signed up for Israel.

And after the 14 months, they took us on rubber boats again. And they took us towards west. And over there, we had to wait until they could-- the underground could take us again. But all along, the UNRRA supported us. The underground was just by transporting us.

Did HIAS help you at all?

Yeah. Yeah. They called it UNRRA. They had the UNR initials. So from there, we traveled to west. And west, we stayed about a month and a half again. Finally, one day, they had rubber boats, those rubber boats, and always during the night when it's pitch black. And they gathered us in the rubber boats.

And they took us with a ship till the ship-- the ship was somewhere in the middle of the water-- took us to the ship. And they took us to Israel-- we thought we are going to Israel. My ship was the Exodus. I went with the Exodus.

We came to Haifa, to Israel, Haifa. I don't remember how many days we traveled on the boat. We came to Haifa. At that time, the England was still in Palestine. They called it Palestine, not Israel. And they didn't want to let us in.

So we fought. And we fought 24 hours. We didn't want to give in. So the Englander threw tear bombs on our ship. And when they threw tear bombs, everybody-- it was a terrible feeling. I thought, I will never see again in my life.

So when they thought, they-- then everybody gave up already. Then we gave up. So they transferred us to an English ship. And they took us to Cyprus. And Cyprus had two camps-- had a winter camp and had a summer camp.

I was in the winter camp-- in the summer camp. We had just-- we lived in tents. Here is the picture in that tent with a few girls from the kibbutz. We ate-- we cooked in kettles like this. And of course, the UNRRA supported us with food and with everything.

And the winter camp was the mothers who had small children. And the married couples went to the winter camp. They

had already better. They didn't live in tents. They had barracks. They had heat. We didn't have no heat, no nothing. And of course, we were supported by England with food, but mainly the UNRRA took care of us.

We stayed-- I stayed in Cyprus for about, again, 14 or 15 months until Israel was established as a Jewish state in '48. In '48, they started to transfer first the children and the old-- I mean, the sick, and the older people, and the children. I was with a-- I went with the second transport. They took me with the second transport to Israel. I came to Israel.

I had a cousin living there, who went out from Germany when Hitler came to power in Germany, in Hamburg. He was living there. So he saw, he cannot exist in Germany. So he went then to Israel. That was in '36 already. So I had in Israel him.

He did send me packages to Cyprus. I got every four weeks-- I got a package. I remember, once, I got a package with a lipstick. I haven't seen a lipstick since '44. So I said to myself-- and I said to the girls, my gosh, I have lipstick. That's all what they could think? Instead, they should send me a can of some food. They send me lipstick.

So I wrote him a letter. And I told him, don't send me makeup or lipstick. Who needs makeup? Who needs lipstick? I need food. So that was one time. He never-- but the packages kept on coming every four weeks.

He's very well off. He's practically a millionaire in Israel, even now, although he's retired already. He was very good to me. And it felt very good because I-- all my life, since concentration camp, I felt, I am so alone, like I would have just dropped from the sky.

I am nobody. I just dropped from the sky. I don't have no roots, no nothing, no nobody. Because nobody came home except me from my closest family. All I have is cousins. This is the closest relatives I have, a cousin. I had one uncle in Budapest, which he died also after the war.

So Israel was very hard. It was wartime. I sit down then. My cousin took me out from that gathering place, where they gathered the people who didn't have where to go. It was a gathering place. They could have stayed there for four weeks. I stayed one night. And he came. And he said, you are not going to stay here. You're going to come. And you're going to live with us.

So I then decided-- I was never able to take nothing from nobody. I never needed it in my life. And I wasn't used to it. So I said to myself, what am I going to do? I have to work in order to support myself.

So then I decided, what am I going to do? What do I know to do? I took a course of sewing. I went for four weeks. Every course what I took at home lasted four, five weeks. I took a course of sewing. I said to myself, OK, I'm going to be a seamstress.

I went and applied a job-- for a job as a seamstress. So my cousin was laughing. He says, you know sewing? I says, there is nothing what you cannot do if you put your head to it. And so I was accepted. The first day I went for a job, I was accepted in a store for alterations. Fine.

So I got already some income. So I started to buy myself underwear and clothes to be like a human being, to look like a human being. My hair grew up already a little. I had already bigger hair.

So it's-- but the war was on. And they took everybody whom they could to the army. They went in stores, they went in houses, the army, or on the street. They could close up a whole street. And whoever there was, young people, they took to the army. I felt, I cannot go through with the army. I went so much through my life, if I go to the army, that will be my end. I said, I cannot do it. So I didn't know what to do.

So finally, I was lucky. They didn't take me to the army. And so then my girlfriend-- I met my girlfriend over there from home. We went to school together. We were very good friends all the way along.

So finally, she says-- she was married already-- why don't you get married, she asked me. Says, well, I didn't find the

right person yet. She says, come. I will introduce you to a friend of my husband's. I says, no, I don't want to. He says, OK. Come for dinner. And he's going to be here too. So I decided, what can I lose?

So I went to dinner. And I met my husband there. First, I didn't want to hear at all about him because it was an interesting thing with him. He used to be in our hometown where I grew up. Of course, he couldn't touch me there with a 10-foot pole.

Because in Europe, you got married usually with the same type of people, with the same group of people. My brother married from Slovakia, from the top family. And so did my sister. And so anyway, I heard about him. And he was in our hometown. But I didn't have anything to do with him. And we had matchmakers. And I remember, before the war, matchmakers came to the father. And the father agreed.

And so anyway, later, in Israel, and the way he went to Israel, he also wanted to come to the United State. But somehow, he ended up in Israel. So he started to come after me constantly. And I always said no.

Finally, I gave in. And I said, OK, I'll marry you. So we got married in '49. In '48, I went out to Israel. '49, we got married. But he had to go constantly. There is army reserve constantly. Every four weeks, you have to go.

So anyway, it's very tough. He had a shop there as a sign painter. He started to work. We made out pretty good. And we had already money saved up to buy a condominium. But how many time-- he had here at that time two brothers in United States and one sister. He still has one brother and one sister. How many times he got a letter? He mainly corresponded with his sister.

How many times he got a letter from his sister, he always-- tears came in his eyes. And I always saw that. And somehow, I couldn't take it. I thought to myself-- and she kept on sending us affidavits, we should come to the United States.

But I was-- I had all my friends there with whom I came through Germany, and through Italy, and in in Israel, and in Cyprus. And I had my cousins there. I was already established. I was pregnant. I had my baby already, my older son. And I didn't want to go. I said, to go again in a new land and then to start life all over again, it's too hard.

But then I saw the tears in his eyes, how many times he got a letter. And the sister, the third time, when she sent the affidavit, she said, this is the last time that I'm sending you an affidavit. Now, if you are going to come, fine. If not, this is the last affidavit I'll send you.

So then I gave in because it was very hard life. I had a baby. I had to stay in line. It was rations in Israel. You got coupons. You got a quarter of a kilo chicken a week. And I had to feed the baby. We-- it's not like here, you have baby food.

And it was very, very tough-- two eggs for a week, we got rations-- two eggs for a week, a quarter kilo of chicken. We licked the bones. And I gave the meat for my child. And it was very, very tough. Sometimes, even for milk, we stood in line until we-- we got in line for the milk, the milk was gone, it was no milk at all. I couldn't feed my child.

So I gave in. I said, OK, let's go to America. Prior to that-- and let me go. This is an interesting story. Prior to that, before we came to United States, I was pregnant. And I went-- he had his shop in Tel Aviv. I lived in Jabalia-- we lived in Jabalia.

Before we got married, I lived in Tel Aviv. And I went to Tel Aviv to see him. I went to the shop because I helped him. I didn't work already as a seamstress. I helped him.

So yeah, to go back, when I worked as a seamstress, I didn't work too long in that store. And then I decided, why work for other people? I could have more money if I work at home. So we got together three-- two girls.

And I went to my cousin. I says, I need a machine. I want to get independent. So he looked at me and he said, you are

here such a short time, just a few months, and you want already to be independent. Says, it took him years to get there where I am already. So he bought me a machine.

And we sit down. And we manufactured skirts. We did wonderful. We made money as much as we want to. We did wonderfully. So anyway, when I was pregnant already, when I got married, then I still continued in that line for a little while, but just for a little while. Then I got pregnant.

And I went to Tel Aviv to see him in his shop. On the way to Tel Aviv, I saw a man sitting on a stone. And he stopped me. And he said, where are you going? I says, well, I'm going to my husband's shop. He says, I see you are pregnant.

And he told me when the baby is due. And I looked at him. Says, how do you know, I asked him. Says, don't ask questions, just answer what I am asking you. And I told him all about it. He says, look, you're going to have a very tough time. But you will get over it. And you'll be all right. Just don't be afraid.

And I turned around, and he's gone. It's like an angel coming that was my father. And later on, I remembered the whole thing. And I was so frightened by it, turned around, and he's gone.

So anyway, I come to the shop and I tell my husband. And he thought I'm crazy to say something like this. But it's true. So I had my baby. I had a very hard time. At that time, it was a baby boom in Hadassah Hospital.

And they let us stand in the hallways. We didn't have even a bed. We sat on the chairs until the labor pain. And I had such a labor pain, I was in labor pain for 48 hours. And I felt, this is it. This is my end.

And I remember, when my mother came in Auschwitz when I have typhus-- in Reichenbach, I mean-- when my mother came to me and says, no, you have to go back. You can't come to us yet. She told me, whenever you are in very bad need, I will always help you. And I remember, when I was in labor pain for 48 hours, I yelled out for my mother. And I said, this is the end. I can't take it anymore.

So finally, some nurses came. And they saw that this is my end. And they didn't even have time to give me an injection. When they ran to the operating room with me, on the way, they gave me the injection that I shouldn't feel it. And the baby was born so with cesarean section. So then I was all right.

Then when we decided that we are going to come to United States, we sold everything. And we are going to the office for the papers. We went to the office with the papers. That man is back there again. And my husband is there. He went in already.

And that-- my father is there. He says, why are you going in there? Where are you going? He said, you have a little-- my son was right there next to me. Said, this is your little boy? I said, yes, he is. What is his name? And we named him after my father and after my husband's father. He has two names. And he smiled. He was happy about that, that we named him for the two fathers.

Said, where are you going? And I told him. We are-- and I told him the story that my husband has here family. I don't have nobody. So how many times he gets a letter, he is almost crying, so I decided-- and it's very tough life here. And I told him, I can't feed my baby here. So if I can't give my baby to eat, then what's the whole use after so many years of suffering?

So he said, OK, but be very careful. He said, you'll be all right. But be very careful. And he told me, I should always give Tzedakah. And he disappeared again. And I go to my husband. And I told my husband again. So he looked at me again, like-- but my father disappeared.

So we made the papers. We came to United States. We came to United States in New York. When we arrived-- we came with a ship. When we arrived, we sold everything over there. We had to start all over here. And at that time-- we came in '54 to United States, 1954, the HIAS didn't help us like now, if someone comes from Russia. Nobody helped us. We didn't have nothing.

So finally, my sister-in-law-- yeah, before that, when we arrived to New York City, my husband knew the language. I went to a course in Germany. I took Hebrew and English, but not as much that I could speak. So it was hard. I lived six years in Israel. I learned the Hebrew language. And here I come to a new country.

And again, I could understand something, but I can't communicate. So nobody was waiting for us in New York City. But finally, the HIAS came and told us that-- my sister-in-law called her and asked her she should meet us, and put us on a train, and go to Wooster, to Wooster, Ohio.

So finally, we went on the train. And while we were waiting for the HIAS people to get there, I had in my handbag all my treasures what I found at home, all my papers, my important papers, and everything. And someone stole it. They just came and grabbed it. And that was the end for it. Finally, I came to Wooster, Ohio to my sister-in-law. Everything is fine.

But I didn't feel at home at all. It was very, very hard for me. My husband started to work. And I said to my husband, look-- we stayed by my sister-in-law six weeks. In the meantime, she told me, I should cook Friday for Shabbos because she had to go out of town. Fine.

I never used a gas stove. I never used an electric stove. I didn't know how to use it. She showed me before she left how to use electric stove-- a gas stove. But her stove, you had to take a match and light it, turn on the gas, and then light it.

So I went to cook, it's nothing. OK. I should cook. I cook. This was the second week that I was in this country. So the first thing, my handbag was stolen in New York. That was the second week for Friday, I went to cook, I turned on the stove, a flame developed.

And I told my son-- he was two and a half years old-- don't come down to the basement because I used the stove. Because my sister-in-law said, use the stove in the basement. Fine. I used the stove in the basement. What is it to me?

And I turned on the match. And somehow, I probably lit the gas before that. And it started a fire. So I got very scared. So I went and turned off the bottom of the stove. So I got burned, my whole hands were burned. My face was all burnt.

So I remember the home remedies. I took the oil in a bottle and I poured it over me. It was dripping the oil. And I put it over the hand. But it was burning terrible. So I went to my neighbor. And I told her, please, call my brother-in-law and tell him, he should come and take me to a hospital or he should do something.

So the neighbor called the my brother-in-law. My brother-in-law took a taxi and came home. The taxi saw the way I look. He didn't want to let me in the taxi. So my brother-in-law said, if you don't take her to the-- in the taxi to take her to the hospital, I'm going to call up the police, and you're going to get it.

So finally, I-- the police came and took me to the hospital. I was bandaged up. Just my eyes were open and here, my nose and my mouth-- my whole face and my hand. I felt so miserable. I even cannot tell you how miserable that's my first experience in the United States. It was terrible.

So finally, I was six weeks in those bandages. I looked like a mummy. And finally, after I came home from the hospital, I told my husband, let's go to a city. Wooster is a small town. They didn't have enough work. He worked altogether two or three days a week, and it wasn't enough. We have a child to support.

I says, your job is for a city. And it's true. At home, too, all he-- he worked in Budapest in Hungary, in big cities. So he said-- so my sister-in-law said, no, he could go and work in a factory. I says, no. He has-- he worked so many years in his profession, why shouldn't he work his profession? If he won't find a job in his profession, then let him go to work to a factory. If not, no.

So my sister-in-law came with my husband to Cleveland. The first day they were looking for a job, he found a job. So we moved to Cleveland. After that, we lived just one and a half year in rented house.

And we bought a house in Cleveland Heights, a double house. Because I figured it out, if we buy a two-family house, it will pay-- the rent will pay for us living there too. And at least-- and then I had already my daughter. I had already two children. So I didn't work.

I just started to work when my children grew up already, when they went away to college. I started to work. I worked at Kelly Kit for a few years. And so we lived on East Overlook.

My children went to-- in Cleveland Heights to school. And we signed up to Taylor Road Synagogue. We belong in Taylor Road Synagogue. So they went to Hebrew school there, both children. And I had my third child, another son. And when my daughter had to go already to junior high, Roosevelt started to be there very bad already.

So we decided, I want to-- I told my husband, let's rent the downstairs. It will pay for itself. And let's move out to a better school system. Then we bought a single home. And we should. And we lived there since then. We live there already 16 years.

In this whole experience that you've had, what do you feel was your greatest loss?

Well, my greatest loss was that I lost all my closest family. And like I said, I felt like I don't even belong, that I wasn't born. I just dropped from the sky. I felt very alone.

To what extent do you think that your Holocaust experience has affected your present physical health? I know you talked about how sick you were.

Well, I have spinal arthritis. And this is my worst problem. And there is practically no medicine for it. I usually take a trip to the Dead Sea. That helps me. So when I feel already very bad and during the winter-- now, during the winter, I-- and my husband is already retired. And since I'm not working either, we go to Florida or we go to my son, to California, which the weather is much better.

But I need the water from the Dead Sea. I feel like one year, about six years ago, I couldn't open up my hand. I closed my hand-- it's automatically closed. I had to use the other hand to open it up.

And I went to the Dead Sea because the doctor said, I don't know what I could give you. It should be good. And I said, well, what can I lose? I tried the Dead Sea. And I went to the Dead Sea, and my hand opens up and closes. But my back bothers me. Like I say, I have spinal arthritis.

What made you decide to share your experiences with us?

Mainly because my children always ask me about my experience, my life history. And I never wanted to go through it because it's very painful. And I live it. I live it through again. And this is very painful.

And when I got the letter from Council of Jewish Women, and they said, they are doing a taping, and I'm going to get the tape too, a copy of the tape, so I decided, it's time to do it. That's when I signed up, that I sent a letter back that I want to do it.

Do you think that survivors have a message that others need to understand?

Definitely. Definitely because that might happen again, the way it looks. And we are supposed to be alert. And it should never happen again. We should stand up for our rights as people, as human beings.

Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

Well, I'm happy that my daughter is married. My children are successful. I accomplished in life what I set out to do. And I feel, even if my mother and father would be alive, they would be very proud what I accomplished.

This is Donna Karon Yanowitz again. And our Holocaust survivor today was Celia Roth. And I want to thank you again, Celia, for sharing these experiences with us. And this project has been sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section.