

You were talking about your journey from Bergen-Belsen back to Hamburg in April of 1945.

'45. And there were flyers thrown down from some airplane, telling that the British were close and that they would soon be here. We did not save that flyer. But it was very good to know about it.

And the men had to march us. I forget to where. Because the rails had been bombed. And there were no more trains leading to Lueneberg no, the place was Celle bei Hanover That's where they unloaded us when we went to Bergen-Belsen.

You know, after the war, I read in Time Magazine, some letter to the editor from someone who lives in Celle either that, I'm not sure. Anyhow, they said that they didn't know there was Bergen-Belsen there, when all the dead people were lying close to the road.

Anyhow, this guy marched us to I don't know where. We slept in the woods, covering us with leaves. We didn't run away. We got back to Bergen-Belsen.

And when we got there, there was a whole new crew there. I mean, a whole new--

But back to Hamburg

Hamburg. So it was filled with people from other camps, who had been evacuated there. And so we never went back to the factory to work. But we registered those new prisoners. That was our new job. And then one day--

Your health had improved by that time?

Yeah. Yeah.

Did you get better because you were given medicine? Or it was just--

No, there was no medicine.

So it was the resting?

Just being in bed and not working, but it was for a long time. And I remember when I, for the first time, went into the bathroom, there were mirrors there. And I just couldn't believe it when I saw myself. I said I look like Christ on the cross.

Mhm. [INAUDIBLE].

So we were used to register the new prisoners. And then one day, towards the end of April, they said now we would go to Sweden, again, you see? So of course, we didn't believe it.

But lo and behold, we really went in cattle cars and got out in Flensburg, which is the border between Germany and Denmark. And there was already a normal train standing. And we were taken over by the Danish Red Cross. And on every seat, there was a package--

[CRYING]

--with sandwiches and chocolate. So then we came through Copenhagen. And the Danes were on the platform.

So I remember one Dane holding up a newspaper saying, Hitler dÃd, Hitler dead. And of course, that was wonderful to me.

Ah.

So then we went by the train. And then they unloaded us onto a boat, you know, a ferry. And there they had papers set for-- I never got to eat anything. Because it was so-- you know, everyone just threw himself on those papers, with flowers, and anything you can imagine.

And then we arrived in Malmo I don't know. I think we went on the train once more after the ferry. I'm not sure.

And in Malmo we were taken over by, I guess it was the Red Cross. And we had to, once again, undress completely. And they burned all our clothes. So that was, I don't know, the 2nd of May, maybe.

And then we had to run into some tents and take showers there. They had it all set up. It was wonderful. And they put us, after we were all bathed and so on, they put us in a covered tennis stadium where we slept on the floor.

But for us, it was luxurious, because they had white-- white paper sheets, you know?

Could you believe you were free?

It was hard.

[LAUGHS]

But they apparently knew exactly what to do. Because they fed us very little. And we, of course, thought they should feed us much more.

But as we later heard, in Bergen-Belsen, it was a catastrophe. People died from eating too much. And you know, the Swedes gave us new clothes. We went to factories and could pick from clothes and underwear and everything.

But that was before the end of the war. You know? The war, I think, ended on the 8th of May or the 7th of May. So for us, the war was over.

And then you stayed in Sweden for how long?

I stayed there for two years. Because it took so long for me to get a visa to the United States where I had an uncle, my mother's middle brother, who was the only one who was able to emigrate. He's the one where I told you that they came from Vienna first to Czechoslovakia and then eventually landed in the United States.

Did you work in Sweden at all?

Yes.

What kind of work did you do?

I worked as English-German secretary in the World Jewish Congress office. So that was very nice. It was like a family.

When I went back to Sweden in '92, I looked for that World Jewish Congress. It was no longer there. They've closed it. They don't need it anymore. But they certainly needed it then.

Were you able to adjust to life in Sweden, after all that you had been through?

Yes. Actually, yes. I mean, I'm not-- still not quite normal.

But you were able to cope?

Yes. I was able to --

To get through those two years.

--to work. Yes. And in the beginning, my two best friends were there. We had a room together, a furnished room in a family. And we all three worked.

These are friends from the camp?

Yes. Yes. And one of them left first. She went back to Czechoslovakia because her sister and the sister's husband had returned. They were in camp too, because, well, it's a long, involved story.

The sister, of course, was Jewish. But the husband was not. And they had hid-- her father and my friend's father, had hidden in the village on false papers.

And someone told on him. And so then they sent his daughter and her husband to camp, too, but just for a year. So they both survived.

So when did you arrive in the United States?

On May 19, 1947.

And where did you go?

I went to New York. And my uncle had already found me a job in an import-export firm. And I had a furnished room in the family again, East-- no, West 86th Street.

But those were difficult times. It was what they call culture shock. It was all so different from Sweden. And I was very unhappy at first. And it took me some time to get used to it. The climate was so hot.

Altogether, you know, at the World Jewish Congress, I told you, we were all like a family. And there, the people who owned that business were not at all friendly. It was all so cold and unfeeling.

And no one wanted to hear about my experience, not even my own uncle, you know? No one asked any questions. And we were so full of [INAUDIBLE].

And then you stayed in New York?

I stayed in New York for two years. And then I got married and moved to Chicago.

Was your husband from Europe?

Yes.

Had he been through--

He was Viennese.

Had he been through the war?

No. He was here.

During the war?

Yes. And you moved to Chicago.

To Chicago, and then we moved to Pittsburgh, and last, we moved to Washington. I really like it here. I'm glad I ended up here.

Can we talk just a little bit before we close about some of your feelings and reflections and thoughts about what you went through? How do you feel about being Jewish? Did this experience make you more so, or less so, or no change at all?

Maybe less so-- no, not Jewish. It made me more Jewish. But it made me irreligious. I don't believe in God, I'm afraid to say.

This is because of what you went through?

Yes.

During that--

I don't think if there were a God He would have let all that happen.

Mhm.

No. But I'm consciously a Jew. And I would never hide it. But I'm just not religious.

Mhm.

Do you receive reparations?

Yes. I get two pensions. One is like social security. And the other one is what they call Gesundheitschein I had to prove that the experience was bad for my health. And since then, I'm getting a pension for that.

How do you feel about getting reparations from Germany?

I now feel about it very good. But it was the hardest thing I went through, to dig all that thing out, everything, the lawyer wanted from me. I was in psychotherapy for several years. And it was not easy.

And every time a letter came from the lawyer in Germany, I thought now. Now what now? What does he want now? But in the end, of course, I could not live from the pension I get here. So that makes a big difference in my life, in my lifestyle.

You say you've returned to visit Europe?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Oh, yeah. I've been in Europe many times. But in '92, I was back in Estonia. Because that was just 50 years-- I never told you about what happened to my mother and the others. You want me to tell you?

If you're able to.

After the war, when we were first-- I told you we were in [PLACE NAME]. And then they sent us for recuperation to various places in Sweden. And my Czech friends and I were in a town called [PLACE NAME].

And there, one day, there we didn't do anything. You know? They were just nice to us and we went on hikes and had fun together, bicycle [INAUDIBLE].

And one day, they had a sort of a little feast for us, where there came a couple of ministers. I forget of what religion. And they lectured to us. I forget about what. And afterwards, there was coffee and cake. There were maybe 30 or 40 of us in that scout hall where we were.

And I just happened to sit next to one of those ministers. And another friend, the mixed one, sat on the other side of him. And he asked me where we had been during the war. And I told him about Estonia and so on.

And he said, strange, with Estonia, you know? I have a friend, an Estonian minister, who told me a terrible story about a transport that came to [PLACE NAME]. I don't know whether he said [PLACE NAME].

But that came. And that some members of his congregation had to shoot those people. And that some of them became quite emotionally sick from it.

And from what he said, of course, he didn't know the details, I thought, that could be us. You know? So he gave me the name and address of this minister.

And it took me a while. I didn't write right away, or [? be where ?] go to see him. And I never did go to see him. I think I just didn't want to know, really.

But I did write him a letter. And he wrote me a letter back saying that such and such happened. That the people had to dig their own graves and were shot on the spot. And he wrote where it was.

But he wrote very consolingly that maybe our families were not among those people. Because he remembers that there were some Jewish women seen in the river, working there. Maybe that's where my mother was. So of course, that was us.

And so that was that. And then, in 1960, was it-- I think in 1960. How did that come about? I can't tell you the whole story. However, they caught some of those Estonian SS people.

And I mean, I can tell you this story, but it would be too long. And some of our friends who lived in Czechoslovakia went to [INAUDIBLE] as witnesses in the trial of those people.

Trial of the Estonian SS?

Yes. And two of them were hanged. And others were convicted in absentia. And one of them was the commander, Laak was his name, L-A-A-K.

And it turned out that he had emigrated. He had fled after the war to Canada. And the Russians were broadcasting those news about the trial at the time and that they were looking for him. And he apparently got frightened and he hanged himself in Canada.

So one of our girls was the living in Canada. And when she write in the paper about that she called the newspaper and said that she was one of his victims, then the newspapers interviewed some others of our girls in New York. And one called me, too.

I was living in Chicago then. And so three of them, at least, are dead. And then while the girls were testifying, they took them to that place where it all had happened.

And there's a monument there now. And it's not, apparently not only our transport, but the German transport. They also killed some Russians, I think. So on that monument, it was in all languages, I think.

And so in 1992, we went there for the 50th anniversary of those [INAUDIBLE]. And one of our friends who was also at the trial as a witness now lives in Switzerland. She escaped in 1968 with her husband. And she really built friendships

there in Estonia. And they go there quite frequently to visit.

You see, this woman, Eugenia Gurin-Loov, works for the Jewish community there. Yeah. This Eugenia Gurin-Loov works for the Jewish community in Tallinn.

And she worked on this book for years. She was already working on it in '92. She found all the documents. And it's all about the Estonian Jews and what happened to them.

Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't talked about, or any other thoughts?

Oh, I'm sure there are other things.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

That you'd like to say.

The reflections are--

Any messages to the world? Anything that you'd like to add?

The reflections are that I cannot stop to hate the Germans. I would never set foot there. But not all of our girls feel that way, because some have been there.

But I personally just don't want to do it. And as I told you earlier, I have all those conflicting feelings about my former classmates. And I'm very attracted to reading everything about the Holocaust. Where some people like to stay away, I am very attracted to it.

And my uncle Norbert Troller wrote a book about Theresienstadt, which was published after he died. But that was his retirement job. He wrote his memoirs, not only about the war, but about his whole life.

Do you still speak German?

Yes. And I read German a lot, too. And I have friends, but very few now, with whom I speak German. Now with [? Ava, ?] I never speak German.

Anything else you wanted to add before we close?

No. Close it.

[LAUGHTER]

That's enough.

Well, thank you.

But I'm very glad that you came to talk to me and I didn't have to talk to a complete stranger.

Well, thank you so much for doing the interview.

You're very welcome.

This concludes the interview of Doris Rauch. It took place on July 7, 1995. It was conducted by Gail Schwartz on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.