

Yes. This is tape two, side one. Before we move on, let's just talk a little bit more about your experience in Praust and the kind of work that you did. Can you go into a little more detail about the kind of work?

Yeah. After so-called breakfast, which we had standing outside, a slice of bread and a little black water, we-- in groups we marched out with guards to the work site. And this was a airfield Germans were building.

There were other workers, Polish people.

Men and women?

Yeah, men and women.

But were you in a group, just--

Yeah, we were separated by ourself.

You were just women.

Yeah, we were women, yes. So--

How long a march was it to--

It wasn't that far, 10 minutes. It wasn't--

And what kind of work did you do?

Well, we pushed some what they call lorry here, pushed this, or loaded them.

Wheelbarrows or wagons.

Not wheelbarrow, the big--

Wagons.

The big lorries. And then we had to take bricks from one side to the other and back. Then they didn't know what to do with us. I remember my hands were bloody from this. And then we stood around. And lunch time, I don't remember what we did, honestly.

We went home early afternoon and were on our own in the barracks. And also--

What were the barracks like?

Empty shells. Just those beds, these long what they call beds, nothing else. There was a big, big oven in there in the winter to warm. But otherwise--

How much space did you have to sleep?

Oh, there was space.

To sleep.

Yeah, there was--

You had your own?

Yeah.

Did you have your cot to sleep to on?

No, they were all in one, these things. And you did hide your shoes underneath. And your piece of bread you saved underneath, because people, they just stole. Everybody was hungry and everybody--

Did you sleep on straw or just on wood?

Nothing, just wood and a blanket.

They gave you a blanket.

Oh, yeah, blanket.

Did you have any coats?

Great-- I don't think, no.

Were you wearing a uniform?

You know, I had one shoe that came to here and one shoe that was-- stayed here. No, no stockings, nothing. Blanket, you took a blanket and wrapped yourself with it. Any details I don't remember anymore.

So you would come back in the late afternoon, in the afternoon?

Yeah, and then just hang around, sit around.

Did you ever have to stand for appells?

Oh, yeah, every day, oh, yeah.

When did you do that?

In the morning. That counted, you know.

And how long did that take?

Half an hour. I'm sorry I didn't run away. So stupid.

Did you ever think of running away?

Yeah, yeah. One woman she ran away, but a couple of days before the march she must have known. She ran away. I think she was half Jewish. She was very good friends with the German-- with this-- there was a woman. And she was always together. She must have told her, you better get out.

And you seriously thought of running away?

Many times. I wish I would--

What stopped you.

See, I had no-- I didn't know. I had the number. And I had no clothes. I had one dress. It was a beige cotton and the blanket. And they would've caught me immediately. But there were ways I could've done. But too late now. For me, alone, yeah.

When did they take your hair? When did they shave you?

While I was there in Proust, one day they came and shaved me. I don't know why, not everybody. Maybe I had lice. I don't know, forgot. Could be.

Was that a very painful experience for you?

Yeah. But one was so subdued. You didn't care anymore. Whatever you did. And that's the truth. They marched into the ovens. And coming back to Auschwitz, there was a man with his daughter. And I remember he had a beard. He and red hair.

He said to me, you know-- we were talking about the crematorium, because you saw them all around.

And you knew what they were?

Yeah, I knew. This man had told me. I never told my parents or anyone. He says, he-- God wants this. And he said that death prayer for themselves and walked in. It's true. This man, I never forget him. This long beard. God wants it and he walked in the crematorium.

I wonder, you can't explain this, why this happened. Why the world let it happen. You can't. why? God wanted it.

Yeah, there's one-- one thing-- this is my belief. We sacrificed to have and Israel. That I can accept. But otherwise, there's no explanation, no-- no excuse.

It's very hard to live. I don't say it to my children, But they know. It's very, very hard. Been through so much. Worse just losing a husband. I mean lose my-- I was 23 in Poland, in a strange country, all by myself. Yeah, there were a couple Jewish women.

Then they told you about the march, or they told you--

Oh, well, ach, the march, yeah. Well, I don't know-- who can walk, walk. You can take your blanket. Because the Russians were near. And then I-- I see them digging a big, big hole on the ground.

Who, who's digging?

The Germans.

The Germans are digging.

And whoever couldn't walk, they threw in, and they put gasoline, and they burned them all. And so we then-- well, like I said, whoever can walk, walk, so we walked. For a while we walked. And I don't know how many weeks we slept in churches at night. It was winter then.

And some Germans threw us bread. And they always asked, who are you? Where are you coming from? And if you told them you're Jewish, some of them, they were really shocked.

So for a couple of weeks-- like this must have been end of January when we left. Oh, it was cold. And there was ice. And we didn't get anything to drink. I remember I was so dehydrated. Sometimes they gave us some bread, a little soup. This went on, what, till March 13.

Were you with the same group of people? Did you--

It got less and less-- walk, walk, walk, who couldn't walk--

They would shoot?

Sure, shot them.

Were you with the same group of people all the time, the same women? Did you--

Yeah.

Did you stay with a small group of women? Did you have any friends?

Well, the ones that--

Kept going?

Yeah. There was one woman-- Leah was her name. Yeah, I became friends with her. She was from Germany. And she walked. And she walked with me. And, oh, her body-- she showed me what-- she had lice all over. And she's got-- and her whole body was full of scars.

So all of a sudden, Leah wasn't there anymore. I didn't see her. So I walked, walked, go on, go on. And after a couple weeks, we were in a town called-- I don't know-- it was [PLACE NAME] or something.

And so we saw Germans got less, and less, and less. They ran back because the Russians were near. So there he had-- there was this big building. It was a school. And we-- we stopped there. And then there was this building, smaller building.

And this German said, go in here, go in here And we all went. And we slept in there. Was the first time in six weeks that we were inside a building. No, no, we were in a church before. Who knows where, some building.

And this German said-- there was one left-- he said, you stay here. And he ran, he ran, he ran. They went back to-- the Russians were very, very near. So we stayed there. And in the morning, we said, we're free, we're free, the Russians, the Russians.

Here was the building, there was this street. The Russian tanks were riding by. We're free, the Russians are here. And that was at March 13th. They looked at us. And they didn't know what it was.

But they raped girls. And they were bad, the Russians. Terrible, they were terrible. I wasn't raped, but many people I knew, they were wild.

What was your health like at that point?

I was-- oh, I was maybe 90 pounds, very, very little. Very little. Well, in the camp where we worked, we got a day-- a bowl-- [NON-ENGLISH], a bowl of soup and a slice of bread. That was what you ate. I don't know how we could walk, how we could go. No milk, no nothing. Soup with a little cabbage in. Yeah, there was a field where we were-- near where we were.

This is in Proust, we're talking about?

Yeah. And there, there was a-- they grew sugar, but not like in Cuba. It's like a beet, a sugarbeet. And we raided that. And if you ate that, you could last a little longer. And any garden, we stole everything.

Did the women-- did women help each other? Were the women supporting each other?

Oh, yeah.

Did you find that to be the case?

Yeah, we got along fine. I mean, you didn't care much at all. You just cared to eat. You were hungry. That's all you wanted, food. But otherwise--

Did people share their food?

No, steal from you, not share. I don't think so. No, you hid it. You needed it. You wouldn't give it-- we were was so far on the march, I remember we stayed somewhere outside. The farmers had built something. And there were raw potatoes. And we all went in there. And we ate the raw potatoes.

Listen, when you're hungry, you don't share. You-- also mentally, your brain wasn't really working anymore. They were terrible, these Germans. Yeah.

What were your feelings when you saw those Russian tanks?

Happy. But then everything comes-- you're alone, where am I? I was in Poland still. And then they said, oh, the Germans are coming back, the Germans are coming back, but they didn't. So we-- a couple women, like I said-- there's always a couple of people you get--

You were close.

--you're together. So we went into this town. And there was an empty house. And we all moved in that house. And there were a couple of Jewish women from Romania. And they spoke Russian. And then the Russian soldiers came in, and visited, and they brought food already.

Yeah, I don't know how long I was in Poland. One day, the local police came with a big wagon and a horse, and put us all on there, and took us out. And some of these Polacks, the Polish people, they are anti-Semitic. And I heard a woman cry, we don't want the Jews. We don't want them here.

So they took us to this big city. I think it was [PLACE NAME]. Yeah. From there, oh, god-- and on our way, the Russians got us, soldiers. Who are you? What are you? We spoke German most of us. They thought we were Germans.

And there was still war. And they thought we were spies or something. And they wanted to take us and send us to Russia to the camps with the Germans. And there was one woman with us, she was there with her daughter. Her daughter was young, very sick. She had some kind of sickness. She got it from something there.

She was from Germany. She was from Poland originally or Russia even. She spoke Russian. I'm thinking of her name, but-- and she told these Russians-- and there was one Jew. The higher ups, they were all Jews, the Russians.

She said, look, we are Jewish. We come from the camps. We're trying to get back home. And he said, yeah? Yeah, bring a-- a [? tefillin ?], a prayer book or something, show him that you are Jewish. And she did read Hebrew. And I think she talked Yiddish too. And they let us go.

Can you imagine, they want to send us to Russia to the camps? And nothing you could have done. We got to train and we went from there to Berlin. Oh, that was terrible, what those Russians did. They went wild. They raped most every girl. [SIGHING]. But we got to Berlin.

Anybody try to attack you?

Me? No. I was so lucky. I sat in the-- in the-- the others sat in the corner too. I had a thing around my head. No, I was lucky. We finally got to Berlin. And there was-- I don't even know, but there was a train next to us, stopped next to us. "Ah, Juden, Juden-- [SPEAKING GERMAN]. Oh, you don't understand German. "You are Jews, Jews. Oh, Hitler didn't kill you all?"

The Russians too. They weren't much better, some of them. So we got to Berlin. Where to go? What to do? Nothing. Money-- I don't know how we got on that train. Well, everybody at that time went. Nobody controlled the-- people were on top or just everywhere.

So we went to this Jewish old age home. And the Jewish hospital was still standing there. And they were operating-- [INAUDIBLE] operating. It was in use. And this old age home was a very nice place.

And we told them who we were. And we were told, you cannot stay here, but go to-- there's a place, there's a synagogue. And there used to be school, [? Iranian Strasse ?], I remember. Next door are the Russians, the Russian sector. But go there. You can stay there.

And we went there to this place. And we got food twice a day. And I stayed there, oh, at least-- it was August. October I got to West Germany, where I'm from. So we were in Berlin. And I was Rosh Hashanah. We went to synagogue. And we saw a lot of American GIs there in uniform coming to synagogue.

What was it like to be free, to feel free?

Oh, good, yeah. It felt good. You were like in a daze. I stayed in the-- yeah, from Bromberg we went to Berlin. And from there, we were trying to get to the west. We all came-- the ones that were left, some were from Hungary, from Romania. They went back. And we, the ones from West Germany, we stuck together. And we tried.

But the Russians didn't let anyone through. So there were many that tried-- no, can't go through. One day, one girl comes in, and she said, "You know, there is some place in [? Zehlendorf ?] Berlin,"-- outside-- beautiful. It used to be the rich neighborhood. "The Americans are there."

What she said, I don't know-- UN or the Americans. She said, "Let's go there." She said, "I hear they bring people over the border." Was the UN, UNRRA. So the next day, we took the whatever, underground street care. We went there.

And sure enough, they interviewed each of us. Because a lot of Germans, SS that were in Poland, and who knows what, wanted also to go west. But they didn't take them. So there were also Jews that we talked to.

Well, we were-- we had-- like you asked me, I had no identification. Oh, yes, I had from Bromberg-- they gave us-- I still have it-- identification. It was a Jewish agency, very, very small. We heard about it. We went there. And they gave us identification.

And I showed them my number and talked to them. And, OK, fine. Immediately, don't go back, stay here. I had nothing to go back there. I had no clothes, [INAUDIBLE] the rags. Stay here.

That was the first time in years that I-- they gave us white bread, you know over there, coffee. You got your-- had your own bed with white sheets, a new dress, new shoes, everything new the same night. And that night, there was a dance. And it was beautiful.

The next morning when we got up after breakfast, they said, come on. We went on these half tracks. What's the navy-- or the air force. They took us over the border. And we went-- at the border They stopped. And they showed the Russians. Apparently, they knew already what we were-- And we went to Hanover. That's where they let us out. And they went back.

So there was this Mrs. [PERSONAL NAME]. Always never called her by her first name. She was a couple years older than I am. Aaron and Honey, and another girl, I forgot her name, we all were from the same area. And we all wanted to

go this way.

That night in Hanover we-- you heard of [GERMAN] where the [GERMAN] were made? In the railroad station we slept on the floor, under the table. The next day, we were on our own. We took the train. I took the train where I want to go. And they-- and each came home to nothing.

When I came to my hometown-- we lived in Holland. And we left from Holland. And my father said, after the war we meet in Gemen. And that's where I went. So it took me two days. I couldn't get-- at that time, the trains didn't run everywhere. And so it took me two days.

One night, I slept outside in a [INAUDIBLE], some kind of barn. But anyway, I got there. And I walked into a Gentile's-- her name is [PERSONAL NAME]. And I forgot her last name. And I stayed with this woman. She had a family. She gave me to eat. She let me sleep there. Her sisters were-- they all came back, but they weren't Jewish. I still correspond with them.

I stayed in this with her. Then I got a little apartment. The city paid for the apartment. And I stayed four years there. I couldn't come here.

You stayed in Gemen.

Four years. Stupid.

Was there any family there?

Nobody. There was no--

None of your family?

No, nobody came back. I'm the only one. My brother was in Panama. He came to this country in '47.

Now which brother is this?

Hermann. He came '47 to Philadelphia from Cologne, Panama.

Did you work in Gemen? What did you do in those four years?

I was so stupid-- nothing. Oh, yes, what did I do? I'm so stupid. I was really-- what did I do? This friend-- I had a-- this woman I'm talking about, she had this younger sister. And I'm still friends with her. She wrote me last week. I have the letter here.

She married an Englishman. They're not Jewish. She moved to England. She lives in England. She wrote me two weeks ago a letter-- I should come this summer to her. And she has one more brother living in Germany. He constantly writes. And he wants me to come to Germany. Ach. I'm not-- I can't. I'm not ready for that.

So what did you do? You did not work?

What did I--

How did you support yourself if you didn't work?

What did I do? Well, they gave me money. They gave me money, the town, but not much. They paid for my food. Yeah, they paid for my apartment. It wasn't much, 30 marks. And then I received something like care packages, my uncle, my brother, with coffee. I sold it. I sold the coffee. I sold-- and for that, I could live. I didn't use much. I asked myself sometimes, what did I live on?

And did you know what had happened to your parents?

No, but later. But not exactly. But I can imagine what happened. They were gone.

So you stayed there for four years?

Isn't that awful.

And then where did--

Well, I tried-- I had-- I knew people. They also lived in my area. A husband and a daughter, they lived near Nuremberg in the DP camp. And they took me once. And they wanted me to stay. I didn't like it there. So I went back.

Back.

No, I tell you another thing why I stayed for years. You couldn't get out. See, I went to Holland. My sister-- sister law and husband, they were in hiding in Holland. They came back. And I went to Amsterdam. And I stayed with them. And I applied to go to America. And they said five years. Can you imagine? regular quota.

So then what did I do? I went back to Germany. And from Germany, also the regular quota was four or five years. The only place was the American zone you could go. I tried that once, and I didn't make it. I failed at it. I paid a lot of money and it didn't work out.

So what did I do? Nothing. I had friends and we--

Did you have any kind of social life or anything?

Yeah, with these friends. With her, we were always together [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah, I had a friend. I came back. Mrs. [PERSONAL NAME] is her name. She lived in Recklinghausen. And she got all the furniture back. She got the house back. And she lived her house and all.

And she created a Jewish-- well, they still had the synagogue. And they had it rebuilt. And she worked for people that was sick, and couldn't write, and couldn't do anything. She's gone too. She died. 86 she was.

Oh, well anyway, we came-- like I said, we came back together. But she went away to another town and I went to another. But she-- I went to her every holiday or Satur...

Then I was in Cologne also for what? A couple of months. The ORT, the ORT. They had their big school in Cologne. And I went to that for a couple of months until I immigrated here.

OK, when did you come to the United States?

'49. October 11, '49.

And where did you go to?

My brother picked me up in New York. And I stayed with him.

How did you get here, by boat?

Yeah.

What was the name?

[INAUDIBLE]. Oh, it was awful. It was awful. I was so-- my brother picked me up with an orchid-- I still have it-- in New York, Navy Yard.

[INAUDIBLE] don't bring me anything.

This is tape two, side two. And you said you came by boat. And your brother met you when you docked. And he gave you an orchid.

Yeah. And the Hadassah was there with coffee and donuts. He took me by cab to I don't which train station. We went to Philadelphia. That was the beginning.

And then you stayed in Philadelphia how long?

About a year. I met my husband-- I was here six weeks.

You met him in Philadelphia?

Yeah.

And then when did you get married?

Oh, a year later. I came up to-- we were married October 22nd, 19--

'50?

'50, yeah.

And was your husband from Europe?

Vienna.

And what was his name?

Ernst.

Ernst Salus.

Yeah.

And did you stay in Philadelphia? Did you and your husband stay in Philadelphia?

No, he was working here for the government.

Working in Washington, DC.

Yeah. I came here-- I was here before I got married on and off. I stopped working earlier. And I stayed here.

And you have any children?

Two.

And what are their names?

Bill-- Bill Leo Salus, of course, and Lisa Edith Salus.

And you've remained in this area ever since?

Yes.

Can we talk a little bit now, before we end, just some of your thoughts about what you went through. How do you feel about being Jewish considering what happened to you because you were Jewish? Did it change your feelings in any way?

No. I only cannot understand when they talk about God, why God let this happen. No, I am Jewish and I don't hide it. But belief-- my belief, a I can't accept it. It's unacceptable. Then to go through life, not easy.

What do you think kept you going during those war years, during those very difficult times?

What?

What do you think kept you going during those very difficult times?

You just did what you had to do, that was all. We had no idea, even in Auschwitz, we had no idea what went on. You knew people were-- all of a sudden, nobody was there, empty. And most people did not know what went on. But the ones that we there long, they found out.

But in Westerbork, I was with my family. In Theresienstadt, you were together. You didn't think much. You didn't get-- you had no outside information, nothing. You were just there.

Did you tell your children about your experiences--

No.

--while they were growing up?

No. I never wanted to talk about it. I thought that hurt them too much. But now, I hear, mom, you never told us. My daughter, especially-- mom, when are you going to do it? When are you going to do it? I said, well, I'm waiting. 50 years, that's long enough. But I don't think my story is any different than anybody else, right?

Each one is special. Each story is special.

Yeah.

Do you receive reparations?

Yes, yes.

How do you feel about getting the reparations?

I take the money. A lot of them don't want it, but I take it. Why? Why shouldn't I? They can pay me back. And there's number for it. But sure, it helped me in the beginning. I didn't work. I did a little child. My husband didn't make that much money.

But it started very low. Now it's over \$530 a month. But what good is that? I never was happy with the money. We never did anything much. Always said to my husband, put it in the bank, I don't want it, I don't want it. Some people lived it up. I didn't. And we invested. And the kids will have a good life.

When did your husband come to the United States?

'38, just before the war. Yeah, he was almost-- they already-- he had a card already to come to they said working place. But they shipped him off over there. In Westerbork too, one-- in the beginning-- I think it was '43 or so. One day, people-- the age-- they told you an age from-- let's say from 18 to 25-- come today to the mess hall.

So he was the German recruiting people-- examine. He says, well, you're going back to Germany to your homeland, you're working. You will work. You know where I went? But we were on it-- my sister and I, we were on it.

And I see the building still. My father went in there. And he said to this German, he said, look, "Leave my daughters here. Take them off the list." He said, "I was in the war. I fought for Germany." He was in the First World War. "I was in the war. So let my daughters stay with me."

That's how we stayed. We stayed. We [INAUDIBLE]. That was '43. But '44, we all went, the family. That man had a heart. That Mengele too let me stay. Can you imagine that? Big guy. He's dead, right? He's dead.

What they did, oh, god. I had some friends they did the experiment on. Oh, my-- she's dead too. All my friends are dead-- my two girls, all of them. One of them committed suicide. Old, lived in Philadelphia. She introduced me to my husband. She had a heart attack-- oh, at least 20 years, 25. All of the sudden, her husband came home and she's dead.

Another one in Germany, she came back from Israel. She didn't like it in Israel. And her husband and... She died. All of them.

Are there any particular sounds, or--

Sounds?

Sounds or smells that you remember. That remind you--

Yeah.

That remind of that? Can you talk about that a little bit? Any the special smells or sounds that bring back the experience?

Yes, the picnic, for instance. When you-- meat-- the meat-- the smell smells like human bones. And also, when I see a big chimney, always reminds me of it. It never, never goes away.

Luckily, since I'm here-- oh, I used to have dreams, dreaming. I don't dream about it here. I have never once dreamed about my husband. I once heard his voice. But he's only gone-- I told you. But the memory, it's something.

Oh, I will never forget. I was in this train. It was going there. Oh, terrible. It never leaves me. There's one thing in this building here-- there is nobody one can talk to. I don't want to talk to anybody. Somebody confidentially, where I can tell my feelings. But that--

Before we end, is there any message you want to give to your grandson or anything special that you wanted to say?

To my grandson, oh--

Anything special?

I love him and I hope he has a good and a happy life. And not to forget me and grandpa. And that's it.

Any other words that you had about your experience that you wanted to say that we haven't covered? Any other thoughts that you have?

I don't know, I've got lots of thoughts. I don't know what do mean.

Does your experience still affect you?

Yes.

In what way?

Well, it never-- like I said before, it never leaves you. Wherever I go, whatever I do, it's with me. And many things affect me. For instance, on TV some shows, crime, or movies, it affects me. And a lot of things-- I get the Post every day, but I don't read many things. It's disturbing.

Have you been back to Europe?

Yes. Yeah, I went-- let's see, did I go back? Yeah, sure. I went with my-- we went, my husband and the kids, one year we went to Vienna. I think it was in '72, Vienna, and Switzerland, and Germany.

What was it like to go back to Germany?

I hated it. But we wanted to show our children where we were born, where we grew up. Even showed them where the schools were. And we rented a car in Frankfurt, Germany. And we drove to Amsterdam. There was the-- wait a minute, were they still there? Yeah, these relatives. Actually, my sister's sister-in-law and husband, they live in Amsterdam. And it was nice in the city.

And then one year we went-- oh, and we went to my hometown. We showed the kids. We stayed two-- the people I'm talking about, this woman that lives in England, she has a sister in Germany.

She invited us to stay two days. It was in the neighborhood where I lived. And so we went with kids who were around. Careful, and a little town, nothing to it. And then we went to Amsterdam. And we drove back to Germany.

And also this lady I told you, she lived in Recklinghaus. We stopped by her and stayed two days. And then we drove back to-- because she never met my husband, my children-- back to Cologne. And then we had some friends, also relatives of the others, in [PLACE NAME], near Cologne.

And then we went, yeah, to Frankfurt, and back to the States. And another time, with the children, we went to Israel. Israel with the kids. I don't know, we stayed a week or so, or two weeks. And that was nice.

I don't know which year. My husband and I, we went back once more. And I was there.

Is there anything else you wanted to add before we finish?

What is there? What is there else? I don't know. If you ask-- I don't know. I don't want to say the way I feel here. Oh, oh. Is it on?

Mm-hmm.

What? This is it, my life story. And I have to keep on hoping for better things. And for my children, they should have a good lives and be happy. That's all I want. And I try my best to go on, right? That's the end.

That's a very nice way to end it. Thank you very--

I think so.

Thank you very much for doing the interview.

I thank you. I'm glad we finished. I'm glad we've [INAUDIBLE].

This concludes the interview of Lotte Salus. It took place on February 6, 1996 in Silver Spring, Maryland and was conducted by Gail Schwartz.