

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Jaffa Munk conducted by Margaret Garrett on October 8, 1996 in Baltimore, Maryland, take 3, side A. You were talking about asking for a job in the hospital where your sister was.

So the doctor looked at me. And he said, what do you think? You look skeleton. You want to have a job? I explained to the doctor the need that I have to be near to my sister.

And he told me that it's OK. I can be in the hospital. I can be in a-- he said to me, I understand the need of you to be near to your sister. And I tell you. There is a little porch that is enclosed. I'm going to provide there a little bed. And you'll be there.

You don't have to work here except if you want to cheer up the sick people here. He said, I see that you have some special ability in you and that you are a very cheerful type of a person. And I said, yes, indeed, I should be cheerful. Do you know what I went through? Well, look, I am here, and I am normal.

So they made me a little room, and that was very near to the bed of my sister. She was unconscious. And yet I used to rub her feet, and I used to talk to her. And, slowly and surely, she came back to herself. And the other two girls also got better. And I used to go to the other sick people and sing for them songs that I remembered from my childhood.

And my sister got better. When she was released from that hospital, they told us that we are not allowed to leave. Going back, we wanted to go back to Hungary. We wanted to see maybe somebody remained from the family.

We hoped for my brother who was the oldest. He was 17 years old. We thought that maybe he came back, maybe our father because my father went from Auschwitz to Mauthausen. We didn't know that he perished later on. Maybe someone is alive, but they said that we can't travel. She's much too weak for such a trip.

And how they organized it, I really don't know, but we were given a room in a kitchen. And, every few days, we had to go back to the hospital for a checkup with my sister. And that time, I came down also with some kind of-- I had staphylococcus infection all over, all kinds of things on my body, you know?

And the Russian doctor came. And, without any anesthesia, without anything, she just cut. I have marks from it, painful and whatnot, but at least I got here. Do you know?

And, about end of August, we got the permission to leave Germany and to go to Hungary. Again, the Czechoslovakian organization, the army, gave us some money to purchase tickets with the train. And we went to Prague first, the capital of Czech.

And there the Joint, the American Jewish organization, had already a headquarter. They had already a list of names of people who perished, not correct yet completely, but they had plenty. And, unfortunately, that was the place where we find that neither one of our parents and not our brother remained from the war.

We were very torn. We didn't want to stay there. Maybe some cousin, maybe some uncle, maybe somebody remained. Let's go back to Hungary.

And we took the train from Prague. We went back to Budapest. And, lo and behold, we found we had two uncles who remained. One of them was in the Swedish house of Raoul Wallenberg who gave them papers. And two of them were in the Jewish ghetto.

And, in a miraculous way, they remained with their whole family, but they didn't have place for us because, after the war, everybody was living together. There was a shortage of apartments or maybe shortage of good will too. That, I don't want to go into it. It's a painful kind of thing.

We were put into an orphanage home. And our education began right away. It's amazing how people who survived and

were right away active and organized schooling for children.

We both went to school. Although, my sister had to be in a sanatorium for a couple more months, but, once she was released from there-- you see the typhoid fever was so strong that it attacked her lungs. And she had to recuperate fully from the sickness. And we both had been in school.

And, in 1946, at the beginning of the year, they were talking about it that all the orphan children should go to Israel because the memories are much too heavy to be in Hungary. We can't return to our hometown. We have no parents. Maybe if we are in a new environment, maybe if we are in a new country, maybe it will be easier to forget. Psychologically, it will be an easier transition from the terrible experience that we went through.

I didn't want that so much to go yet because I wanted at least that one school year to end. I felt that so much was deprived from me from my education. However, they said that, even though that I didn't finish the year, since I was doing very good, they are going to give me credit for that year.

And, in 1946, about May, we went with the illegal boat to Israel, which was occupied at that time by the Britons. And, even though the Britons knew what we went through, they were not much of fans to admit us to Israel. We were a lot of orphans and a lot of broken people.

And we went on the deck of the boat, and the British boat came to greet us. And they wanted to send us to Cyprus. We begged them that, please, we are so broken, and we need to get out from here. And we need to be in the country.

After an hour-long discussion, they admitted us to Israel. We were put again in a camp for three weeks. But then some teachers from the Jewish agency, they came, and they released first the young children.

And I arrived in 1946 in June to Jerusalem, and I was put up in an orphanage home, and I went to school. So most of my education is really from Israel. I have my BA from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. And I became a certified teacher over there. And then I continued here in Lehigh University in Allentown.

And how did you get to the States?

To the States I came as an exchange teacher to New York, to Brooklyn, Flatbush, to Yeshiva of Flatbush. The principle visited. I was teaching already. I was newly married. And I was teaching in Israel when he visited me in that class. And he asked me if I would want to come for a little bit to America and teach here.

And I had my only sister Esther was married, and she lived in America. And I thought to myself, for sure, I want to go. This is my only family I have. And for two years is not so terrible. And the two years lasted for 38 years. And I'm very happy to be in this country.

So now I would like to tell I have been first in the ghetto, Di³sgy³Å³r. Then I was in the brick factory in Miskolc. We were taken to Auschwitz. I was in the Birkenau lager.

And the camp was named [? B3, ?] which was a camp of elimination. Everyday, they eliminated. It was called the vernichtungslager. It means that camp.

From there, luckily, in end of the summer, about beginning of September, I was taken to Bergen-Belsen, in December, from Bergen-Belsen to Rochlitz where we worked in a munition factory. We made little appliances for airplanes. From Rochlitz, we were taken to Rochlitz, Graslitz.

Graslitz, we were in a jail house. And our work consisted of piling stones from the top of the mountain down and up and down and then for six weeks about the Todesmarsch, the death march, and liberated in nearby to Libschitz, [PLACE NAME], Libschitz-- that's Sudeten Deutschland-- by the Russian army, living by a Catholic priest for a while, then in the hospital, and then in a little apartment in the city of [PLACE NAME]. And, from there, we returned to Hungary.

I can thank to my parents that I was able to hold out in the depth of the darkness and the most difficult days due to their upbringing and due to the special supervision of God who, even at the time when there is darkness in the world, he wanted people to remain, perhaps to tell the story what took place.

And I am very happy. I have a nice family. God was very good to me. I have four lovely children and 13 beautiful grandchildren who know what I went through, and they are really trying in each day and in each moment to sweeten my life.

And you married a rabbi.

And I married a rabbi who happened to be my teacher in Israel. And we got married in the Israel, and we had two children there and two in this country.

And your name when you were born was Naomi. And now you use a different name.

My name was-- you see, in those days, Jewish people gave a Jewish name. And they had to give also a name that was accepted by the country where you lived. So my Jewish name was Shaindel, which means pretty. And my Hungarian name was Naomi, spelled in Hungarian N-A-O-M-I, Naomi.

When I arrived to Israel, the people, they thought that I am not Jewish. I was blond, very fair face. And they asked me, what is your name? So I said to them Naomi because, in my papers, it is the official name. They said, oh, this is not a Jewish girl.

And I said, what do you mean? I have a Jewish name. My name is Shaindel. Oh, Shaindel, that means pretty. Why should you have that name? That name in Hebrew is Jaffa. Jaffa means pretty. In Yiddish, Shaindel means pretty.

So they said, from now on, your name is Jaffa. And, from then on really, in all my papers is both of my names, Jaffa Naomi. The only name that I do not carry anymore is what had been given to me in the Jewish language, Shaindel, by my parents, which one is translated into Hebrew. And that's why it's the different of the name.

I also forgot to ask your father's name.

My father's name was Philippe Donath.

And your mother's name?

And my mother's name was Olga Donath born Shick. My grandfather, Rabbi Shick, was a very great rabbi who established a very special kind of high school, one of its kind in Hungary, that people not only learned Bible, but they learned-- it must like a vocal school. They also learned some kind of trade, either being a tailor or being a shoemaker or carpenter.

My grandfather believed that a person should have some kind of a trade and not depend on it that, from somewhere, he is going to have an income. And I am very proud of him because I think that that's how we should be in life, combining the two. It's one thing not enough. You have to have both.

And my brother's name was Joseph Donath who perished in the Holocaust. And my sister Esther Judith, Judit in Hungarian, Judit, she's alive, and she lives in Montreal. And my name now is Munk because I am married to a rabbi, Yona Munk.

Well, your story has been very important. Thank you very much for giving your testimony.

And thank you for your time.

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Jaffa Munk. Thank you, Mrs. Munk.

My pleasure.