

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Tania Rozmaryn, conducted by Gail Schwartz on February 23, 1997 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is tape number 3, Side A.

So they kept on filling up that room. And we were standing there. And then, all of a sudden, there are a few sprinkles of water came down the shower heads. And we sort of, a little bit, washed ourselves. And another door opened. And they told us go out. And there were piles of shoes and piles of clothes. And they told us grab something to wear.

So all of these were women who were all naked? What was that like for you to see your mother like that?

It was, for the first time, it was so humiliating to see my mother and other women trying to the nakedness. And myself, even as a girl, my mother never saw me naked. Except when I was a little girl. When I became a teenager, I would always lock my door. And it was terrible.

But again, they dehumanized us. And we were just acting, just existing, and just doing what we were told. And that was the most horrible thing. And this was their aim at the final solution, first to dehumanize, and then to kill.

And they told us, here are piles of clothes and shoes, grab. And it was so pathetic. Like, a big woman would grab a small dress. Or a tiny girl would grab a big coat. And then, of course, we would switch. And they sent us into a barrack.

And we had to lie down on the floor the first night, just like sardines. When one of-- my mother, my sister, and I, one fitted into the other with the knees. And holding each other, to keep each other where-- the safety that we felt by being together. If you had to get up to go out, you were stepping on arms and legs.

And in the morning, they would call Zahlappell. Everybody had to go out for roll call. We got up. And we would line up, five in a row. And my mother, usually, what she did from the first day, she would rake up with her hands, a pile of dirt and put me on top of it. So that my head should look even with all the other people in the row. And I would stand on this pile. And my head was as tall as everybody else's.

And then we would just sit there in the barracks all day. They would give us a little watery coffee. And they would only take us out when they were punishing people or when they were hanging people. Once, I did not see it, but the people that were with us in the barracks told us, because they were so--

Yeah, then we found out that the place where we went was not a shower room. It was actually the crematorium. But what happened was that there were so many people from the East and from the South being brought in to Stutthof that they couldn't fit in to gas everybody and to burn everybody in the crematorium. So they gave a few sprinkles of water and took us into barracks, thinking that in a while, in a few weeks or so, they will have us, they'll have time to kill us and to burn us.

So some people in my barrack told us, because they were so overwhelmed with many Jews to kill, what they did, they would line up people. They would first line up a row of wooden logs, and then a row of people, and make the people walk and lie down on the logs, and then another row of logs, and then another row of people, and sprinkle with gasoline, and burn them alive.

With us, we were sitting there, and we were waiting, essentially, until-- but we didn't know that, until they will loosen up in the crematorium. And it will come our turn.

Were there other people there that you knew? Or was it just your mother and your sister?

My mother and my sister. We didn't know many people, because they were all from the Kovno ghetto, and then they were from the other, from Kovno, from Shavli, --eh-- Zosle, but we didn't we didn't know them.

Did people talk to each other?

No, people were walking around like zombies. Go out, go out, come back, come back. I was-- again, I was sitting there, one evening, and I was singing. I was singing. And in every barrack, in the back of the barrack, was a room where the Kapo, the Kapo that took care of that barracks, they had a bed. And that's where she lived.

And I didn't know that. I was sitting. And I'm singing. All of a sudden, the door opens up. And the Kapo woman, she comes in, she goes, who was singing here? And I didn't want anybody to take the blame. I knew I was going to be punished. And I stand up. I said, I was singing.

"Come with me." I went with her. She takes me into her room in the back of the barracks. And I she opens, she opens the cupboard, takes out a big chunk of bread and a big chunk of margarine, slaps it on the bread. She says, "go, share it with your mother." I went back. And again, my mother looked at me as if I came from the other world.

What had you been singing?

I was-- I don't think I was singing the same song that I sang before. I was singing, I think, a curse song that they-- but she didn't understand what I was singing. That they will be defeated. And they will die. And we'll survive and we'll still be liberated, like in the olden times when Jews were in desperation and in danger and liberated.

But it was very sad tune. But how was it? I don't even remember. I remember [VOCALIZING]. Something like this.

Was this a song you had made up? Or was it a--

I made that song up too. But that was a song that it was in anger. The other one was more philosophical. It was in the beginning that we came from home. And this was very, very anger.

When you were singing in the barracks, were other women listening to you? They were all listening. I remember it the song was going that you should all go to hell, I will bury you nicely. But you are calling us, Mach us shnell, Mach us shnell, Appell, but you are calling us, in meantime, to roll call. But eventually, we will survive, something.

Can you sing that part of it?

[SINGING IN YIDDISH]

And then there was another song we used to sing about, at night, it was one night. I was sitting in my bunk. And that was way before and looking out outside, looking at the moon. And saying and thinking that you are teasing me. You are so beautiful. And I am here all locked up. It was really, and again, hoping that would it be, would the day come that I'll be able to look at you and enjoy you and walk in the light of the moon?

So here we were in Stutthof everyday, they say Appell, my mother raking up. One day, they came and they told us that they need 5,000 women to go to a labor camp to dig trenches for the army, because we knew that the Russians were advancing. Do you want to ask me something or you want me to go on?

The Russians were advancing, they said 5,000 women to labor camp. And they told us to line up, five in a row, in front of the gate. And at the gate, they will check who goes and who doesn't. At the gate, when we got closer, we saw there was the head of the camp, with a doberman, club in his hand, a gun in his belt, and some of the Kapos surrounding him with their guns and their belts.

And as people were passing the gate, he was pulling out children and old people. This is where they pulled out my grandfather's wife with her little girl. And they were pulling these people out and throwing them in a pile. And immediately, there were wagons and taking them, and we knew already, up there to the crematorium.

How did you know what the crematorium was?

Because when we were there, people that where there before, they told us, you see, this is what they are doing. This is

what they'll take us. This is where they'll burn us.

And here we are, we're lined up in five. It was my mother, my sister, myself, two friends of my mother's, Rita and Basia [? Shahor. ?] And the five of us are going. And I'm the youngest. And here again, now, this is something that I talked about it. I taught about it. I wrote about it. I can't explain it.

Because the only thing is that if you believe in God and in an angel, this is what happened. Because there was no way that somebody could beg. And you are familiar with the stories, that somebody could beg for his life and be effective. There was no way. They would-- somebody would start talking or begging, they threw, they send the doberman, or either shoot the person, or send the doberman, ripped up to pieces.

And I was very shy, very timid, very insecure little girl. And here we are, crossing the gate. And he grabs me out of the five. And he throws me on the pile with the children and the women, the old women and the young children. And here is the moment that I, well, I have to believe it was the hand of an angel or of God.

I got up. And I walk over, straight to the head of the camp, the Lagerfuhrer, and I look at him. I was little. He was tall, red hair, freckles on his face, gray, watery eyes. And I look at him up. And I said in German, I said, "I am not a little girl. I am a teenager. I am very strong. And I worked already before. And I can work. And there is my mother and my sister."

I didn't know what would happen to me. It's just that something, somebody took me and brought me in front of him. And I looked at his eyes up, and I see a flicker there. At that moment, he grabbed me by my neck, pushed me through the gate, yelling [SPEAKING GERMAN], OK, little girl, run to your mother.

When I came on the other side of the gate, my mother, everybody, my friends, they all grabbed me and hugged me and kissed me, literally, that I came from the dead. We marched. And then they took us with trucks to Poland, to a place called [? Dyrbek. ?] In [? Dyrbek, ?] they had barracks prepared for us. But not like for human beings, barracks like for horses. They were circular. And they were divided by poles, where every triangle was placed another to stand. And in the center, there was an iron stove.

And they put-- there was straw on the floor. And they put us there. And, oh, no, no, no, first, we were. We went to [? Malchin, ?] but no, this was in the second labor camp. They had pitched tents for us. And in every tent, there were 10 women, 5 on each side.

And every morning, we got up. And they took us to dig trenches, not for soldiers, but cylindrical trenches. And then they would camouflage it. And they were along the line from south to north, hoping that when the Russian tanks would come, they would plunge into those trenches. It was very hard work, because we had to work with picks and with shovels. And to dig those cylindrical trenches, I think, they started from five feet all the way down to, I would say, one foot at the bottom.

Again, where did you get the strength?

I don't know. I really don't know where the strength come. And nobody died of fatigue. There were many women that died there. It was a epidemic of, not typhus, at the time, but

Diphtheria?

Diphtheria, right, that many women died of diphtheria.

Now, where is this that we're talking about it? It was a name called [? Dyrbek ?] in Poland.

Near where?

It was not far from Poznania, which is Poznan. And we worked there. In the beginning, it was OK. And we worked the

trenches, and every day. And then it was, again, the latrine, it was like a board. And it was a hole. And anybody who needed, would go. And they would watch you. If you're sitting a little too long, they would come and clobber you. It would all open.

And of course, there was no food. What kind of food did we have? During the morning, they gave us a brown bowl, like you have in the Holocaust Museum. And I looked at those bowls. I went with friends.

I was telling them what we did with it. In the morning, they would give us a little coffee, or whatever it was. And again, a bread that we had to divide, a slice of bread. And then when we came back at night, again, they would cook some kind of a meal. Sometimes, they would throw in a piece of horse meat. And if you were lucky enough to find a little chunk of horse meat in your soup, you really felt that you'll live forever.

How did you keep yourself clean?

OK, here we go. Once in a while, they brought water. And we would go with the same bowl that we had our coffee and soup, they would give us water in the bowl. And we would wash our bodies in it. And we finished washing our bodies, we would wash up our panties in it. And then the next morning, we would have coffee in it again and have our coffee without thinking twice.

At home, I remember my mother, let's say, she would make hot chocolate. And my sister would take a sip from my cup, I would not touch that cup again or the glass. She touched it with her mouth. And here I was washing my panties in a bowl that I was later eating from and drinking my coffee. And then it--

How many changes of clothing did you have?

Nothing, whatever we had on. That's what we wore. That was it. And at that time, they gave me-- I had grabbed a pair of leather shoes when we came out of the gas chamber. But at that point, the shoes were already torn completely. So they gave me a pair of wooden clogs. And I just couldn't walk in them. And I would sprain my ankle, but I would still walk on.

Then, winter was approaching. And they took us to another place, called [? Malchin. ?] In [? Malchin, ?] they had those plywood barracks for us that was meant for horses. And they are triangles. But the divider was, let's say, high as your head, because so the horses wouldn't. But all the way on the bottom, it was like one circular thing. And we got down, my mother, my sister on the straw.

And this is-- and it started to get colder and colder. And we would get up in the morning. And then my mother would stuff in some straw in the coat that I was wearing, in the front and in the back, and with a little-- with a string tie it at the waist line, so that it would keep us warm.

And then my mother, when it was really cold, what my mother did for us, she would take us outside, when it was snow and make us strip. And with snow, she would rub our bodies, our hands, arms, and feet for circulation. And after that, when we got dressed, we felt so warm. We felt so good.

And we started working again on the trenches there. And it was already very cold. It was November, December '44. The earth was frozen. And we kept on working until January the 18th, 1945.

Did you get any kind of frostbite?

No, no, miraculously we didn't. Because this is what my mother used to do always, rub our hands, our fingers, we didn't even have gloves, even nothing. Then January the 18th, it was already snowing. And it was winter. And it was below zero. And they told us to line up. And they gave everyone a loaf of bread. And they said that we're going to march north, back to Stutthof.

And then we found out, we heard already, the Russian katyushas shooting. And so we knew already that the Russians

are coming close. And they wanted us back to Stutthof. What we didn't know was that on the road, as we were walking, it was snowing. And then some days, we've marched for over a week. Some days, it was not snowing anymore. The sun was shining. And the snow was sparkling.

But it was so frosty. And at that time, I always, every day, all day, I was thinking in those days when I would go cross-country skiing and come home with my breath would freeze my scarf, coming home to a warm meal, and the nights when my father would come with the horses and the sleighs. And we would go around, sleighing around the area. And here I was, walking, marching.

And what happened was that if somebody stayed behind, they would immediately shoot them. And as we were marching, on both sides of the road, it was full of snow. But the snow wasn't white. There were bodies. And there was blood, human blood, on both sides of the road.

And we were walking on the sides of the road, because in the middle of the road, the Germans, the civilians and the military, were retreating. So they were in the middle of the road. And we were walking in the snow on both sides. And we saw other groups marching, in front of us, ahead of us, everybody going north. And they pushed us all to go towards Stutthof, to go back to the concentration camp.

Nights, they would put us up. Once, they put us up in a school. Once, they put us up in a barn. In the barn, it was so cold. When we slept in the barn, in the morning, we would get up. And people would be frozen there. And they would pull out frozen bodies from the barn.

Once, I remember, we slept over in a barn. And we were so hungry. And saw that we were so near a village. I didn't tell my mother or my sister. We were so hungry. I ran out of camp into a farmer's house. And I told them that I am very, very hungry, if they could give me something.

And they cut off two large slices of bread and put some fat on it. And I stuck it in the bosom of my coat. And I ran out of the house to run back to the camp. And all of a sudden, I saw a German soldier spotting a girl like me at another house, shooting her down dead in the snow. I waited a while. And I said, well, he'll probably kill me. But somehow, I managed to crawl back into camp and to share the bread with my mother and my sister. One night, we were very lucky.

What was your mother's response to the fact you took such a chance?

Well, she was very angry with me. And she made me and my sister eat most of the bread. She wouldn't touch it. And most of the time, when we got our portions of bread, she would cut off half of it and split it between my sister and me. Never ever eating her portion of bread that she had gotten.

How was her health?

Oh, she was healthy. She was strong. You could see. She is now 95. And physically, she is beautiful. No arthritis, no diabetes, she was never, not a day in the hospital, as long as I know her. But Alzheimer's disease caught up with her.

So the night that they took us to a-- oh, it was a stable. It wasn't a stable. It was a barn for cows. And it was warm because of the cows. And at night, we huddled up to the cows. And in the morning, we took some milk. Then, when they came, and [MUMBLING] nobody, I don't think, they caught anybody. And everybody was so happy. Nobody froze to death that night.

And again, every night, my mother would, in the morning, or at night, she would wake us up, go outside, and she would rub our limbs with snow to improve the circulation. And we were so hungry. And as we walked, I remember, once, I looked up at the hill. And I saw a house there, a farmer, and the wife. And there was smoke coming out of the chimney.

And the woman ran out of the house in short sleeves. I said, oh my God, she's not cold? It's below zero. It must be so warm inside that she ran out to get to throw out the refuse. And I visualized myself, what I would give to be in a little house like this with the fire going, and warm, and something to eat. Why? Why is it happening to us?

And one day, as we walked past by villages, we would rummage through the garbage. And once, my mother found a marrow bone. And my sister was the weakest. And she gave it to my sister to suck on the marrow bone. And when she was through with it, she gave it to me. And then she didn't throw it away. She held it, maybe she could still scrape off something from the bone with her teeth the following day.

And then one day, I remember, we found in the trash, we found-- it looked like lungs. I don't know what it was from, an animal. And we were sucking on it. It was raw. And it was red. And we were sucking on it. We were so hungry. And we kept on marching. And we saw people die on both sides of the road.

But my mother was pushing us ahead. We should never be at the end of-- then, I saw one girl. Her mother was so weak. And she put the string through the bowl, through the brown bowl that we would drink our coffee or eat. And she put the mother on the bowl. And with the string, she was pulling her. And the mother was sitting on that bowl. And she pulled her over the snow. I never know what happened to it.

Then, one other peculiar thing happened to us, which I can't explain again. We were walking up a hill, in a forest, near the river of Visla. And it was so cold, maybe it was the fifth or sixth day. And my sister was always, she used to get hysterical. And after the war, you can imagine that, not only her, but even I, with all my being strong, I suffered very severe post-- post-traumatic stress syndrome.

And that, and there were anxiety attacks that I had. But my sister was worse. But I was strong, all the time, when we were marching. And the one day, we were marching. And my sister rested against a tree. And she says, I'm not going anymore. Let them kill me, because everybody who was left behind was shot to death. She said, no, let them kill me. I'm not going.

And everybody's already in front. And here, the last, the Germans that were coming from behind to see who is left to kill. And we are begging. She says, you go. You go. I'm not going. Let them kill me. And my mother I said, no, we are not going. We will stay with you, whatever will happen.

And the last German that came from the rear, he came over, and he said, what's going on here? And my sister said, well, I don't care. I can't go on anymore. She was very pretty, dark hair, beautiful eyes. I can't go on anymore. Kill me like you kill everybody else. I can't. That's enough.

He looked at her, he says, oh no, you want to die? No way. He took out, from his pocket, a piece of cake and an apple. And he gave it to her. And he gave her a smack with the butt of the rifle. And he said, you better go. I'm not going to kill you. And we went on.

And we went. And then, we came closer to a place where we saw there was a lot of blood. It was off the road. And they took us there. We didn't know where it was. And they took us in there to a big, big barn. And people were there and distraught. And they were dying.

And then we realized, every morning, there was lots of lice there. And every morning, people would die. And they had a special group of people to pull out the cadavers there. And there was a big, open pit. And every day they would add to the dead people.

My mother took one look. And there were around 600 or 800 people. And she said, oh no, we were still healthy. And my mother was exposed, when she was young, during World War 1 to typhus. And my sister had typhus in Å»eÅ¼mor But I didn't. And the typhus, people were dying of typhus.

And my mother-- so the lice were, of course, the lice were spreading the typhus. And my mother looked around, she said, no, no we cannot. Let's see if there is any other place here we could lay down our heads. And there was a little barrack there. And in the barrack, this must have been army barracks. And that barrack there was like a army washroom.

They had long troughs. And they had long pipes overhead with faucets. So we assumed that this is probably where the

army would go in to wash themselves. My mother, in the trough, there was no water. Anyway, she said the troughs was empty. She said this is where we're going to sleep. We're not going to sleep with the straw, and the lice, and the typhus.

So we were there. And every day, they took out dead people. And they started sending us to work, those that were healthy, to dig trenches for soldiers at this point. We went every day. And we came back. And every day, the pit was getting fuller. They would put some disinfectant and keep the pit open for people for the next morning.

And then, one of my friends, my mother's friends, the one that was with the five, she was a nurse. Somehow, there was a Krankenstube It was like a hospital. And they had one room there for the nurses. And she, somehow, she got in there. And she took all of us in there. And we had-- it was two-tier beds. And this is-- we used to go to work. But when we came back, we came to that place to sleep. And it was nice. The floor was, there were boards on the floor, and it was clean.

And one day, as we were digging the ditches, the trenches, I felt feverish. And I came home, back to the place. And I was totally unconscious. And I didn't know what happened to me.

What is the name of the location that you're at?

Location was Prost. And the Russians called it the Toten Camp, the death camp. What happened was that everybody went to Stutthof. And Stutthof was overwhelmed. They didn't have enough room in the crematorium to burn the people. So the first thing they did, they had boats on the Baltic. So they filled up the boats with people. And they sank them.

And then they had no more boats for the rest of the people. So they told everybody to divert them to this place, to Prost. In Prost, they had a marker airport. They had airplanes made of cardboard. So the Allies should think that if they would bombard the place, so they would think that this is a real airport. And then maybe, nearby, a real airport would be saved. And they were, of course, Nazis in the place, the German military were there are all over.

And then I was unconscious. I didn't know, anymore, what happened to me. And then I woke up. At one point, I woke up. And my mother and my sister were dragging me. And I couldn't catch my breath. And then my mother covered me. And I saw boards flying all over the place. And I lost consciousness again.

Until one day, I opened my eyes. And I saw I was in a bed, with a feather bed, white, linen, pillows, pillow cases. I touched my hair, my head, my hair was shaved off. I started to scream. And as I was screaming, my mother and my sister came in. And they started kissing, and hugging me, and telling me that we were liberated on March 23, 1945 by the Russians.

And then they told me what had happened, what had transpired. That I became stricken with typhus, and in typhus, you have a crisis. You either make it, or you don't. And this is how many people died. And then, my sister and the friends were telling me that my mother would sneak out from the camp, from this Prost. And she would go to the roads, where the German army, they would rest overnight. And they had their kitchens. And they had the ambulances.

She would go. She would cover herself up. And she would beg for something to eat or aspirin, something. And then she would sneak in back to the camp and try to save me. And then what happened, when the Germans saw that the Russians are advancing, they decided they put dynamite in the camp and around the camp to blow up, not to leave any remnants, not to leave traces of that death camp.

There was one Hungarian woman, a girl, that worked for the head of the Nazis. And when she saw what happened, she went to him, she says, look, the war is over. The Russians are advancing. What will you gain by killing all these people? Do one good gesture. She said, 10 minutes before you're going to dynamite the place, open the gates. And let the people who can still walk, let them save themselves.

So he said, OK. 10 minutes before, she went in. And they announced, whoever can run, in 10 minutes they're going to explode the place, to dynamite. And this is when my mother and my sister grabbed me. And they dragged me. And this is when the explosion occurred that I woke up. And then I went back into unconsciousness.

Not many were saved, because most of the people were sick, emaciated, or stricken with typhus. I think from the 800 people that were there, maybe around 30 saved themselves. And then, when the Russians came, they took everybody to a village. And they kicked out the peasants there. And they gave us to live in those houses, when they woke up, and I saw that we are liberated, and I survived the typhus.

This is tape 3, side B. And I just wanted to ask you one small question before we continued. I think that you had said that when you were ill, your mother went to get some supplies for you and that you crossed the road to the Russian Army. Did you want to collect that?

No, no it was a mistake. It was not the Russian army. These were the Germans that were retreating back to Germany from the Russian frontlines.

OK, now, you're on this wonderful bed with the wonderful pillows and so forth.

Yes, and I tried to get off the bed. And I couldn't. I must have weighed 40 pounds. My legs were spindly. My arms were thin. And I just couldn't move. But there was enough food in that place and that my mother and my sister nourished me. And we stayed there, probably, for another six weeks.

After that, the Russians came. And they took us with trucks to a Polish city called ToruÅ, ToruÅ. It's in central Poland. But of course, at that point, it was under the Russian jurisdiction and occupation. And they took us to a DP camp. And they placed us there in primitive housing. And they told us this is a transit camp. They are going to take us back home, back to Smorgonie.

And when we heard that, we were devastated, because we knew that there was nobody there, all the relatives. And there is nothing left. And there are gentiles living in our houses. And my father was dead and all the relatives were killed. And we didn't want to go there. But they had barbed wire surrounded. And they wouldn't let us out.

There was once one positive thing, though, what happened there, that nobody died after the liberation, because they didn't have much food for us. So they gave us bread. They had potatoes for us. And little by little, we started eating normal food, whereas, under occupation, under the British or the United States Army, which they weren't aware at that time, they came, they liberated the people from the concentration camps in the Bergen-Belsen, and others, in Munich.

And they gave them immediately food and chocolate. And they all started grabbing and eating. And they died. Like my grandfather, Zeyde [? Beryl, ?] he survived the war. The people told us that he survived the war acting as a shoemaker. And he was liberated. And after liberation, he started eating.

He was liberated. He was in Dachau. He was liberated. People came and told us, we know your grandfather. He was liberated, look for him. And my mother went to Munich to look for him. And people told us that he started eating after the liberation. And he died there. But his name was [? Danishevski. ?] So they assumed that he was Polish. And they buried him in a Polish cemetery.

So later on, a year later, my mother went. She found the rabbi in Munich. She went to the Polish cemetery. She dug him up. He was in a Polish cemetery with a cross over his grave. And she took him and buried him in the Jewish cemetery in Munich.

So here we were. And the Russians had absolutely no excuses for us. We had to go to work. Here I was, two months after typhus, and we had to go. First, they took us to a lumber yard, where they were cutting boards. And I had to stand there all day and sawed those boards. And I was so weak, I would fall. And I couldn't catch my breath. And I was sure that I would die.

And then, at other times, they sent us to a flour mill. And I had to drag those sacks of flours. Again, I was sure that I wouldn't make it. But somehow, I recuperated. And I survived.



And then, at that time, people who survived would go from one DP camp to another to see, to check if there were relatives, if anybody survived. One day, a couple of Polish soldiers came into the DP camp. And they were Jewish in Polish uniforms. And they said they were in the Polish army. And they were together with the Russians helping liberate Poland. And that's why they were in the Polish army.

And they were looking for relatives, if anybody heard, this one that one. And we didn't know. Then they said, what are you doing here? And we said, well, the Russians liberated us. And now, they want to send us back to Smorgonie So he said, what, are you crazy? Why would you let them take you back to Smorgonie. Why don't you come to Poland, to Lodz, or to Warsaw? Because they are not under the Russian jurisdiction. And they are representatives from the HIAS and from the American Joint Distribution Committee.

And they help refugees there. And my mother said, how are we going to get out from here, barbed wire? They said, we'll help you. So my mother said to us, girls, what are we going to do? And my sister said, let's go. And I said, no, I don't think we should go. I want to go. We don't have-- our father is dead. We don't have any relatives. We don't have money. We don't have anything.

How are we going to live? I want to go back to Russia. I want to get an education. And in Russia, education is free. I want to go back to Russia. And then, my mother and my sister started, they said, wow-- what are you all alone-- no, we're all going. And then we made up a time. The soldiers came. They cut the barbed wire. It was in the fall. It must have been October or November. It was freezing rain.

So how long were you in this DP camp?

In this DP camp, we were there from-- we were liberated in March. And then we were two months in Prost. And then, March, April, May, and maybe, in June, we were in that from June until October or November, we were in the DP camp, in the Russian transit camp. They came. And it was a cold night, freezing rain. They cut the barbed wire. And they took us to the train station.

And there were hundreds and hundreds of people waiting for a train, because it was right after the war, trains were irregular. And when they came, people were all over. You couldn't get in. So a train, we waited for hours, and a train finally came. And people were hanging from the steps, holding onto the banisters. How, where are going to go?

He said, never mind, he says, hop up. We'll help you get on top of the roof off the wagon. We got on top of that freight-- no it wasn't the freight, it was passenger train. And we got on top of the roof. And the roof was slanted. But there were several little chimneys for ventilation, because it was a passenger train. And it was snowing. And it was raining. And we had no choice. This was you, your mother, and your sister?

My mother and my sister. And we lied down flat on our stomach. And we held on to those chimneys for dear life, all through the night, with snow and rain falling on us. And in the morning, we came to Lodz. We came to Lodz. And there was already many Jews. And there was a place for the refugees to come, a big place to sleep over. And they were feeding the people.

And my mother looked around, and she saw there were already organizations organizing from religious and non-religious organizations. And she looked around. And they were like sort of, they initiated like kibbutzim, communal living and preparing the people, and preparing them for going to Israel and making Aliyah.

And my mother looked around, and she said, well, I'm not going-- she found a religious kibbutz. She said, I'm not going to let you go in a non-religious kibbutz, because people at this point are very demoralized. And there was a lot of-- many girls were pregnant and all these. She said, you're not going there, took us to a religious kibbutz. And they took us in.

And my mother went to work in the kitchen where all the refugees that came back from Russia and all over. And here is an interesting story. She was in the kitchen cooking, and baking, and serving the people wholeheartedly. And then I remember we didn't have food in the kibbutz. So she would come and bring us food, but not enough to share with the

others. So she made us lie in bed and cover ourselves with a blanket and eat underneath the blanket, because there wasn't enough to share with everybody else.

So she was there. And one day, people were coming and going. And then she sees a young man sitting there and crying. And she gave him a bowl of potatoes, of soup, whatever it was, she said, eat young man, eat. He said, I can't eat, this is Lodz, this was my hometown. My parents, my sisters, my brother, all my relatives lived here. He said, now I come back from Russia, he was in Russia during the war, there is nobody here. How can I eat? And he was crying.

And my mother sat down next to him. And she was talking to him, and she was telling him, look, we all lost. And we all-- Thank God we survived. And we have to start a new life. And she comforted him. And he ate. And here I, to make a long story short, two years later, he was a member of our kibbutz. And he married my older sister. And they live in Israel now. As a matter of fact, next week, they celebrate his 80th birthday.

And so my mother would come to the kibbutz. And we really had no food. Absolutely, what we had was bread, and we had oil, and we had onions. And we would saute the onions with the oil and spread it on the bread. And this is what we ate. And everybody in the kibbutz had to go to work, to have an income.

So they call this a kibbutz, even at Lodz? What is your brother-in-law's name?

Moshe [? Yamnick. ?] And so we had to go to work. And everybody had to do something in order to sustain the kibbutz. Because at that time, yet, we didn't get any support from the American charity groups.

When you say kibbutz, were you also staying in the same area?

It was like an apartment, with several bedrooms. And they were two bedrooms for girls and two bedrooms for boys. And they put up bunk beds. And then we had like, let's say, the dining room. This is where we all ate. And we learned a lot, Jewish history, and Hebrew language, and Zionism, and Bible.

And this is where they started teaching us Hebrew, the beginners, and I answer. They said, oh, I had a poor vocabulary. But like I said, my diction, my accent was terrific. So every day, I graduated to a different group. And then I became a teacher.

What was that like for you to come back to studying?

It was just wonderful. I wanted to absorb, to absorb as much as possible for the years that I missed. Because I always, always wanted to, that's why I wanted to go back to Russia. And then, we had to go to work. And one day, on a Friday, somebody came, a Jewish family, they needed someone to clean up the house for Shabbat. And they sent me.

And I went to that house. And I cleaned the floors. And I wash the dishes. And I clean the toilet. And I was crying. I said, here I am liberated. If my father would see me doing this, but I have no choice, I have to do it.

And then I found out, they ask anybody in the kibbutz, from the girls, who wants to do the laundry would get a extra special treat. Extra bread, and she could buy herself a herring. And I volunteered to do the laundry, because I wanted to have an extra piece of bread and an extra piece of herring. And we were there in Lodz.

Was your mother staying with you in this little kibbutz area?

No, no my mother was away. She slept where she was, in that transit camp for the refugees. She slept there. And she was cooking there for the people and serving there. And then--

But you and your sister were in the kibbutz.

And then something happened. And at that time, after liberation, you really don't think that you could die, because if somebody died of their appendix, I said, that's impossible. I mean that person survived the concentration camp. How

could this person die? It's impossible. You felt invincible. You felt that they are going to live forever and nothing frightened you.

And then, we were in the kibbutz. And somebody came, and they told us that way up, near Gdansk, there was a Russian compound. And they took girls there. And they keep them as concubines in that village. And the girls are miserable, if anybody could do something for these girls, volunteers.

I volunteer. I go. And another boy, and that boy's sister lived near Gdansk. So we knew that we will get there. And we can stay overnight with her. And then we could take a train to get to the village.

I went there with this boy. We met his sister. We stayed overnight. The next day, we took the train. We went to the village. We walked, from the train to the village, must have been around 8 miles. We came to the village towards evening.

And we went into a farmer's house. And we told him we are hungry. And we told him that we heard that there are Russians in the compound. And they keep Jewish girls as slaves. Could you possibly-- could you steal yourselves, sneak in and have someone come here. We want to find out what's happening there.

She went, the farmer's wife, she gave us food. She gave us two rooms to sleep separately. And she went. And she brought one of the girls. And we asked her what is happening. She says they are about 20 girls kept by the Russians. And one was pregnant. She was the daughter of a rabbi. One was pregnant. This was the sister of the girl that came to talk to us. And she said we need to get out of here. It's impossible. They are going to take us with them to Russia. See what you can do for us.

We walked back to the train, like eight miles, we went back to the sister's house. And we stayed overnight. And then we took a train. It was a freight train and went back to Lodz. We came to Lodz. And we told him what happened. And we said we have to do something for them.

And we made a meeting. And we decided that we were going to make fake documents for the girls. And I was going alone to deliver the documents. And it was already winter. It was snow. It was freezing.

And at that time, I decided I will go by myself. It was a Thursday. And the boy that went with me the first time, there was some kind of a Zionist gathering taking place in Sosnowiec, not far from Lodz. And there were four volunteers, three boys and one girl.

And this boy that was with me, he said, he was going with them. And that was Thursday. And I went. And I made a big muff. And I sewed in all the documents. And I went.

And it was winter. It was snow drifts. It was terrible. But I'm going. And I took a freight train, again. I came to Gdansk. I found the house of his sister and her friend. His sister is now in Australia. The friend lives in Teaneck, New Jersey.

You are 17 and 1/2 years old.

I found the girls. I went to sleep. In the morning, I got up. And I went to the train. I took a train. And I went to the nearest village. And then I had to walk for eight miles. And I got there in the late afternoon.

And it was a blizzard. The snow was drifting. And I'm walking. And the snow is coming to my knees and to my hips. And I'm walking, and walking, and walking. And out of breath, and I stop. And I'm breathing. And I stop. I didn't think I would die, because nobody, after you're liberated, how can you die? You don't die, especially, you have to help somebody, right?

And all of a sudden, I saw the lights from the village from far. They were twinkling against white snow. And on the last leg, I made it with my last breath. And they came to that farmhouse. I slept. In the morning, I told the farmer's wife, again, to come and to ask one of the girls to come. She came. And I gave her the fake documents.

And she was in seventh heaven. And that day, I walked back to the station, the blizzard already stopped. And it was like a path that they went with a sleigh, so you could go. And I came back. Maybe, I left on Wednesday, because I came back on Friday to the kibbutz. And I saw that everybody was in mourning.

What happened was that these four people that were going on a bus, or a truck, they were going to the convention. They were stopped by Polish, they were called AK, were anti-semites. And they took them out to the forest. And they killed them, all four of them.

And that Friday, they were brought back right away to the kibbutz. When I walked into the kibbutz, in one of the bedrooms, they had their coffins there open. And I walked in. And one of them was the boy that was with me. And I looked, and I said, if I wasn't going back with the documents, I probably would have volunteered to go with them.

It was very tragic. And we were there for a few months. And then they told us that they have but people from the Bricha, this were Israelis, that they risked their life to take the people from Poland into Germany, and specifically, into the British or the American zone. And they told us to get ready, that one night we would be taken by the Bricha.

They came to take us, and first, we went by trucks. And then, we went into-- they took us on the border into a little house. And they gave each and every one of us a fictitious name. And told us that we were-- told us each and every one, where we were born.

And of course, they told us that we were born in West Germany. So they would, the Germans, if we come on the Russian side of Germany, the East Germany, because first, we had to get into East Germany, to, if they would catch us, to tell them that we are citizens, because we were born-- this one said in Munich, and this one said in Poking, wherever fake documents.

What was your name? And where were you born?

I was born in Frankfurt am Mein. And I don't know what my name was. And we started out. And we came to a little, as I said, on the border. And the border police were, of course, bought off. And then, in the middle of the night, we left that house. And we had to go across the Carpathian Mountains.

The snow was devastating and climbing. And there were so many people that they fell. And they said, after the concentration camp, I cannot go on anymore. And everybody held everybody else through the night. And in the morning, We got to East Germany.

When we came to East Germany, there were trucks. And they took us to Magdebourg first, and then to Halle. And then from Halle, they took us to Berlin. And in Berlin, we crossed the border to the American occupied zone. And from there, they took us to a small town near Munich called Poking. And this is-- they had already there, in one big barracks, they had already an existing group that was before us in Lodz, that they were in the kibbutz there. And they took us in there. And we joined the kibbutz there.

But the tragedy, the Jewish tragedy doesn't end there. Because when we came, those people went to Israel illegally. And they went to Israel. And they shipped them all to a kibbutz which is infamous, Kfar Etzion was named. And they were there. And then when the war broke out, the Arabs slaughtered them all. The children, some of their sons survived. And I have met some of them, the children of these people that were in our kibbutz.

When you got to the American zone, what did that mean to you?

Well, it finally meant that we are free, free to be Jews, free to be Zionists, free to learn, free to have courses, free to have meetings, free to have conferences. And hope that eventually, the Americans would help us get to Israel. We didn't even think of going to America, because each and every one, we said, we survived the Holocaust to go to America? Who would want to go to America? We want to go back to Israel. And we stayed in the kibbutz. And then--

Are you still with your mother and your sister?

My mother and my sister, we stayed in the kibbutz. And then, a cousin of mine, from Vilnius, arrived with his wife. And we found out that they are in a DP camp near Stuttgart, which was called Pocking which was called, it was near Stuttgart, and what was the name of it? It was between Stuttgart and Munich.

And he urged us, he said, what are you going to be in the kibbutz? Come stay with us. Just two of us, we survived, you survived, come with us. And we came to his place, to that DP camp. And they had, there, they had big-- they had plans there where the Germans were producing turbines for ships and for heavy industry.

And they had a little settlement where-- for the German workers. So when the Americans came, they kicked them out. And this settlement, it turned into a DP camp. So it was wonderful. It was houses, two-family houses. And everybody had an apartment there, where they lived. So we came. And our cousin got an apartment for us. And we were there.

And at that time, we really had very little food, only care packages that we got. And one night, Friday night, I remember, we were sitting in our room, lit candles, and we were singing Shabbat songs, my mother, my sister, and myself. And somebody knocked on the door. A neighbor came in. And he says, my name is [? Frierman. ?] And he says, I was a teacher in the Hebrew Tachkemoni in Krakow before the war.

This was a very prestigious Jewish-- it was like a yeshiva for boys. And he said, now, we are organizing-- we have organized here a school, because there are many Jews from the concentration camp, no little children survived. But they are Jews that come from Russia, and they have small children. So we have a little school.

He said, I heard you sing [? Smiris. ?] Who are you? Where do you come from? We told him. He said-- and my sister already had a job. She worked, already, there for the Jewish agency in that camp. It was the [? Forit ?] Seidlung, right, this DP camp was called the [? Forit ?] Seidlung, in Heidenheim. Right, the name of the place was Heidenheim. And the place was the [? Forit ?] Seidlung.

And he said, you speak Hebrew so well. He said, why don't you come and be a teacher? I said, what are you talking about? I have fourth grade I finished. I can't be a teacher. What will I teach?

He said, look, you'll teach-- the first grade, you'll teach them what you know. And then, of course, he said, look, if you will be a teacher by us, you'll get an extra care package. I said, OK, if you want me, I'm going. The next day, I went there. And I was installed as the Hebrew teacher. And I found so-- found it so fascinating.

I always wanted to be a teacher. Whenever I was a little girl, we were playing something, and everybody said, let's play house, let's play store, I said, no, let's play school. I'll be the teacher. And I started teaching in that school. And I also helped organize a youth group for Bnei Akiva for the orthodox organization. And then somebody came to me. And they said, we want you to organize a youth group on the British zone in Bergen-Belsen.

And if you will be there, you may be able to get a legal certificate for you and one for your mother, because the British promised us that they will give us 100,000 certificates for Jews to go into Israel legally after the war. So I said, well, I have to go. I went to Bergen-Belsen all by myself. I didn't know anybody there. But there was a kibbutz from Mizrachi.

So I went there. They set me up with another girl. But I didn't-- I kept started organizing a kibbutz. And I didn't work with them. They were cleaning and doing there. And I didn't feel free to eat with them. So here I was starving again. And every Shabbat, the kids would come. And so I organized a group.

And then, somebody heard that I have organized a group. And they came to me, they said, we have a school here. Would you like, you speak Hebrew, would you like-- I tell the same thing. I said, the fourth grade. But I don't-- I was teaching already, one year, first grade. If you want me, I'll come. And there, it was a sophisticated school. They had already a high school there. And the principal was the a real-- He was a principal in a school before the war.

When did you get to Bergen-Belsen?

Bergen-Belsen was in the 1957.

'47?

'47, right, in 1947. Thanks for that correction. In '47, and I was there. And then, well, I was there. And I was teaching. And I was-- and then I met some girls. And they worked in a kitchen. They had a nice apartment. And they used to invite me for Shabbat.

So I was already, I was teaching in the school. And I even made a play. And the principal there, the high school was Dr. Lubliner. And he saw that they wanted to learn. I wanted to know. He took me under his wing. And he started teaching me. He was teaching me. And I was absorbing. Every book he gave me, I would absorb.

And then we were there. And then they said, well, soon, soon, you'll get certificates. And my mother came in 1947. And she was with me. And my sister, my sister, no, my sister didn't come. My sister was married in '47, because that's where she met her husband. And her husband had a brother that was in Israel from before the war. And he came to visit them. And then he put my sister on his passport, that he said the authorities that he found a minor daughter. And he took her to Israel legally. And then it took another year for my brother-in-law to get into Israel illegally.

And here I was with my mother in Bergen-Belsen. And we were waiting. And then it was already '48. And then it was the exodus. It was so tragic. And then, it came '48. And we were already happy that we were going, now, after the war, we're going to go to Israel.

And at that time, as I was going to these two girls that I met, one of them was getting married. And they fixed me up with somebody which I didn't like. I didn't like that person. And I came home, and the next Saturday, they made him sit with me on the bus or whatever. My mother took me. And my mother was my God. I would never contradict her.

And we came. And my mother said to me, she said, you met someone, his name is Mandel Rozmaryn. You're going to marry him. And I said, no, I don't know him. And I don't want him. And he's not my type. And I want to study. And I want-- and she said, look, he's the only family that survived Auschwitz, the father, and the mother, three sisters, and a brother.

And they were already in Bergen-Belsen. They started doing business. And they were ready-- she said, look, we don't have anybody. And they have already business. And they have a home. And they have money. You'll be in a family. I said, no, I don't want him. She took me by the hand, Saturday afternoon. And she says, you are going to meet him. And if not, she said-- and she took me as we walked.

And I said, no, I don't want to marry. She said, if you won't marry him. I'll go home and commit suicide. And I was frightened. Later on I learned that she whenever she wanted something for me, she threatened. And lo and behold, we got engaged. And I said, but I want to go to Israel. He says, we all want to go to Israel. But we decided to go to America first.

And in 1949, January 4, I married this man. Then, I had, right away, a Son. And in 1950, we came to the United States without money, without a language, without relatives, without anybody. The HIAS took us in for a few weeks. My son was eight months old.

I went out, I didn't know what to do. I got some cornflakes, which I started boiling for him. And then they gave us an apartment in Crown Heights on Lincoln Place. And they said for a few months, we'll pay rent. And you have to find a place to work and pay your own rent. And here we were, didn't speak a word of English. I didn't-- no many, no relatives.

My husband got a job, somebody worked in a slaughterhouse as a shochet. So they took him in to be a supervisor there of the kosher meat, but paid very, very little. And I had to go to work, what should I do? So somebody was there, somebody that we knew that worked in a shop sewing patches for coats. He said, why don't you come? I'll teach you how to sew. And you'll still work in the shop.

I went there. And he taught me how to sew. And I sat there. I sewed patches. And I made \$35 a week. And my son was already over a year old. And I would leave him alone. And then my mother-in-law would come and pick him up. And he would stay with her.

And it was so miserable. We had very little food. And the apartment was boiling. I remember the first time we weren't used to. And there was no balconies there. I laid in the bath with cold water all night. I thought I would-- we didn't even have money to buy a fan. And they worked in the shop for several years, until '57.

And I was depressed. And I was suffering from post-traumatic stress syndromes. I was suffering from anxieties. But I didn't know what it was. All of a sudden, I felt I was dying, and sweats, and this, and dizziness. And I was afraid to walk out in the street.

But I had to go on to shop and to cook for my son. And in '54, I gave birth to my other son, which I didn't plan on. But he came. Of course, in those days, you didn't make abortions. And I was crying. And I said, if my father would see me now, why did I survive the concentration camp?

What am I? What is it? What am I here for? And I said, no way, I have to do something with my life. That's what I survived. I went to night school. I started learning English until '57, I knew already. And then, I said to my husband, and my mother had come already also from Germany. And she had remarried a cousin of my husband. Her name is [? Cilla ?] [? Altman. ?] And they had come also. I went through until they came in '56.

And I said to my husband and to my mother, I said, my mother was helping me cooking, and cleaning, and doing everything. I said, I have to do something with my life. For three years, I was teaching. I want to become a teacher. They said, who is going to take you? I said, we'll see, maybe, maybe.

I took a deep breath and they went to Yeshiva University Teacher's Institute. And I made an appointment with the principal, Rabbi [? Feigelson ?] And I come in. And I said, I want to become a teacher. And he says to me, you want to become a teacher, do you have a high school diploma? I said, no. Do you have a grade school diploma? I said, no.

He said, so what do you want here? I said, look, I have two small children. And I work very hard. Give me a chance. If you will see that I am not doing, then I will bow out. Please give me a chance. He said, you are the first one. But I will give you a chance.

Rabbi [? Feigelson ?] gave me a chance. And I started going three nights a week by subway from Crown Heights to Lexington and 34th Street to Teacher's Institute for Women. And I said day and night I didn't know how to read the Bible. I didn't know how to read commentaries. But I know how to read Yiddish. So I bought, I still have, a whole set of Bibles with the Yiddish translation, with Russia Yiddish translation. And I studied day and night.

To make a long story short, I graduated summa cum laude after three years. But when I came in, all the girls came straight from high school. And where am I? What am I doing here? I graduated. And then he told me that I have to-- we have to go to get nine credits in psychology in education in a regular university, otherwise, we wouldn't get our teacher's license.

So at that time, in 1960, we moved to Queens. And I went to Queens College. And I got my bachelor's degree in education. And in 1960, I got my first job as a teacher.