

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Liselotte Epstein Ivry, conducted by Gail Schwartz on November 29, 2012 in Washington, D.C. This interview is being conducted over the phone. What is your full name?

My full name?

Yes, your full name.

Liselotte Epstein Ivry.

And when were you born? And where were you born?

I was born in a little village called, in Czech, [CZECH], and in German, Liechtenstein, in Bohemia, Czech Republic.

And now, let's talk a little bit about your family. Your parents' names were?

My father's name was Victor Ivry-- [LAUGHS] Victor Ivry. Victor Epstein. Because my son is Victor Ivry. And my mother's name was Elsa Epstein, born Sicher, S-I-C-H-E-R.

Do you know when they were born and where?

I don't know when my father was born. He was born in a village not far from where we lived in Ujezd or [CZECH].

Oh, OK. How do you spell that? It's OK if you don't--

[INAUDIBLE] In Czech, it's Ujezd. U-J-E-Z-D. And I don't his birthday.

Yes.

Because my father died when I was 3 and 1/2.

Oh, oh, all right.

So I don't know his birthday. And my mother was born on the 27th of September, 1890.

Let's talk a little bit about your parents' background. What kind of work did your father do?

Well, my father, as a young man, was a soldier. He was in the First World War. And when he came back, he got married to my mother in 1920, I believe. And they had a general store.

And then my mother--

Where was that? Where was that?

That was in [CZECH], in Liechtenstein. And when my father passed away, my mother continued the store. It was a very successful store.

What kind of store was it?

Oh, we could sell anything. We were like-- when somebody asks me, what kind of store, I said there were-- like in Canada I would say Eaton's. Like in the United States, I would say like Macy's.

The only thing, Macy's didn't sell any food. We sold rice, and flour, and cream of wheat, and herring, and salamis, and

rolls, and whatever you-- and also beddings buy the yard, yard goods. And we sold things like buttons, and silk, and we sold petrol, and nails. And whatever you wanted, we had it.

Were you an only child?

No. I had a younger brother by the name of-- my mother called him Hans. But now, he's in Czech. It's [? Hanush ?] Epstein.

And when was he born?

He was born on the 8th of June, 1927.

And so you said your father died when you were quite young.

When I was 3 and 1/2.

Yeah. And how religious was your family when you were growing up?

Well, you have to understand, in Bohemia, in Western Bohemia, the Jews were not religious. They kept holidays. And in our little village, we didn't have a synagogue.

Oh.

So on the holidays, we went to next door village, and there was a synagogue. But soon after, there were not enough people. So we didn't-- we stopped going there, and we started going to another one in another village. And that was called [PLACE NAME]. And there, we went to the synagogue on the holidays.

On the holidays, yeah.

We kept the holidays.

Did you observe the Sabbath or anything like that?

Well, we baked our own. And you know, we-- it's very funny. Your friend, [? Mikael, ?] asked me how I called the bread for Shabbat, the challah, and I would say we called it [NON-ENGLISH]. And she said, yes, that's how they called it.

So you observed the Sabbath? You observed the Shabbat?

Yes. My mother had the store open, but I wasn't allowed to do anything. I liked to do, even as a little girl, I liked to do handicrafts. And she would never allow me to do any handicrafts. She would say, you have the whole week. You can do things. But on Shabbat, you don't do that.

Where did you live? Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood or was it mixed?

No, it was a little village of 80 houses.

Oh, only 80 houses?

Yes.

And how many of them were Jewish?

There were two other Jewish families.

Did they have children?

Well, the one was an older couple. And the younger ones, they had one child. And he was born probably 1935 or something. He was a small baby then. I remember him.

So your friends were non-Jewish children?

That's right. I went to public schools.

I was going to ask you about your school, yeah.

But you know, this was only a village school. It had only four classes for eight grades.

Oh, OK.

And when I finished my fifth grade, my mother felt that I was a smart girl, that I should go to high school. So she inquired the next city to where we were. It was called Pilsen, Pilsen.

Yes.

It's where [? Mikaela ?] comes from. And so she went to a school, a German school. And the principal said that I have to write a little the exam, which I did.

And I went there to school. But even so it only was 18 kilometers from our village, I couldn't do that. There was no transportation. And with horse and buggy, I couldn't do that twice a day.

Right.

So my mother found a family where I was boarded. That means when I was 12 years old, I already left home.

Oh.

And but I found-- I used to go to school and give lectures on the Holocaust. And I would tell the children that at 12 years of age I would be already on my own. And they said, oh, how horrible. And I would say, well, it wasn't so horrible.

I became very self-sufficient, and I had to look after myself. And I said, it's very important. And, well, I was taught from when I was very young to be self-sufficient.

My mother would send me on a train when I was six years old to visit a uncle and aunt who had no children in Southern Bohemia. And I wasn't afraid at all. They put me on the train, and that was a whole day on the train. And then the other side, my uncle would be waiting for me, and I had absolutely no fear.

When you grow up in a village, it's different like in the city. Because in the village, you don't have this-- well, we did have burglars. They burgled our store. But I wasn't afraid.

First of all, there was maybe one or two cars. One of them was our doctor from the next village, and he came through the village like a crazy guy. So we used to say, go away, go away quickly, because the [INAUDIBLE] is coming. You know, even with the chickens and the geese were running away on the street.

Right.

In front of our house was a pond. And as children, we would go swimming there. Nobody taught us. We just went in the

water and started, first, with one leg down, and then we just lifted the other leg. And that's how we were swimming.

And in winter, it froze over, and we would be skating on it. But I was-- I didn't have really proper skates. My mother had a pair of skates. Can you imagine from the turn of the century? They were iron skates, and you attach them to your shoes, you know?

Mm-hmm.

Like you had a key, and you had to turn it. And I would put them on in front of our house. And by the time I got to the pond, I lost them about three times.

But my brother, he was very good at it. And he wanted special skates. And he told my mother, you buy me [NON-ENGLISH]. And these were already good skates, and they had little-- like little teeth in the front.

And as a matter of fact, one day he fell into the water, because we had inns. And the inns would take the ice from the pond for the summer so the beer would be cold in their cellar. And overnight, it would freeze over.

And let's say there was a little snow. So you couldn't tell that they took out the snow, the ice. And one day my brother crossed the pond, and he fell in, and he was standing in the window.

My mother and I, we were absolutely going crazy, because you could see him going up and down and up and down. And then a young man came. And he laid down on the ice, and he rescued him.

Oh, my.

He had pneumonia, and pleurisy, because he was in that icy water.

Yeah. Did you experience any anti-Semitism in the town or among your friends? You said you had--

No.

--non-Jewish friends.

No, no. Because you have to understand that we didn't have a radio, because we didn't have electricity. So nobody had the radio.

My mother, I think, was the only person who got a newspaper. So they really didn't know what was going on around them. And it was a German-speaking village. People lived there probably, I don't know, 300 years, 400 years, something like that.

What language did you speak at home?

German.

German?

Mm-hmm.

OK. And did you have a large extended family? You mentioned some relatives.

Yes. My mother was a-- they were 10 siblings.

Oh, my.

Five girls and five boys. And my father, there were five boys from the first marriage, and then there were two girls from the second marriage. My grandfather married his niece. Probably at that time, it was allowed. I don't know. But it was his brother's daughter.

And he said that she was so beautiful that nobody else would be able to have her but him. And he had five sons with her.

So you would go visit all these relatives and--

No, they would come to visit us.

Yeah.

Because we lived in the village, and they lived in-- like five of them lived in Prague, and so on. So during the summer, we always had visitors.

Was your family a Zionist family?

Well, living in the village-- and my mother took us to Pilsen. That was, as I said, the next big town, the city.

Yes.

And she would take us there for Hanukkah and the holidays. So we would be able to know what it means to be Jewish. And for Sukkot, we didn't have a sukkah. But we put branches from the trees, the branches--

Yes.

--behind all of the pictures. So we knew it was Sukkot. And my mother, which was very unusual, knew how to read Hebrew. Because at that time, women really didn't know anything. And to learn something about being Jewish, she engaged a rabbi from another town.

It took him two hours by bus to come and teach us. And, of course, we didn't like him very much because he was limping. And children are very cruel, and so he was different, right? And we always were somewhere. They had to look for us in the village where we were.

So he was teaching us some Hebrew, and he was teaching us the Sh'ma, and so on. So I knew that I was Jewish, you know?

Yeah. But you-- yeah. So Hitler came into power in 1933, and you were only eight years old, obviously. When did you first--

Yes, well, at that time, you know, Czechoslovakia was a very wonderful country. There was no difference between religions.

Yes.

Everybody went to the same school, and it was really wonderful. And the first president of Czechoslovakia was a man by the name of Masaryk. He was very forward-looking.

As a matter of fact, he took his-- he married an American. Her name was Garrigue. And he incorporated in his name her name. So his first name was Tomas, and then it was Garrigue, and then it was Masaryk.

Masaryk, yeah.

And he was very, very-- I mean, he was a socialist. But he was-- sorry, being Jewish. There was a process. One Jewish

man was accused of blood libel, and he defended this man. I mean, he was a fantastic man.

The only thing, he was already older. He was, during the First World War, he was a legionnaire. And of course, he was in touch with the United States, and England, and so on.

And this is when Czechoslovakia became a country, in 1918. Because before, it was part of Austria-Hungary. That was for many, many, many, many years.

So when did you first start hearing about a man named Hitler? Do you remember your first time you heard of him?

Well, the thing is, when I was in Pilsen, the family I lived with, every Friday night, we would go to another family visiting. And they always were listening to the radio. And the conversation always was about Germany, about a man named Hitler.

But where I lived, they were considered Germans. So there was a man by the name of Henlein, and he formed a party. And so I knew about the Henlein Party.

And in our village, there only were probably three people who belonged to that party, and they didn't live in-- at least the young people who went to school, university students, who went to school in Prague. And they brought it. They talked about it, but nobody else did.

And so, of course, in 1937, I already was aware that there was a man by the name of Hitler. But really, what--

You were 12 years old then?

I was 12 years old.

And you were still going to school away from home?

Yes. And I came home during the summer, and that's when it all started, 1938.

Right.

And, of course, Czechoslovakia wasn't supposed to be occupied.

Right.

But Hitler said never. And they mobilized, and of course, people from my village who were Germans, they also were mobilized. They all went to the army.

And then in October, Hitler decided, yes, of course-- or no. This was like this. In the spring of 1938, Hitler occupied Austria.

Austria, right, and the Anschluss. Right.

And he promised, of course. He had the meeting with Chamberlain in the summer of 1938. And he said that he would not enter Czechoslovakia. And, of course, he was a liar, and we know what happened.

And so the 1st of October, the Germans started crossing the border from Bavaria and Saxony. But they said that our little village would not be occupied, because we had a few Czech citizens. And so my mother was worried what's going to be, but they said we're not going to be occupied.

But during the night, from the 7th to the 8th of October, somebody knocked on the door, and it was an officer from the Czech army. Because they had some of the soldiers were billeted in our village. And so he said whether he could buy

some petrol for this truck. And my mother says, what do you need petrol for the trucks now? It's the middle of the night.

And he said, well, we are leaving, because the Germans are going to occupy your little village. So she was very upset. And she asked him whether they would take us along.

Oh.

And he said, yes, they would. So in the morning--

This is the three of you-- your mother, your brother, and you?

Yes. And we had a maid. And of course, she was crying bitterly, because she was so attached to us.

And, oh, yes. And the people assembled in front of our house. And they yelled at my mother. And they said-- they called her by her first name, because they all grew up together then.

My mother's name was Elsa. And they said, Elsa, what are you doing? Why are you leaving? You know, we are not going to do anything to you.

And she says, but I have children. I have to protect my children. So they offered to send a truck, and the soldiers would [? sing ?] from our store on the truck. And we didn't take anything from the house, only things from the store.

And she asked them whether they would take me along, because we had some relatives in-- it was a bigger village near Pilsen. It was called TÄ™emoÄ;nÄ; and they should take me there. So I went as a 12 and 1/2 year old-- no, no. I was 13 by that time-- put me on the truck with the soldiers, and I arrived at my relatives.

But you were still-- your mother and brother were still with you, right?

No.

Oh, they put you in separate?

They still were-- I was the first one to leave.

Oh, you were in separate?

I was separate. And these relatives had no idea that I would come. And I really didn't know them.

And so I said, well, we are running away, because we're being occupied. So they took me in. And the soldiers would wear-- the things they had on the truck, they put in a barn. And then my mother and brother came in the afternoon. But during the night, the soldiers came back, and they stole a lot of stuff.

Oh, my goodness. Yeah, yeah.

Until my mother-- my mother got in touch with some of her brothers and sisters in Prague. And they said, well, we have to come to Prague. And so I don't know how long we stayed with these relatives.

Do you remember at that time being very frightened when you had to leave your home?

Well, it was-- you really--

You were 13 years old, so.

You really didn't know what was going on. You're 13 years old. And your mother says, you go with the soldiers. You go

with the soldiers, you know?

Did you take anything special with you when you went with the soldiers?

No. I really didn't. No.

Probably my mother took my clothes. I didn't. I have no idea.

You didn't take them.

And then we went to Prague.

Yeah, the three of you?

The three of us. And some relatives waited for us on the train. And we went to an uncle and aunts where they decided what they're going to do with us. And so I was--

Now how long had you stayed in that-- before you got to Prague, how long did you stay in that--

With these people into Tábor?

Yeah.

Oh, very short time.

Oh, just a short time?

Yes.

Oh, OK.

And so I--

So it's still fall of '38, but you got to Prague?

Yes, on the 8th of-- no. Maybe it was the 14th. I don't know. On the 8th of October, we were occupied, and we ran away.

Yeah.

And then I went to Prague. And they said that my uncle and aunt-- that was the oldest brother of my mother-- that they would take me in, and I would stay with them.

[SNEEZE]

Excuse me.

And my mother went to live with her-- she had a widowed sister and a bachelor brother who lived together, and she went to live with them. And my brother went to live with a cousin.

So you all lived in separate places?

We all lived in separate places. And I stayed with my uncle and aunt for-- well, yes. So when I got there, my aunt who was a former schoolteacher, she felt that I have to-- I cannot just sit around. I should go to school.



Right.

So she took me to a school. Of course, it was a Czech school. And she took me to the principal and she said, this is my niece.

I would like-- she should be able to go to school. And she says, no problem. She can come tomorrow. But I didn't speak Czech.

Oh.

But when you are 13 years old, believe you me, you learn a language one, two, three. And my aunt was very smart. She engaged a girl who was a year older than me, who was smart, and she taught me the grammar. Because Czech grammar is like French.

You have seven cases. It's not like English. I mean, English is cinchy to learn.

There's no grammar to it, because the words, they're all the same. The endings are all the same. There's only one article. Whereas, in Czech, you have three and seven cases, and then the words change.

Do you remember the name of the school you went to?

No.

And who were the other--

As a matter of fact, but I went back in 19-- wait a minute, I will tell you-- 1995. I went back to Prague, and I went to the school. And-- or '96, rather. No, hold on.

I went back to the school in 1999. And I went there, and I said that I was in the March of the Living. And I-- what I was doing. And perhaps they would be interested to-- that the students should hear me.

And the teacher was very excited about it. And I was talking to the children there in 1999.

Wonderful. Wonderful. So now, you're at school.

Now, I'm at school.

You're 13 years old.

Yes, 13 years old.

You were learning Czech.

And I went to school. And my aunt was-- she was looking after my homework, especially when I had to write a little story of something. She made me write it as long as I didn't make a mistake. So when I came to school, I wrote a little story, and I always was 100%-- better than anybody else.

Wonderful, wonderful.

And, well, everything-- you go to school. You make friends, and you get used to things. You don't take it so tragic at that point.

Right.

Until one day--

Did you ever listen to the radio and hear speeches by Hitler? And do you know?

Yes, but people-- look. I went to school. I came home. I did my homework, and I went to bed.

Yeah, yeah.

You know, I'm 13 years old. My aunt, and she had-- Mary, her daughter. And they probably talked about it, but I was-- I had to do my homework, and I couldn't. It wasn't discussed kind of.

Yeah.

But this one day-- and we went home from school for lunch.

Oh, OK.

Yes. All our children go home for lunch, because that's the main meal. And then you go back to school. And you stay in school till about 4:00 or so.

But this particular day, it was a nice, sunny day. It was March 15.

This is--

And I go-- and I go from school--

It's 1939?

1939. And I come to the main street and got every-- I mean, it was horror, because the Germans were marching in with their tanks and everything. And people were standing on the sidewalk. Some were crying, and some were hailing.

And I didn't know what was going on. It was-- and then I came home. And, of course, my uncle and aunt were very upset.

Right.

But I was allowed to finish my school, my class, my year. The Germans let us stay and finish the school year. But there were things.

Every day was something different. The first thing, you had to give up all you your radios. You had to give up your jewelry.

And I had a little ring. And my mother gave it to me, I think, for my ninth birthday, or something like that. I had a little ruby stone. And my uncle-- my aunt said, you better give me that ring, because you don't want to be punished because you didn't give up your rings. I had to give my ring, which was dramatic a little bit.

And then you were not allowed to go to the parks. You were not allowed to go on the sidewalk. You were not allowed to go to the movies and to the theater. You could only shop at certain hours, because probably at the end of the day when there wasn't very much left, that's when we were allowed to go shopping on the street. I think we had to go in the last car, and so on.

Is this something you talked over with your friends, your Jewish friends?

In the school, there were no Jewish friends.

You had no Jewish friends at school?

No. Anyway, but then--

Did you know any other-- did you know--

And then so in '39, we could finish school, and that was it. So my mother found out that the Zionist organization opened a school. It was a youth Aliyah school, and she made me go there, which was the most wonderful school. And there, I learned a great deal.

And our teachers were not very much older, because they were university students, and they couldn't go to school. And they were Zionists. And so they were teaching us. And we were preparing to go to Palestine.

Was it September '39 that you started the Jewish school?

Yes. And we were planning to go illegally to Palestine. So we studied all the regular subjects, but we studied Hebrew, Jewish history. And it was like a very-- I mean, we learned more than a regular school. It was like a university, I think.

Did the school have a special name?

It was called Jugend Aliyah School.

[INAUDIBLE]

Yes. And so I was in a class at the beginning, a Czech class. And then they moved me, and then I was in a German class.

I could go. I spoke both languages fluently. And then I was-- they made class only with girls, and we learned how to sew. Because in case we go to Palestine so we would know something. So we learned how to make patterns and sew.

What did Palestine mean to you at that age?

Pardon?

What did Palestine mean to you at that age?

Oh, we were Zionists. I belonged to a Zionist organization. As a side thing, I want to tell you that there was a young man by the name of [? Hanan ?] [? Bakri ?] who was with me in that Zionist organization. And then when the war broke out, we all went to somewhere else and I never heard from him again. I didn't know where he was.

And I received a newspaper from Prague. It's called [CZECH]. And one day, there was a little ad. A man who was looking for another man, and he signs himself [? Hanan ?] [? Bakri. ?]

And I said to myself, there's not that many [? Hanan ?] [? Bakris ?] around. And there was his address in Israel, and I wrote to him. And I said, you know, I think I know you or you know me. I belonged to T'helet Lavan.

And anyway, within 10 days, I got a phone call from him. He was so excited. He says, yes, yes, that's me.

And unfortunately, a few-- I was in touch with him all the time. And when I went on the March of the Living, the last time in 2004, I met him with his wife in Jerusalem. And I was now in contact with him via email. But his emails stopped, and I sent him [? dishes ?] for Rosh Hashanah, and I didn't get an answer.

And I started phoning him, and there was nobody there. The phone was ringing, ringing, ringing. So yesterday, I phoned Israel.

I phoned [NON-ENGLISH]. And I asked about him, and they were telling me that a few days ago was his funeral. So he was in my [? k'futzah ?] in the Zionist organization.

So we were ardent Zionists, and we wanted to live in a kibbutz. And we wanted to do all the work. And we were very excited.

Did your brother go to the same school?

No. My brother was younger. He went to a Jewish school. They had a Jewish school for--

Young children?

--for primary school.

And what did your mother do while you all were at school?

Well, I didn't live with my mother.

No, I know.

My mother lived with her sister.

No, I know. But did she work? Or did she do anything?

No, she didn't do anything.

She did not?

No.

So the war breaks out--

So it's 1940. And I went to that f School. And--

Did you know about Hitler invading Poland in '39?

Oh, yeah. Well, then we were very well-informed.

In '39?

Then, of course-- then, of course, there was-- yes. And--

Do you remember being frightened at all?

No. No. We were too involved with going to Palestine.

And we thought that we would-- even going by myself, you know, you weren't afraid. You were a youngster. You wanted to go. You wanted to build this--

But you had also said when you were very young, you were very independent.

Oh, my mother did that. And I think she did a fantastic job to make me independent. Because she had not that much time from for me, you know?

Yeah.

But she wanted-- and especially, I was the older one.

Right.

I was the one-- you know?

Right.

I could do things on my own.

Right.

And--

So now--

And then Eichmann came to Prague to the Jewish Community. And he said that anybody who would be able to get a visa from a country, they could go. That the Germans would give them visas and let them go.

So my mother-- they were Aktion they called it. You know?

Yes, yes.

They were organizations who helped people to go to different countries. And there was-- and you remember Dr. Vincent?

Yes, [INAUDIBLE].

But, of course, we didn't know Dr. Vincent. We called it [NON-ENGLISH], because it was near the museum that the-- the office. And so my mother also registered me there to go to England.

And I had a guarantor in England. It was a brother of my aunt who lived in London. Because you needed--

A sponsor.

You needed somewhere to go.

Yes.

So he wanted to do that for me. And I had a cousin who was-- he was I think five years older than me. And he went.

He went. That was in August '40-- in August-- wait a minute. August '40-- '41. No, August '41, I believe, or '39, or '40. And he-- it was before the war broke out.

Well, the war broke out September '39.

Yeah, it was summer of '49. And he left.

'39, '39.

And I was supposed to go with the next transport, and the war broke out. So these transports, the Kindertransports, stopped.

Yes, yes.

And so I went to this school. And--

Do you remember any of your teachers names?

Of course.

What were some of their names?

Well, I was telling that yesterday to the lady in Israel. Well, the young men who taught me Hebrew, he name was [? De'eb ?] [? Sheik. ?] And he survived, and he went to Israel. And he became-- I think he was ambassador or something to France.

And his son, Danny, is also in the Foreign Service now in England, I believe. Then I had a wonderful teacher. He taught us science, and his name was Billy [? Groat. ?] I found him again.

He survived. And I found him again in Israel. And we corresponded for a while, and then he died.

Then I had a teacher by the name of [? Gonda ?] [? Redly. ?] He thought, I believe, history. I'm not quite sure. And he didn't survive.

He was a fellow in-- you will have his book, I'm sure, there. It's his son found-- his diary was found in Theresien. And it was published, and I'm sure you must have it-- the story of [? Gonda ?] [? Redly. ?]

He was the one who put the names together for the transport from Theresien to Poland.

Oh.

So he had a terrible job.

Yes, yes.

So if you're interested, I'm sure you can find it in your library.

Yeah, I'm sure. Yeah, yeah.

And--

So you weren't able to go to England. So then what happened?

Well, I continued going to school.

Yeah.

And we hoped to go to Palestine. But then in the fall of 1940, as I told you that Eichmann said that the Jews could leave whoever has got visas. So some people got visas, and they went to England-- few some. America had quotas, so they didn't take us. And Mr. Roosevelt didn't want us, because he was running for a second term. So he couldn't use us.

And a few people went to Cuba, to Guatemala, to Quito, and to South America. They would go to a priest, and the priest

would give them the papers that they were Catholic. That's how they got to South America.

And since Eichmann couldn't get rid of us, so he had to find a place where to send us. And so he found this place called Theresien or Theresienstadt east of Prague. But before that, he couldn't wait that long.

So in October 1941, the first transports were sent, five of them, 1,000 persons each, to the Lodz ghetto. That was the beginning. And then they sent about 150 young men to Theresien to prepare the camp, to make bunks, and the kitchens had to be-- because it was a military time.

Right, right.

And so they prepared it. And then the first transport to Theresien went in December '41. So then they knew that we will be moved, but nobody had any idea what it was like, where we were going to go, what's going to be.

And I didn't go to school. It stopped. And anyway, it was a very uneasy time.

So you just stayed home with your relatives?

No. My relatives are fed up with me. Because, you see, after school, my school was till 6 o'clock. We had a long day, because we had to accomplish a lot. And because I belonged to a Zionist organization, I still went to a [NON-ENGLISH], a get together from the Zionist organization. And Jews had to be home by 8 o'clock.

And I didn't want to. We had a nice time with all these young people. We learned how to sing Hebrew songs. We learned how to March, and everything was Zionists they're doing, preparing to go to Palestine.

Did you wear a uniform or anything?

No, no, no.

Just your regular clothes?

My regular clothes.

And I started running home like crazy-- because I couldn't wait for a streetcar, because that was too slow-- because I had to be home before 8:00.

Right, right.

Because if they would have caught me, they could put me into jail. And my poor uncle and aunt, they were on pins and needles, because it was five to 8:00, and I still wasn't home. And so I had arrived maybe 1 minute past 8:00. And my poor uncle was standing already in the door. My aunt must have given him an order that he should give me one, you know?

Yeah.

[INAUDIBLE] And so they decided that they cannot take it, because it's-- I'm doing terrible things to them. And when you're 14 years old or 15--

Right, right.

--you know, you want to be with the young people.

Of course.

You don't take these things so serious. And so they asked my mother that she should find a place, to send me somewhere. So my mother went to the Jewish community and to social services and says, I have a daughter. And I cannot keep her. Perhaps you have a place where you could place her.

So they did place me with young woman. It was like a women's shelter, but most of them were a little older, and they were not of very good repute. And they did things which I really didn't like, and I felt-- I went to school from there-- but I felt that this wasn't the right place for me.

So I, myself, already at that time, was very self-sufficient, I must tell you. And I went to the social services and I told them, listen, this is not a place for me. These girls are doing things which are not--

Were they Jewish girls?

Yeah, yeah.

They were all Jewish. OK.

Yeah, they were all refugees. They were mostly from Caraptho, Russia, which is now Ukraine.

Yeah, yeah.

And so I went there. And he says, well, we have now a home for young girls and boys. And we will place you there.

And these are children from a town called Ostrava, where their fathers were sent to Poland to work, the Jewish fathers. They took the Jewish men.

Yes.

And they send them. It was called [? Nisko. ?] And so the children were sent to Prague. And there was-- we were in two apartment houses in two different apartments, like large apartments. And one for the girls, and then the other one for the boys.

And we get our food there, but the food was hardly any food. And I got extremely thin. And they become worried.

So they found two families where I went for lunch, two lunches a week, so I shouldn't get so skinny. And that's when I still went to school. And so then I was sent to another home. You know, how you are being shoveled from one end, from one place to another. And the transports were going already.

And my mother and my brother-- even so, my brother lived in an orphanage, and my mother lived with her sister. But when the transport was called, my mother and brother went together. In August '42, they went to Theresien.

And I went to Theresien on the 9th of September. I believe 1942 was the transport BF, and my number 992. I remember that very well.

And I worked then. I came there. I knew someone, a young man, and I worked in a hospital as a nurse's aide.

My mother worked also as a nurse. And as a matter of fact, we had typhoid. And she worked in the hospital where the children had typhoid.

And my brother, he was very young then. He was 15. He was making toys for children, like wooden toys. I mean, not for the children, for [INAUDIBLE]. The Germans took all these things out. They took it to Germany.

And in Theresienstadt, it was, again, we were the young people. And then I was already 18-- no, 17. And we would get together in the loft. We had lofts.



The Germans kind of didn't know that we had these lofts, and we would get together. And we would-- there would be somebody who would read poetry, and somebody would sing. I mean, it was like what young people are doing.

But the thing was that people started to leave, and nobody knew where these people were going. And people-- oh, yes. A lot of people came from Germany, and German Jews were told that they're going to be sent to a bath, like marine bath, health spa, to a spa.

Right.

And they were allowed to bring their mattresses along was something. And they'll say, arrived. And they said, so where is the spa? Because they lied to them.

Yes, yes.

And with loads of old people, and they started dying out very fast. And we are the young ones. Well, we kept on going. We did our thing even when-- the only thing we were afraid that we would be sent away, and nobody knew where you're going to be sent.

They sent you a little piece of paper, and you said-- they said, you have to be at 8:00 at this place of assembly. And so my mother was one who got a little paper once, and because she was a nurse, she was looking after people who had typhoid, so they took her out again. That's what [INAUDIBLE] was doing.

And then one day, again, she came to me. And she said she was called up again. And that was September '43.

And at night came my brother to see me. And he says, you know what? I'm going voluntarily with mother, because I cannot let her go by herself.

My mother wasn't that old. My mother was in her early 50s. That was '43. That means she was 53 years old.

Oh, gosh. Yeah.

But he said he couldn't let her go by herself. Anyway, so they left. And I-- this is the famous DM transport. Well, I suppose you know that all of them got killed on the 8th of March, 1944.

But my mother died. She got diarrhea. And when somebody got diarrhea, they died from dehydration.

Yeah.

And my mother died on the 4th of January, 1944. And my brother, who was in this DM transport, and the whole transport was called up. And they were killed, all of them, close to 4,000 Czech Jews, were killed on the 8th of March, 1944.

And so we were left in that, in Birkenau. And we were waiting when we are going to be called up. Because, you see, when you arrived in Birkenau, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, you had to sign a paper, that after six months, it's going to be special treatment. And our six months would be up very soon.

So we knew this is what's going to happen to us. But in the meantime, the Germans sent in more prisoners from Theresien to [INAUDIBLE]. That's the million camp-- to fill it up.

And then what we didn't know was the invasion of Europe, you know, 1944 when the British went to Dunkirk, and the Canadians, and so on, they started invading Europe. We didn't know that right. So one day-- I mean, you know, there were always rumors. And there were rumors that there's going to be a selection.

See, in our camp, there was never a selection. Like in the men, where the men were, in the D camp, there were always selections. And they always took out the people who were old, or sick, or couldn't work anymore. And they took them out, and they gassed them.

That happened. I don't know how often during the week, but it happened very often.

Can we go back a little bit in time? And tell me, going from Theresien to Auschwitz for you, can you tell me about that?

Yes, that was terrible, because I had high fever. I had tonsillitis, and so forth. They couldn't care less.

They put you in these cattle cars, and without water, without toilets.

And when was this? What was the date that you left Theresien?

On the 15th of December, '43.

15th of December?

Yeah, that was transport DR. And we were one, and then the next day came another transport.

And so tell me a little bit about that journey from Theresien. You said you were sick.

I wasn't very much with it, because I was-- we were in this cattle car. There was nowhere to-- there were no benches, no nothing. You were just-- I was standing, or trying to sit, or something.

And they always did that during-- they always moved you during the night. They put you late afternoon. They put you in the trains, and then you traveled.

And you had no-- we tried to look out that little window. And, of course, we had no idea where we were going. And then we arrived in the morning.

And the doors opened. And the Germans started yelling.

How was the journey?

It must have been overnight.

Just overnight. OK. And were you with friends your age?

No.

Who were you with?

All kinds of people. I don't have no idea. I have absolutely no idea who was with me on that train.

And so we jumped. They yelled us to get out, get out. And we had to jump out, and we saw young boys in their pajamas running around.

And they would say, they would say to us, don't go on the trucks. Don't go on the trucks, because if you go on the trucks, you go to heaven. But you know, you are completely-- you don't know what's going on with you. You have absolutely no control about your thoughts or anything, because it's like a strange land.

And they put you on the trucks, and you go. And so they drove us from there into the camp. And we landed in that family camp.

And so they divided the girls separate, and the women separate, and the men separate. And I ended up in that house or block number 11. And there were about 800 women in one of these houses, these blocks.

And we had these bunks, three-story high bunks, and about 8 women would lie on a shelf kind of.

Right, right.

And since when you're young, so you could climb up. So you were up there. And, of course, when you were up there, which was good, because you had air. And when you were old and sick, you were on the bottom, and it was pitch dark. And it was like hell there.

What were you wearing? What did you wear?

What did I wear? Oh, yeah, I know what I wore. Now you reminded me.

We bartered. In camp, you barter for things. And I bartered with someone for a man's suit. I don't remember what I gave, but I ended up with a man's suit.

It was a very nice brown men's suit. And there were women who were working in-- well, they had sewing machines. They were sewing, so they did things on the side for a piece of bread or something. I don't know how many slices of bread I gave her for that, and she made me a beautiful suit.

She turned it inside out, and I had a lovely jacket. And from the pants, she made me a skirt. And then I found somewhere a piece of fur, and somebody made me a cap. So I had a fur hat, and I had a fur collar.

So I looked really snazzy. And in that thing, I came to Auschwitz. Now, I remember that. Sometimes I forget things already.

Oh, this was your clothes in Theresien, you're saying?

That was-- yeah, yes. We as girls, we wanted to look nice in Theresien. Most of the girls wore plaid skirts. These skirts were made from blankets.

Oh.

I don't know where we got these blankets, but we had-- we wore these--

So that's what you wore to-- that new suit you had is what you wore?

That new suit, oh, yes.

You wore that to Auschwitz?

That was very-- I was very fashionable.

But I'm saying, that's what you were wearing when you got to Auschwitz?

That's what I was-- yes. And so we were there a little while, and then they took us out to another block. And there, a girl sitting, Polish girls sitting at little tables. And we had to sit down at the little tables, and that's where they tattooed us.

And I got my number, and my number is 70663. And my number is very much on my forearm, because that jacket had very tight sleeves, and I couldn't move my sleeves up. Normally, the number is near the elbow, but my number is very low down, because I couldn't move up the sleeve.

What was that like for you? I mean, here you're, what, 18 years old, and getting a tattoo?

You're in a trance. You are not there. So when you arrived in Auschwitz, it was like you went from one-- you were like a marionette. Where they put you, there you went, and you had no idea what was going on with you. Because, as I say, it was like being in a trance.

Did they take off your hair? Did they shave--

Wait a minute.

OK.

So when we had the number, we again lined up in front of the block. And all the women-- the men were in different blocks, and the women were in different blocks. And they started marching us to outside of the camp to a building. We had no idea what this building was. When we arrived in that building, we had to get undressed, and the only thing we were allowed to keep were our stockings.

And they put something on our hair in case we had lice, I suppose, and they put us under the showers. Now, we had no idea that these were gas chambers, because this was-- you could use this as a shower place or as a gas chamber. Because the only thing-- the difference was when they wanted to kill the people. There were little openings in the ceiling. And through those ceilings, they put in the canisters of Cyclone B, and the pebbles would slowly come down, and the people would suffocate.

Right.

But [AUDIO OUT] round, but we had no idea. But then we took a shower, and we were allowed to keep our stockings. And there was a bench, and we put the stockings there. And when it was time for me to get my stockings, they weren't there. I was hysterical, because it was December, and I had no stockings.

So, of course, they took all our clothes away, the shoes and everything. And then but I found another pair. I don't whose it was. Probably this person took mine, so she left hers.

And they moved us to another room where there was a girl, and she threw at us clothes-- literally. She had a big bundle of clothes, and she would throw it. And whether you were tall, or small, or whatever. It was horrible clothes.

And I think we had-- she gave us a little coat or something. And instead of shoes, we got these pantofles. You know the wooden clogs?

Oh, yes.

But that was really a savior. Because if we would have been standing in those leather shoes, it would have been even worse. They wouldn't-- at least we didn't have frozen toes. Because we were standing outside for hours being counted in the morning and the afternoon.

And then they start us moving-- and we were marched back to the camp. And I was on that block 11.

Yes.

And we were not allowed to go out. There was a quarantine of 14 days.

You're talking about still the family camp?

That was in the family camp.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah. But we were a quarantine of 14 days. But we found out things-- what it was like, where we were. I mean, there's always somebody who comes in. The girls who brought the soup, they would-- we would try to talk to them.

I found out the previous transport with my mother and brother is also there. So I found out where my mother was.

Oh.

And when we were allowed to-- after the 14 days, then we were allowed to walk around in the camp. I went to look for my mother, and she was on block 27. So that was quite far away and having only those clogs.

And in Poland, it's very-- the mud is unbelievable, because it's clay. You sink into it. Like you had to take a step, take your pantofle and put it down, and then you put them on.

I did find my mother, and she was in a terrible state already.

Oh, my.

She had diarrhea. How do I know she had diarrhea? Because anybody you saw with a white mouth. They gave out a powder against diarrhea, so I knew that already that she was not well.

Yeah.

So I said, well, I have to do something. So I volunteered to carry the soup, because if you carry the barrels-- it was heavy like hell. And the two girls were carrying the soup-- one in the front and one in the back.

We had like poles, you know?

Mm-hmm.

And over the poles, there was some bands. And those, you put over your shoulders. And that's how you walk. That's how you carry it.

But the thing was, when you went to pick up those barrels, you could scrape out the leftover soup. That was-- so I said, I'm going to go and carry the soup. At least I will be able to give to my mother a little soup. Unfortunately, she got so very ill, and she died a few days later.

Oh.

So I stopped carrying the soup, and we didn't do anything. We did not go to work. We're just sitting there. And most of the time, we were standing outside being counted, because they counted us in the morning, and they counted us in the afternoon. And we had to stand there, and they had to calculate whether everybody was there, you know?

They had us to count, because the dead ones, people were put in the back of the block of the house. So they bent in the back, and they counted the dead. And if it didn't-- if the figures weren't right, so they started counting again. So we sometimes were standing there for hours.

How supportive were the young women to each other?

Well, we made friends. You become friendly with a person who lied next to you. To me lied a girl whom I never saw in my life. And her name was [? Judy ?] [? Peltzman, ?] and so she became my friend.

Yeah.

And I mean, I knew some other people. But what we did, like when-- we didn't go to work. So we spent the whole day in that house. And we were sitting there. And very often, we were cooking, imaginary cooking.

Oh, yes, yes.

And across from me, there was a lovely lady. Her name was Mrs. [? Morgenstern, ?] and she was older. Her son was a very nice young man.

And so we were making strudels, and we were making all kinds of things. And one would say, my mother did this. And another would say, no no, no. My mother did that.

Yes.

And so we were cooking.

Yeah.

And also, we also pretended to take a bath.

Oh.

You know? How wonderful it would be, because-- oh, yes. And I also want to tell you that the young women, they're very conscious of hygiene.

And we went into the bath house every morning, got undressed, and washed ourselves completely. It was cold water. We had no towels, but we washed ourselves.

And but you know, we didn't care. We were naked. Because nobody could see us. It was such a-- it was like a fog, because from our warm bodies in that cold place. It was all foggy. So nobody could really tell who was who.

Did you get your period in--

Well, that was our luck in a way, the period stopped in Auschwitz.

Your period stopped, yeah, right.

Because before that, it was horrible. You had nothing, you know?

Yeah.

It was just terrible. But now, we are paying for it. Because most of people who lose their period when they're young, you get osteoporosis much faster. You know, like the runners?

Oh, yes.

You know the people who-- the women who are runners [INAUDIBLE], they lose their period also. So one good thing, we lost the period.

Just to go back, how did that happen-- how was that handled in Theresien?

If you ask me what we did, I can't remember. It's something, it just escaped me. We probably-- I don't know. We probably took some pieces of cloth or something, but I cannot-- I don't want to make up any stories.

No, no.

But I can't remember exactly. I will not-- I will not tell.

Yeah. So now you're in-- you said you were standing around, because you weren't working.

No, we weren't working.

Yeah.

Anyway, it came, the 7th of March.

This is '44?

That's '44. And so they called out all the numbers from the previous-- from that September transport. And they had to-- they had to line up until they had everybody. They moved them over to the camp A. We were B, and they put them in the camp A.

And I saw my brother there. And I had a pair of mittens. And I called to him. And I said, would you like to have my mittens? I thought I would throw them over the wire.

Had you have any contact with him before that in Auschwitz?

No. Very little. I went to-- after my mother died, I went-- on the way down, I stopped at his block. He was in block 16, I believe.

Block 16 you said?

I think so. I'm not quite sure, but I think it was. And I went-- you couldn't go in. You had to say you want to speak to--

Yeah.

So I told the guy who was standing at the door. And I said, I'd like to speak to [? Hanush ?] Epstein. And he called him, and he came out. And I told him that mother died, and he didn't say one word to me. He just turned around and he walked away, because he was so attached to her.

And I really never saw him very much, because he was painting the chimneys. But everybody knew him. He was a very beautiful child. And people were just taken by him.

And I never saw-- so that day, and he was on the other side. I saw him, and called to him. And I said, I have those mittens. Would you like those mittens?

And he said to me, where I am going, I don't need any mittens. And during the night, from the 7th to the 8th, they took them by trucks. And they killed them all that night.

Oh, god.

And you could hear them singing. They were singing. They were singing the Hatikva, and they were singing the Czech national anthem.

And so we knew that we have three more months to live. But as I told you, in the meantime, they sent another I think 7,500 people to fill up the camp. And then one day, well, these rumors that there's going to be a selection.

Because as I said, we never had a selection. That was end of June, I believe. You know, because don't forget, we had no calendar.

Right.

What we did is we made little marks on our bunks and to see how many more days we have to-- till with die. Kind of we scratched them out. And so there were rumors.

Because in camp, there always are rumors, and that there's going to be a selection. And sure enough-- because Mengele used to work in our camp, he did his research on dwarfs and twins in our camp.

Right.

So they came. There came the orders that we have to line up. It was at the end of the camp, like near where the tracks are now. And you had to get undressed completely, and you put your clothes on your right arm, because the left arm you had the numbers.

And so you went one after the other. And Mengele decided who is going to live and who is going to die. And fate is unbelievable, and that's why I'm so fatalist.

Because I suffered from psoriasis. And just at that time, I was completely free of it. I didn't have any blemish on my body.

And so when I went through, so he chose me to live. Because he just moved with his thumb as he's known what he was doing. And the SS men, they were watching. And when he made one sign to live, and they took you, and they wrote down your number.

And the ones he said for death, they didn't need to write down the number. And so we didn't know what was going on. And we had to-- then we got dressed, and we went back to our bunks.

Let's go back to Mengele. Had you seen him before that day? Or was that the only time?

No, we used to see him. He used to come to the camp.

And so you saw him before.

Did you know who he was? Or what he--

Yes, we knew that he was Dr. Mengele.

Did you know what he was doing? Did you--

That he was doing-- well, that he was doing-- in our camp, he was doing research on dwarfs and twins.

I'm saying, but you knew that?

Yes.

How did you know that?

Well, you know--

People just talked?



We knew a lot of stuff.

How? How did you get information?

Well, for instance, we got information. There were young Polish boys who lived in the men's camp in camp D, and they were roofers. They were fixing the roofs of the houses.

And because they could go from one camp to the other, they were very knowledgeable. They knew what was going on. And they would tell us all the news, you know?

Mm-hmm.

And also, they were-- the craziest thing is there was one camp. It was all Gypsies.

Right.

That was in the D camp. And the Gypsies had better food than we had. And they brought the food from the Gypsy camp to the hospital to give it to the people who were sick.

Now, that's sick, isn't it? You gas people, but you bring food from the Gypsy camp to give people who are sick. I mean, this is absurd, isn't it?

So because they were moving from one camp to the other, so they knew the news, what was going on. They were like our postmen.

Yeah, OK.

And so we knew a lot of things which were going on. And this also was the time already when they built the railroads into the camp. Because when we came, it wasn't there. So they built that railroad so that trains could come straight into the camp.

And we saw these trains arriving every day. And then the camp next to ours, the C camp, was empty. But then it started filling up with girls, and these were the Hungarian girls who they kept alive.

We would talk to them. Probably, we spoke German to them. I don't remember, because I don't know Hungarian.

Right.

And we could kind of talk, because the camps, the division, was only wire. So you saw what was going on next door. And, I mean, we didn't go near the wire, because the wire was electrified. The minute you could touch it, and off you went.

How did you keep yourself going? I mean, here you lost your mother, and your brother, and you're a young woman. How did you keep yourself going at that time?

You had this tremendous will to live. You wanted to show them that you are going to live. You're going to outlive them, and you did everything possible to stay alive. Like staying clean helps you, you know?

Mm-hmm.

And all-- we were discussing all kinds of books. And we were all very intelligent people, so we've been talking about Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, and Schiller, and Goethe, and all these things. We somehow wanted to-- in Hebrew we say [HEBREW].

Yes, yes.

Do you know what that means?

Yes.

We are going to show you.

Right.

We are going to live out. We will manage to survive. So anyway, so when he chose us, the next day we were called. All our numbers were called out.

We also were chosen, and we were marched to the women's camp. And when we came to the women's camp, the orchestra was welcoming us. They played for us.

But there's a book. This girl wrote a book about her being a conductor in the women's camp.

Yes.

Yes, she was conducting there. And they are playing very nicely. And we were marching in, and they put us up in different bunks there.

But the girls who were there, they didn't like us, because we had hair. We were the only prisoners who they didn't shave.

Oh.

So already, that, we were different. And so they already didn't like us. They were shaven, because most of them came 1942 from Slovakia and Poland. So they already. This is 1944, so they are already there a long time.

And when we wanted to go, for instance, to the washroom to get washed, there was a girl standing with the [INAUDIBLE]. And she let the water straight at us. I mean, they didn't like us.

Yeah.

Because they also knew already that we are not going to stay there.

Oh.

And can you imagine they being there since 1942? Now, it's 1944, and that we are going to be shipped out. And they just-- they were not-- I can understand it.

Yes.

They were jealous of us.

Of course. Of course.

And so we were there a few days. I don't know how long. I tell you what. I think it was the end of June. And I think that we left a week later.

Now, I have a literature from Hamburg. And there they write that we arrived at between the 16th and 17th of July. But I think we came there sooner than that. I'm not quite sure.

So you were sent to Hamburg?

Well, yes.

So anyway, so they put together-- they divided us, and they added to us some Hungarian girls. And we were standing always in all in five, and they moved us around. And we moved around, because we wanted to be with certain girls. And we didn't want to be divided, and so on.

So there was always a big doing on, and they didn't do anything to us. And anyway, they divided us. Part of us went to Hamburg, and part of us went to Stutthof. And they added some Hungarian girls.

But I don't know whether ever anybody told you that. Before we left, we were examined internally, because perhaps we were hiding some gold or something.

Right.

So and then we were brought to the train. And when we were brought to the train and we saw that there were not only SS men, but soldiers-- well, first of all, it was a relief that we left. We were going out of Auschwitz, because nobody in their right mind ever could fathom that that would happen.

Right.

So they put us on the train, and again, there was nowhere to sit. It's just the train. But we stopped quite often, because they were air raids. Because we drove.

We didn't know where we were going. We drove through the whole of Germany. From Southern Poland we went all the way to Hamburg.

So when we arrived at that place the next day-- and I do think it was my birthday, and it wasn't the 16th of 17th. I believe it was my birthday. And so we found out that we were in Hamburg. And they put us up in a warehouse.

I found out just a few years ago that it used to be a tobacco warehouse. Right now, I have a picture of it. Because as I told you, I got in touch with Hamburg.

Yeah.

And they send me pictures. I have pictures of all the places we were. And there, they write that we arrived between the 16th or 17th, but I'm quite sure we came there a little earlier. And it was clean, and the banks were only two stories, like one on the upper and one lower. So that wasn't-- before, we had three stories.

And they were smaller ones, only about two together. And we each had our own little bed kind of. And the soup was better. And there was no gas chambers.

Right.

You know?

Yeah. I mean, we were in heaven. But the first night, the whole house started to shake, and we didn't know what it was. It was an air raid.

And some girls yelled to the others who were upstairs, don't move. Why are you moving? The whole thing shakes.

Awe, yeah.

We had no idea that the bombs were falling all around us. And so we started going to work. At first, they put us on a ship.

I mean, we went to different places, mostly oil companies. We were cleaning up. You know, that's what we were doing first, to clean up. And I remember they brought me to this place, and my first job was to wash windows.

And I said to the fellow, could I have some newspaper? And he said, what do you need newspaper for? I said, well, to wash the windows. You will see.

And when I was finished, they couldn't believe it, what a good job I did. And we got a little bit of soup, and there were other people working there. But we found out later on, Dutch people and French people. They were in work camps, and they were also working in factories to clean up after the air raids, but just to clean up.

And the air raids were continuous during the night and during the day. Like we would go in the morning, and there were houses standing nicely. And on the way back, there was nothing.

Oh, gosh.

You could see the bathtub was hanging on, and the stove was on the other hand hanging there. I mean, they did a real good job, I can tell.

Yeah.

But the British knew and the Americans knew where we were. That they were a group of women, that they're not going to bomb us--

The warehouse, yeah.

--where we stayed and even where we worked.

Yeah.

And so we were there a few weeks. And I just found from Hamburg-- I got all this literature-- and it says-- just a minute. I will tell you.

We went to a place called Neugraben, and we arrived there on the 13th of September. And we left there on the 8th of February. So we were there the whole winter.

We went to work. People worked all over, but my group went to work in a sandpit. Because they built little houses. Because don't forget, the people of Hamburg, they had nowhere to live. So we were building little houses.

And so I was in a group where we were working in a sandpit. And so we each got a shovel and started shoveling the sand. And we had a little train, little wagons, and we put the sand there. And we had a foreman, who was an old German, skinny guy, who was very decent. And he saw that I seem to be a good worker.

And it's funny. When they see that you are a good worker, they always kind of find you a good job. So he stopped me. And he says, you are going to be the switcher. So I became the switcher on the train.

There was a fellow who was the driver of the train, and I was the switcher. And the driver, he was a Communist. And he had to go to the police, I believe, every night or once a week that he didn't run away or something like that. But the air raids were unbelievable.

And so when the air raids were-- the thing what we had to watch out were the-- it was called Flak. That's anti-aircraft.

Right.

You know, the splinters?

Yeah, yeah.

It splintered. And if that caught you, you were dead. So when these little wagons were empty, we would turn them upside down. We could do that. And we would hide--

Hide underneath.

Yes. And you could hear tink, tink, tink. You know-- how these were falling on it.

So we were there for a while until, I told you, just the 2nd of-- until the 8th of February. And then they moved us again. Oh, by the way, Neugraben is today a shopping center.

And I had a friend. Her name was Ruth [? Pinchoski. ?] And she-- her name afterwards was-- oh, she married a fellow, [? Sayon. ?]

And you know, she was fighting with Hamburg that they shouldn't be allowed to put a shopping center there. But anyway, I have a picture of the shopping center or part of the shopping center. And there's a tablet where it says that we were there. That's what I read from.

And anyway, so they moved us to a place called Diessdack on the 8th of February, right?

How do you spell that?

What?

How do you spell that?

Diessdack?

Yeah.

D-I-E-S-S-D-A-C-K, Diessdack. And I was chosen to work right outside of camp. I was making big bricks with holes, you know?

Mm-hmm.

Like I had a helper. She was mixing the cement with a stone, and then I would put it in the form, and bang it down, and make it so its solid. And then you put out the form.

You lift it out, and you had this brick. But you had to work hard. Otherwise, it would fall apart.

And then somebody came in. They put it in. It would be dried, and this is how they would make new houses.

And it's a strange thing. I remember most everything. But I could not tell you who was living with me in that room where I was, what it was like.

They sent me from Hamburg a picture of that place. It doesn't say anything to me. I remember that there was a dining hall, which was a long hall, and I remember exactly where I was working. But I couldn't remember that place, what it looked like, or who was with me.

Because very shortly after that, one day we went from work, which was around-- I say that it was the end of-- that was still in February, but nobody wants to believe me. We went from work, and we were standing to go in. And as we were standing, the sirens sounded.

And they told you that the Flyers were already crossing the channel, and this was called a four alarm. And we told the guard, who was a soldier-- and he was a nice guy. He was a decent guy.

He was kind of heavy, rotund. And we called him Poppy. And we said, Poppy, look. There's an air raid.

Can't we go in? And he says, I cannot let you go in, because you have to be counted. And as we were standing there, it became a four alarm.

That meant the Flyers really are already over the city, and the bombs started to fall. And it killed Poppy. But, of course, he wasn't killed by the bomb, but he was quite killed by a Flyer.

The girl next to me, her name was [? Suzy ?] [? Klasa. ?] She was killed. And I started running like crazy through the dining hall. And to this day, nobody wants to own up whose plane it was.

Yeah.

They used to fly over us. It was in the spring of '45 when they were bombing Dresden to hell.

Yeah.

So they were going over us every day. And because near us was a power station, and this was like at that time, radar didn't work so well. So this was a point they knew that had to fly over in order to go the way onto Dresden.

Right.

But the camp was gone. And because the camp was gone, they had to move us. And they left us there a few days yet.

There was like a factory, and we were sleeping there on some benches or whatever it was, more outside. Because also the luck was that we were the only ones who were in camp, the others, because it was early. Like it must have been 4:30.

So that girls still didn't come back from work where they worked outside of camp, except we were near the camp. That only a few people got hurt, and a few people got killed. Otherwise, everybody would have been gone.

And it was one plane which got into trouble and had to let go. In order to save the plane and themselves, they had to get rid of the bomb, and they fell on us. And I tried to find out about this plane. I wrote to a number of war museums in England, and they don't know anything about it.

I wrote to the War Museum in Washington, and there was such a clever guy who said-- send me back an email, I should go to my home office. Like Montreal would be in the United States that I could go to the office, you know? He had no idea what I was talking about.

Yeah, right.

So till this day, nobody wants to own up. And I went to the War Museum in Ottawa, and I spoke to an officer. And I said, I'd like to know what happened with that plane, because the camp was gone. And because the camp was gone, we were moved to Bergen-Belsen.

Oh.

And there, half of the girls who would have survived died there of typhoid. So anyway, after a few days, we went to the train. And as we were waiting for the train, there was an air raid. We were sitting there on the grass, and we just didn't move.

I mean, we were not afraid of air raids. First of all, we couldn't go anywhere. And then the train came, and they put us on the train.

And early in the morning, we arrived. We didn't know where it was. And we had to carry some jackets or some Air Force

Jackets. It was heavy like hell. And we schlepped it to this camp. And then we arrived in the morning.

What day was this, do you know?

That, I don't know. I am saying-- you see, this is I am saying, but nobody wants to corroborate that with me-- that it was sometime in the end of February. And they said this isn't so, but my figure, I'm sure it's so.

And when we arrived, they had a block there. And there was nothing. There were no bunks, no nothing. And we had to lie on the floor. And it was terrible, because one was lying on top of the other.

And when you had to go to the bathroom, you had to step on the bathroom. The toilet didn't work. I mean, we had no water. We had no toilets.

There was nothing. It was complete hell there. I mean, most of the people were dead. It was-- typhus was--

This is Bergen-Belsen you're talking about?

That's Bergen-Belsen, yes. It was horrendous. We hardly got anything to eat.

And water was-- there was no water. As I told you, the toilets didn't work. I mean, you couldn't even go.

You know what? We went around the houses. It was terrible, because-- it was just awful.

And then one day there was a huge tent. And we didn't know the tent was full of corpses.

Oh, gosh.

And they made us drag those corpses to mass graves, because they wanted-- they knew that they were going to leave. So they wanted to clean it up kind of.

Yeah.

So we did that. And when it was certain hours, I said, enough. And so we just dropped the corpse and went back. And we saw like a row of corpses lying there.

And you know, you become so not feeling, you know? You become so nothing. You know that if this goes on, this is what you're going to be like, and you fight on.

And then the Germans ran away. And then they brought in Hungarian soldiers, and they didn't give us anything to eat either. So we went trying to find some food. And the Germans had storage. They stored potatoes, and turnips, and things like that under straw-- and like Earth and straw. And it was like big graves, huge things.

So we went there to dig it up. And these damn Hungarians started shooting, and they killed girls.

Oh, gosh.

And you know what? The funny thing is I'm the only one who remembers that. When you will read anything about this stuff, they don't talk that the Hungarians were there. But they were there.

Anyway, and then they left. And then there was no one. There were just a few of us who still be able to walk around. And there was [AUDIO OUT] and myself.

And we felt that Red Cross must be coming. Somebody must be coming. So we wanted to prepare for that.

We found a little table. Believe you me, it was a little table. And it was hard for us to carry this little table. We carried it on the main road to the entrance of the camp.

And as we were standing at the entrance, somebody started shooting at us. And the girl next to me was shot at, but the bullet went into-- she had a blouse with a pad. And it went into the pad, so nothing happened to her.

And as we were standing there, a huge tank arrives with a white star. Who the hell knew what it was. We had no idea what it was.

And then the turret opened, and there was this young man. And he said that the division of the Allies came to liberate us. He said it in German. [GERMAN], he said, and they started driving in.

And the soldiers came walking. And I spoke a little English already at that time. And he told-- the first thing he told me that Roosevelt died. Because Roosevelt died on the 12th, and we were liberated on the 15th.

And I, like an idiot, was crying. I never cried throughout my whole three years, but I cried. So now, when I give a lecture I tell the children that I'm ashamed of my tears, because Mr. Roosevelt could have saved thousands of Jews.

Right.

And he didn't do anything. So that's why I'm ashamed of my tears.

Right.

Anyway, so this the British army came in. This was the first camp they liberated, and they saw the horror. Because most people were dead, and there were thousands of them.

And they got in touch with the head office. And the first thing they did, they put up showers. So at least we could get washed.

And there was a town not far from where we were. It was called Bergen, which was an armory town. Of course, the German soldiers were not there anymore. And that, they changed into a hospital town.

And they tried to take out all the sick people first. So I wasn't sick. I was walking around.

So you should have seen-- they put down on the ground. The soldiers put down a stretcher. Before you knew, there were 10 naked ladies lying there, because you were not allowed to take any of the clothes, because it was full of lice, right?

Yeah.

Anyway, so I was one of the last ones going out. And then we come into Bergen. And there was a square, and I was put up with some other girls in one of these buildings.

And there was a kitchen. And I don't know how smart I got. But I'm going to go and work in the kitchen. And I worked



in the kitchen.

And I stole some butter, and I put it in my chest. And I ran home, because I wanted to bring the girls butter. And before I came, it was running down.

Anyway, so then the Red Cross started coming, and they had clothes for us. Because after all, we had nothing. And I got a leather jacket. It was an old leather jacket, but it was a leather jacket.

I got and Eisenhower jacket. Yes. Oh, yes, but while we were still on our own before we were liberated, there was nobody. We could walk around, and there were warehouses.

You have no idea, but the German had warehouses full of-- what do you call it-- attache cases. These leather attache cases the officers always used. When you see films, they always have this attache-- a whole building full of attache cases, a whole building full of jacket flyers for the Air Force, beautiful jackets. And then there was old clothes and all kinds of junk.

And I found myself a pair of pants. It was-- they were huge. So I put I think some kind of a piece of string around it, because I weighed 46 pounds at that time.

46 pounds?

Yes.

That's all you were?

And I'm 5'8.

You're 5'8, and you weighed 46 pounds?

And anyway, I found those pants. And there, I found the leather jacket-- not the Red Cross didn't give me. There, I found the leather jacket. And so the Red Cross there and when we were liberated, they tried to give us clothes, and so on.

And then the British soldiers, they're very nice. And there was a movie house, and you only were allowed to go to a movie if you had an escort. You had to go with a soldier, and I found myself a soldier.

And his name was Goldberg, and he says he was Jewish, and that he came from Edinburgh, Liverpool. I don't remember what-- somewhere. He became my friend kind of. And then they said, if we know of any people we want to write to, you could.

So I raised my hand. And they said, you want to write to someone? I said, yes. I have an uncle in Canada.

And they said, but you know his address? I said, damn well I know the address. I said, it's 1448 Bishop Street, Montreal.

And they looked like I was nuts. You know, how could I remember an address in Canada?

Right.

So I did write a letter, and my uncle got it. It was a first letter arrived from someone who was in a concentration camp. And I believe it was even published in the newspaper. And so my uncle knew that I was alive. And [INAUDIBLE]--

Can I ask you this first?

Yes.

When you realized you were liberated, did you have any emotional feeling? Did it mean any--

Oh, wow. That's all I can say. Yeah, I mean, it was unreal. It was absolutely unreal.

But the thing was that we had so many friends who were sick. And we tried to find them. And to find someone, because there were hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of them lying in these places there.

I had a lady, and how she got through, that Mengele didn't take her was unbelievable. She was much older, and she looked older. She had hardly any teeth, and not a nice-looking woman, but a heart of gold.

She would do the dirtiest work, and she would get a little extra soup. And she would give me a little bit of bread or a little something to help me. So I went looking for her. It took me days to find her amongst-- because there were no lists. You only went from bed to bed to bed to bed.

And I did find her. And she told me, you know what? I have a son in Czechoslovakia. And she told me where he lived and his name. And after the war, I did find him, and he got her

Good.

I never saw her again. But anyway--

Was there any-- did you have any sense of celebration when you were liberated? Do you know what I'm saying? Did you feel it?

Oh, we celebrated. I can tell you, we had a parties. Yes, yes. We were dancing.

You did?

Oh, yes. We had-- there were young men, and the soldiers. And the funny thing was there were some French Canadians.

They said they're from Canada, and they spoke French. We couldn't understand it. How come I spoke French with the Flyers?

Right, yeah.

And also--

So you did feel liberated, truly liberated?

Oh, I mean, it was something, you can't describe it. That you made it, you know?

Yes.

You are the ones who made it. These horrible people couldn't get you down, and you really made it. And so also--

Yeah, then you said you were talking about that you-- about your relative in Montreal?

Yes.

Yeah. And you wrote to him, and he got the letter?

Yeah, he got the letter. And we were allowed to go into the villages, you know? So we went into the villages. And we didn't set the houses on fire, and we didn't beat anybody up.

And we were so happy to be alive that we just went into the houses. We looked around, and we didn't steal anything. It was amazing that it didn't occur to us that we would take anything.

Yes, yeah.

And this is what I tell the young people. That here we were, and they did such terrible things. And we went into the villages, and we didn't do anything to anybody.

We didn't steal. We didn't burn down the houses. We just looked in awe to all these things.

And then I remember we had a big party on the square, and we were kind of dancing, and so on. Anyways, there was a girl whom I knew already from my Zionist days. And she said that she got in touch with her husband. And he's coming, and she will go home with him.

And so I said to her, Eva, can I go with you? She says, sure. So I went with her. And then Ruth Bondy-- you might know the name. She's a writer. She lives in Israel.

She went with us on that. So we went on that rickety track, and we drove through the whole of Germany, from Hamburg all the way to the Czech border. It's a long way. And we came there, and we went to the inn, and they didn't know what to do with us.

They were so happy for us. And the next day, we drove to the Czech border. We got off the truck, and we stood there, and we sang the Czech national anthem.

And then we drove into Prague. And this young man, with whom I'm still friends, he said, OK, girls. That's it.

And this girl who was my friend, I called her [? Chinda. ?] I didn't know her-- [? Ornstein ?] was her name, but we called her [? Chinda. ?] And the two of us, we looked at each other. And we said, so where we are going?

So there was a young woman standing there. And she saw that we didn't have where to go. She said, what are you going to do, girls. And we said, we don't know.

She said, you know what? I got my apartment back. I even found my husband. You can come to us.

So and she left. And she gave me the address, and she left. And I knew exactly where it was.

And so the two of us, we traveled very light.

Yeah, right.

And we didn't have a penny to our name.

Right.

We did have a few clothes-- not much, but a little something. And we went on the streetcar. And we had no money, so a soldier paid for us. And that's how I started my life again.

And so you stayed in Prague for how long?

Well, since I got in touch with my uncle.

Your uncle.

I did not want to stay in Czechoslovakia.

Yeah, right.

And I came to Canada in '49. Even then, it took four years for me to get a visa.

What did you do in those four years? Did you--

Oh, so I had a very good friend in Theresien. He was my boyfriend, but it was a really girl-boy-- not lovers.

Yeah, yeah.

He was he was a very good boy. And he said-- and again, I have to emphasize that all what we needed to know, we had to memorize. And so he gave me his mother's name, because his father went illegally into Palestine in 1940. And he gave me his mother's name and her address.

And so when I came to Prague-- and first of all, we had to-- to go to eat, we went to Habitas, the Catholic charity. And to the nuns we went. The nuns fed us lunch.

We were lined up. There were people from all over the place. And I came in my leather jacket. And next to me were two young men. And they said, would you like to barter it for a coat?

And I said, yeah, sure, if you have a nice coat. So they said, OK, tomorrow for lunch you come, and we'll bring you the coat. So they came, and I gave them my jacket, and they gave me the coat.

The coat, yeah.

And so I started looking for this lady. And when I came to the address, the super told me that they moved. And he gave me the address.

But there was a building in the center of Prague where all the people like me would gather. And they would tell us-- give us information where we could get the money, and where we could get food, and so on. And in the foyer, there were pictures.

And it says, this is my brother. He was there. This is my mother. She was there.

And amongst the pictures, I found the picture of this young man, my friend. So I knew already that he's not back yet. And so I went to his family, and I told them who I was. And the they were very kind to me.

And the gentleman already knew that he was not alive, but the mother still didn't know. He still was waiting for him. He died in Buchenwald in January '45. And so they would ask me to come for meals, and I would go there for meals. And then they realized that he's not coming back, but I don't have anybody.

And I told them that I have an uncle in Canada, that I want to go to Canada. I won't stay. And so they took me in, and I lived with them. And the gentleman was very practical. And he said, since you want to go to Canada, you better go and start learning English.

So since I had somewhere to stay, it didn't cost me anything. And I went to-- it was called the Institute for Modern Languages. And I went every day. And by the end of the year-- I went in the fall and the spring. I wrote my university exam, and then I looked for a job.

And he saw that he would open a little store for me, like a flower shop. He said he would finance it, and I would be running it. And nothing came of it.

And then he had a friend who opened a store, and they hired me. You know what I had for sale? Three pairs of gloves. That was my inventory.

Right.

And one day I came and somebody broke in. So that was the end of my job. And I went to the Jewish community, and I got a job, which was a horrible job, back in the place that I was once where I lived. It was above the synagogue.

It was a big hall, and they were clothes brought back from Theresien, which was a horrible thing. And we went through them and put them like the better ones aside so people like me could get some clothes. And also, we had a division from America.

People from America were sending parcels, and so we had there, and there were blankets. They were not woolen blankets, but there were blankets. And you know what? We stole them, a lot of them.

And I had from one of the blankets made a coat. We died those blankets. It was brown, and I had a beautiful brown winter coat.

And I didn't stay there too long. And I was hired to work in the-- we had a newspaper, which is now Rosh Chodesh. At that time, it was called [NON-ENGLISH]. And I was working.

There was a lady. We did the addresses. We had little plates, and we put the addresses on. And I also would retype the articles people wrote by hand. And I would type them so the proofreader had an easier time to do that.

But what happened was, my mother's cousin, whom I called Uncle, was brought back from Israel. And he became chief rabbi of Prague, and his name was [? Gustaf ?] [? Victor. ?] So I was kind of a high-ranking relative there.

And one day I went downstairs, and I met a man, and the man knew that I knew English. And he says, listen, I have a good job for you. Would you like to work for the American Joint? I said, well, why not?

So he sent me where I had to go, and I worked for the American Joint. And my salary was twice what I had, and I didn't have much work. I filled out little pieces of paper, and I went to the bank to get thousands of dollars. Because in order to emigrate, you had to pay in dollars, that we provided the people with dollars.

And so I waited till-- and, yes. And my visa didn't come through. It took four years. And they were looking for girls in Australia.

There was a shortage of young girls. So I had a relative who was working in immigration for the Jewish community. And she says, you know what? Why don't we make out an application for a visa for you? You know, you're not getting the visa to Canada, so you might as well try to go to Australia.

And one day I got the visa for Australia, and the next day I got the visa for Canada.

Oh, my.

Yeah. So I didn't go to Austria. I said, that's too far away.

So then you went to Canada?

I came to Canada to my uncle, yes. And he always wrote to me that I should learn to become a hair-- he had a hair dressing salon-- that I should learn to manicurists or something like that. And I would tell him, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because I knew I wouldn't want to do that.

Anyway, but he paid for my fare, and I went by train to Belgium, to Ostend. And from Ostend, I went to Dover. And

then by train, I went to London.

And this relative who said I should apply for Australia, she had friends, and she told them that I was coming. And she went with me on the train, too. She wanted I should smuggle through for her a ring, and I refused.

I said, on account of a ring, I'm not going to be put in jail.

In danger, yeah.

I'm sorry. I cannot do that.

Right.

But these people waited for me at the station in London. And the first thing they asked me was, I brought Czech salami? I did have some Czech salami.

And they lived in St. John's Wood. How do you like that I remember all that?

Wonderful. How long did you stay in London?

Well, just a week. I wanted to see London before I go to-- so I wasn't-- so I came to St. John's Wood. And the first thing they offered me, did I want a rum and Coke? Did I know what a rum and Coke was? I said, yes.

Well, I took a few sips. And then they told me that their apartment was too little. That I cannot stay with them. They arranged for me to stay somewhere else. Well--

Then you got to Montreal?

Just one second.

Oh.

I went. They put me up in a hostel from the Jewish community. It was like back being in Theresien. It was a huge hall for women, and underneath, there was a huge hall for men. And the food was served on metal plates, well, just like camp.

It was such a shock to me. You have no idea. And I had a cake in my [INAUDIBLE]. And there was a little boy, and he knew that I had this cake.

And during the night he would say, Mademoiselle, gateau. Mademoiselle, silver plate, gateau. He was from Egypt. Because at that time, the Jews from Egypt and India who wanted to go to Palestine had to go through London. So these were the people who I stayed with.

But I wanted to see London. So I took off in the morning by myself. But on the way back, I always had problems, always some man would follow me.

Because it was in Aldgate East, which is a very bad part of London. That's where the London Tower is. And I was smart.

I said to a policeman, I would say, would you please take me home, because I am being bothered by men? They don't leave me alone. And that's how I managed to go out, and go back in, and so on. And then I took a train to Liverpool. And I went on the Empress of France, where I was deathly sick, to Canada.

And then what did you do in Canada?

Well, yes, and all these ladies who were on the train-- on the boat, they were mothers of war brides. And I was desperately sick, and they took me to the doctor. And since my name was Epstein, he said to me, oh, you must be a relative of Sir Jacob. And I happen to know-- just by accident, because I always was interested in art-- I happened to know that he was a famous sculptor.

Right.

And I said, yes, of course.

Of course.

So I was-- so I got the better treatment kind of. And so they always said, how well you know your uncle? I said, I don't know. So we come to Montreal, and I'm standing up there on the boat. And I look down, and I said, there he is. That's my uncle.

I love it.

Yes. Anyway, that's how it was.

So you got to Montreal, and then you met your husband? Just very quickly--

Yes, and I got married in 1950.

Was he from Europe? Or was he from Canada?

He came from Lithuania in 1923.

Oh, OK.

His family was-- his father was here before the First World War, and then he came back. And now, before the turn of the century, I must say.

And his first name?

His name was Sidney.

Sidney Ivry. And then did you have a family? Did you have children?

Well, at the beginning, we couldn't have children. So I adopted a girl who was 17 months old. Her name is Elsa.

Oh, yeah.

And then four years later, I became pregnant. And I had a son, and his name is Victor.

Oh, OK.

But Elsa is not very nice, and she doesn't talk to me now. She's 60 years old, and she has two children. And they have-- I have two grandchildren from her and five great-grandchildren, but I don't see them.

Oh, dear.

Anyway, that happens. What can you do?

I know.

And my son has three daughters, and he lives in California. He lives in Orange-- that's outside of San Francisco.

Can I ask you some questions, just general questions, now?

Yes, sure.

Well, just to finish up, did you work?

When I came here, yes, I worked, but first in the beauty parlor, which I despised.

Right.

Because the ladies who came there, they were real WASP-y type. And they were talking about their birdies and the doggies. And then afterwards, I experienced these things they're so banal.

Yeah.

And I told my uncle that I really didn't like it. So he knew somebody at Bell Telephone. Bell Telephone is a big company.

Right.

And I was-- in Europe, we learned how to do these designs, construction. So I thought I could draw plans and things like that. So I went there, and I had to pass an exam.

Everything was fine. I could answer everything except when it came to feet and ounces. And because after all, I learned everything--

On the Metric system.

On the Metric system, and so I failed. And so I got a job in an office where I did invoicing. And that's where I met my husband.

OK, let me ask you some general questions. What are your thoughts about Germany today?

Well, I say the people who were born after the war, they are not responsible for it. I don't like, for instance, when I go to a store-- now, it's not so obvious. But years ago, I would stand in line, and I would hear German.

I'd immediately turn around. And when I saw a person who was about my age, I had very bad feelings, because I knew he must have been somewhere. You know? And, of course-- a friend of mine. He wrote a big article. But he says, one eventually forgives, but one never forgets.

Forgets, yeah, right.

But I really don't forgive them either. Because, for instance, the guards in Auschwitz, nothing happened to them. They went home, and they got married. And they are grandfathers now or whatever.

Nothing happened. You know, they caught the top. But the regular soldiers there who did just the dirty work, and kicked us, and beat us, and they helped us into-- pushed us into the gas chamber, he went home like nothing would have happened.

Did you tell your children your life story?



Yes.

How old were they when you told them?

Oh, I told them gradually.

Yes.

Yes, they always-- first of all, I had a number. So I had to-- I couldn't say, well, I put it there for nothing. I had to tell them who put it there.

When your children were the age that you were during the war, did that bring back a lot of memories for you?

No. No. You know what? It's much worse now.

Right now, because I live by myself and I'm not well, it haunts me much more than before. When I was young, I was busy bringing up a family, having children, and doing things, and schoolwork, and all that. I belonged to a Zionist organization. I belonged to-- what do you call it-- Hadassah. I belonged to Hadassah, and I was very active.

I was a President. I was this, and I was that, and always working for Israel. But the war years, it was pushed aside, because I was busy. I was busy living.

Do you feel that you are a different person, you would have been a different person today, if you hadn't gone through what you went through?

Oh, certainly.

In what way would you--

Well, first of all, I would have been a professional person, because, as you can hear, I'm no dumbbell.

Right.

And I would have become some-- who knows what? And so my life would have been different. And I wouldn't have been a different person as a person, because that's what you are, whether you're kind or miserable. So I still would like-- I like to help people now. I'm sure I would have liked to help people then also.

But I would have been-- I can tell, I'm sure I would have been quite an outstanding person. I was very talented as far as art was concerned. When my children were small, I took art classes, and I went back to university. My major was-- don't laugh-- German literature and fine art.

But when I tell it to somebody, German literature, I said, yes. I studied Thomas Mann, and Henrich Mann, and Kafka, and Heine. And after all, these are all Czech Jews except Heine was not-- but Rilke. And so and I did extremely well. I finished with magna cum laude. And then I was teaching preschoolers' art for 13 years.

Is your husband still alive?

No. My husband died in '96.

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

And I understand that you do a lot of speaking to--

Well, I used to. Right now-- yes, I did it for 25 years.

Wonderful. Wonderful.

But you have-- I published a book. You have the book now in the library, because I sent you one.

And the name of your book?

It's called, I Am Their Voice. I felt that 6 million people lost their voice. So I tried to-- it's even presumptuous on my part, but I thought that--

Wonderful.

And it's not about me. The book is not about me. It's quite different.

It is letters, poems, and drawings from children I spoke to.

Wonderful. Wonderful.

So there's so many books written about people. They write their stories. And you know what? The sad part is, nobody is reading it.

Young people [AUDIO OUT]. They are on their texting business, you know?

Yeah.

So my book is different, because it shows how young people really can feel with you, can have understanding, and want to-- are really very sensitive. So if you will read it, the poems are outstanding. They are written by 12-year-old kids, and I couldn't write poems like that. I had an idea-- but now since I'm not so well, it would have taken some time-- and to find somebody to put these poems to music.

Wonderful.

Maybe some time somebody will do that, because they're absolutely wonderful.

Are you angry that you had to go through what you did, and have the losses that you had, and other people your age living over here did not have to go through that? Are you angry about that?

No. No, no, no, I'm not angry at that. As I said, I'm a fatalist. It just happens that I was born in Liechtenstein, and I wasn't born in Washington D.C. Or I wasn't born in who knows where.

Do you feel Czech? Or do you feel Canadian? Do you feel Jewish? How would you describe yourself?

All the above.

All the above. Yeah.

Yes, I speak fluently Czech. Even so, my mother tongue is German. I probably better Czech than German now, because I don't speak-- I have a cleaning lady who's Czech. I speak Czech to her.

But nobody can get over it that I speak so well Czech without mistakes. You know, Czech is quite a difficult language.

What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Do you remember?

Well, I saw Eichmann sometimes. He came to Auschwitz to inspect everything.

You did see him?

Yeah, well, I mean probably. Just you were-- he just was passing by kind of.

How did you know?

And the thing is, of course, I was in Prague when Heydrich was killed.

Oh, yes.

And you know what they did? Because they knew that-- they came on bicycles. So they woke you up in the middle of the night.

The police came and said, do you know how to ride a bicycle? And I would say, yes. You own a bicycle? I said, no.

And you know what they did? After that, they sent 1,000 Jews-- right after Eichmann did that-- 8,000 Jews immediately to Poland to death, 1,000. And the funny part is, the initial of that transport is A-A-H.

And we call it [NON-ENGLISH]. It just happened that way. I am [? BF. ?] But that transport in May is A-A-H. If you look at it, you will see that 1,000 people from Prague went directly.

And were you aware of the town that was destroyed after Heydrich was killed-- Ledecka?

Ledecka?

Ledecka.

Yes, we knew about Ledecka.

You did?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Any thoughts on that?

It's a terrible thing at Ledecka.

Yeah.

And you know, some of the children from Ledecka came to Theresien, some of the small-- I don't know how many, but that's what I was told. I never saw them. And you know, I have a gym teacher. We were talking about-- because I remember teachers. His name was Fredy Hirsch.

Oh, yes, well-known. Yes.

But he was my gym teacher. And you know what happened? There came a transport of children, and they put them not too far from Theresien.

And because he was so fond of children, he went there to look how it's going. And the SS found him there, and that's how they sent him to Auschwitz. Otherwise, he might have survived. And he committed suicide.

Suicide, yes, yes.

And Fredy, he was such a fantastic guy.

Yeah.

And you know, he was gay. But there was never ever any suspicion that he would mistreat anybody-- never. And he was my gym teacher. And in all the war years, we went to gym.

And we had a place. That was the only place we could go. It was called [NON-ENGLISH]. And there, we would be able to run.

And he had a table. And he was standing on the table, and he would be whistling. So we were doing gym.

He was so handsome. There's a little book about him. A young girl, who did research, it was for her doctorate or something. She wrote about him, and I have this book.

And Wexler, the one who ran away? There were two--

Oh, yes, yes.

Yes. So they went to Fredy already when the whole transport was in that A camp. And they went to Fredy and say, listen, Fredy, we really want to make a-- we don't want that we all go to hell tomorrow. Let's do something to disrupt the whole thing.

And he said to them, give me-- I don't know how many hours he gave them. And they came back, and he was dead.

He was dead.

A doctor gave him some pills. And he swallowed them, and he died. He was such a handsome man.

But there was never-- and there was never anything that he would go after the boys, never. And you know, he looked after the children in Theresien. They had-- as a matter of fact, today I send you through the Holocaust Center, a 10-year-old kid wrote a newspaper, and somebody gave me a copy.

It's not-- some of it is not very clear. But anyway, they made copies for me here at the Holocaust Center, and they sent it to [? Mikael. ?] And you will be able to see it. It's like a newspaper.

The handwriting of this 10-year-old kid, and, yes. And I went through all the list, because I have the book from Theresien. And so I can tell when they were born, and I can tell which transport. So I made the list.

Of all these children who wrote in that little newspaper, one survived. You know, there were 15,000 children in Theresien. And from the 15,000, 50 survived.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Are you more comfortable around other survivors?

No. To me, it doesn't make any difference. The Hungarians bother me.

Oh.

Sorry to say. You know, because I left in 1938 my home. And they left in 1944.

They had six years to do good. It is true, they killed so many of them.

Yes.

And you know what? When they tell the story, they say that Mengele was the one who did the selection at the train. So I always would tease them. I said, tell me, did he introduce himself? Or did he-- how did you know he was Mengele?

Because there were so many other SS men who did the selection. But they say-- because that's the name they know. And I always say, don't say that. Because we have deniers. And if they find out that you are telling a lie, that's not very good.

Yeah. Do you think the world has learned the lesson about the Holocaust?

No. No, not whatsoever. As a matter of fact--

Can it happen again? Do you think it can happen again?

Yes. It doesn't have to happen to the Jews. It can happen to another nation, that there's a crazy guy. And there's all these people are no good. But we Jews have a-- but they can't get rid of us, you know?

We are here a long time. And so many pogroms and so many things are done to us, and we are still here. Look, I believe that the Jews in Bohemia are Spanish Jews, and my family are Spanish Jews.

Because if you would see the pictures of my aunts, you would say, oh, my goodness, gracious, look at their big, black eyes, and their huge black hair. And I have-- on one side my family, from my grandfather's side, I can go back to 1752, and the other one, to 1715. And as a matter of fact, I was telling [? Mikael ?] that there is a book out-- it's also written by a woman by the name of [? Richkova-- ?] about the Jews in my area.

And the first ones arrived there in 16-something. So I wrote to her an email and I said to thank her for all the work she did, for all the the digging and uncovering all the facts about all the Jews. And she's not Jewish. But one thing I want to know is, where did they come from?

And I also was at the main archives in Prague and where they did research for me. And they said that my family, they can date back to 1715. But where they came from, they cannot tell.

Do you get reparations?

From Germany?

Yeah.

Very little, yes.

Is there anything else you would like to talk about before we close?

Well, you tell me what interests you.

Any message to your grandchildren that you'd like to give her or great-grandchildren?

To my grandchildren, I want to say that they should never forget where they came from.

Yeah.

But you know what? My granddaughter just got married, and I could not go to the wedding, because it was in San Francisco. And I wasn't up to go.

But she married a non-Jews. They had a huppah. And and he broke the glass, and so on.

Do you feel more Jewish because of what you went through? Do you think that your experience made you feel more Jewish?

No, no. I was very Jewish to begin with. My mother was very Jewish.

Yes, yes.

Yes. Oh, yes. And you know, we always-- like, for instance, when my children small, when I went to synagogue, I always walked. And it wasn't around the corner. And it was in honor of my mother.

Because when we went to our little synagogue, we had to go through woods, and fields, and meadows. And we always walked. The only thing, on Yom Kippur, at Ne'ila, the fellow who looked after the horses, he came there with the horses to take us home. But my mother would never drive, never.

And so I did the same thing. I always walked with my children to school. And my children went to a Jewish school. My son spoke very well Hebrew. And he studied Tanakh and all that. Yes.

But, you know, now, he's far away. And he's in a surroundings which is not very Jewish. He does go on the holidays to a temple, because the woman he married, they belong to the temple. As a matter of fact, my son got divorced after 28 years, which is-- I got sick, and he got divorced, and everything at the same time. It was very hard on me.

Do you feel that you're two different people, because of what you went through-- someone on the inside that's different than the one on the outside?

No. No, no. I never hide who I am. This is who I am.

I had the misfortune to live in Europe in a horrible time. But I'm a fatalist, and this is-- and it was my fate that I didn't have psoriasis and Mengele chose me to live. And otherwise, I would have been dead a long time ago.

Yes.

And right now, I'm sick, and I'm very much alone. And that is worse than anything else that you can imagine. I'm always by myself.

And I have a friend whom I played bridge twice a week. And he's getting on. And he's now 92.

And he's now in residence, but it's a very beautiful residence. And I phoned him, and he cries. He doesn't stop crying. He says, you know what? When I was young, I did all these things.

And now, this, it doesn't leave me, and I'm just a wreck. And so it comes back more then before. It haunts us much more.

Yes, yes.

And this is the bad part.

Yeah, yeah.

And you see, a person like you can understand that. But how could you tell that to your neighbor? How would they know what you feel like?

So you are there, and you have to keep on fighting and hoping that you are not going to die by yourself. That's all I'm worried about. I have a lifeline.

Good.

But the thing is that I still try to-- as a matter of fact, now I'm doing research on Mrs. Albright, Mrs. Albright's life. You know that I met her cousin?

Oh, you did?

Yes. I met her cousin in-- [? Dascha. ?] I met her cousin in 1998, I believe. Because this friend of mine, whom I told you who's-- he was in Prague at the same time. And he was staying in a hotel.

And I phoned him. And he says, come on over. I have a visitor here. Come on over.

So I went to the hotel. And her cousin, [? Dascha, ?] was there. And we talked, but nothing much. Like visiting in the hotel, you talk about the city or whatever it was, because he comes from the same town as Dachau.

And that's-- he knew her as a young girl. And her parents, her father, was their family doctor. And so she says, I have to go now. I said, I have to go now, too.

And so we left. And we went downstairs, and we crossed the [? Mensa ?] Square. And I said to her, tell me, how can she say that she didn't know she was Jewish? So she said to me, her daughter said, Mommy, when she looks in the mirror, doesn't she see who she is?

Right, right.

I tell you, I cannot understand that. She came back to Prague in 1947. That means she was 10 years old.

Right.

Her cousin, [? Dascha, ?] who was older, came back at the same time from England. And her cousin, [? Dascha, ?] her parents weren't there. They were all killed, and her grandparents. Didn't she ask, what happened to Uncle so-and-so?

I mean, even if you are 10 years old. The bad person is her father. I hate him, because he was such a bureaucrat. He didn't want that anything should interfere with his climb. He wanted to become ambassador.

You know that being a Jew, he was afraid maybe they wouldn't promote him. So they all became-- they all were baptized in England. I mean, she's such a smart woman.

Not only that, she was teaching history. So didn't she teach history, what was going on in Europe? Didn't she know?

I mean, how could-- if I would meet her, I would say, Mrs. Albright, you are such a smart person, but you are such a damn liar.

Anyway, what I'm doing now, research in her book. If you seem to have the book, on page 276, there is an article [AUDIO OUT] by the name of [? Eugena Smalkova, ?] that she was in Auschwitz. And she was pulled out by a SS man, and that's how she survived, and went to Hamburg. This is a bloody lie, because we were not in the showers. We were selected in the camp.

And then she arrived. She went to Neugraben, which is a lie, too. Because we went from Auschwitz, we went first to

Hamburg, Friehausen, and then we went to Neugraben. So the whole thing doesn't make sense.

And not only that. I have the book where everybody is listed who went to camp from Theresien, right?

Right.

I cannot find her. They cannot find her in [INAUDIBLE] Theresien either. So we cannot-- we don't know who she is. But she writes this that her daughter is working for Mrs. Albright.

So I told your friend, [? Mikaela, ?] I said, why don't you ask this daughter which transport she went to Auschwitz? Because we cannot find us. Her name is [? Eugena ?] [? Smalkova. ?] We cannot find her anywhere. So this is my latest thing.

Yes.

And I want to write to the publisher and say-- I don't want to say they should change it now. But in case there's a reprint, either you leave the whole thing out, or say the truth how it is. Because [? Eugena ?] [? Smalkova ?] can't be found to go to Auschwitz.

Well, I wish you good luck on that research. And we're going to have to close now.

Yeah, OK.

So I want to thank you so much for doing this interview.

You're very welcome.

And I'm going to close with this. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liselotte Epstein Ivry. Thank you.

Thank you. Have a nice day.

You, too. Bye.

Bye.