

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Hoffman. This is track number two. And you were talking about now being in this house, with a little bit of water.

Yes, it was amazing. There was a bathroom, you could go to the bathroom and not outside on the latrine. Because while we were in Auschwitz, they woke us up at 3:00 in the morning to go to the latrine, and then back to sleep on the floor. So it was wonderful-- clean.

And we would sit on the bunk beds in the evening, and we would talk about what we would eat when we got free. And we would only be able to think in association what we had-- bread, coffee, and soup. So we never could remember any other food except to compare with what we had to eat.

We got up very, very early in the morning. The stars were still shining. And we would march through the city, through the town, whatever, to the factory.

Are you still wearing your white summer dress that you had gotten?

Yes, the whole time. And it was amazing-- the people, first of all, the women, the SS women, were local women who really did not know how to be bad. But after a while they taught them, and a few of them were tough on us.

But there was a family who had a little girl. And as we were marching, the little girl ran out and gave me-- she was looking, they knew I was a young child-- she ran out and gave me some food, and then ran back out. If they would have caught them, they would have been punished. But they did not care, and they did that.

It was fantastic. And she would come every so often and bring me something.

In the factory where I was working, you had to have very delicate hands. You had to straighten out tiny little wires, which was part of an airplane part. And they were sort of twisted, and you had to straighten them out.

And that's what I was doing. Some people were blowing bulbs and heat with heat, I think, a tough one. But most of us were just doing parts of this for the airplane parts.

But they were standing behind us, the German, and they made us work faster and faster. And then, we worked till late at night. And then we went back, they took us back home-- home. And then, the next day, we were there the longest time in Weisswasser. But it was better than Auschwitz.

Then we started-- we heard that there were airplanes coming, and bombed these German factories and things. And they had us go outside and lie on the ground, and just be there while the bombs were coming.

And we said, thank God, maybe the bombs will hit them and we can get out of here. We were praying for that. But nothing happened.

Then, after some few months-- we never knew what day it was, or date, or anything. Then they moved us to another factory, Horneburg. And if I tell you how one or the other was, I wouldn't know which one was which. So I can say that one of the factories that we went to, it was in a salt mine, inside-- that's where the factory was, and that's where we had to go.

And it was hard to walk on the salt, and all. And that was a horrible place. So Auschwitz, Weisswasser, Porta-- oh, Porta, [? Porta-Westfalica ?] was one before. Then Horneburg-- no, Horneburg, Porta, Beendorf was the worst. And when we got there, everybody was full-- who were there-- they were full of-- a man is looking in here, now.

What is he saying? Please-- Beendorf.

Yeah, OK.

You tell me. OK. Beendorf was the worst place. It was filthy, the people were full of lice, and it was just horrible. You couldn't go to the bathroom. You could not wash your hands, or anything. It was just a horrible, filthy, dirty place.

And we were there for a while. And from Porta-Beendorf, then they sent us to Hamburg. And there, they had a bestial SS who beat us a lot. And it was a scary, horrible place where we just didn't know what was going to happen to us.

He beat us. He just abused-- abusive person, yeah, SS.

OK, you're a young girl, and this is happening to you. Did you talk it over with the older women about what was happening to all of you?

It happened to all of us the same way.

No, I understand that. Is it something you shared with each other about your feelings and thoughts about what you all were going through? Or was it so traumatic that you--

Oh, we were talking, we were all talking to each other about all this, what's going to be, what's going to happen. And it-- yeah, we talked, but--

Were any of them very motherly towards you, being such a young girl?

Well, we were all like close family. So there were some girls, and I think when they came to Sweden, one beautiful one, she got married there. But I feel-- and Blanca had a cousin, and she came to America. And so we knew, but otherwise, there we all stuck together.

About how many women were you with?

Oh, 1,000 women in one barrack.

No, no, no, but then when you left to go to the different factories?

Oh, it was-- I don't know, how many fit in each.

So now you're with this abusive guard, and you said he beat you.

Oh, he was vicious. He was very, very vicious, very bad. But we were there for a little while.

Did he beat you, particularly? Did he--

No, no.

You were not beaten? Were you beaten? Did he beat you?

No, no, but that was the last place. But when we were in the better places, like Weisswasser, we would dream about being home. And we would sing. And being-- Blanca and the older girls, when we marched, we had to march 100 kilometers one time, and we would sing so the others don't cry.

What did you sing?

I don't know.

Do you remember the songs?

No.

No songs?

No, I don't know, but we sang the whole time as we walked, we marched. We stuck together. And the unfortunate thing was, well, they had no use for children and babies. They took them all away. But one woman was pregnant, and she was due.

And Blanca took her into the barrack, and she delivered the baby. And then she took the baby to the German nurse, and asked her to take some care of it. What they did was, though, they destroyed the baby, most likely. But she could not do anything.

But she wasn't allowed to have a pregnant woman, she wasn't allowed anything. But the systems that they had, the horrible, brutal behavior of the SS by that time, it was all new SS, not the ones that were in Weisswasser. They had women, soldiers, who were used to being bad.

So it was very, very devastating.

And so the last factory, the last camp you were in--

The last place was Hamburg. And I don't know if it was a factory, or that was just-- I don't know which is which. I know that we were working in ammunition factory in the beginning, I think. I don't want to quote-- Horneburg Weisswasser was the big one, that we were there the longest.

But we were working in other factories, like I don't want to say it, because if people will know, they may say, they didn't have one there. But I know that there were places that were out of sight, like the salt mine, in there. They were hiding those factories there.

So we went through the hardest, the toughest. And it was a miracle that I survived. I kept saying, I wish we were all dead. We wish that God would take us away so we wouldn't have to suffer anymore. But I was a skeleton by then.

And at the end of the war, Hamburg was the last place. I had sores, I had--

Lice?

What?

Lice?

Oh, I had lice from Beendorf. And you were not a human being anymore. I'm a skeleton, I was a skeleton.

So let's now talk about the liberation.

Yes, so--

You're in Hamburg, right? For liberation.

Yes, OK. So one day, we had a girl who-- they let us get out of the wagon, to be outside the wagons. And one day, she comes in and says, I have news. Today, they are going to cut the bread-- you know, a loaf of bread-- cut the bread in six-- in four. And we are going to get some of the margarine and things. But they will cut it in four, which means you get a bigger piece, and not cut in six.

And then when it came, they said, no, it was still cut in six, that she they lied to her. And we still had the same thing. And we always said, oh, that girl, she always comes with these news and they are never true.

So we did not know that the war was over until-- then she came in and says, the war is over, and Hitler is dead. And we said, oh, she comes with these stories. We did not believe her.

Then, they let us get out of the wagons. And there was an engine, a train, on the other--

Track?

Track. And the engineer gave me a cup of hot water, and I wrote in my story, I couldn't believe it. I could wash my dirty hands and face. And then, he gave me a Maggi cube. And from the rest of the water, I put that in the hot water so I could have like a chicken soup.

It was like a bullion--

A bullion, and I said, at home, the chicken soup didn't taste as good as this. But again, he also said, the war is over, and the head had fallen-- Hitler is dead. And you are going to Denmark. We could not believe that we were free.

So they loaded us in real trains, and they took us-- we really went to Denmark. And you ask the questions you want to ask, then I'll tell you about that.

OK, well is there anything else you want to talk about the factories and the labor camps? Anything you wanted to include?

Oh, I see.

But if not, we could go on.

Except the fact that we-- from early morning, till 10 o'clock at night, we got back to our quarters. And just--

Were you still wearing that white dress?

Yes, yes.

Still?

Yes, and freezing, freezing.

And at the time of liberation, you were wearing that dress?

Yes. There was no way-- and luckily, that jacket saved my life, too. Because you know how these jackets are, they were heavier.

So you're 14 years old at the time of liberation.

Yes.

Had you started to menstruate at all?

No, actually, I started in the ghetto-- the first time, I didn't even know what it was. But they gave us-- the water they gave us had this medicine in there that stopped you from getting it. So at that time, I didn't have it.

So from then on, you did not?

Yeah, after that, I didn't get it anymore. And I don't remember then when I got it again.

So now it's liberation, and you said you're going to Denmark.

They said we're going to Denmark. And we said, we can't-- that's not true. We were talking to each other.

Did you do any kind of-- did you and the women do any kind of celebration when you really realized?

Wait, wait, wait, we said, it's not true, because Hitler would kill us, murderer before-- he would not let us be free again. He would kill us before, so it cannot be true that we are liberated.

So, but then, I said, but it was really true. They brought us to Denmark, and they put us in a school-- empty school. They had fixed up bunk beds, and white sheets and blankets, and white nightgowns. So we could not believe we got--

Is this in Copenhagen? Or where-- in Copenhagen?

No, no.

You don't know the town.

I don't remember.

That's all right.

I don't remember. It was close to the border. So it was the most heavenly feeling. And then, we sang, and we talked about happy things, or what we're going to do when we get home.

Did you think your mother was still alive?

No.

And your sisters?

No, because the women that were there before, they said that they had put them in a shower and they were gone. And then, when I spoke to a lady here who researched it for me, my father, because he was the only one that I knew nothing about.

And then she sent me the information, and she told me that the last place that they took him was Bergen-Belsen, and no more news after that. And that's where they were killing them.

So now you're in Denmark.

We're in Denmark, and when the train stopped, the people, the Danish people were rushing to us and brought us all kinds of things-- cookies, chocolates, food, everything. And little children-- and I wrote in my story that was the saddest thing, because we remember that our family were killed, they were gone, and we'll never see older people, our elders, and our children. We remember that they are all gone. And what are we going to do now without that family?

And-- you want me to--

Yeah, keep going. So how long did you stay in Denmark?

So we stayed overnight, and they brought us food. And couldn't believe the wonderful things, like oatmeal or things-- they had to feed us light food in the beginning. And we could have all we want. And it was terrific.

The next day, they put us on a ferry boat, and took us across to Sweden. Because Sweden went to Germany and asked

them, at the end of the war, and asked them to that they should give them 5,000 survivors. They wanted to take-- the Red Cross-- wanted to take them to Sweden.

And they did. That's why we went to Denmark, then Sweden. So then, we arrived in Sweden next day. And they took us to another big school, and again, they had fixed up all the bunk beds.

And they fed us wonderful foods again, all we wanted. And it was unreal. It was hard to really grasp that after one whole year, we were free.

But then, they took all the people who were sick into the hospital, and one of them was me. And I also had an infection on my finger that was very, very, very bad. And they did surgery on it, you know, they took care of it, and they fixed it.

And then, they x-rayed, and all the things. I was coughing. They found that I had a spot on my lung. I don't know here in America what you would call it, but it was on one spot-- it was a sign of lung trouble.

And oh, and in that wagon, when they put us in the wagon and pushed the wagon into the woods, when they opened it, I don't know if I mentioned, 54 people were dead in my wagon. And I was one of the six that was still breathing.

So when I came to Sweden, they had to put me together. They had to nurse me back to life. And I was in the hospital for a while. And after that, they fed me and got me healthy. And didn't let me out until I was OK.

And there, we were very close again with all our friends, because we were in the same wagon. And they had a lot of visitors coming. First of all, they had people from every paper in the world-- overseas, and Sweden, and everywhere.

My uncle in Australia saw the story, and saw that I was alive. It was amazing. And so, it took quite a while before they let me out of the hospital. I have some pictures-- very little, but I'll show it to you afterwards.

And they put us-- and they had us in the school yard, and people were coming. We were closed off from the public because we were sick, but when we were at the fence, and the Swedish people came on the other side of the fence, and they kept throwing things over to us.

And because I was a small child, they threw a small suitcase-- this little one. That was the most precious thing in my life. That was the only belonging that I had.

And there was a young man, Leonard-- fantastic, he was a gymnast and terrific-- I don't know, he was 20 maybe, or 20-- whatever. And he would come every day to there. And one day, he took his sister with, Anne-Marie, and then she would come every day with him.

And they said, when you get out, will you please come and live with us? I said, I'll tell you when we get out of here, they're going to take us to a school. But after I get out of the school, I will come to you. I would love to.

And when I came back 10 years ago, to Sweden, the newspapers came out, because they came out the first time when I was there. They came out and they asked Leonard, how come that you got friendly with her? A child?

He said, that's because she was so sweet, she looked so sweet, that I had to-- a sweet child-- that I had to take care of her. You know, and Anne-Marie, his sister, we wanted her to come and live with us. And their mother had died a long time before.

But their father, Fabro Gustav, Uncle Gustav, was the sweetest man in the whole wide world. And he loved me like he loves his own children. And he pampered me. He was so-- I lived with them for quite a while.

How long did you live with them?

At least one year, at least. I don't remember, but I know at least a year.

And then where did you go after? Where in Sweden-- what town in Sweden were you?

OK, wait, I'll tell you first. After we got out of that school, and this-- yes.

Then you went to the school after the hospital.

And they took us first to Visingsö, which was an island in Sweden-- beautiful island. And there, they had us in a school. They were teaching us, they had professors-- they came from everywhere. They taught us everything.

And there were both Hungarians, and Polish, and young, and boys, and girls, and women. But women, they had little, cute little houses. It was like a resort. And we were very happy there.

And from thereon, later on, they sent us to a school up north-- was another school. And we were there for quite a while. And last of all. They brought us back to Stockholm. And by then, we were well.

When you keep saying, they, you mean the Red Cross?

Yes, the Red Cross, or the UN, or whoever-- all the people that were giving us their lives, you know, help.

So now you're in Stockholm.

Yes, but outside of Stockholm was a town called Hesselby, and that's where they brought us. It was a boarding school. And there, they had people coming from everywhere. There were actors, there were-- I mean, every kind of company or organizations that would come. And wrote articles, and treated us to certain things.

So when we got out of there, one day, I have to tell you a story-- one day, that is in Sweden, after camp-- that was the last school. And one day, I said to a girlfriend of mine, let's go visit another school on the other side of Stockholm.

You sound like a very independent young woman.

Yes, yes, yes-- well, they told us how to take the train, and take the bus to the other school. By that time, we knew what was around. So we got on the bus, and we went to the school. But I-- oh, I had my little suitcase with me.

And when we were in Stockholm, in the street, we saw a lady munching on an ice cream cone. And we had a little bit of money, not much, and we were excited. We wanted one. So we went up to the guy with the cart and we said, two, please.

And he opened the top and gave us, and opened up the buns-- hot dog. And when we saw it, we were shocked-- we never had seen that. We wanted ice cream. So we gave him the money and got the hot dog.

So we were ashamed of having it, because in Hungary, when you went to the market, people were selling sausage hot dogs. And that was not a nice thing to do. I know in Budapest and in big cities, they would sell those things, but we didn't know-- as children.

And so what we did was, I put the hot dogs inside the suitcase, and I was going to throw it away when we got to a place. So we went to the school, and then when the end of the day, we came back, we're standing at the bus stop, waiting. And the bus came, had to rush get on it, and I forgot the suitcase on in the street outside the bus.

So then, oh, my God, once I was on the bus, took off, I said, I left my suitcase! And so I asked the driver, and he said, you can call lost and found. And I didn't even know what it was, or the name. But I called next day, I called lost and found, and they said, can you describe it?

I said, yes, a small suitcase. And he said, what was inside of it? And I said a cold dog. [LAUGHS] Oh, no, he didn't ask

then. So we went to pick it up next day, and that's when he asked what was inside.

And when I was so embarrassed, opened it up, and there was the hot dog [LAUGHS].

[LAUGHTER]

And he laughed so hard and gave me the little suitcase.

And I had a fantastic life for a year with Anne-Marie and Leonard. They were brother and sister to me. And then the newspapers came out to Anne-Marie's, to their house, and they wrote the article.

Oh, but I forgot to say is that, when we got back, the first thing they did to us, before we even stepped into any clean place, they disinfected us, cleaned us, no lice, no nothing. So we were clean already.

And but Anne-Marie was working for a company, but she was only a few-- well, maybe six, seven years older, maybe she was 23, or 25, but she was like a mother to me. And Leonard was like a brother who spoiled me. And he was a gymnast, and when he went on a trip overseas with the national gymnasts, he came back and he brought me a little ring from some other Middle Eastern country. I haven't got it-- somebody got it from me.

Did you want to go back to Hungary at that point? Did you have any feelings about it?

No.

You did not want to.

Not then, no.

So then, after you stayed on with them--

So, I-- from Hungary, no, I didn't go back to Hungary until 10 years--

I meant, did you want to go back?

No, no, no. I wanted to come to America. But first, in Sweden, I was in Sweden for five years. And they sent me to boarding school. And they-- then, when I got out, and I lived with Anne-Marie, then I got a job with five of-- by then, I taught myself Swedish. I looked the words up in the dictionaries, and I was one of the few who could speak Swedish at such a short time.

So now it's 1950.

Yes, but before that, in Sweden, I got a job with five of the top women's magazines to translate stories, because I could speak languages from other countries, into Swedish. And that was such a thrill. That here is a greenhorn who can work to do this for a magazine, it was unheard of, unbelievable.

But before that, I had my first job that I'm telling you about, the fun one. Before, they were making marzipan in a big kettle, and all I had to do is stir the big kettle with the marzipan. But after that, I got that good job, and it was fantastic.

And we had lots-- in Hesselby, in that boarding school-- we had lots-- and the last place-- lots of visitors. And they were, like I said, actors, they were pianists, they were to entertain us, and things. They had a Hungarian ballet dancer who had a place-- you know, she has a school to teach ballet.

And she would come to the boarding school to check to see who would be good to bring to her school. It's so funny. And of course, I'm dancing with the movements, and because my father used to teach me to dance. And I did Latin, and tango, and fox-- everything. But here, when the music was on, I was gyrating with my Latin movements.



She says, no, that won't do. No ballerina. [LAUGHS] So that was very funny.

And then, we-- yes, and then we had a pianist-- a young man that was very good-looking. And all the girls were surrounded with him. And I did not-- I was a child, still, but I mean, still I didn't.

And so that was [? Hjalmar-- ?] and that was the one time that I saw him. Then many, many years later-- I mean, towards the last year in Sweden-- I was at a party, and whom do I see but [? Hjalmar? ?] Then he started to take me out.

And he had asked me to marry him. And I wanted to go to America. I said, no, but I-- here, I was a young woman. Before I was-- oh, thank you, thank you. Before, I was a child, and now I was a young woman that he asked me to marry him. He wanted me to stay in Sweden.

And I just turned him down. And I said, when I come to America, if I don't like it, I'll write to you. Of course, that did not happen. But it was exciting to be considered a human being after that.

So then, Anne-Marie said-- oh, they joined-- they were in a sports club, where the sports club had a base close to wood. They had a building, and the families could come with children, or the young people to come for weekends. And they had all kinds of outdoor sports, and all.

So Anne-Marie said to me, the vacation is coming. And we, the other girl, Bisa, from the building, other friend, and her, we're going to the sports club's headquarters, the camp. Are you going? I said, no, because I read a magazine that the Swedish peace organization will pay for any young people, anywhere in the world, to come outside of Stockholm to a farmer that will give you a job for six weeks, and pay you for the work.

And you had to sleep and live in tents. I said, that's where I'm going, because they want to prove that young people-- all kinds of people in the world can live together in peace. And I said, that's where I'm going.

So when I went there, they came out to visit us from the UN. And the Swedish organization, they said, we are going to Switzerland to a UN world conference for three weeks. Would you like to go with us? We will cover all your expenses.

And that was because I could speak all the languages. And the Swedes, at that time, hardly knew English. They didn't. So I said, yes, I would love to go.

And then, I said, I'd love to go. They said, we're going in six cars. And with the statesmen and their wives. But then, in the camp, where I was in the tents, this young woman stopped by one night, and said, you know, I was hitchhiking here, and a man, 65-year-old man, had given me a ride.

And he asked me if I would want to be a governess for his 11-year-old child, son. And he lived in a mansion, and he was the president of the biggest steel factory. And she said, I would have loved to, but I told him that I'm getting married, so I can't.

But Agnes judging you-- the way you speak languages, the way you are acting perfect for a job like that, and I recommend you to the man. So she wrote to him, and he invited me to his mansion to see if I would like it.

So when I got there, the chauffeur met me, and they drove into the front of the mansion. It was like a dream. And after a while, after he talked to me for a while, he said I'd love for you to come and take the job. I said, I would love to, but I can't, because I am going to Switzerland to a UN world conference for three weeks.

And he said, I will wait. You come back, and after that, you come here. So I did. And I took the job of a dream.

The mansion was absolutely breathtaking. He had all the servants, all the workers. But he wanted someone who could always be a family member, so when he went-- he traveled a lot for business-- and he wanted someone who was close to the boy, not just the servants.

So I said, OK, I'll be back. So yeah, then I came and I took the job.

My friends were dukes, baronesses, and barons, all. And every weekend, he had lots of guests. He had-- this was his second marriage, with a 11-year-old boy, and a six-year-old girl, who was with her mother. But he had a grown son who was running their plant in South America. He had a daughter who was in New York in a theater-- she was a stage designer-- they were grown people, they were.

And so it was fantastic that he had chosen me to be able to meet all those famous people. They were all kinds of-- and locally. And there was an engineer's hotel there, that he was associated with, too. And every time he got an invitation to any big event there, they sent me an invitation, too.

When you were with these people, did you tell them about what you had experienced during the war? Did you?

I guess I did.

Did tell them?

I-- yes.

Let's move on a little bit. So you stayed there, and then how did you get to the United States?

Well, finally, I'd been waiting for the-- the Hungarian quota was filled. And I had to wait for five years before it opened. And when it opened, then I could travel.

This was 1950?

What?

1950?

1950, and my uncle-- see, I had a few relatives who left Hungary 25 years before that. They lived in Cleveland, and in New York. And my father was in touch with them, my family, we were in touch with them the whole time.

And he looked at these Jewish organizations-- had lists of survivors. And he saw my name only. My whole family, nobody was on there but me. So he wrote to me. And it was the thrill of a lifetime. And he sent me a ticket to come to America.

And finally, I had the visa.

What did America mean to you as a young woman, at that point in your life?

Life. And I wrote, and a new life started for me. And by that time, I was one year in concentration camp, five years in Sweden-- this was six years later. And I've gone through so many different lives there, but this is going to be my future life.

Did you come by boat?

I came on the Queen Elizabeth. That's where he had the ticket for me, on that. And I came to America.

What was it like to get off the boat and step onto the soil of the United States?

Oh, it was-- it was like a dream, a miracle. I could not believe that I was in America.

Di you see the Statue of Liberty when you came?

Yes, yes.

Did that have any meaning for you?

Well, I knew about that, because my uncle in Australia-- like I mentioned, so many, they were all writers. And he wrote a story about New York. And he's never been here, but how much he read.

And he described everything about New York, every little nook. And so when I saw that, I couldn't believe it.

And I had a cousin who met me. I had another uncle in New York, and had a son and daughter-- these were grown people, grown up not like me. And they met me at the ship. And oh, my God.

And I stayed with them for a few days. And on and on, my life was a dream after that. In New York-- I lived in New York, but my uncle was in Cleveland. And after a while, sent me a ticket to come to Cleveland to meet all my relatives in Cleveland.

It was just--

Did you live in Cleveland after that?

No, because he-- Uncle Dave, David, his wife had a sister in New York who had daughters my age. But they were in Cleveland, they were older people. So they said, I should come and stay with the sister. And they were my age-- daughters.

So I was in New York. And from there, it was on and on.

Just generally tell me where you were, then, after that.

Pardon?

After that, tell me just generally where you were.

Yes, yes.

So you went back to New York.

First, I was in New York. And first, I was staying with their relatives. Then, there was another family that had daughters, and they were closer to the city. The other family was way out. And so, I lived with them.

And I was getting offers from people to work in different capacity-- like governesses. And I think maybe I tried it one time, but it was an actress that was working and wanted someone to watch her-- but I didn't stay. That wasn't why I came there for.

And then, I got a job counting bottles in-- packaging bottles, 144, one gross in each box. And I was doing that briefly, because the owner liked me for his son. And that's why he hired me-- he wanted me to be close by to her son.

But I left that job, because I could speak the languages. And once I went to the airport-- that was the Idyllwild airport, now is the international--

Kennedy.

Kennedy, yes. And I went out there for some reason, and one of the airlines said, would you like to work for-- it was

Scandinavian Airlines, because I could speak the language. And the family I lived with, lived close to the train station. So I could go out there.

I said, yes. So I got the job. I was on the switchboard. I was greeting people, important people. And it was a very exciting job, meeting all these very famous people.

Then Canada-- was it-- Canada airlines-- was is it, now? I'm trying--

It's OK, let's move along a little bit. So--

Yeah, anyway, so they hired me for a ticket agent. And they trained me. And I could travel free, although, I was working, I didn't have much time to travel. But there, they mostly hired me to greet the famous people when they arrived and they had to change planes. I would take them to the lounge and entertain them, and take them back to the next airplane when they had to go.

And I had politicians, I had Rock Hudson, I had Steve Cochran-- which you would not remember, in the movie. And many other famous people who came. And that was very exciting. Steve Cochran wanted to take me away. But I was not ready for that.

And so I was working there. And the ticket agent, which made me meet the whole world. And I was in a uniform, and oh, it was just fabulous life.

And then, I got my visa to come to America. And that was fantastic.

Oh, and then, in the meantime, Hjalmar-- the pianist-- he begged me to stay in Sweden. But nothing could keep me from coming to America.

So when did you meet your husband?

Oh, I met him a couple of years later. But let me see first-- when I came to--

You'd been working out-- yeah, you went to New York, you worked at the airport. And is that when you met your husband, after that?

I met my husband at a family-- it wasn't a party, it was a funeral. And after, with the family relatives, it was not my immediate family, it was my cousin's family, who was another family. And that's when I met him.

And he started to call me and date me.

Was he born in Europe, or was he--

No.

He's American, he was born in America.

No, he was born in America. And lived--

And what year did you get married?

19-- let's see, I came here in '50.

And do you have children?

'53--

'53?

'53.

And do you have any children? I have four fabulous children. Shauna, and I have Kerry, and Keith-- [LAUGHS]

Shauna, Kerry, and Keith--

[LAUGHTER]

Do you have another son? Do you have another son?

No, but I started to think-- not the name, not because of the name, don't you dare tell him, because I didn't forget him. I was thinking ahead.

Then where did you live? Where did you live after you got married?

You see, that's why I got slowed down, because--

Can we talk a little bit now about--

Yes, I will tell you what you want to know.

OK, and I want to talk to you now a little bit about your thoughts and your feelings, because you said you got married, you had the children. Do you think about, now that you're a little bit older, do you think about what you went through even more at this time in your life? About your wartime experience, your childhood?

Oh, yes, yes.

Do you think about it a lot?

I think about it a lot on holidays. And I imagine how we were together on holidays. And whenever I speak-- and I speak all the time about the Holocaust, everywhere.

You speak publicly about the Holocaust, to groups.

And I think all the time, and vision in front of my eyes. I dream-- I think about them all the time.

Do you sometimes feel like you're two different people? Somebody on the outside to the public, and somebody different inside?

No, I'm all that story when I speak.

It's your inside speaking, in a sense.

Yeah. The people love to hear the stories, the children love to hear the stories. Because what the average person had heard was either on television, or in a movie, or in a book, or a newspaper. And they never heard the personal stories about the persons.

So you said you do speak publicly. You, in a sense, lost your childhood, because you were so young when the war started. Do you feel you got it back, or you just lost it? Did you ever get your childhood back?

Well, yes, with my children.

With your children.

I want to tell you something--

I just wanted to ask this one question-- when your children were the age that you were when the Germans invaded Hungary, did that bring those memories back? When they were 13, let's say.

No.

Did it--

I was so happy with my children that I did not connect them with such things.

When did you start telling them about what you had gone through?

I don't remember. I guess when-- they knew it from quite a young age, because I was up to speak from day one. And in school, they learned-- that's when they learned in school. And that's when I would tell them something.

Like you were very open with them about what you had experienced? When they were, what, teenagers?

Yes, oh, yes, yes. Now I forgot--

That's OK. What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Do you remember having any specific thoughts when Adolf Eichmann was put on trial in Israel? Do you remember that? That time?

Well, I don't really remember exactly. I was inside of me. I was connected to that, but I tried not to.

Do you have any feelings for Hungary now? Do you feel Hungarian? How would you describe yourself?

No, I don't feel Hungarian. But I do-- I mean, it still is a life of mine that I loved. And I still find I say things to the children-- I taught them Hungarian words and sentences, and Shauna and I and two friends went back with us to Hungary. And I was very happy that they could see where I grew up.

And Hungary is beautiful. And I wish that I could take all of them with me to Hungary, even now.

What was it like for you to become an American citizen?

Well, it was very exciting, of course. I got my green card. And then when I got married, I turned American right away. And actually, I felt like I'm an American when I came here, after that. And I was in the world, in that world, in that life.

I had jobs, I had a job that no other woman had ever had here in America. I was the first lady commodity broker in America-- trading commodities. And still, today, a lot of women in the field, but nobody trades commodities. I was the only woman-- for 11 years, I was the only woman.

That's how I raised my children, after they went to school. And it was wonderful because I dropped them off at school, or they took the bus to school in the morning, and I was home in the afternoon, because the markets closed at 1 o'clock.

What city did you raise your children in?

In-- [LAUGHS] I was going to say in Helsingborg-- in Chicago.

In Chicago, OK.

You see, I still dream about Sweden and Helsingborg.

Well, I was going to ask you, in a sense, about that. Do you dream about your life in Europe? In Hungary or in Sweden? Do you find that you dream a lot about that?

Oh, yes, it comes up in different times, different occasions, yes. Especially when I tell them about funny expressions about things.

Do you get reparations?

Yes, from Germany.

From Germany.

Damaging for-- in the factories, my hands are shaky. And after the war, also, my lung.

But this is still--

What are your thoughts about Germany, today?

People had asked me often, do you hate them? No. I lived in Germany when my husband was in the army. And we were sent overseas-- I lived there with him.

And there were many wonderful people, and I loved them. And it isn't the country that you hated, it is the people, the bad people, that had done terrible things.

And those are the ones I hated. Otherwise, people, there are good and bad people everywhere. And I loved the good people.

Do you feel that you're a different person because of what you went through? That if you hadn't gone through and had the difficulty, you would be different?

Well, I am much more loving to people in general, because I have been through so many bad things, that good people-- you treasure them, and you nurture them, and you love them. So I don't hate anybody.

Of course, those who did wrong to us, they're gone. They got their reward.

Do you think the Holocaust could happen again?

I hope not-- not if I can tell the world about it. No. There was something I wanted to tell you, and you stopped me.

Oh, I'm sorry. Well, please, do you remember what it was?

I'll think a minute.

Did it have to do with life here in the United States, or back in--

I'll think a minute. If not, it wasn't important.

Yeah, is there-- about-- block?

Blanca.

Yes, yes, Blanca-- yes.

Oh, Blanca.

Yes, the most important thing. I mentioned that Blanca was a nurse, and that she pulled out her-- tried to do that. Well, we came to America, but we lost each other. We thought the other one was dead, but we, each of us, we came to New York. We found out later on we both lived in New York, and we both lived in Chicago.

And I have-- I worked, then, as a commodity broker. And one day, I was in a financial building, in the lobby, waiting. I had bought-- from Mexico, I bought a big, beautiful vase. And it was next to me in the lobby. And I was waiting for a friend to pick me up to take me home.

And I was watching the people, and the elevator door opened. And this woman stepped out. And I said, gee, she looks so familiar. And she wore French couturier outfit, beautiful. And I yelled over to her-- I couldn't leave my vase-- I said, you! You over there! I know you!

So she came over to me. And she said, what's your name? I heard her Hungarian accent, so I said, Aggie, in Hungarian, Aggie. Aggie! Oh, I am Blanca! I said, Blanca, then we both cried.

And there was a priest in the lobby, and he came over, and he blessed us. And then, I guess the people in the lobby called the newspapers-- the Chicago Tribune. And they took the story, they took our pictures, and they took our story to AP, UP, all over America, and all over the world.

And my uncle in Australia saw the article, the picture. And Blanca-- this was 23 years later, and our homes were 20 minutes from each other. But it was in an area where I never went to that part of the town. And after that, it was on my birthday, I said, that was the most fantastic birthday present I ever had.

And then, we saw each other constantly, and we lived and loved each other. And it was so fantastic. Then-- and she got married, and I moved to Texas.

And then her husband died, and she went into a home here-- here? Where am I now? [LAUGHS]

In Chicago?

No, in California-- that's why I said, where am I? In California, and she lived there. And just about eight months ago, she passed away. I had visited her several times, we talked on the phone. And her nephew sent me her album, and I look at it twice a day.

And the greatest joy, happiness that I had while we were together there.

It's a wonderful story. That's a wonderful story. How did you get the training to be a commodities broker?

I had a neighbor-- I lived in Evanston outside of Chicago, and I had a neighbor who was a floor trader. And one day, he said, I'd like to take you down to see the trading floor. I said, I'd love to.

So we went, and he introduced me to the number one wheat trader in the world. That was a company, and he was doing work with them. And he started-- the man started to talk to me about a half hour. And after he finished, he says, would you like to be a commodity broker?

I said, well, I'll tell you, I would love to when my youngest child is in school all day.

How much education had you had up to then? Did you do any college in the United States?

No, but in Sweden, we studied for three years, all year round. And that was the equivalent of college-- everything, plus more than what they study [INAUDIBLE]



And so then, two years later, he called me. He said, are you ready? I said, yes. It was fantastic.

And then they coached me, they taught me. And 11 years, it was so fantastic. I made extra money to give the children, but I was home before they got home from school.

What kind of work did your husband do?

What kind of work? He was a sales rep for big chains. Yeah.

And then, after I got out of the commodities, then I turned to be a sales rep-- I came to Texas, and I had a business partner-- he did mostly the-- drove me to the different big chains, and he entertained the customers. And he gave me his brilliance, because he had three of the biggest plants in America before he retired from there.

And so we traveled, and I was selling-- I was doing the selling. It was for how many years? Also 11 years. And then I retired and I opened a shop. And I did that for a while, then I retired for good.

Since you lived in a time, and in a country where people's civil rights were taken away from them, in Hungary, were you in any way active in the Civil Rights movement here in the United States? Obviously, your children were very young.

No, no.

And you had other things to do.

No, first of all, when I was in Hungary, I was too young.

No, no, I meant--

To know about it. And here, I'm not-- I'm a peaceful person. I'm not interested-- I don't want to hear any more bad things about anything, anybody, any people.

So do you read about the Holocaust at all? Or see movies or films about it?

Well, first of all, I did see Schindler's List, and I have read a lot.

You do read.

Years before, not anymore-- a lot of years before. And I live for my children. I was lucky that I have them-- I am lucky, I have the most fantastic children. And not because I am partial, but they all have had terrific education, they all have accomplished tremendous things.

My daughter, Shauna, is an actress for 25 years, and also wanted a profession. And she is a psychotherapist, also. And she had seen a lot of the world, and she is active in all aspects of the show business, and in therapy.

Because of what you went through, were you more protective of your children when they were growing up?

I was, yes.

More so than an average American family.

Yes, you know what I used to say? I could pick up my skirt, and big skirt-- no, I didn't have-- I felt like I wanted to lift up my big skirt and put them all under the skirt to safety them.

So you were more protective?

Oh, yes, definitely.

In what ways?

And I divorced when the children were two, five, six, and eight and a half-- so I raised them all alone. And they came out pretty good. And the other two boys are in the stock brokerage business-- they are quite successful. And the youngest one is-- the oldest one is-- I just-- excuse me, I can't think [INAUDIBLE].

You mean the business that he's in?

Yes, he's a mortgage banker-- mortgage banking. He has his own business, own company. This is what happens when you become 83. Excuse me.

Well, before we end, is there any message you wanted to give to your-- I assume you have some grandchildren? Do you have--

Yes, I have five beautiful grandchildren.

Wonderful, is there any message you wanted to give to them before we end?

I tell that not only for the grandchildren, but to all children-- love all the people. Love them in your life. Love your family. Love you teachers, because I had a lot of students, a lot of teachers.

Don't let the bad things happen-- the future of America is in your hands. You have to see to it that things like that never, never happen again. And your children and your grandchildren will be safe forever.

Well, that's a beautiful note to end on.

Thank you. I did want-- I forgot what I was going to say.

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Hoffman.