

Today is April 13, 1983. And we're at the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Washington, DC. And I'm with Irene Farkas Berger, who now lives in Brooklyn, New York. And, Irene, can you spell your maiden name and your mother's maiden name?

Spell it?

Yes.

I have to write it down then

OK. That's all right.

OK, I'll spell it from here.

Yeah.

I write the way I talk. I don't know how to spell. That's the way I was taught.

OK.

My mother's name?

Yes.

S-A-L-L-Y Grunstajn-- G-R-- this was a Grun, maybe here is different-- U-S-T-A-J-N, Grunstajn. And my name is Farkas, Irene Farkas. I-R-E-N-E F-A-R-K-A-S.

And what would you like to talk about?

I would like to talk about where I was in the concentration camp.

Fine.

And how I came there. I'm born in Nizni Remety. That was Czechoslovakia. They took us April to the ghetto.

How old were you?

I was 17. And I was in a-- a ghetto. And then, they took us from there to Auschwitz. When I arrived to Auschwitz, they told us women should go separate and men should go separate. So my little brother, six years old, he was running after my mother and after me. We were together on the other side. My mother went on the other side. And my brother came with me.

So Dr. Mengele pushed me away from him. And he said he belongs on that side. And I came on the other side.

Then they took us, and they gave us a shower. They took all our clothes. They cut our hair. We were completely undressed. And we had to go in front of the Germans.

He put one on one side, one on the other side. One was to death, and one was to life. But I didn't know that.

I was running after my mother. He pushed me back. He says, Sunday, it is [NON-ENGLISH], that we're going to come together, because he knew that I'm going to go there too. But it wasn't like that.

And when I went in the transport when we were walking, in the Lager between the wires from the train, I see an old

people. I have a grandfather. He was old, and he couldn't walk. And they told the people when they cannot walk, they should sit down and wait.

It's OK.

Father and grandmother to sit down. [SOBBING] And I was looking back. And I see a truck came. One man grabbed by the feet, and one man grabbed by the head. And they were wiggling and up on the truck, one on top and the other. Screams were in the seventh heaven. And they died right there because they put them like sacks of potatoes, one on top and the other alive.

And then we went away. We went between the wires. We couldn't get out. There was a Gestapo in a little house when we were already in the [NON-ENGLISH], when they cut off our hair. And when we came, we thought there's crazy people there because we weren't walking the streets, and we saw inside behind the wires everybody, women they cut off the hair. We thought it's a crazy house. We didn't know because we just arrived.

And then when transports came, we were already there. We saw what kind of crazy people because we were the same thing. They put us over there. We saw it as normal people. But they cut off their hair.

So when transfers came, right here is the wire. Here was the street. They came from the train. They walked through-- near our barrack. And they said-- and I see how people cannot walk. And the Gestapo hits them and kicks him and beats him.

And I was there for six months. And there was a Lager with children and women and old people, young people, all together families. In one night was a Blocksperre. They didn't let nobody out in our place they should see what's going on, a whole night. In the morning, we got up. Everything was clean. Nobody was there. They killed everybody, children, women and men.

When I come to that block and they give us food, they give us a soup. It was like water. And you felt the sand under your teeth. I couldn't eat it because we just came. So I went to the wire where was those Czech Jewish lady. And she was screaming, [NON-ENGLISH].

She wanted to get that little soup because she was very hungry. She was already before there. I just came. I was fresh. So I went to give her my soup because I couldn't eat it.

So I went onto the wire because she was on the other side. And I have a scratch here. And if that wire would be electric-- and at that time was no power in the electric-- I would be killed. So I had a scratch here. You can see the scratch. It was bloody. I'll never forget the scratch.

And I pushed under the plate. And I gave her the soup. And she blessed me.

And the Kapo came. And he started to beat the old lady for the soup. I said, what are you doing? Leave her alone. She's hungry. And that was going on and on.

Then I had a little brother. He was 13 years old. They let him live about six months.

So he was walking on the street, on the main street to work. They were carrying tiles, the children. So I used to go to the wire. And I used to talk to him.

He threw me across the wire a pair of men's shoes because I didn't have no shoes. And he had. Somehow he had an extra pair. He threw it to me.

And he said, my sister, don't worry. Don't worry. Everything will be all right. He was 13 years old.

And he went to work to take those tiles. When he came back the next day I saw him. He said, my friends are no more

there because they didn't go to take the tiles. When he came back, it was empty. They took them to the crematorium. After that time, the next time they took my brother, and I never saw him again.

And then they used to come to the barracks. And you had to undress. They used to pick who's to life and who's to death. I used to undress naked. There was two doors, one girl here and one there, whoever he liked the body. I was very young. So one here, one there.

But they have to have always a certain amount what they had to go to the crematorium, only when transport didn't come. My Lager was a death Lager, Vernichtungslager. When transport didn't come, they always come to pick from us.

I don't have a number because I didn't go to work. They didn't pick me to work. I was always in the death Lager. That was the C Lager. I was in 22 barrack. I had a block over, she was a very good girl. She was wonderful. Her heart was bleeding when somebody came to take, like Mengele came or Drexler, they came to take the people. She was all white. She couldn't talk to us because she knew what will happen.

We didn't know. We just thought. But we always said, I'm going to live. I'm going to live. This is not true.

And when the chimneys used to burn, it used to smell. I still smell it. I still [SOBBING] when it's a bad weather and it's like cloudy, I smell that smoke. And they always used to-- they came and they ask who has fine hands from good homes, from rich homes. And only beautiful girls they picked.

Me, they didn't want. I was very skinny and small, but healthy. And they picked them. So they picked them for a work that they were carrying those big heavy like this, filled up with coffee, the coffee. They had blisters on their hands.

So I was for six months in Auschwitz, Birkenau.

What would you do? You didn't have work then.

I didn't do nothing. I just waited they should come and take me to die. And there was three sisters. One sister decided she didn't want to live. So she went on the wire. Still they took her off she was dead because the wire, the electric kills you.

And I see him on the roof, a little piece of bread. I was very young that time. I was very hungry. I didn't know the bread was like a rock. It was there a long time.

So somebody was holding the door. And I went up on the roof. And I got a piece of bread.

In the meantime, a transport came in. And it was Blocksperre. Everybody had to get in because you're not supposed to know something from outside. They would tell us, you know, everybody, Blocksperre, Blocksperre. Everybody had to be in.

So everybody went in. I couldn't get off the roof because somebody had to hold my door to come down. So the Gestapo came. And he says, come here.

I couldn't run because I would be killed anyway. So he's holding the gun on me. I said, I can't come down. You have to hold the door.

So he was holding the door. And I came down with a piece of bread. He says, what did you do over there? I said, I went for the piece of bread. I see a piece of bread. I was hungry.

So he asked me, in what barrack are you? What's the name of your block over? I said her name is Roszinka. I'm in 22 Block.

So he took me in. And he said for her, how do you watch your people? So she told them that she can't watch everybody.

There's 1,000 people. In every barrack was 1,000 people.

We had wooden beds, one on top on the other. That's the way we were sleeping. We were freezing. It was cold. We were warming ourselves with our bodies.

And she started to hit me that my head almost came up, came off, because she had to show the Gestapo that she's hitting. After he left, she brought me honey with a little piece of bread. I couldn't hold my head for two weeks.

And then I was six months there. And everybody was running away. So they took us to give us a shower. And they gave us a whole salami and a bread that we are going somewhere else because the Russians were-- it was bad. The Russians were coming, or somebody there, to Auschwitz, Birkenau. So we were so afraid that if we go in the shower they give us the gas. So we thought who knows if we're going to eat that salami or that bread.

And then I had a friend, she had a sister, a little sister. She was 15 years old. She was a beautiful young girl. And when we came there, before we left, they also selected us. They took away that little sister. And then she went and she wanted to get back that sister.

Now while we were separate, but she came out because she took out the-- you went in the bathroom, and they had to take us out. In the room, you went in the bathroom. Everybody went there. So some people had to take that out.

So that little girl went to take that out. And she wanted to come. But she couldn't come because so many numbers were there. So one girl wanted to exchange because her mother was on the other side. But the one who watched us, the block over, didn't let. She pulled her back. So she went in the gas chamber.

And we went on the train. Then we came to Hochweiler. In Hochweiler, we were-- was a lager. And we were going, I don't know how many kilometers, for a couple of hours to work. It was freezing.

You had to walk?

Yeah. We were walking to work. And we were making-- we had to-- I don't know how to explain myself. You had to make where the Germans should hide in case of a war, to dig--

Ditches.

Dig, digging. But it was so frozen that we couldn't dig. It was like a rock. It was frost. But we were working. We got warm because we were very cold. We weren't dressed. Some people didn't have shoes, no coats, nothing on the head, cut off the hair.

So the Wehrmacht-- that's the nicer people already. He's just a soldier. And he watched over us. He had like 100 people to watch. He was a very good man.

And he always used to say, not for us, but for the main, for the block over. She says, [NON-ENGLISH], that she should calm us down, that everything will be all right. It's not far to wait. Because he was reading the papers, he heard the news. But we didn't know nothing. And she told us that.

And every day, he used to get like a soldier his food. He used to give every day for somebody else where he saw somebody weaker or sick. And he used to say to us, nicht arbeiten, nicht arbeiten. We shouldn't rush. We shouldn't kill ourselves. He felt sorry for us.

But when the Gestapo came, arbeiten! Arbeiten! Arbeiten! Arbeiten! And he was very mean. He had to show him. But he was a very good man.

Then they took him away to the front. And he dropped us off in Gross-Rosen. In Hochweiler, I was working in Hochweiler. Then we had to leave Hochweiler already.

So we came to Gross-Rosen. I was there two weeks. I met a friend of mine from where I come. She was a teacher, very educated girl, beautiful girl. I never saw her again.

And then from Hochweiler-- and then a transport came in from L³dz. They said L³dz, L³dz, because we used to scream, from where are you? From where are you? From L³dz. That's Poland.

But we were in better condition. But they were like scallops, like skin and bone. And they couldn't walk. And they kicked them. And they hit them. And they fallen in the water. It was raining.

In the puddles.

It was wet, in the puddles. They kicked them. They couldn't walk. They stayed there.

And every day in Gross-Rosen, when they Zaehlappell, that means they have to come to us. We have to stay in the five in a line. So every day those young Germans, very young girls and boys-- they were Gestapos. They stayed by the door. And every day was coming blood from the head.

They didn't wait people should go to stay in the five in the line. But they broke the head, every day another one. So we used to go hours before to stand outside in the cold that we shouldn't get killed because everybody wanted to live. Nobody wanted to die.

I always used to say in my mind, I would have died. Because people who said, I'm going to die, they didn't hold it. I was very strong. I said, no, I'm not going to die. I'm going to come home. I want to see who came home. I want to see everything. I will never die.

And I didn't die. God watched over me. I went through every selection undressed. God gave me life. He put me on the good side.

And from there, from Gross-Rosen, they put us in open wagons, like they take cows, or you know in open, not a train, but open, and the Gestapo with the guns pointing, you know, we shouldn't-- nobody should jump off. So we came to Dachau. And they were terribly bombing us on the way. They were bombing. The bombs were falling.

We jumped down from the train. Even the Germans, the Gestapos who watched over us, they were afraid to die too. They ran. And they kneeled down and they lay down on the floor. And we lay down too. But they didn't kill us. They didn't do nothing to us. We lay down near them.

And after that, still we arrived to Bergen-Belsen. A lot of people got killed. A lot of people there was from Poland. There was a lot of trains in the line, men and women. Men were separate. A lot of people were killed.

Yeah, but what I forgot to tell you something about Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, when I seen my brother for six months, then next to me, the Czechoslovakia, the women with the children, with the old people, where I give the soup, in one night, they killed them all. And then somehow, my brother came over there. So I used to talk to him through the wire.

Finally, there was beautiful Gypsies in Germany with little children with carriages, men and women also together. They were closer to the crematorium, to the Brzezinkas. In one night, they cleaned them out. They killed them all.

Then they transferred my brother to the-- that called the Zigeunerlager, Zigeunerlager. That was the third lager from the train. And he couldn't talk to me no more because he was too far away.

So I used to write a little letter. And I used to wrap it in a rag and tie it up and throw it over to that Lager. And from that Lager, somebody threw it further to my brother. And that's how we were in contact.

What did you write it on?

You know I asked him how he is and--

No, what did you use? How did you get paper? And how did you get a pen? Or what did--

We have paper. At one time-- we had a paper. I don't know how. I forgot how I got it. But one time, my brother was in munkator. That was [NON-ENGLISH] arbeit. That was like soldiers without ammunition. They shouldn't be able to defend. So they took all the young people first, the men, like soldiers, but without ammunition.

So my brother was [NON-ENGLISH], 43 was his number. I'll never forget that number. And we wrote cards, the first time. I wrote home from where I come. And I wrote for my brother. But I couldn't write. Somebody wrote it for me.

Every card was written the same way. When my brother came home, he had the card. He got it for me because he didn't think that he's going to get it. They wrote in the card, [NON-ENGLISH]. You understand? Things are very good, and I'm healthy. That's it. And they send it. And he got the card.

And then I wrote to a couple of Christians, to neighbors. They also got the card. That was only one time. That was only one time.

But in Auschwitz, when I was going sometimes, they used to take us to the Brzezinkas to take a shower. And they cut again our hair. We were completely bald.

And when we went on the way back, a transport came-- because they're not supposed to do that when a transport come that we should meet with them. But somehow, we did meet. So I was asking for bread.

But on the way before I was asking for bread, a door opened up, a big door. And I see a big truck. I never believed that they kill, even I knew. But I said, no, that's not true, because I wanted to live, in my mind.

And a door opened up when we were walking on the street to our block. And I seen dead people, naked, women. They were all women-- a big, big truck, you know those big trucks-- one on top on the other. They were prepared probably to take them to-- then I start to believe they kill. But I still didn't want to die. I still didn't want to die. And that was going on.

And my brother got killed, my mother, my father. I had a brother 13, what I met with him for six months over there. I had a sister eight. And I had a brother 13, a brother 13, the one was there, that one I met. The six-year-old brother and the eight-year-old sister, they killed him right away when they took my mother by the station.

So when we came to Bergen-Belsen, that was the last stop. A lot of people died. Still, we came there. They didn't give us food. They closed the water. There was a big swimming pool where the Germans used to swim, the Germans, for pleasure. But they had troubles because everybody was hitting them. They came, you know, the soldiers, so they didn't swim. So they didn't clean the swimming pool.

And we were so weak because they closed our water, they wanted we should die. So we went to take water to drink from there. And dead people were swimming, the water was green. When I went over there and somebody touched me, I would fell in because we were very weak. We were skin and bone. So a lot of people, everybody wanted water they pushed, and they fell in. And that was the end. So dead people were there, and we were drinking water.

And we had lice. Big, white lice we had. And we had typhus, stomach typhus. We were very sick.

So there was one doctor what we knew her from the ghetto, from Beregszãsz. And she was a very nice lady. And she said, the more you go out, the more healthier. You need a lot of air because it's stunk in the place.

We were sleeping on the floor. And I used to take off my clothes. And I used to take all the lice. And plus they had the nats--

Gnats.

Gnats. And I used to kill them. And as soon as I sit down, I have again it bites me all over. And I had a friend, a young girl, a beautiful girl. In Hochweiler that happened. They asked her, the Hochwachtmeister, he asked her, he asked people who wants to go to work? Who wants to stay home, not to go out on the field? Who wants-- so she said she wants to go. We used to be always together. We were five people in our place.

So she was making rails-- not rails. You know the around a house what you have?

Fences.

Fences. She was making fences. And she looked more like a German. She had beautiful dimples in her face. And somehow he liked her.

And every day, he used to come. He used to say, Hanni, Hanni. Hanya was her name was. Hanni. And she used to go out. But she had nothing with him to do. He just felt sorry for her. She was younger than me. And he used to bring her food, good food, what he used to get because he used to get outside. And we used to share with everything.

And on the day when we went away from Hochweiler, we were going-- and younger, younger, two sisters were going. They both didn't come home. They died in Bergen-Belsen after the freedom. And they have some sisters-- they are four sisters and one brother. They were 10 children. So half of them were left. They were young.

So I went to visit them in Bergen-Belsen in a hospital. And she said, Irene, if you come home and if you find somebody home, don't tell them I'm so sick. But I came home. And I met the brother, and I met the sisters. And I told them that.

But I went to visit her again. I didn't see him no more. And I went-- I ran after the doctor because that time the sick people, they were taken to Sweden. My sister was in Sweden. She couldn't walk. She was very swollen. And she-- I don't know, she had a very strong heart, because most of the people they got swollen, they died right away.

Like I was sitting next to somebody, two friends, when we were together, sitting, sleeping on the floor. And there was a younger sister and an older sister. The older sister watched her sister. And somehow they start to talk like crazy, you know. They didn't know what they're talking. They were still talking to you. In a minute, she was dead. It was horrible. It's not prescribable.

And when we walked, if they would let me just sleep for a second, I was walking and sleeping and walking and sleeping. And they were pulling me because they didn't want to let me to fall to sleep, because a lot of dead people are on the road. If you fall to sleep, you don't feel nothing. I was very--

And you had ice, the way you were breathing, from the very big cold, you had ice. So we went-- we walked through, we were sleeping in Breslow. There was a big sugar factory. And there was big things with syrup from the sugar.

Everybody was so hungry that they got the syrup. And everybody was drinking. A lot of people died right and there. They didn't make it to go to Bergen-Belsen.

Their bodies went into shock.

Yeah. And then they pushed in-- they drowned in that syrup because everybody was rushing for food. It's so many things to tell that it's impossible to tell.

Did you have the syrup?

I had the syrup too. But I didn't have as much. My sister got to it. And I had very little because I couldn't get more. They were pushing--

Luckily.

Yeah, luckily. It was good syrup. It's from the sugar. It wasn't poisoned or something. But we were hungry. And we died from that syrup. He didn't have what to eat.

Yeah, and then I from Nizni Remety, a friend, very nice girl. That's the sister I met in Gross-Rosen. She was a teacher at home. That was a big thing. In Europe people didn't have so much money. But they were a very nice family. They educated their people. Two daughters were teachers, two daughters. So that was her sister.

And when you were walking, they asked you, if you cannot walk, they'll take you with a wagon. They'll take you with the wagon. People were pulling the wagon. And they put up people to sit on that wagon.

I didn't want to go. I had life, that's why. I don't know. It was meant for me to live. She didn't have no life. She said, I can't walk no more. I'm going to go on the wagon.

Somehow I felt something will happen with those people. So the people who were pulling, they told them to wait in the back. And then they stopped. And then the rest of the people came with the wagon. They were all shot. And I never saw her again. So when I met this sister in Gross-Rosen, and I told her about it. She was crying very much.

And then one sister, she lives in Florida, the teacher. Her husband is a lawyer. They were in love when they were home. And they were hiding. They weren't in the concentration camp. Somehow a Christian girl hid her because she was going with her school in BeregszÅsz.

And they were looking for her. They said for the family in the ghetto, they told for the family if somebody will miss, they killed the whole family. But they still they didn't know where she is. So they didn't kill nobody. But they were fooling you. They were wanting to make you scared.

And in BeregszÅsz, in the ghetto, they put pails, big pails. And they said everybody should throw in the jewelry. So everybody threw the jewelry.

But my father, he was a shoemaker. And he put for every child in the soles, he put in-- we had dollar bills, American money. We had relatives here in America. And we weren't rich people. You know, my father was a shoemaker, and we had eight children.

And we had-- whatever we had it was sweet and very good. It tasted everything good. We didn't have so much clothes like we have here.

So he put for every child and for my mother and for himself in the sole, he built in dollar bills. So he said, my children, wherever you come, I don't know what will happen. We're going to be separated or something. We didn't know what will happen. So everybody will know that they shouldn't die for hunger. They should take those dollars out and cash them somewhere and buy food.

But when we went into Auschwitz, we have to take off the shoes and throw everything away. We had to take away the clothes and throw away. And in Hochweiler we got clothes. They gave us clothes. Some girls find paper money, dollars.

So we thought that was from the other people also what they saw in the pillows, and they sewed in somewhere, and they found it. And they were very afraid that they were going to get killed. So what did they do? They put it in the oven. They burned it. They didn't--

[AUDIO OUT]

Let me remind myself. I had an aunt. She had 10 children. The oldest child was 13 years old. I'm always looking. I'm still looking, maybe somebody's in life. But I don't think so anybody is alive because they were all younger children.

Maybe they would be older, maybe one or two would survive. They were beautiful children.

So when I came home, I went to [NON-ENGLISH]. And I went to see the house where they were living. They had a beautiful house and a garden.

My heart was crying. I couldn't look. The Christians took all the windows in the house. And grass was growing in the house. And everything was-- it was like-- it looked like a cemetery, her house.

Then I had an aunt, she had two children. She married when she was already older. She was 32. Her husband they took in the munkatabor. That's for work, without ammunition, only men. Then a black paper came down that he's dead. They didn't tell her. But she fell because he didn't come.

But before he died, one time they let him home to see the family. And he knew that something horrible will happen. When he was going back-- he had to go back, like a soldier, but without ammunition. He was crying like somebody dies.

And he left her. She was pregnant. She had one child. And she was pregnant, my aunt.

And then they took her from a different place. I was in Beregszáz. But she lived in a different place. They took her to another place. So we all went separately, not all, because everybody lived in a different place, wherever they took them.

And then I had here in America an uncle and two aunts. But one was dead already when I came. I met only my uncle. They are also died already. They are not alive. We are all dying. We haven't got much left. Soon, nobody will be left of us.

I wanted to ask you because your memories are so clear and you express yourself so well, where you were when you were liberated and what you remember about it.

Oh, I can tell you. I was liberated in Bergen-Belsen, April the 15th. I'll never forget that day. And the American and English and French, the soldiers, came in. We couldn't walk on our feet. We were very sick. We couldn't walk. We were very skinny.

And they start to cook. And they give us food and chocolate and white bread. We didn't see that-- we were very dried up. We couldn't eat. If we eat too much, we died.

Did you know that?

We didn't know. We ate everything we could. But you weren't allowed to eat when you are-- you didn't eat for-- I was only one year in the concentration camp. The Polish people suffered much more because they were, I guess, five years. By us, they took 1944. I was freed in 1945. I come from Czechoslovakia. That's the Carpathian. And they took late.

So they give us food. But I was very sick. I couldn't eat. The people who ate, they all died. They realized, the Americans realized, that they're dying from the fat food because they cooked soup and there was so much fat. We weren't allowed. They had to eat without fat.

I like to eat-- my sister was already feeling a little bit better. Then she got sick. So she used to bake a potato outside, outside the place where we slept in. How do you call that? You know, we were in barracks.

Yes.

So outside there were trees. And we made from two tiles, we put on the floor, we made a fire. And we had a red plate.

A hot plate.

Yeah, what we were eating. And she put in the coals a potato. And I wanted to eat a little sour milk, a little dessert, a sour pickle. I didn't feel like to eat. I didn't have the appetite. I was very sick.

But those people who ate, they all died. And I ate this, and I got well. My sister got sick, and they took her to Sweden.

I was crying. I said, I have nobody. I have only this sister. I don't know nobody is alive. I want to go.

But I felt bad that the Red Cross didn't want to take me. But I cried so much they felt sorry for me. And they wanted to take me.

Then a lady came along. She was from Khust. She was married before the war. And she didn't have no children. That's how she stayed alive because they put her on the good side.

And she told it to me-- she was like my mother. She says, Irene, she says, don't go home-- don't go to Sweden. Go home. Maybe a little sister came home. Maybe a little brother came home. And you will never know.

And I start to cry. I figured I always will be able to get in touch with my sister. But if I don't go home, I'll never know if somebody lives or they died. So I went home. And that's how I met my brother.

The rest, all, everybody was killed. And then they made weddings very often because we went to dance, you know. We met people. Nobody had a mother or a father. We were very young. So we stick together, all the youngsters.

So mostly every-- every day, mostly weddings were. So I met my husband. He had--

Now, what town were you in? You went back to your hometown?

Home, yeah, to Czechoslovakia, Nizni Remety. And then I went to a wedding. And I was dancing with my husband. And I don't know, somehow he was meant for me, and I was meant for him. We liked each other.

You met at somebody else's wedding?

Yes. And in two weeks we got married. Two weeks we knew each other. I never knew him from before. And we went from the Carpathian to the Sudeten. That's also Czechoslovakia. But the Germans used to live there. That was Sudetenland.

So we were living in Ašsti nad Labem. And my husband went to Prague. And he got a permission. And he had a fruit store. We had a fruit store. And I had two children. They were born in Czechoslovakia.

We were waiting for the Czechoslovakian quota because my uncle sent me papers to come. He signed for me. And we had to wait too long. And then they said nobody will be able to get out because the Russians are now.

So we took the two children. We locked the door with the furniture. And we left the fruit store full with fruit, everything, just what we had on us. And we went to Prague. And the Joint, you know, the organization, they arranged for us.

So my little girl was talking Czech because the Czech people didn't like to hear Jewish because they hated the Germans. And Jewish is like German. See, we were speaking only Czech.

When they came here, my uncle wanted to talk to them. He couldn't talk to them because Yiddish, they didn't know Yiddish. They knew only Czech. So we left to Prague. And they made arrangements.

What year is this?

This was 1950 we came. And we were 11 months in Austria. We waited for the quota because we ran away from

Czechoslovakia in the Sudetenland because the Russians didn't let out nobody. So we went with the children. We ran away just the clothes we had. We didn't even have a suitcase, two children without nothing. Two children were born--

And they were how old?

The girl was three years old. And the boy was 18 months younger. One after the other I had him. We had no roof. I mean in Czechoslovakia we had already. But we had to leave that again.

So we were in Steyr. We were waiting for our quota. And then we came with a French ship, with the Graza. That I'll never forget either. It was in 1950. In 1951, I got birthed to a little girl.

Do you have three children?

I have three children. I have two daughters. One is a teacher. And the other one is-- she's working in Park Avenue. She's a computer. And I have a son. And I have seven grandchildren, thank God.

That's terrific.

Seven grandchildren. And we went through a lot even after the concentration camp when we came home because we had to run from the Russians. We didn't want to stay there. And I wanted-- my mind was always to go to America because I knew I have relatives.

So my husband, he put-- I wrote for my aunt because I found already my aunt. I didn't have an address. She lived in the Bronx. And somehow I found her.

And I told her, I wrote her a letter, I said, my husband has also an uncle. He lives in Canarsie in Brooklyn. His name is Adolph Gelb. But we can't get in touch with him. We don't know how to find him.

So she put it in the newspapers here in America. And he was reading the Jewish newspaper. And he sees that a nephew is looking for him.

So he sent us money where we were waiting for the quota, for the Czechoslovakian quota. And we went to Paris. We came with the Graza. That was the name of our ship. And that was it. We came to America.

And we are very happy. And God bless America. This is the best.

Terrific.

It's more, but I can't say so-- when they were selecting us, we weren't allowed to say that we are sisters. We had numbers. Because if they knew you have a sister or somebody, they took you apart. They took you somewhere else.

So my sister, we used to stay in the line when they came to select us. In the block, we had to undress, completely naked. So she used to play tricks on me. She was older than me. So she went before me.

And then I got confused. I didn't know if she went to that side or on this side, if this is to the crematorium. And I cried. I called, Rivka, where are you? Rivka-- I cried my heart out. And she was hiding under the bed. That was in Auschwitz, in Block 22.

Even then she had a sense of humor.

Yes.

Under the worst circumstances.

Yeah. And then when they give that little piece of bread, it was like a tile. It was like you could hit the walls with it. So they make 12 slices of one bread. It was black.

And I couldn't hold it. I said to myself-- I was very hungry. I had to finish it in one time. Some people took a little piece, a little piece, and they put it away for later. I finished it at one time I should feel that I had something.

My sister was older. She used to hide her bread all the time. But when I didn't have, she shared with me. I didn't ask her, but she shared with me. She shared everything with me.

In Bergen-Belsen, she was going where they throw out from the kitchen the garbage. So she wanted to get some potato peels to eat. So Gestapo came. He almost broke her back. He was hitting her so much. She and she didn't bring the potato shells because she dropped everything.

And on the way, when we were going from Hochweiler-- so we were walking till-- we came to the, I don't remember the place. When they took us to Gross-Rosen, they put us in trains. So what did I want to say?

Yeah, on the way, we came to a little place. It was like a big town. And we had to sleepover. We were walking in the frost and the bitter cold, bitter cold.

Barefoot?

No, I had a pair of wooden shoes. I don't know how I got them.

Clogs?

Clogs, yeah. Some people have other shoes. Some people had no shoes-- everybody had something on the feet when we went away from Hochweiler because we were on a working place. We were working.

So we stopped in a town. But I can't remember the town when they took us to Bergen-Belsen that was. And we came to that town. And we came-- there was a big school. And there they put us to sleep, all over, wherever to sleep over.

We didn't know that the Germans ran away. That town was empty. They left hot milk. They have cake and bread because they were very rich Germans. And they had very good stuff.

We went-- oh, this is very important I should tell you. See, it comes to me. So I see everybody running around, and they're taking clothes. I said, what is this? Were we freed? She says, no, nobody's there. Go get something.

So we went to the town, to the houses, to get. And we came-- it was like a grocery. So I took a bag of sugar to put something in my mouth when I walk. So we give each other-- everybody shared.

We went up on the-- it was like a steps up. It's not on the roof. It's in the house. I don't know how do you call that. They used to store everything there. They lived very good.

We never had apples in the winter time. We had dry fruit, dry fruit. We had dry plums, dry apples. But not raw like here in America, you have all the fruits.

We had it only in season because we didn't have-- we had to keep it. We didn't have Frigidaire in those days. We didn't have lights in those days. We had to burn gasoline. You know naphtha.

Gas.

That's how. And we used to have an oven. We put on the fire. That's how we used to live. So I went up on the roof. I found all kinds of delicious cookies, cakes, apples, that we never saw for such a long time. We were so hungry.

And we come down, hot milk they left. Baked meat in the oven. All kind of wurst, you know when you kill a pig-- I'm kosher. I don't eat unkosher. But there I eat everything because I wanted to survive. So I found that.

And I don't know what that was with the Germans. When we were freed in Bergen-Belsen, some people went out in the town. And they got something round. It looked like a cheese. It must have been very valuable. Something was there. But they were standed up. They didn't want to give it. And people took it.

I didn't take that. I didn't know what it is because they didn't want to give it. They were very much-- something very valuable was in there. I don't know what it was.

But I just looked for the food. I took the meat. [NON-ENGLISH] what they made from the-- what they made from the pig, like frankfurters. You know when they kill pigs? They killed a lot of pigs. They were very rich in that place where I came. And I put some apples in whatever.

We should only food, nothing else-- no money, no gold, no diamonds, just food. And the Gestapo came. And he says, the [NON-ENGLISH]. Alles Deutschland. The German blood is not cold yet. And the Jews are here to rob them food. So he said, [NON-ENGLISH], to go in the five, to stay in the line. [NON-ENGLISH], everybody to kill.

We were shaking. We were praying not in a couple of minutes we will be dead. And we were crying.

And there was this good man, the one who went with us still Gross-Rosen, then they took him on the front line. He was crying. I said, [NON-ENGLISH]. They had to have the guns. He says he can't let me go. Everybody wanted to get out.

And then, I don't know, something came in his head. He says, [NON-ENGLISH]. Everybody runs. I figured when I run, he's going to shoot me. He let us go.

So we were walking. If they would let me sleep for a minute to lay down, I would never get up. I would freeze to death because I didn't feel nothing no more. I was very frozen. And it felt very good. I slept and I walked. I slept and I walk.

And that's it. I have a lot more to tell. But right now, I don't know.

That's OK. You did terrific.

I told-- OK, I forgot to tell you about this, my friend, who was standing home and she fixed the fence and the German liked her. Because she was blonde, she looked like a German. But her end wasn't good.

When she died, she died in Bergen-Belsen just before the freedom. And we were sleeping one near each other. And when she died, I never seen in my life all the lice came on top on her. You could see every lice. It covered her body with lice.

And her father came home. And he was crying because after the liberation she died. She was sick.

And I look for water. They closed all the water because they wanted us all to die. And she probably had pneumonia. And when we were freed, she was very sick. And I was running after the doctor because they came to look only for the French people, friends and doctors. You know, Francois, Francois, Francois.

And they didn't care if somebody else died. Everybody was dying. They didn't help us right after the liberation. Still, they came. People were very sick, and they died.

So I was running. I said, please, this is my friend. Help her. Take her to a hospital.

One doctor promised me. But he never returned. And she died. When I was sleeping near her, she died near me. In the morning, I got up, she is dead. That dead.

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