

Interviewing Mrs. Ilse Loeb at the American Conference-- Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors on April 8, 1983. Mrs. Loeb's name is spelled L-O-E-B. And she lives at 19 Keith Drive, Monsey, New York 10952. Mrs. Loeb, can you please tell me your maiden name?

Ilse Morganstern.

And your mother's maiden name?

Elvira Frolich.

OK. Mrs. Loeb would like to start by talking about right before the war and her experiences during the war.

OK. My purpose here today at this gathering is to relate to you my experiences as only a survivor can. I was not in a concentration camp, but my experiences were somewhat similar to Anne Frank. Some of you younger people may not know that she was the girl who hid from the Nazis in an attic, but she was betrayed. After the war, her diary was found and translated into many languages.

I grew up in Vienna, the city of Beethoven, Mozart, and Strauss, where once, the emperor Franz Joseph was a great benefactor of the Jews. My family had many friends and had a high regard for cultural activities. We were a happy family that enjoyed life and took advantage of the good things that Vienna had to offer-- its flower gardens, parks, museums, its outstanding cultural events, and of course, its delicacies of the palate.

But in my first junior high school year, at a time when I was beginning to understand the advantages of such an existence, my life became suddenly uprooted. It all started on a rainy day in March of 1938, when Hitler and his Wehrmacht marched into Vienna.

Almost overnight, there seemed to be a change in the attitude towards us from our so-called friends and neighbors. They did not want to associate with us any longer and called us dirty Jews. I had to transfer to a school 20 blocks away, which was attended by only Jewish classmates, as an order from the Nazis. And I had to walk there every day.

My parents had a printing business. And one day, an SS man-- that's the secret police, the Germans-- came into our store and told my father to leave immediately and that the business was now taken over by the new regime. A few days later, a big sign was put at the entrance with a swastika. I will never forget the day I walked there and saw my father standing at the opposite corner, looking at the place he built up over the years. And he had tears in his eyes.

After the fateful Crystal Night, the night that the Nazis burned synagogues and arrested thousands of Jews, my parents were very anxious for me to leave the country. At that time, a Nazi who lived in our building came to our apartment and told us to leave right away and to just take a few clothes. We had about 10 minutes to do that. Everything else, we left behind.

We had to move in with another Jewish family two blocks away. It was the last time I saw the home where I grew up. My parents wrote to a cousin in Holland who had lived in Holland for many years. And my cousin then responded and sent a telegram very soon, in which it said that I should come to Holland immediately.

Did you have sisters and brothers, Mrs. Loeb?

Yes. I had a brother. And he was lucky at that night of the Kristallnacht that he was not caught by the Germans because many young men were taken away that night. But somehow, he escaped. And he later went to Holland too. I just lost my dear brother last year. When I said goodbye to my parents, one cold Sunday morning in November of 1938, neither of us knew then that we would never see each other again.

In the recent TV movie Blood and Honor-- have you seen that-- you could observe the same scene-- a Jewish family, anxious for their child to be brought to safety, saying goodbye to their child, going off to a strange and unknown place. I

was a young teenager, going off alone to a strange country. The train ride was very eventful, as the Germans almost didn't let me cross the border. Maybe I should not go into detail on that train ride. Do you want me to?

Yes.

Every Jewish person had to have a big J on the first page of a passport to be identified immediately as a Jew. A passport in those days was the most important thing that a person owned because that was their, really, passport to freedom. The Germans only allowed anyone leaving Germany or Austria ten mark, which was not even enough to go back to Vienna from the Dutch border for me. But we had it all figured out.

My brother stayed with friends in DÃ¼sseldorf, which was near the Dutch border, and just in case I wouldn't be able to get through, he would-- I could go back to DÃ¼sseldorf to my brother. When I got to the border, the conductor looked at my passport and immediately saw I was Jewish, took my passport, and put it in his pocket, and just took off.

And I took one-- my bag and looked for him. Because I knew that I had to get my passport back. And I could not find him I suddenly saw him on the platform. And I went off the train and ran up to him. And I said, give me my passport back. I was 13 years old.

And he said, you will never get in Holland. They won't let you in. I said, yes, I have a cousin who is waiting for me on the Dutch side of the border. He says, I don't believe you. And then I saw his superior officer standing there. And I pleaded with him that he should give me my passport back.

And the man said, eh, let her have her passport back. And at the moment that he finally handed it to me, and I wanted to step back on the train, the train was just leaving the station. And suddenly, I was there all by myself on that platform with 10 mark in my pocket and decided what to do next.

I went into the station and paid, I think, half of that money for a phone call to the Dutch border and had my cousin paged, who, of course, got very excited when he heard his name over the microphone. And I said to him, I was held up. But I'll come with the next train. And so I did.

And I got off at the Dutch border with the next train. My cousin stood there with a woman from a children's committee. And she whispered into my ear, if they ask you anything, you say that your mother was taken to a concentration camp, and your father had died. But nobody asked me anything.

And I came into Holland very, very easily. I arrived safely in Amsterdam. And everything worked out well for me the first few years. My cousin introduced me to foster parents, who made a good home for me.

Were they Jewish, Mrs. Loeb?

Yes. I stayed with them until June of 1940. Now, I'm still in touch with my foster sisters and foster brother. My foster parents died. And my foster sister only recently, on a visit to the United States, told me how it was that I came to their home.

They had pleaded to take a child from Austria or Germany at that time because they heard all these stories what was happening. But the committee thought they were too old and they would not let them do it. And my foster sister went back there time and time again and pleaded. And I had--

Back to the committee?

To the committee. And I had, when I first arrived, gone to a family who had just lost a child, a little baby. And they felt that maybe that would help them get over their grief, but I was already a big girl. And they were disappointed. So they didn't want me to stay there any longer.

And that's when, at the same time, my foster sister had just gone again to that committee and said, please, we want a

child. That's-- all right, there is just one just came available today. And that's how I came to live with them. And they were-- as I said, they were very good to me. And I'm still in contact with them.

You lived with them for two years?

I lived with them for-- from 1939 to 1942. Now, at that time, I was still in touch with my parents. They had tried to come to Holland. And my father, who was a lithographer, among other trades, had a position secured at the Dutch Mint. It was not until after the war that I found out from a friend of my parents why the Germans would not let them leave Austria. They took my father's skill, and he had to work to make counterfeit money.

My parents also tried to come to the United States. And my brother, who at that time had come to the United States already, had sent them the papers. They had to have an affidavit that meant he had to stand good for this person, that in case they couldn't find work, that you had to support them. That was not easy to find. But a lot of people did help. But two weeks before their visa was supposed to be issued, the United States entered the war against Germany, and the consulate was closed. And my parents never were able to leave.

In June 1940, Hitler tried to conquer Holland. The Dutch people fought courageously for five days, but defeat was inevitable. The German Air Force, the Luftwaffe, bombed Rotterdam, a major city. And to avoid further bloodshed, the Dutch forces had to surrender.

After the German occupation, the fate of the Jews was doomed. The same restrictions were put in effect as I had experienced in Austria only a few years before. There were 140,000 Dutch Jews. And they were told to register.

They did not know that was the worst thing they could do at that time. Because then the Germans had lists of who was Jewish. A few people didn't do it. And they were lucky because nobody could prove that they were Jewish.

The people who didn't register?

Who didn't register. German Jews were already registered, like I. And in June of 1942, the Germans confiscated that list. Anyone who had come to Holland illegally was sent to a work camp in northern Holland, called Westerbork. People in that camp were among the very first ones to be transported to the concentration camps, and consequently, very few survived because they were in the camps already in 1942-- three years.

When the Jews were first rounded up, all the Dutch workers staged a sympathy strike in protest. But the Gestapo issued a 24-hour ultimatum and broke the strike by shooting the leaders of the strike. I just want to bring out that the Dutch people tried to help, but it was of no avail. A monument in their memory was erected after the war at the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam.

I had come to Holland legally, but the Germans sent me an order to leave the country immediately, destination unknown. They asked me to be at the railroad station at midnight. And the reason they did these things at nighttime is so that these transactions would not be observed by the Dutch people.

My foster parents and friends all advised me at that time to go into hiding. We had the option of letting the Germans take us away eventually or go into hiding. But it was very difficult to find people who would help, especially if the Jews who wanted to hide had no money to pay for their food and lodging.

Did your foster family go into hiding?

No. My foster father was an Englishman. Now, he had lived in Holland about 50 years, but never became a Dutch citizen, which ironically, later, saved his children's life. And that was because he was under the agreement, the Geneva agreement, that he was an Englishman. So that the Germans interned in England would be treated well, they had to treat the English people in Holland well too.

I-- OK. Can you send me a copy? OK. I want to mention at this point that in back of the minds of many people who hear

Holocaust survivor stories, the question arises whenever they hear how the Jews were dragged away in those terrifying months, why did they go without resistance?

My answer is when machine guns or torture are facing you, there is no choice. But many did defy the orders. And I was one of them. To just disappear was something that had not been done before.

But with the help of friends, everything was arranged. I was to leave for a small town near Amsterdam. At the railroad station, I took off my coat with the yellow star, which every Jewish person had to wear at that time, and put on a different coat without a star, and at that moment, had a new name and a new identification. With other words, I had a new identity.

What was your new name?

My new name was Jopie Luck. And the Dutch underground issued these papers for me and selected a town near the beach, where a lot of people had to be evacuated because of security reasons. The Germans didn't want them to live near the beach. So it could not be traced anymore that I had lived there. That's why they selected that particular town.

I had an identity of a young woman who was born in Holland and was not Jewish. And as I said, the Dutch underground workers helped me with that. They were very courageous. They would confiscate the papers from the German headquarters to do this. And so I lived with brave people for the next three years, moving from place to place if it became too dangerous to stay on.

Many times, I had to sleep in the outdoors when we were warned about a raid. And sleeping in the outdoors as a young girl was actually more dangerous for me in other ways because there was a field nearby where the German soldiers would maneuver at night. And I was more afraid to be raped than I was, actually, of Germans taking me away.

Only 1% of the Dutch population was Nazi-oriented. But we were never sure who might be an informer. In the town where I was hidden, many artists lived. And it was known that a great number of Jews were hidden there. A new mayor, a Dutch Nazi, was determined to find them. So he went out at night with some Gestapo officers to find them.

He also came to the house I stayed in, but I was warned about 10 seconds before by a Dutch policeman. And I had just enough time to hide in an attic. And luckily, they didn't find me. But I had a few very anxious moments.

We used to listen to an English radio broadcast every night, which was our only link to freedom. At least we've found out what was going on in the rest of the world. Because the Germans kept saying how they were winning constantly. But the radio gave us the courage to know that they are slowly but surely going to be defeated.

The hope that V-Day was coming soon gave me the courage to go on, even though the most difficult times were still to come. By September of 1944, the American and English forces had conquered France, Belgium, and the south of Holland. We hoped to be liberated within hours, since Holland is a small country.

But the Germans put up a fierce counterattack and stopped the Allied forces in the south of Holland. The Dutch railroad workers went on strike in order to prevent the Wehrmacht from transporting their soldiers and ammunition. But the Dutch people suffered from this strike too because there was no way of transporting food to the proper places.

And so began a winter without gas, electricity, and with very little food, rations of a half a bread a week, no meat, very little milk. We were forced to chop trees to have food for warmth and cooking. And we had to improvise a little stove that we put wood in and to cook.

How many of you were living in the same house?

Well, there was my cousin. And he was, of course, the one who brought me over. And his girlfriend, who was not Jewish-- and everything was on her name. With other words, the house we stayed in, everything was registered under her name. So no one knew that there was anyone Jewish living there. And my cousin also had false papers.

So there were three of you living together?

Were three of us. And I was in the house as a maid. So in case someone would question that, that's why I was there.

What was your cousin's name?

Edi Stark. It's very sad that my cousin, who defied the Germans every day, and we would wait for him at night, and worrying if he would come home safely, and he always was clever to fool them because he was a blonde. And the Germans never would have thought he was Jewish. But after the war, from the strain, his mind cracked. And in 1959, he committed suicide.

We were forced to sell our clothing to farmers in the north for a few pounds of potatoes and grain. On one of those trips, which I took on my bicycle-- which, by the way, was considered in those days as a possession of a fancy automobile-- a German soldier stopped me. It was nighttime, and I was scared.

I only traveled at night in order-- from being detected. To describe to you this feeling, I have to quote a journalist, who also survived by hiding, a Mr. de Jong. And he says, you can feel scared watching a scary movie or being locked in a dark room.

But then there is the other anxiety, the kind when you feel that someone is grabbing you at your throat. You know that this is the moment that your life depends on your actions. You call upon your last mental reserve. And suddenly, you stay calm.

When the soldier told me he wanted my bike, I was actually relieved. And I let him have it. He could have asked me to come to the Kommandantur or some other frightening thing.

But I want to add that when I got back home, my cousin was very mad that I had given my bike to him because from that time on, it was very difficult for me to get around. He just did that to get a few extra guilders. He was selling my bicycle. But I didn't know it then. I was too scared to realize it. I didn't want to argue with him.

But the Dutch people were wonderful. Their perseverance and strength helped me cope, even though their own safety was jeopardized by helping me. My uncle was hidden in the northern part of Holland with a minister.

And the minister not only had helped the Jewish people, but he also distributed these ration cards to people who were in hiding. And that was a mistake. The Germans heard about him doing the ration cards, and came to the house to get them, and found my uncle there. So they took the minister and my uncle and they, of course, didn't survive.

In the recently-published work by Joseph Hellman, Avenue of the Righteous, the author describes the selflessness of those Gentiles who, at the risk of their lives, tried to help us Jews. 700 trees are planted by Yad Vashem in Israel in their honor and memory.

Dutch underground workers helped too. Of the 20,000 Jews who went into hiding, 8,000 survived, which is a much better percentage than that of the concentration camps. OK. 105,000 Dutch Jews were killed. There are many little stories of narrow escapes I could mention, where a few seconds meant the difference between life or death.

The story that stands out in my memory is a tree incident. Do you want me to tell it? OK. We went into the woods at night to chop trees so we could cook our food. There was a curfew between 12:00 and 4:00 in the morning. But that was the time that we did the work to avoid detection.

This particular night, we were chopping a tree with a handsaw, of course. And we were getting to be quite experts on this. But that tree was starting to fall in to the wrong direction. It was going to fall over the street instead of into the woods. And just at the moment that it was falling, a German jeep with Gestapo officers passed by. And just as they had passed, the tree fell right across the street. And I know that if the tree had fallen on the jeep or maybe before the jeep got

there, I would not be sitting here now.

The end of the war and Hitler's power came in May of 1945. What we had hoped would be a question of a few weeks or months at the most lasted almost three years-- over 1,000 days, of which each one seemed to last an eternity, especially for a teenager like me.

Just before our liberation, I became very ill as a result of undernourishment and lack of fresh air. I was bedridden for many weeks. And it was very difficult to find a doctor who would treat me, who could be trusted to know that I was Jewish. I had a bad cough. And when visitors would come, I had to suppress my cough so that they wouldn't know that I was in the other room, which was horrible.

Why did the doctor have to know that you were Jewish?

Well, he would see the situation. He would know. It's just something you couldn't hide. You couldn't hide that. I had not been in contact with my parents for three years. And I tried to get in touch with them after the-- [AUDIO OUT]

--tell us about that moment.

OK. I was in a small town near Amsterdam. As a matter of fact, on that same spot, there's now an old age home for retired artists, at the exact spot where the house stood, where I was in hiding. And we knew that the end was coming. The Canadian forces rescued us, Canadian soldiers.

And they already had dropped care packages about a week before. I remember running out to the fields. And suddenly, you would see airplanes with-- dropping food packages. And we would all go running, grabbing them. We were all so, so hungry. I keep telling my children, they don't know what it means to be really hungry. And I have never, after the war, been able to waste food.

And my children think that I overdo it sometimes. But I guess that's one of my hang-ups. I don't have too many, but that's one of them. For instance, shampoo was so scarce, I think you could wash your hair once in two months. So whenever I wash my hair now, I have to take the last bit out of a bottle and use it up. I guess that's as a result of this.

My parents, of course, did not survive. But I had the opportunity to go to the United States before the war. I visited a dear cousin of mine, who lives in Falls Church last night. And her husband is now dead. But he sent me papers in 1940, when he first arrived in the States so I could come. And I made--

He sent you papers to Holland?

To Holland, yes, through some rich person who did this. And I did not want to do it because I felt-- I wanted to be close to my parents in case they would survive. I want to be near them. Of course, then, in 1940, after the Hitler conquered Holland and he bombarded Rotterdam, all my papers were destroyed because the American consulate was in Rotterdam.

So even if I had wanted to after that, I could not have come. But I never regretted that I didn't come, even though I almost was killed myself. Because I felt so good after the war, thinking, I'm near here. If they need me, I'm right here. But of course, it was too late.

Here's the story of my life during the Holocaust. Why do I tell my experiences after 40 years have passed? Many survivors still cannot talk about it. It is emotionally draining for me too. Some people think we should forget, for it creates unpleasant feelings and it makes us uncomfortable to hear the horror stories. But as we survivors are getting older, and someday, our voices will be silenced, we owe it to our parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters who suffered and died to educate our children-- and they, in turn, their offspring.

In the town where I live, a new center for Holocaust Studies is being built soon. And this will keep the flame alive in our community to teach future generations about the causes, the agonies, the aftermath of this unparalleled catastrophe. Mankind shall always remember so that a future Holocaust will forever be prevented.

Mrs. Loeb, do you have time to talk a little bit more about what happened right after the war?

Sure.

You were-- you stopped with the care packages being dropped by the Canadians. And then what happened? And how did it?

OK. I had found out that my parents had died.

How did you find that out?

I had written to Vienna, to the newly-formed Jewish Agency, who told me that they died in Izbica. And I thought, I had to get my life together. My brother was in the United States. And I knew I could count on him. He would bring me to the United States. But something very unexpected happened. I had no one to support me.

And I didn't have any skill. I had only gone to junior high school, up to seventh grade-- yeah-- when I had to leave Vienna. I had some private lessons from very dear friends in Amsterdam, who was the editor of the biggest newspaper in Amsterdam. And I'm still in contact with his family too. But other than that, I had no formal education. So I started to work for a family to do domestic work.

In Amsterdam?

In Amsterdam. And since I had been ill in the last year of the war with pleurisy, I had to be checked periodically with a chest X-ray. And then I went for another checkup. They told me that I had developed tuberculosis. As a matter of fact, I think I am telling this wrong. Could you erase that a little bit? No? OK.

I can't listen to where it started. But you can correct.

OK. Actually, what happened was I-- after the war, I didn't know yet I was ill. After-- in May of 1945, I went back to Amsterdam and wanted to become a nurse. That was my ambition. And I worked in a hospital for about a month and then tried to transfer to one of the biggest hospitals in Amsterdam.

And there, they gave me a physical examination and then called me into the head nurse's office and said, I'm sorry. You cannot be a nurse. You will have to be a nurse to yourself. This is how it was. And I had to be in a sanatorium for 10 months. I was very lucky that it was discovered in an early stage and did not have to be nursed too long.

So after I got out of the sanatorium, I had to go for periodic checkups, and didn't know what type of work to do, and went to the domestic work. And when I went back, they told me that I had a relapse, that I just-- not really a relapse, but that I was not well enough to work, that I had to have complete rest. And I think it might have been the HIAS. And I just went here to the--

HIAS.

--the booth to find out if they had my records. But they couldn't find it. But some American agency heard about my case, that I needed rest, and I did not have the means of stopping to work. And they came to me one day and said, I heard about you. We want to help you. The money will be there.

And there was a place in Holland, an old castle for people who needed help. I was one of the few that needed physical rehabilitation. Most of them had come from the concentration camps and needed psychological help.

That was quite an experience. I was there about two and a half months when my papers were processed and I had to go for my visa. And I was very, very anxious to know if the chest X-ray would be OK. And thank god it was. But when I came to the United States, I still had to take it easy for a while.

And when you came to the United States, was that by plane?

No. Again, it was very difficult to get passage on a boat. Finally, you have your-- the quota. And then you-- finally, they give you the visa. And then you're still faced with the problem of getting passage or getting the money for the passage. But somehow, I did it.

So you were about 22 years old at the time?

Yes. Well, 21.

And you were still in touch with your cousin?

Yes. I was in touch with him, but not much. I didn't know it then. I knew there was something not right with him. But I couldn't just put my finger on it. And then, of course, many, many years later, when this happened, then I realized that it had started already then.

But I am still in touch with his girlfriend, who later became his wife. And I had her name put on a list at Yad Vashem so she would be recognized. And it was two years ago. And they haven't done anything about it yet. So I gave it to someone at the Yad Vashem booth.

When did you arrive in America?

I came here on June of 1947 and went to Chicago, where my brother lived. And I had learned to be a dressmaker in Holland from my foster sister before the war. So that's all I could do. And that's how I started, and I'm still doing.

That day that you and your brother saw each other must have been--

Well, that was another funny thing. And last week, I was interviewed in my area by a reporter. She got my name from the Holocaust Survivors Group. She wanted to interview someone who is going to Washington. And I think she's going to follow up on this here.

What impressed her about my whole story the most was the fact when I told her that right after the war, I went to the backyard and I dug up a little metal box, where I had all my own belongings, including a photo album that I had put together when I left Vienna with my own name and everything-- and addresses I had, and my brother's address too. And my brother's address was a big blotch that you couldn't read it from dampness or whatever. And it took me months to find him.

Once you got here? From Amsterdam.

No, from there. No, once I got-- he brought me over here-- I mean, yes, with an affidavit. But it took me months before I was able to locate him. So last Friday, she sent a man over to photograph me and with instructions that I should be holding that photo album. That's supposed to be in the paper next week.

One-- her question was-- why are you going to Washington? And I have several reasons why I'm here. One of them is, of course, the fact that this story has to be kept alive. Another reason is I'm very fascinated with the fact that so many people who have been through this horrible period in their life are able to lead fairly normal lives again.

You hear about the people who came back from Iran, who were imprisoned for a long time. When they came back to the United States finally after they were released, they had all these psychiatrists and psychologists there to help them cope. Who did we have? Nobody, no one. And I think it's marvelous how people were able to get married again, even if they had lost the family, have children. It's great. It's really great, I mean, when you look around.

And I have learned from all this-- I made up my mind right at the end of the war, I want this to be a positive experience.



Now, I want to learn from this and not dwell on the bad things. I will appreciate everything good that's coming to me, more than maybe the average person. And that's why I think I'm a very happy person and well-adjusted. And it helps, also, the fact that I can talk about it, which a lot of people can't. So I think I've learned from all this. It's made me a better person.

OK. Well, thank you very much.