

Into the microphone.

[INAUDIBLE].

[RUSTLING]

This is a interview at The American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Washington, DC. It is April 12, 1983 at approximately 10:20 AM. Could you please tell us your full name?

My name is Celia Rosenfeld.

Celia, can I call you Celia?

Yes.

My name is Bill. Where were you born?

I was born in Hungary, Budapest.

How long did you live there?

I was two years old when I arrived to Poland with my family.

So when were you born?

I was born December the 25th, 1922.

Now Celia, you lived in this little Polish town. Tell us about your life there before the war.

Well, before the war, I was one of five children, three brothers, me, and a sister. Came from a very Orthodox family. We were very happy. We have all family together till 1939, when the war came. This was the worst time in my life.

Celia, did your grandparents live in the town, too?

No, my grandparents died before we came to Poland, from my father's side. My mother's mother lived with us a short time, and then she passed away in our home.

In the city that you lived in, your own family, were you very observant? You said your folks were Orthodox. You observed Shabbos?

Oh, Shabbos, very, very much, they were very religious. We were all raised religious.

When the war broke out you were in the German zone? Not the Russian zone?

No, no. Yeah, in Poland, in the German zone. Right.

Do you want to tell me-- whatever you want to tell me. You just talk.

I should talk-- what can I tell you. 1939, this was just before the High Holidays, which was very bad. My father was very Orthodox. And there was no temple. They burned all the temples.

So they find my father in our private home, praying. They took him with his tallis, you know, what he has on in his head, took him in a truck. They drove him around the whole city. They start beating him up. Till he came home and he

died, because they beat him to death.

[CRYING]

How old was your father at that time?

56.

What happened to the rest of the family?

My two brothers, my oldest brother with his wife and my second older brother, they escaped to Russia to save their life. My sister lived in a different city. She was married.

I was with my mother and my youngest brother. I worked in a workshop for the Germans. We made uniforms for the Germans.

So one night, I have a night shift. I came home one night. This was 1940. I didn't find my mother, not my brother. They sent them to Auschwitz, to the camp, to the gas chambers.

I was by myself and worked till they need me. If they didn't need me anymore, they send me to a concentration camp.

What camp did you go to, Celia?

I was in a few camps. They took me from home. They took me to Markstadt. I was only one day there. Then they took me to Klettendorf. From Klettendorf, I was a short time there, they took me to Langenbielau, from Langenbielau to Reichenbach.

No, I'm mixed up. From Klettendorf, from Markstadt to Klettendorf, from Klettendorf, I went to FaulbrÄ¼ck, from FaulbrÄ¼ck to from Reichenbach to Langenbielau.

In Langenbielau, there was our camp. But I worked in Reichenbach because there was a big factory. I was working in a factory, making fabrics.

I operate three machines. I used to make the beginning, when I learned this profession, I didn't know how, we made fabric for mattresses for the hospital. Then they took me on a machine to make parachutes for the Germans. I worked there all the years till I was liberated in 1945.

Which camp was that, Celia?

This was Langenbielau.

How many years were you there?

In Langenbielau, there was the last two years I was there.

Did you work? Each camp you were in, were you doing work?

All the time.

Generally seamstress work, or dealing with cloth?

With cloth, most of the time, yes, with cloth.

Can you describe what your life was like in the camp?

What can I tell you? We were in our room, like 33, 35 girls. One blanket, and just was on a board we slept with one blanket. Most the time, we slept in our clothes because it was very cold.

One meal a day. We have to walk to work, 12 miles, a hour, six miles one way. When we came home at night, we didn't know what to do first. Shouldn't we stay in line for to grab a little bit water to wash ourselves, or to stay in line for the meal? We got one meal a day, like, a water soup with one slice of bread.

We were three girls very close together. One stand in line for water so we can keep clean. Otherwise, they would shave our heads off.

Did you manage to stay healthy during the time you were in camp?

Most the time, yeah. I have a little problem with my eye. Otherwise, I was not seriously ill.

Do you stay in touch with your three friends or the two friends?

Three girls from the same city all the time until we were liberated. One of them even married my husband's cousin, and we had, like, a double wedding. We lived a little while in Germany together.

Then we separated in Germany. I went to a different city. She was in a different city. But we were united again when I left Germany, 1948, when I went to Israel. We got united again, and we were very close to each other.

While you were in the camp, did you find any kind of pity or compassion from any of the guards or people who were over you?

Not compassion at all. Hatred, I did. I found. Even during the hours I worked in the factory, we have, like, a foreman who take care when a machine got broken and I have to call them to repair the machine. He always stepped on my feet.

He always said if I would have the power, I would kill you. But the only thing I wouldn't do it right now because you are a good worker and we need you. They were very rude to us.

Because we have, like, walking to work, we have German women. They were special trained to take us to work. We have to march to work. We couldn't walk.

They have to count 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, like soldiers. The end of the week we were so exhausted from work, from staying on our feet for eight hours walking 12 miles a day without food. For punishment, when we didn't walk fast enough, we came into the camp we have to kneel on our ground with two rocks on our head to lift up our hands for punishment. Because they missed the movie, to go to the movie.

Was it 12 miles each way or 12 miles a day?

Six.

Six each way.

Yeah.

When you worked, did you ever have any time off at all? Did you have to work seven days a week all the time?

No. Sunday, we didn't work, six days a week. Sunday, we were in the camp.

Tell me about how you would spend a Sunday.

Working in the camp, cleaning up the yard, cleaning the toilets, and helping in the kitchen to wash the dishes. Maybe an hour or two, we would have free. So we were sitting and singing songs and talking to each other, when the day is going to be when we're going to be free and have a lot food to eat, even a piece of dry bread, but not to be hungry.

[CRYING]

Dreaming of our liberation, to be united with our parents, our families, our brothers, our sisters.

We were talking before we got on the tape about religion and orthodoxy. You had some thoughts that you expressed at that time.

Yeah.

Would you like to tell us about them now?

Yeah. During the war, we didn't think too much about this. Because we didn't know that we lost our families. But after the war, I was thinking why did God punished us? Why was the reason?

First, He took all the Orthodox people and the Orthodox. They believe in so much more than our generation, the younger generation.

But then, when we were free, I got married. I got pregnant right away. Nine months later, I have my son. I still thought to myself, well, He's going to carry on our family.

I named him after my father and after my husband's father. I said, well, we have to keep up our religion, still. We are Jews. So I tried the best, but I'm not as Orthodox that my parents are.

I don't keep kosher. I keep up all my holidays, the High Holidays. We celebrate we go to the temple. Passover, I never eat bread. I keep up the tradition.

I'm very proud of my son. He does the same. He continues the same thing than I do.

How old is your son?

My son is now 36.

Where does he live?

He lives in Buffalo, New York.

He was born in Europe?

He was born in Germany.

After you were liberated from the camps, and we'll talk about your liberation perhaps later, where did you go?

After I was liberated, I stayed in the same city when I was liberated. I was liberated in May. In November, I got married. November the 7th, 1945.

Then we didn't like this regime with the Russian. So we smuggled to go to the American zone. So we came to the American zone, but in Germany.

I lived there till 1948. My son was two years old. We emigrate to Israel to find our new home.

But my husband couldn't stand the climate. It was very, very hard for him. So I have no choice. I have to leave Israel, go back to Germany, and wait for our quota.

What year did you go back to Germany? What year was that?

1952.

How long did you have to wait for a quota?

Seven years.

And you came to the United States?

1959.

Under whose auspices did you come to the United States? Who brought you here?

Well, there was very hard for me. I have a girlfriend here which I was with her very close in Germany. She went to the HIAS, and she begged them just to give me the papers. But I paid for everything. They didn't pay me nothing.

So the HIAS brought us to Cleveland, Ohio. I stayed with my girlfriend for a few weeks till we find some room. We settled down. I went right away to work. My husband found right away a job.

We have a little bit problem with our son because he didn't know how to speak English. No school would accept him. I sent him to the Hebrew Academy, to a private school. But he didn't learn any English, just Hebrew. In Hebrew, he knew.

So a friend of mine took me to the board of education. they. Found a school which all the foreigner kids went there. After six months, he learned English and he went in to a regular school. My son is now a college graduate with a master's degree, which he finished in the American University in Washington, DC.

He's married to a wonderful girl. She's American. They are married 12 years. They have a wonderful daughter. She's 7 and 1/2 years old. She's named after my husband.

Two months before my son got married, my husband passed away. I went on with the wedding. I didn't want to disturb their happiness. That's only once in a lifetime. Now my son is in Buffalo, New York, very happy, thank God. I live by myself in Cleveland, Ohio.

What do you do? Are you retired? Are you still working?

I came to Cleveland, Ohio. I was three weeks there and I started working. I worked till about two years ago.

I got very sick with my arthritis. I have it in my spine, and I cannot work anymore. So I'm, like, semi-retired. I'm doing alterations at home, just to keep busy and making a few dollars.

We've gone from your early years in Europe to today.

Yes.

Now can we sort of jump back a little bit?

Sure, anytime.

OK. You went to what kind of school in Europe before the war? What sort of school did you go to?

Well, I went to a Catholic school.

Were there other Jewish children who went to the Catholic school?

Oh, yeah. Most Jewish children went to the Catholic school, because it was a small town, and there was no private school. I went a half a day to Catholic school and then I went to a Hebrew school.

Did you have any non-Jewish friends?

Not too close, because, again, I have to go back the time when they thought that I'm Jewish and I killed Jesus. When our Passover came, they were always teasing me and hating me. They said, I hope you're not going to kill me because you need the blood to bake your matzos for Passover.

I felt so bad because I thought I'm your friend. We are in school together. We live in the same neighborhood. It is not my fault that maybe the Jews killed Jesus.

I didn't know at this time. Was it my fault? I would never hurt anybody now. This is hundred and thousand years back. But still they couldn't believe and always was the anti-Semitism very, very big in Poland.

I see. I want to ask you, again, how do you pronounce the name of your city, you lived in Poland?

C-H-S-Z-A-N-O-W.

How do you pronounce that?

Chrzan³w.

How big a city was that?

This was not a big city. It was about, I would say, about 10,000 population.

How many Jewish people lived there?

Oh, I would say half, 50.

What did the Jewish people do in this city?

Oh, you mean the Jewish population?

Yes.

There were all kinds of Jewish organization. My brothers, two of my brothers, they belonged to the organizations. They have clubs and were entertaining. My oldest brother, every Saturday night, there was a dance.

There was so much fun. There was no television. There was no radio. There was no car transportation.

But they were occupied with readings. There was libraries. There was all kind of pool tables to play. They have meetings together.

We walk a lot. We make all kind of little trips together. We enjoy our life very, very much.

What sort of things did the people do to make a living, Jewish people do to make a living?

All kinds. There were business. There were peddlers, tailors, business people, blacksmiths, any kind of person, any kind. Everybody has their own profession, and everybody made a living.

The living was not as luxurious than you saw here. Maybe if you saw the Fiddler On The Roof, that was the life in Poland, in Europe, in the little cities.

Did you have enough to eat?

Oh, yeah. We were not hungry. No. We got best the holidays. No matter how hard it was, the parents always managed to have a new suit or a new little dress for the holidays.

Food was enough. We were not hungry. Not like here, you have everything from anything you dream of it, but we didn't know. We did not know a other life. We were very happy and satisfied with the things we had.

Our parents were very Orthodox. Every meal we ate, we have to bless and thank God for giving us the food we have on the table.

When the Germans came and they killed your father, and then you were left with your mother and your brother, young brother, and you were working as a seamstress making the uniforms, did any of your non-Jewish friends help you at all?

No, no. They didn't even want to see us. We were separated from them. We were, like, in a ghetto, bunched up in a few streets, lived together, so many one room. We were not allowed even to talk to them. They didn't even try to help us with anything.

When you lived in the ghetto, what was the food situation?

Very, very bad, very bad, there was hardly anything to eat. Then we start really feeling pain. My mother saved a bite of food, what she supposed to eat, and give it away to us. Because she said you are young, you should eat.

There was very little. We have, like, coupons. That was enough just to survive. But it was very, very bad.

The place that you worked in your home city, was that in the ghetto or outside of the ghetto?

This was the temples. They start burning up the temples. So the Jewish committee, we have, like, a Jewish committee that begged the Germans please don't burn all the temples. Make something.

So they start making, like, workshops. Around this workshop, they made a ghetto. So we couldn't walk. So we walked to work, back and forth, so we didn't have to face any other streets.

Was the Jewish community helpful to the Jewish community?

They tried to do. But it was very hard for them, too. For instance, when the German went in and said all the jewelry has to be give away, so they came to every house and plead with us, please give away the jewelry. Because otherwise, they're going to kill us.

We gave everything away. Even when they collect, like, silver, we have silver candlesticks, silverware. We give up everything. Then copper, we have copper candlesticks for years back, you know, it went from one generation to the other. We gave this up.

If not, they came and they said, look, we need so many people for work. The Jewish organization has to come and beg them. Please go and work.

Each day, different people has to go and dig, all kinds, very hard jobs. We did everything was possible just to save our life. We thought maybe this is going to save our life and we're going to stay in the city. But nothing helped.

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

[RATTLING]

Nothing helped. Then, all of a sudden, they took me away, too. They didn't need me anymore. They took me, too, and we start taking away all the younger people to the concentration camps.

Celia, you and I talked again before you were on the tape about what you want your son and what you want your granddaughter and other people in this younger generation and future generations to get from your experience and experiences of people who went through what you went through.

[CRYING]

I want him to continue not to forget the day. I don't know if you saw on television or you were there. This is not a dream. That's not a lie. We wanted to continue to show all the people there was a Holocaust. There wasn't just a lie that we made up stories like this.

We hope that our second generation will continue. Because our days are count. We're not going to live too long.

They should never be forgotten. This Holocaust should be remembered. It should be written in American history. Because that's what we went through, should never, never happen again to no nation and no matter if we Jews or non-Jews.

You also indicated before we got on the tape some reactions to the meeting you went to last night at which the President was present.

I was very, very proud when I saw this. I thank God in the United States. I'm very proud to be here, because it's a wonderful life. Even I went through a tragedy, I lost my husband. But this was nobody's fault. It has to happen to me.

I was so proud when I saw the President of the United States with his wife walked in. How he was, his speech, I was very, very impressed. He tried to help us.

I'm very proud of the American people. They're very nice to us. When I came here, I didn't even know a word of English. I couldn't go no place and talk. When they tried to say to me, don't worry, honey. I know you're going to be all right here.

You're going to learn the language. You're going to be very happy. We're very proud of you.

When I became the American citizen, I was so proud of myself, too. How nice they were to us. They didn't know what to do for us.

They took us to the library. They show us movies, old movies about the United States. They serve us a donut with coffee, milk for the children. They were so happy that we became American citizen. I was proud of myself, too.

Celia, I'm jumping around, again, with you.

[LAUGHTER]

You were eventually liberated.

Yes.

When was that?

This was May the 9th, 1945.

How did that come about? Tell me about that.

Oh, how? Oh, there was a very tragic moment and a very happy moment. We were for three days without security, because we were always with Germans. For three days, we didn't see any Germans in our camp.

So we start doing something. They left the gate open. We walked out. We walked around.

The German people there offered us food, but we didn't want nothing to do with them. We were afraid. So all of a sudden, we saw a motorcycle with two soldiers. We thought to ourselves, who are they?

Then a truck came with soldiers with rifles. They ask us, are you amcha? We didn't know the word amcha.

Then a captain with medals, probably he was a captain or something, he asked are you Jewish people, Jewish kids, Jewish? We said, yes.

So he said, you know we are Russian. We came to liberate you. Don't worry. You are free people now.

We're going to try to do as best we can. Give you transportation. Go back to your own homes, to your own countries. Maybe you're going to find somebody from the family.

So it wasn't so easy. We struggled till we find transportation to go home. I went home to my hometown, to Poland, to Chrzanów. And there was a Jewish organization, all the letters and mail came to this organization to find somebody who survived for my family.

Nobody. I was there for a few weeks. I went back to Germany, where I was liberated. I met my husband. We got married November the 7th, 1945.

Celia, how were you treated by the non-Jewish population in your hometown when you returned?

Not good at all. When I came, I thought they're going to be very happy to see me. Even children mine age, we went to school together. They was very surprised that I'm alive.

They didn't help me at all. They said how come you're alive and not your family? I said, well, I was the lucky one. I didn't stay too long there, because I didn't like their attitude.

I went back. Because I know when I'm going to be back, be from Germany, I have a better chance to go someplace.

Celia, did you have any kind of interaction with the German people after you got out of the camp? Did you meet any German people?

No. We didn't, no. Five miles away from our camp was a men's camp. The men, even my husband before I was married, he was searching for the Nazis. He remembered a few from their camp.

When they found somebody, they took them to the Russian people to give them away, you know, and say, look, they were bad to us. They were in the Nazi party. They killed so many people we saw. They tried to do it best--