--continue? Should I continue?

No, start again.

Start again. My name is Ruth Sold. My maiden name is Meisels. I was born in a little town in Hungary in 1929.

The first recollection I have of things being different than they used to be was when, in 1943, my father was taken away to a work camp. Subsequently, they sent him back. And I was attending school in a city near our little town. And I wasn't very conscious of being Jewish besides being religious. Because all my friends who were non-Jews never made a difference until the day I had to wear a gold star and I wasn't allowed to go on the train to go to school.

A few months after that, I had to drop out of school because I could not travel to be there every day. And in very little short time later, we were gathered together and taken to the city in a holding camp until they were able to send us to Auschwitz.

How did they come and tell you about the gold star, not going to school?

I think there was just an ordinance, like, from the mayor of the town or whatever. I don't recollect exactly how it came about. The only thing I remember is that the little village I lived in had eight Jewish families. And we all had to put the gold star sign.

But it was a farming community. And most people did not go out of the town for any particular reason. But since I had to go to school every day, it very soon came up on me that I'm really different.

I can't go on the train like I used to. The first few days my very good friends would hide me with their backs on the train so I could attend. But then it had to stop.

And in Hungary, instead of high school, they had a school called gymnasium. And I had to drop out the last year of my schooling. And then, after they collected us and put us in this holding camp, the trains came, when they were able to get the transport trains.

And of course, they piled everybody up, young and old all at once in closed freight cars with no food, lots of people in one car. And it was very uncomfortable until we got to Auschwitz, not knowing where we were going. We were told we are going to a work camp.

I had my parents with me. I come from a family of eight children, of which I was the oldest. And when we got there, we were separated. My father was sent to one side. I was sent to another side. My mother, my grandmother, and all the younger children were sent to a third side.

At the time, we didn't know why. We were only told that the young ones are going to work. And the mothers with the children are going to be taken care of. I also had my grandmother and an aunt with me. My grandmother went with my parents, with my mother and the children. And my aunt came with me.

We stayed in Auschwitz for three months in the big barracks, in the big lagers with 13 to a bunk. They shaved our hair. They took away all our clothes.

I was considered to be lucky. Because the man who was one of the older inmates, somebody who's been there for a long time, must have felt sorry for me because I was only not quite 15. So he made sure I got a warm dress. You were given one piece of clothing and one pair of shoes.

And the three months we were in Auschwitz we really had nothing to do except dreading every morning that they were coming to-- don't listen, please-- they were coming to roll call. And if they had an order that in certain camps they needed this and this many people to work, they would choose that and that many people.

And the thing that stands out in my mind the most is that I was terrified that I was going to be separated from my aunt. And my aunt was in her own early 40s.

She had no children. She wasn't married. And she was very tiny. And I was very young.

So all the odds were against us. She wasn't exactly the kind of person you would think they would take for a labor camp. And I was so young I certainly wasn't thinking along those lines, either.

But I don't know how or what happened. We remained together. After three months, an order came that they needed 500 people in a factory where they were making bombs.

So they got together 500 of us, including me and my aunt. And they took us to the railroad station to take us to this camp. And we were staying there the whole day. And towards evening, some rumor started that they really don't need anybody there. And that they're not going to take us back to the Auschwitz camp, but they're going to kill everybody.

And everybody was very upset, of course. And we were all very worried. But then they let us stay on the side of the railroad all night. And that next morning, they took us to Lubberstedt, to the camp. And I spent there the last until liberation-- until almost liberation.

there, suddenly we worked in-- well, I didn't go into the things that-- what happened in Auschwitz. Because I'm sure lots of other people--

That's all right. You go ahead.

--told you.

Your experiences may be a little different.

Well, it's only different in a sense where I think I was very bewildered. Because I couldn't understand because I was so young. And after a while, I think I became-- I don't even know. I think I became unfeeling. And I became-- I don't know what I became.

Nothing seemed to matter, really. It was an ordeal just to go to the bathroom. The barracks for the bathroom was for 1,000 people all at once with no toilet paper. You didn't feel like you were a human being anymore.

The rumors were flying. By then we knew that the gas chambers were going on. So kind of we understood the family was not going to come back. I didn't know what happened to my father. I didn't know where he was then.

So all the days seemed to run into one, because nothing ever changed. After Auschwitz, we seemed to be-- or as I remember, I seemed to feel that maybe it wasn't so bad. Because we won't be in Auschwitz anymore, that if you go someplace else, it can't quite be as terrible, as terrible as Auschwitz was.

Except that we were wrong. Because it was terrible in another way. Maybe not the same way. In Lubberstedt, they had different kinds of barracks. Everybody had a bunk. And they allowed me to bunk in the same bunk in the same room with my aunt. We were about 12 people in a room in the barrack.

They fed us once a day a bowl of thin soup and one pound of bread was cut into four. And we were all sent out to the factory in shifts. For two weeks, you worked the shift from 6:00 in the morning to 6:00 at night. And the next two weeks, you worked from 6:00 at night till 6:00 in the morning.

My job was when the people filled in the bombs that are yellow explosive liquid, they put 16 of them in a cart with wheels. And we had to push it from one end of the building into corridors to the other end of the building. There were fumes coming out of the bombs.

My aunt, when we came there they asked for volunteers who could be a shoemaker. So she volunteered, although she never did it in her life. So she was on the camp side at all times.

I remember us always being hungry. I remember us losing a lot of weight. I remember of my aunt protecting me. And I think that if I didn't have my aunt, I wouldn't have survived.

As a matter of fact, because she was on camp site, one day she found some beets fell off the truck. And she picked them up and she hid them to save it for me. And after I ate them, I became ill. And they had to put me in isolation.

And they found out she was the one who stole it. So she was beaten. [CRYING]

I thought by now I was used to it. I wouldn't cry.

When they put me in isolation, my aunt was very worried that they going to send me back to Auschwitz because I couldn't work. But they kept me in isolation for about five days. Then they sent me back to the barracks and getting back to work.

And this went on with variations the entire time until the end of April in 1945. The Allied troops were nearing the area where the camp was. And they didn't know what to do with us.

They didn't want us to be liberated, so they put us on freight trains. And they started taking us from place to place. And every place they got towards was also very near to liberation.

At the same time, the trains that we were carried on had soldiers on the back open train. So the Allied planes were bombing, because they didn't know we were in the trains. So we had to each time get off the train and lay on the ground.

And 250 of us died, the last just a few days before liberation. They were actually killed from the bombings.

At the end, the rumor started that they're going to put us once more on the train and they're going to blow up the train. And then everybody decided that we are not going to let that happen. That if they want to kill us, they're going to have to shoot us. But we'll not go back on the train.

I don't even remember the name of the routes where they took us. One afternoon at the end already, and it was raining very, very hard, and the SS and the German all went for shelter. And we stayed there the whole night. And the next morning when the daylight came, the Germans were gone. And we were liberated by the English.

[INAUDIBLE] feelings or how [INAUDIBLE] when the English came in? What was the reaction from you and your campmates?

Well, first of all, to the degree that we were able to be happy, we were happy. But I think everybody's first reaction was to get something to eat. Because by then, we were all down to-- I think at the end I wound up to be 70 pounds.

Oh!

And it was just six days before my 16th birthday. And of course, I was very happy that my aunt made it through with me. And then the first thought after that came to go home and try to find somebody, even though I knew that my mother and the children wouldn't come back. But I was hoping my father will come back because he was only 44 years old.

So after liberation, we all got sick. So they took us to--

[INAUDIBLE].

They took us to a resort, to a resort place where the Germans used to vacation in Germany. And we stayed there for two

weeks until everybody came to themselves a little bit. And the English army fed us. And the doctors took care of us.

And then they gave everybody permission to go wherever they wanted to go. So my aunt chose to go to Czechoslovakia. And I chose to go back home to find somebody, to look for someone. It took me weeks to go home because I had no money. They gave us clothes because we came out in rags.

Oh, I must go back to say something I skipped over what happened at the camp. When we worked in the factory and they had no bombs to make, they made us build roads. Because the Germans had no gas for their trucks.

So they took all the women with no winter coats, with no winter shoes. We were pushing the trucks in the snow on the roads because they had to build. So lots of us got frostbitten, pneumonia. A lot of people got tuberculosis because of the fillings for the bombs. Can we stop a moment?

After many weeks of traveling, I went back to my hometown, looking for somebody. I stayed here for a few weeks. Nobody out of the eight Jewish family ever returned. I was the one and only survivor of the entire little town.

But then I was stuck there. I had no money. I didn't know how I was going to go back to meet with my aunt. At the time already, the Russians occupied the area that I came from. I couldn't get out of the country. I didn't know where to go.

I found, near my little town, that one of my second cousin's wives came back. And she found her apartment. So I came to stay with her. I stayed with her for a few weeks.

And in the interim, we found out that I also had some distant cousins in Romania. And one of them was very good friends with the mayor of the town in Romania where he lived. So that part of Romania was also Russia at the time already.

So because he knew people, he arranged with a Russian officer to come with a car and a cousin and take me from my formerly Hungary, now Russia part, to Romania. So the Russian officer came with one of my cousins. And he took me to them.

And then he decided he didn't want to let me go. So they had to get him drunk so that they could take me away from him. And I stayed with these cousins for six weeks.

They made arrangements for me to sneak through the border from Romania to the part of Hungary that at the time wasn't Russia yet. They paid off a farmer. And he sent a truck. And a number of people who wanted to speak to all of us went together.

And as we were crossing the border, we were caught. And they took us into the-- I don't know the border guard's office or whatever. And we told them instead of that we want to go to Hungary, we told them, we wanted to go to Romania. So they wouldn't let us go. So we remained in Hungary.

And I traveled up to Budapest where I had-- I had an aunt in America who came here before the war. And she married somebody from Budapest. And my uncle's sister lived in Budapest.

So I stayed with her until my aunt, the one who never went back after the war to the old place, came from Czechoslovakia to meet me in Hungary, to pick me up. Then we had the problem of going to Czechoslovakia. I had no papers.

And in those days, on every train station, they used to come up on the train and examine your papers. So my aunt had, by then, gotten me false papers. And supposedly I was Czech. But I did not speak Czech.

So we had to figure out a way of me not being able to speak. So we decided that I had a terrible toothache. And they tied up my face. And when the guards came, I just showed them I'm hurting very much. I can't talk.

Then we went to Prague. By then in Prague, I had one of my distant cousins, who was in concentration camp but survived, came to Prague, married a Czech, and lived in Prague. So we stayed with her for a while until we found a job.

We couldn't find-- we didn't speak any Czech. It was very difficult to find a job. So somebody told us in a little town in Czechoslovakia called Benesov. They had a factory where they made little light bulbs.

So my aunt and I went there. And we found an apartment. We went to work. And we worked in this factory from 1945 until December 1948. Then our quota came up to come to the United States.

I came to the United States in December 1948. I met my husband shortly after. I lived with my aunt until I got married in September 1949. And I tried to put my life together again.

My aunt got married also. And she had a child. And she lived for another-- 16 years ago, she died. She left a 16-year-old daughter.

I got married. I went to work. I came to this country. I didn't speak a lot of English. Incidentally, when I lived in Czechoslovakia, I had to learn Czech. So I learned Czech.

I came to the United States. After I got married, even before I got married, I didn't know how to do anything. But somebody my aunt knew had a factory who manufactured neckties. So I became a necktie finisher.

I worked at it until I became pregnant. Then I had a child. I had a son. Four years later, I had another son.

We had a very hard time. My husband was not well-to-do. My in-laws got very ill, so I took care of my in-laws.

Then the aunt I was in camp with developed lung cancer. I took care of my aunt with the lung cancer. And when she died and my in-law died, I returned to work.

But this time, my children decided that it's not going to be neckties. In the interim, I became a citizen. Then my children decided since the Germans never let me finish high school, I must take a high school equivalency.

So they forced me on the train. They made the appointment. I took the high school equivalency.

Then they decided I'm never going to go back to work piecework. So I went then to work for Metropolitan Life. They forced me and they bodily took me to the train.

I told them I never worked in an office, hardly expected to pass the test. I took the test. I passed the test. I started working.

But then the summer came. And I told them I can't work in the summer because I have children and I can't leave my children alone. So they let me take the summers off. And they let me come back.

After I came back, one of my American friends called me. And she said I don't want you to go to Manhattan to work. She was a school secretary, one of the public schools. Come and work in the school in the office.

So I went to the school. Subsequently in school they made an announcement that since you work for the Board of Education, they are going to give you an opportunity if you want to go to college. So I signed up to go to college. So I attended Pace University.

And unfortunately, did not finish. And I've been working ever since in one of the New York City school systems as a kind of secretary in the office, IS 192. It's a new school. I don't know if it was was there when you--

And I work for the Bureau of Special Education. And it makes me feel happy that maybe in some little way it's worthwhile. But it's all because of my children.

And as far as my children go, never spoke to them about anything. Because as I said, I wanted them to form their opinions of this world and not my opinions. Because when I first came here, to say that I was happy is an understatement.

I really thought I'm coming to true democracy and my vote is going to count and things are going to be the way people want it to be. And as I went along, I became kind of disillusioned. Because I started finding out all the things that happened during the war that did not have to happen. And because governments were so callous and people were so callous.

And although I can't say I'm not a bitter person because I feel that if I let my bitterness take hold, it would only be detrimental to me and not to anybody else. Because then I couldn't enjoy all the things I have. And I don't want the Germans to win to a degree that they really won out. I want to know that I remained and they really did not kill everybody and everything. I want to know that they didn't ruin all my life, only part of it.

But I was very, very disturbed when I found out that governments and people are so very much uncaring. So it had to color my outlook. And I didn't want it to color my children's outlook. I didn't want them to say, look what they did to my mother.

Although lots of times it comes up where they, when they were little, they used to ask me how come I don't have a grandmother? How come I don't have a grandfather? How come we don't have cousins? How come I don't have an aunt?

So I would answer to them. I would say they were killed or they were whatever, but not go into it. But then I'm sure and I know that they learned later on as they grew up.

And so I don't know. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe I should have told them everything.

But it was my personal opinion that this was the best thing to do and that we have to go on. And it's not that I'll ever forget. I just don't want it to ruin any more.

What about Jewish involvement? Has that been part of your life and your children's lives?

In what way?

Religiously I'm talking about.

Well, I keep a kosher house. But my children don't. They both married. They know they are Jewish. They're not religious.

I'm not very religious myself. I observe all the holidays. And as I said, I keep a kosher house. But other than that, I can't say that I belong to one organization, and that's all.

And beyond that, I am not the type of person by nature. I am not an organization person. I don't even know. I don't even know why.

Maybe the reason is because right now it's so hard to live in New York City where you don't have the freedom to go at night and come. And since I'm not home all day, I really have very little opportunity. So maybe that has something to do with it. I don't know.

Or maybe, if my life would have been that I lived amongst people my own kind, maybe I would have been automatically involved in these things. But since kind of I was, like, separated from that kind of thing, I don't know anyone in my area who survived like me.

Only because when I came here, I had no friends. So after I got married, I automatically gravitated towards my

husband's friends, because he was born here. And he had friends here.

Did your children marry Jews or--

Yes, they married Jews. And I hope that-- the thing that hurts the most that I think that nobody learned anything from it, from the experience, from the tragedy that happened. I think it can happen again.

And that's what's so disturbing. Because I keep on thinking, look what happened to the boat people. Look what happened to the Vietnamese. Look what happens to anybody. And look how nobody cares.

Or even if they care, nobody's doing anything. That's what's so disturbing. What kind of a world am I leaving-- are we leaving for our children? That you would think that after a terrible, terrible dehumanizing experience like this that the world would have learned and said, well, our generation is going to leave a different legacy.

But I don't think it happened. I don't know. I don't know. Before I die, I would like to believe that. But I don't know if it's ever going to happen. I really don't. So that's my story in a nutshell.

[INAUDIBLE]. Thank you. How do I go back?

Just say the holiday sign and then go from there.

I did not go into my life too much in the United States. I just want to remark. And it really hits home how much we suffered and how much we lost, it's when it's the holidays. And there's no one to come to a seder. [CRYING]

And there's no one to break the fast at Yom Kippur.

That's when it hits home how little we have left.

That's why we hold on to the ones we have so hard and so close.

It's OK.