

--spelled C-E-L-I-N-E capital W-E-B-E-R, who lives at 108 North Laurel Avenue, in Los Angeles, California, 90048. Mrs. Weber was born in--

Poland.

Where in Poland?

Poland.

Where in Poland?

OK, I'll take that. I was born in Poland. And my maiden name is Kaplan. My father's name was Kaplan. And my mother's name was Kaplan-- no relation whatsoever.

I remember when I was in the first grade, it was an, in Poland, of course, antisemitic school. And they asked me, what is your mother's name, maiden name? I said, Kaplan. And your father's? Kaplan. Is there any relation? I said, no.

And she smacked me over the head, and she said, my goodness, you don't understand my question? I said, I do. Mommy's name was Kaplan. And she married a Kaplan, no relation. So she took my hand, and she banged it with a [INAUDIBLE]. I came home with a swollen hand.

This was mine school age, very tender age. But at the school where I went were 1,200 people, 1,200 students. And there were only a handful of Jewish people. It was a Goyishe section.

Well, I was just that I come from a family from five children, quite poor, raised in one room, seven people. We had three beds in the room and garderobe, an armoire, we call this, for our clothes-- and two tables. This was all what we had.

And in the wintertime, we had an iron stove in the middle of the room. Sometimes we had coals. Sometimes we didn't. So we froze to death. And we didn't have enough food. Of course, there was an organization, I think, HIAS, already, in this time [? coming. ?] I'm talking now about five years old, five, six years old, seven years old at the most.

So I remember my mother had to go very far, miles and miles, to get a little bit of coal or wood. And we made a fire. Sometimes we could make a fire. Sometimes when the wood was wet, we couldn't even start a fire. OK.

Then we had five children. I was the oldest one. And I always had [? warmth. ?] Always had [? warmth. ?]

When my mother used to take a little loaf of bread and cut it in pieces, this is for you, this is for you, this is for you, this is for you. And I said, well, mummy, I want another piece of bread. She said, [YIDDISH]. You want this in Yiddish.

No.

I think I'm hungry. So my mother said, a thing that take [YIDDISH]. This means, if you're hungry, take a little bit of salt, and you'll be thirsty. Right, that's the meal. OK.

Then, of course, I went to school. I finished school in Poland. In Poland, high school is not like here. You are 13, 14, you finish high school. It's almost like high school. Then you can go to work.

I start working at the age of seven, and I raised all my mother's children. And always I had fantasies, fantasies. I realize my fantasies. I had fantasies that said, I would grow up. I said, Mother, if I will grow up--

Louder.

OK. I said, Mother, if I will grow up, I will run away. She said, why will you run away? I said, I want to go to a country where there's always sunshine, where I don't need sleeves to wear. And I'm going to wear-- live in a palazzo house. So my mother said--

He's coming with another cassette.

So I didn't.

You're going to tie it up with the other one.

It's here.

No, no, the one what he took already.

Yeah, but the tape is here.

Oh, he put the tape here. Very good. Good.

You were speaking about--

OK. OK. Yeah, I said to my mother, children fantasize. But since I was never a child-- I was never a child. I start working at age of seven. And I had to go to school. What I did at age of seven?

I entertained, what I still do now. And I also make beautiful handwork. And people pay me for it-- handwork, like embroidery. I would say not needlepoint but gobelin. You know gobelin? Very fancy work.

And then I had to make my own money to buy me a pencil or an eraser or even a book. We had to buy our own. Because the children, in the Catholic school, they got books from the government. But the Jewish ones had to buy their own.

And the teacher, when she knew what we bought this particular book in a Jewish bookstore, she tore it apart and she'd throw it away. I wanted to say something. It's a good thing I didn't say. It's political.

You can say anything you want, anything you want.

I don't even want [INAUDIBLE] to have a pope, a Polish pope. You know, I come from a country, and I hate the country. I hate the language. I don't use this language at all. I pretend not to know.

I understand. It's OK.

I do. Well, anyway, like I said, when I was very young, I had one good teacher in school. She loved me. I had very blonde, curly hair. I still do, but they are stretched, very blonde hair.

They always said that Jewish people are dirty. My mother tried the very best to send me to school the best what she could. And still, they said that. Yes, you're-- they call Cele. You are clean, but the other ones are not clean. They all were clean. Yeah, all children were clean.

So this particular teacher, she didn't have any children. She was a Gentile. They all were Gentile, even the Jewish school. But there was always only one--

Why don't I hold it?

--only one. They had to be Gentile teachers. They didn't allow it. And in my city, where I come, I'm almost on the German frontier.

We heard Hitler much before '33.

Which city?

This is Kalisz. Just a few little miles away, they was already speaking German, like in Plaszow, see? And we had, in this time-- I'm jumping from one subject to the other.

We had, in 1936, we had a president. His name was Pilsudski. He died in 1936. He was a little bit more lenient for the Jewish people. That's what they say. But I do remember pogroms. I do remember pogroms. I remember, when I was a tender age, we had already other children, because we are three years apart. We were five. So my mother said, [YIDDISH], children you come home. The police are making pogroms. The police was making pogroms on the Jewish people.

Well, the time from pogroms, I don't have to go in, because you know from your history the time from pogroms.

But if you have some personal experience that you remember?

I remember. I remember.

It's helpful--

I remember, very well.

--for you to describe it.

And if the Jewish family didn't run in, very quick, in their houses, they just tortured them. The police tortured them. That's what they said, go out, beat [NON-ENGLISH]. You go out and do whatever you want with Jewish people. And this was my childhood. And I'm not so old. I'm not even 60.

OK, now, when I said, I will go back. I said, Mother, I will run away. So Mother said, where are you going to go? This was an age of 10. I said mother, I have to go. She said, why? I said, first of all, I cannot grow up in this country. I want to have another education. You cannot give me any. You have other children to feed. I want to run away to give-- help you out.

Well, this was another dream for three years. And I, on the age of 13, I said to myself, that's the time to go. So I remember, I opened the door at 1:30 in the morning. It was in September. And I run to the corner. And the corner was twice as far as here.

I can still see my mother took a little show of running after me. And she said, my little child, where are you going? I said, I will let you know mother. So mother said to me, yes, I know you dreamed about this all your life, and now came the reality. I will not stop you. Whatever you want to do, do. I cannot give you anything. So run away.

Where did I Go I go to Belgium. It took me four weeks by foot to go to Belgium. And in this time 1933--

How old were you then?

13.

By yourself?

By myself. I want to tell you, no language, no mother or father, no money, nowhere to stay, and nobody what I knew in Belgium. My mother, it took me four weeks to go to Belgium, smuggle. And at this time, the Jewish people, 1933 was a mass immigration if they were lucky to go out from Germany.

And I come to the frontier. Jaroslaw, I think it was. It was already on the frontier-- still Poland but already German. And the Germans stopped me, middle of the night. And in this time, when I went to Germany, I didn't know what south or west is, nothing. I didn't know. I know geography, the way to go somewhere. I never went any farther than from, here, two blocks. Because in my city, they were horrible to the Jewish people.

Where my husband come, this was near Auschwitz. My husband was born near Auschwitz. I'm a widow now. I'm sorry, I'm just interrupting from one--

Go.

--thing to the other.

You're all right.

Well, I better go back to my childhood. And then I remember, I was in Germany. And then I hear a German, on the frontier, and saying, halt, stop. I shake like a leaf, not even grown up, miserable, undernourished.

And he said, if you will not stop, I shoot. I didn't even said, yes or no. He already shot me in my foot. And then he came over. He said, do you have money? I said, yes. I have 50 marks in my purse, what my zayde put in, in the hand, from the purse, and then close it up with a hammer.

And he said, my zayde benched me. That's where he put on the kittel. You know what's a kittel?

Yes. Put on the kittel. I can, even now, feel his heavy hands on me. And he said, I'm not for it that you should go. But if you have your God in heart, he will guide you on a destination when you want to arrive. Where do you want to go? I said, I don't know, Zaydie, in the [YIDDISH]. Just the [YIDDISH], you know, just to go to the world.

By the way, I still have now the same character. I'm always on the go.

So when I came to Germany, of course, I came with a very bloody foot. And this was Yom Kippur night. You know, it's a big gap from one to the other, what I'm going. That was Yom Kippur night.

And he said, I see. And I wanted to go to a temple to have help. So he said, I came to Germans-- I'm sorry to say, I went to Aachen. This was already the frontier, Belgium and Germany.

But there's a big story between, the four weeks what I went-- a big story.

Tell it. It's very interesting.

Well, this would lead me to today and also to the wartime. All by myself, I never met anybody. No money from my family anymore from age 13. So when I came to Germany, there were still a few German people in the synagogue, dressed up in big hats, with-- how you call this-- jacket, tail jackets.

Yes.

And he said to me, from where do you come? I said from Poland. I'm ashamed to say, but I have to say it. And he said, from Poland? Oh, you are Ostjude. And I said, yes.

Then you don't have a room here. You go in the back of the temple. There are Polish people. I come in and I sat, pale, no food, a bleeding feet. They took me in as a [NON-ENGLISH]. I said, [NON-ENGLISH] from Poland. And mama, papa, too? I said, no, all by myself.

They took me. And they wash me. They feed me. They got me a doctor. I don't know what they did. I know I have a big

mark on my foot. And they said, where do you want to go? I said, of course, I cannot stay in Germany, because you cannot stay either.

I want to go to Belgium. They said, do you have money to go to Belgium? I said, no. Where do I? I don't have any money. We will get you some money. And we will see that you should catch the train to go to Liege. This was Liege. Just the city from Aachen, we should come to Liege.

When I came to Aachen, they already speak Hochdeutsch, like Flemish, in Belgium. I didn't know either one-- either one. And on the train, I met a gentleman. He said, [YIDDISH], where do you go?

I said, I go to Belgium. How old are you? I said 18. Why should I say I'm 13? 18? I didn't look like 13. I didn't look like 18. I look much less than than. So are you 18? I said, yes.

Where do you come from? Poland. Why are you so miserable? I said, because we didn't have enough food. Do you have your papers? I said, of course, I have my papers. I have all, everything. Where do you go? I go to my uncle. All made up-- story. I was afraid. I didn't to whom I'm talking.

He said, you know what? You come with me. I will take you to Antwerp. I said, no, sir, I'm going to my family. To me, it looked like he was a German. He was not a German. He was a very fine Jew trying to smuggle in people from Germany to Belgium, not much before the war.

And then he said, are you hungry? I said, no, I'm not hungry. I had plenty of food. I didn't want anything to do with this man. He said, do you have a Ticket I said, yes. I didn't have a ticket on the plane-- on the train. Because the people, the Polish people didn't have money to buy me a ticket. Because in this time, they were already standing with this, a container for a little bit of soup in Germany. I said, yes, I have a ticket.

He said, maybe you have a ticket. But let me pay you for your ticket. He pay me for this ticket. He said, are you going to Antwerp? I said, no, sir. I have family in Brussels. I still didn't trust him. He didn't look to me Jewish at all. He was a very good Jew, what I found out later.

And when I came to Brussels, but there are many stories between to say, but I cannot keep you up. And I have to catch the bus, too.

But tell.

When I came to Brussels--

I think this is a very interesting part of the story.

Well, nobody run away from the house on age 13.

Right.

But because I promised myself and my mother that I would take care of my mother, the children. My father was not a very tender father, and he couldn't make a living either. Why? That's a another story. It was political business.

When I came to Brussels, I was a wetback-- no papers. So in this time, the Belgian people were good people. But they didn't want to have illegal people. And who was Illegal? Like we have Mexicans, the Polish people were illegal.

I didn't have any papers. So they got me. I found a family, a Jewish family, with seven children-- very primitive people, not educated, and kind of vulgar.

And I was at this family setting. What can you do? Oh, I can do this and I can do that. That's true. I can sew. I can cook. I can clean. They took advantage of me. I already knew how to sew when I was really, like, five or six or seven years

old. I was making sweaters, cutting big sweaters for small sweaters, from hat, I make shoes. OK.

So she said, yes, you can stay with me. But you have to sleep on the attic. I said, ma'am, I don't care where I'm going to sleep. I want to sleep overnight. She said, yes, I will give you a place you can sleep overnight. But 5 o'clock in the morning, you have to get up, because my children have to go to school.

I was like a little Cinderella. You know, [NON-ENGLISH]. Not the Cinderella with the golden slipper, but I was a Cinderella. I had a heck of a life there. A heck of a life. I said to her, would you give me for a stamp, so I can write to my mother that I'm in a very fine Jewish family? She said to me, well, we will see.

For almost two months, my mother got gray not knowing where I am. Finally, she got a letter from the prison. But I don't want f to say that I want to go back to Belgium. And in Belgium came in-- they had a butchery.

I had to clean the butchery. And those smells? Little hands, like this? Ach. I remember, I am picking up, myself. This time, I didn't see that.

But I was sleeping in attic. And the attic was just broken. It was pouring. In Belgium, we always have rain. It was pouring. I went down. And I said, ma'am, I cannot sleep, it's so wet. So she said, put the bed in another corner.

The next day, I start coughing and coughing. I cough my lungs out. Came in a lady, a lady, an angel lady. I said, Mademoiselle, what are you doing here? In Jewish, [YIDDISH]? Said, [YIDDISH] I sing very beautifully. [YIDDISH] That's why. My mother was entertaining, too. I sing and dance till now. And I play Jewish shows.

Do you know what? Very slowly she said, in the nighttime, I will get you out from here. You pack your suitcase. I said, ma'am, I don't have a suitcase. That's what I have on me, that's all what I possess. Said the lady can give you anything. She have seven children. No, she didn't.

In the nighttime, I will come and get. She come in. She buy her meat at the butcher. And she said, [YIDDISH] Not a person, not nothing. Nothing. You have shoes? I had only one shoe. The other shoe, there. I didn't.

So I cannot run away. They knew that I'm planning something. If I run away from my house, why shouldn't I run away from here? I just had in my mind, run, run. And I still run now.

So she said-- came to this lady house. She knew that I'm illegal. She know all the story about me. I had a paradise. They fed me. They clothed me. They put me in a warm bed. I really became a real Cinderella. They give me the clothes from their daughter. They took me to beautiful places, knowing that I'm not illegal-- that I'm illegal.

And in this time, this was three years later, at the age of 16, I found a gentleman. And the gentleman is now my brother-in-law. He's still living in Belgium.

And he said, do you know how to sew? And I said, sir, I know to do everything. I never say, no, till no. They ask me, there's no such thing, no. I always said, why he, she can do and I cannot?

I said, yes. He took me to his brother. The brother was a tailor. He studied. He went to the conservatory. He educated himself. He was a college-educated person in a university. And this became my husband, later.

So he said to me, mademoiselle, do you know how to make a [YIDDISH]? A [YIDDISH] is this part from a jacket. This is very hard to do. The latest thing, what you learn in sewing, is to make this part. This part-- see this line?

That looks very difficult.

And put in the sleeves. I said, sure, I can. [YIDDISH] He said, can you press? I said, yes. I took this iron. And I still have a mark, [INAUDIBLE]. I still have a mark, here. I took this iron, with such a little handle, like a skillet. And the iron fell like this. And I had a hole from this iron. It's an iron what you had to put on the gas not on coal-- on gas to heat.

And it just fell like this. I never had an iron like that.

He said, [YIDDISH] Nothing [? done. ?] And it was burnt [INAUDIBLE]. I take this iron in the hand. And I start pressing. [YIDDISH] I didn't know how to do it.

But he had an eye on me. And I had an eye on him. And we get acquainted. I live in a little, tiny place. You will not believe where I live. I was illegal. And he said to my husband-- my husband said-- no, my husband's brother. He felt that he has to take care of me as a child. So I would rent your room, but you are illegal. I have to give you a room where nobody will take you out. It was a room for prostitutes.

The prostitutes in Belgium are very fine people. They're very clean people. They go to the doctor every day. I had a paradise in this house. They clothed me. They fix everything. And the lady prostitute was a married person. She had a husband. She had a child. And that's a part of business. They knew that. But they have a very good heart.

They put me, also, on the attic, because I was illegal. But that was a clean attic and light and everything. My husband was already legal. He also came, that same way, to Poland. But he came. He was born near Auschwitz, four mile from Auschwitz. He came the same way, in age of 10 or 11. He came to Belgium.

So he was, in the daytime, a tailor. And in the nighttime, he went to school. And he was really a very-- grew up to be a very fine man. And he graduate a concert pianist. Then is another story, completely nuts. All right.

Then we were going by five years. But this was between, sweetheart, I had a heck of a time.

What year was this now?

No, no, I want to tell you, between, you know, I was illegal?

Yeah.

So all the time, they caught me. They put me in prison. I was in prison a week or two, sometimes three weeks. And the nuns were the operators in the prison. They were very bad to me. I had bushy hair, a lot of bushy hair. And they talked to me French. I didn't know French. I didn't know Flemish. I didn't know French. I just came.

What is now? 9:30? I have to hurry up.

No, it's 9:15.

OK.

We're in good shape.

So she said-- you know what they did? You know what she did? She said, she looked in on such a little opening, they will go. She looked in a little opening. And she saw that I'm not in bed.

I didn't know. In the daytime was a bed. No, in the daytime, it was a table. In the nighttime, it was a bed. She talked to me that I should open the table, and there will be a bed. [NON-ENGLISH]

I didn't understand with it. She opened the door. And she put her hands. And she turned, turned around, and give me two spanking, and then said, don't you see this is a table? I said, can you speak German? She said, no. You speak Flemish or French. I talked to her. She didn't understand my gesture.

Well, what happened? They took me to a special room, where they make a picture. And they photographed me, so miserable that I was, with this hair standing up. I didn't have a bath, I don't know, for three weeks. Always smell like nobody's business. And they sent this picture home to my mother.

My mother has seven sisters and 49 cousins, and here comes a picture. They scream. They said, what did you do to this child? Why is she in prison? I bet she is a prostitute. What did they know? I didn't have even a stamp to write.

So when they caught me, one time, another time, another time, this very fine lady said to me, why do you work in this place. You have a good position in my place. Because she was a dressmaker.

No, I found my husband. Sentimentally, we were together. And I lived with my husband's sister. Because in this time, there was no hanky panky. I was going with him five years. She started-- she was very mad at me, extremely mad. Because she didn't want me to end up with my husband. She had a son prepared for me. OK.

There's nothing what I had then. But in this time, you remember, I told you about a man who paid me a ticket on the--

Yes, of course, on the train.

He was a friend from the lady, from this good lady, what I stay. He came from Antwerp, a very, very wealthy diamond merchant. Because the diamonds were in Belgium. The capital from diamonds was in Belgium, in Antwerp. And he said, I would like to take this girl home to my house, raise her to a certain age, and marry her my son.

So they start to fight. There were not enough Jewish girls, in this time, in Belgium. If they knew, the city knew that a Jewish girl is coming, all the gentlemen went to the-- got immediately to the railroad station to see who was coming. Now, it's the opposite.

So he said, I'm taking this girl to me to Antwerp. And we'll see what you're going to do. So they start fighting over me. And I said, don't fight. I already make up my mind, I will not stay with you. Where are you going? I'm going working for this gentleman. She said, but I am paying you more. I dress you. I feed you.

I start to eat so much, at this place, what I was with Mrs. Nikczisky was her name. I start to eat so much. When everyone was through, I still didn't had enough. When they ate, and they already filled up, my saliva was still running. I couldn't eat myself to be [NON-ENGLISH]. But they understood that one day I will stop.

OK, now I was in Belgium illegal. So my husband said, my fiancee, Mademoiselle, I will send you home. And you will come back, with legal papers, like a princess, back to me. So I said, sir, I didn't ask you when I will come. And I won't ask you when I'm going to go back.

So I wound up, in three years, back and forth, back and forth in the prison. And my mother was shortening her life on account of me. But--

[AUDIO OUT]

--they already be filled up, and saliva--

[AUDIO OUT]

--it was--

[AUDIO OUT]

--eat myself--

[AUDIO OUT]

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[AUDIO OUT]

--it was--

[AUDIO OUT]

Why?

[AUDIO OUT]

--prostitute. Why--

[AUDIO OUT]