

--Jewish Holocaust survivors. This is an interview with Alice Grant Weinstock. Maybe we can share that somehow. Ms Weinstock, can you please give me your mother's maiden name.

Margit Schwartz.

Can you spell it, please?

First name and last name?

The last name.

S-C-H-W-A-R-T-Z.

OK, has your name been changed? Or, in this country, was your name changed?

Yes, it was.

To?

My maiden name is Ziegler. I married a man whose name was Glickman. And they changed it to Grant, to simplify it, for the children's sake. And when I widowed, then I remarried. So I have the name today, Weinstock.

OK. Was there a particular aspect of your experience that you wanted to speak about?

Yes, definitely.

OK, why don't I give you the microphone? You can--

OK. The reasons that I would like to talk about it? That I was the only survivor from five children that my parents had. And for 30-some years, I had three children, and I never talked about it. It was very much too painful. And any time, I would think that I want to say something to my children, I would just break into tears. And they didn't want to continue it. I guess it was too painful.

But with this opportunity, I would like some of those facts to be known. Because lots of people talk about all the people's behavior, mostly how everybody was looking out for themselves in order to survive, which was a must.

But although, I survived, it had a lot to do with the help and care and the love I got from my cousins. Those were three sisters that I met shortly after I arrived in Auschwitz.

And I didn't start out very good. I had the defeatist attitude. I just didn't want to go. on And I didn't want to live. I didn't want to eat. And I didn't want to do anything that I was supposed to, until my cousins really forced me to eat and forced me to do all the important things in order to survive. And it took me a while to agree with them, but I'm glad I did.

I was just about 18 years old when I arrived in Auschwitz. And I spent six months there fighting for my life on a daily basis. After six months in Auschwitz, together with my three cousins, we pretended that we were four sisters. What year was this?

'44, 1944. As a matter of fact, once we were separated by Mengele. And one of my cousins, who was very brave and very strong, she stepped forward. And she practically-- she kneel down in front of him and touch his hand and begged him to let us stay together. And I guess he permitted for us to be together, just to get rid of her touching him or begging him. And so by this miracle, we decided that, as long as we stayed together, whether for the gas chambers or for freedom, we'll stick together.

And I feel that, today, this is very important to know. There are some studies made about this phenomenon, how people build walls around themselves in order to survive and did not care for their fellow man.

Like I said, I haven't talked about this to my children. But I guess I wanted them to know. It's important.

After Auschwitz, we were transported to N rnberg, where I worked for forced labor, for the German government, in the Siemens factory, where we were working on airplane parts and such items. I was there for about three months.

When the Allies were bombing the city, and many, many days, we didn't get food or water or anything for our survival, any help at all. When it became obvious that they can't keep us too long in the city, we were transported back to the area in Czechoslovakia. It's called-- well, the Germans called it differently than the Czechs. It's Holysov or Holleischen. I heard it both ways.

Can you spell it?

I'm not sure.

Can you guess?

It's a small place not far from Pilsen where they make the famous beer.

The beer.

And--

How were you transported from one place to another? I really don't remember clearly, no more. But I imagine it was with trains. And in this area, where it was mostly forest, I continued working on underground facilities. And this time, I was working on bigger items.

In N rnberg, I used to work with very close work. And I'm terrible near-sighted. So I suffered a lot. But they needed good dextrisity in the fingers. So I managed to do well on that.

But at this particular place, we were working on bigger items. And sometimes they made us work through the day and through the night. And we would practically drop or fall asleep at our workbench.

Did you work in one place and live in another or did you live, right there, where you worked?

No. We were marched every morning. We were marched every morning to a working place and then back to our camp. And oftentimes, the Allies were overhead and bombed areas. And sometimes some of the girls, that they were with me on the transport, they got killed, on the way, walking either to work or back.

Did you have guards with you when you were walking back and forth?

Yes. Always, yes, there was guards, yeah. About three months after working in this condition, when the war ended, and I was freed by Yugoslav partisans, who found us, in the camp, in such deteriorated condition, that--

What was the name of the camp that you were in when the Yugoslav partisans found you?

That was in Holleischen.

OK.

But I didn't have-- again, did not have name. The Germans ran away about two days before.

And just left you there?

Just left us there. But later on, we found out that, overhead, they had a device that would go off a few hours after and would kill us all. But when the partisans arrive, I guess they were aware of the situation. The first thing, they checked out the building.

The Germans had booby-trapped the building?

Yes. Yes.

So that it would explode?

I mean, we just found out later on, we all would have been dead shortly afterwards. When the partisans came in, they freed us. And when they opened the door, we just didn't believe that there's such a thing as freedom. We hesitated walking out.

Of course, we didn't have much energy to walk out either. And the Americans came in. I don't remember how many days later. And more or less, they took care of us.

And then we just-- my cousins and I, we just, more or less, walked away from everything. We didn't get much medical help a little assistance-- here and there. Then we just went on the trains.

How did you manage to build up your strength again?

Very slowly, I must say.

Well, did certain groups-- did certain charitable groups help you?

Yes, along the way, we used to stop. And there were announcements by train stations and post things on the walls that, if you want to eat or if you need any help, certain places to stop by. And that's what we did.

And I don't remember how long it took us to get-- we went back to Hungary. And we were hoping to find some family members. But we did not. I was the only survivor from my family.

You're from Budapest?

No, I'm from Kisvárda.

Can you spell that for me, please?

Yes. K-I-S-V-A-R-D-A. That is approximately the middle. It's called the Puszta which is just flatlands in Hungary. In my hometown, there are about 3,000 Jews. And only a handful came back.

Yeah, but no one from your family.

No one. No. I was the oldest. That's all. I'm the only survivor.

How many family members did you have?

Five children.

And what were their ages?

I was the oldest. I was 18. I had, let's see, a sister about 15, two brothers, 11 and almost 13. We were getting ready for

his bar mitzvah. Then I had a baby sister about 2 and 1/2, 3 years old.

Was your entire family deported, at one time, to Auschwitz?

Yes. Yes, everybody.

So you actually-- can you share a little bit of that experience with us?

Well, first, in my hometown, we were put in a ghetto. I don't remember how long-- for weeks. And of course, our whole lifestyle changed.

And I remember, as a young girl, how interested I was in the company of young men and other girls and how restrictive everything was and how unhappy I was in the situation. But I wasn't very well informed, at that time, what's happening in the world. I really wasn't.

And we kind of believed that we'll be safe, no matter what locations we might be in, but that we'll be safe. And I really didn't-- I didn't believe, even when we were in the wagons, that we are going to our deaths. Just it didn't even occur to us. I imagine the elders knew, but they didn't share this knowledge with the children.

Was your family together up until you arrived at Auschwitz?

Yes.

And then what happened?

Well, we arrived in the evening. In the very early morning, we were taken out of the transport. And I remember carrying--

You stayed in the transport the entire night?

Yes. And I remember carrying my baby sister while we were walking. And we didn't know where we were walking. But we're walking. And the moment I handed over my baby sister to my mother, that moment, somebody grabbed my arm and practically threw me on the other direction. And I remember my mother's last words, take care of yourself. And then I never saw them again.

So your mother went with your baby sister.

Yes.

And the younger brothers and sisters?

They all went with my mother.

And what about your father?

They were all separated. I mean, they just all went one direction. And I was thrown in the other direction. But the interesting part about that, I feel, all my life, how fate works is that, had I not handed my baby sister over to my mother, I probably would have gone with them. Because then--

Yeah, they probably would have assumed that it was your baby.

That's right. And so it kind of makes you think, doesn't it? It is how fate works and how

A one split-second-- a one split-second decision. When you first arrived at Auschwitz, did you find that you were-- what

accommodations did you have? How did you manage those first couple of days?

Well, those are very dark moments in my life. I--

If you would prefer not to speak of them, that's OK.

It's OK. I don't remember in exact details, but I do remember how everything was removed from me. And I was given one thin, cotton dress, shapeless, long, thin and painted a line behind my back, you know? But I remember that the paint went through the garment, and that I had it on the back of my--

On your skin.

--on my body, on my skin for a long, long time. Took a long while to wear it off. And I had a decent pair of shoes. But the very first night, it was stolen. And then all the time, while I was in Auschwitz, I did not have shoes. I wore one of those wooden clogs. I remember, I had a very hard time with that.

I remember reading about them.

Yeah.

Did you meet your cousins, immediately, in Auschwitz? How did you find each other?

It probably were days. I don't quite remember. I just-- I don't even remember how I met them, it's so blurred. But mostly I remember that they took over, looking after me, when they found me. Because like I mentioned, I just wanted to give up.

I just didn't want to live. And I just felt that it's unbearable situation and that I can't go on. And if it's not-- it was unbearable situation. And if it wasn't for them, especially one who is very, very good to me and very strong and very good at the same time.

Where are your cousins now? Did they come--

They're in New York.

Did they come to the United States with you?

Well, we came different times. And I live in Los Angeles. And they live in New York. We talk to each other on the telephone, often. But I don't get to see them much. And I'm sorry they didn't come over here.

How come they didn't come?

They all have jobs and responsibilities. So, I don't know.

Different, various things?

Yes. But they know how I feel. And nevertheless, I told my children that I can thank my life, most especially, to one cousin of mine, whose name is Magda. She was very devoted.

And If they ever make a study about relationship in the concentration camp, I think this is very important. Because I have great arguments with friends and acquaintances I talk to, because that's all they can remember, the cruelty.

And I said, no, no, wait a minute. I can tell you about something else, too. And they think that it's a very unique experience if somebody survives with the caring of another human being. And I tend to feel that I want to leave this behind, so people would know that they were kind deeds and caring in Auschwitz.

Did you find that generally people would care for members who were not necessarily--

No.

--of their own family or that families sort of stuck together?

Not really. I really-- well, you might say that, if you happen to meet mothers with their children, of course they were caring, yeah, but not cousins and sometimes not even sisters, really.

Did you ever have the experience to see two people, who might be totally strange to each other, who might have developed a relationship and come to lean very heavily, like that?

I imagine this was. I imagine it happened. But I can't. I was so involved with our own little survival group, that I really can't specifically tell you about any.

But we were-- the people that were around us, even after the war-- as a matter of fact, we did meet a girl, who wasn't feeling well. And we looked after her, too. And she survived with us. And after the war, I became very good friends with her. And her brother married this cousin of mine, who was very good to me.

So it was just kind of interesting. Because this strange lady tells me they're the most wonderful people on Earth. And she wanted to be really good friends with us in Hungary. Because we came to the United States, and she remained in Budapest. Because her brother married my cousin.

And they live in New York.

Yes, they are.

When you left the camp, when you were liberated, you managed to go back to Hungary by train.

What was your experience? Or can you share a little bit about the welcome that you received in Hungary?

Well, I really did not receive any kind of welcome. We were terribly disappointed. Because we didn't meet. We knew what happened to our families. But yet, you always hope. There's always hope. And I met one uncle, who I hardly knew before the war. I was not very close to him. So I was glad to see him alive. But it wasn't like finding somebody closer to us.

Bittersweet.

Yes. So we didn't stay too long in Hungary. We went back to Germany and applied to come to the United States.

When you went back to Germany, where did you go? How did you make your way back there? Did you have easy access in terms of traveling around Europe at the time?

Yes, we did. And we settled in a DP camp.

And which camp was this?

That was Eschwege. And we got married there. I met my husband, who was also Hungarian, a survivor. And we stayed, I don't know how long, maybe two or three years in Eschwege. And then we moved to Frankfurt. And we stayed there two or three years until all the papers cleared.

And in 1949, we came to this country. And I had this daughter right here. And when she was two years old, we came to this country.

As a young person, of 18 years old, in a concentration camp, can you tell us a little bit about the feelings that you might have had being alone, being a young girl, and with all of these soldiers? Were you afraid?

It's the most terrifying, the scariest feeling. I can't even describe how lost you feel. You just feel that nothing that ever could happen to you could be anything worse and you just think it's the end of the world. And [it's just unbearable. It's really unbearable.

When you thought, in terms of survival, did you think in terms of it on a day-to-day basis?

In a moment. In a moment basis, more or less.

OK. What about the conditions under which you lived in Auschwitz?

Terrible, inhuman. Just the fact that you hardly had your little space. I remember, when it was raining, it was raining on a certain part on my shoulder. And I couldn't even move enough to avoid this water drop. Even today, when I am in my warm, comfortable home, and when it's raining, I kind of feel a chill on my shoulder just from the thought. I kind of remember how it felt when it was raining on my shoulder. It's really weird. But when it's raining, I feel strange.

What season of the year were you in Auschwitz?

Let's see? Something like from April to November.

So it was mostly through the warmer months, when it would have been easier.

Yeah. But yet, we were freezing every morning.

It got cold at night.

Very cold in the morning.

What were the-- I hate to call them accommodations. What were the barracks or buildings like that you lived in, a physical description if you would

Just where they used to keep horses, sometimes before. And they had those wooden-- well, I don't know what you call it. Those wooden beds, where people--

The cots. Like a cot?

No. But not even -- We didn't have nothing. It was just on the bare wood. And everybody just had a little narrow space. Like I said, you turned around, the next person had to turn around, too, because you just didn't have enough room to move about.

How wide would you say the space is, the beds were-- call them beds? How wide would you say they were?

Well, I really can't give you any measurement, except I would think that it was room for six skinny people to sleep side-by-side.

And that's what you slept, skinny, six skinny people.

Yeah, that's right.

Right. How often did you eat at Auschwitz? Well, we get a small piece of bread, every day, and a bowl of more or less water with some little bits of pieces of grass. And you were lucky if you get a potato once in a while. But really, very

minimal.

Did the inmates prepare the meals or the food? Or did you know anything about how that came to you?

Well, it was delivered in one of those big containers and just from sort of like bucket. And it would just serve for everybody in one of those little containers, and then hand it from mouth to mouth.

How many people lived with you in that close quarter? Do you know?

I don't know, but quite a few hundred. It was a long, narrow building. And my memory is not that good. Certain things I've really forgotten. I don't want to remember.

That's reasonable, too.

Was it always all women at the time?

Yes. And was always a crowd. You always felt crowded and pushed and shoved all the time.

How do you feel about crowds now?

I don't like them. I'm very uncomfortable in large crowds. I really am. Does it sort of bring back some other chilling little feeling?

No, I try not to think about the past that way. But I do get uncomfortable. But maybe that's my nature, too. I'm not sure. In between lots of people, I'm uncomfortable.

As a young woman-- and this might seem a strange question, but there are lots of things that young women have to deal with. How did you deal with the sanitary conditions?

Well, I think that-- I know I used to take icy cold showers, which I probably couldn't do today.

How often were you permitted to do that? Or did you request to?

Yes. No, we were permitted. But I don't remember. I couldn't tell you how often. I remember how frozen the faucets were and how really, really cold. But I guess I was glad to be able to do that.

And as far as-- we were sprayed with chemicals against lice.

So how often did that happen?

I don't remember.

You don't?

You got to accept, I know, that under the circumstances, when you worry about being alive, some of the things doesn't matter that much. Cleanliness is one of the things you do the best you can.

Mostly, that's all you thinking, all day how hungry you are how wonderful it would be to get something to eat. Those were the thoughts. We used to sometimes just sit together and exchange recipes in order to pass the time and hang on, you know, bring back the normal side of life.

To identify that there was, in fact, a normal side of life, that life was not totally like this?

That's right.

Did that sort of encourage you to go on, that maybe--

At times. At times.

At times did it have the opposite effect?

Oh, yes. it made us more hungry and more desperate and more hopeless. It all depends.

As young women, did you have to deal with the problem of menstruation? Well, fortunately or unfortunately that stopped because of our condition. So I did not have that problem. I'm not sure if everybody was in the same situation. But I know I stopped menstruating very early there. I guess for lack of nutrition.

Nutrition? And probably stress and anxiety might have something to do with that also.

See, I consider it a miracle that I survived, because I wasn't that energetic. And I wasn't that strong. And sometimes I saw people, who were in much better condition, collapse, just like that. But I never fainted.

I guess once my cousins taught me, that you have to fight for your life, and you have to do everything for yourself, I guess I changed my attitude. And I was really a fighter. I wouldn't give in for anything.

How long did it take them to convince you?

Probably quite a few days. Quite a few days.

How old were they when you met up with them?

The one that really protected me was my age exactly. And then her sister was two years older, and then a younger sister, about three years younger. So they were like 16, 16, 18, and 20. And I was 18.

And how long had they been at Auschwitz before you got there?

Probably just a few days before.

Were they also from Hungary?

Yes.

Do you remember what town?

Yes, it's called MÃ¡ndok. It's just a small town. The place I come from, KisvÃ¡rda, considered a city. And they lived maybe an hour away.

Did you see them as children? Did you know them well as a Child

Yes. Yes. How were they related as cousins?

Their father and my father were brothers. And their father was a lovely, caring, loving man. And we were close, close as a family.

Did they have a similar experience, in leaving their town, as you had in yours?

Yes. Yeah.

With a ghetto and deportation?

Yes, the same.

And did they have any other brothers or sisters that then?

Yes, but they did not survive. They had a brother.

How old?

They had a younger brother. I am not sure about his age. And they had an older brother, about 24. Neither of them survived and their parents-- nobody survived, only those three girls.

OK.

Sometimes I feel the need to discuss my background with my children. But being such a sensitive nature, I would start and ask them, well, would you like to know about my background? And I would start to cry and be upset. And my children would say, well, that's OK, Mom, we can talk about it some other time. And somehow, the other time, so far, it hasn't arrived.

And they are grown children. My youngest is 25. The next is 31. And the third one is 35.

Did any of them attend the conference with you?

Yes, my older daughter, who is 35. And she's a mother, herself. She encouraged me to come. I thought about coming, but I probably wouldn't have if she wouldn't make all the arrangement and encouraged me to come. And I'm glad I did.

And more or less, I can talk to her about the three of them. But my younger daughter, sometimes-- some time ago, she told me that I am obsessed with the idea of being Jewish and being a survivor.

She made this comment because I talked to her about the importance of dating and marrying a Jewish person. And she told me that she-- told me that actually thought I was obsessed. And I was a little bit hurt. I didn't continue the subject.

But I'm sure, eventually, I'll sit down with her and discuss it. And I'll see if we can-- I kind of like to change her mind about certain things, too, that I am [? so scared, ?] because I'm not. But I feel that I won't live forever. And it would be helpful for them to know.

Do you think that coming to a conference like this encourages children, such as your children, to be aware of the details--

I hope so. That's the purpose of it. I hope so. I hope it would. And I also-- this maybe-- might encourage the whole world to listen and to make sure that something like this won't ever happen again.

I also feel that, in my heart, I would like to somehow thank the American government. I'm trying by being a good citizen. But I really, all those years, I always appreciated the fact that I was allowed to come and start a life, a new life in this country. I think that's really-- I think that I did the best I could under the circumstances. But I always felt, in my heart, gratefulness for this country. I really do.

You said that you met your husband in a displaced persons camp, in Hungary or in Germany?

Germany.

Can you share some of that with me? What do you remember about that?

Well, it was kind of just a meeting, an ordinary meeting, really, with a very nice person. And I was very happily married to him for 30 years. He's a wonderful father and a wonderful husband. He survived mostly, in the Budapest area, by hiding and with documents. He had false documents.

And when he died, in 1977, of cancer, I had a very hard time, because--

[AUDIO OUT]

--man. And really, I loved being married to him. He was a great father to our children. And he was a wonderful man for the community. He was president of the synagogue in Venice, California, [PLACE NAME] Synagogue.

He worked very hard to keep his doors open. And he was very kind and loving to the older people in the community. And I'm sure he will be remembered for a long time. He was rather young when he passed away, unfortunately, with this disease.

It's very, very difficult. And I had a pretty hard time since then. I'm trying to just start the life all over again.

It's very difficult.

It's very difficult--

Absolutely.

--especially when you've lost so many people already in your life.

You begin to think, how can you lose one more?

That's right. And then you lose one more, and it's very, very hard.

Probably, you have to concentrate on the things that you do have instead.

Yes.

I'm sure. I'm sure. What were the conditions like? Where was the DP camp?

It's called Eschwege. I don't remember any well-known city.

How did you find your way to there?

I mean, I don't remember that either.

You just sort of showed up there?

I imagine, yes. Because we were traveling all over Germany. And for whatever reason, we settled down there. I couldn't tell you. I guess, a certain part of my life, which is kind of--

Was the American government in charge, there, the Americans, the American Army?

Well, I think it was the HIAS, the Jewish organization. Because we received lots of help. And also, then the German government provided, somehow, some help. I don't know what we did.

How did you feel about taking aid from the German government?

At that point, we had to get help from whatever situation. They gave us some food cards and whatnot.

Was this Jewish agency that took over and provided caring for you, but did you have medical assistance did you have--

We did, sure.

What type of medical assistance did you have?

Well, at that time, I only needed medical assistance, because I was expecting my child. And I remember there was a little hospital where I gave birth. And I was given very good care.

And then you went and lived-- I'm sorry?

Then we lived in Frankfurt, in our own-- just took an apartment with a German family. And somehow, my husband made a living. I hardly remember how. But we managed for three or four years until we came to this country.

Does your daughter remember any of having lived in Germany?

No. She was just a baby. She wouldn't remember.

Did you find-- how did you find the people of Frankfurt? Do you remember anything specific about that?

Well, there were lots of other survivors. There was sort of an area where we would meet and get together. And we didn't. You know, we didn't socialize or have really anything to do with the German population, mostly just with the survivors.

When you went back to your town, what about some of your friends from school? Did you find many of them?

No, I did not, but I went back to my home town, and I walked into our house, that was our house. And what had caught my-- actually, it was very painful. As I walked up to the house, there was, on the clothesline, clothing from my baby sister. And that was very painful. As I walked in, there was a family living there, a non-Jewish family. And I introduced myself to them.

They treated me very poorly. They probably felt guilty that they took over the household, the house and the household, the furnishings.

Did they just-- were they just invited to walk in and live there? I mean it was just vacant when you left? You walked out.

Anybody's property, any Jewish person's property was up for grabs.

Was it more or less who arrived there first?

I am not sure how they got it, but they got it.

When you left and were deported, did you leave all of your belongings in the house?

Everything. When the Germans came into the house, my mother was preparing noodles. She was making dinner. And we were just asked to leave everything behind, just walk out. And we never saw our home again.

So this time, after the war, when I knocked on the door and walked in, there were several children. And the man of the house came to the front door and, real nasty told me, said, what do you want? And I just said, I really don't want nothing. I just walked by, and just I used to live here. This was my home. And I see my sister's clothing on the line. And they chased me out of there.

Was there any place that you could have gone to have established a claim on the things that were in that house?

Not really. Because the government didn't care to. Nothing at all. I got so frightened, when those people practically threw me out. Now, I don't remember this either. But some of my acquaintances, in later years, told me that I went to the center of the town. There was a second-story house that belonged to my uncle. And that was housing some survivors, some young girls, and a young man, too.

And I went up there. And this young man, that I met later and told me, that I walked up on a rail, and I wanted to jump down. But I absolutely don't remember. I guess I was so upset when I saw my little sister's clothing on the clothesline, and the meanness of those people, not even letting me look around or talking to me.

I don't remember going up to the second story. I don't remember anything. But I was told that somebody caught me, when I was going to jump down, and took care of me for a while. But I have no recollection.

None at all of those--

No.

--people or that building?

No. No. Or any of that experience?

No.

How did you find out about this story in later years?

Later on, I met somebody, who was also in that building.

And they remembered, specifically.

They remembered, yes. But I don't. But it's very possible.

Sure.

I remember the feeling, as I walked up to the home and saw the children's clothing, hanging on the line. That I remember. And I also remember that this man was nasty and chased me out.

Did you maybe have a feeling that it was all a bad dream and, in fact, your sister would be in there or was it all very clear to you that somebody else had taken your things?

Well, you always have hope.

Yeah.

Even now, you do. But you know that--

It's not true.

--couldn't be. It's not true, but maybe, maybe there is still [INAUDIBLE]

So there was a little spark of--

Yes.

--oh, my God, they're here.

Yeah, something like that. Yeah. It's very painful to look at your home that not long ago you walked out of there, and everything was fairly normal in your life. And then, a year later or a little bit more than a year later, the whole world changed around. And you're not even a welcome visitor in your old home.

What about in the town? Did the people of the town--

Very few Jewish people came back, very, very few. And I, more or less, just stayed there for a short time. Then I went back to my three surviving cousins. And I lived together with them for a little while. And then we went back to Germany. And then I met this wonderful man that I married later.

When you were in your town, in Poland, did--

Hungary.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Hungary. Had you graduated from school? What was your schooling experience, there?

I went to-- well, it's called, four years of secondary school. And then I went for learning how to sew. And I went to three years of evenings. Well, I was in the process of going to evening school to get a business education-type-of-thing, in order for me to get my license, to be a dressmaker. But I never completed.

What was the town like? What did most of the people do? That was an agricultural town. What type of--

No. That was considered a city and had a very religious center. There were about 3,000 Orthodox Jews living there.

Your family was an Orthodox family?

My family, yes. I am not.

What did your father do?

My father was a tailor in certain months of the year. And his parents were in a town, not far, maybe half an hour on a train. They were-- how would you call it-- not farmers, but they had lots of land and fruit orchards. And they were landowners. And my father used to spend all the months in the fall to help the parents in the fruit orchards, to collect the fruit and sort it. And they used to delegate this all over the country. Usually, he stayed there, maybe, at least three months. We didn't see him every year for--

Oh, he went away?

He went away, yes, to handle, with his brothers, all that merchandise.

And what was the traditional role for your mother while he would be either doing his tailoring or the harvesting? Looking after the children and cooking and baking, regularly.

Was there a synagogue in your town?

Yes. There was one in my town.

There was more than one?

I think more than one.

There were 3,000 Jewish people in the town? How large was the town, itself?

I couldn't tell you in numbers. But it was considered a small city. I don't know how many [INAUDIBLE] it had. It had a very beautiful synagogue, with stained glass windows.

And I went back to Hungary in 1972. And I wanted to visit the synagogue. It's completely in ruins. All the windows are broken out.

Is the building used for anything now or is it just in ruins?

Right now, I doubt it. It's just in ruins. It was very heartbreaking to see that. Completely, all those beautiful stained glass windows were broken. And it just was [INAUDIBLE].

Did you go to school with children who were not Jewish or did most of the Jewish people stay together?

Well, I went to-- I went to kind of, for about, three of them-- to the fourth grade, I think, I went to a Jewish school, and then transferred to that other one.

Was it a state-run school? How was the school organized?

I don't know. I don't remember that. But I know I went out part of the Jewish education I went.

When you said you were preparing for your brother's bar mitzvah, can you describe what it was like, for a young boy, in 1944, to have a bar mitzvah?

OK, he was learning. There was lots of excitement in the household, in his preparation. He was quite a few months away from it. We weren't in the last stages of preparation. But it just the excitement was in the house, that his bar mitzvah is coming.

How was a bar mitzvah usually celebrated?

A grand occasion.

And it included what kind of festivities?

Oh, fantastic cooking and baking, and then a religious observance. And it was just about as exciting as a wedding reception. I mean, really grand stuff.

Did family and uncles and aunts come from other towns and people came and stayed?

That's right.

Did they stay for long periods of time?

For a couple of days.

A couple of days?

Yeah.

[AUDIO OUT]

The things that stay in my memory, details of sizes of things and about how large a group, I don't remember. Only certain feelings that stayed with me all those years.

Did you instantly understand that, if you had had the baby, you would have gone with her? Did you understand what was happening?

No, no, later on. Later on. And even to this day, I think about that, that God had a purpose of saving my life. And sometimes, I wonder what else am I supposed to do, besides I feel that I've raised three nice children.

But sometimes, I have a little voice in the back of my head asking, what else are you supposed to do, in life, to justify, I guess, the reason for survival. And sometimes, I have a problem with that, because I'm searching. I'm trying to figure out what else. So, so far, I haven't come to any other conclusion.

Are you any part of a group of survivors, at home, in Los Angeles--

Yes.

--where you might have shared some of these others?

Yes, I have.

Because you obviously pay a lot of attention to some of your thoughts and your feelings.

Yes. Yes, I am part of a group. It started about a year ago and to discuss a lot of our experiences. And this is the group that I have this certain individual, who is very cynic, in a sense that, he survived with a twin brother. But the Twin brother wasn't in Auschwitz.

And we talked about that. And I said what if you would have been together with your brother? Wouldn't you try to do everything to save him? And he said, I'm not sure. I can't tell you that I was alone all the time. And I really argue with him. And I'm trying to make him understand that, yes, it's possible that some people cared for each other.

Maybe his own loss and his own loneliness made it impossible for him to see that at the time.

I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But I really want everybody to know that there was such thing as people who cared about each other.

At night, or in the evening, when you would come back, what did you do all day, in the camp, in Auschwitz, for the six months that you were there? What did you do during the days?

I have a hard time remembering details. But we always tried to stay away from the spotlight, more or less hiding and always thinking of ways to get something to eat.

For example, I remember one incident that there was a truck, driving through the main street, that had lots of cabbages. And my cousin, Magda, she was the very brave one. She jumped on top of it. And she started throwing cabbage, in all directions, for everybody.

So there again points out that she didn't just care about herself or, let's say, about me. Because she threw off as many cabbages, as she could, in all directions. So whoever had a good chance to grab it, they could.

Were there any guards around at the time?

Yes, there were.

And what did they do?

And dodged them. And they aimed a rifle at her, but she was so fast that she didn't get hurt.

Did she jump back into where she belonged to be?

Somehow, yes. I don't remember, really. But I only remember the flying cabbages.

Do you remember eating the cabbages?

I'm sure, I do. Yes. Getting tummy ache from it. But I still, when I close my eyes, I see the cabbages flying through the--

Did you ever have any relationship with any of the other people in the barracks? Or was your relationship just in conversations or sharing thoughts?

Yes, we always had some, a few other people. And in fact, we had an experience that maybe also should be mentioned, except I don't remember what location it was.

But this particular cousin of mine, she crawled out, in the middle of the night. I am not sure whether through the door or window. I think that was in NÄ¼rnberg. And she tried to dig up a vegetable that was left under the snow.

She figured it out, there must have been a garden there, once upon a time. And she did dig up some raw potatoes-- onion, potatoes, and carrots, and things. But the guard noticed, and, again, they were shooting in her direction. But--

They were shooting bullets at her?

Bullets. But she didn't get hurt. And she crawled in. I'm not sure how. She was just-- the moment she crawled into the bed, or so, into this big bed, the lights went on in the camp.

And the lageralteste came in and then also the guard, who was aiming at her. And they announced that everybody will be killed unless they point out who the person was that was outside. Some people were so scared that they pointed at us, and they mentioned that it was the Ziegler sisters.

So we were asked, individually, which one of us it was. And we refused. We refused to say which of us, so all four of us got a beating.

For nothing.

We got it. That's right. We got a beating with one of those-- I don't know what you call it-- leather straps. And we got 25 on our behind.

Who did that?

She did, the gal who was the lageralteste. Her name was Lola. I remember, a beautiful, tall, redheaded girl.

Was she Jewish?

Yes, she was Polish-Jewish. And I'm sorry to say, she was the girlfriend of the SS in charge on the camp. And she's the one who hit us, mercilessly. All four of us were beaten up so badly, that our skin-- we couldn't sit down for weeks. We were black-and-blue for a long, long time. But we would not give out which one of us was. So we four of us together.

You seem very proud of that.

Well, because I [INAUDIBLE] you know?

That's a good point. That's a good point. I think it's extremely interesting, and it helps point out the character and the nature, not only of you and of your cousins, but also of the environment that you are in.

Yeah. Yeah, I guess it would.

Sure.

Actually, the girl-- the one or two people who pointed us out, they got into trouble with most of the people that cared for us. Because they said that, you shouldn't have.

It was not a popular--

No, it wasn't.

--not a popular announcement?

No, it wasn't. And they were fighting between each other. And she said, well, gee, we don't want to get killed because of that. And then another would say, well, they wouldn't kill all of us. And you shouldn't open your big mouth. And there was a big fight between the people.

How many people were in charge? There was Lola. And she was with you all the time?

Yes, she was. But there were some other people. I don't remember. There was always two or three or four in charge. But she was the-- she was the one, who it's called the lageralteste. She was the boss. She was very cruel.

What else do you remember about her?

I remember something else, that when we were traveling in Czechoslovakia, coming back after the war, I think it was in Prague, by the train station, we heard an announcement on a loudspeaker that somebody wants to speak to the Ziegler sisters.

Now, I don't know how that all that came out. But there was--

This is when you were together with your cousins?

But after the war. There were three young men. And I believe they were Israelis. They asked some questions of us about the situation, how it came about that Lola beat us. And later on, we were informed that she was executed.

Did you ask them who they represented or what information?

I probably did, but I don't remember--

It didn't seem important at the time?

--at this point, that time. What has remained in my memory? how did they know? But they did. And I remember that we were, hurriedly, in the train station, in Prague. And those guys had a list of papers with them. And they wrote everything we have to say. And then I guess we just said, goodbye, and hopped on the train and went further. But later--

How was it that you heard that she was executed? Do you remember?

I think that, again, we talked about the situation with other people. And then somebody just mentioned that, hey, by the way, Lola was executed for the cruelty--

Her crimes?

--of her crimes.

When you said she was the girlfriend of the SS, do you remember what his name was?

No, I don't.

Was he the man--

They were always together.

Was he the man who was in charge of just your particular section?

He was over her. Just that particular section, I'm sure.

When you had said that you saw Dr. Mengele, at this one particular time, in the camp--

No, we saw him more often. But this is one particular time, when we dared to have anything to do with him, personally--
- begging for keeping us together.

Did people ever approach him-- often approach him for things, like that?

I really can't tell you. Probably not. I think people would be very frightened to because he meant life and death. It was death, mostly.

In a split second.

That's right. But at this point, my cousin, she felt we had nothing to lose.

Did you all remain in fairly good health throughout this, in the sense that you didn't need medical attention? I mean what about after these-- what about after the beatings?

We would not dare to ask medical. We suffered, silently. It was very, very painful for a long time. But we'd never ask for it. It was common knowledge, that if you ask for any type of assistance, you might enter the hospital, but you might never come out alive.

Did you know anyone who ever did go into a hospital but came out?

Not personally, but that was the general talk of the area, that--

Don't go to the hospital.

That's right. And we tried never to be seen any way. And then he tried to hide all of us.

Were you given any more than just the one dress, the thin cotton dress?

No. That's all. That's all.

When you were liberated, obviously, the people who liberated you-- did you travel through, to Germany, in that dress?

I probably didn't, because I think we were given food and clothing. But I don't remember that part at all. But I imagine I had shoes and had clothing. Yeah, I couldn't have gone the way I looked. It's just all blacked out. I just can't remember those parts at all.

I only remember hopping on trains and deciding, well, maybe this is a good place to stop and see where we can eat. And we slept in the park in Prague. And we woke up in the middle of the night, with some noises. Excuse me.

Oh, sure.

What happened is that Russian soldiers found the group of our--

Now, when was this? Do you remember the year or the month and the year?

Well, sure, it was in 1945, probably in May, June, July. It couldn't be much later than that, because we could sleep, outside, in the park. It must have been warm.

And this group of Russian soldiers tried to attack us. Then again, I was saved. My cousin saved me. I remember that I was screaming and yelling and screaming, because this Russian soldier grabbed a hold of me and was trying to force his attention on me. And I didn't realize how to handle him, except the more I scream, the more I fought him, the worse it get.

And my cousin, Magda, came to my rescue, again. What she did is she fought him like a man would fight with another man.

Good for her.

How would you explain it like that?

Punching.

Punched him.

Punched him.

Punched him in the stomach. This Russian soldier was so flabbergasted, that he let me lose, immediately. And he shook hands with my cousin.

And he walked away.

And he walked away. He respected. He didn't respect my screaming and squirming and yelling. But he respected her attitude. And so again, I was saved by her.

Did you sleep in the park, there, after that?

I don't think so. I don't think so.

I wouldn't.

But I do not remember how and what we did immediately. I have an interesting memory. Just certain things stay in my memory.

They're very interesting.

Some things I can't remember at all. But that was quite a frightening experience.

I'm sorry.

It was very frightening.

Yes, you started to say that you had another interesting memory.

Well, no, I'm just saying that only certain interesting memories stay in my mind. And some other information that, maybe, I find is not important, I don't remember it.

Well, you focused in and seem to remember a lot of the very positive things, especially with regard to your cousin, as a person, who really was someone--

She's quite a girl.

Yes, she sure sounds like she is. She sure sounds like she is. We have just a few minutes of tape left. I'm not sure exactly how many. But it just looks like a few. If there's anything that you feel, another memory? If you want me to stop the tape, if you want to think for a moment?

I think we just about covered everything, I really do. I am grateful for the opportunity. I'm very happy to be here. And again, I have some little hope that-- I think that maybe I'm looking at faces here-- maybe I meet somebody who is from my hometown or somebody I've known in my past. But even if I don't, I still feel good about coming here and being part of this.

How did your daughter feel about coming and all the second generation?

She is very positive on the subject. She says that, if people will not pay attention, and people will not make an effort, it will be forgotten. And it should never be forgotten.

And unfortunately, the people who have to remember it the most, obviously, are the survivors who can share, firsthand.

That's right. And we won't be here for too much longer.

Well, you seem like you're going to stick around.

Well, I'm getting close to the age where--

Things happen. Absolutely.

So we have to, I guess, pass it on to our children. I feel fortunate that my older daughter is very much interested. And I'm sure that she won't forget it. And her little boy is 10 years old. For a school project, he gave my grandmother's life story. And when he read it for me-- some weeks after, I imagine, that he either presented it to the teacher or read it out loud. I'm not sure.

But when I read this school work, I thought to myself, my goodness, how does the kid know everything?

Interesting. Did he ask you first? Did he ask you firsthand?

No. Off and on, when he is in my house, he gives me just a question, here and there. But he has excellent memory. And obviously, he put together all that little information that didn't make me think anything of it. Just Grandma, what did you do such and such a time? And grandma, where is such and such a time. But he put together all that information. And for a school project, he just said, my grandmother's life story. I thought was very neat.

And he had a lot of very interesting details, huh?

And he's just 10 years old, you know? But he's interested. And he travels with his mother, often. My daughter works for the airline, so she has tremendous opportunity. And they travel all over the world. And my little grandson said that, I want to go everywhere, but I don't want to go to Germany.

And then I tried to explain to him that, today, Germany is not the same way it was in the World War II, and that he shouldn't quite feel that way. I don't want him to hate anybody. And I thought it strange that a child would say, I want to

visit all over, every country, but I do not want to go to Germany, he said.

When you think that there might be Nazis, who exist today, either in this country or in Germany, does that make you feel hatred?

No, I don't think so. It might. I might feel a little sadness. And I'm a little bit afraid, but no, I stopped hating them long time ago. I don't hate them. And in my travels in Israel, I know lots of young people, from Germany, who are working on the kibbutz. And they have expressed, to me, the shame for their parents crimes. And I think lots of young people, today, in Germany, will try to correct the situation, I'm sure. I have faith that they will. And I'm not afraid, anyway. I'm a little bit--