

How did you feel when the Allies came to Europe?

To Europe or did we-- when did we get liberated? Those were two different things.

When you got liberated.

Because that was quite a different time. They came to Europe, but we weren't liberated till the 12th of April in 1945, the day Roosevelt died.

And the Allied invasion was June 6, 1944.

That was a long time to go. A lot of troops were killed from that time until the liberation.

Did you know that the American army had landed in June of '44?

Yeah.

Was there a difference in feeling in the camp?

Well, of hope. We had the hope. And not only did we know that it had landed. We had day and night thousands and thousands and thousands of planes going over our camp from England to Germany. I mean, we heard the bombardments.

Also, on the other hand, the Germans shot off the V-2s to London right near us. We saw that also happening. So we were really in a pretty uncomfortable spot when it comes towards war. And our only hope was that the Allies would land and that we would get out of this mess, would get liberated. Did you notice a difference in the German SS attitude when they thought that-- I don't know if they did think at the time, but that the war was not going well?

Well, the only difference was that after September 6, 1944, there were no more transfers going from Holland to Germany. All the Jews they had then they would keep in Holland because they had no way of transporting them. All the rails were bombed. That was our luck.

And I don't know. It was a time of such turmoil. Like I mentioned before, the Dutch SS were running away from Holland. They came to our camp because they were afraid. After all, they were traitors to their country. They did still bring in Jews which were hidden, because they had practically cleaned up Holland with Jews. I mean, at that time there weren't many left.

They did a good job. I mean, by the time the war was over, the Jews were all gone in Holland too. Only those who were hidden. [DUTCH], you call that in Dutch. And I don't think they left anybody free anymore at that time. I mean, they had just cleaned up.

So therefore we were just waiting and hoping to get out of this. We knew that they had built a gas chamber in our camp. My mother had seen the SS coming out of a bathhouse, what they called a new bathhouse with the gas masks. But we didn't really couldn't believe it because we didn't know there was such a thing as Auschwitz, that there were the ovens.

Even though my husband had an illegal radio-- that's how we always knew where the Allies were. And he heard BBC London. Underground, he and a friend had heard that. But we never knew what was really going on in Auschwitz till the first Jewish people came through from the American Joint in Paris-- that was when the war was over, not when we were liberated. We were liberated in April-- and told us those horror stories. We did not know before about what was going on.

Between the time you were liberated and the time you left, were you still under-- were you under Dutch control--

What do you mean by that?

--in Westerbork? I mean, once the liberation army came--

Yeah, we were then controlled by the Prins Bernhard Brigade, which was came in from England and the Dutch underground. Because the war wasn't over. Amsterdam was not free, and Amsterdam was very-- we couldn't get into Amsterdam. There were all kinds of diseases. There was no electricity.

So we stayed in camp actually after the war was over until--

July.

June or July.

1945.

'45, yeah.

And then you came to America.

No. Then we came to Amsterdam. How could we go to America? There were no boats going.

No, I meant that after you left the camp, your next destination, though, was--

I worked in Amsterdam for the American Joint. And we brought papers out from Westerbork at that time. And we made statistics of all the people who were deported and all the people who-- and then we opened an office called the [DUTCH] In other words, every Jew who came back or who came out of hiding would come to us and register so we had files on him.

And also from every-- we did this already in Westerbork before we could go to Amsterdam, meaning after the war. Because we had the Dutch prisoners there, the Dutch Nazis. They then were in prison in camp. And you see I could-- I could write your whole books. I mean, a few minutes it doesn't mean anything. I'm jumping from one to the other.

And we had made them up file cards from every person who was deported. And we brought that file to Amsterdam with a few people. And in time, the American Joint would get to us, and we started an office, a research office where we would-- could tell.

You see, the Germans had everything very orderly. Every transport they send by name, by date of birth, and where to. I mean, it's unbelievable, but they didn't do it disorganized. They did it very organized. That's the most amazing thing. And that's how everything was organized.

It's just amazing, you know?

Yeah.

And so we had all those papers, and then the American Joint took over. And we-- like for instance, people who came back from camps would also come to us, register that they are back, so we put a file into-- put it into the files. Then therefore their families from all different countries would get in touch, I guess, with the Red Cross, with the American Joint, and they in turn would come to us for information.

How did you get this job with the Joint, the American Joint Distribution Committee.

Yeah, I really don't know. It went well. It was called the [DUTCH] which is the Dutch word for "Jewish Research Department," or something like that. And of course, who sponsors a thing like this? The American Joint, right?

So somehow we had the papers, and they got in touch with us. Exactly how this worked, I don't know. But I remember the Joint came to Westerbork to us. And at that time, we were working, and they told us already to get everything together, and we were four or five people who did it all together. Herman and I worked very hard on that.

Did you meet Herman in the camp?

Yes.

Were you married in the camp?

No, a year after the war.

Did they allow any marriages in the camp?

Yes. A lot of things were allowed in the camp that you wouldn't believe.

Want to explain that?

Really. I mean, it sounds funny, but it's true. Yes, there were marriages in the camp.

Who performed the Jewish marriages?

Possibly a rabbi and a Dutch-- what do you call this? From

Civil officer.

Civil officer, yeah. Not a German, no. A Dutch civil officer.

And those marriages then were recognized under Dutch law?

Yes. Some of them are still alive. Others are not. Others went right to Auschwitz. They got married and went right to Auschwitz. So it's very strange.

When you-- when you left Amsterdam, were you and Herman married then or?

Yes. So you married then in Amsterdam?

Yeah, on '46, Lekstraat Synagogue in Amsterdam.

Why did you go to Hartford?

Because my father had--

No, she was in New York.

No, I lived in New York. I went later to Hartford. But I first came to New York. My parents lived in Hartford, so we joined them there.

Did Herman's parents come to New York also?

No, Herman's mother was killed in concentration camp. So was his brother, in Auschwitz. His father then went to Australia, who survived one of the Polish concentration camps.

Oh, his father was-- was his father transported from Westerbork?

No, from Cologne.

How did Herman get to Westerbork?

Like I did. The Dutch sent us there.

No, but I mean, how did Herman leave-- he did not leave--

No, Herman went to-- went illegally to Holland and then in turn was put into camp in Holland and into prison.

In Westerbork?

No, that was before Westerbork. Because he came illegally to Holland.

I see.

He fled on Crystal Night, on November 9, '38. And he was a young kid, and he was put into jail, and then eventually sent to a camp called Hoek van Holland and then Westerbork.

Did Herman come with any member of his family when you knew him in Westerbork?

No. His brothers also were in Holland. They came also illegally over, and they were in a orphanage home, and then like foster children with Dutch-Jewish families. Two younger brothers.

But Herman was alone in Westerbork when you met him?

Yes, yes.

This is hard to ask as second-hand information, but how did Herman feel, having been separated from his whole family?

Terrible. He got very sick. When the Germans marched into Westerbork, he got-- he fainted. When the first Germans entered Westerbork, Herman fainted. And ever since, he has a stomach trouble.

Has Herman been back to Germany?

Mhm.

How does he feel?

Well, he has no feelings for it. He has a complete blockage. He doesn't even remember a thing from his childhood or so other than his family. But he wouldn't-- he doesn't remember anybody. He just-- I feel deep down he doesn't want to remember anything.

Have you been back to Germany?

Yeah.

How do you feel about it?

It's still very upsetting when you go there because you ask, how could it have happened in a beautiful country like this? And you can't cut out memories. I mean, those are things which come back to you.

How do you feel when you see men approximately the age of 70 today?

Well, you wonder what did they do.

Is it easy? Have you ever raised the issue with any of them?

Sure. No, I mean, I really and truly had only conversations with those people who I knew were decent people. With the others I avoided every-- any kind of a conversation. But of course, if you travel somewhere else in Germany where I didn't know anyone, I don't know to whom I talk. And of course, you always have that suspicion what did he do.

How do you feel about seeing Germany in such beautiful condition, being rebuilt, and wonder if some of these people who are 70 years old and who may have participated-- may have participated--

Most of them did. Most of them did participate.

What is your reaction to that?

It's shocking on one side. On the other hand, like one German said to me, maybe if there would have been a Marshall Plan in 1918, and Germany wouldn't have gotten into the depression as it did, maybe there would not have been a Hitler. You see? I mean, they all know very well that's due to help from America they got.

I mean, they feel they are of course very ambitious and hard-working and they're very proud of what they have done. But on the other hand, deep inside, especially the younger generation knows that America and the Marshall Plan was a big help to do this.

Of course.

And they do have a point by saying this. If Germany wouldn't have been in the economical situation as it was, but of course America was also in a bad depression at the time.

Yeah, but the Versailles Treaty was very harsh with Germany at the time.

Yes. But I feel if there was a Marshall Plan, maybe all this would have been avoided, and a World War II would have been avoided, and Hitler wouldn't have had a chance. And they might have a point on that.

Do you think the split in Germany between East and West Germany was-- I mean, I'm asking you if you regard it as such. Do you think that was a punishment of Germany?

At that time, yes. Now I wonder how dangerous it is for our future. Because it seems, what I hear-- what do you think? I mean, at the time it was a punishment, and why shouldn't they be punished? They can't be punished enough for what happened. And unfortunately, the good have to suffer with the bad. But all the Jews had to suffer, so I can't feel sorry for them. No way.

But now it's a danger that I understand East Germany is really becoming quite a dangerous state. The Germans are Germans and will stay Germans. And what the Germans do they do good. They build the concentration camps well. They rebuilt Germany and Western Germany well.

Now, the East Germans, who are so inclined to be so communistic, they are also doing that very well. And I'm wondering whether this isn't going to be a very great danger for the future, this split. Because I understand the schools in East Germany are by far better than any Western schools, whether it's West Germany or our country here.

The children are trained, what I hear, like the Hitlerjugend was, very strict schools, marching every day with a red flag. Not with a Hakenkreuz but with a red flag. People are not as bad off as everybody thinks they are. That's what I hear from people who have been there.

And people-- I really don't know well even on my trip now. American people who went over to the eastern side, who had relatives there and so on, it's true they do not have the affluency as you see in West Germany because it's shocking how well and how comfortable off they are, and their socialized medicine works well. But on the East Germany, I understand everything is very inexpensive. It's true, they don't earn much, but they can also have an apartment for 20 marks.

And schools, high school, colleges, everything is free. Medical-- medicine is completely free, and many of the young people are very good communists, just like they were very good Nazis. And the eastern zone was always a dangerous one. So I really don't know whether it's good or bad.

I only brought that up because we were talking about the punishment of Germany after Versailles or by Versailles by the treaty, and I'm wondering whether the punishment--

Well, you know what? There's something else. What you find in Western Germany, you find so many-- in all the towns, in every city-- the Germans who left Eastern Germany right after World War II-- and today, they tell you they had to leave because of the Russians forced them to leave. I don't know whether that's true or not.

I would rather think that many of them were Nazis and collaborators with the Germans in Poland, in Russia, in all those states or countries. And then when the Germans were defeated and the Allies came in, they all went to Western Germany.

And today, they tell you, well, they had to leave. The Russians pushed them out. But I wonder why they had to leave, what did they really do?

They were afraid of Russian retribution.

We have this-- no, they were Nazis.

Yeah, that's what I mean.

Of course. Just like we had here in Park Terrace. I mean, remember all the superintendents we had, the Poles and the Russians? I always told you, I feel like the SS is marching. There all those people had very high positions under Hitler. And then they left right after the war, and they came here, and they work for the Jews as superintendents. They were good superintendents. Whatever they do, they do well, in either way. That's the most amazing thing.

Coming back to America, did you have any language barrier at all when you first got here?

Well, of course, but I took English as a young child, private lessons in Europe. I still have an accent. Can I lose my accent? Of course I do.

Henry Kissinger did fine with it.

Yeah, well, so I didn't have too many problems. No, that's why you asked me before, and then we never finished that. I never gave you that answer about how we were liberated, when we were liberated, and so on. I really never went into that. There's so much to talk about.

And I was right away really able of speaking a broken English to the Allied troops, to the soldiers which were Canadians at the time. I understood their questions, and they understood my answers. How well? But somehow we managed quite well, so I did have a little bit of a background.

Do you think you and Herman had had an easier time than your parents did in adjusting to America?

I would think so. Even though my father had a very hard-- had to work very hard. My father had a good, growing

business in Europe. He had to leave everything. He didn't go back to Germany where he could have gotten his business back and his properties because he wanted no part of Germany anymore. He was too proud for that.

So my father had to work as a butcher here, and he worked very hard. And we all had to start the hard way. But Herman went to college, and he went to evening schools, and he worked at it. It was easier to do it when you were 24 than when you're 50 some years old.

Yes, that's true.

Right?

Well, thank you very much.

You're welcome.

Having gone through this experience, do you think that you would be more aware now than even though you were young then, but assuming you would be the age you are now, assuming that you would have been the age that you are now, do you think you would be more aware?

I can't answer this because the truth is that the German Jews, who were all comfortably off in Germany-- I would say most of them-- who had business, who were educated, who were cultivated, who were intelligent people, and didn't take Hitler serious, didn't fight against him, didn't do anything, just let it happen, and said, well, was können wir denn dann machen? Which was a lot of nonsense, and I wonder if I would be different. I don't know. I can't answer this.

I would hope I would be different, but I don't know if I would be. Look what we do. What did we do in this country now about Reverend Moon? It's about time that we get an organization together to fight this man because he is a very dangerous person, and you never know what this can lead to. I don't think those things can only happen in Germany. I think they can happen anywhere.

No, I think that they happened in Germany is proof that they can happen almost everywhere. It wasn't a barbaric society at all.

Like they always say, the German Jews were more German than the Germans, and that's true. You look at the movie Ship of Fools. Did you see that?

Yes.

OK. You look at this movie now, which is excellent, The Voyage of the Damned, where there's one German who was a Nazi said, but those Jews really loved Germany, when they left and they were crying. And the other German said, who was not a Nazi, but they are Germans. Why shouldn't they?

Well, that's the same--

And this is the same as Americans. And I think we have a society now where I think it's about high time that people get moral obligation, go. I mean, I'm certainly not Orthodox or religious, but I'm going to shul. I'm going to take-- I'm taking care.

I think the Jews should get a little bit more organized. They should belong. They should see all those things and this Reverend Moon and a few of the Christians for-- Jews for Christians-- what is it? Christian for Jews? For Jesus.

Yes.

Christians for Jesus, all those organizations, they are nothing to laugh at. I mean, I think if the German Jews and those Germans who were opposed to Hitler wouldn't have laughed about Hitler, would have taken him serious, maybe a lot of

things would have been avoided.

I'm sure that's true.

Those are, of course, hindsight. But that's true.

Thank you.