

You said earlier that your family before you ran from the ghetto were discussing your own death and how awful it was. And then a long time ago, when we first talked, you said this about your parents. You said your parents were apathetic and helpless. They couldn't stand up to death and that they were even telling jokes about their own death. What was it like in the house the night of August 26, the night before the ghetto was liquidated?

Very little conversation, just mum, just looking at each other because we were completely helpless. And my parents felt that terrible guilt they couldn't save their own children. So they just said, you go to bed, go to bed without any hope whatsoever. And tomorrow, you have to report to the center of the city, which meant we knew-- they knew already what it meant that they were going to march to their death.

And when you came home from work that night, what did your mother do?

Well, my mother was-- when I was at work-- I think I am repeating myself-- they told us then that we don't have to report tomorrow to work. You know, this work around the bridge was going on-- on three shifts. So the second shift didn't come in already. So we knew that this is it.

And as we were walking-- it was about a 9 kilometer walk going back to the city-- I was looking all over. And I was saying to my friends, you know, this is a nice little forest, a few woods. This would be a good place to hide. You know, you knew that we're going to face death. And maybe we'll be able to escape.

But when we came to the city, my mother was standing at the gate. And she said, what did they tell you at work? I said, they told us not to report tomorrow. She says, well, this is it. Tomorrow, we have to report to the center of the city. And they're going to transport us to another city, to Sarny.

She knew.

She knew. We knew that this is where we were going to go.

And did she say anything about being killed?

She-- yes, she knew that they were going to die. They were going to be-- what kind of death, they didn't know. But she cried. And she said that she worked all her life. She had small children. Now that the children are growing up and they are tremendous help. And she sees some satisfaction in her job well done of the children. So she has to die.

And I had-- I had nothing-- we came back. And we were sitting next to each other on the porch, nothing, no reaction whatsoever, just numb. No crying, no screaming, nothing. It's-- it's-- it's incredible. It can't-- it cannot be explained.

How would you feel tomorrow that tomorrow somebody will tell you that you have to report to the city and that's the end of you, they're going to dispose of you? What kind of reaction can you have? If somebody is getting a cancer and he knows he's going to die, but at least nowadays there are certain things that can be helped. So he's living with hope.

There was no hope. They absolutely took away our hope. There was absolutely no hope. And that's what his objective, you know, to make us apathetic and not to want to live.

But you escaped.

Well, that night, we went to bed without any plan whatsoever. And about midnight, a neighbor of ours knocked on the window. And he said, you know, the ghetto is already surrounded, and there are already casualties. He said to my father, maybe you know a different way back-- way-- a different way out, not in that direction where the forests are.

So we started-- we didn't get undressed when we went to bed. We were all dressed. But he said-- he said to my sister, he mentioned to put on to take the winter coat. I didn't have any inkling that I'm going, not whatsoever. But I-- my sister was older than I. So I looked up to her.

She said she's going. I said, and you're living mother? She says, I'm going-- with no explanation. So I went too. It's like running out of the house.

Earlier you told-- then you picked up the story and you explained how you escaped. Once earlier, you-- you mentioned that there were Seventh Day Adventists--

Oh, no, this comes later. This comes when we went into the forest a little bit later. That happened in November. I'm talking now about August.

OK. From August now, the last time we finished talking, you had already joined the--

No, last time-- yeah, you went a little bit back.

Because I wanted to know--

Right.

--what it was like in the house a little bit before.

Yeah. Now, I told you about the farmer that gave us food. And then some other people escaped from other ghettos. And we thought that it's getting too crowded. So we went into deeper into the forest.

So when did the Seventh Day Adventist--

OK, so in November, it was started getting cold. And it started snowing. So we had-- how do you live in a forest without-- and what about the footsteps in the snow? We were afraid of that. My father and my brother and my cousin and other boy, they built a little bunker.

In that area lived Seventh Day Adventists. So he-- and the Seventh Day Adventists are very liberal. They don't believe in fighting. They don't believe in killing.

So my father took me and my sister to the Seventh Day Adventist. And he asked them politely, maybe they could keep us for-- during the winter time so they said, yes. They agreed. They took my sister in and myself. My sister was a seamstress. And I just helped out. I was knitting. I was helping out in the house.

They were very cheerful people. I found them very pleasant. They just tried to convert us. They said-- you see, I told you that.

No, you didn't.

They said, what do you say to your God? Your God abolished us-- I mean he completely-- you have no faith-- I mean you cannot have any faith because he's not taking care. How about joining our religion? And I said, no, no, I was born a Jew, and I'll die a Jew.

What happened to them?

Well, I really don't know because we had escaped from that area. But from what I gather, there were an awful lot of-- the Germans were destroying the villages in that area because they were assisting partisans. So they considered them that they were on the side of the partisans. I don't know in particular what happened to these.

They had boys who-- they didn't believe even to serving in the army. They did not serve in the army. And a lot of the local people, local young people joined these partisans because they also saw it's-- that it's a way of fighting the Germans. The Germans-- they saw that the Germans are not good for them.

How long were you with the Seventh Day Adventist? Through--

Maybe a couple of weeks, not much.

So just a couple of week.

Just a couple of weeks. And after that my father, there was a group of scouts from the group of Kovpak-- you know, the partisans. They came to mobilize people to take them into the group of partisans. So this is when my father decided that that's it. That's our-- that's our chance of maybe survival, if not survival, at least of taking revenge of killing some Germans, doing something against them.

To die fighting.

Pardon me?

To die fighting, that's what you said once before. You said your father said he was going to die fighting if he could.

He wasn't going to-- yes, he was going to die fighting. That's what he wanted.

And what happened to you when you went with the partisans?

Well, when we just came, the first thing they told us that there are no-- families don't exist here. We have to separate you. So my-- I told you that this was a group of 5,000 people, 5 battalions. Each battalion was 1,000 people. And they were scattered in different villages.

And they stayed there a few days or a week or sometimes only overnight. So my father and my brother, they sent to a different battalion. Ours was battalion number 1, which was they were doing the food supplies, you know, the-- and so they needed people to work, you know.

They used to bring some food, and they had to process it, like meat and cook. And also, my sister was a seamstress. So she helped out. She was mending their clothes and all this sort of thing.

But it-- so we joined, it was in November. And between November and march, we were constantly on the go. We were moving, moving, moving, not for the purpose of occupying territory, but just moving around and doing all kinds of damages to the German army.

So we couldn't stay because the Germans were on our tails too, you know. So we stayed one week, sometimes-- sometimes a few days. And then they started chasing us. And we had to leave. And we had to go another place.

And also, I was telling you, by the same token, there were local partisan groups that were stationed in the same area all the time. And they were doing-- they had a radius of territory that was assigned to them. And they were doing all the throwing of trains or dynamiting bridges or ambushing Germans that were moving from one city to the other. And everybody had just doing damage in the back. And it should not-- it should have-- it should damage their fighting.

You were 18?

I was-- in 1943, I was already 19.

And your sister was what?

21. Two years older.

You were young girls--

Yeah.

--in the midst of this--

In the midst of all the soldiers and--

Were you concerned about that? Were you worried?

No. They were nice. The only thing that-- there was no raping or this sort of thing. There were no sexual harassment. Everybody was concerned about himself. And also, we had-- we had orders to fill out.

Were there other women in the group?

Yes, there were some other women.

But you were separated from your father and your brother?

Yes. There were other women that served as soldiers too. It just so happened with my sister and I did not let-- my sister later on became a regular soldier. And she got a rifle. And she was fighting just like the other men.

And what happened to your sister?

Well, at that point, it was already in-- at the end of February. And they ran out of some work for her. So there was nothing to do. So she said, if there's nothing to do here, how about transferring me to the battalion where my father and my brother is? So they did. They transferred her.

At that point, I was already working as a nurse. I was helping out with the wounded. And I was helping out. And a disease started spreading, typhoid, because of the sanitary conditions. We never got undressed. We could barely wash ourselves, especially in the winter time. So there was-- there were quite a few-- I took-- I was in the group that had about 18 typhoid patients.

We'll come back to this. But your sister, she then was reunited with your father?

She was reunited with my father, with my brother. And she was a regular soldier there.

And what happened--

And I never saw them. OK. And then I contracted the typhoid. And they didn't know about me. And I didn't know where they are.

And as I-- my luck was that while I was sick and I was burning up with fever, we were stationed in one place. Why? Because at that point, they had accumulated an awful lot of wounded people. And they were also lacking already in ammunition and in dynamite and all kinds of medications.

So they were looking for a way of how to get it and how to get out of the horrible situation. The wounded couldn't be taken care of because there were no medication. So they just so happened that they were stationed near a huge lake. And the lake was very big. And 1943 was a very harsh winter. So when the lake froze, and probably it was very deep.

And so it-- they made an airfield out of it. And airplanes were landing at night from Russia. They were in communication always with Moscow. And they were bringing ammunition and medication and clothing. And the same night, they took away some wounded with them.

So this happened for an entire month. And that month, I was burning up with fever. And after 10 days, the fever broke

and I started getting better-- better. I was I was like a toothpick. And quite a few people died from the 18.

But I contracted this disease from one of the big shots. He was one of the big officers in that group. And I took care of him. And so when I started-- when I started getting sick, he was sort of like coming and helping me out, bringing a little food here and there.

So the partisans took care of you when you had typhus?

We took care of ourselves because if we would have had to be transported to another village, I don't know if we could make it. Or they would have-- I don't know if they would even have transportation for us.

You know the value of a person was nil. So there will be one less person. But, you know, I was-- I was doing my private things right under me because I was sick. I couldn't get out. They threw me out of the house. And I was lying in the snow for probably 10, 15 minutes. And I could hardly get up.

So who cared? They hardly bring me-- brought me a glass of water. It was my luck that my resilience was so strong. I made it. I made through. Some people died. And not old people, they were all young people. They died.

So they threw you out of the--

Window, and then I came by myself. I came back into the house. OK. And then when my fever broke-- oh, about that time, my father got-- learned about that I am that I am sick. So he came to see me. He came with my sister.

And he was standing there. And he was crying. And I saw him like through a daze. And I started crying. And I said, why did you abandon me? Look what's happening to me. I'm dying here.

He said, yes, I know, but I'm helpless. I can only be here a few minutes. And I had a good leader. And he let me go for a few minutes. I told him that you were sick.

So he said, he looked at me. And I looked at him. And he didn't even give me a kiss. I wouldn't kiss him because he was afraid to catch the disease. And he left.

And soon after, my fever broke. And as my fever broke, this was the time when they were still having-- when they still had airplanes coming into that village. And they took me to a house. And I came across a boy from my city. I recognized his father. And his father told me that he's waiting his next-- to be transported in an airplane to Russia because he froze his feet while they were-- while they were in the forest. So I said, oh, my God, maybe they'll take me too.

But who listened who? There was nobody to talk to. So they shaved my head, and they sort of disinfected my clothing. And they put me in a house. And I stayed there maybe a day or so.

Oh, my father came again to visit me with my sister. I never saw my brother anymore. And he said-- so then I was already-- my fever was gone.

So he went to this officer. And he begged him that he should-- he should take care of me. And if I'll get better, he should transfer me to his battalion. And he promised him. So he went-- they went back with the hope that I'm getting better and when everything will-- I mean when I'll get-- while I'll recuperate a little bit more, so they'll take me to their battalion.

Anyway, that-- a day later, they came-- two soldiers came with rifles. And they said to me, you come, come with us. And I said, where?

At that point, I already lost my walking capacity. I couldn't walk. And-- and I couldn't I couldn't hear very well. So they said to me, you know, this is war. And you're in the partisans. And we cannot afford to have sick people. You are already immune to the sickness. So you have to go back and take care of somebody else.

So they brought me to another house. And they brought a woman that was very sick. She was burning up with fever. And they had assigned a horse and buggy with a driver because she was a mistress of one of the big officers.

And in that house, I stayed probably a week. Now, I-- they used to bring her food. But she couldn't eat. So I ate all the food that they brought. And I could eat for five because I was so weak. But that week, the staying in that house, I get caught up a little bit. But I still-- I was sick. I was very sick.

And one night they knocked on the window. And they said that we are being chased by the Germans. The German army caught up with us. And we have to move. We have to go.

So he started yelling, come on, let's get-- let's dress the sick woman, he said. I said, I can't. I couldn't move. My legs were hurting. I couldn't hear. I couldn't move. I was in terrible pain.

So he started-- he dressed her. And he put her on the-- and he ran to the main doctor to complain that I don't want to do anything. And I don't want-- and I said, and I'm not going anywhere. It was terribly cold.

So the leader from that battalion came and everybody. And they said, you know what's going to happen to you if you're going to stay? The Germans will catch you, and they'll kill you. I said, OK, I--

At that point, my brain wasn't working anymore. Because if I-- if it would have been working, I would have understood the circumstances that here I'm staying-- I'm here-- I'm remaining here by myself, and the Germans will come in, and I'm a Jewish girl. They'll kill me for sure. If not them, the population will kill me.

So they left. The group left. And I stayed. And I was left in the house.

In that area, there was a local group. And there was a girl from my home town. And she had seen me. So she found out that one partisan girl was left. They left her, and they didn't take her with. The fact that I didn't want to go she didn't know.

So they sent me a another guy, a driver with a horse and buggy. And he came. And he said, come on, we're going to chase the group.

It wasn't-- there was only one night. So they could have gone maybe 10, 15 kilometers. Had another girl with him. And he took me in the buggy.

And I don't know. He wanted to get rid of me. So he said, are you cold? I said, oh, I'm shivering. I was extremely cold.

He said, OK, I'll tell you what. I'm going to let you off in a farmer's house. And you stay there. And you get warm. Tomorrow or maybe later, I'll come and get you.

So he knocked on the door. And he said to the guy, listen, I have a girl here. She's not well. Could we leave her here for a while? And please take care of her. But remember, she's a partisan and don't do anything bad to her because I'm going to come to claim her.

Well a day went by. Two days went by. And nobody is there. I found out later that after he left the village, he drove about 5 kilometers. The Germans caught up with him. And they killed him, this guy with the girl, the one that was supposed to--

--to rescue you.

Yeah, right. So in that village were some Jews that were not affiliated with partisans, that were hiding on their own. So that farmer knew about them. So he went. He saw that nobody is claiming him-- me. So he went to the Jews. And he said, listen, I have one of your own. Why don't you come and get her? I mean, they threw her into my house. What am I

going to do with her?

I was lying on the oven. And I was singing all kinds of songs. Can you imagine how my brain was working? If I was in such a danger, how could I sing songs? But my brain wasn't working. I didn't know-- I was completely confused.

You think you went a little mad.

Pardon.

You think you went a little mad.

Yeah, right. Anyway, so they came. They did come. But they didn't walk into the house. Through the window, they spoke to me. And they saw that I am-- I looked sick.

So they said-- they asked me questions. I wasn't-- I didn't act like a crazy person. I told them that I have a father and a sister and a brother. And we belong to the Kovpaks. But I said, I don't know what happened to me. I couldn't-- I couldn't do-- my comprehension was completely-- I didn't know what's going on.

So they said-- so they took it that I am-- because I wasn't all there. So they said to him, listen, you keep her as long as you can. And we'll bring you some meat. So they did. The next day they brought him some meat. That was very-- they couldn't-- you couldn't get any meat.

And about a day later, the little boy comes running to the house. And he says, Dad, the Germans are in the village. So the first thing he said, get her out of here-- because I'm Jewish.

So he took me. And he told him-- he told the little boy to take me to the house where the Jews are. So I came in. And they were sitting all dressed up. It's like-- and they explained to me, you know, that the Germans are going to enter the village. And we have to escape. We're going to escape into the forest. Are you going to come along? Are you going to come with us?

I said, yes, I will. And that night about they gave me something to eat. But they wouldn't come near me. And they gave me something to eat.

And a couple hours later, they were alerted that the Germans are in the village. And they started running. They said, come on. I said, no, I'm not going. I'm cold, and I'm not going nowhere.

And they left. And I was-- I was again-- I was left by myself in the house. And I couldn't make out what's going on here. So where are the partisans, and where are the Germans?

Anyway, that night-- that night, they did an awful lot of putting mines on the road, the partisans, the local partisans. And there was a group that had to leave that particular area because they were also in danger of being attacked by the Germans. So they came into that house. There was a whole group of them.

And I was lying there. And there was a Jewish girl. She came up to me. And she spoke to me in Jewish. And she asked me questions. And I answered her. And I said, you are partisans. How about taking me along?

So I remember her saying to the other people, she's a very sick person. And that was it. They stayed till about daybreak. And they left. And I'm by myself. I stayed in the house by myself.

And by the way, the population of the village also ran away into the forest because they were afraid that the Germans will kill them because they were assisting partisans. They were not assisting partisans out of good will. The partisans were in the area. And they had to comply with their orders. So they escaped into the forest too. It was a very small village, maybe of 200 population.

Are you the only one now left in the--

And I am the only one. But I don't know. I'm lying in the house. But I walked out in the street. And it's strange. I saw a man. And he was talking to me. And there were a couple of partisans standing.

And I walked a little bit. And then I became terribly cold. And I went back to the house. And I lied there on the oven. It was warm.

And all of a sudden, at about 1 o'clock during the day, I see German tanks with German soldiers. So I ran out. And I grabbed a ladder. And I went on to the attic.

And across the street, that was the headquarters of the partisans. They had pictures of Stalin and Lenin. And I saw Germans running in and shooting, shooting at the pictures. And I became-- again, I became cold. And I thought to myself, I don't care.

I mean I knew that the Germans are going to do something to me. But death didn't mean anything. I can't explain it. So I went down. And I went again on the oven. And I laid down.

About an hour later, there was a whole caravan of horses and buggies and also tanks. So they told them to stop. And they dispersed them, each horse and buggy to a different house.

And one-- and a group of Germans with a horse and buggy came in to this house. And they came in with a rifle. And they saw me. And they said to me--

One thing subconsciously, I knew that I can-- I don't understand German. I understood. But I can't understand German.

So they asked me, who are you? And I said in Polish, I am Polish. I am Polish. And what-- and I said, see, I'm sick. I spoke Polish. And I said to them, I'm sick.

So they said, OK, come down, come down. And they saw some hay. And they said, they were partisans here. I said, I don't know anything. Told me to clean the house. And they said, this is where they're going to stay for the night. I should prepare-- we'll start preparing some food.

And I started-- tried to start making a fire. And one German called me and said, you come and show me where you hid your silver. I said-- I said, I don't understand what you're talking about. He started getting real angry. And he said, you know, you come here, don't tell me. In German, he says, you come and show me.

And if it would have lasted another five minutes, he would have shot me he was so angry. But all of a sudden, they got an order, they have to move. So they moved. And the caravan was going. They had to accommodate more groups of Germans into the houses. And I went back on the oven.

And about a half an hour later, the same thing happened. They came into the house with a rifle and started asking me. Then they said, you come down. And we're going to have our dinner here.

So I made a fire. And they took out eggs. And they had hard cheeses. And they had salami. And they had bread. And I made scrambled eggs for them. And I cooked some water. And they had some tea with them.

And they sat down to eat. So they asked me if I would join them at the table. Yeah, I joined them. And they gave me everything whatever they had.

And the conversation between them went out like one after the other, who do you think she is? What nationality is she?

You understand German?



Yes, I do. I lived in Germany for--

Did they know that you understood them?

No. No.

So you didn't tell them?

No. I understood what they were talking. But, you see, my brain wasn't working. But it was working enough to know that I cannot understand German. You understand?

Anyway, so they said-- so they shrugged their shoulders. And they said, I don't know, we don't know who-- I mean-- so then they finished eating. And they said to me-- they showed me in sign language that you can't sleep here. They are going to sleep there. And you can't.

So two soldiers, one with a rifle in front of me, one with a rifle in the back of me, and I think-- they told me to come, to go with them. And I think to myself, oh, I bet they're going to shoot me. That's what I-- that's the way I thought.

And they took me to another empty house. And they said that's where you're going to stay. I-- at that point, I became-- I was very frightened. And they left the house. And I didn't even close the door. And I went back on the oven.

And that night was-- they were constantly shooting. The Germans were constantly shooting because they were afraid of the partisans that were around. They also had to lend some airplanes because some of their soldiers were killed. And they were-- the mines exploded on the roads. So they had to land airplanes to take them on small planes to take them back.

And they had they were shooting flares to light up the area. And it was terribly noisy. And with that noise, I fell asleep. I fell asleep. And when I opened my eyes, there was a complete quiet.

I walked out of the house. And I went into the house where they had dinner. And I found a toothbrush. And I found a piece of bread and some salt. So I put the salt and the toothbrush in my pocket and also matches. And I put that in my pocket. I had a premonition that I'll be able to use them.

And I'm walking around. There was nobody. The village is completely empty. There were cats and dogs and chickens and cows. And everything was roaming in the streets, but no people.

What happened? This was the regular army. This was the Wehrmacht. They came into the village. And they were chasing-- they were chasing the partisans. But as they were moving along, they encountered the inhabitants of the village who were hiding in the forest.

And they asked them, why are you hiding? I mean, we're not after you. You should go back to your homes. We are not-- we are not here to kill you. We are chasing the partisans.

So they started coming into the village. And I'm sitting in the house. And here comes in the lady of the house. And she crossed herself. She said, what--

I was known in that village. There was a-- they called-- they called me the crazy Jewess, you know. That, oy, the crazy Jewess, what are you doing here? So I said, here I am.

So she ran out to the neighbors. And they all came looking like at something that is a miracle. And that night, there were about five older women sick and one man. They killed them all, that left-- they were left in the village.

The Germans?

The Germans killed. So they came. They said, look, ours they killed. And, look, a Jewess, they didn't kill. What's going on?

But, you see, they were afraid-- they would have killed me if they would have known that these are still the Germans here. They thought that the Russian front is here and that the Russians are already are fighting the Germans and that the Russians are going to back-- they are winning the war. They are going to occupy the territory. So they didn't do anything to me.

So she said to me, you know what? I hope the war is going-- my husband is in the army. And I have a piece of land. And I need somebody to help me. You'll stay with me.

So she took her horse and buggy. And she said that she had-- he hid some meat. So I went with her to the forest where she hid it. And we came back to the house. And we started cooking a cabbage soup and baking some potatoes.

And did you ever see a Russian oven where you throw in the potatoes? Inside they have utensils that you take them out. And I was helping her. And I was standing and take-- and all of a sudden, all of a sudden, I felt like steam is coming out from my head. And the picture became completely clear.

I knew that I did not follow the partisans. That I am in the enemy's territory and that's the end of me. So I started crying hysterically. And I said to her, what did I do to myself? I had a father and a brother and a sister in the partisans. What am I going to do now?

She said, did you have these attacks at home too? You're crazy. So I said-- so I decided that at night, I'm going to go into the forest. The forest was like a shield for us. You know, the trees, we were hiding behind the trees. So I thought, well, I didn't have no hope of remaining alive. If the Germans won't kill me, the Ukrainian population were very against the Jews. I don't have to tell you.

So I would have ran out that night. But I got a horrible, horrible headache, a blinding headache. So I laid down. We ate. And I laid down.

And we fell asleep in about 4 o'clock in the morning. It was still dark outside. We heard terrible noise. And We took a look through the window. The village was full of German tanks with German soldiers with German-- with German artillery, you name it.

So she said-- I said to her, maybe we'll change clothing because I was still dressed like a Jewish girl with a navy blue coat. And they had a different dress code, the farmers. I said, let's change clothes. She says, if you say one more word, I'm going to tell the Germans that you're a Jew, and they're going to kill you.

In the meantime, a German knocked on the door. And he wanted some food for his horse. So she came-- she came out to give it to him. And she followed him outside into the street.

And I walked out of the door. The forest was about not even 500 meters. I walked into the forest. It was a terrible, terrible snowstorm. And I walked on the road. And I saw some farmers with their horse and buggy were coming towards me. And they were asking, what's new in Berezniki? That was the name of the village.

I said, I don't know. Some Germans came in. And it took about 10 minutes. I turned around, and the whole village was on fire. They put the whole village-- from all four corners, they started burning the houses and killing out the people.

This was already the Gestapo. This was the SS. The Wehrmacht was in front. And they were the SS. They had an order to kill everybody.

Have you stopped to think what compelled you to walk away?

What compelled me to walk away? I was running away from death. I knew that I'm going to get killed. If the Germans

won't catch me, the farmers will catch me, will kill me. So I'm running. In what direction? Where? I don't know. I'm just walking.

Were you panicked? Were you--

No, I was-- surprisingly, I was calm. There was no other way. Who I should I cry to? Or who should I scream to? So I was walking.

The only thing that was I was concerned I was terribly hungry. I was-- don't forget I was after a terrible disease. I needed food.

So I came into a house. You know, I'm already out of the village. But they had separate houses that-- the farmers lived on their own piece of land. So I come to the house. They were all sitting around the table and eating pancakes. And they're all dressed like ready to run.

And I walk in the door. And they say, oh, look who is here, the crazy Jewess. What do you want? I said, could you give me something to eat? They said, get out of here, you dirty Jew. It's because of you that all of these things happen. I said, OK. You think you'll escape it. You'll have the same end like we had. Do you know that later on, I learned about a half an hour later they killed them all around the table.

So I walked away from that house. And I was terribly cold. I was freezing. So I saw a house on fire. So I thought-- and I saw a German standing near the house. And so I thought to myself, I don't care. I really don't care. I don't want-- I can't-- I don't want to live.

So I started walking towards the house. As I was approaching the house, he left. So I sat by the house for quite a while. And I was warming myself near the fire.

And then I started walking, walking on the road. And I walked into another house. They were also ready to-- they were all-- and I decided I'm already a little bit-- a little bit further out of the village, maybe I concoct another story. My Russian was very good. I spoke fluent Russian. So I'll tell them that I was-- I'm Russian teacher from Russia, and I was teaching in that village, and I'm escaping.

So I knock on the door. And she let me in. And I tell her the story. She said, here's a piece of bread and just leave. We have our own problems.

So I walked further. And in about another kilometer, I came another-- the farmer was standing in front of the house. And I walk up to him. And I'm telling him the story. He says, listen, my dear, you don't have to tell. I know who you are. And come on, we're all in the same shoes. The Germans were killing the Jews. Now, they're killing the Gentiles. So come on. First, come in the house. And we'll feed you, first of all.

And secondly, he said, do you know that the Jews that were hiding in Berezniki, in that village, they are they are hiding not far? Oh, I said to him, you have no idea what you just told me. I know I'm not going to live. But at least I want to die among my own. So he said, OK, eat your breakfast, and my two boys will take you to that area where they are hiding. So I said, OK.

The snow was up to here. I was so sick. I was walking. They brought me to an open area in that forest. And they said, if you'll cross that open area, this is where they are hiding your Jewish--

Your own--

--the people that you know. So I crossed that area. And there were no Jews. But there was a group of farmers. They were organized. They had their horses and their buggies. They had their fur coats. I mean sheepskin coats. They had hay. They had their pillows. They had their food, dry food, nevertheless food. And they were probably about, I would say, 10 families with their children with everybody.

So I decided I'm going to tell the truth. So they said, OK, listen, don't worry about it. You come. They gave me something to eat. And whatever will happen to us, will happen to you. So I said, OK.

They were very nicely organized. They knew the area. They were the Polesie swamps. They knew the area, that if they'll go into the thick of the swamps, the Germans will not dare to get there. So they had scouts in all four directions. And they were watching in which direction the German army is going.

OK, so the next day, they started beating me up. They started beating me up. They started cursing me. They started telling me that I'm a spy, that because of the Jews the war started.

And I said to them, you know what? If you want to kill me, I'm in your hands. But I'm not leaving this area. I'm staying with you.

But we stayed 10 days, no fire. They couldn't make a fire because smoke you can feel from far or during the night you can see the fire. So I was sleeping by the buggies.

When I got up, I had so much snow on me. And my feet froze completely. I couldn't stand up my legs. And after 10 days, somehow the shooting started. While we were hiding, while we were sitting, the shooting was going on all over.

Were these partisans?

No. These were local people, local population. So they decided now that the shooting stopped, they are going to look-- they are going to see what's happening in their homes. So they went to see-- they found their homes burned out.

But in that village, they had taken in a group of people into the church. They gave them some candy they should come into the church. And then they took them outside. And they lined them up. And they shot them.

So they found a line of people lying dead. Among these dead were two wounded women. They were not completely-- they were not completely killed.

So they took these two women. And they brought them into that forest. And they said to me, you know what? Since you're not well, why don't we put you in a hut, in some sort of a hut in the forest. And you'll take care-- you'll be with these women. They will bring you some food. And that's how you'll be able to exist. We don't know what's going to happen. So I said, OK, fine.

At that point, I couldn't walk anymore. So they brought me with these two women. One was very heavily wounded. And that first night, she died. So they came. They took her. They came to find out what's happening. And they found that she died. So they took her away. And they brought me some a little bit of soup. And I remained with the other woman.

The other woman was only wounded in her leg. And she also thought that the Russians are coming again to occupy there. So she said to me, you know, my nephew will find out where I am. And this is when I'll take you to my house. And you'll stay with me. You'll help me up and out in the farm. Fine.

Maybe two days, we stayed together. And her nephew came. The minute he stuck his head into, she says, look, at the dirty Jew, I don't need her. Right away, off the bed.

He said, Mom-- aunt or whatever he called her-- you said to her-- she says, I don't want no part of her. It's because of them that were suffering like this.

Let me ask you a question. You said the other woman died.

Yes.

What did you feel when she died?

I was happy because I thought maybe I'll inherit her blanket. But they wouldn't give it to me either. I was surrounded-- I was surrounded with death. How did I feel? She was out of her misery. Do you know, at that point, I was hoping that I wouldn't get up the next morning because I had terrible leg pains. I was praying to God, why did you forsake me? I don't want to live.

I was hoping that-- I knew stories that they used to say some people froze in the woods. And I didn't freeze. I thought maybe I'll freeze during the night.

You're still with this other woman though?

Yes. I'm with-- OK, he came. And he claimed-- he took her away.

So now you're alone.

Now, I'm alone, yes. OK. And I stole some flour from the caravan of people with whom I was, and I put it in my pocket. I had matches. So I made myself a fire. There was a little-- they dug a little hole and there was some water. And the water was brown like coffee. But I found a broken little pot around there. So I took the cold water. And I mixed the flour. And I ate it.

And I was sitting there a day or so. And all of a sudden, a farmer passed by. And he looked in. And he said, oh, my God, you're here alone. He said, not far from you, from here, there are Jews that are hiding. I said, oh, my God, maybe you should tell them they should come and get me. I would be so happy. I don't want to be here.

He said, OK, I'll do that. But meanwhile, not far from here, there are burned out homes. Why don't you go. They come out. And they take the potatoes and the vegetables from the cellar. You come out, try to come out of that house. I was practically crawling on all my four. And I crawled out to that house.

Your feet were still frozen.

Yes, my feet were still frozen. And I came out to that house. And the house was burned. There was a cellar. There were potatoes. There were some beets there.

And I found two chickens. They drowned in the-- what do you call where they dig-- where they take water out? And they-- in the well, they drowned in the well. I took them. And I took a schmatta there I found, a piece of rag. And I put some potatoes and the both chickens. And I found a pot. And I crawled back to my bunker.

And I came back. And I cut up the chickens. And I had a pot. And I cooked myself chicken soup. And I thought, well, can be any-- or any way--

Did he bring the Jews--

So anyways, I would say about a week passed by, nobody came. Finally, he-- at one point, he brought them. He brought them to the bunker. And they took me with them. They were about seven males, a father and two sons, and another father and two sons, so six, and another, and another two. They were nine. And I was the 10th one.

So I stayed-- that was already in March. It started getting warmer outside. And there were an awful lot of cows and horses lying dead in the forest. So we used to go and cut pieces of meat and bring it into the hut. And--

Horse meat too?

Horse meat and cow meat and potatoes. We got potatoes from the cellars, from the burnt out houses. And it started getting warmer. The farmers came back to their homes.

And so in April and May, they started working in their fields. So we hired ourselves out just for food. We used to go-- but that area was already German free. The Germans wouldn't come into that area, although it was still under the German occupation.

Let me just stop you for just a second. Did you have any news of the war?

Not, no--

You didn't know Stalingrad--

We didn't know, no. We didn't know what's going on. No. But when we were in the partisans, they had radios. We knew of what was going on. That was in 19-- that was-- I'm talking about 1943, '43 in April, '43. I don't remember when Stalingrad--

January.

In January, '43? So they started already being beaten the Germans. But we didn't hear anything. But the partisan movement was very strong in that area. And they gave them an awful lot of trouble.

This is Pesach.

This is Pesach. We knew when Pesach was.

So you were with a Jewish--

With Jewish group. And that's when I contracted scabies. You know what scabies? Was-- all of us, all of us had scabies. They are in the joints of your body, in all your joints. And they itch terrible. And they are they are blisters. You can scrape. And you scratch, they burn.

So we were all with scabies. And we had lice. And we had fleas. And we had this huge wild rats that were running around us. And we had potatoes.

But the partisan, the local partisans came back. And they started acting with their assignments. And there was one from Germany. He was among the partisans. So the partisans used to come to visit us.

So they brought the doctor. And he checked us for the scabies. And he made for us a home remedy. He told us to find the fat from inside of the pig. It was called the lard, lard. Then the thing that you put on the wheels of a buggy--

Grease.

Pardon.

Grease.

Grease, the grease, and also sulfur, the end of the matches, you know, the sulfur, make a mixture and rub ourselves. And in a couple of weeks, they started disappearing.

And your feet, had they--

Pardon me.

And your feet-- your feet had frozen--

They-- one toe started getting rotten. But it got better.

OK, let's stop here for a moment. OK.

[AUDIO OUT]

We're at May 1943. You were again sort of reunited with a group of Jews.

No, I left off when I said that I was hiding with the Jews individuals, that were not affiliated with the partisans. They were just hiding in the forest. And in that forest were partisans, the local partisans.

And you were-- there were rats. There was disease.

You name it, everything, yes.

And there was Pesach.

And there was Pesach.

You celebrated the holidays?

Yeah. But we ate potatoes anyway. So we didn't have any bread. We celebrated the holidays.

So what did celebrate the holiday mean?

Whoever knew how to-- whoever remembered some prayers by heart-- and by the way, we had two old older men. One was actually a cantor in a little town. So he used to pray. And, you know, he used to sing. Whenever I hear this song, I start crying.

It's [NON-ENGLISH], oh, my God, why have you forsaken me. It's a beautiful song. But that's what we were sitting and singing.

Can you sing it?

No, I can't remember now.

It's a famous saying.

It's a famous what?

Saying.

Saying.

Yeah.

The [NON-ENGLISH]? You know why? Because Jesus when he was crossed, he said, [NON-ENGLISH] which is almost like forsaken. He was also saying to God. Yeah.

Given what you said earlier about your disillusionment and your questioning, what is celebrating the Passover mean?

Oh, this is tradition for me. It's embedded in me. I love it. I do celebrate-- we always celebrated all our holidays.

So it wasn't an occasion for asking other questions about where was God in all this?

No.

No. It's just tradition is something separate.

That's right, exactly.

OK. How did you hook up with other partisans? Or did you?

OK. So that was somewhere in 1943, right? That was summer in 1943.

Spring.

Right, right. The komarov-- it was called so, [NON-ENGLISH], the whole unit, because they had smaller units. They were comprised out of small groups of partisans. And the komarov was the one that were in charge, that dealt with all of this. They were like the headquarters.

This was Russian?

Russian, all Russian. So they had to transfer some radio to another [NON-ENGLISH] another group. And there was a man by the name of Misha. I don't remember his-- he was Gentile. He was an ex-pilot, a Russian pilot. He was shot down somewhere in this area. So he joined the partisans.

So he took a group of about 10, 12 people. There were two girls that were actually brought from Russia. And they came by parachute into the forest. They used to bring some people and they let them out at night by parachute.

These girls, they knew how to operate radios in the open. So they had-- they had a lot of ammunition. They had a lot of bullets with them. They had also dynamite. They had to transport it across a famous railway, which runs between Luninyets and Baranovich.

So they came. And they knew that I am a former partisan, that I belonged to this big group of Kovpak. So they asked me, would I like to join the partisans again? And said, yes. I grabbed the idea. To me, I didn't see any hope in staying in the forest. I was afraid that one day the Germans will kill us, or whatever. So I said, oh, yes. I grabbed the idea.

So we all got ready. And I was wearing the radio on my shoulders. And I had bullets around my waist. And I had a rifle. And we had to go through very deep swamps. We had to carry the radio and the rifle up because we were up to the waist in swampy areas.

Was this the Pinsker swamp?

That's the Pinsker swamps. And we had to go like about 80 kilometers. So it took us like about two days and two nights.

And they needed girls' help because they used to catch a peak somewhere from the-- or a care from the local population, so we cooked dinner for them. So we were three girls. And the rest of them were men, about 10, 12.

Had you ever fired a rifle?

No. I didn't.

Now, you're schlepping a rifle.

Now, I'm schlepping the rifle. And as we were walking, they're telling me they're going to reach a group. And not far from them, there's a Jewish group, strictly Jews, about 120. So I said, oh, that's a terrific idea. I'm going--



And Misha, the leader of our group, he saw my worth, because I was very handy, I was helping, and I was carrying. He said, no, he's going to keep me. I'm going with him to his group.

I said, no, you know what, Misha? I want to die among my own Jews. I don't trust you guys. And besides, I'm a girl. I'll have to sleep with a man. I don't want to sleep with a Gentile guy. It's not funny. It's painful. But that was the life. So we came. And we reached this Kaganovich Otriad. And I said, goodbye. I'm staying there.

Near that-- they were 120 Jews from two small towns, from Lenin and from Pogost-Zagorodskiy. Lenin and Pogost-Zagorodskiy, this is around the Pinsk area. They survived from a labor camp, a German labor camp. And they were mostly from that area. There were quite a few women. There were small children. There were old men.

And they had among them, they had 10 rifles. And one rifle worked. The rest of them were not workable. So with this rifle, they were able to go and secure themselves some food. They used to go up to a farmer, and he saw a rifle. He had to give it to them.

But what they tried to appeal to the rest of the partisan [NON-ENGLISH], so-called, you know, their headquarters, that they are also an otriad. They should also be provided with some ammunition. But you know, they were all Jews. And antisemitism still existed.

And on top of it, there were also next to a group of partisans, the [NON-ENGLISH]. The [NON-ENGLISH] are the equivalent to the Ukrainian [NON-ENGLISH]. They are from the White Russia.

Fascists.

Fascists, yes. So quite a lot of White Russians and even Ukrainians defected from the Russian army into the German. And there were 300 of them. The majority of them, they were the ones that had defected. And at one point, they were in a fight with partisans. And they saw that they are losing, so they surrendered. They surrendered their weapons. They surrendered everything what they had.

So they organized a group of partisans from them, out of them. So now, they are on the partisans side. Understand? But they were terribly antisemitic. So they always used to do some things to damage their reputation.

Anyway, we couldn't get any weapons. So the Jewish boy came on a clever thought. They took-- they cut down a tree. And they chopped it up. And they made like a triangle out of it, a long triangle. And they carried it on their shoulders for about 10 kilometers. And they came to the railways, to the rails. They attached it to the rails. And the next day, one of the trains-- it threw off a train from the railway.

So now, all of a sudden, the Jews got a good reputation. They are fighters. They know what to do. So they supplied them with ammunition. They brought some dynamite. They brought some rifles. They brought some automats, you know.

And, OK, so I stayed in that group. They wanted to show-- not that they wanted to show. They were assigned a job to dynamite some railway for about area of 2 kilometers. They grabbed the idea. And they had already weapons. And they had dynamite.

So they organized a group like about-- we were about 15 or 20 partisans. And they took me as a nurse. In case something happens to them, I should be able to do give the first help. And we had our guide that knew the area very well. He knew how to get to that railway and how to come back.

So we reached the railway. It was a very damp night. It was very foggy. And we carried-- each one had a piece of dynamite. It was like a piece of soap with a wick attached to it. And that's all it had. They had to attach it to the railway. And they had to light the wick. And that's how it blew up.

So we came. And there was already some other-- they were always fixing the railway. And who were fixing it? The

Germans. They had their communications organization that I talked previously, der Todt. They were strictly doing roads and railways.

So they always worked around them. By these rails were bonfires that they had lit, the Germans, while they were-- it was in the winter. No, it was-- yeah, it was around April, May. It was still cold outside. So they had fires going. And they had barracks there where they slept near the railway.

When we came there, I and the guide were assigned to one point. They'll go, and they'll put the dynamite. And they'll start running. And this will be our gathering point. And from there, we'll run back. OK?

So we came. And all the partisans, they were all my friends. They had the dynamite. And they started working on them. But their matches got wet. Because it was so foggy, they couldn't use-- they couldn't light. So they started grabbing the hot coals.

In the meantime, there was a commotion. And the Germans heard that there was something was going on. So they ran out shooting.

When they started shooting, the guide said to me, oh, I'm not staying here. I'm going to get killed. I'm running. I said, but we have our order. We have to stay here. This will be our gathering point. He said, no.

And so I ran after him luckily, because when I started running, a German was chasing me. And I saw the bullets crossing-- I saw the fire crossing. And he was yelling, halt. He was very near me. And I came to a ditch. And there was a tree across the ditch. I ran. And when they came to the ditch, they stopped.

Well, we're all-- all the partisans came back. We had one casualty. One was killed. But they did a lot of damage. It did dynamite the railway. For 2 kilometers, they dynamited the railway. So this Jewish otriad got already a good reputation, that the Jews are also fighters. Otherwise, they left the Jews because Jews don't know how to fight. But that was already in May.

Around June, July, the officers on top came to a conclusion that it's not a healthy thing to keep a group of Jews. We have to disperse them because there was a case of one guy, his wife became-- unfortunately, she became pregnant in the forest. So he wanted to get a little bit more nourishment from our Jewish group. So he went to a farmer and asked for some honey.

Somebody from this [NON-ENGLISH] spotted him. And they turned in his name to the higher echelon. And they killed him. They shot him. They took him out. And he was like a-- this was the time when Stalin already gave an order not to touch the local population. They were assisting the partisans and nobody should rob them. So he was also served as an example.

By that time, they decided to disperse us. And they dispersed us in different Gentile groups. Some of the old people and the children and women they left behind. And we stayed-- we were assigned into a different mixed group, Jewish guys and Gentiles. And we were doing our work the same like in the other partisans.

I was assigned to wash their clothes. And how do you wash clothes that is like-- what do you call the sacks made of-- I forgot that material-- burlap, burlap. When you wash burlap, it becomes like a piece of thin-- you know, it's terribly-- it gets hard.

They had an awful lot of flies. So you had to cook the burlap in big pots of water. And there were no soap. So we were using ashes from fires. That softened the water. So I was using this-- I was using my hands to drag out the clothes. And I had wounds all over. I had like the holes in my hands. And it was burning. That was one thing.

Then they considered me to be a very excellent worker. They promoted me to work in the kitchen, to cook the food for them. So I had to get up 4 o'clock in the morning and cook their soup.

And our group was, I would say, about 80 people. And we lived like this. We're doing all kinds of damage to the German fronts and all kinds of explosive jobs. And we stayed until in April of 19-- no, not in April-- in July of 1944, we were liberated. The Germans were already pushed back. The Russians were chasing them back into Germany. And we were liberated in Pinsk.

In Pinsk near the swamps?

Yeah. It was a big city. And I was assigned to work for the NKVD, the security, the Russian security. I worked there-- that was another episode in my life that I didn't have any food. They paid us. But there was nothing-- they couldn't buy anything. I was really hungry.

I was day and night-- I had to work there till 1 o'clock at night in a building where it was-- where nuns are-- what do you call where nuns are? Monastery, a monastery. All of a sudden I'm looking words-- a monastery. And it was built from cement. And there was no heat, sitting till 1 o'clock at night in temperature below zero being hungry. There was another Holocaust. You know, it was terrible. It was very hard.

Before we talk about the liberation, let me ask you to go back for a second.

Yes.

This partisan who was shot.

Yes.

--because his wife had a baby.

Right.

Is there more to that story? What happened to the baby? What happened to them?

Oh, that's a very famous story. The baby was born. I stood when she was born, a little girl. And when she was-- when she was six weeks old, her mother found out that-- they didn't tell her the truth that he was shot. They told her that he went on a sort of a mission, and he'll be back.

But she saw weeks go by and he doesn't come back. At one time, she spotted a soldier wearing his jacket. So she surmised that he is not alive. And it happened probably in May, we had to-- all of a sudden, there was a-- they came to tell us that the Germans are coming to fight. So they had to abandon that place.

And it was-- so we were all-- it was a very dark night. And the ground was still half frozen, half wet. And we were-- it was so dark that we had to hold on to each other, not to lose each other. And they took the baby.

They gave her some homemade vodka, a little bit, she should sleep. But in the middle of our journey, she started crying. So they decided-- and the echo in the forest goes a long way. And the Germans were around us. They surrounded us.

So they came to Sarah, my girlfriend. They said, Sarah, you have to give up the baby, otherwise the whole 120 people are in jeopardy. How about, she says-- that was when we were still in the Jewish group. She said, how does a mother give up her child? So she was giving and taking it back and giving-- finally, she gave up the child. She gave them the child.

And two Jewish boys took the child. And they brought her-- they didn't kill the child. They took her to a farmer. And they said, this is a baby from a partisan. You better take good care of the baby. Otherwise, you'll pay with your life.

A couple of days later, Germans came into the village. And the population had to run out because they were afraid of being killed. And this woman left the house. And she left the baby in the house. She was sure she'll come back and the

baby would be killed.

She came back. There was a little bag of sugar and a red ribbon next to the baby. A German probably that had left his baby in the house, he had pity. He left something for the baby.

The next time when the Germans attacked was about a week later. She already grabbed the baby and started dressing it. But she was late. And as she was running out of the house, a German caught her. But he had pity on her because she had the baby. So she knew that thanks to the baby she survived.

So the baby also survived?

The baby survived. After we were liberated, she came-- she wouldn't give her up. Don't ask what she had to go through. She had to take her to court. The woman claimed that it's her baby. She raised her and she went through a lot with her. And she's not giving her up. But she had to go to court. And she took some money to get the baby out of there.

So what was liberation like? I mean--

It was very exciting. We all marched. And we were so jubilant, you know. We helped the Russian army win the war. We came into Pinsk. We marched in as partisans. And everybody cheered.

But the population was terribly afraid because they were helping the Germans. They were accomplices. So I started working for the NKVD. And then I thought that that's not for me. I'm going to die here on the job. So I got-- I always had bad eyes. I got a paper from a doctor that I cannot be up. And they let me go.

And then we started planning not to stay in our area. I came back to my city. I found my cousin who was with my father, my brother, and my sister. He came back from the Carpathian Mountains. That's when half of the Kopok otriad was destroyed.

You found--

My cousin.

Your cousin. When did you find out about the rest of your family?

At that time, he said they-- I was hoping maybe, maybe, they'll come back. It took about a year, nobody came back.

All three of them didn't--

No. They were killed in-- while they were fighting, they were killed. The Ukrainian population in the Carpathian area, in the mountains, were extremely antisemitic and anti-Russian and anti everything. So they helped the Germans kill.

But, you know, out of the 5,000, 1,500 survived from that area. He made a tremendous mistake. He shouldn't have gotten into the mountains. That's when the-- that's when they lost them.

1,500 of?

Of partisans survived, out of 5,000. And my cousin was one of them. He was left-- at night, he-- they all fell asleep because they were exhausted from walking. And he woke up, and the group was gone. So by himself, he managed somehow to thread through the villages. And they were united not far from Warsaw, already by when the Russians were there.

But then they dispersed the partisans. They took-- 80% of them, they took into the army. Most of them were killed in the army, in the Russian army. That's the reward they had for saving the Russian army. Well, but that's war.

Most of my Jewish-- and I must tell you that because whenever I go to shul and I say Kaddish for my family, I remember each and every one of them, how heroically they died. They died fighting. They died fighting. They attach themselves to trains with dynamite, with all kinds of things.

They were very brave soldiers. They were an asset to the Russian army because they had nothing to lose. They really fought because they knew what they were fighting for, although the Russians, the Russian soldiers, too, because they saw what's happening to them in the prisoners of war camps.

You told me once that there were actually-- you remembered some songs, that there was some Zionist feeling among the partisans as well.

The Jewish?

Yeah.

But the Jewish, sure. They all come from the same type of shtetl where I come from.

I mean-- I know this sounds foolish maybe, but you actually told me that there were-- you remembered good times during this period.

Yes. When we thought that we were not in danger, when the Germans are not-- we were singing Jewish songs and dancing. And it was lively in the forest with all this, with all what was going on.

And was there talk about going to Palestine?

Yes. That was the dream. That's how we reached Germany. When we were liberated, and most of us saw that we have nothing to live there, we have nothing to stay there, all our cities were one big cemetery, we are stepping on blood, we decided that we cannot stay there. So we heard about Jewish displaced persons camps in Germany.

You had gone back to Dombrovitsa.

I went back to Dombrovitsa, yes. And I found-- that's when I found my cousin. I found some other Jewish people that survived in Russia. And I vowed that my foot will never step in there anymore. I never went back. That was the last time I was there. Now, I keep having a desire to go to the grave of where my mother is buried. But it's hard.

Where is she buried?

She's buried in Sarny where 15,000 Jews are buried.

In a mass grave?

Yeah. In a mass-- with my two sisters.

This means that the last time you saw your father and your sister, you were ill.

Right.

Is that the last time?

That's it.

Through a through a daze.

It's like a silhouette. I don't have a picture of my father. I look at my uncle, when I showed him-- and he reminds me of

my father. But I don't remember his face. Vividly, I don't remember. I remember my sister.

But, you know, I'm 75 years old. My sister was 21. I was 18. I remember them as young people. My father was young. My father was 42.

Of course, you didn't know it was farewell at that--

No. We didn't know what's going to happen tomorrow. My father sort of like had a fatalistic outlook. He always was saying that I'm not going to live through it.

And if you lived with-- I didn't-- I didn't-- should I say that I lived with hope? No. I didn't live with hope. I just lived. And I pushed through every day.

What's going to happen tomorrow? I don't know. What's going to happen the next hour? I don't know.

What brought you to leave Dombrovitsa? What steps did you take to leave?

Oh, what steps did I take? I lived in Pinsk actually. I came to Dombrovitsa to visit. And when I saw-- and there were some Gentiles, they said, how come you survived? That were their questions. So how can I live among them? All the Jews were killed and you survived? How did that happen?

What did you say?

What do you say? You sit there and stay there, what, should I start arguing with them? There was nothing to say. I said, you are the same murderers as the Germans. And they knew it. They knew it.

So you set out for a displaced persons camp.

At first, I set out for Poland. We couldn't get into Germany, don't forget. It was a border. There was Poland. There was Poland. So we set out to Poland.

And we came to Stettin. Stettin is on the German-Polish border. And at that time, so how do you cross the border? So they had already black marketeering groups that were hiring trucks and bribing the guards, bribing the guards on the border, and transporting Jews from Poland into Germany. That's how I came into Berlin.

And in Berlin were three displaced persons camp. Each camp-- two camps were about 3,000. And I lived in a small camp, about 200.

Under which jurisdiction?

I lived in-- the camp of the 200 was in the French. You know Berlin was divided into four. So two were in the American zone. And I was on the French zone. And there was the Russian. The Russian, we were afraid of the Russians.

Well, how did you feel about the Russians?

I have a sentiment for the Russians. When I think back, when everybody abandoned us, nobody wanted us, the Russians put out trains. And they said, you come to us. You come to us, and we'll live together.

I'll never forget that. This is true. That was in 1941 when the war started. Nobody wanted us. And the Jews that evacuated into deep Russia, they survived. That's a plain fact.

And they were the partisans?

Pardon me.

And there were the Russian partisans.

And there were the Russian partisans, yes.

Some of them.

Some of them. A lot of them were killed, a lot, by the thousands. It was an exceptionally good organization of the partisans with an excellent organization. You know, it's a wrong comparison, but fight terrorists-- the partisans were terrorists. For the Germans, they were terrorists. It's hard to fight terrorists in the background. And that's what the partisans were. They really were a hindrance to the German front.

Did you keep in touch with any of these people?

Yes. I have friends in Israel. I have friends in Chicago and in Cleveland. And we come together in the wintertime to Florida. We sit, and we reminisce about the times, the ones that I was in the forest with.

But none of the Russian partisans you keep in touch with?

No. No. None of the Russians.

So you were in the French zone in a displaced persons camp?

Right. 1948. We came in 1947, January. There was also a journey. We started out 30 people on a big truck going through the Germans-- and we went through the German border, because as I said, the guards were bought up, and they let us go through. And there was one child among us. It was a two-year-old boy.

And as we went in to Germany, about maybe 12 kilometers, the truck broke down. What do you do now? Go into Germany? We're illegal. Go back to Poland? We don't want to.

So we're standing there on the road in the middle of nowhere. And I'm still cold now. I'm shivering. I'm always-- I'm anemic. And I'm afraid of cold weather. So I'm sitting there, and I'm shivering.

And all of a sudden, I hear two men come and say, who wants to walk to Berlin? I said, I. And I got out with these two men. And we started walking.

We came into a mill, you know where they do flour. And we got in-- first of all, we got into where the guard was sitting. There was a little oven. We warned them ourselves up. And we asked him how far is it to the next town, Ebensee.

So he told us about 6 kilometers. And we walked. We came to the station. And it was a very small town. And right away, we look different than the rest of the population. So that they arrested-- that they took us into the police station and--

Who arrested you?

The Germans.

German police?

The German police, yes. And they started questioning us-- who are we and how did we get here. And so we said that we are we-- didn't say that we came on a truck with more people. We said that we went through the border on foot. That's what we told them. In our aim, we said, is to go into Berlin. We understand they have displaced persons camp, and we want to go to Palestine. This is our aim because we are Jews--

The two guys were from concentration camps. They had numbers. They were very rough with us. But finally, they gave in. And they put us on the train. And we came in to Berlin.

And we alerted the people who were part of the business group that rented out this truck. And they sent another truck. And they brought them back. The baby, by the way, died that night. The two-year-old baby died.

How were they rough with you? You said the police were rough with you.

Oh, they did not abuse us physically. But they were rough in questioning. They wanted to send us back to Poland. And we put up an opposition. You can kill us here. We're not going back to Poland.

So what was it like in the DP camp?

Well, we were provided with food and some clothing that they got from probably warehouses where they stored the Jewish clothing that-- I'll never forget the coat that I got. I was desperate. I needed a coat. And I got in-- that was in Pinsk.

I got into a warehouse. And I saw all these clothes are laying with the yellow Star of David. They were all the clothes from the Jews. I got a coat, and I walked away with a terribly eerie feeling. Who knows what's coat I'm wearing?

But in Berlin, they fed us. They organized schools. It was a very, very good organization. A lot of people started getting married. That's when I got married. You know, we were all young people.

How did you meet your husband?

I met my husband in that small-- he came to meet somebody from Poland. That was the first stop. When a truck came in, that was the first stop in that camp when they brought in the people.

In Ebensee?

No. No, in Berlin, in the French sector. They were a German sector-- I mean Russian sector, a French sector, a British sector, and an American sector. And we were in the French sector.

That's where I met him. And we got married in 1948. My son was born 1949. But in '48, they already dispersed the DP camps. They transported all of them into West Germany.

And from there, they looked for means of how to get them out either to Palestine or America. They started-- we started getting contact with relatives and trying to get visas of how to get in. That was in 1948.

But in '49, the end of '49-- no, no, in '48, they dispersed the camp. '49 and '50, we lived in Berlin. My husband did some business. And they were a group-- there a group of Jewish people that remained, that remained from the camps. And--

Was it the Joint Distribution Committee that helped?

The Joint Distribution Committee that helped and the UNRRA helped. And we did-- but we started doing some business. And we did not-- we made it a point not to associate with the German people, not at all. We already had our education in the camps. They had schools.

Oh, I started saying that we started asking for visas. But in 1950, by the end of 1950, they passed a law right here in America to let displaced persons in without visas. You know, not only Jews, there were some Gentiles too. That's how some of the German Nazis got smuggled in. That's--

So you had decided you wanted to come to America?



Well, no, originally, our aim was to go to Israel. We wanted to go to Israel. At that time, it was still-- in 1948, the country was established. And so we started planning, making plans. Some of our friends went already, illegally.

And they wrote to us that we shouldn't dare to go there. The circumstances are very bad. There were no housing. There was no food. That's when we made our decision, if that's the case, we are going to America. My oldest son was born in Berlin in 1949. And we came to America in December of 1950.

Straight to Detroit.

Straight to Detroit, yes, because my husband comes from a town-- my husband came from a town, my late husband, from Rohatyn. And he had people that come from that town.

So he was not a survivor?

He was a survivor-- he was in the army. Four years, he was in the Russian army. He fought for Stalingrad. He came from Stalingrad all the way to Berlin. And in Berlin, he was wounded. And after he was wounded, they sent him to recuperate in a kolkhoz. You know what a kolkhoz in Russia?

A farm.

Yeah. What do you call-- by the government, it's a government farm. So he went to recuperate there. And then when he came back to Poland, he was also-- he was not in Stetting. By the way, he brought a girl with him. And we brought her to America.

He found her in his city. She lost her parents. He brought her. And we didn't adopt her. We are her guardians. She was 16 years old when I married my husband. And we brought her to America.

And she didn't take our name. We educated her here. And then she got married. And she lived in Chicago. Now, she's in New York. And I'm in contact with her.

You said he was from Rohatyn.

Right.

Which is--

Rohatyn is Galicia. It's southern Poland. It's not far actually from-- I come from a different area. You know, I told you. Yeah.

But he had relatives here?

Not relatives, [NON-ENGLISH], people from his town.

I see. And he-- they were-- their parents were in the same business. They were in the meat business. So he came, and he started getting established in the meat business. But we bought a farm. We bought a dairy farm here. But it wasn't working. And then my husband was in the wholesale meats.

Earlier you said that you had this dream of-- that you told your sister, I think, you said, about an airplane coming and picking--

When we were sitting right after we escaped from the ghetto and we were sitting in the bushes without a cover on our head. And we heard airplanes flying overhead. And I said to my sister, can you imagine a miracle like this should happen, all of a sudden an airplane should land here and should take us to America?

So now you were here. Did it seem like a dream?

Yes. I love America.

Did you remember that dream when you were--

I sure did. I remember everything. A lot of it faded, an awful lot of it faded. But all the things that I said, I remember everything. I remember.

Before I ask you a couple of other questions, you have more than one son.

I have two sons.

And the second son was born--

Here in Detroit.

And grandchildren?

I have four grandchildren, four granddaughters.

All granddaughters?

All granddaughters. I had two sons.

Mazel tov.

Mazel tov, yeah. I wish I would have a grandson. he would be a name carrier. But thank God for these four girls.

You also told me earlier that you live with it? Are there are there certain words, events, sights, moments, that happen on almost a daily basis that sort of touch off a memory about the--

Yeah, that's something.

What for example?

You know, you have to be in the circumstance of talking about it. It's just like when you sit and tell jokes. Somebody tells a joke, so you remember a joke. I sit with some people that lived through it. So we remember certain things, like in the scabies that we have or the lice that we had. We were itching from all over. I mean it was a horrible feeling.

And yet, we joked. And we sang. And we danced. And life was normal, so to speak, "normal." Some normality.

It's easier to talk to others who were there, do you think?

It's much easier. You don't understand what I'm talking about. No, thank God that you don't understand.

I do. I do.

Yeah, well, you're a teacher. So you're in it.

No, I do thank God.

Yeah. You do. And I-- and you know what? My children, I started telling the story since they began to understand. And they know the story backwards and forwards. But sometimes when we sit and we start reminiscing, and all of a sudden,

they get anxious. And they start telling me--

My younger son, Steven, is a psychiatrist. He's a child psychiatrist in Boston. And he forgot about it. But many times, he used to tell me, Mom, I have to write a book about your story. I really have to.

He's very intrigued with the fact-- with the time when I lost my memory because he's in the business of psychiatry. He went into psychiatry because he wants to study the human brain. He cannot-- he wants to study how I-- it's like was a blackout.

This is when you had typhus?

Yeah, after the typhus. It was like a blackout for two weeks. I wasn't aware of what's going on around me. And then, all of a sudden, I came out of it without any warning, without anything. How do you explain a thing like that? So he has-- but he's still thinking about it.

Before I forget, what's your other son's name?

My son here, right here in Farmington Hills, Barry Auster. He's a dermatologist, a wonderful guy.

Barry Auster?

Auster because that was my name before. And Steven's name, Steven Auster. And the girls are Austers.

So you remarried?

I remarried, yeah. My husband's name is Henry Feldman. He is from Romania.

What are the granddaughters' names?

Pardon?

The granddaughters' names.

My granddaughters' names? One is Erika. She is 20. She is going to be a junior in the U of M. Elana is a senior in high school. She is 17. And Rachel is just starting high school. She is 14. And my other one, Julia, is 10. She is in Boston, very bright. All of them are very bright, bright kids.

Well, I think I accomplished something. Even though I say that I live with a guilt feeling-- I do. I live with the guilt that I survived and the rest of them didn't.

Should we stop there?

Yeah.

OK. Dave.

Yeah.

Done.