

OK. You were in detention and you jumped out of the window.

And the opportunity arrived from nowhere. I was awakened early in the morning to take him to the-- on a half floor. And there was a corner window. And I noticed the window was open. There were bars. But I was so skinny, my head did go out. Rest of my body did go out. And the Polish soldier that was with the Russian.

He did-- took me upstairs. And when I opened it-- when we opened the door, there was about 20 men standing in their underwear, that was sleeping. He wants me to make theirs beds or something. It was just something to make you mad.

So I said, look, I am not a German girl. I am Polish. Because at that time, they fight-- the Russian were fighting the Germans. I said, you did-- cannot make me stay here and watch the men dress. And I shrug my shoulder and closed the door. And that-- like magnet, that window was there. I mean, without thinking-- I mean, planning-- I squeezed my body, hold it to the bars, swing my body, and jumped, and fell. There was fence right in the middle of the window.

I fence-- was a early springs, was snow, and dirt, and mud. And I fell like a cat an all four. I didn't-- even didn't take my shoes off. And for a moment, I could not stand on my legs. But the desire is so you escape, you want to run.

So on that-- on those feet, I walk about-- was about four blocks. And when I came to the big building where there was supposedly me, I did see the men. So I pushed the button. And I leaned against the wall. By that time my feet was swollen, just falling over my shoes. My ankles was like a balloon. And the door opened.

And who comes out? Russian soldier with their heads pointing. And he look at me. And he said, Irene? I said, yes? That was Haller's brother. His whole family was wiped out by the Germans. So he took Russian uniform and was fighting with the Russian the Germans. And he was visiting Hallers. And he said, what do you do here?

I said, well, I escaped. He said, why did you do it? We were every day at the commissar from the temple. They told us that you were arrested. And we were doing everything to free you. Well, it was too late. I couldn't go say, sorry, I escaped.

So they could not hold me there. So he took a car and brought me to Krak³w. And I was in Krak³w in the different-- the phone call with her husband and Maurice. And I was little here, a little there. And I find out that my father was killed by the Germans.

Now, the Hallers-- you're talking about these are the people that you saved. And they made it back to this town. And then you came and found them there. I see. And then--

Because they were moving.

Right.

And so--

Now, you were in Krak³w.

In Krak³w. And I was by the other peoples that I saved. And they were-- I was by the medic with my feet up for a couple of weeks because I broke some veins. But there was no life for me because I could not go home. My mother was arrested with all four my sisters. The Russians arrested when I escaped. My father was already killed before, the German killed him.

And so I become the-- wanted in my own country. So at that point, the Jewish people went to the historical committee in Krak³w and wrote my story. I have the story. I can tell you. I have Polish, and Hebrew, and Yiddish. And they gave me false names. And they smuggled me out to Germany to displaced person camp. So I was a Catholic living in a Jewish camp.

What was the false name?

The camp?

No, the-- your name that you were--

Sonja Silverstein. And they-- I made my hair black. I looked funny, I looked-- with my blonde complexion. And everybody said, well, how come? I said, well, my mother was Italian. But I tried to change my personality. And I was working in a Jewish camp in-- that was Hessisch Lichtenau in Germany, in Bavaria. And then I worked in a dispensary.

And at that time, there was the movement with Haganah. And I wanted to go with the Haganah. I start to learn Hebrew. But my heart was at large. I was-- did-- contracted diphtheria. And that affected my heart. And I was not able.

So one day, a man from United Nation came to check on the camp. And a older gentlemen want to interview me. See, the Jewish people were very proud of me. And they were talking. So he spoke English and French. And I spoke Polish, German, Russian, and some Yiddish because I spoke quite good Yiddish. And would you believe? Six languages, we could not communicate.

So we called-- they called somebody to translate. And I opened my heart and told that man everything-- about being raped and everything. I just told him that for 10 years, I was woman without country, that I lost-- I could not finish my study, finish my schooling, and I lost my family. And the future was really looking sort of bleak for me. I did not know what to do. And then he was very moved. But there was no romance or anything. He was moved.

And 1949, just before Christmas, I came to United States. And believe me, everybody knows about the Statue of Liberty. But to me, it has a different meaning. I mean, to me, the torch, that was beacon of hope. And I was alone-- without money, family, marketable skills, not one word of English. But I was free. I was free.

And when-- in five years, I become United States citizens. And I then pledge my allegiance and my honor to this land of the free. And would you believe it? I was working in a factory. In the second day I was in United States, I find work. I work in a garment center because I knew some Jewish. So I could find myself work there.

In New York?

In New York. And after I was citizens-- and one day, I went to-- by the United Nation building for something. And man came to my table and asked if he may sit down. I said, oh, please do. Well, by this time, I spoke some English. I knew how to put the water, and get a coffee, and this. I was American.

And when he sat down, he look at me, he say, [FRENCH]. I said, no, I do not speak French. So he said, forgive me, but I have impression I met you someplace. I said, well, I am from Poland. So he said, well, I never been in Poland. But, he said, but--

Hello.

Hello.

--but I am-- I was with the United Nation. And he said-- start telling me my story. And then pretty soon, he proposed. And we were married.

This was the man--

And now I am grandmother and have a-- two grandsons-- one five and one seven. And I will be happy, happy grandma.

This was the man who interviewed you in the displaced persons camp?

Yes. That was the same man, yes.

Amazing.

Well, that's my story. I'm sorry.

Thank you very much for participating in this interview.

You're quite welcome, honey.

Thank you.

Quite welcome.

Is there anything you would want to tell your grandchildren?

Yes. I already-- you know that they are proud? I did not know. But we did have party. And Ray was six and the younger four. And the women were saying, oh, who is this? Oh, that's my grandma. And she save many lives. And she was in the newspaper. They're proud.

I mean, I was telling them the story since the-- this. I tried to raise them like I was raised. My son-in-law was in business with me. And he decide to become a minister. He is in a study in Oregon in the Multnomah Bible College.

So you have a daughter and?

Daughter, one daughter, and two grandsons. And you see, I was in-- two years ago in Jerusalem. I received a medal of valor. And they planted the tree on the Avenue of the Righteous. And this is my treasure that I leave to my grandchildren.

Thank you.

Thank you.