

Of the interview with Martha Mandel. When you got to London, Mrs. Mandel, and even when you were in Berlin, what kind of contact were you able to maintain with your family? Were they all still in the other town?

When I left the 31st of July, 1939, my sisters told me, I told you before, don't-- we don't say goodbye. We will come in a few days. We have our visa. I never heard of my family again.

Only via my friend in Stockholm, I wrote to them. And I know in what concentration camp they were. And he sent to-- sent up the-- my letter to Treblinka or whatever. I never heard whether they got the letter or anything.

So once you got to London, all contact with your family was over?

Absolutely. No family-- we had a wonderful house, and grounds, and everything, and money-- not millionaires, but they could-- could-- every-- Hitler took everything. He came to my brother-in-law, who had a department store. Do you give up the department store or not, with a pistol on his breast.

There weren't many choices of what to do, were there?

If you said no-- he did not get one penny. But he was able to go out. But how? He had a ticket to south France, southern France, to go to Argentine, a plane ticket and everything, plane ticket to Paris, from Paris to south, to take-- not a plane. They went-- by boat, they wanted to go, everything paid for.

When they came in Düsseldorf, you know the city, to the place, you cannot go on a plane. And they had to-- they knew the boat would leave on a certain date. They had to be in southern France. So they went by train. But at least you could go by train to Paris out of Germany, and from Paris by plane to south-- southern France. But the boat, with that ticket paid for, left without them because they could not come by train there.

Tell me a little more about your experiences in London. It must have been very frightening because you were doing something you had never done in your life.

Very.

You didn't know about your own status there. And you didn't know what was happening to your family. So tell me something about your life there.

I was the most unhappiest person in the world. That's all I can say.

So you came from this experience in Berlin that had awakened all of your senses--

Wonderful, yeah.

--into being-- feeling like not a real person in London? Yeah. But then I came to know there were some acquaintance there. They had an apartment. And they let me come at least to take a shower once a week. I could not take a shower at my place. Everything was frozen. All the pipes are outside the house in a very wonderful room.

I don't know what they did, the people. I didn't care. I never asked. I had at least once a week a shower. You know, I come from Berlin. Every day, I was cleaned and shaved, every day. No more. I became dirty and filthy for my standards.

You felt as if your life was turned upside down?

Upside down. I cannot even say this word. This is not life.

During that period of time, did you have any connection with anything ideological that sustained you in any way,

religious or political ideology that gave you strength?

Well, of course, I was interested in politics, what was going on. In London, at least, I could hear what was going on in horrible Germany, you know. But of course, I never went to-- I had no money to go to the theater. \$0.92 a week I made. You can imagine how much I could spend for theater tickets.

Did you have any view of Zionism at that time?

Of?

Of Zionism.

Zionism?

Yes.

In my family, no.

So that wasn't anything meaningful to you?

But of course, I had friends from Germany. They wanted me to come to Israel.

But I was frightened. I was frightened to go to Israel. I didn't know. And I didn't know the language. I said no. But they wanted to come to save my life already in Germany when I-- before I left for England, they wanted me to come.

I was frightened. I was frightened to leave my family and everything and a new world, unknown to me. No, I didn't go.

When you were a child and you went to the Jewish school--

The Hebrew school.

--the Hebrew school with your family, was that a typical thing that Jewish children did in your town or in the surrounding area?

It absolute was the only way. Maybe we could have gone to a Catholic school, but no-- all the children went in the first three years into the Jewish school, elementary school. And we, of course-- my parents had the most-- had 12 children. All the other families had two-- one, two, or three children. We kept up the school, my family.

When you first heard the reports about the mass murders of Jews, did you doubt them? Or did you believe them right away?

I believed everything because I heard via London horrible things already.

Did the people--

And I lived my life listening to the London in the evening because in the street, there were cars going by. And they could find out that somebody is listening to a foreign radio. How they knew it, I don't-- I risked every night my life in Berlin by listening to London, to London radio, only for the news.

Never did I dare to anything about what I'm interested in and everything else, but for politics, you know. And I risked every night my life. But I wanted to know what was going on in Germany because I didn't know anything. I heard it via London.

And you believed it even when you were still in Berlin?

I believed everything what London gave. Yeah.

Tell me something about your husband.

A wonderful--

Musician?

Hmm?

A musician, did you say?

Yes, musician, a composer, a writer, an artist, everything nice and nothing to do with politics or anything. His life was in him. And he had wonderful people. And he was a teacher at a-- not-- as a head teacher of a Jewish school in Bochum in Westphalia [INAUDIBLE]. With his free time, he was reading, writing, studying. Wonderful, wonderful man.

When you got to America and after the war was over, you eventually knew that you heard nothing further from your family. Were there other relatives that survived--

One of--

--cousins, aunts, uncles?

At first, my sister, who went from southern France to South Africa with her family survived.

One sister?

The old-- my older sister. My younger sister survived concentration camp, would you believe it? She was kept for six months by Christian friends. She-- for six months, she did not leave the house. She never got-- nobody in the building knew that my sister was living with this-- with her Christian friends there. When friends came to the house, she was in her room. Never, nobody, their best friends didn't know that my sister was living with them. This is how they saved her life.

Then my sister did not want to live longer with them. And they knew if the Nazis would find out they were helping with a Jewish woman, they would have been killed all together, all three of them, my sister with her friends. My sister gave herself up. She went back to her apartment. And a short time later, she was in concentration camp.

So you have-- had one sister of all of the brothers and sisters who survived?

Concentration camp. And the sister in South Africa, she was not in concentration camp. She survived in South Africa, in Cape Town.

Ah. And did you see her?

Oh, yes. She came here in 1956 with her husband. And my sister came with her husband. And they spent a few weeks here with me here. When we still came with, we were the three survivors of all-- of the Holocaust.

The sister who survived the concentration camp, where did she then live? In the United States or where?

She lives now in Germany. She had her husband there. And her husband was not Jewish. Her husband never slept in their apartment. My sister was with these Christian friends. And he slept every night with other friends. He never went back to the apartment, a wonderful, wonderful man. He was like a brother to me.

Anyway, when my sister came out of concentration camp, she lost 75 pounds, couldn't eat any food, only baby food. She lived on cooked potato peels and worked from 6:00 in the morning until I don't know at night, I think about at 7:00 or 8:00 at night, and lived on cooked potato peels.

When she left concentration camp, I don't think she remembered me. She had no memory. Can you imagine? She did not remember that I am-- I'm in America. But her husband contacted me in America. And this way, we got together. We came together. But my sister took a lot-- more than a year to be normal again, to be-- to take care of things.

And her only son, before she went to the Christian friends who took her, she put in a orphan-- in a home, orphan home under a different name. And he had the feeling that his parents do not want him. He was five years old, that they threw him out. They don't want him anymore. He had a different name and everything, no connection with his parents.

And when the war was over, and of course, my sister knew where he was, he did not even want to come. He didn't want it, that he has no parents-- unbelievable story.

And it's happened to so many families.

In my family. And the boy is now a man of 50. He come to visit me. And he's very-- he's helping me whatever he can. He is a wonderful, wonderful boy. He has three children.

Lives were totally destroyed. What else do you think should-- that you would like to say that I have not asked you about this experience?

I didn't get your question.

What else would you like to record that we have not discussed about this experience?

I only try to-- I had wonderful Christian friends, one aristocrat, a very-- lived in Berlin in the boulevard, just like in a mansion, you know. And she said, Hitler cannot stay. He will lose. Stay here. Do not go away. She did not want to let me go. She loved me. And I loved her. But I did-- thank god I did not listen to her. I wouldn't be here anymore.

You knew. Somehow, you knew that it was all true and that--

Because a Nazi told me. The Nazi told me, get out as quick as possible. Terrible is planned for the Jews. I didn't tell her, my wonderful, wonderful friend. And after the war, I got in contact with them-- I tried to-- through a friend of mine who was in Berlin, a friend from Philadelphia, and a doctor who was stationed in Berlin. And I gave him the address, Trabener Strasse in Grunewald, of my friend.

He say-- he said, this street does not exist anymore. And there are no houses. That means they are bombed out, bombed out from the war. The street does not exist and the name does not exist-- and wonderful, wonderful people, Christian people.

So you never heard from them, you don't know what happened?

He made all inquiries about the name. Nobody knew of them. No contact-- wonderful, wonderful, wonderful people. They were so nice to me. And they wanted to help me. But they couldn't. Hitler was stronger than they are.

How do you consider your whole experience as having the strength to get yourself out of Berlin, to know that you had better leave, not to depend on other people, to know to get out of London to come to America-- to what do you attribute that strength, that survivor instinct?

I was thinking of my family. From London, I could not help them. From America, I thought I could help them. And I wanted to know from my-- of older-- and from my sister in South Africa. And everything I had-- from here, I was free.

I could contact the whole world. I could-- my friend in Sweden, I could contact. I couldn't do anything there, where I was. Everything was closed in London. I had no money and everything was. I thought, here, I could work, and I could make money, I could make connections, and help as much as I can.

The time that you came to America is very surprising, in 1941, just as the war was about to come to America. And there must not have been very many people who were able to go from London to the United States.

Yes. Yes, of course.

That was miraculous.

It was very, very lucky. I-- we were very lucky that we could come from Canada, via Canada. And if the English people did not-- the Jewish English people were so nice to help us with the ticket and everything. And they said, you go on your own risk. Also, the airlines said, we do not promise you to take you to Canada alive.

All this, what-- the Nazis were shooting everywhere. And all the boats, all the ships were all grounded, hundreds of them, because there were mines there. So they didn't know it when Germany didn't send-- or the other countries-- no boats anymore, only via airlines. We went via Alaska. We didn't--

You flew in 1941?

--we couldn't go. Yeah.

You flew.

Via Alaska and from Alaska to Canada. We could not come to New York because we would have been shot. Was impossible. We never would have arrived in New York. We would have been shot in the air-- hundreds of airplanes and boats.

This is an amazing story.

I was lucky. And when we went on the plane, no promise that you arrive. You go on your own risk. We had nothing to lose but our lives.

Who did you come with-- your husband and who else?

With my husband, of course.

And were there other people?

Oh, of course. We were-- I told you we were standing in Central Station in New York. There were about 10 other couples in this-- that-- the same or very likely had the same experience as we had-- more or less. Some less, some more.

So it was really miraculous--

Yeah.

--that this group of people arrived safely in New York?

Absolute. We could not believe it that we are on safe ground. For years, we were not on safe guard every-- wherever we were, we could be shot. We could be taken. We could be taken or anywhere. But of course, in London, every night, the Germans came over. It is a miracle that we survived. Whole streets disappeared in London, this-- the German bombs there.

Yes.

A miracle that I am here and that I lived in a house here. The next house was bombed. Our house was standing up there. That's how it was. And everybody, of course, [? there. ?] Miracle, I don't know. Yeah.

But you see how important it is to preserve these stories, very important. Mrs. Mandel--