

And Nesse, I think that a good place to start would be at the point in the death march when you ended up in the barn. So if you could just take me to that part.

As I mentioned to you before, after the death march, we wound up in a place by the name of Chinów. We were pushed into a barn. I do not know how many of us were left dead on the road.

We may have been about 600 when we arrived there. But through the three weeks that we were there, there were more dead bodies in the hole that they dug than people in the barn. I tell you, it was just a terrible, terrible sight.

It came a point at that time when I really prayed to be one of the dead. But that will was different. March 10th, 1945, we were liberated by the Russian army. Actually, the Russians were taking over that area, and they found us there.

Describe to me some of the things that happened in that barn before they came.

Before we've liberated, or that particular day?

No, before you were liberated, leading up to that particular day.

Leading up, OK. When we came in, actually, to the barn, the Nazis ordered 50 women out. They gave them shovels. They told them to dig two giant holes.

We thought that we were being lined up and shot, as in previous times, that's what happened. But the Nazis had different plans for us. One hole served as a bathroom. They put some sticks on. And the other hole served as a grave.

Every morning, the dead were ordered to be taken out. They had to be undressed naked, because the clothing could be recycled. But the people were dumped into the hole.

Food was given to us, very little. You see, the Germans did not get, at that point, allocation food for us, for the prisoners. It was up to the village to supply some food for us. People just died from hunger, typhoid, dysentery.

I tell you, the mountain of bodies outside were dead. But the people inside looked dead, also. We were just living zombies, skeletons covered with skin.

And that particular day, before the Russians found us, in the morning, when the women that were in charge to take out the dead took the bodies out, came back into the barn, and said to us, no guards. Some of the women said, let's run to the village. Now, you know, we couldn't even walk. We were so sick.

Somebody else says, the SS men are hiding behind the barn. The minute we start to walk, they are going to shoot us. But we didn't know that there were no more guards. They ran away.

All day long, we sat in that barn, not knowing that our guards ran away. At night, we heard the sound of boots. Now, you know, for us survivors, the sound of boots, we shiver.

And then, we heard the Russian language, and there was the Russian Army. And the soldiers were telling us that they took over the area. They cannot stay with us, but in the next day or so, the backup units will come, the medics, and they will help us.

Now, that night, I tell you, I cried. I remember, I cried. And 50 years, almost, from March 10 until now, and I still don't know why I cried.

Did I cry because I felt sorry for me? Did I cry for my family that was so brutally killed? You know, it was just something that people said, you must have been very happy when you were liberated. But I remember

that sadness in my heart, not knowing, not having a home where to go to, not having a family.

So that night, they did basically nothing for you except tell you you were free?

Well, some soldiers gave us a bite of bread. And they said to us, we are afraid to give you food. If we give you too much, you may get very sick. So don't run to the village. Don't eat too much. We are going to come with the medics and tell you exactly.

Now, many people, right after liberation, died because they ate the whole slice of bread. Our stomachs were so shrunk, we couldn't digest anymore, too much food. So that's all they did that night.

Did you talk with the other girls or you just cried, or do you remember what other people did?

There were different reactions. Some people jumped for joy. Some people applauded. I heard applause to the Russians. The people that knew how to speak Russian had a little conversation, trying to find out if other places were liberated.

Don't forget, I was from 13 to 17, from the age of 13 to 17, ghetto concentration camp, labor camp, death march. I wasn't really educated enough to understand what was happening.

Now, describe to me your physical condition. What did you look like?

I tell you what I looked like. I weighed at liberation, 69 pounds. I'm not a very short lady.

I don't know how tall I was at that time, how much I grew during the war. I am 5' 4" and 1/2 now. Can you imagine 69 pounds?

My face was swollen, because I was beaten up severely on the death march. My hands had frostbite. My toes were black from frost.

I had one dress, a blanket that was wrapped around my body. Between the blanket and the dress my, body-body was wrapped around with straw. Somehow, we found straw on the ground, and we tried to insulate ourselves with it.

Let me tell you how I saw myself a few days after liberation. I have not seen myself in the mirror for almost two years. A few days after we were free, the Russians carried us bodily, actually, to the village, put us in little houses until the makeshift hospital was made.

And as I was laying in one of those houses on a straw sack, I saw a door with a window pane. And I thought, I'm free. Let me look outside, how the free world looks.

But as I looked through that little window pane, I saw a reflection-- a reflection of the most horrible thing that anyone can imagine-- a skeleton covered with skin, with big blue eyes. And as I turned around to look whose reflection I saw, I realized that was my reflection. This is how I looked.

Where did you think that you would go in those first few days?

A few days later, I was taken to that makeshift hospital that was set up in the little village of Chinów. I was there with typhoid, dysentery, treatment for my toes, my scar on my face, my wound at that time. I was there for six weeks. I was there the longest.

Then, the people that were in charge of the hospital called me in that little room that they called an office. And they said to me, now, you can leave. And I looked at them, and I said, where do I go?

I don't have anyone to call. I don't have a home. I don't have a country. I don't have a family.

So the person at the desk looked at the woman in back of me. And they asked her, where are you from? She

said from Lithuania. So they assigned me to be her ward. Because I was 17, I was under age, I became this woman's ward.

Stranger-- I never met her before. She was very kind. And that's how we started out on the journey, supposedly to go back to Lithuania.

You could not buy a ticket and travel wherever you wanted. You had to go where the trains were going to. Trains were traveling east and west.

Russian armies were traveling. They were taking all kinds of machinery from Germany towards Russia. And we had those freight trains.

Wait, you have to put in a new roll.

Camera roll two is up. Slate two is up.

[INAUDIBLE].

OK, let's back up, and tell me how the trains were going and how you--

OK, so I wound up with this lady whose ward I was. And we had to hop different trains, because there was no way that you could buy a ticket or go directly to Lithuania, where we were planning to go. Trains were going east and west and north. And those were trains that the Russian armies were moving from one site to the other, also freight trains that machinery was taken from Germany to Russia.

So we hopped those trains. They allowed us to do so. And we went from one place to another. We wound up in the city of Łódź, Poland.

By that time, it was May, already. I remember well because I was still on one of those trains when the war stopped. So I know it was May.

When we arrived in the small area of Łódź, that shelter that they had, there were already help set up. We human beings are really wonderful people. There was the Red Cross, Christian Relief, the HIAS are helping, giving us a little food, telling us where we can go for to sleep over. In that large room, I remember there were big posters around, where you were supposed to sign in and let people know where you're from in case somebody from your family comes through the place, they should know if you're there.

What did you find?

OK, one day, as I looked at that poster, and it said Lithuania, I signed my name somewhere on the bottom of that poster. All night, I was wondering. I said, who is going to bend down and read it on the bottom of the poster? Now you can see I was 17, but not too wise.

So the next morning, I was so anxious to get back to that shelter and to sign my name up high, where people could see it on eye level. And I was writing my name, Nesse Galperin-- that was my maiden name. A lady was standing next to me and asked me-- she said, which Galperin are you from Šiauliai? I don't remember you.

You see, we had a Galperin, a shoemaker, a tailor, and my parents had a dairy store. They sold butter and milk. And I told her, I said, I'm Galperin from the dairy business. Oh, she said, Nesse, that's you. You look so bad.

And when I looked at that woman, I recognized her. She was a strong lady before the war. But mentally, she was not quite there.

And the next thing out of that woman's mouth was, oh, I was with your mother in the camp. I said, how can that be? My mom was separated from me in the concentration camp.

She said, yes, they took a little bit stronger women to another camp. And she's right now in a little shelter in this and this small village, near the border of Poland and Germany. When I heard that, I couldn't believe the woman, because I knew she wasn't mentally stable. But still, I thought, maybe it is true.

So I go to my lady whose ward I am. Her name was Hannah. I said, Hannah, we have to go back-- back to the German border.

She said, you're crazy, child. Who goes back? Everybody goes forward. I said, but somebody told me that my mom is alive, and she's there in that village.

She said, I'm not going with you. She took out the piece of paper that stated that she's in charge of me. She tore it to pieces.

She said, now go to the desk. Tell them you're 18 years old. They'll give you another document. And if you want to go, go.

So everybody's traveling east. I'm traveling west. I arrived in that little village. I found the shelter. I walked in, and there were ladies from my hometown that I recognized.

And after they asked me who I was, because they could not recognize me, they said, oh, Nesse, your mom heard that you were alive and you were in Łódź. She went to look for you. Can you imagine?

She went one way. I came the other. Took me about two or three weeks-- I really don't remember-- to get back in Łódź, where I was reunited with my mom.

Tell me about the moments of getting reunited with your mom.

I tell you exactly how it was, because I'll never ever forget that. When I came to Łódź the second time, that is looking already for my mom, there was already an organized committee at the train station. There were women that came and actually bodily showed you where the shelter was. And there was a redheaded woman from my home town standing there at the train. And when she saw me, she said, Nesse, I'm going to take you to your mother.

I said, how do you know me? She said, yes, we heard that you were here and you went to look for her. And we thought you would come back.

She took me up two flights or three flights of stairs. I don't remember anymore. Here, I could hardly move my feet, because they were frozen. I don't know how I walked up those stairs.

She knocked on the door. She said, Mrs. Galperin, I brought you your daughter. And the woman left.

And what I remember, the door opening up, and there was no lights. I don't know why. Maybe it was still bombed there. It was a candle burning. And there was my mother.

She looked frail, but she looked the same. She, from the age of 45 to 46, she didn't change, really. But she did not recognize me.

My head was still shaved. My face was still swollen, wrapped around with rags. And at that point, I still had very terrible clothes on. Some Russian soldier gave me an old coat. I had a pair of men's shoes on.

And I just remember her saying, OK, take off your coat. And here's my mother. I was so anxious to hug her. And after I took off all that junk from me, she said, I did not recognize you, my child.

And needless to say, we were very lucky. So few found mothers and found children. I was really very lucky.

Now, I want to go back and ask you specific things about getting liberated and getting disinfected. Did they

give you a toothbrush? Tell me about little things like that.

[LAUGHS] OK, I'll tell you. You know, I have a little bit of a problem with the word "liberation." You know, we are grateful to every soldier that came in, whether it was French or English or Russian or our wonderful American soldiers that came in and talked to us like human beings.

But really, did anybody send armies to liberate us? They found us there. Whether it was in the American zone or the French, they found that in those camps.

Now in my particulars, I told you, the first units went through. They really gave us crumbs of bread, I remember just, and saying, we don't have ourselves. And we don't want to give you too much so you don't get sick.

Now, as I told you before, the next day, the few that were a little bit healthier had walked to the village. I really don't know whether it was a mile or a mile and a half. We could see the village. It was within walking distance.

I personally could not walk. A Russian soldier carried me on his arms and brought me to that little house. After being in that little house for two days, where we were given a little bit of food-- they stopped in every house and gave a little bit of soup a few times a day-- then, that makeshift hospital was created.

I remember they brought me into the hospital. I remember them shaving my hair, all over my body. I remember a burning sensation of DDT or some other kind of disinfectant. And then, I didn't remember anything else for three days. I was unconscious.

When I woke up, I remember the Russian doctor asking me my name, my age, where I'm from, and holding my hands and giving me hope that I'm free, that I'll be OK, that they'll take care of me. I don't remember any toothbrushes. I don't remember any luxuries at all in that little hospital.

We're about to run out, so we should put another roll on.