

[INAUDIBLE]. Coming up.

OK.

Did that help?

Yes. And this is Ms. Weber, mark one, row one.

OK, Irene, I want you to tell me a little bit about your impression of liberation-- how organized it was, or what it meant, what emotions you saw.

I was liberated in a strange way. I was in a prison in Czechoslovakia because I escaped twice. And finally, I was found and put in a prison. And that prison was totally abandoned by the Nazis, and we were locked in until the Red Cross, the International Red Cross, came in and liberated us and opened the doors for us.

But where I was liberated, were the Russians came in to liberate the place, that area in Czechoslovakia. So I was-- of course, they didn't just let us go, but we had health checkups, and we were deliced and sent to the hospital. The persons that needed it, needed hospitalization, were sent there.

I went to the hospital because I suffered from undernourishment, and I had the symptoms. And while I was in the hospital, something that really made me feel good. I saw the mighty German armies-- through the window in the hospital, I saw the German armies walking with their arms up and hands behind their heads, and the Russian soldiers that were leading them. And this is when I really believe that the war is over.

Tell me how organized it was. After the Red Cross came in, then what happened?

Then, as I said, they checked us out and put us in the hospital. And after that, I was on my own. I did not really-- I was not in any organization or under any supervision of any kind. I was free, and I was on my own in Czechoslovakia.

What I got from the Red Cross was a change of clothes and a little bit of money to tide me over. And from then on, I just had-- I did not want to go back to Poland. If I wished to go back, they would have arranged it.

But I didn't want to go back. I had no one to go back to, so I stayed in Czechoslovakia and I got-- I met a girlfriend, and we had a small apartment that was left by the Germans that escaped. And we stayed there.

And I wasn't quite well yet. I met that girl in the hospital. And I had to look for a way to make some money. And, of course, registered as a Czechoslovakian citizen. I totally rejected my Polish background at that time.

Was there much support do you think? Or did you feel abandoned?

I did not feel abandoned. I felt free. It was very hard for me. But the strange thing is I was not in contact with any other people that came from concentration camps. So I was really totally detached from everything. And I wanted to make a life for myself and go to school, and I had to work and learn on the job because I wanted to be free, and I wanted to be away from everything.

Tell me about the-- tell me the physical condition that you were in when you liberated, like what you looked like, how much you weighed.

I lost a lot of weight, and I had wounds in my mouth from undernourishment. So I was treated for that. And I had wounds inside my cheeks inside my mouth. So I was sick until-- I stayed in the hospital for probably close to two months.

Did they give you-- you said they gave you clothes. Do you remember the clothes?

Yes.

Tell me about them.

A pair of shoes, flat-heeled shoes, socks, a dress, that I remember distinctly-- quite nice. And that's about all. And the reason I could stay in that apartment and not need anything because everything was left behind-- linens and dishes and things like that. But I still wasn't quite well. I had the gastrointestinal problem for a long time.

Now, tell me about the occasion that you came to a displaced persons camp.

Well, after a while in Czechoslovakia, the Russians-- the Communist Party was voted into power. And as soon as this happened, we were not allowed to leave the country, and we were closed in. We had to have our IDs with us all the time.

And there was a lot of propaganda, how wonderful life is under communism. I was very young. Somehow I did not believe that, because I thought if I cannot leave, if I cannot travel and leave the country, then this didn't sound good to me. I was not very well informed on the ideology of the Communist Party, but I just didn't like it.

So I went to Prague. It was very difficult. I just left everything behind, and just take a little pack-- took a little package with my clothes and went to Prague and tried to get help to get out of the country. I was very determined to get out and be free. That was my-- this is what I wanted most, just to be free.

And there was an organization, underground organization, that smuggled people through the border. And I remember, we had-- I had to stay in Prague for a couple of days, and then we went on the bus. There were several people. We went on the bus to the border line. There we spent the night, which was absolutely horrible.

And at the certain time, we were told that now we can crawl under the fence and get to the other side to Germany, and that was the American zone of Germany. And I did that, and it was a terrible experience, this whole thing, because there were renegades and people that were not very kind to us. And we-- my life was in danger, really.

But once I crossed the border, there was a bus waiting for me, for several people, I guess. And then we were taken to Landsberg in Germany, in West Germany. And there, we were in a DP camp.

Tell me about that.

I didn't like it at all. Because, again, I was in the camp with bunk beds and crowded and lots of people and no privacy. And it just felt that I was in the camp again, except there were no Nazis around.

And I don't know how I met-- and people lived there. They were getting married. They had babies. And they didn't have babies while I was there, but they were pregnant. And I said, this is not the life. I can't do that. I cannot stay here.

Then I found out that one of our people somehow was on a farm several miles away from Landsberg. And I wanted to see her, and I walked several miles and met her. I knew her from concentration camp.

And I told her that I want to stay with her. I don't want to be in the camp again, that I want to stay with her if she will have let me stay until I find a different way, and that I can settle and do something, until I figure out what to do with myself. And so I did.

I picked up my little bundle again, and I went to the farm. And I was working there. It was a German family that owned the farm. And I was working on the farm a little to earn my keep.

And in the meantime, I found out that there is a place that there are several of our people settled in, and that's Rosenheim, not too far from Munich. And this is-- and I went there. I went to Rosenheim and I got a room-- two rooms,

actually, like a sitting room and a bedroom with a German family. And I paid them.

The only means of paying them I had is because the Jewish organization was sending us cheese-- those five-pound boxes of cheese and wine and cigarettes. And I didn't drink the wine, and I didn't smoke the cigarettes. I ate the cheese.

So I sold it-- and some kind of shortening. I sold all that to the Germans. I gave it to them, and they let me stay and gave me a few dollars-- marks, not dollars.

And I stayed there, and then I thought, now, the next step is I have to go to school. I have to do something. And I found out about-- that was ORT, I think, the American ORT. I went to Munich, and I found out about that. And I chose nursing school. And then I had to go to Ferenwald, which is a small town, a village. And this is where--

Wait. We have to put a--

[BEEP]

So I go over--

[INAUDIBLE] [two ?].

So I found out about the nursing school, and I went there. And I went to school. I practiced in the hospital. And after I finished, and got my diploma, I got a job in Poking, which was a DP camp also, but I lived in the nurse's quarters. And I was-- my patients were all survivors.

And many people were going on the aliyah to Israel. And we were taking care of-- taking blood and helping out that way. But I also had a steady job in the hospital, in the DP-- hospital for displaced persons.

Tell me about getting-- about these people who were going to Palestine.

They were people just like myself. Some of them young, some of them older people. They all wanted to go. And many of them did, I think. Of course, it was not yet-- Palestine was not yet the State of Israel. It was Palestine, and they actually were entering illegally the country that is now Israel. But nevertheless, they wanted to go there.

I probably would have gone to Israel after finishing my duty. I felt that I'm doing a very important job working as a nurse in a DP hospital. And then I thought that I may eventually go to Israel.

Tell me again about not wanting to stay in Landsberg and why.

Why I didn't want to stay-- I have to stress very much that the conditions were very crowded, no privacy of any kind, and too many people, and too much-- emotionally, it reminded me of the concentration camp, although it was not. And I realized that all along, of course. And I was free to leave whenever I wanted, which was great.

But the life in the DP camp was not for me. Lots of people were very happy that they had the safety of those camps. I just chose not to stay there.

And what about being in Germany? What about traveling in Germany? Were you afraid?

No. I was not afraid, because I kept still my place in Rosenheim, my room. And I was quite a distance away in school. So about once in two weeks, I used to come by train back to my place, knowing just-- I want-- I just had to know that I had a place on my own-- my privacy, that is so important to me.

And I traveled back to school-- throughout the whole night I was traveling, because the railroads were bombed, and I had to change two or three trains, and I slept while waiting for the next train. I just slept on the bench.

And the station master knew me, and he gave me some blankets, army blankets to cover myself up because it was cold. And I was never afraid. Somehow, I was never afraid. I was the only one at that station in the middle of the night because I traveled at night. I started late afternoon, and I traveled at night so I could be back in school in the morning.

And were you given enough support after liberation to help you start a new life? Or do you think more could have been done?

Well, I tried really to help myself as much as I could. When I was in Czechoslovakia, I didn't get any support. Because I left this whole network of help. So I didn't get it. But when I went back-- when I came to Germany, I did get the support. Whether it was enough or not, I really don't know.

From the perspective of those times, it probably was very helpful. But I thought that I cannot continue doing this forever. I wanted to be able to make some life and future for myself. And when I was working in the hospital, of course, there was some money that I got, and I was paid for my job. And also, we still had some aid from the United States, the Jewish organizations, the joint organization and the UNRRA and such.

So that was-- and yes, I did travel in Germany. And I just simply did not have any fear at all. Because I felt that what I went through during the years of war and concentration camp, and especially prison, and after escaping, then I had nothing to be afraid of.

Thank you. We have to now record just the sound of the room. We have to just be quiet for about 30 seconds.