OK. Today is February 7, 2001. We are at the Peninsula Temple Beth El. And we're interviewing Marie Brandstetter. My name's Peter Ryan, interviewer. Anne Green Saldinger is doing the videotape.

Could we begin by my asking you where and when you were born?

I was born in Kalisz, Poland. And you want to know my date, too? In January 20, 1933.

And where is Kalisz?

Kalisz is-- well, it's in the part of Poland what used to belong to Germany a long time ago.

So it's western Poland.

Yes, it's between Poznan, somehow, and Lodz. That's the way I see it. I'm not exactly sure I know how to explain it. But it's-- you have to go on the-- I don't know whether it's west or south. But that's the only way I know how to explain that.

And how big a-- was it a city or a town?

Yes, it was a city. Actually, I was born in Blaszki, in the city of little town Blaszki between-- that is between Kalisz and Lodz. But we-- after I was born, we moved to the city of Kalisz. So my brother was born there, too.

So I just forget to say that I'm born in Blaszki. That's a small little tiny town. That's where most of my families were born there, in that little town.

How many were in your family?

In my immediate family was my brother, my mother, and I. That's just four. But my mother comes from 14 children. And my father comes from eight boys and two girls.

And what did your father do?

The older brothers that were in Poland, they owned a bus company. And that bus was going from Kalisz to Lodz. That's what he did.

Did he own it or did he drive also or what?

He didn't drive it. No, he owned it. But he used to take sometimes go through from the office of Kalisz to the office of Lodz and sometimes gone for a whole day. And most of the time, he was on the bus helping whatever he needed to do there. And that's what I remember him doing.

And what kind of a lodging did you have there?

We didn't have a home, but it was an apartment-like. I think that was an apartment-like. And we lived right-- in back of our apartment was a big river. And it was the river-- oh, just skip my mind. I have it in my book.

And I crossed the river. I can always remember seeing a jail. And to the right of that apartment I remember was a beautiful, beautiful big park that we spent quite a bit in Kalisz.

You were older than your brother?

Yes. I am two and a half years older than my brother.

What were your parents' names?

My mother's name was Ida Zelver. And her maiden name was Messer. My father's name was Chaim Zelver.

She came from a family of 14 children.

Yes.

And where was she age-wise in the 14?

Oh, that's a difficult question. I never could find out from all of them. I know that her brother that died after her, he was one of the oldest that survived. She was-- I think she-- no, I'm really not sure exactly.

But she was not the youngest, and she was not the oldest. The oldest were all-- they all perished. But she was one somewhere in the middle.

And your father, he came from a family of eight?

My father came a family of eight. And he was the youngest in the family-- a family of eight boys and two girls. But he was the youngest of the family. Yes.

There were eight boys and--

And two girls.

So there was a family of--

Of 10.

I see. What do you remember about your early life there?

Well, I know that I had a happy life. It was a wonderful life. We had a very big family, very close family. We all used to meet on Saturdays and go to that beautiful park. We always get dressed up. And I think I was the apple of my father's eye.

And I didn't want to have a brother even before he was born. I used to tell, I don't want a brother. I'm going to throw him in the ocean-- in the river on the balcony, off the balcony, but was very happy after he came. It was a one-bedroom apartment. We were very happy. I really cannot remember anything else that wasn't not but happy occasions.

My father was a very soft-spoken person, very gentle person. When we used to go out on Saturdays, he made sure that Sam's little shoe's on right, my pigtails would be with the right bows on it, and my shirt would be buttoned and all dressed would be-- I always was dressed up like a little doll. Yes.

And we always used to take a walk in the park. And they always took the same-- that was the enjoyment of Saturday walking into the park. Now-- and I also remember when my brother was born. I'm two and a half years older than him.

But I remember the day because my uncle, one of my mother's brothers which was very close with my father, he-- my mother had my brother at home. And he told me that I'm going to have a little brother. Let's go. We're going to wait for your father on the corner and tell him the news that he was born. And I remember just like I would be there now. And I was two and a half.

Was that exciting, to tell him the news?

Yes. We were standing on the corners when he got off the bus to come home. I can even remember where he walked, the street that he walked to our house. If they would take me back and put me there on that street, I would go directly to

the place. And he loved me very much. And he picked me up and carried me back to the house.

And my uncle and him were walking together. And he was all excited about having another child. My uncle, that particular one, my mother's brother, he was the one that was one of the survivors in this family.

One of the few?

One of the few just-- but he went to Russia. So they stayed in a camp in Russia.

Now, did you go to school at all in that time?

Yes, I was in a preschool. They used to call those-- in Europe, they call those kindergarten. But it was a preschool. It's--

Before formal school.

Before formal school. Right.

Was your family Orthodox?

No.

No.

My grandpa-- I never met my grandpa. My grandpa from my mother's side was a shammas in the temple. And I just received from them a picture. The same cousin that gave me my other pictures, he sent me a picture of my grandpa-- which I've never seen either-- is from my father's side.

I never did ask him what he does. It never entered my mind to say, what did you do? So I don't know what he did.

How far away was your father's business from where you lived?

In the same city. In the same city. And if one of the buses would come by, they would all gather in front of the office. I have pictures of many in front of the office. And they might have had an office in Lodz, too, because this is where their destination was. So I don't know much about Lodz. But I do know that this--

So really between those two cities.

Only between those two cities.

Only between--

On the way-- sometimes I remember he was taking me. That's all before the war. He would take me along-- and I'd love to go with him on the bus-- and drop me off in Blaszki where I was born, where a lot of our family lived, and picked me up on the way back, because I even remember how that city looked.

It was one stop and one stop only at the time. And he would drop me off. And my family would be there picking me up. And I spend with the cousins a day. And then on the way back home, he'd pick me up. That's how that route ran.

So you were about five years old when the war started?

1933, I was a little over five, almost five and a half.

Five and a half.

Was there much of a Jewish community in--

Very big Jewish community. Yes, Kalisz had a very big Jewish community. I have a book on that. My aunt sent me-- now, in my older years, somebody sends me that. And somebody sends me this from Kalisz, too. And then when I was in Yad Vashem, I read up on Kalisz-- very big Jewish community.

Now, you weren't Orthodox. But you were religious?

I don't think I would call it that we were. I don't know. My grandma was. My mother's mother was. My mother's sisters and my mother's-- and my mother, they always believed. They're very good believers.

And they traditionally lighted the candles on Sabbath. But I don't think my father, my father himself, was the kind that would go to the temple every Saturday or Friday night or whatever. No. Later on in the years, my mother married another man that was very religious like that. But we--

Your father wasn't very religious.

No, I don't think so.

And did some of the brothers and sisters live in the same community?

All of them. In that particular apartment complex, my mother had one sister and one brother living in the same complex. And my aunt went back here after the war. Actually, she went back in 1990 again.

And that place, that particular apartment where we lived, it was taken down. And there was an office put into it-- so next to the park. But three brothers and sisters, they lived together in it, two sisters and one brother in that particular apartment complex.

Do you have any memories of the outbreak of the war?

Yes, I have-- I just remember almost everything about it. I know that my father went to work. I do remember one thing, though, before the war broke out. I used to love to sleep with them in bed. And my father was a smoker.

And he would lay in the dark in the bed. And I would lay next to him. And he would like to listen to the radio, what goes on, because everybody kind of expected a war. They hoped it wouldn't happen. And I remember he would lay there, listen to the last-- 9 o'clock would be the last news.

And one night, I remember him saying. He says, this is all very well, he says. I'm translating it from Yiddish. But this is not going to help the situation. I hope there's not going to be a war, but there's not much chance of not being one.

And I remember as a child, it just lays in my head that he took his cigarette, put it out, and went to sleep. I used to be a spoiled little one. I liked to go in between them and sleep, until they put me in the bed across the room.

When did that happen?

All the time when I was little.

Oh, I see.

My brother was-- he was staying in his crib. But me, I always-- well, also, I had a bedwetting problem. So as soon as I would wet the bed and I fall asleep my own place, and they would have to change it. So they let me stay for a while.

And that really contributed a lot of problems in my life later on during the war. Really, I was punished for that and so forth. But this is later on.

If you liked to sleep between them, that gave you an incentive to wet the bed, didn't it?

No. I would wet my own bed. And that's when I used to come in. I would say, I don't want to-- yeah.

If you wet your own bed, then you got to sleep with them.

Maybe. Maybe. Who knows? Not analyst-- I couldn't say anything about that.

Tell me what you remember about the outbreak of the war.

One morning in 1938, September-- I remember September the first, I think-- my father went to work. My mother said goodbye to him.

And then the next thing, she turned on the radio. And she heard that Hitler invaded Poland. It was unbelievable. Everybody was-- she was talking to everybody. And everybody was scared to death. My husband's going to go to the war.

It was chaos. I remember it was chaos. I didn't get a word. I didn't get any attention that day, because also there was somebody at the door and delivering a telegram, I think, telling that my father has been drafted to the Polish army.

And unfortunately, he was the only one, only one of all the families. From my mother's side, from my father's side, he was the only one because he was the youngest of all the families at the time. He was--

Do you know how old he was then?

Yes. I don't know how old he was then, but I could add it. But he was born in 1905. No, my mother was born in 1908. He was born in 1905. Yes.

Anyway, he went to work. And my mother was-- she started crying because she heard that he was the only one that was going to be taken into the army. She cried all day long. And I couldn't figure this at the time out, this whole situation. I was five and a half, almost.

And she couldn't wait for him to come home and tell him. She wishes he wouldn't come home. She kept saying, I wish he wouldn't come home so he can run away-- at least save himself. But when he came home and she told him and she told him, you know what? They don't even have records of you.

I'm sure you're not even registered. Let's just take the children and run away. Let's save ourselves, because the news was very bad. And he said, no. He says, I can't do it. I need to go serve in the army. But she pleaded with him and pleaded with him.

He had two days to get ready. And I'll never forget the day he finally left. She cried. I cried. And I kept telling him, don't go.

And now, he said, I want you to take the children. And I want you to save the children. And I want you to run. And wherever you can, hide until this is over. He says, it won't be long. It will be over. That's all they ever hoped. It will be over.

And he would not give in on this situation to tell what mother suggested, to run off. And they would never know the difference because that's what everybody did if they didn't want to serve in this army, knowing they're going to get killed, anyway.

Well, my father left. And she said she's not going to budge out of the house. She wouldn't budge from the house until he came back. Well, two days later after he left, two days later, he was still laying out in a field. They were all the people

that came to register and be put with uniforms.

The war was going on. How long did it take for Poland to be taken? It wasn't that long. He came home. And they didn't even know he was gone.

So she says, now, let's do it. Let's do it. He came home. He shaved. He took a shower. And he went back, because he was afraid.

He kept saying to her, if the Germans are not going to get us, then somebody's going to get me from the Polish army. And I'll be dead one way or the other if I don't do what they-- he was not brave in this situation. So he went back.

And she told him, I'm not moving from this house, she says. And this is how it was. We stayed there until 1940. But a lot of things happened in between.

He saw the bombed-out city. We went to Lodz. We ran to Lodz. We took the family bus and all the family we could put in. We ran to Lodz. Then they bombed--

Voluntarily?

Yes, voluntarily. We took one of our buses and put the family, as many of the family we could get in-- ran to Lodz.

This is after the war is over?

No, this is still during the war, while they were bombing our city, while my father was in the army already. And then we came to Lodz-- didn't have where to stay. And they started coming there bad. So all the family, we just went right back home.

When we came home, that's when we found everything shattered and bombed, but not as bad in our city as it was in Lodz. But on the way driving home from Lodz on the buses, we saw-- that was only, what, maybe a week or so later. We saw all these soldiers walking like tired and broken down and shattered and all these horses laying on the roads.

They didn't have highways in those days, just horses, the horses that they were shot during the fight. And there was walking by a battalion of soldiers. We found out later on that one of them was my father. We were afraid to open the door.

But he was afraid to-- he didn't know who was inside, because we were hiding. Everything was-- the windows on the bus were kind of covered so they wouldn't see who's inside if it were Germans. And later when we corresponded, which comes very much later-- when we were in Russia, we corresponded with him. We found out that he saw the bus that day.

But he could have run off there. And again, he didn't take a chance with this thing. He came back. We were ready. Well, that's the time he saw us. And where they were going, I don't know. I cannot tell you. But I do know they looked like they just went through a very heavy battle.

And inside the bus, I do remember somebody saying from the family, I hope-- I wonder if Chaim is between these soldiers. I wonder if Chaim is between the soldiers. But nobody would open up. They covered these windows in the bus. Only the bus driver got to see how to drive. Nobody else could see out much, unless you peeked out.

Well, this is when we came back to Poland. And again, my mother stayed on and waited. But there was one sister of hers which is still alive today. She was 18, almost 18, then, Sophie.

She was also blonde, just like myself and my mother and my brother. And we were the only ones from the family left in town. And she kept telling, we have to go. We have to go. But my mother says, no, I'm going to sit here until Chaim comes home.

All the other people had left from the family?

Everybody had left from the families. They all left. Wherever they went, I don't know at the time. But they were all-- they left the town so they would not be prosecuted from the Germans.

Well, but we just didn't sit home waiting for dad. My mother stayed on that corner which I mentioned to you before. She stayed there with us in one hand, my brother in the other hand, 24 hours a night-- I mean a day.

Waiting for your father?

Waiting for my father to get off that and come back home, until my brother got very sick. He had the mumps. And in those days, mumps, I understand they got infected. They got infected and had to be operated so the pus would be taken out and whatever.

And nobody-- she was afraid to go to anybody. She took a chance. She went to this one doctor. He said he'll do it. He was not Jewish, but he said he'll do it.

But she has to promise to take the child right that night out of here and out of town so the Germans won't find out, because we didn't look Jewish. That's why we could stay. Nobody bothered us.

The people in the town knew, though, didn't they?

Yeah, the people in the town, the Polish people in the town, knew. But at that time, I suppose they still didn't tell on each other. But there were no Jews in town left. And we--

And the doctor was not supposed to treat--

A Jewish person. Right. And he knew that we were Jewish. So he made mom promise that she'll take us right out of town, out, so he doesn't get caught on that. Well, she did.

We didn't take much. I only had about five dresses or six dresses, seven petticoats underneath. And she even took a chalice. And she took some silver dollars that she pinned it between our legs.

And she put all these dresses on me and all these petticoats because I could walk. My brother, after surgery, he couldn't. And my aunt was with us. And she took things.

But I remember that particular thing that she took, what she carried beside my brother, was a chalice. She had a-- I'm sure I pronounce it right. It's a [HEBREW], what you drink wine out of. She got for her wedding-- how do you say it? A--

Chalice.

Chalice. There you go. And she wanted to hold on to this thing because her parents gave her that for her wedding.

That meant something to her.

It meant something to her. But it came in handy later on.

Now, the aunt, the aunt is the sister of your mother?

Mother. That was my mother's next-to-youngest sister. The youngest sister was already gone. That comes later.

This one didn't have a boyfriend or anything, so she stayed with us. And all the time, she stayed with us. When we

came-- when we went at night, we caught-- my mother said, we're going to catch a train. Wherever it's going, we're going out that way. We don't know. We can't ask where it's going.

There are soldiers all over the train station. We're going to get on this train and sit down. And wherever the train takes-- if it takes you to Warsaw, fine. If it doesn't take you to Warsaw, wherever it will go, we take. We can't stand on this train station with him being--

She didn't really have a destination in mind.

No. But she just wanted out of the town. She was scared.

Now, when you say there were soldiers on the platform, were they German soldiers or Polish?

All German soldiers. No, all German soldiers.

So the Germans had already occupied the city?

Yes, they already occupied the city. Yes. And--

Did you know if they had begun to pick up Jewish people?

Yes, because when we were sitting in-- when we were staying in town, we saw them throwing down pamphlets, propaganda. We saw them throwing candies in people. And the candies would be poisonous. My mother wouldn't let me touch anything. That's-- holding Sam on one side and me on the other side, that was her life. And my aunt was right there with us.

But we left and we got on this train. It happened to be-- we didn't know where the train was going. But it was going to Warsaw. And the whole train-- it seemed to us at that time that the whole train was full of Gestapo and German soldiers. And we didn't speak Yiddish. At that time, I couldn't speak Yiddish.

My mother only spoke Polish to us. And my and only spoke Polish, which was fortunate there, too. And now, my mother needs to change my brother's dressing because he told her within so many hours, you better take it because-- so it won't get infected again, to clean it. And she started taking off his bandages when one of these soldiers walked up to us.

And he said-- he took my brother, picked him up, and started walking away. And my mother is just-- she just was beside herself. She didn't know what to say. And my aunt kept telling her, don't say anything. But I ran after the soldier. Give me back my brother. I want my brother back.

In Polish, I was talking to him. And he didn't turn around. And I followed him all the way wherever he was going. And that's when he went into another car, set my brother down on a bench somewhere there, like a table, and started changing his dressing-- changed his whole dressing, picked him back up.

And I'm screaming there constantly. I want my brother back. I want my brother back. And I'm just there with him. He took my hand, my brother on his arm, and brought him right back to my mom's-- put him on my mom's knee, on her leg.

It was unbelievable. She says, I can't believe it. I can't believe it that they didn't know we were Jewish. It's like a miracle, this whole thing. I didn't have to do anything. Well, this was one of-- I think it was like a miracle, because if they would have found out, we would have not been-- he couldn't have done these things.

We arrived in Warsaw. That's when we were already on the road. We arrived in Warsaw. We could not get off that train. The soldiers were not allowed to get off. We were not allowed to get off because they were transporting Jews already like cattle.

And there was crying, and there was screaming. And there was screaming from those little windows like you see in the cattle car. And it was absolutely chaos on there. And we could just look out the window and do nothing. And the soldiers were not allowed to get off, because the transports were going as fast as they were filling these Jews up in there.

So you can see it was already quite late. It was already late in 1940 when we were there. And they didn't let us off. And it was terrible to see this. And I didn't understand much at the time.

When I think back-- you see, all this came back to me later on in my life. It was there, but I remember it just like out of a movie, that these people were screaming. And the Germans were screaming, schnell, mach schnell, mach schnell. You dirty Jew, they were calling. I can't think of it. I speak German. I can think of any, because it gets me very excited when I talk about this.

But nighttime came and everything went quiet. When the dark came, everything went quiet. There were no more trains. They all left. They let us off the train. The soldiers got off, and then we got off.

And now, my mother says, I don't know what to do. She says to my-- and I don't know where. It was dark. Warsaw was bombed. So we don't know what street or where to go. She says, I really don't know.

So she just started walking with us. She was holding on to-- they would change off, my aunt and my brother. And I would walk with them along. It was dark. We heard this buggy with a horse tramping and heard the noise.

So my aunt says, let me do the talking. She stopped him, this man with that horse and buggy. And she said to him, this is my sister. And one child is sick, and the other one can't walk. And we don't know where we are at the moment. Do you think you could tell us where we can go at least find some shelter overnight, my sick nephew and all that? Excuse me.

And he said, OK. He knew that we were Jewish. I know. My aunt-- later on, we talked about it. He knew that we were Jewish, because usually Poles don't walk around in the middle of the night to get-- and we had no choice. So he took us.

And he drove us up to a hotel. And that hotel when we walked in-- and he said to us, good luck. We knew that we were betrayed right there, because we walked in and they were singing and having a good time at the bar, soldiers, all German soldiers and some Gestapo, too, with the higher rank.

We walked in like-- my mother, my aunt and my holding onto my-- my aunt was holding on to me, my mother holding on to my brother. And we walked in. And this one soldier comes out of the bar.

It's like yesterday. He comes in. He says, what can we do for you? And my mother says, I need some shelter for these children. She says, it's dark outside and I don't know where I am, all done in Polish.

And he tried-- and he's German. But I think my mother must have understood because Yiddish and German are so close. So anyway, she answered him in Polish. He took out some candies from his pocket. And he gave one to me, and then he gave one to my brother.

And my brother just kept holding it. He didn't want-- he was not well yet. And my aunt kept pinching me. Don't eat it, because we knew already what candies can do these days. And maybe he knows we are Jewish.

We never took a chance on-- she never took a chance with her children, my mother. That's the wonderful person she was. And my aunt, too, when she was-- well, actually, my aunt now, I think of her as my other mother because she was only a few years older than me. But that's how I think of her.

And she says, don't eat this because it might be poison. But he didn't want to go away. He just stood there and stirred and stirred and stirred. And we were just standing there. And it was just my mother having that child in her hand was heavy. And we didn't get anywhere.

So my aunt took my brother's candy and she ate it. And then she says, go ahead. Eat it. We can't help it. He won't go away. So we ate it. It turned out to be OK.

Now, he says to us, I will call somebody to find you someplace to stay overnight. But you make sure you're out there in the morning. And my mother said, yes.

So he called the clerk over from somewhere and says, find these people someplace to stay overnight. And the place that they gave us was like a closet. I have a walk-in closet now looks just like that.

In the same hotel?

In the same hotel. It was pitch dark out there. We didn't even know if we were on a street. Everything was bombed out so we didn't know what street we're on. And he told us-- told them to take care of us and give them something to eat. They look like they need something to eat.

And this is what they did. My mother-- and the rest of the night, she didn't go to sleep. My brother and I went to sleep. But I understand the rest of the night was very, very quiet.

But before we went to sleep, she was telling me, you better go to sleep because we have to leave here very early. It's going to be dark when we leave here. And we're going to go-- a lot of walking to do.

But it was daylight. And it was wintertime, though. And it was quiet in the hotel, no more singing-- was everything quiet.

Any idea what month this was?

I think it was sometimes February or-- it was cold still, February or March, still wintertime, because whatever comes up next--

1940.

1940. 1940. Yes. The war was almost-- was over with Poland. They already had captured Poland.

From there that morning, she woke us up. We got dressed. We were still with those heavy petticoats and the heavy everything still on us. So it kept us warm. And we were going.

And she said that we're going to go until we find somebody-- she said to find somebody to tell us what we can do. Well, they knew my aunt was young. They knew they're very close to the River Bug. And the River Bug-- across the Bug, if you can get yourself across, the other side is Russia. So actually--

She knew that.

Yeah, she knew that. My aunt knew that. So we know that Russia is divided between-- at that time when we were going-- I haven't been back to Poland and I don't care to-- we didn't have too far to go to get to some sort of a border there and to get to that River Bug.

And from there, we always hoped that somebody will be there to take us across to Russia, because the Germans were in back of us. And the Bolsheviks were in front of us. At the time, I didn't know one from the other. But later on in life, I realized that's what it was.

And she says, we're going to go-- as much as we can walk, we're going to walk towards whatever that border is. And it was daylight almost when we started walking. It was cold, but we walked. And they changed off of holding my brother and then--

Could he walk? Or he had to be carried still?

No. No, I can't remember. We might have been, but I can't-- just somehow, I can't remember that part. All I know, the next thing-- maybe because I stayed that night at that hotel, we were also scared. And we got up so early, it was dark that I cannot put this together.

But I do know the next thing I know from my memory, I recall that I was at the border at the Bug, at the River Bug. And there were 13 other people besides us, 13 altogether people, that wanted to cross. And my mother went up.

And she says, look, I've got two kids. And I want to cross, too, because I don't want to stay behind. I don't want to be left behind here. So they said, we'll try to get you on this little rowing boat.

And that's what we did. We got on that boat. And as soon as they-- it was very dangerous because there were too many people on that little boat. But they crammed us in as much as we can. And they started rowing.

And I fell in the water. And that's when I knew it was good in winter, too. I started screaming, help me, help me. And my mother started screaming, help my child. And people would close their mouth.

And they would try to get me. But they couldn't, because I was coming up and down. And I couldn't swim. And with all these clothes, I was in the water. It was so heavy. All I can remember-- screaming, mama, help me, help me. And she kept screaming, too.

Well, the next thing I knew, somebody pulled me out. When they pulled me out and put me next to my mom, I was just frozen, absolutely frozen. And my mother's mouth was held so she couldn't scream, because they were afraid that they shouldn't hear us back there.

And the Bolsheviks didn't let us in. The Russians really didn't want anybody, especially if you were with a man. If a man was behind you, another man, they would not let in. Women and children, they didn't bother so much. That's--

Why not the men? Do you know?

I don't know why not the men. I cannot explain it to you because I'll tell you why. I'm saying this because when we got off that boat, off that little boat, rowing boat, everybody went in different directions. Nobody knew where they were going.

It was already a little warmer. The sun was already shining. We had to dry off. And my mother had to take all this one at a time off and get me dry. And then we rested a little bit.

And we started walking. My mother says, I don't know. I'm going to walk this direction. Looks-- that's where I'm going to walk. And my aunt-- and her, she was young, too. That's where we started walking.

Well, way in back of us, there were two men walking. And these Bolsheviks in front of us started-- we could see them shooting, not trying to hit us, but shooting at us. And my mother just-- she can't believe it that they were so mean-- here you are coming away from one mean person into Russia-- that they would kill women and children just walking.

And it was going on for about 15, 20 minutes like that when she sat him down on the ground and told me to sit down to rest. And she looked behind. And there are two men, oh, I don't know, maybe 1,000 yards away. But they were walking.

As much as we were walking, they were keeping their distance. That's who they were shooting at. They didn't want them to cross the border. How did the Russians know that there are not Germans? They wouldn't just let anybody.

But women and children, they did. My mother waited until they came up close. And my mother says, what are you doing? They're not shooting me and the children. They're trying to get you out of the way. Please go someplace else. You're going to jeopardize two children and two women here just because you want to trail us.

They didn't want to do it, but they stayed behind. And we started walking again. I remember my mother arguing with them. And they stayed behind. They stopped shooting. There was no shooting. We walked and walked the rest of the day that day.

It was another day that it's unbelievable in my life. We came not too far-- we were not too far from the town of Kovel. Kovel is White Russia, Belorussia. And that's-- we walked.

And then by that time, my mother started asking in Polish to these people-- Polish and White Russian's very close in the language, Russian, too, for that matter-- where can I go and take my children to rest? She says, I just came across the border.

So they would tell her, there's this town, Kovel. You walk as much as you can. If you get there, you have some way to-- you'll see there's so many of you Polish people there. There's a temple that's packed with people-- big, big, huge temple. And that's what we headed for. And we stayed there.

When we got there, we had a bench like a pew like you call whatever it's called now. To me, it was a bench. And she made my brother lay down and myself. And this was our territory for three weeks, a little more than three weeks.

We could find some food there. My aunt meanwhile took some stuff and went back to Poland. She went back to Poland, believe it or not.

Why?

She was young-- because she wanted to convince the rest of the family, if she could find them, to come also to Russia because nobody's going to survive. And she found them. She found them. She found everyone, including-- the only one that wasn't there was my father. He was trying to cross Bug again.

Every time-- he tried to cross three times. And each time, he was shot. And the last time, he was very badly wounded. So he went back to the family, tried to get to us, because he knew that we went across.

I don't know how they knew. But I think with these people coming in-- I'll tell you why, because in that particular town, the whole town was full of refugees from Poland. And everybody knew everybody.

So when they go back, I saw this family. My aunt went back, tried to persuade the rest of her family. They kept saying, no, we're not going to go. Grandmother, her sisters, her brothers-in-law, her brothers, nobody wanted to budge. The children-- they all had children. Every one of those in the families had children, some of them teenagers, some of them little ones.

Do you know where she found them?

She found them in-- she told me. I think I have it somewhere in my book the name of-- I think she found them near Lodz ghetto before the ghetto was made into a ghetto, somewhere nearby right there. And she maybe was-- I'm not sure exactly where she found them. But all she-- she came back telling my mother that they wouldn't budge.

And she already knew what we went through. She came back to stay with my mother and us. She promised my mother that she'll try to come back. And she did. She came back almost three weeks later.

But in these three weeks, while we were sitting there doing nothing and millions-- to me, it was millions in those days. It probably was thousands. But to me, it was millions as a child. People were arriving. And they all settled in that town-- no place to settle but either in temple or whether we went someplace else. That, I don't know.

And between all these people, she found her brother-- my mother-- with his girlfriend and her sister with her boyfriend. And they were the youngest of the family. Those two were the youngest of the family. But they were very close as

brother and sister.

And she said to them, nuh-uh, I found you, she says. You're not going to live like this, she says. I'm your mother now. I'm going to marry you off. So that's when the--

Chalice--

Chalice came in hand. She sold it. There was the biggest wedding you've ever seen, not just of those two, of the brother and sister, but also of other couples. They made a huge chuppah. They found a rabbi. And that's what-- they made a wedding that night.

And my sister-- my mother's sister, the one that went across the border back, came back one day after that wedding. And she married them off. And she felt, now, I'm going to rest at ease knowing that you two are married, because whether they were religious or not, that's how they believed in those days.

Those brother and sister are the ones that got saved, because they also came to Russia. Those brother and sister lived all their lives after the war in Israel. And they're gone, too. The cousins-- the children are there. But it made my mother feel very good.

But that's all we could stay. As soon as my mother came back, we heard that Hitler's coming in. He's invading on Russia. So we have to move further. And we started running again. That's when we really--

During that three weeks that you were in this town, do you remember the Russians bothering you or harassing you?

No, I don't remember anything because at that time, I was already between Poles again, between people again. I do know we didn't have much food. It was very difficult of everything, because they couldn't feed-- because everything was taken away from them, too.

But in White Russia, I don't remember any prosecuting us at the time when we were there. So that part, I don't know. But I do know that my mother always held on to us so we couldn't get lost, so nobody could take us away.

Was your brother getting better by this time?

Yes, he was getting better. As a matter of fact, he was almost healed. It was an infection that really needed to be-- the pus taken out. And he was healed. That's when my mother and aunt decided we would have to run.

But my uncle that got married and my other end that got married, they just took off with themselves together. We knew that they're going to be OK. They couldn't travel with us because there were men in this. We felt that as women, we'll do better.

My mother always felt as women, we'll do better on our own than having men with us, which turned out we just-- that's exactly what turned out to be, because once you found yourself a space in Russia and you would settle down and you could find some food and whatever, they would take the men into the Russian army.

They want them to become citizens. They could have used every man on the front. They lost. And that's how the man, the Polish man, would hide out, too. Not so much the women-- they could care less-- but the men.

And they wanted us to become citizens, too, even during running, because one year out of running, we stayed nine months in the Ural Mountains. And that's where I started school, in Russian school. But to make the story, we have run away from-- we went further. And that's how we started spending our time at--

Now, when you say "run away," how did you run?

Well, we walked. We walked to-- always, we walked to the direction where a train would stop. They always had cattle

trains going by. And they would always stop to fill up with whatever they filled up-- water. I remember seeing water being filled up. And there were always hundreds of thousands of people on those tracks sitting there.

But they would let you get on the train?

They would let us get on. The tracks-- the cattle cars were always empty going. But they would not leave empty once they stop. People would push themselves to get off.

Wherever it was going, people were going in whatever direction. We got on one of those, too. And that's another episode that happened to be that night.

Everybody was pushing and they-- clumsy me. They pushed me underneath the railroad, underneath the-- my mother couldn't find. She was screaming. My aunt was screaming. My brother was crying.

And everybody was screaming, pushing themselves into the car. And we wanted to get on there. But my aunt couldn't get on until she finds me. She pulled me away seconds-- seconds before that train took off. And people were hanging on every place.

And my mother said, there is somewhere-- somewhere an angel over our head. This is the second episode that happened-- actually, the third, including the one in the hotel. And since then on, I think I heard my mother say "angel." Even so, I couldn't believe-- I don't know whether we believed in angels or whatever.

I kept thinking that I have an angel. Me, I have an angel over my head. And I love angels. But we had to wait until the next one came along. And we got on there.

We didn't know where it was going. We turned out in a place. That's where it stopped. I can't remember the name, but I know it didn't look too bad. My mother said, if we can establish ourselves here, find some work, and hang out for the war here until the war is over and go back to Poland, we'll stay.

And this is where we stayed maybe two weeks. And all of a sudden, during one night-- we found shelter. Excuse me. Overnight one night on a Friday night-- I'll never forget-- the Russians liked to do this to the Jews, anyway, the Communists at the time. They like to do it on their Sabbath or on a Saturday or a Friday night.

They came and started knocking at all these doors. I hear the biggest commotion. Get up, get up, you're being evacuated. Get up. Everybody was sleeping. It was about 12:00 or 11 o'clock at night at the time. And everybody didn't know what's going on.

And that's when they took us on buses. We traveled two days on-- not buses, on trucks, trucks filled with people towards the train and took us to Siberia. That's where they transported us all, whoever they could round up, to Siberia.

By rounding up, I think-- when I look back at these things, by rounding up, there were never any men on these places where we used to stay because all the men would be hiding out. And then we came to Siberia.

It was cold. My mother got a-- a barrack must have been a block long, big, big barrack. Empty-- everybody was on the floor. That's where our domain was, on the floor. Everybody had their little corner.

Cold-- by that time, we really didn't have any clothes anymore much to worry about. And the shoes--

What happened to your dresses?

Oh, my mother had to-- for the two weeks and the three weeks where she wasn't-- the three weeks or whatever we were in Kovel and then the two weeks where we went into the next, she traded each one for some food. She traded for food or for some of-- mostly, I remember she traded for flour so she can make some [POLISH], how you say-- macaroni and make her own noodles and stuff like that to give the children to eat.

So you were getting food.

Food was not so bad. We had once a day food, for sure.

But you were getting colder.

But now, when we got to this big barrack, things were getting worse. But everybody-- my mother was fortunate, too. She got into where-- she got a job there. She was the head of letting everybody shower.

But they all had to take their turn every day. And that's where she was. And if I wanted to warm up in Siberia, I would get into the shower, because that's one good thing it was in that big, big barrack.

They had hot water?

They had hot water. Yes. But we didn't want to stay there because it was no life, absolutely. Sleeping on the ground with 5,000 or 10,000 other people in the same place, we needed to go further to situate ourselves. So my mother decided to take one night with my aunt to take us and told us, in the morning, we're leaving.

We're going to go during the night, and we're going to run away. Put some warm rags on our legs over the shoes at the time. And we started out with snow up to I don't know where.

You were walking?

We were walking. And she did find out where to walk, because she wanted to know, where do we walk? Towards the railroad tracks. And we were always-- when we get to a railroad track, we know we can get on one of those trains because they always stop.

There's a mass of people. They used to stop really for either taking on coal or taking on water again. And this is where you go to-- when you used to run to a railroad track over there, you always see millions of people standing on the tracks trying to do the same thing. That's how we got transportation.

Would there be any food at the railroad track?

No. No, everything from then on was everything downhill. It was very, very hard.

But at that camp, you were given food?

We used to be fed. We used to be fed once a day. Yes. I don't remember exactly what, but we used to get I do know once a day, bread. Once a day, we used to get a slice of bread. And that was very important in those days.

But we ran away. And just before we got to the railroad track, they found us. And they took us back. They didn't punish my mom for trying to run off. But they said, you're not going to run away again. And my mother said, she will.

So we went back for another few weeks. And she tried again. And we got away. That second time, we got away. That's when we caught a-- I keep saying "train." Yeah, one of those railroad-- one of those cattle trains.

And we didn't know where it was going. But it turned out it was going-- see, Siberia at the point where we were was very close to the Ural Mountains. And so we ended up in Asbest, the city of Asbest in the Ural Mountains.

And I even remember the Sverdlovsk Oblast, they used to call it. That's the county. And that's where we kind of settled. They gave us a little-- my mother found one room for all four of us. And I can't tell you what we went through over there.

That's when I went to school. I started school. We had to-- couldn't stay home. My mother found something to do. I think she worked at some kind of an asbestos factory at the time. My aunt worked with her.

We idled doing nothing the whole day. So she wanted us into school no matter what it took. And we didn't have any clothing much at all. And the winters were bad there, absolutely. Still was winter-- it was cold. It was very cold.

Your brother, was he in school, too?

Yes, he went to school, too, just to go for a kindergarten type of a thing just to keep with other kids. And--

Were you able to get any coats?

No. I used to run down to school. I remember running down that mountain. And the teacher knew that I would come with rags on my feet, cold, no coat, run really fast to get into the class, and she'd always put me next to this heater. And she saved a seat for me because I was one of the refugees that we really didn't have anything left anymore.

And my aunt-- and she would leave-- no. The teacher would always let me sit in that corner next to the-- which I wish she wouldn't have at those times because my feet are still frozen today. I have a lot of problems with my feet. Sitting next to a heater after you run on the snow barefooted, it doesn't do much good.

But this is what she meant very well. And this is how I stayed there for nine months. We stayed there. When the summer came, it was cold summers. It wasn't hot summers It was very-- this is a cold area.

This is right near Siberia, so it's not that-- but they had summers. And they had warm days. And we stayed through the summer.

My mother organized where she could-- we had something more to eat by then. But my aunt, she found a man she wanted-- she found a young man that they were going to marry. There were eight brothers of them, too. And four of them were with this one man that she met.

And they wanted to get married. So my mother said, OK. You want to get married? Fine. That means we cannot travel together anymore. So she married her off in that town.

And she went with-- she had to go with her husband, because the husband was with other brothers. And they didn't want to be found because, again, they wanted to take these men into the army. And sure enough, they didn't want to go into the army, in the Russian army. So they always had to hide.

They were Polish Jews.

Yes. They were all Polish Jews. They were actually from a town not far from us.

How did they manage not to get drafted?

They had to be hiding out. They really had to be hiding out. I don't know how they managed. But all I know that after that, I had a coat. We were a little bit better off.

Well, I used to have a meal, at least, a day. And my mother says, we can't stay here. This is getting harder and harder. The winters were so bad. And we're coming to another winter. We don't have what to eat and what to wear.

We're going to go further. We'll go with the rest of the crowds of women are running. And that's what we started running again. We went this time on one of those trains. Well, we went on-- I wanted to mention to you that I was also between-- when we were going between Siberia, we caught a train that ended up in Moscow before we came to the Ural Mountains.

And that train left us off there-- made everybody get off. And there, we didn't know what to do, either. And that was the day Stalin declared war on Germany. And we walked to the Red Square. As shabby as we looked, we walked there.

It wasn't too far, I remember-- not too bad of a walk because everything wasn't-- and there were thousands of people in the square waiting for him to come and speak. And I saw him personally. I couldn't believe it.

My mother said, she's not going to miss it for anything. Hungry or not, she says, we are going to wait there until he comes out. And they were shouting as he was talking for his country. We have to protect our country and Russia and whatever. I can't remember-- unbelievable.

There were so many people that I don't know why they didn't steal a few of us kids in those days. But they didn't need any more kids. They had enough troubles with their own.

By nighttime, when it was dark, everybody was gone. And he was finished talking. He talked for two hours. I'll never forget that. And we went back to the station-- station-- back to the tracks to find somewhere to go. That's when we ended up in the Ural Mountains.

I also want to tell you when I lived in the Ural Mountains, we didn't know any-- by that time, we didn't know. But when I came to Siberia, I wrote a letter. Polish-- I didn't even know my alphabet that well. But I did my best way I know how.

I told my aunt to help me. And I wrote a letter to Stalin. I had an answer from them. And I just had this-- if we knew that any of this meant anything these days to have something to document like that.

He answered me that he cannot help me to let my father come in because, like I said, the Bolsheviks wouldn't let him in. So they were shooting at him. And he finally would sneak away from the Germans and try to cross the border.

But the Bolsheviks wouldn't let him into Russia. So that's how he couldn't come in. They were very close, and the borders were very, very, very tight.

So how old were you? You wrote a letter to Stalin?

I wrote-- I was over six. Yes, I was already, I think, almost seven. And I wrote to him in Polish, because I only knew Polish at the time still. He answered a very brief little note. I don't know if it was sent out by-- I can't remember that.

But I know I had a note. And my aunt, up to this day, she couldn't believe this. She still would talk about it that he answered me. In the midst of war and chaos, he managed to answer me, telling me that he's very sorry, that he's got no jurisdiction over Poland, and some more in this way.

And he says he knows-- what a hypocrite. He knows that kids should have their father and mother with them. But it's war, and there's nothing he can do to bring my father in. And I hope after this is over, I'll find my father. That's-- something like that. But we never saved it.

During all this time, did you have any communication with your father?

No, but we knew where he was.

How did you know?

Because people when they came into Kovel, when we were in White Russia, they would say, oh, we just saw your family in so and such place. They won't budge. They won't budge. They say the war is going to be over in a few weeks.

They don't want to go-- a few months. They don't want to run away from home. And we knew whether my father was there or not because he was very well-known, too, because of the bus company. And people that rode the bus used to know him and so forth. So I imagine that's probably why.

But we knew-- until we went into Siberia. From that moment on, we didn't hear anymore about anything. We didn't even know what was going on from then on. But we did know that we didn't want to stay in Siberia, even near Siberia in Asbest in Ural Mountains.

And we headed out to go-- we traveled-- traveled. We ran a long time, for one month only, before we came and off and on, off and on on a cattle train with very little food, very little ways to relieve yourself, and very little ways to have water because those cattle cars were so packed with people, who ever could get on it, that it was unbelievable that they would just not throw you off.

And it was chaos on those things because everybody wanted to go further away from Germany. Now, there are other people that didn't do that. They settled.

And if you were like my other aunt and uncle, the one that-- I had two uncles and one aunt-- yes, mother's sister-- the two that she married and another one that they found later on, stay near Leningrad, which is near St. Petersburg now. Was it-- no, near Stalingrad, staying in a German camp there later on during the rest of the war.

They were in German concentration camps near-- that's when they thought they were going to conquer Russia. That's why they put-- and I have a Russian friend here. And that was almost the Ukraine. So that's how it was.

And they told us afterwards. They survived. They told us afterwards. So there was from the whole family that everyone that went to Russia survived.

We were lucky. We all survived. We had it bad, but we survived. But everybody that stayed behind, there was not one survived.

Now, you went from Siberia to the Ural Mountains?

To the Ural Mountains.

And your mother worked in an asbestos--

Asbestos kind of factory. Yes. That's why the town of Asbest was called Asbest. It was a big town. It's still on the map.

And your aunt had already left?

And there, that's where she found her husband. And she got married. And they went in different directions. I think they stayed behind and we left, because life for us was very, very bad.

Where did you go? And how did you get there?

Well, that's when we went back to the-- that's the only way we knew how to get. We went back to the tracks, found the train, whichever direction it was going to go again. We ended up-- that's where we ended up. We came into Uzbekistan.

We were a long time on the road. That was very-- I remember days and days, people were dying on the road. And you have to go down to relieve yourself. You couldn't even do that because they only stopped to take on water or whatever in different places.

And if you got down on time and didn't come back on time, that's it-- end, no more. Mother doesn't find you. Sister won't find you. Brother won't find you. That's it.

So everybody was kind of starving. People were dying. All the people were dying. And the kids were screaming. Little kids were crying. It was constantly like this on those trains.

Every time I think about it, it just gives me the chills, because this is how-- I just myself cannot believe that all this cold and hunger that we survived. My mother, my brother, and I, we survived.

But when we came to Kazakhstan, by that time, I mentioned to you that we had a coat. I had a coat. My brother had a little coat. We had some old shoes on.

We were in the same-- wealthy at the time with having a little something to wear. But when we arrived to Uzbekistan, that was the first place--

Now, was that south?

Yes, that's where it was warm already. They didn't have those harsh winters like-- yeah.

You didn't know you were going there, though.

No, we didn't know. But in Uzbeks, they wear those little kippahs. What do you call them in English?

Like a turban?

Not turban. They wear little beanies like the Jewish people wear. They constantly have a little hat on because they were religious Muslims. At the time, I didn't know what a Muslim was, either. But I do know it was not bad there.

We only stayed there two days. They wouldn't let us stay in Kazakhstan-- in Uzbekistan. So we went back on the train, on one of those trains. And that time, we had an idea where it was going, out of Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan. And this is where we remained for the rest of the war.

We came to Kazakhstan in the middle of the night, 12 o'clock at night. And when that train emptied itself, the whole train, all these people got out. But they all laid down right at the tracks there. And everybody went to sleep. Fresh air-- it was a nice evening.

And we had our little coats on. So my brother was sleeping in my mother's arms. And I would put-- no more aunt with us, you see. And I did put my head on her knees. And we fell asleep like this, my mother sitting. And we all fell asleep.

Would you believe it? When I got up, I didn't have anything but underwear on. They took everything and stole everything off me, everything off my brother. And we were in such deep sleep, such worn-out sleep, that nobody felt anything.

And my mother started crying and screaming. My kids, they're naked. There are no clothes. It was unbelievable what she did that night. In the morning, we couldn't believe it.

So these people, they gathered something, anything just to cover us up and with so many thousands of people sitting on those tracks. But it was not too bad because at least it was not so cold, like where we came now.

15 of us walked into-- they had little-- in Kazakhstan, it's hard to explain. They don't have-- I never-- we went to a kolkhoz. A kolkhoz is a collective farm in Russian. And that's-- we figured it's quiet. We'll sit out the war.

So 15 of us-- my mother, myself, my brother, and altogether 15 people, men and women and so forth, got off that train. And we headed for that particular place. Somebody said, if you set out at kolkhoz, then you survive the war. If you survive there, you'll survive the war. You're going to be able to go back home.

And that's why we didn't want to run anymore. It was just no way to run anymore. My mother-- there were 15. And the place we were in, it was made out of mud, doesn't have windows. I don't know. It's like made out of clay would be the exact word.

A kolkhoz doesn't have windows because they never had winter over there, particularly that part, and was fortunately a little river. We bathed in the river. We ate out of the river. We did everything out of that water.

But that took its toll, too, because we started getting typhoid, every one of the 15 people, one at a time. And we were having-- I think my mother and I, the strongest, we were the last ones. And then I'll say there was another lady with two more children.

During this time while we were there was very bad, too. We didn't have food. The people that live in Kazakhstan were short people. They were oriental-looking, with a million little braids, the women. And there were no men. There were no men.

Only women?

Only women. They were all gone to the army. And then came a little warmer time, summertime. At the time when we arrived there, they went to the fields to see if they could plant some things. And they would make their lodging in the fields. So they wouldn't come back from-- that's why we could stay in some of their places, you understand.

So when they came back-- but fortunately, it was a warm country. But we all stayed in one little place, a room half the size of this. That's when a lady delivered, I remember, a baby. My mother was the oldest one, so she helped her deliver the baby.

The baby couldn't survive because we didn't food to give it to eat. And she didn't have food to feed it. And the baby didn't survive and, one at a time, died in that place of typhoid. So the only ones that survived out of 15 people was a lady with two children and my mother with two children.

But when I got my-- first, my mother got typhoid. She got up. Then I got typhoid. And when I got up, I started screaming and crying because she shaved my hair off because I was full with lice.

And typhoid, you have to-- if you are with lice because you're in conditions like that, you have to burn your hair. First, you've got to just burn-- take this hair. Shave them off. And she did the best she knew how to shave off my hair. I looked horrible. I never forgave her for that.

But she kept telling me, why are you crying? She says, hair can grow back. But if you would have been-- thank god that you woke up from the coma of typhoid. We had stomach typhoid. And then my brother got it, but we all survived.

Well, sitting in that place was being very bad, because there was no food, no food whatsoever. The only thing I remember having once in a while over there was wild scallions that they grow, little onions, green onions. And they seem to grow over there because it was next to a river, quite a bit of this.

But after this, you wanted to drink a lot. So you're more blowing up than anything. But one day, that lady and my mother, we kind of stuck together with the kids. She said, let's go to a next kolkhoz and see maybe we can bring something back to eat for the kids.

While they were gone, we kids were fending for ourselves. And I took a walk one day with the rest-- with the other two kids and my brother to search for some food. And I got bitten by a scorpion. And I was doing screaming and dancing on that particular place where I got bitten on my leg where some of these little ladies saw me.

And they knew exactly what's happening to me. They threw me on the ground. They started sucking out the venom out of me. I survived that one, too, believe it or not. It was unbelievable.

And then they had some buttermilk. And then they put buttermilk on it. And they used to wash their hair with buttermilk. They used to make their own buttermilk, if they could, and wash their hair because it made their black hair shine-- very, very shiny used to be, the hair.

Now, your mother wasn't working during this time.

No. No, there was no place to work-- was nothing to do, just to wait out the war and starve. And there were many nights I cried myself to sleep at night, absolutely many nights.

I kept praying. I said, why can't I have at least something to eat? I know I have to live in this condition, but something to eat.

About a week later, she came back, my mother, with that other lady. I can't remember her name. And then they couldn't find any food. They came back with such bleeding feet, so worn out. Walking barefoot on this dry desert where the rocks and stuff, they really were a mess.

That's when my mother and her decided we've got to get out of there. We got up one day. And she says, we're going to go into the next town that we can find some food. But we're going to go all together.

And that's what we did. We started walking into the mountains. We knew the next town over there is not as warm as this place where we are now. But we didn't have much clothing left. And certainly, we didn't have any shoes.

We started walking. And it took us two days over these mountains. We walk. And we didn't have any food, but the kids couldn't walk anymore. I don't know how the ladies made it, but the kids couldn't. We were all about the same-age kids.

And so she-- we saw a dead-- I have to tell you this because it's very important. We saw a dead mule full with maggots sitting on it. And my mother said, we are going to do something about this. We're going to eat this.

And I said, no way. I'm going to die right now, and you cannot make-- this is as much as I would have gone for that thing. But she had matches. She cut something off, pulled-- I remember seeing her pulling off a piece of this meat and bringing some wood and boiling this over the fire.

And she says, you're going to take some of that. You're going to eat it. I'm sure she didn't cut off the one with the maggots. But she said, you're going to eat it. And we're not moving until you kids eat something. You can't go any more longer without food like that.

Looking at me now, you wouldn't believe it, right? But she insisted. We didn't budge. And we didn't want to eat it. But she insisted that us kids would eat it.

They ate. She ate. And she ate a dead mouse, too, when she found it, because that was the only way she could survive. I wouldn't touch it. My brother wouldn't hear of it.

But she made us. And she said, either you're doing this, or we're going to die right here. We can't go any further. I swallowed it. I ate it. And I made it-- took a few bites out of that somehow.

She says, now, we can go on. And we came into this-- two days later, we came into the next town. Over there was already cold, the town that had-- sometimes, it used to snow there. It was cold.

They didn't have right papers to stay in that town, to be registered so we can get once a week some bread. They had to go back all the way to the kolkhoz over the mountains again. The two women left us children on the doorstep of some building. And they had to go back to get the right papers, in order when they come back again, they could be registered. And maybe we can get once a week food, once a week bread, once a week something or housing.

They did go back-- left us children. We used to eat out of the garbage then. By the time they came back, there was a lady. I will never forget. We all spent our time in the evening near the garbage can where they throw out food. They used to throw out some-- people had some food, potato peels. And we would just eat it and anything we could find.

By the time my mother came back, I already had dysentery from eating out of the garbage. So now, she says, I'm going

to put you in the hospital. They had a hospital there. She says, I'm going to see if they're going to take you into the hospital.

And they did confirm it was dysentery. And she says, at least-- please go. At least you will have something to eat. And this is how I decided, OK. Then I'll go to the hospital if they're going to feed me. Two days later, I still was laying there another-- they wouldn't give me anything because they don't give anything with dysentery.

So I ran away. And would you believe it? I survived that, too. I ran away out of the hospital. Then she found a little place for us, a room with this other lady. And she had-- the lady's was the boy was the older one. In my family, I was the older one.

So they'd send us up to get our weekly bread one afternoon. We were hungry. It was cold. And it snowed that day. So in Russia, you have to go stay in line. And she told us the bread we're going to get is going to be next week's.

But we need it now. We have to eat something. But you could get next week and next week, too, as long as you stay in line. So we used up our last week's already. So he and I went up.

And in Russia, when you stay in line, it's not just a line where you stay here in America. You stay-- you keep each other warm because you stay a whole day. So you're inside almost like glued together. You get out of here and you get out of line, you want to do something, forget it. You don't get back in. There's no way you get back in.

We stayed a whole day there, two kids holding our breath, practically, not being able to go to the bathroom, not being able to eat, and freezing cold. We stayed there. We got our bread. We were so happy.

We were coming down that hill, running down that hill. The mother's going to be happy. His mother's going to be happy. We're going to have some bread tonight.

Somebody attacked us. Two kids attacked us, took our bread, beat us up, and we came home beaten up. That was the day of our bread. On and on and on, these things were just going.

But then my mother got sick. She got malaria. And she couldn't take care of us. So she was laying in some sort of a basement. I can't even tell you what it looked like because it was only-- and the lady would take care of her, her friend that we survived all together.

She said to us, to my brother and myself, you have to go to an orphanage. I can't do this anymore. I'm sick, you're hungry, and you get food in the orphanage.

And I didn't want to go. But she says, you're being selfish. You have to take your brother and go. So the orphanage was across the street, almost like-- I keep saying there was something in between, some kind of a ravine in between.

My mother would be on that side. And to cross to go to the orphanage, I would have to cross something. It would be on the other side. I don't remember street names. At that point, I really don't remember.

And we went to the orphanage. And she was staying with the lady in that place. That friend of hers would take care of her. But later on, that friend caught malaria. And she died because she also had dysentery. And she died. So my mother was kind of left alone there, too.

How big was the orphanage?

The orphanage didn't have any Jewish people or Polish people or whatever. It was all Russian. In one room, they kept them locked up on the-- and I swear I'll never forget that. In one room, they had a bunch of children that used to be cannibals, because they were Chechens.

I'll never forget. They were Chechens. It's called Chechnya. But over there, they call them Chechens. They would never

let them be near us. They could never be near us.

That was an orphanage that everybody got assignments. Oh, by the way, we went with the two other children that survived. And I had a bed that I was sharing with that girl. And my brother was with the boy.

I remember her name. I can't remember his, but I remember her name was Becky. And Rebecca, they used to call her then.

And I would start wetting the bed. No, first of all, we had assignments to us. And when those assignments came for us, I was supposed to-- I forgot what you call this, that you carry two buckets.

Yoke. Yoke.

A yoke. We were supposed to bring water from, oh, a half a mile away out of the ground because everything was frozen. That's how we were supposed-- that was our assignment, to bring-- every other day, we're supposed to bring the water. But being so undernourished and so vulnerable for every disease at the time, I couldn't handle it. I did, but I couldn't handle it.

So I decided I am not-- after being punished so much-- you see, I shared a bed with her. And I wet with my bed not wanting to. I did it all until I was about 12 years old. I would wet my bed.

She would change places with me, thinking by drying it out, I will not get punished. But the spots are still there. So I used to get-- they knew it was me. So they didn't want-- so they put me on a bench without clothes. And that's a whole night. So the more they did it, the more I wet.

I was a nervous child, and that's all I could do. I couldn't get better. So I gave up my-- I decided I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to take this. I'll give up my bread and my daily food for somebody else to take my chores.

At the time-- I am sorry, but my tears are getting in my eyes. And somebody else took my job to do this. And I ran home to mom, back to her. And I said, I don't want to go there. I'm cold. And I don't want to sleep. She says, I can't help you, either, at the time.

How about your brother?

My brother was there. He was all right there. He was too young to be able to-- they took mostly advantage of the older kids that could help. They didn't do it just purposely for me. But they just did it-- you have to do your chores. But I couldn't do it anymore.

So my mother said, somebody stopped by before the-- that was before-- after her friend died, somebody stopped by. They knew that she's laying there. Some of the refugees knew it. So they stopped by to visit her. And they brought her something to eat.

And she says, somebody brought me-- brought you a little coat. They found it somewhere. And she says, I can't wait to give it to you, a coat. And I was so happy.

She says, but you have to go back there. She says, you have no other way. I don't want you running on the streets and starving. At least of a day, you can get something.

Well, I listened to mom all the time. I'm the good person. And I went back there, and I had that coat. I was happy it kept me warm. And they decided instead of punishing me, they saw they couldn't get anywhere.

They thought-- I didn't stop. They thought to do the opposite, put me someplace where it's warm. They figured maybe that will stop for me wetting myself. And they put me in the infirmary and on the floor and with a little heater in the middle. There's quite a few of us were sleeping.

And I didn't take my coat off. I wouldn't take my coat off. So I was so close to that. I fell asleep, and I didn't wet the bed that night. That's true. But my coat caught on fire from the little heater.

And the next thing I know, I found myself rolling in the snow. I didn't even know what happened. They threw me. They picked me up, and the smoke overwhelmed them. And they picked me up and threw me in the snow. And they rolled me outside in the snow.

And this is when I looked and I started crying not because I survived. I started crying because my coat was gone. And I think that was the last time I ever wet the bed over there. It was warm. That helped. It did help. But mother had--

Couldn't have been too warm if they put you in the snow.

Well, yeah. But it was warm in the room, yes, in the infirmary. What I'm saying is that I think that kind of cured me. And I think I took-- I got over all my fears. And I don't think I was ever scared again from that moment on. I think by then, I was already, I think, 11 years old-- not quite 11, maybe 10.

These friends that kept looking after my mom, even though she was laying there all alone, someone asked about her-- came in another friend from another town. And he asked about her. A person she never met asked about her. Have you heard of this woman with such and such name?

And this is how it went on all during Russia when everybody was running. Maybe you heard such and such name. It's like after the war, maybe you know this one is alive or this.

Well, during the war in Russia, they also would ask, oh, I just came from such and such place. Maybe you know such and such person that survived. Maybe you would know. But this happened to be that somebody came in looking for my mom.

And her sister sent out these messages because her sister was good-off by now. By now, she was already better-off. So she wanted to find her sister and the children. And my mother was constantly with malaria. Either one day, she'd get better. And then right away, she'd get malaria again.

And somebody told that she knows somebody by that name. And they took that man. They took that man to her. And he told her that your sister is alive and they are not too far from here. But you're sick, and I don't know how you can get there.

And how are your kids? She wanted to know. But I'll tell you what we can do. We can let your kids at least come to the place. And then maybe they will find a way of getting you out when you feel better. First, let's get those kids out of here.

So when I came to see mom, she told me, you've got to do something. And she says, this is dangerous, but you have to do it. And I have no choice. They told her exactly how to do it and what they're going to do. It turned out to be it was a very good friend of-- this, I have to tell you.

My mother told me. She says, you are going to go tonight. And you're not going to tell your brother that you're going away because I don't want them to get in trouble over there. You are going to go to the station again, to the tracks.

You're going to take a train-- that's how she told me-- that goes in this direction-- here she is, facing me-- that goes in this direction, not that goes in this direction. That was how it was told to her. You'll get on that train, the first train that's going to come going in that direction. And you'll get off at the first stop after going the whole night at the first stop that stops in the morning. And I want you to get off there.

I said, no way. I'm not doing this. I've survived so much with you and with my brother. I'm not going to go get lost someplace. I just didn't want to do it.

She says, you must. There's no way out for us because they cannot come and get us. They couldn't come and get us. They have no way of coming to get us. And you need to be the first one to do this.

Well, I went to the train. It was nighttime. And I went to the train tracks. And sure enough, I'm sitting there on the ground. And I said, uh-uh, I'm going back. I'm not doing this.

And I got up and I started walking back towards wherever my mother was. I heard the whistle from the train coming. And I stood on. And next thing I know, I got on that cattle car. And there was a lot of people there. I found myself a little corner.

And I kept dozing off. I kept dozing off. And I didn't want to miss where he's going to stop, because when you're that tired, you could go in a very deep sleep and not wake up sometimes, too. So all night long, I tried to stay awake so I can remember how to get off.

And down there, when I got off, just like she told me, there was a man that recognized me because he knew my father, recognized me. He was from the same town as my aunt. Later on, he was here in America. We found him here in America. It's unbelievable.

He knocked on my shoulder. He did like this. And he said, are you Manya? I said, yes. He says, I recognize you anywhere. You look just like your father, he said. He took me home to his place.

They were a little better off than the rest of us-- nourished me for one week, bought me some clothes, and sent me off on a journey to my aunt. And she lived in Tashkent at the time-- Chimkent. In Kazakhstan is Chimkent. Tashkent is Uzbekistan. And we lived in Chimkent.

She lived in-- when I got there, I did get-- I had the most unbelievable ride on a truck that I don't know how I survived getting there on the back of a truck, cold and everything. But I got there. And she was so happy to have me.

And I explained to her exactly where mom is and where Sam was. And they tried their best. And they brought mom and Sam out of there. That's how we got up again. And they were better off, because we set out with them the war.

She had two-- she had twins then. And we went home together. And this is some of my-- there were so many other things in between that I can't think of it right now. But--

How were they able to have it better? Were they able to work?

Well, they stayed out the war. Later on, towards the end of the war, we knew it's going to be over soon. I don't know how. I was too young to know all that. But somehow, they knew.

The brothers found a place that somebody took them into work. And they worked in a tannery at the time because during the war in Russia, if you could survive the cold and the hunger, they didn't bother us women and children-- not as much men. They were hiding out because they didn't want to go to the army.

But everything-- they took everything away from the people. They wanted everything up in front. They wanted so desperately to win the war that they took everything away from the people that you couldn't-- and my brother from one night, he went out to try to get some water for my mom. My mother loved to drink water. And we could never find it.

In a cold night, he went out to look for some water when he was already seven years. He found 300 rubles sitting there on the ground. You couldn't buy anything with 300 rubles because there was no such thing as stores and go out and buy. Where my aunt was, they had a bazaar. Bazaar is like--

Antique place.

No. Market.

They call it-- yeah, it's like a farmer's market. A bazaar is a farmer's market. They call it in Russia a bazaar.

There, he found something to eat. But where we were in this particular place was nothing. It was just unbelievable. It's just like they never-- I don't know how they even survived there. So it was very difficult-- very difficult to live there.

So my aunt and her brothers-- my uncle and his brothers, they worked in a tannery. So they made some money. And they were able to buy things for themselves. That's why when we moved in with them afterwards, we all lived in the same room, of course.

And after she had the twins, we still lived in the same four square walls. But we were together. And we were not so-- that's when I went to Polish school. I started going back to Polish school and so forth.

My language was good in Russian, so I wanted to remember Polish. I don't know what for. I never went back to Poland to do this. But that's how we survived the war. We set out the war.

And after the war was over, from that moment on, my mother kept having off and on malaria. And it took us one month to get home also on cattle trains. But we were sent with food and stuff already-- not much. But at least home was-- to go back to Poland.

You went back to your hometown?

No, we did not go back to my hometown. We ended up--

Where did you get that food from? Was that government--

The government was already sending us and taking things on loan. And if we wanted to go back to Poland, we went back to Poland. They couldn't feed everybody there, anyway, in this country that lost so much. So most of us wanted to go back home.

And by that time, women-- one of my uncle's brothers married a Russian Jewish lady. So there was more family to go back and so on. And meanwhile, he lost a brother that died of dysentery, too. So who could survive got back home. We survived.

And a lot of miracles happened in my life. And I believe I had really an angel over my shoulder. My mother always kept saying, we have had an angel over our shoulder that I could bring two kids into such environments and survive seven years like that. It was unbelievable.

We came back to Poland. And we came back to Katowice, the town of Katowice. And that's where most of the trains came back from all over Russia, the cattle trains and people in it. And it's like the station. And that's as far as the Russian trains will go.

And that's where we found that we have another-- that's when my mother found she had another brother that survived Russia. And he's the one that later on lived in Canada here, Montreal. He passed away just a year ago.

When she found out she found him, so the wife and him took us. He was the best friend of my father. My father would never-- I have pictures of him. And if you look in my book, he's holding my hand. My father's holding my hand.

We're walking always together. He was the best friend. But it didn't turn out to be like he promised my father. He told-- my father asked him, please look out for my wife and kids. But he took his wife and child, and they ran off first. And we've never seen them since. But we found each other.

Where did you find him?

In one of those towns where we arrived. And my aunt-- there were friends, people. There were people they knew. They knew that my family got killed in Treblinka. Nobody survived.

When I heard my father didn't survive, that really blew my mind because I just didn't care. All this going through, not seeing him again, it just-- I didn't care. I was old enough to understand everything by then.

So my aunt and her-- my uncle and my aunt, the one that we found there, they took us. And they had a house that somebody gave it to them to rent to stay in well after they're coming back. It wasn't in the town where we were born or where we lived. But this is where most of the people kind of stuck around until they found their destinations to their own towns back, to find--

You weren't inside of Poland.

Oh yeah. It wasn't Poland. And so we stayed with my aunt. We're just three of us. We stayed with my aunt. And my mother got sick again.

We only were there less than two weeks. Mother got sick again. And when she used to get the malaria, she used to get into a coma. And it just takes a few days for her to really come. So she took us two kids, my brother and myself, and put us in a kibbutz.

In that time, thee were kibbutzim from Israel. They call them "madrihim." They call them the leaders, whatever kids they could find that survived the Jewish and taking them away to put them in these groups of kibbutzim. And I don't know whether you know.

But in those days, it was called-- kibbutzim will be Hashomer Hatzair, the name of the-- would be the left wing. Ehud will be the right wing. Dror will be the left wing. And whatever they can get, all the kids they could find, they put them in these different-- they're different parties, but all going to one goal to go to send to Israel, to survive and to pick as many as they can save.

So my aunt went and put my brother and myself to one of these kibbutzim. Two weeks later, the kibbutz took off. My mother didn't know. She was still in a coma. Two weeks later, the kibbutz went to Germany. And we didn't want to go, but I had no choice. We were in a kibbutz.

Nobody came to see us. I didn't want to bother my aunt. And so we went off, and we went to Germany. It took us a whole night. They transported us and hid us. But we came to Germany across the border.

There, we came into a big, big, big, big-- I cannot describe how many kids were there of all Jewish surviving kids that they have rounded up. And they were going to transport to Israel. And that's where we stayed.

And the UNRRA took over. The American took over that place. And they helped with the Israeli-- not at that time-- the Palestinian people that work with them and teach them and grill them. That's what we're going to do. We're all going to Israel.

We're going to-- we're going to have someday a country of our own. And this is how it was in the kibbutz in that particular camp. But my mother didn't know where we want. But I want to tell you before I forget, we took these two children with us back to Poland, the two children that survived with us. We put them--

That the mother had died, huh?

That the mother had died. We put them on a transport. My mother put them because she couldn't handle us, let alone them, too. She put them-- we always-- we took them back with us from Russia. They traveled with us.

As soon as we arrived in Poland, we gave them into hands. Like my aunt gave us into a different group, we gave them in a group at the time. And that group took off for Israel.

So we knew that these children were safe. And they're with a group. And I never heard from them again.

It's a shame because they were too young to do anything about it. And if they remembered, I don't know. So they went to Israel. My mother wanted to make sure that these kids are safe and gone.

What part of Germany were you in, in this camp?

First, I arrived to Bremerhaven in Berlin-- Tempelhof. In Tempelhof we stayed there for three weeks. And then we came to-- we crossed the border to Berlin. And then we came in to the American zone in Berlin.

And then as the Jewish people picked us up and they put us into a camp, it wasn't too far from Ulm. But they were all in Niederschlesien, which is in Bayern part of Germany, which is near Munich, near Stuttgart, all this. That's called Bayern. Niederschlesien. It's called-- in German, it's called Niederschlesien, that part of Germany.

And we were in one of those camps there. But my mother didn't know where we were, what happened to us. After surviving all this, she lost us.

And this is already after the war. It was chaos. You can't find anybody. If you found anybody by-- who knew where two kids went? They found so many kids.

And that was a children's camp or--

It was only a children's camp.

Only children.

Only children. I can't imagine how many-- I can't imagine even how to tell you how many kids were there.

What language would they speak to you there?

All different languages. They tried to teach us to speak Hebrew. From the moment they brought us there, for as long as we would have to wait to be transported back to Palestine-- illegally, of course-- we knew we were grilled and we were everything taught to us in Hebrew. We learned that way.

We didn't waste time. And we didn't have such thing as play. Soon as they got us into those camps, they put us in the classes. And there were people that would teach us our names, how to pronounce, and what's going to happen to the next few years in our life and blah, blah, on like this.

Well, it came the day-- we were there already two months. And it came the day that they're sending the transport out to one of the illegal ships to go to Israel. And they had about 21 trucks. I can remember seeing them go and go and go.

And they put these kids by-- whatever they could remember their names, they put all these children by their alphabetical names on those tracks. So number-one track would have A and on and on. But I was a Z. So you know I would be on the end of the trucks. My brother and I were Z's, Zelver.

You were able to stay together with your brother?

At that moment, I was able to stay with him together, yes, because she put us both into the kibbutz. Anyway, we went. We got loaded on the trucks. And it took a while before those trucks-- to load so many trucks of kids, it takes time.

And the instructions that we had, all the what's going to happen, how are we going to survive if we do get on a ship, and blah, blah-- the same thing that was told to us when I went later on the exodus. This was not the exodus we were going on.

But meanwhile, my mother came across the border. My aunt was absolutely sorry that she did this. But they came across the border to Germany. They never went home to Poland, back to where they wanted to go. They came searching for us, for the kids.

Did they have a way to find you?

Well, my mother went from camp to camp, from every children's camp that was possible, until she came to this one. But listen how she found me. She went into this camp after-- this was her last children's camp to go to. They had a few camps like that, but not as big as this one.

Later on, they combined them more into the bigger camps. As soon as they sent children out, more kids would come. A lot of kids survived that from the Polish people that kept them, from the camps, without the parents. And they needed to be taken care of.

So these were orphans--

All orphans, orphans, unless-- probably later on, they found families. But at this moment, everybody was an orphan there from different part of-- from Czechoslovakia, from Hungary, from different languages they spoke and on and on like this and kids from Russia that were closer to Poland and so forth.

We were all loaded up on the trucks. And once trucks started moving, the first one started moving, then my mother had the last camp to go to, this one. They told her, this was a big camp. And if you cannot find them there, we don't know where to help you. So she came.

And as she was walking in the gate and they opened up the gates-- they kept us under these big camp gates-- the first truck started going out. I could still hear her voice. She kept screaming, Manya, Manya. She called my brother Shlamech. Manya, Shlamech, are you on there?

The first truck went. The next went, and the next went. I didn't even hear this because we were way somewhere on the end. I didn't even hear where she came to the end.

Some of my friends-- we were all talking. And some of my friends-- I hear some lady screaming out your name out there. And when I looked out, of course, my mother-- she took us off before the truck went out that gate. How's that? And that's how we went.

And then we stayed-- we moved. She took us to the next camp where we had to stay as a refugee, as a displaced person. And that was on the Danube in Ulm, also near Munich. It's a big town, but that particular town, Ulm, is on the Danube River there.

And we were there. I went to school there. I finished Hebrew high school there. I went to a nursing school there. Even though everybody thought I was 25, I was only, what 14-- not even 14, 12 when I was-- I wasn't 16 until I came to this country.

And I went and got-- for nine months, I had a degree of learning to be a nurse. I helped at the office over there at the hospital infirmary. And I did very well. And it kept me busy.

I kept-- until one day, I had a girlfriend which she-- my mother decided to get married. And my girlfriend's father decided to get married to somebody. And we were just so kids that we lost one of our mother or father, we didn't want to have anybody else in our lives. We didn't want to have a stranger.

And I didn't. I was old enough to understand I didn't want that now stepfather or anything. So one day, she joined another kibbutz, which they called them in those days. And she said she's going to Palestine.

And she says-- and she left. And I was really lonesome without-- where I go, because we were just so close in our situation, except for her, her father survived. And for me, my mother survived. But they all get married.

Now, they found spouses. And I-- as a teenager, when I think back, that was wrong of me because she went through enough. She needed to get married and have somebody in her life, when I think back about all this stuff. But she said she was--

How long were you living at that displaced persons camp?

We came there in 1945. And I didn't leave that place until-- I didn't come to America until 1950. But I was one year in Bad Aibling-- so I think four years.

Your brother was there, too, at that time?

Yes.

All that time?

We all were living together. And that's where--

You stayed together as a family.

Yeah, as a family.

What were the conditions like there?

It wasn't bad. It wasn't bad. It was very crowded. And we had to share one room with a stepfather and mother and whatever. And then we got-- the food came from the US.

Did you have enough food?

Yes, we had enough food there after the war with displaced persons, except living was not the best. Clothing and things would come from families from America and stuff like that. That was after the war. It wasn't too bad. That was the good times.

Now, you were learning how to be a nurse.

I was learning-- first, I was learning Hebrew. And I needed to be-- I was getting of age where I needed to be graduating. I studied very hard. And I spoke Hebrew. And I still do very well.

And my brother went to school there. And he went to cheder there because that's how life was there. But I wasn't happy when my girlfriend left. And I wasn't really happy-- my mother was not married yet. She was going-- and I was not going to be there when she's going to get married.

That's-- from the time when I took that train to Russia by myself, I was all independent. I didn't need anybody, and I went every place myself. I got a visa from America that I can come to America to my uncle's to stay here, one of my father's brothers. But I couldn't come with my brother because I was a minor and he was a minor. We couldn't travel together.

And at that time-- so they sent me off on a ship alone. That's what I described in the book. When I got to Bremerhaven and I was ready to board a ship, they took me off. And they said, I'm too young to travel alone. I'm a minor, and I have to be sent back to camp.

So they sent me back to camp. Instead of sending me home to mom, because mother was already married, they sent me

back-- I'm actually running ahead of myself, because this was already after-- this when I went back was after the exodus. You see, when I was with mom and before she got married, my girlfriend went off and she went off.

And one day out of the blue, they all appeared-- the whole kibbutz appeared on the ground in the park in our town, Ulm. So she came home to say hi to her father. She came by to say hello to me.

And she says-- I say, where are you going? I say, where did you run off to? Where are you going? She said she's going to Israel-- at the time, Palestine.

And I say, why by yourself? You don't know what you're doing. We were all young kids then. She said, I don't want to be here when father gets married. And I want to take it on my own.

She says, you want to go? Just like that, she says to me, want to go? I say, yes. I went home. And I took whatever I had on. I put on, and I left. I said, mom, I'm going to Palestine.

And there's little she could stop me. I went out there where they were all sleeping in the park for overnight. They gave me a name. They grilled me what my new name is going to be. And they told me what I'm going to go through to get to Palestine.

We're going on a big ship. We're going to be a lot of people on the ship. We're going to try to jump in the water. This was all that one night, the whole thing.

When we get to the Palestine shores, we're going to jump in the water. The Jews on that side will be in the water, try to rescue as many people, because the British are going to not let us in and on and on and on. All night, it took that grilling for me. And I was off.

That's where I went-- didn't even give it a second thought. So I went with her. And of course, the more kids they pick up, the better it was for them. So when I went with her, next thing, I found myself going across the French border and being in Marseille.

And there, we hid out for two weeks underground kind of, hiding out. But we had food. We drank a lot of milk-- was not milk. It was condensed milk. That's where I really started getting the-- and we stayed there for two weeks waiting for the ship to come in to Marseille to get the ship.

And we were taught Hebrew again. And we were grilled about what's going to happen and what we're going to do when we get to Israel. And if we-- this kibbutz-- that was a kibbutz called Dror this time. It was the left wing, I would call it. They were right and left, because the right ones were the religious. And the left one were non-religious Jews.

And they said, when we get to Israel, if we make it to Palestine, then we're going to be going to the Negev. And we will have a kibbutz called Mishmar HaNegev. And it's there today. Let me tell you, it's there today. And this is how we were taught what was going to happen.

Well, I got on the ship. And if I thought I had it bad in Russia, that was really unbelievable. 4,500 people were on that ship. The ship was so old-- and at that time, I found out-- not until I came to America and I wrote my book that I found out that ship come from Baltimore. It had two times to go back before it can go forward to pick us up in France.

It was so bad. And what it was, it had-- instead of lodging where you could sleep down somewhere, it had these-- I don't know how to explain it to you. You know how you see those pictures from the camps that people are all laying on these beds like-- what do you call these flat--

Bunks.

No, like flat wooden-- and they could only--

Shelf.

Shelves like-- yes, shelves. That's how this ship was built for-- the ship only could carry 600 people. But 4,500 people were on that ship. That was just unbelievable.

So I found my way up to the top. And I stayed on top all the way through. And I could see what was going on. And I had this little tiny space. It was made out of iron. And it was just hurting me terribly, but that's where I would stay and sleep at night.

And from that moment on, my mother didn't know where I was. My brother wasn't with me. I didn't take my brother this time. And the first day we were out, we saw the first frigate after us.

By the time we were on the sixth day, we had at least seven of them behind us. And of course, they stopped us. We never made it close enough to jump. The British stopped us.

But the only way my mother knew that I survived, because I used to sing when I was young, I sang the "Hatikvah" through the radio. Whole Europe knew what happened to the ship at the time because the exodus was a very big problem there.

That was the last and only ship that had so many people and the last ship that they had to declare the state of Israel, because it was the kind-- the only ship that they sent back. And she knew that I was alive, so that was fine.

I stayed in the same clothes for three months. There were no showers. There was nothing. We didn't get off. We wouldn't get off the ship.

After they-- I have to tell you this. When we-- the wall-- as you know, I don't know about the exodus. You know how much the-- one of the complete walls fell out. So now, we are being towed into Haifa. We have to get off in Haifa.

And they put us on three ships because they put 1,500 people on each ship, on each British ship. And they told us we are sent in-- some of us would get off and fought. They had to take the wounded off.

They fought us with hot water bottle-- with hot hoses-- with hoses not that hot, but warm hoses. And we threw at them potatoes and cans. That's our fight. A ricochet was near the captain's-- one of those officers died on the ship and Jewish and ricocheted a bullet right through this side of this leg. But I was OK.

When I got off in Haifa, we could see them on Mount Carmel, Jews singing and screaming to us. We could hear. That was middle of the night. And they told us, the British, we're going to board there and go to Cyprus, like all the other Jews went.

But that's not how it would turn out. Eight hours into the journey-- it only takes six hours for them to go to Cyprus. Eight hours into the journey, and we know we are going to Cyprus. We found out that we are being sent back to Germany.

And that's when we got different grilling again. We are not to get off the ship. We are to fight our way. No matter who dies, who gets sick, we're not getting off that ship. And this is how it was.

When we arrived in France, they came with-- they fed us. The French Jewish organization over there brought us food. And when we are on the ocean and when we are going to France, we were protesting. They would feed us cereal with maggots in it and with worms in it, anything to get off that ship. But we did not budge.

And this is how I came to be on the exodus. After they sent us finally back to Germany, we went back to France. But that's where we started out from. But they wanted to send us all the way back to Germany, because we wouldn't get off in France.

They made another German camp just for these kids. And they were already negotiating the-- they would almost-- like Israel was almost there, the country was almost going to be there. It didn't take much longer after that.

And then we were told that the first ones-- besides the Cyprus people from Cyprus, we are the first ones from Germany that are going back on regular transport if the state does become Israel. But when I got back to camp, my aunt, the one that we survived during the war, she was there waiting for me. I got off the ship.

So she finally forced you to get off the ship.

Yes. In Bremerhaven, we had no choice. In Germany, we had no choice. Everybody was singing and crying and fighting. But we got off. And they took us on transports to a certain camp that was built special for this occasion with the 4,500 people that are coming back.

And my aunt was there. And she took me out. She said, I'm going to take you out in a little shop and buy you some clothes. But she took me out. She bought me something to wear. And I got cleaned up. And I got fed.

And off on a train, she sent me home to mom. She says, that's enough. You're going back to the camp where mother is. And that's when I went on a regular visa to America. But I still got sent back there, too.

So I ended up-- when they sent me back from going on my own-- like they wanted me to go to America from the big ship. They sent me back to another orphanage, which was international. It was the biggest orphanage in Germany. But there were kids there from all over the world also that ran away and got saved during the time.

But there were also Black children there, Black babies. They had a special house with just Black babies from the officers. And there were a lot of Jewish. Every nationality you want to mention was there, kids that survived the wars and so forth and so forth that could go.

The only could-- the Czechoslovakians could go to Australia. And the Jewish kids could go to America if they have visas and so on. And everybody was going out to Canada. And that's how they were transporting these kids into different countries.

And that was where?

In Bad Aibling, which is near Munich. It's called the Children's Home of Bad Aibling. We have quite a bit on that, too. From that moment-- from then on, that's it. I came to America. And I came--

Well, that's a good time to stop. We need to take a break.

Yes. I'm almost finished, anyway.