MIRIAM SAMUELS 12/18/91
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Today is Wednesday, December 18, 1991, in San Francisco, California, and I'm Barbara Barer continuing my interview with Miriam Samuels, with Laurie Sogna on camera, doing the videotaping. So we were continuing on, you've just arrived in Auschwitz...

A: Auschwitz. [Correcting pronunciation.]

Q: Auschwitz.

A: Okay. Well, we arrived at Auschwitz, and they took us to the bath houses.

Q: Can you describe your arrival?

A: Okay. When we arrived in Auschwitz, from trains that we were on for many days and nights, in filth and in dirt, and hungry and thirsty. And when the train stopped, they told us to get off, and there were Germans--German S.S. men and women--men and women both--and dogs, and they had nightsticks, and they were making us get off the train real fast. Some people were very weak and fell down. They separated us. I don't know, I think they separated the young and healthy to one side, the old and mothers and children to the other side, and they marched us off.

Q: You were, like, alone, weren't you?

A: I was completely alone, because I was taken from Hungary, and I was not from that area. I didn't know anybody. I was completely alone. And I was just-- I think I was spaced out. I just didn't know what was going on.

Well, they separated us, and they told us to go one to the right, one to the left, and the S.S. men were herding us along. And some of the people who--

[coughing] Oh, boy, am I going to cough now?

Q: That's alright.

A: Some of the people who were--heflinger, they called them--

Q: What did they call them?

A: Heflinger. The captives, like some of the same people as us, who were taken before, were also helping along to give us directions which way to go. They took us to the bath house, and on the bath house it said "arbach mach die frie": "work makes you free." A big sign. Then they told us to go to the back and get undressed, and drop our shoes in one place, our clothes in the other. They were making us do things pretty fast, "schnell, schnell, schnell," means "fast, fast, fast."

And we couldn't have anything; we were completely naked. They told us to go in, and from the ceilings were hanging clippers, hair clippers. They shaved our heads--

Q: Who shaved you?

A: Uh, the people who were like us, who came before, the haftlinger, other Jews or whoever was in that camp.

Q: Women?

A: No, it was just anybody. I don't think anybody had in mind anything about women or men. I mean, after such a misery, you don't think about that type of thing. Except sometimes you do, I mean, but it wasn't like anybody looked at anybody.

And then they shaved us, and then they had us take a shower, which was also going through the room real fast, and then they sprayed us with some type of a disinfectant. I remember, it was hurting like crazy, it was biting, it was like a petrol product, like a naphtha or something. Some type of a product like that.

And then the gave us a piece of clothing. And some of us got shoes, some of didn't.

Q: Did you get shoes?

A: I got shoes. And we didn't get any underwear, you know, and it was a really, a big shock to us, all at once being left like that. I think we were so bewildered that when we came out from there and they told us to line up in four, we looked at each other, and we thought "Are we crazy? Are they crazy?" We couldn't understand how one human being can do that to another. And then they told us to line up and then they counted off a thousand of us--it's a lot of people--they had us go to one block. A block was one of those stalls where they put us on three layers: The heavier on the bottom, then the middle, and then the top.

Q: Just pieces of wood in a row?

A: Pieces. It was a three-layered bunk beds, but they were bigger than a bunk bed. There were five people one way, five the other way, packed like sardines. And when one in the middle wanted to turn over, everybody else had to, because it was that tight. Except they put more of us there, it was like 13 hundred, because they were bringing in so many people at that time that they didn't have where to put them.

We... They took us for the first night so they didn't have room. The venderlager, which was a gypsy camp, then they took us to lager tse, and that was in Birkenau. Birkenau and Auschwitz were one next to the other, the camps. They were pretty much the same.

Q: How did they move you from one to the other?

A: Walked.

Q: Walking?

A: Walking. Yeah.

The... Birkenau had a lot of the crematoriums in it. And, anyway, when we were there for a certain length of time--

Q: Like how long?

A: Well, I was there for three months. But when we were there maybe a couple of weeks, we got very weak because they didn't allow us to get out to walk or anything.

Q: But how was the day?

A: The day was mostly--We got for breakfast coffee which was drugged. For lunch we got a beet soup, sugar beet soup of some type. And because we were in a destruction camp--it was the vernightenslager--

Q: What's that?

A: That means the camp to be next to be destroyed. So they didn't bother giving us numbers on the arms, but they gave us numbers written on our jackets, on our clothes. Then they... Anyway, what they did is, in the morning we had to get up about five o'clock and stand apell. Apell was counting. We were standing against the building, and there was more of us--13 hundred people were more than the building was wide. So, inside we would never have fit in the barracks. But because we were three layers, that's how we fit. So we would stand there, some days from five or six in the morning to 11, and we weren't supposed to move.

Q: Could you talk?

A: We weren't supposed to. We were supposed to be very quiet, and just stand like at attention. And we--standing still like that, even when you're well, is very, very hard. But when you're hungry and cold it's even worse. So people were fainting left and right. They would just tip over and fall. The blockelderster, who was our blockedlerster inside the things, her name was Alice, she was a girl from--a Jewish girl--from Czechoslovakia, a Czech girl. And she said if somebody falls down, give 'em a big hard slap to wake 'em up, because if they don't get up, they're gonna be killed, they're gonna be shot. Or taken to crematorium, or just shot on the spot.

So I remember how painful it was to see somebody fall down, wanting to tip over, you had to slap their face so that they could... You know, so that they wouldn't be killed. Some people were so upset and discouraged of the hardship that was on them there, that they went to the electric wires and got killed. When they did that, a lot of times they punished the blockelderster, the woman who was taking care of us. At one point, we saw a lot of the blockelderster having to go through the whole camp, which was quite large, on their stomachs in the mud as a punishment. These women. So if somebody says they were bad, I think they were told what to do, and if they didn't do it then they were punished very severely.

Then when... When I was there for about two weeks, I befriended this woman, Alice, the blockelderster. I just went to her. She had a little booth in the front, like a little bit bigger than a phone booth, where she stayed. That was her office and where she had her bed, and I told her... She had, her legs were swollen, and full of blue and black blotches

on her legs. And I told her that I'd massage her legs. I had nothing else to do. I had nobody there. And because of that, she--I didn't ask for anything--she would give me once in a while a piece of bread.

Then she came out and she said that we need 200 women for carrying food, escamander, from one camp to the other. And so I volunteered right away. I knew that it would better than staying packed like sardines all day. Oh, we had this appell twice a day, by the way: In the morning and in the evening.

Q: And in between, what were you doing?

A: We were laying in these bunks. Because there was really not enough room for us.

Q: Where did you get the idea to massage her legs?

A: I don't know. I guess I felt sorry for her. That she-- A lot of people resented the kapos, the blockelderster, as bad people. I didn't see it that way. I knew that, because, from the time before, that I saw that what was happening in Stanislager, I knew that people that want to survive do all kinds of things. So if they were rough with somebody, I knew it was not because of a choice, but it was because she had to, to survive. She was already there for a long time, for two or three years.

So, I went on the S. commando, with the first 200 people. Everybody wanted to go, but the first --

Q: Everyone wanted to go?

A: Oh, sure, but you know, the ones that were first, or were picked out that were strong enough, that's the ones who went. Anyway, I was one of those people. We were carrying food from the camp we were in--from lagerstse; they had a kitchen--to the Czech camp, which was the next camp, and we had to go through a gate. Even between camps, there were gates, with wire, with their watch--you know, the Germans standing on the top--all over sprinkled. And as we would walk through the gate, we carried cans of food or coffee that were like big garbage cans, it was taller than me, and I used to have to bend to one side--you know, so that--to lift. And we had to tell the number as we were going through, that we went through to the other camp.

Q: How far was it between the camps?

A: Um, it was not far. It was a 10-, 15-minute walk each way. Then we left them the food, and we went back, picked up the empty cans from the morning, and we did this twice a day. That gave us a chance to be in the fresh air and walk. The air wasn't very fresh. And as we were walking one day-- As I said, we were spaced out, we didn't know what was going on

Q: You also said you were drugged in your coffee.

A: We were drugged. I mean, we were really very--

Q: Sedated?

A: We were very subdued. I mean, like nobody thought of anything. So, as we were walking and I was standing by the girl next to me, there was this black smoke coming out of the chimneys, with this pungent smell of bones. You know? I didn't know what it was from. But I just said to her, "I wonder what they're burning there. It is so--" The air was so heavy with it, so smelly. And the S.S. man (they walked with us anywhere, even from one camp to the other) says "You dumkopf," (meaning "you stupid") "don't you know it's your parents burning, and your sisters and brothers there." Anyway he told us. That's when I first heard that they were burning our--I mean, that that's a crematorium.

So that was-- When I was maybe there about two and a half or three weeks. Then more transports were coming in, and as they were walking through the barbed wires they saw these--they saw us, with our heads shaven and looking drawn and awful--and they said -- They were not yet processed. We heard them say in Hungarian, "It's a bawardhous", which means it's a crazy--this is the crazy house. You see, people before-- An hour later they looked the same. Before they knew what was coming, they thought that this is a crazy house. That's the way we looked.

Anyway, I did this for a certain length of time. By the way, that Czech camp, where they didn't have a kitchen? They also kept them just for a short time. They didn't feel like they needed a kitchen for them. They were waiting for crematoriums, just as they were waiting for crematoriums for us. You know, they didn't give us numbers for that reason. It was called a vernichtenslager, the camp to be destroyed first.

Q: Meaning the people in the camp?

A: The people, yeah, the vernichtus. So they didn't build a kitchen for them. That's howcome we had to carry food there. And not enough, but just enough to, so that they would survive to, so that they can kill them.

Then when I was there about close to three months, the-- One day, the S.S. came there with their dogs again, men and women both, and they told the blockelder, who was inside, the kapo, to have us all undress. We all had to get undressed and come out naked outside. As I say, there wasn't enough room inside anyway, and they would not come in in a closed space, with the prisoners.

So when we came out, again with these nightsticks, they were "this way, this way." It just so happened that at that time I had a temperature because--I don't know what was wrong with me, but when I was carrying the food that day, I fell down, I fainted, and somebody got me up and got me going. So I was very flushed. And I was standing there naked, and I was sent to this side, and then they didn't let us anymore into the barracks. We were separated. About 200 of us. 200 or 250. And they had us walk from this camp to another camp, completely naked.

Q: What did you think was happening?

A: Well, we thought they might be taking us to the crematorium. But to be very honest, I don't know how anybody else felt, I didn't feel frightened or anything. It was just like you gave up, or whatever is coming is coming. They took us to this other camp, and again we went into a shower room. In there, they gave us civilian clothes afterwards. And they gave us bread and cheese. So, I remember I got a turquoise blue dress, of

flannel, with long sleeves. I will never forget it, because I started to feel like I'm a human being again. So then, um, and it was tishebaff, and I knew this Hungarian--

Q: How did you keep track of the dates and the holidays?

A: I don't know. There were people there who were there for a longer time. And they kind of told somebody, and you know, it kind of went from-- And people counted. I don't know. But somehow they knew. It was tishebaff. Maybe they just thought it was tishebaff, I don't know.

So when-- The Hungarians were very religious, most of them. Nobody would eat it. Now, mind you, we were very hungry.

Q: Did you eat it?

A: No, I didn't eat it. In the same day, they loaded us on a train, and they sent us, they said, "You're going to work." We had-- It still was a cattle train, by the way. Not anything better. But here we had our cheese and bread. Everybody had a pretty good slice of cheese--of bread--and limburger cheese. But it doesn't matter what it was like, as long as it was food. So, we went in the train, and everybody chose me, because nobody knew me, that I'm going to be honest, and everybody gave me their portion of the bread and cheese to keep for them until the stars come out.

Q: They didn't trust themselves to keep it?

A: Keep it, yes.

Q: Because they were so hungry, huh?

A: Yeah. So they gave it to me, and when the stars came out, I gave everybody back their bread and their cheese.

Q: Three stars, you watched for?

A: Yes. And they ate it. And then I think the next day we arrived in a camp. And it wasn't completely built. We didn't see-- Just one building, which was the kitchen. They had bunkers built there. They were underground and were covered with grass, and it looked like it was just a regular field. But there were barbed wires. And so we had somebody before us helped to do some of the barbed wires, and then we had to build the rest of the camp, for the men.

Q: What was in the bunkers?

A: Nothing. They had like-- It was like a room dug out underground. The top was covered with grass, and there you stepped down a step or two, and you were inside. And on each side they had built from wood, like benches for sleeping, I think. You know, like beds. Wider than benches, but, you know, for sleeping, on each side. And there was a walkway in between.

Q: And who was it was used for?

A: For us. They built it for us. Somebody else built it for us. Now we--

Q: So they wouldn't know anyone was there, or?

A: That's right. So then,

Q: Were you the first to come there?

A: We were the first ones to come there. It was completely new. We had to, in turn, build the rest of the camp. This was just for us. You know, for a few, that were finished. We had to dig out the ground, get the ground out, and carry it like on a carrier made out of wood. One person in the front and one in the back, dig out the dirt, put it there, and then carry it to form this room. And then they built it, they took the same dirt and covered the top with it. And put grass on it.

Q: Like digging a grave?

A: Yes, but it was underground housing, like.

Q: This was men and women?

A: No, we were just women.

Q: That's what I thought.

A: First, when we came. So when we finished building this. Okay. When we first came, they told us to come and stand in apell. And right away, the thing was so different, because these were not S.S men. These were people who came back from the Russian front. Officers and soldiers who--

Q: Germans?

A: Germans. And they talked to us, they called us "heflinger," okay? Which was, that's like captured, like war prisoners. And they already talked to us about hygienic things and things like that. They asked if anybody was menstruating.

Q: Was anyone?

A: No. But they gave us pads anyway. So we felt a little bit better because we already were talked to like we were a human being. They worked with us very hard, and as I was carrying the dirt, I was--

Q: In your turquoise dress?

A: In my turquoise dress. I also have curly hair, so even if my hair was short, after three months, I already looked pretty human. So an officer--leftenant, I don't know what you would call them in the English things--came and he said he wants me to come with him. Or he looked for me, and I was trying to hide out, but you could see me a mile away in my turquoise dress, I think [laughing].

Anyway, finally, he came and he told me, "What is your name?" And I told him. He called me, instead of Miriam, he called me Marianna. "Du comes wit mir." ("you're coming with me") And I was scared to death. What does he want with me? First of all, we were scared more than anything that the Germans were picking out Jewish girls--because we heard about that from before--for their own pleasure. And that's what I was afraid of. You know. So, as I was walking beside him through the camp, I saw another girl, who was much prettier than me, and I said to him, "Herr leftenant, isn't she prettier than me?" And he said, "You want her to come with you?" And I said yes. That's a terrible thing to do to somebody, but, you know, you want to save yourself. So he says to her, "Come on, comeinze here," and she doesn't understand German. Hungarians didn't speak Yiddish, so they didn't speak German either, so I told her in Hungarian, "He wants you to come with us." And then she looked at me like she wanted to kill me. I don't know if she knew that I, you know. And so we both went. He took us out of camp, took us to his quarters, and he told us that we were going to be his "futzfraulein," which means cleaning woman.

They didn't want to look at the most awfulest people. They wanted to look at somebody who looks a little bit more human. So she was his "ftuzwoman", and I was for a lot bigger officer because I spoke the language. We were never supposed to be in the room when they were there. We cleaned their room, cleaned their boots, and did--but not when they were there. When they were out on maneuvers, then we had to do the work.

Q: And where were you when they were there?

A: We had to go to the S.S. kitchen to work. So we did both. We cleaned their things. So once in a while--

Q: Where did you sleep, then?

A: Oh, we had to go back. Oh, they wouldn't let us-- And we couldn't eat their food, either. No. We were just there for the--

Q: Nine to five?

A: Nine to five, and then we went back and we had to eat from the kitchen from what the heflinger ate--the watery soup--not their food. But still, it was better than to go out and work with munitions, or in the fields, or clean up bombs, or light munitions. They did all of those things. So, me and her worked there, and then they brought-- Okay. So, that was in the beginning.

Q: And in the kitchen, who were you working with?

A: With other people who they chose to work in the kitchen. Also Jews. Except there was one Frenchman who was a chef, and there was one German who was the overseer. There was a Jewish bookkeeper there working, and the people who were doing the general work, cleaning the kitchen, the dishes, the serving. I mean, we did everything. Peeling the vegetables...

Q: And they watched you, that you couldn't take anything?

A: We were not supposed to ever touch anything. And we were both told not to because we were afraid that they are gonna kill us. We were told.

Q: Wasn't it hard to be around all the food?

A: Well, once in a while we stuck a piece of raw potato in our mouth. If there were carrots, especially, or cabbage, which was a big help because we really needed that. We had to go to work much earlier than anybody else because we had to serve coffee for the soldiers before they went on maneuvers, which was about 5 o'clock in the morning. We had to have the coffee made. There were big copper kettles. It was for a big military outpost.

Q: Was there any resentment among the other people that you were getting to do this?

A: I don't think so. I mean, everybody was assigned where they were assigned. You know? And, as I say, I really didn't have anybody that I really knew. Everybody knew me, but I didn't know anybody. I became very good friends with the girl that came with me, Nushi. We're still friends. And then her cousin. And, anyway, that's gonna-- I'll explain a little bit more about that after.

But then came a transport from Poland. Straight from a ghetto. And it was Lodz, it was from Lodz. And this was only men. Oh, and they also sent us 50 more women who were from Poland. They also wanted me to become their kapo, the blockelder, for the whole women's camp, because, I don't know, they all wanted me. And I didn't want to do it. As I say, I didn't know anybody, but they wanted me to do it because I was a stranger, and so you can't fault this person, you know. So I didn't want to do it, but then when these Polish women came, one of them became our kapo. She was very good at it. And she had sisters with her.

So. And we were-- As I said, the transport of men came. Then we'd gotten shoes that were pieces of wood on the bottom, and then some kind of a very inexpensive piece of cloth or leather put over it to make it as shoes. With laces, actually,you know? And they kept our feet from the wet, from the bottoms. So it was pretty good, I mean, you know, we were off the ground quite a bit. And so everybody got--this was already late fall when the men came--got a pair of these shoes. The men came, and I saw a little man without these, barefoot. And I took my shoes and gave 'em to him, over the gate. I wasn't supposed to. But my friend says to me, "Why are you doing that? Winter is coming, you're gonna freeze to death." And I said, "I really don't care." How 'bout if this would be my brother or my father? And I gave him the shoes. Then-- I mean, people were still human. We still were thinking of others.

Q: The whole time were you sleeping underground?

A: Well, it was not ground, it was underground. But it was-- We had wooden benches. The Red Cross in the meantime delivered us blankets. They were supposed to give everybody a blanket, but they gave every third person a blanket. For three people, one blanket.

Q: And you in your turquoise dress, night and day?

A: Yeah, that's all we had. We had no heat and we had no showers. We had no place to take a bath. The whole time.

Q: And where did you go to the bathroom?

A: They had built, on the premises, on the border between the men's and the women's camps (they had wires across the middle) toilets that were boards, and you could go from either side. So we could hear the men, the men could hear us. There was also there a barrel of dry chlorine inside of this building. We used to use that to clean ourselves, as, like a disinfectant. Now, as winter was coming on--

Q: What was the point of having it all--like, not a building, but having it all covered up?

A: From the German viewpoint? Well, first of all, they didn't want to--they didn't want from the air to show that they had camps. You see?

Q: They had all the other camps.

A: Well, this was a satellite, lager 4. It was a satellite to Buchenwald, I think. So... But I'm not sure to which big camp. But it was a satellite. There was about 12 or 14 of these. I was in Lager 4. It was called "kofereelager 4. These people were divided into groups, into individual camps. And, like one camp built the next camp, and the next camp, and the next camp. And then as the camps were overflowing and the Germans--most of the German people--were at war, going for services, they needed farming, they needed to clean and build their roads, they needed to do factory work, to get munitions, and all of that. And all of that is done by people like us, you see? I was-- Because I worked in the kitchen and for the--as, like, the cleaning woman--I didn't do much of that. But that's what the rest of them were doing.

So. But when snow started falling, there, we used to take our clothes, rub it with snow, then rub it with this dry chlorine to wash it off, shake it out, and wash our bodies the same way in the snow. And we weren't very healthy or fat, I'll tell you that much. And then we would put it underneath us, and sleep on it all night so that in the morning we can wear it.

None of the women--the men again-- Most of the men there, I would say 70 percent died of typhoid in that camp, and none of the women were affected. They were next to each other. And it was just because of how we women took care of ourselves. It was winter, and it was very cold, and as I said, we didn't have the clothes, we didn't have any heat or anything like that. And we didn't have the food to keep us warm either. So when people went to work, and-- But, as I said, the men were dying, they were taking them out dead, people from wagons, every day, they were just dying like flies. So, it was typhoid, and typhoid is transferred through lice. And they closed up the women's camp, so we couldn't even go now, anymore, to work for the S.S. They took people from a clean camp to come there, so they wouldn't let us anymore to work there.

Q: How did the Red Cross-- Where did they come from?

A: The Red Cross-- The Red Cross didn't directly come into camp.

Q: What did they think was going on there?

A: Well, they-- I think the Red Cross came in actually a couple of times. Once they gave us the blankets. And from what I understood--between us, you know, people who worked certain places knew--that the Germans took all of the blankets for themselves and for whoever they wanted to, and gave for every three people, one. They also brought us cigarettes and canned, concentrated milk--that sweet milk, condensed milk. They also did the same thing with that. They gave us, for three people, one can of milk.

Q: Well who did the Red Cross think they were giving it to?

A: They thought they were giving it to us, but they were not allowed to--the Germans did not allow them into camp.

Q: But did they know about the concentration camps?

A: Oh, yes! Yes. And then at one point, when we were in that camp, they sent some people from Holland--they were Hollandians--to delouse us, so called. You know, to... And these were men. And they brought soaps and stuff like that for us to wash, but we didn't have water. Then they got water in the snow, bowls of water, and we washed in that. And I remember one of these Hollandians gave me a bottle of like afterbath splash, or something like that [laughing]. You know, I think you were so dehumanized, that, you know, that was a big thing. I used it. [laughing]. But it was funny because it was a big bottle of some type of--

Q: Perfumy stuff?

A: Perfumy stuff. Yes, the Red Cross knew, and they did--they did, in a way, try to help. But what is, in a whole year, twice? Once a can of milk with four cigarettes--you know those samples? And a can of condensed milk for three people. I'm sure they gave a lot more to the Germans, except the Germans took them--took all of these things for themselves.

Anyway, after a while the Germans decided that-- As I said, the men were dying of typhoid. And me and two other girls (the gates were closed between the two camps, we couldn't have--) decided to--but there wasn't electric between us, it was just barbed wire--so we decided to go over the barbed wire and wash the men's clothes. And we did. We went there with, I don't know, somebody made a big fire, and one of those people whom I gave the shoes to, was one of the people who was bringing the dirty clothes. And we would boil the clothes, and we would take them-- The Germans must have given permission, or something, I don't know. But we had to go to the men's side. And after the lice were cooked, they turned huge, big lice. And we had to, with brushes or with pieces of wood, to scrape them off. When we did that, we had to take off our clothes and leave them behind, as not to bring over the typhoid on the other side. And we did that a few times, and then the Germans decided that the women were not affected, and they sent us to another camp. They sent to camp 11.

Uh, so it was very cold, the middle of winter, and they took us. They told us to line up. We had to go to the men's camp--

Q: When you left your clothes there, what did you put on when you came back?

A: Well, I think what we did, the clothes that I washed from the men, I used them.

Q: Okay, you put on-- Sorry, go ahead.

A: Then when we went, they took us to this other camp, camp 11, and--

Q: All the women?

A: All the women. Because the women were not infected at all. We were completely immune, it seemed like, to the whole thing. We went to camp 11, and as we came into camp we saw four bodies hanging from the first block, from the first building. And the people who were going with us--by then they turned S.S. To run a concentration camp you had to turn S.S., so all of those officers we worked for became S.S. I remember that one of the officers--haupmann, which is quite a high thing, told me (I worked for him) to take off his emblem from the Vermacht--you know, his star, whatever he had, his things--and put on an S.S. And when he told me he had tears in his eyes. So some of them really-- I mean, you can't say it was everybody, but they carried out the things because they weren't going to go to the front. Now this was in '44, now, mind you. You have to know how far the war was and what was happening to them.

Q: Were you never abused by any officer?

A: No. No.

Q: Were they punished if they did, or what happened?

A: Yes. No, I would have been shot. Because that was-- It was--what was it? Race mixture, and they were against that. First they used Jewish women and they themselves had to shoot them. That's what I was afraid of in the beginning.

Q: Yes.

A: No, they didn't. I mean, there were some very bad soldiers who pulled off our scarves or wanted to do something, but they were not allowed to--especially the people who worked in the S.S. kitchen. I mean, I'm sure they wouldn't have been punished, but they didn't, you know, abuse anybody between us. But they used to call us names, "???" and stuff like that.

Where was I at?

Q: They took you to another camp.

A: Yeah, yeah, to block 11. And, as I said, we came in and saw what those people hanging. There, it was different. We didn't do anything. It was winter. We were just kind of sitting there for a while. The war was pretty much coming to an end, like in Russia, or already did. And they themselves were pretty confused. They-- You could see.

Q: So you were like in the barracks now, or?

A: We were, yes, we were in the barracks. Not too many things happened there except for after a while they gave us less and less food, because I guess they didn't have it either. And we didn't' work, we just kind of did small things, you know, like in the camp.

Q: And you had no idea about anybody in your family?

A: Well I knew. Oh, I knew by then that I don't have, nobody lives.

Q: How did you know?

A: When I was in Auschwitz, I saw a friend of mine who was married and had a small child, and my mother took her child and carried it for her. So when they were separating the people, they put her one side and my mother to the other side, where the women with the children went. So then, I knew that she isn't alive, my mother. And, of course, I knew about the rest of the family from before, that they're not alive.

Q: When was the last time you saw your mother?

A: I saw my mother when I was in Hungary. She came to see me once. But afterward I heard that she was being beaten because she didn't want to tell where I was. She was afraid they were going to bring me back, and that the gendarmes would abuse me. So, actually, you were asking me was I abused, was I raped. The reason I wasn't is because, I think, I had a very smart mother who had a very watchful eye over me and gave me a lot of courage, and things to know on how to take care of myself, to avoid some of these things.

Then came spring, you know. And it was rainy and muddy, and we were very hungry, and the Germans were disappearing little by little--the S.S.--from the camp. And then in

Q: Did you form friendships in this situation?

A: Well, I had--I personally had the two friends, the one that came with me, and her cousin. I knew-- The people I worked with I knew. But I didn't know the other people at all. I also, while I was in this camp and working for the S.S., I got very sick. I had some type of a throat infection, and-- It's hard to explain. Inside of my-- I ran a high temperature. And we had a doctor who was, he was the chief of staff at some big hospital in a Romanian city, I don't remember. And he was over 70 years old. He was allowed into the women's camp once in a while to... You know, to see if somebody was sick. Because we were working hard. And, by the time I came home from work it was dark, and he took my temperature, and it was very high. He said, "that's not possible, you couldn't work." You have to go-- They didn't give you permission to stay back too often from work, because then they probably wouldn't have gotten anybody, just for serious things.

So, I went to work the next day, and I came back, and this time I came back a little bit earlier, and he examined me again. My temperature was even higher, and I had some type of an infection in my throat that was like an egg. I blew up something, I don't know what. I never heard of anything like that. And he told me that it's life-threatening. And he had a little manicure scissors, which he, on matches, sterilized, wiped it off, and that was the next day, because the sun came out because there was limited of everything, and I was sitting on a chair outside. He put a piece of wood inside my mouth, and he cut the

thing out. And I think I started feeling weak from that on. I mean, like I lost a lot of energy, it seems to me like. And he put me separately. They had like a sick house, but he put me completely separately because he said it's contagious. I don't know what it was, I still don't know. But I know that I had to hold whatever he had there in my hands. I was so his assistant. He also, this doctor, also did something else for me. From hard work--I still have the scars here--from ladling food and from heavy work, I developed growths in my hands, and on here too [indicating sides of hands]. Thick, red, very painful. So, I went--- Because he brought a German doctor to show my case, and then he did it. So they gave him a little bit more instruments, what to work with, and some medication. I think they gave him a surgical knife or something because he used it on me after. Then I got these things on my hands.

Now, I have to go back to work, you know. This was just a kind of after-work type of thing. He already had a light bulb in his case, and he made a cross, cut off the things on my fingers, cut off the thing, put in a lot of gauze that, and cleaned off the sides of my hands. Cut off almost like--

Q: Like calluses or something?

A: Well, they called it ???, they called it like "wild growth." Some type of a growth. I guess it's calluses. But it was not in the normal place, you see. It was from a ladle, like I would serve 500 meals a day, so I had these... Anyway, especially this, I remember, I couldn't believe it, because I looked, how he cut out one section, the next section, and then he stuck so much gauze on it that I couldn't believe that it can get in there. And he wrapped it, and he said, "you can get back to work." So, I had those type of incidents, you see. And I suppose other people did, too.

Um, anyway, sometimes around the middle of April, they told us to get out, get lined up, and they started marching us from this lager 11. And they marched us for days, here and there, and back.

Q: Just aimless marching?

A: Aimlessly.

Q: How old were you, now, 18?

A: Oh, no. At this time, I was 19. No, I was 20!

Q: Twenty?

A: Twenty, yeah. I was 20. Anyway, they marched us from place to place. When we started out, there was as many as S.S. as there was of us. I think the Russians were coming from one side, the Americans from another, and they were going south. I remember we were going south for some reason. Because as we were going the weather was milder.

And people were disappearing. I think some people ran away, some of them were killed. Some of them ran away with Germans, too, to be their witnesses. You know, they said, "we'll hide you until the war is over, but you'll have to witness that I was a good guy."

there was a lot of that. Anyway, we were-- The planes were flying very low over our heads

Q: Which nationality were the planes?

A: Americans, French. We were going toward. And they still looked for a place where to kill us. They brought us to Dachau, I think. They brought us to Dachau, and they brought us underground, and they were so filled up to kill their own that they couldn't find a place for us. You see, they wanted to get rid of the witnesses.

Q: Why didn't they just shoot you?

A: But where would they hide--bury us? I mean, you know, they had to dispose of us. It wasn't so easy. As the planes were flying overhead, we didn't hide, because, you know, we wanted to be seen. But the Germans told us, "run to all sides," you know, "lie down." And I didn't, and a German S.S. woman hit me over my breast so that she cut it. When I went to the doctor he said, "Oh, you had surgery?" I mean, it's quite a good cut. That was a woman, mind you. Because I didn't jump right down to lie down. Anyway, they were taking us from place to place, like, "go faster," or "go slower."

Q: How did you get that taken care of?

A: I didn't. It just healed on its own. Who got anything to-- You know, things were just-- Nature had to cure you, mostly.

Anyway, then, when we were walking maybe a week, we came to a place where-- and most of the S.S. were disappearing. There were less than half left.

Q: When you were walking like that, where did food come from?

A: Well, first of all, sometimes they gave us food because they, you know, they had to have food, too. And sometimes they didn't. And in that case, they would give us a slice of bread.

Q: You mean food would come on trucks behind them?

A: Well, I don't know. To be very honest, I don't know.

Q: Yeah.

A: I can't remember. I can't remember eating.

Q: Right. Oh.

A: So I really couldn't tell you, but I think they must've brought food along or something. With them. They cleaned out the camp. You know, they left, and they must've brought food with them. And there was an awful lot of S.S. with us. So as we were going we slept in outside, it was the middle of April, mostly. We came to this place after about a week, and we saw other transports in the front of us, some in the back of us. There were just-- I think most of the people who were in a certain area they did this to.

They didn't want to leave 'em behind to be freed, so they took 'em as far as they could until they were surrounded.

So we came to this place, and they told us to go into--they were barracks, like military barracks--to go into the barracks and stay there for two hours, not to come out. If you come out, you'll be shot. So we went in, waited for the two hours. We saw that what was going on. You know, we weren't that stupid, to see that. That they were losing the war. But they were also very upset, and we were very afraid that we would be-- You know, they'd kill us. Killing was no big deal for them.

So we went in, and two hours later we came out. There was not a German to be seen. There was nobody. Just us. And we waited maybe an hour or so longer, and outside we were running, we didn't know what. Now. Now, what do you do? Where do you go? I mean, there's nobody there. About an hour later, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon or so, came in two jeeps with five soldiers on it. That's it. We were freed by five Americans.

Q: Five American soldiers?

A: And then they apologized. They're sorry they're so late, but they had to make a bridge across a river, which was next to that place. I don't know. Some of us went to see it. Would you believe that? After all of that!

Q: Five guys came in?

A: To free us. I remember I was standing there gazing. Some people cried. Some ran to the soldiers and wanted to hug 'em. Tell 'em what was happening. I just stood there, and I couldn't believe it. Five soldiers and two jeeps! No guns, no nothing, you know. That's a war? You know, just didn't seem possible. Anyway, then the same--

Q: So you were free. What were you supposed to do?

A: Yeah. And here they tell us, the first thing they told us, don't go into town. Don't go for food. You're not allowed to go because there are still a lot of S.S. in the surrounding areas, and you'll be killed. Which was probably so. Don't go, because we were ready to go. Some people took off, and they went to some restaurant--I should've brought that picture--and they stole all of the tablecloths, and we all made ourselves skirts out of them. By hand, you know? They were blue and white checkers [laughing]. Everybody had a skirt made up of them.

Q: Where did you get needles and thread?

A: Oh, somehow they got it, I suppose. You know, they went around to, you know, to the next town. They figured, now we're free and we can do what we want, people thought who got freed. I didn't go. I just, I couldn't believe it. I was, I was, I think I was stunned. They also--

Q: Did the soldiers bring food or anything?

A: No, they didn't bring anything. They just told us, "Don't go to town because..." But I think the next day I went to town, and I saw, the bakery is open, and people are standing in line to get bread. We couldn't even do that. First of all, we didn't' have the

money; secondary they wouldn't give it to us. And the soldiers told us not to get into the stores or beg for anything or anything.

Q: Why?

A: That was our-- Those were the orders. The next day, more soldiers came in, and they brought food. Ok, I'll tell you--

Q: What language did they speak?

A: There were among us people who spoke English. And, I don't know, people communicate somehow. You see hungry people, you give 'em food.

Q: Right, right.

A: But, do you know what they gave us? Their own rations. They took some of their breakfast, I don't know, whatever they had. They gave us, I remember, we got powdered eggs, bacon (which we didn't eat, by the way). It was in little cans like a tuna can, and it was wrapped with paper. And we didn't have where to prepare it. So, little fires were made outside on the lawns. These barracks were mostly officers', S.S. officers', and where the S.S. lived, or something. So there was a lot of papers. Then we moved in into an office. You know, in an office building. It was full of paper. I wish I would have saved some of it. But at the time, you don't think. But there were people who spoke English, because I remember one came out, and he gave a full report about everybody who should be sought after, and he knew all of the facts and figures and all of that. So we got freed, and they, little by little we started getting a little rations. You know, what the soldiers had. And people were running from one place where they got freed to the other to see if they can find some relatives. My girlfriend, Nushi, who was my friend, she and the barber fell in love in camp, and then they found each other. He came to our camp, and we insisted that we sleep between them, so. [laughing]. We were very proper. And then about-- We got freed, and somehow people got lipstick, and they

Q: Do you remember the date?

A: It was May the 1st I got freed.

Q: 1944?

A: 1945.

Q: Forty-five.

A: May the first. And a few days-- Things were humming, like, you know. People got radios, and we could listen to the news. And, you know, there was still war, but the war was just about over. I think when the war was over was the 9th, in Europe, or something? The 9th of May, and this was the 1st. And Czech military came to the camp that we were in, and they said, "Anybody who is Czech and wants to go back, we'll take you." They came with trucks, with military trucks. And they give you until tomorrow to decide. The people who were Czech registered, and most of them left. Well, actually, a lot of them didn't because they were afraid to travel. But I did leave with that first transport. But before I left, and her cousin also was leaving, she also got a boyfriend who

was from our area, and he was Czech. But this was Hungarian. She was Hungarian. So we said that we would not leave until Lushi, my friend, and her barber-fiancee, or boy that she was in love with, got married. We got together, we found a rabbi, and we got them married, and we left.

Q: How did you get a boyfriend when the only time in the camp you were separated from the men.

A: Well, you see, as I told you, we were chosen as cleaning women; he was chosen as a barber. And while she was back cleaning the boots, they couldn't talk: He was Polish, she was Hungarian. And they couldn't--they didn't have a language in common. And I was their interpreter. Actually, what happened is he--when he came from Lodz, he was a very modern, non-observant Jew. And he thought that God was doing this to him because he is not practicing Judaism. So he promised the first Jewish girl that he meets he will marry. He comes to camp, and meets me. Okay? And he tells me this. He says he wants to marry me. Now, we're both in camp. We don't know if we're gonna live or anything, but he tells me this. And so, I introduced him to my girlfriend. And I said, "You suit more each other, much more than you and me." And I told everybody that I have a fiancee in America. Because, to shake off. People were trying to get somebody, because people lost their families, and they wanted to have somebody. And I --

Q: Didn't you want to have somebody?

A: No. I didn't because I think I already went through this once before. I guess maybe I was afraid of losing somebody. Enough to get to know somebody well. I don't know. But I was an exception to the rule, because her cousin also found somebody who was interested in me, and so I gave him something to take to this other girl, because he was driving a truck. And they also got married, and they live in New York, and we visit them. So they both--both of these couples are married, happily married.

Q: So you got them married before you left--

A: Before we left. When we left for Czechoslovakia through Germany--

Q: Three women and two men--

A: No, just two. The one that got married stayed behind, because her husband was Polish and she was Hungarian. But we wouldn't leave them if they were not married.

Q: Aha.

A: So, they were the first married couple, I think, in camp. I mean, you know. So then we left, and we traveled with the Czechs, oh, about three days, I think. Because the roads were bombed out in Germany, and all kinds of things happened. And then we came to Pilsen--

Q: Where?

A: Pilsen. That's on the border between Germany and Czechoslovakia. You heard of the Pilsner beer?

Q: Um hm.

A: That's the same Pilsner. It's very close to the border. Then we crossed the border on the trucks, and we all got off of the trucks and kissed the ground. Then, they took us to a big hotel in Pilsen. It was kinda late by the time we got there, and I remember looking at that plush red carpeting and velvet settees, you know. All of the things, and we are dirty, and you know, out of camp. We looked like-- And after so many days of transportation, you know, going on trucks and walking, and the roads were bad. Anyway, we came to this place in the evening, and each of us got a big mug of beer. Pilsner beer. And beer doesn't have--some of it doesn't have--much alcohol. The black beer, especially, is very rich, very good. We all had beer, and then they served us a real Czech dinner. ???, which is like dumplings, with meat sauce, not much meat, but meat sauce. We went to sleep, and in the morning they brought us coffee and rolls in bed.

Q: You didn't get sick from this food?

A: No, we didn't. Well, I don't think they gave us that much, but just the same, they treated us, thinking of it, you know, of how we must have looked and how we were treated, I think they're wonderful people! You know, to do that, in a hotel. And from there, now we're already on Czech territory, the soldiers left us behind, and said "Take the train, you don't have to pay for tickets, and everybody can go home. Or if you don't have a home, go to Prague. And some agency is gonna take care of you." Most of us went to Prague.

Q: How did you know you didn't have a home?

A: Well, I did. Well, but to get home-- You see, the war is--

Q: ??

A: Yeah. We went to Prague. You see, first of all, we didn't have money, we didn't have-- You know, you had to go someplace to get some help. So we went to Prague, and we waited. We came to a high school--they put us in a high school--and we stayed there for-- There still was cleaning up after the war, for a long time after there was no food. We stayed in this high school, and they set up a kitchen for us, and they fed us. They, you know, put up beds, and stuff like that. I don't know how they did it. It's like here for some type of an emergency, same way. I met a lot of people that I knew there, and, you know. In the meantime, the military were coming back from the Russian front, and they were stationed in Prague, and I met my cousin there.

And all kinds of things happened to me. Somebody who was in love with me and I didn't know came and found me there. People that were looking for people came to look in these centers. Now, Prague was one of the cities that was most helpful. Because they had these agencies where, if somebody was sick, they got medical care, or they were sent to schools if they were in the middle of an education and wanted to stay. I mean, you had an opportunity. They also gave you clothes, and they gave you some money. That type of stuff.

Q: Were you looking for anybody? Who were you looking for.

A: I didn't ask for anybody. I was just looking, if I find somebody. I did find people that I-- You know, the way you look is you ask, "Have you seen such-and-such?" Or if you know somebody, "Do you know of anybody who lives from my family?" You know, that type of stuff. Anyway, I stayed there for three--for two weeks. And then this boy who thought that--well, he thought that he was in love with me, and I didn't even know it--took me to the International House. People were living there who were caught during the war, from the United States, from England, from-- They still couldn't get home. Though from there, there were some military planes for American citizens to take them home, and the reason I know that is because a young man by the name of Baer, from New York, offered me the opportunity to marry him and go with him home, and then I can divorce hime. Of course I didn't take his offer, because I thought, "I'm free now. I don't have to do things like that." And he was a very nice man, and he was very sincere about it. He did leave a few days later from that International House.

They still were getting things on tickets, food, while I was in Prague. And in the International House, the people were giving out some of their meat and protein food for us, because the doctors said that we needed to be built back up. That was in Prague. Then I went to Hungary. I was in Budapest, but that wasn't the same. The exact--

Q: ???

A: To get home. I was gonna go home. And what we did is, we just got on a train, and we were riding free. And we took our chances. Because while riding on the train from Pilsen to Prague, I had to jump off the train because there were Russian soldiers on the train. And luckily I was with three young kids, three young men, actually. I put on that bandanna like my mother told me to do. And it was getting dark, and I got on the train in Pilsen, and there were no seats, because the Russian soldiers tore out all the seats, so they could sleep, I think, on the floors, or whatever? So there were no seats, except for one by the door, something that opens up, a seat. And a Russian soldier was sitting there, and because it was dark, the lights were broken--or whatever, I don't know, there were no lights--so, he says to me, "Babushka, sit down." You know, he gave me his seat. And I sat there, and then the light came on, and he saw I had a young face, I'm not an old woman. I got real frightened, he was coming at me, and I jumped off the train.

Q: Alone?

A: Alone. And then I got to Prague. You know, I somehow got in to Prague, and took the-- Well, you know, I knew the language, and I took the regular buses, and I got someplace where I got together with the rest of these people. So you did-- It was dangerous. That's why a lot of women did not go at that time, you know, when the war just ended. They stayed in Germany. But I was very anxious to find out. I still was hoping that maybe my mother was alive. Maybe somebody came back. And if they would, the people always go where they came from, I thought, to their home. So I went. I wanted to get home. But it wasn't easy. It's not like now, you take a plane. You had to hop from one train to another and hope that the that railroad goes there, or that the train tracks-- A lot of places were bombed out, and you couldn't get there.

So, anyway, I came home, and I found that somebody who I went to school with was taking apart--taking off the windows of my house. And I asked him, "Why are you doing that?" And he says, "I fought for this country, so I can do anything I want to. If I want this house, I'll take it." It was like-- After all of this, it was like somebody sticking--a

friend, supposed to've been--a knife in my heart, you know. Then I stayed over at a neighbor's house for overnight, one night. And some of the neighbors came and gave me some souvenirs from what was once upon a time my family's, mine. Nothing in jewelry or anything, just like embroidery that I did, and some-- They used to have a lot of fancy embroideries and ritual things, and stuff like that. I took all of that, and I left.

They were talking about going to Rumania at that time. Because Rumania wasn't as affected as the rest of the country. And they said if you go to Bucharest that there is an Israeli agency and that you might be able to go to Israel. To Palestine. So everybody at that time was going. And they also were giving like a big sum of money, there was a Jewish agency there that was handing out money to all the people who came back from the camps. So they can go or start something. I don't know. My husband got some, too, as a matter of fact. I think it was like a thousand whatever they have in Rumania. Which probably would be like a hundred dollars, I suppose. So I was gonna go there, and again, I'm traveling with these three--two--young men, actually. One was younger than me, and one was older, which I befriended on the way. It's kind of a protection, you know, not to be by yourself. And then we stayed wherever there was someplace for people like us to stay. So there was a place in Kirahaus, which is about 3 kilometers from where my husband is. We stayed overnight there, because that was close to the Romanian border. And then we would go to the town where my husband lives, because from there they would hire somebody to take you to Rumania.

So, early in the morning, I already heard that my husband was alive. I knew them, and his brother, and I thought maybe my-- I also was going there because my aunt was his aunt too, and she had children, and I thought maybe some of them survived, so I was going to look for my aunt and my cousins.

Q: On your mother's side of your family?

A: Yeah, my mother's sister.

Q: Um hm.

A; So, I went there, and came to my husband's house, and my brother-in-law was doubling, he was 29. There was a whole bunch of men, no women. Except for my sister-in-law. And right away, we started talking that I'm getting married. As soon as I walked into the house.

Q: You knew him from before, or?

A: Kind of. Not really. You know, I knew them when we were kids.

Q: Um hm.

A: Not well or anything. I used to play with his brother, the younger brother, because he was the same age.

Q: What was the reunion like, walking into the house?

A: Well, they were very happy to see me, and I think they planned everything out before I got there. They heard that I'm alive--

Q: They knew you were alive, but they didn't know you were coming?

A: Yeah. They knew that I was in the next town.

Q: Oh.

A: Somehow. It was very close, so, you know. Uh, so it was I think Thursday morning when I got there. And I said, "Don't be stupid, don't be ridiculous, I'm going to Rumania, because that's where I-- You know, I want to go to Palestine." So my brother-in-law, first all of all, he pretended that he can't talk, and he has a ??? on. Then he took me in the garden for a walk, while he still has the ??? on and can't talk. In the meantime, the rest of the men and my husband took these two guys, hired for them a guide, and took them across the border to Rumania. So here I'm left, and my husband-- And my brother-in-law says to me, "You're family, and I'm not gonna let you go two days before Shabbat. Where are you gonna be for Shabbat? And you have to relax, and we already have an establishment here, and I'm married," and all of that. He says, "If I wouldn't be married, I'd marry you. You know I always loved you." That type of thing. And he says, "My brother is gonna go with you to Rumania, he already was there. He'll take you there. Why do you have to go with strangers?" You know? And I said, "Look, I'm not ready for marriage, I don't want to talk about it." "But stay for Shabbat." "Okay. I'll stay for Shabbat." So Friday my husband comes in, and because there was a lot of men, there was no place for me to sleep except in the room with my brother-in-law and his wife. So they're in one bed, I'm in the next one, and I'm still in bed, and my husband comes in, and he says to me, "Myencu," (which is an endearing word), he said, "my brothers and I decided that we should get married." And I said, "What? I haven't even been here for 24 hours." And I said, "Tell your brothers that you can marry each other. I'm not marrying anybody. Forget it."

In the meantime, his brother--his older brother--who was, who told me he was in love with me all his life, comes in and he says, "My wife doesn't know how to bake, but won't you please bake a cake for your engagement party?" "Engagement party! What are you talking about?" Anyway, all of the men gathered, and they all talked to me. That my father and my mother promised that I would marry him. It's not so. He's-- My husband still says this! But she said, at some point, I know my father-in-law, he used to hold me on his lap, and he said, "One day you're gonna be my daughter." But, anyway, this is Friday: I can't go anyplace. You know, there is no place. I can't leave. And I figured, well, I'll just, you know, say no. And my older brother was asked, you know, to court me, to go for a walk in the garden, and stuff like that, so maybe if I talk to him I'll change my mind. [laughing].

So we go in the garden, and they had like an orchard, you know, walnut trees, all kinds of trees. My husband goes with a ring in his mouth, hanging down from a walnut tree, trying to get me to put the ring on my finger. [laughing]. I had a big laugh, and I-- No way. Then, they still had invited people from all over for Saturday nights. And mind you, there are very few Jewish people here. But the man who got free before from the Russians, because they were in the army, and their work camps were there. There was a lot of men but no women. So, anyway, it was very disturbing to me. I didn't know what to do, whom to turn to. You know, what do you do? My sister-in-law's father was there, too. He was an older man, and I thought, I'll talk to him. And he says, "Well, what's wrong with him? Why wouldn't you marry him?" You know? And stuff like that, and

so. They promised me diamonds and jewelry, and a good life, and everything. The whole family did. My brother-in-law also gave me choices. He says, "If you don't want to marry one, I have three more brothers to choose." But I have to marry one of them.

Anyway, they wanted me to say yes. So Saturday morning, my husband and an older man who was supposed to have been my father's friend, say, "Let's go." There is somebody who has a vineyard, and he was a friend of my family, and I should go and talk to that man, and try to convince me that I should really marry him. So, I agreed to go to see that man because he was a friend of the family, and he came there, and this man says--he talked to him--he says, "You know, she needs a long vacation, she needs to go to a ???," which is a recovery place, you know? Because I just got out of a horrible concentration camp. No time to get married, at this time. He said, "She should go to that, and she should first get herself so she can decide what she wants." And he makes all of this, and in the meantime, he gave for the party a lot of wine. He came for a guest, and he did want to get me drunk so I would say yes.

This is a Saturday. And we walked from one town to the other. And they got me to-- I think I drank the same amount as they did, every one of them. And as we were walking home, they were drunk like skunks, and I was too [laughing]. So we came back, and I said unconditionally, "No way am I getting engaged or married. That's it." But they already had a band. They had all of the people there, and they told the people, "Okay; she says no." You know, no is no. Meantime, there were things to eat. You know, people didn't have food. There were things to eat and to drink, so they stayed still a little longer, and I left the room. And I went outside. And they all--my brother-in-law, my husband, his wife, her father--all came out to talk to me. And when they talked to me, they were trying to convince me of all of the nice things: "You're going to get the same gold watch as Ella got. You're going to get the same thing as so." They told me stories that they found my aunt's jewelry, and it's all gonna be mine. And, I don't know, they just... And I can live in my aunt's house, which was a very large house. And, anyway. And I still say no. I'm standing outside, and I hear a ???. That means, in Jewish, a ???. It's an engagement party. They break a plate. And everybody yells, "Mazel tov!" And I still say no.

Anyway, somehow I got in, and they were dancing, and everybody got drunk. They had gypsy music, and I was engaged. Just like that. I was engaged. I still. I went swimming, and I wouldn't let my husband come in the water when I was in the water. [laughing]. Well, mind you, I didn't live through teenage years. I didn't have anybody to tell me anything, how to behave or anything. So, for the next Friday, following, comes this man who put me in the International House in Prague, because he heard I got engaged. So he took off from the army, he got leave, and somebody else followed me who thought he was in love with me. These two men both come because I got engaged. And they come-- There was no other place to go to, no hotels, just to my husband's house. And they both want to claim me. So it was very funny, because the guy was a friend of my brother-in-law's who was in love with me. I didn't know about it, actually. And I said, "Aren't you going to congratulate me?" You know, I accepted that I'm engaged. And he reaches out like that [indicating], and cries. A soldier! You know, I couldn't figure it out. Then I find out that he and my brother-in-law made a bet when I was 14 years old which one was gonna marry me, my brother-in-law or him.

And the other guy says, "Engagement don't mean anything. She's in love with me." And he was going to stay for shabbat at their house. Can you imagine how uncomfortable I was? Three men.

Q: Yes.

A: Anyway, they both left the following Sunday. But then I still didn't want to get married. But I didn't want to stay there, because the Russians were there. You know, they were getting more and more settled in there. I said, "No, I'm not going to stay here. I'm going back wherever the other people are. I feel safer there because something is going to happen." We were going to go to Palestine, and I wanted to go to Palestine.

Q: What was your fear?

A: Well, first of all, we didn't have any freedom. At our wedding, they got into--they took pictures, and I didn't have one picture because they wouldn't let me have the picture. And I left in the meantime. I mean, they just-- We were just afraid of them. We were afraid of communism, and there were also spies all the time. When went in a restaurant, and if there was a Russian sitting behind us, we thought he was spying on us. We were afraid of going to ???. A lot of people did go that I knew. So, you know, there was that fear.

Q: And when were you married?

A: Six weeks later. Anyway, we were married...

Q: And the six weeks you spent at your brother-in-law's house?

A: Yes. No. I was, in the meantime, I still wanted to go back to my hometown, so I thought, "I'll go there, and I'll have time to think." But my husband followed me. There was no getting away [laughing]. So, anyway, we got married-- Oh I-- Well, let's make, let's clarify something: I wasn't ready for marriage. I really liked him. And I figured, all of the other men, or people, that so far--I didn't know very many--that he was the best catch. So it wasn't like I-- I just was not quite ready yet, for getting married, at that time. I didn't know where I am at, or where I was gonna go, what was gonna happen to me. And I was trying to think logically. Which doesn't always work. But my husband convinced me that-- I said, "I want to leave," and he says, "Then in that case, please let's get married, because you don't have money for one, it would be better with two." See, we were still on the old tradition that people don't live together before marriage. So we got married, and then the high holidays rolled around, and we weren't about to leave there. When the holidays were over, I said, "We're going right now." And we did.

The borders were closing, and I was already pregnant. I got pregnant right away after I got married. And we went on our bellies across the border to Rumania. Because the flares were going off. But luckily because we there was still in the fields the corn and like that, we could hided. So Saturday night, we took off and went to Rumania, and then from Rumania we came Sunday morning, and I took all of those things with me that the people from my camp gave me, because those were precious things to me. And we went out to some family there, we stayed overnight there. Then we took a wagon, and we traveled. It took us three weeks to get to Germany. The reason it took us that long is because by then you had to have a passport already, and the money wasn't ready, they were changing the money. So it took us three weeks, because we were jumping off the trains and jumping on, jumping into train stations. It's a very long story. But we got to Germany, and by the time we came, most of the camps--DP camps--were filled. So we

told them we wanted to go to Palestine, and they said, there is a kibbutz that will probably accept you. But they just accept unmarried people. So went in there as unmarried. We lived separately for a while.

Q: And you're pregnant?

A: I'm pregnant. Until I told one woman-- She was telling me that they called me the ??? because in the Czech meaning, I am a Hungarian and he's a Czech. So they said, "You're spending too much time with that Czech." Anyway, so it was that type of a case in the beginning. Then when they found out, they gave us a room.

Q: And where are you? You're in a DP camp?

A: Now we're in a DP camp which in Germany. And this was in ?? by Frankfurt. And we were staying on Kibbutz Yahut.

Q: Explain that.

A: A kibbutz yahut means a mixture of people. You can be religious or free. Some people were having kosher food; some did not.

Q: Who set up at the kibbutz?

A: Well, some people who were Zionists. Instead of being in camps in the same place, they set it up as a kibbutz. And some people who had some profession, some knowledge of something, were teaching the other people how to do things. Like my husband was teaching metal work and drawing things for some of the people who were interested in that, so when they come to Israel, so they can have a profession. People were teaching, were learning, different professions there. And we were also trying to sustain ourselves. And we practiced things just like on a kibbutz: The working, the dancing, the singing, the togetherness. You know? Not everybody separate.

Q: But who organized it? The Zionists?

A: Some of the people who were there. And then they became like the elders.

Q: Were ???

A: No, no, no, no. No, our people, our people. But it was in a German military outpost. So we were accepted there, and we stayed there. My husband was teaching there, as I said.

Q: What did you have to do to be accepted?

A: First of all, you had to be a Zionist. You had to be one of those people who was interested in going to Israel and to work for Israel. Unselfishly. For the group, not for yourself. We learned Hebrew a little. We had classes. And I worked in the kitchen a lot. And I washed the floors and the staircases, and all of those things. You know, just worked there. And my first child born was still born there. We had a curfew. We couldn't go in or out at curfew.

Q: Was stillborn?

A: No. When my daughter was born, I was still in the camp, I was still in the kibbutz. As a matter of fact, I walked from the kibbutz when I got in labor to the hospital in Germany. I mean, in Hoecht, which was, oh, I think about four or five miles, a long way. But they said that if I walked I was gonna have an easier birth. I came there and I was in labor for 26 hours, nothing happened. And then I think I was unconscious for about five hours, I was told. And they didn't take care of me in this hospital. Then the midwife, or whoever is delivering babies there, and the nurse, called the doctor and said that I am unconscious for a long time, and to do something about me. And so they had to ask permission from the U.N.--well, I don't know if it's the U.N., it was called the UMRA--I think it has something to do with the U.N. International things. That they had to take my baby in pieces. They said the baby is dead, it's never gonna be born, and they have the frau there on the UMRA team, you know, the number? Because they pay for the care of me. And that's when I woke up. I was unconscious for a long time, but I woke up, and I heard that they were going to take my child in pieces. And I started screaming. So that they would hear me on the phone. I was screaming that they want to kill my baby. I want a whole baby, not in pieces.

So they performed a C-section on me. And from what they told me, about six people after I was strapped down had to hold me down. I was so-- I was tearing the stirrups and everything; I wouldn't lie still. And after the surgery, I got an infection because they operated with-- Friday--this was Saturday morning--Friday was their operating day, and I think the instruments weren't clean or anything, and they performed surgery on me with dirty instruments. And I got infected, and I couldn't move, I couldn't move my hands. I was lying there wide awake. After the operation, because it was curfew there, my husband came Saturday morning, and the doctor who operated on me said, "Your baby is dead." And my husband took her by the collar by her jacket, or whatever she had, and said, "She is not dead. My baby is not dead. You're a liar." And while she was telling that to my husband, a nun came in, and a couple of nuns behind her, with this beautiful baby with a little red bow in her hair-- It was my baby. What they did, they gave me ether. I remember that part, when they told me to count backward. And I think, because of the long labor, the baby turned blue or something. And instead of reviving her, they threw her out into the outside, I think, on a table or whatever. And the nuns go there to service early in the morning, like 5:30 or something, before they start their duties, they go to the chapel. And they walked by there, and they saw this baby lying on the table, so they picked it up. You know? And I think that maybe they felt like they still can revive the baby. They took the baby and wrapped it, and they rinsed her stomach, they said, with half a liter of tea, which is half a quart, of black tea. That's what they told me. They rinsed her stomach. And then she started crying. And she was okay. They cleaned her up and they brought her.

While, at the same time, while the doctor was telling my husband that the baby is dead. So that's how much care they gave of Jewish children in Germany. Then after that, as I say, I got infected, and I was in a ward. There was all kinds of people. The nurses would uncover me, and the doctors would make their morning rounds and just have a look from far away, and go by. Nobody paid too much attention to me. My husband would come every day and wipe my lips with a wet cloth. And there they didn't give you any food if you didn't go to the bathroom at first. That was the policy. I don't know if it was just for new mothers, or whatever. But then when they came to take out my stitches, the seventh day, I think, that they take out the first stitches? The same doctor who did the surgery, I

think, came, with her little things where she puts the things, and she started taking out two and three stitches, and then my whole stomach opened up and burst. And the pus started running over. And she started ringing for the nurses to come, and they brought towels and sheets and surrounded me, because I was just, I think-- I felt a great release. I had a high temperature. But nobody took care one way or another.

Anyway, I felt a big relief. I felt like I can lift my arm now. But they took me on a gurney, covered me up, didn't put me together again, just the way I was. They took away the wet things, covered me up, took me to the infectious ward, which, in turn, the nuns were in charge of. And there, they didn't put me in a room. They put me in the bathroom to die. The bathroom was the type of bathroom where they kept linen; it wasn't used as a bathroom. It was used more like a storage room, a linen room. And they wheeled me in there and turned out the light and left. Nobody gave me any medication, nobody gave me any-- I mean, I wasn't taken care of. They just put me in there to die. In the morning, the nuns came in, and I asked them, "Can I have some breakfast?" And they were very surprised, because they put me there to die. But because my stomach opened up, and all of that thing came out, I felt better. So now they have to find me a bed. So they find me a bed where there were three other women on the ward. And the doctor goes, and then they go and put in a drainage pipe in me. Then they used-- I don't know how they have now--they used to have glass. One on the top and one on the bottom of my stomach. To drain the pus. And I remember all around me the sheets were all green from this, from the infection. And to keep the infection controlled, they told my husband, a couple of days later, that I need alcohol. Any type of alcohol he can get, but I need a whole quart of alcohol.

In the meantime, I didn't know what was going on with my child. Because I couldn't see her, because I had an infection. My husband told me the baby was still in the hospital, and we were on a kibbutz; there was nobody there to take care of her. Finally, he goes to see her, and she is all covered with rash. So he takes the baby home. He doesn't know what to do with her, or with what to feed her. And he--and I don't know how--he goes to buy mother's milk. They had no formula or anything to feed the baby. And it was in May or June already. People were eating strawberries and she was allergic to it. Again she gets infected. I had a friend who had a baby three weeks older, and after she nursed her child--but she also left the kibbutz. The food wasn't so great, and so she didn't have enough for two children, but she would feed her a little bit; otherwise she just lived on tea and sugar. For five weeks. And my husband would buy milk--skim milk, that's all they had--on the black market, and bathe her in it to make her wounds heal. Of course, I didn't hear, because he wouldn't tell me any of this, because it would get me very upset. The nuns also suggested that they bring me food from home. Because their food wasn't so good and there wasn't so much of it, or whatever. Or they didn't want to feed a Jew, I don't know what it was.

So my husband and the kibbutz--and, as I said, there wasn't very much--would bring me food. My brother-in-law would go, and he sold his hat and whatever he had to get chicken and have it killed and make me chicken soup.

Q: Your brother-in-law also came to the kibbutz?

A: Yes. So, that's the brother that lives now in Alameda. So food was brought mostly from there every day. And my husband had to walk.

Q: Five miles?

A: Five miles, yes. So all of this was going on, and they didn't know when I'm gonna get better. They had to go on the black market first, and buy some alcohol. Sometimes it was rubbing alcohol, sometimes it was regular whisky of some type. Whatever there was available. Sometimes it was champagne. Now, what they did with this alcohol was, the nuns would mix it with eggs and put it in a teakettle, put it on my chest, and I'd just drink it down. The eggs were there so it wouldn't burn my throat. So that kept the infection from getting worse.

Then one day the doctor examined me. She sees my belly's really big. They're gonna put me back to sleep, and they're gonna do more surgery. While I was asleep, I was relaxed, and I emptied my bladder. They were gonna operate. The reason was that, I guess, you know I was in pain and it was painful to go on a bedpan or whatever.

Q: And that caused the distension to go down?

A: So, anyway, then they had a doctor on the kibbutz, and he went to the German doctors, and he said, "If you are not going to do something about this Jewish woman, I'll see to it that you pay for it." Enough is enough. I mean, they saw that I'm not being treated right. So they told him that if I could get penicillin, they could help me. So my husband had to go to a chaplain, an American chaplain, to somebody who was in contact with my family here. A chaplain and a newspaperwoman from New York, who was a correspondent during the war. And they, in turn, let my family know here. And they--I don't know how--got, somehow, penicillin--

Q: These were your uncles on your mother's side.

A: Her brothers. They got penicillin to me. Then they were giving penicillin every five hours. It wasn't the same as now. And so I got penicillin. And the German doctors and the hospital were supposed to give it to me. They didn't give me the whole amount. They gave me once or twice. And they wanted to specially treated for that. They got paid. My husband had to give them cigarettes, coffee, that he bought on the black market. And we didn't have much with which to buy. But to save my life, he had to do it. After five weeks, I got out of the hospital. And I still had my glass pipes in my stomach because I was still running. But it was better to get out of there, and besides, they didn't have room for me. Anyway, after five weeks I got of the hospital, and I came home. And my baby weighed less than at birth, at five weeks. I took her to the doctor, and the doctor told me, "You have to nurse her or if not she'll die." After five weeks, I didn't have anything to nurse with. And I had an infection. You know, I still had some infection.

So I would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning, go for a walk before she wakes up, so I could nurse her, because that kind of stimulated me. I also ate herring and drank a lot of beer. I blew up like a balloon from that type of things. Because I wanted to be able to nurse her, and I did nurse her, for 10 months.

Q: Really? Your milk came back?

A: Well, not in abundance, but it came back. It came back. But it took an awful lot of work to do that. Then the same German doctors wanted me to sign a certificate for them

that they were good--that they were treating the Jewish people well in the hospital. Because it looks like the hospital then the court started, and they were S.S. people who took care of me. And the chief of staff was S.S.

Q: Did you sign?

A: No!

[next tape continues]

Then, believe it or not, I think this was very, very stupid. German girls came to-- We moved out of the kibbutz. Because I had the baby, and there was really not enough food for her there. And we thought that outside of the kibbutz, and we moved into Saltzheim itself, a DP camp, that maybe if I cooked myself I could make it go longer, or, you know, it would be better, I could get some food for her or something. So, we moved out, and because we moved so late, there wasn't any space left, and we moved. One apartment was divided among three families. Of course, the ones that came first had the bigger rooms. We had a very tiny room. And I was-- Every morning I washed the floor. So we had to take out the crib into the hallway, and we had two boards on each end of the room, and in the middle we had a table. That was our things. We shared a kitchen and a bathroom between the three families. There was one family-- um, three families upstairs and three families downstairs in a duplex. Food was very, very sparse. While we were in Saltzheim in the kibbutz, our allotment was 900 calories a day. And that was stuff like powdered milk, powdered eggs, canned fish. When we got bread, we didn't have peanut butter or jelly with it, but they gave us chocolate sauce to put on the bread. While I was pregnant, I think I got once a package of raisins.

Anyway, it was-- We were hungry, plain and simple. And because we kept kosher on the kibbutz, we didn't get meat at all. But when we got out, we got a little bit of meat. By then, correspondence with the United States got a little bit better, and my family from here sent us some clothes. Some clothes for the baby and some clothes for us. But this newspaperwoman--Elizabeth Zakatoff was her name--the packages were sent to her. They couldn't be sent to us. So she would take the things that was for my baby and divide it between me and this other family who--Rifkaranovich--who used to nurse my child once in a while in the few weeks. Because they got to be close friends. So she would take my package and give, whatever the other woman wanted she would take out for her, and the rest came to me.

I guess I didn't-- First of all, in the beginning I didn't know. And then I guess I was grateful to her that she did nurse my child, even if it was very few times. But she did what she could. Anyway, when we lived in the DP camp, we also didn't have anything to feed the baby with. Now, I weaned her, and there was not very much to eat, and she wasn't a good eater, either. So we bought forty pigeons.

Q: Pigeons?

A: Pigeons. Put it in the attic. And I would feed them, and once or twice a week I would have one pigeon killed by the ??? for kosher, and cook the pigeon meat, and then I would put in oatmeal in it or something for a soup. Because the meat wasn't adequate. It was very tough. But the soup was made like a broth. So, to feed my baby, that's what was I doing.

Q: And cleaning up the pigeons.

A: Well, it was-- I had to go in the attic to do it. And to catch a pigeon isn't very easy either, by the way. Then, when-- Anyway, we lived in this DP camp, and we couldn't get any milk. If we got milk, it was usually skim milk, that's about it. I remember going once for--they said that they had someplace oranges to sell. And it was--the line was--a mile long. Every mother who had a child was there standing for an orange. Can you imagine, to have a baby and not be able ever to give her a piece of fruit? We didn't have any of that. The Germans were so vicious even then, at that time, to us, that they did everything in their power to put us out-- By the way, those homes were taken away from German people--those apartments. I don't know how that happened, because it happened before I got there. But they were German homes. I don't know if they got paid for it, or it was S.S. homes, or whatever. But I remember, General Eisenhower was there. As a matter of fact, I have some pictures, not of him directly but of the things that he came to our camp, to tell us in a nice way to leave. That the Germans want their homes back. While we were living there.

Anyway, so, we wanted to go to Israel in the worst way, to Palestine. We worked for it, we did everything in our power: We registered, we were just going for all kinds of meetings with Chialim, which was the Israeli military. I even met Ben Gurion there. Then, of course, he wasn't the president. He was just a short little man with the white flowing hair on him. But he came to camp, to the kibbutz where I stayed. You see, they came all the time, Chialim and people like him, to choose the people who were gonna go illegally first, who are military-worthy. They needed people, but they needed people who are not gonna hold them back. But because I was pregnant, I couldn't go. And they wouldn't take my husband because they didn't' want to separate us or for him to be unhappy. And they said unhappy people don't do the right things.

But my brother-in-law, the one who lives in Israel, went. With the illegal things. And the way, he went on an illegal ship, illegally. He was 16 or 17 years old, and the team of these people from our kibbutz heard that they're taking to the illegal ship some people to France. So my brother-in-law was in bed already. By the way, when my two brothers-in-law came, we shared a room with them. My first four or five years, I never lived alone. I mean, in the same room: They lived in the same room with me. Anyway, my brother-in-law heard about it. He jumped out of bed, but one of his legs in his pants, and ran, with one leg in and one leg out. He got on an ambulance, because it was curfew, as I said before. And they took him to the--that ambulance, it was a Jewish ambulance driver--took him to the train, and the train wasn't watched, so they got on. And then when he came to France--I don't know which harbor it was--all of these 13 people were just living on the beach because they couldn't get on that illegal ship. And they stayed there until they loaded the ships and all of that, and then one day they got on the ship that had illegal people being taken to Israel. And they were hiding, so they wouldn't find them. But what they did is they carried on boxes of food and stuff. So some of them had food, some of them didn't, it depends on what boxes they carried on. So that's how my brother-in-law got to Israel.

So even then, it was very difficult to go to Israel. But while we waited in Saltzheim in this DP camp which there was no food and very cramped conditions and the Germans wanted us out. And really we had very-- You wouldn't believe what type of foods we

eat--we ate. Like I used to buy from the ?? the grashnitz, it was called, and that are the-- Oh, what is that called now? Like, I think its in the neck, the lymph things.

Q: Not the gizzard?

A: No, no, no, not the gizzard. No, these are things that is thrown away. It's little bead-like stuff, and it's inside the neck of an animal. It's the lymph nodes, like things.

Q: ??? or something?

A: Yeah, anyway. Because that is, I mean, it's edible, but it's an--

Q: ???

A: Well, you have to peel it. Anyway, but it's also where the cancer starts, I think, like in the lymph node things. We used that-- That was our meat thing.

Q: Protein?

A: Protein, yeah. So life in the things were very, very difficult. A lot of the Jewish women who went to have babies never had a baby. When I went for my first prenatal examination, they had me stand naked and wait in line to examine me. Then they looked at me and said, "you're fine." I was never examined before I had the baby, before my first childbirth. Um. I don't know. It's pretty hard to explain, of some of the awful things that was done. I have spoken to somebody who was taken blood from all the time. You know, and was completely disfigured or didn't grow because they wanted to find out--he was a twin, you know?--they wanted to reproduce a lot.

Q: This was after the concentration camps when you were in the DP camp?

A: No, this was in the concentration camps, but some of the things--these things that you heard about--yeah. We had-- By the way, when I was, when I had the infection and was in the hospital, a man came in to see his wife. She also had an infection. I think she had, not a miscarriage, but I think, anyway, something was done to her, and she lost the baby. And he came to the hospital to see his wife, and he recognized me, and he told me I was the one who gave him the shoes.

Q: Oh, really!?

A: Now, then I would never have recognized him. Because he had--he didn't have any teeth when I saw him. And he was very short. And, you know, without shoes and everything? But then when he told me that he had a beautiful wife. I didn't believe him, you know. And she was a beautiful woman. So all kind of incidences happened. I found people that, when I was working in the S.S. kitchen, they had young boys who were--they called them royfers--who were runners, who delivered food to the officers, in other words. Or carry messages. Now, they would come-- The couldn't have any of the food, but they would come to-- and I would serve to take back to the officers the food. And while I was doing that, sometimes I could give them something, you know? So that they could hide or eat it up before they got back. And I found people like that, and didn't recognize 'em, because all at once people changed. You know, they became like different people. But this little man, all at once, he looked like a normal human being,

with teeth, and tall, and, you know, different. And he always--he wanted to become friends, because he always felt like if I wouldn't have helped him, he wouldn't have survived.

And the reason I'm telling this about Germany is because the same things are still going on in Germany. They don't like Jews. They don't like anybody else. I think we have to be very watchful about this. About the German people. Sure, they're not all the same, but I think the majority of them are, even now. The reason I left then, Germany, because we had an affidavit the year before, from my family. The reason we didn't go [was] because we waited for Israel to become a state. And then it came when the DP camp was emptying out, and people were leaving every which way because it was an awful long time to raise a family that way, and under those circumstances. We decided to leave. And sadly enough, we left just about a few months before Israel became a state. We left there in February. We got here in February to the United States, and Israel became a state in May.

Q: ???

A: Yes, that's when we came. I remember that: Me and my husband were in tears that we didn't wait longer, because that was really our dream, for both of us. And we were gonna go to Israel later, by the way, from here.

Q: Did you come directly to California?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you come?

A: Well, we went-- What we did is, first of all, it wasn't as easy as all of that. We had to go to the American Consulate. We had to show that we were married. We had an affidavit. Then they had to have an affidavit that we were not gonna be a ward of the state, that the family is gonna provide for us, jobs, housing, and living expenses.

Q: And you had two uncles in California?

A: Three.

Q: Three uncles. Your mother's three brothers.

A: My mother's three brothers. And they sent things that how much money they have in their savings, and they have a business, and that my husband would be employed, and that everything, you know, we have housing. That way, they let us come. Now, I wouldn't come without-- One of my brothers-in-law went to Israel, but still lives with us. I wouldn't leave without him. So I told my uncles that they had to send him an affidavit too. It's a visa. So they had to do-- They did that. And they had to pay for all the expenses, like for the ship, for the doctor bills, for the train, for everything had to be covered.

When we went to the American Consulate, we were interviewed by FBI. If we're not communists, or why we were in concentration camp? Why are you leaving? We were examined, unbelievably, in every which way, we don't have any diseases. So at that time

if people came, they had to be free of disease. Emotionally, I don't know, because [laughing] that's another question. But then we came on a ship that was junked after we got off of it.

Q: Where did the ship sail from?

A: From Bremen, from Germany, to New York. And it was a navy ship, an old one. It was called Marina Marilyn. It was painted in gray, inside and out. And I was sick the whole time we were-- It took us three weeks to get from Bremen, which I think takes about a week or five days, three weeks to get to New York. Because the ship broke down, and we were stuck in the middle of the ocean with no light, and cold food. They had food, but it was cold. But the water wasn't working.

Q: Did you come to Ellis Island?

A: No. No, we came to New York, and the same newspaperwoman who was in Germany, waited for us, met us. Plus some other relatives from my relatives, and I got off the ship before my husband. They had to go through all of the thing, but my baby had a cold or the flu or whatever, so they let me get off first, without having to go through the whole thing. And I came in, and I had on a decent coat that I had made, and shoes, and a purse. They looked at me, and especially--not the newspaper woman, but this other person, she came with her husband, she was my aunt's cousin--and she uncovered my coat, wanted to see if I have anything underneath. And she said to me, "You look pretty okay," you know. She was puzzled.

And I couldn't understand why she [was] puzzled. I'm not. Oh, I had, my fingernails were done, and my hair looked okay, and, you know. I looked fairly decent. Actually, I have a picture of me, you know, from before. I didn't look like somebody who, you know, comes out from a place like that. And so she-- We went to a hotel, they had to pay--my family had to pay for a hotel to stay in in New York. We went to a hotel, and she runs straight to the telephone booth and calls my aunt. It was at night, you know. Here it's much later, I guess. And she talks to her both in English and in Yiddish. So I could understand what she was saying. She said, "What did you want me to see? If she's clean? She looks like a Parisian model." She says, "She has long fingernails, and she wears a hat to match her coat," and she says, "You better be prepared for--not for what you expected." Or something like that. And then I went on the phone, and I talked to my aunt, and when I came here, my two aunts bought together a bottle of nail polish and polished their nails [laughing].

Q: You mean, in order to meet you?

A: So..

Q: You took the train from New York?

A: So we too-- we stayed in New York--

Q: A few days, or--

A: Five days. And this newspaperwoman took us to see the Empire State Building. We couldn't go too many places because, as I say, my child, my daughter was sick. But

just the same, she took us places. Then we came to-- She put us on train, she brought us kosher food, and we got on the train. I couldn't ask for anything at the time except coffee and soup. And I remember, the whole time I had coffee, and I think they had clam chowder soup, which I don't know, is not kosher [laughing].

Q: Oh, because you didn't know the language?

A: I couldn't speak.

Q: ???

A: That's soup and coffee: in every language, the same.

Q: But did you like it?

A: Well, I don't-- I ate it. I mean, I didn't know. So then we came to Oakland.

Q: You got off the train in Oakland?

A: To get off the train in Oakland, California. And we get off the train, or we're getting off the train, and my family is running forth and back, all over. They can't find us. They just can't find us. Now, not that many people were getting off the train. But they still couldn't find us. So then, finally, I got off the train, and I said, "Uncle Sam, you don't have to look. We're here." I recognized them. From pictures, and also because he looked a lot like my mother, one of my uncles.

So they were so surprised. They looked for somebody different. You know? Because when my uncles came, everybody was wearing black stockings and stuff. Like I stayed for close to a week with one of my uncles, and my aunt--it was really funny: I got up in the morning, and I put on a bathrobe. I didn't have more than a change of clothes, actually. But I had, I put on, a bathrobe. And I put it on, and I came down, and she said to me, "You mean you have a bathrobe?" And I said, "Yeah." She said, "I didn't think that in Europe they know what a bathrobe is." You know, people had, at that time, such a mistaken idea of what Europe was like. I mean, we were very backward. I'm not comparing it to the United States, but still, we used <u>some</u> things.

And people were calling up, "Is your niece here?" And she said, "Yeah, but she's not a greener." You know, she was very-- They gave me a party, invited all the people who might have known my parents or came from that area. And they wanted to show us off. They were so proud of us. I couldn't tell you: They were just positively--. Then they brought out another cousin because of us. I told them that, you know, it's okay. The Marshalls, Larry Marshall. But they couldn't quite accept that we were in a concentration camp, got out and we still looked like normal people. Or that I had my nails polished, or my hair looked decent, or, you know, I just had one outfit, but it matched. You know, that type of stuff. They just couldn't believe that. Somehow I knew a lot about Oakland because my mother used to correspond with her brothers. So I knew about the bridge--about the Bay Bridge--at least I think that's the way I knew, because my cousin said I want to show you the Bay Bridge, and the Golden Gate Bridge and the lake. And I said, "I know all about it." And he says, "How do you know?" You know? So I think that was from that my mother would talk about it, probably.

Q: Let me ask you: How do you think your life has been affected by what you experienced?

A: Well, it's been been affected. I don't know. I think if I would have-- This is another thing that my family was a little bit upset that I was married, because they felt that I would've been a good student, and could've gone to school and become a professional person or whatever. But all in all, I think, I'm happy with my family that I have now. I think my family is very dear to me because I lost-- I mean, maybe I hold on too much to them because I lost most all of my family. I am very aware of anti-Semitism, and so are my children.

I don't think I ever thought. I think I always wanted to get a better education. I have something--a drawback. And I think this is something that is silly; my children always tell me that. That I'm not a very good speller, and that's-- I mean, that holds me back a lot, because I'm embarrassed about it. I can read any paper, any book, I understand everything. But when it comes to spelling, I mess up terribly. But I think, I always wanted to be--when I was growing up I wanted to be--a teacher, or at least my parents were talking me into being a teacher. And I think I would have liked that. But more than that, I would have liked to have a good education. I'm interested in philosophy, I'm interested in art, I'm interested in all kinds of things. I'm interested in geography. I actually instilled that in my older daughter, and she took that in college, a very hard course, I remember her working so hard on it. My children give me things like maps and globes for occasions. I mean, when something news comes on, I like to see what it is. And, I don't know, I think I probably would have been a good student. I don't know what would have become of me, and I don't know if I would have been any happier.

And I think--when I talk to schools, this comes up a lot--that they ask me, "Is it worth it?" I say, "Yes, it's worth it."

Q: Worth it to survive?

A: To survive, yeah. A lot of people say, "Don't you feel guilty?" No. I don't. I mean, I didn't create this, and I feel sad about what happened to my family and thousands or millions of other families. But, no, I think it's good that I survived. At least one person out of a family survived. And now I have a family that they will grow, hopefully, and be good people, and maybe make some difference in this world. I think I have three daughters that are well educated, and do contribute quite a lot. And I have grandchildren, and I hope they'll do the same. So I think I do make a difference. And I think sometimes, you can't choose: It's what happens to a person that you have to accept, and live with it. And the United States really has been very good to me. I have no complaints.

Q: What about your religiosity?

A: Well, I always believed in God. I sometimes have a quarrel with him, why things have happened, but I always believe in God. And I do observe a lot of things, but I don't think I believe the same way as I did before the war. Because then I just believed because I was told. Now I believe differently. I think there are miracles, because some of them happened to me. It's pretty hard to explain, even from this after the war, what's happened to me: That they tried to kill me and my child and we both survived. But. Well I think--somehow I think that we don't choose what's going to happen to us.

Maybe we're destined. I don't know if you know the word "bashert?" It's a destiny of somebody, of how they're gonna do? I do believe that you have to fight for whatever in life you want. And if you can't achieve it yourself, you hope that maybe your children or your grandchildren will. Because I did come from a very religious family, it would be very hard for me to completely give up on everything. And I am interested in history, I'm interested in-- Actually, I'm very interested in what's happened to the Jewish people all through history. If you really study it, they always wanted to kill us, to destroy us, and to change us, and we survived. So, how can you help but believe?