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OK, Barbara, you start.

OK. Today's Wednesday, December 18, 1991, in San Francisco, California. And I'm Barbara Barer, continuing my interview with Miriam Samuels. And Laurie Sosna's on camera doing the videotaping.

So we were continuing on. You had just arrived in "Ausch-whites."

Auschwitz.

Auschwitz.

OK, when we arrived in Auschwitz, they took us to the bathhouses.

Can you describe your arrival?

OK, 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 SS 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.

And 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.

You were alone, weren't you?

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 SS man was herding us along. And some of the people who-- [COUGHS] --boy, am I going to cough now?

It's all right.

Some of the people who were-- haftlingen they called them.

What did they call them?

Haftlingen the captives. Like, some of the same people as us, who were taken before, were also helping along to give us direction, which way to go. They took us to the bathhouse. And on the bathhouse it said, "Arbeit macht frei," "Work makes you free," a big sign.

Then, they told us to go to the back and get undressed and drop-- put our shoes in one place, the 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. And they had shaved our heads.

Who shaved your heads?

The people who were like us, who came before, the haftlingen

Other Jews?

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Other Jews or whoever was in the camp.

Women.

No.

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. But I mean, it wasn't like anybody looked at anybody.

And 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 -- like a [INAUDIBLE] or something. Some type of a product like that.

And then they gave us a piece of clothing. And some of us got shoes. Some of us didn't.

Did you get shoes?

I got shoes. And we didn't get any underwear. And it was 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 up 1,000 of us. There was 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 on the top.

Just pieces of wood in a building or?

It was three-- it was 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 1,300. Because they were bringing in so many people at the time that they didn't have where to put them.

They took us for the first night, because they didn't have room, to Zigeunerlager, which was a Gypsy camp. Then, from there, they took us to Lager Tsev and that was in Birkenau. Birkenau and Auschwitz were one side-- one next to the other, the camps. They were pretty much the same.

How did they move you from one to the other?

Walked.

Walking?

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

Like, how long?

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

But how was the day? I mean--

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

What's that?

That means the camp to be next to destroyed. So they didn't bother giving us numbers of the arms. But they gave us numbers written on our jackets, on our clothes.

Anyway, what they did is, in the morning, we had to get up about 5 o'clock and stand appell. Appell was counting. We were standing against the building. And there was more of us, 1,300 people were more than the building was wide. So inside, we would have never fitted in. But because we were three-layered, that's how we fit in.

And we would stand there, some days, from 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning to 11:00. And we weren't supposed to move.

Did you talk?

We weren't supposed to. We were supposed to be very quiet and just stand, like, at attention. And 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 blockalteste, who was our blockalteste 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 him a big, hard slap to wake them up. Because if they don't get up, they're going to be killed. They're going to be shot, or taken to the crematorium or just shot on the spot.

So I remember how painful it was to see somebody fall down, wanting to tip over. You have to slap their face so that they could-- 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 blockalteste, the woman who was taking care of us.

At one point, we saw a lot of the blockalteste 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, they were punished very severely.

Then when about-- when I was about there for two weeks, I befriended this woman, Alice, the blockalteste. I just went to her. She had a little booth in the front, 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. And I had nothing else what 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, S-Kommando, from one camp to the other. And so I volunteered right away. I knew that that would be 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.

And in between, what were you doing?

We were laying in these bunks, because there was really not enough room for us.

Where did you get the idea to massage her legs?

I don't know. I guess I felt sorry for her that she-- a lot of people resented the kapos, the blockalteste, as bad people. I

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didn't see it that way. I knew that because from the time before, what I saw that was happening in StanislawÃ³w, I knew that people, if they 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. And she was already there for a long time, for two or three years.

So I went on the S-Kommando between these 200 people. First of all, everybody wanted to go.

I was just going to say, didn't everyone want to go?

Oh, sure. But the ones who were first or were picked up that they're strong enough, that's the ones who went. Anyway, I was one of those people. And we were carrying food from the camp we were in, from Lager Tsev 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 their watch-- the German standing on the top, and there was all over sprinkles of them. 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 so that-- to lift. And we had to tell the number, as we were going through, that we went through to the other camp.

How far was the [INAUDIBLE] camp?

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. Though, air wasn't very fresh. And as we were walking one day, as I say, we were spaced out. We didn't know what's going on.

You also said you were drugged in the coffee.

And we were drugged. I mean, we were really--

Like sedated?

We were very subdued. I mean, like nobody thought of anything. So as we were walking and I was telling to the girl next to me, there was this black smoke coming out of the chimneys, with this pungent smell of bones and, you know? I couldn't-- I didn't know what it was from. But I just said to her, I wonder what they're burning there. The air was so heavy with it, so smelly.

And the SS men-- they walked with us anyway, even from one camp to the other-- says, you dumbkopf 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're burning our-- I mean, that that's a crematorium.

So that was when I was maybe there about 2 and 1/2 or 3 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-- and they were not yet processed. And we heard them say in Hungarian, it's a [HUNGARIAN] house, 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-- 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 need a kitchen for them. They were waiting for crematoriums, just as they were waiting for crematoriums for us. They didn't give us numbers for that reason. It was called a vernichtungslager, the camp to be destroyed first.

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Meaning the people in the camp would be destroyed?

The keep-- the people, yeah, vernichters. So they didn't build a kitchen for them. That's how come we had to carry food there until-- not enough, but just enough to-- so that they'll survive to-- so they can kill them again.

Then, when I was there about close to three months, the-- one day, the SS came there with their dogs again, men and women both. And they told for the blockalteste, for the woman who was inside, the kapo, to have us all undress. And we all had to get undressed and come out naked and outside. As I say, there wasn't enough room inside anyway. And they would not come in, in the closed things with the prisoners, what they call them.

So when we came out, again, with these nightsticks, they were, this way, this-- you know, you go this way. It just so happened that at the time I had a temperature, because I-- I don't know what was wrong with me. But when I was carrying the food that day, I fell down. I fainted. 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.

And what did you think was happening?

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. And there, they gave us civilian clothes afterwards. And they gave us bread and cheese.

So I remember I got a turquoise blue dress-- a flannel, with long sleeves. I will never forget it, because I started to feel like I'm a human being again. And it was Tisha B'Av. And all of these Hungarian people--

How did you keep track of the dates and the holidays and things?

I don't know. There were people there who were 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. It was Tisha B'Av. Maybe they just thought it Tisha B'Av. I don't know.

So the Hungarians were very religious, most of them. And nobody would eat it. Now, and mind you, we were very hungry. And the same day, they loaded us on a train.

Did you eat it?

Nope, I didn't eat it. The same day, they loaded us on a train, and they send us-- they said we are going to work. And we had-- it still was a cattle train, by the way. Nothing 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 on the train. And everybody chose me, because nobody knew me, that I'm going to be honest. And everybody gave me their portion of their bread and cheese to keep for them until the stars come out.

Wow. They didn't trust themselves to keep it?

Keep it, yeah.

Because they were so hungry, yeah.

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

Three stars you watched for?

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

What was in the bunkers?

Nothing. They had like-- it was like a room dug out of the ground. The top was covered with grass. And then you step down a step or two, and you were inside. And on each side, they had built, from wood, benches for sleeping I think, like beds. Wider than benches, but for sleeping, on each side. And there was a walkway in between.

So who was it used for?

For us. They built it for us. Somebody else did it for us. Now, we--

So they wouldn't know anyone was there or--

That's right.

So then-- no, they brought us--

Were you the first ones to come there?

Yeah, 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, for a few that were finished. We had to dig out the ground, get the ground out, and carry it 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 build it to-- they took the same dirt and covered the top with it and put grass on it.

It's like digging a grave.

Yes, but it was underground housing like.

This is men and women? Or were you all women?

No, we were just women.

Yeah, that's what I thought. Yeah.

Yeah, first, when we came. So when we finished building this-- OK, when we first came, they told us to come and stand in appell. And right away, the thing was so different, because these were not SS men. These were people who came back from the Russian front-- officers and soldiers who--

Germans?

Germans.

Mm-hmm.

And they talked to us. They called us haftlingen OK, which was-- that's like a captured-- like, war prisoners type. And

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they already talked to us about hygienic things and things like that. They asked if anybody is menstruating.

Was anyone?

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

In your turquoise dress?

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, [NON-ENGLISH]-- I don't know what you would call him in the English things-- came in, 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.

Anyway, finally, he came and he told me, what is your name? And I told him. And he called me-- instead of Miriam, he called me Mariana. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] 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 are 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, [NON-ENGLISH], isn't she prettier than me? And he says, you want her to come with you? And I said, yes. I didn't want-- [CHUCKLES] It's a terrible thing to do to somebody, but you want to save yourself.

So he, [GERMAN], come on, [GERMAN]. 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. They took us out of camp, took us to his quarters, and he told us that we are going to be his putzfrauen, which means cleaning women. 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 putz woman, 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.

And where were you when they were there?

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

Where did you sleep then?

Oh, we had to go back.

You went back.

Yeah, oh, they wouldn't let us. And we couldn't eat their food either. No, we were just there for-- for the--

9:00 to 5:00. [CHUCKLES]

9:00 to 5:00, and then we went back and we had to eat from the kitchen from what the haftlingen ate, the watery soup-- not their food. But still, it was better than to go out and work with munition or in the fields or clean up bombs or live munition. They did all of those things.

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So me and her worked there. And then they brought-- they found-- OK, so that was in the beginning.

When you were in the kitchen, who were you working with?

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-- who were doing the janitorial work-- cleaning, the kitchen, the dishes, the serving. I mean, we did everything-- peeling the vegetables.

And they watched you that you couldn't take any food.

Oh, we not supposed to ever touch anything. And we were well-taught not to, because we were afraid that they are going to kill us. We were told.

Wasn't it hard to be around the food?

Oh, once in a while, we stuck a piece of raw potato in our mouth, or if there was carrots, especially, or raw 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-- the coffee made. They were big, copper kettles. It was for a big military outpost.

Was there any resentment amongst the other people that you were getting to do this?

I don't think so. I mean, everybody was assigned what they were assigned. 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, and we're still friends, and then her cousin. And anyway, that's going to-- 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 send us 50 more women, who were from Poland.

They also wanted me to become their kapo, the blockal-- 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 fault this person, you know?

So I didn't want to do it. But then when these Polish women came, one of them became a kapo. She was very good at it. And she had sisters with her. And as I say, 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. And they kept our feet from the wet, from the bottom, so it was pretty good. I mean, 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. And the men came, and I saw a little man, without teeth, barefoot. And I took my shoes and gave it to him over the gate.

I wasn't supposed to do that. My friend says to me, why are you doing that? Winter is coming. You're going to freeze to death. And I said, I really don't care. How about if it 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.

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So the whole time, you're sleeping underground?

Well, it was not ground, it was underground. But 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. So--

And you're in your turquoise dress night and day?

Yeah, that's all-- the only thing we had. We had no-- by the way, here, we had no showers. We had no place to take a bath, the whole farm.

Where did you go to the bathroom?

They had built, on the premises, on the border between the men's and women's camp-- 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 the bath-- of this building. We used to use that to clean ourselves as a disinfectant. Now, as winter was coming on--

Well, what was the point of having it all-- like, not having a building, but having it all covered?

From the Germans' 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?

And then they had all the other camp?

Yeah, well this was a satellite. It was Lager IV Kaufering. It was a satellite to Buchenwald, I think. 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 IV. It was called Kaufering Lager IV.

These people were divided into groups, into individual camps. And one camp built the next camp and the next camp and the next camp. And then as the camps were overflowing and the German-- most of the German people were at war going for services. They needed farming. They needed to clean and build the roads. They needed to do factory work to build munitions and all of that. And all of that is done by people like us. You see?

Because I worked in the kitchen and for the-- as the cleaning woman, I didn't do much of that. But that's what the rest of them were doing.

I see.

But when snow started falling there, we used to-- 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, they-- most of the men there, I would say 70% died of typhoid in that camp. And none of the women were affected, and you 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 say, 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 in-- but as I say, 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

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go now anymore to work for the SS. They took people from a clean camp to come there, so they wouldn't let us anymore to work there.

But how did the Red Cross-- where did they come from to find it?

The Red Cross didn't direct come into camp.

And what did they think was going on there?

Well, I think the Red Cross came in and-- actually, a couple of times. Once, they gave us the blankets. And from what I understood between us-- 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.

But who did the Red Cross think they were giving it to?

They thought they were giving it to us. But they were not allowed to-- the Germans did not allow them into camp.

Did they know about the concentration camps?

Oh, yes, yes. At one point, when we were in that camp, they sent some people from Holland-- they were Hollandians-- to delouse us so-called. And these were men. And they brought soaps and stuff like that for us to-- to wash, but we didn't have water. And 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, after-bath splash or something like that. [CHUCKLES] Well, I think you're so dehumanized that that was a big thing. I used it.

Sure.

[CHUCKLING]

But it was funny, because it was a big bottle of some type of a-- [CHUCKLES]

Perfumy stuff, yeah.

Perfumy stuff. Yeah, the Red Cross knew and-- and they did-- they did, in a way, try to help. But what is in all of-- 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 it for them-- took all of these things for themselves.

Anyway, after a while, they-- the Germans decided that, yeah, as I say, the men were dying of typhoid. And me and two other girls, we wouldn't-- the gates were closed between the two camps, we couldn't get-- decided to-- but there wasn't electric between us. It was just--

Barbed wire?

Barbed wire. So we decided to go over the barbed wire and wash the men's clothes. And we did.

We went. There was-- I don't know, somebody made a big fire. And one of those people whom I gave the shoes-- he was one of the people who was bringing the dirty clothes and the things-- and we would boil the clothes and take with-- the Germans must have given permission or something. I don't know. But we had to go to the men's side.

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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 it behind, as not to bring over the typhoid on the other side.

We did that a few times. And then the Germans decided that the women are not affected, and they sent us to another camp. They sent us to Camp XI. So it was very cold. It was in the middle of the winter. And they took us, told us to line up. We had to go through the men's camp.

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

Well, I think what we did, the clothes that I washed from the men, I used those.

Oh, you put on-- yeah. Sorry, go ahead.

Then when we went, they took us to this other camp, Camp XI.

All the women?

All the women, because the women were not infected at all. We were completely immune to, it seems like, to the whole thing. We went to Camp XI. And as we came into camp, we saw four bodies hanging from the first block, from first building. And the people who were going with us-- now, by then, they turned SS. To run our concentration camp, you had to turn SS. So all of those officers we worked for became SS.

I remember that one of the officers, a hauptmann, which is quite a high things, told me-- I worked for him-- to take off his emblem from Wehrmacht, you know, his star, whatever, he had his things, and put on an SS. 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 didn't want to go to the front. Now, this was in '44, I mind you. You have to know how far the war was in already, what was happening to them.

Were you never abused by the officers?

No, no.

Were they punished if they did, or what happened?

Oh, yes. No, I would have been shot. Because that was-- it was [NON-ENGLISH]-- what was it? It was 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.

Yes.

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 SS kitchen. I mean, they wouldn't-- I'm sure they wouldn't have been punished. But they didn't abuse anybody between us.

But they used to call us names and [NON-ENGLISH] and stuff like that. Where was I at?

They took you, all the women, from there to the next--

Yeah, to block-- to XI. And as I said that, we came in, and we saw all of those people hanging. And 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-- to an end, like in Russia. It already did. And they, themselves, are pretty confused. You could see.

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So you were in a barracks now?

Yeah, we were in 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, like in the camp.

And you had no idea about anybody in your family or anything.

Well, I knew-- oh, I knew by then that I don't have my-- nobody lives.

How did you know?

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 by then, I knew that she isn't alive, my mother. And, of course, I knew about my-- the rest of the family from before, that they're not alive.

So when was the last time you saw your mother?

I saw my mother when I was in Hungary. She came to see me once. But afterwards, I heard that she was being beaten, because she didn't want to tell where I was. She was afraid that they're going to bring me back and that the gendarmes would abuse me.

So actually, you were asking, 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 of how to take care of myself to-- 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 SS, from the camp. And then in--

Did you form friendships in those situations?

Well, I have-- I, personally, have the two friends-- the one that came with me and her cousin. 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 SS, 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 from-- he was a chief of staff at some big hospital in-- 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-- to see if somebody is sick, because we were working.

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 to look at anybody, just for serious things.

So I went to work the next day. And I came back. And this time, I came back-- 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, a 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 for the next day, when the sun came out, because there was limited of everything.

And I was sitting on a chair and 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, I lost a lot of energy, it seems to me like.

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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 his assistant.

His assistant, yeah.

This doctor also did something else for me. From hard work, I-- I still have the scars here-- from ladling food and from heavy work, I developed growths in my hands, and on here, too. Thick, red things that were very painful.

And so I went-- by then he-- because-- he brought a German doctor to show my case, but he did it with him. 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.

When I got these things on my hands-- now, I had to go back to work. This was just kind of after-work type of things. He already had a light-- a light bulb in his things. And he, I remember, made a cross on my finger, cut out the thing, put in a lot of gauze, wrapped it. And he did-- cleaned off the sides of my hands. Cut off, almost like--

Like calluses or something?

Well, they called it [NON-ENGLISH]. They called it, like, wild growth, some type of a growth. I guess it's calluses. But it was not in your normal place, you see? It was from a ladle. I would serve 500 meals a day, so I had these.

Anyway, he-- 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 in it that I couldn't believe it, it can get in there. And he wrapped it, and he said, you can go back to work. So I had those type of incidents, you see? And I suppose other people did, too.

Anyway, sometime around the middle of April, they told us to get out, get lined up, and they started marching us from this Lager XI. And they marched us for days, here and there and back.

Just aimless marching?

Aimlessly. And there was--

How old were you now? About 18? 19?

Oh, no, at this time I was-- I was 19. No, I was 20.

20 already.

I was 20, yeah. I was 20. Anyway, they marched us from place to place. When we started out, there was as many SS people 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, though, to be their witnesses. They said, we'll hide you until the war is over, but you have to witness that I was a good guy type of thing. It was a lot of that.

Anyway, we were-- the planes were flying very low over our heads.

From which nationality, the planes?

American, French. We were going toward-- and they still looked for a place where to kill us. They brought us to-- 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.

Why didn't they just shoot you?

But where would they hide-- bury us? I mean, they had to have a-- to dispose of us. It wasn't so easy.

As the planes were flying overhead, we didn't hide because we wanted to be seen. But the Germans told us, run to all sides and lie down. And I didn't. And a German SS woman hit me over my breast so that she cut it. When I went to the doctor, he says, oh, you had surgery? I mean, it's quite a good cut. That was a woman, I 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.

How did you get that taken care of?

I didn't. It just healed on its--

It just healed on its own.

[CHUCKLES] Who got anything to-- 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 SS were disappearing. There were less than half left.

Miriam, when you're walking like that, where did food come from? Where did you eat?

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

You mean, like, food would come on trucks behind them? Or what--

Well, I don't-- to be very honest, I don't know.

Yeah.

I can't remember. I can't remember eating.

Right, oh.

So I-- [CHUCKLES] I really couldn't tell you. But I think they must have brought food along or something with them. If they cleaned out the camp, if they left it, they must have brought food with them. And there was an awful lot of SS with us.

So as we were going, we slept in outside. It was in the middle of April, mostly. We came to this place in-- after about a week. And we saw other transports in the front of us, some in the back of us. There was just-- I think most of the people who were in a certain area, they did this to. They didn't want to leave them behind to be freed, so they took them as far as they could, until they were surrounded.

So we came to this place. 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. We weren't that stupid to see that the war-- that they're losing the war. But they were also very upset. And we were very afraid that we'll be-- they'll 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

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we waited maybe an hour or so longer. And outside, we were running. We didn't know what.

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.

Five American soldiers.

And then they apologized. They are 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--

Five guys come in and--

And free us. I remember I was standing there, gazing. Some people cried. Some ran to the soldiers and wanted to hug them, tell them 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? Just didn't seem possible.

Anyway, then the same--

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

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 is still a lot of SS in the surrounding areas and you'll be killed-- which is probably so. Don't go-- because we were ready to go.

Some people took off, and they went to some restaurant-- I should have 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. [CHUCKLES] Everybody had a skirt made out of that.

Where did you get needles and threads?

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

Did the soldiers bring food or anything?

No, they didn't bring anything.

Just five guys--

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.

Why?

That was our--

Orders.

Those were the orders. The next day, more soldiers came in, and they brought food. OK, I'll tell you--

What language did they speak?

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

Right.

But do you know what they gave us? Their own rations. They took some of their breakfasts-- 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 and outside on the lawns. These barracks were mostly offices, SS offices, and where the SS stayed-- lived or something. So it was a lot of papers. And then we moved in into an office, 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 man 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 little by little, we started getting a little-- still with rations, what the soldiers had. And people were running from one place, where they got free, to the other to see if they can find some relatives. My girlfriend, that's Nushi who I said 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--

[CHUCKLING]

We were very proper. And then about-- we got freed, and somehow people got lipstick, and they--

Do remember the date?

It was May the 1st I got freed.

1944.

1945.

'45.

May the 1st. And a few days, things were humming like. People got radios. And we could listen to the news. And there was still war, but the war is 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 where 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'll give you until tomorrow to decide.

The people who were Czech registered and most of them had 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 is Hungarian, she's Hungarian.

So we said that we would not leave until Nushi, my friend, and her barber fiancÃ©, or boy that she was in love with, get married. And we got together, we found a rabbi, and we got them married, and we left.

How did you get a boyfriend? I mean, all the time in the camps you were separated, I thought, or--

Well, you see, as I told you, we were chosen as cleaning women. He was chosen as a barber. And while she was back

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cleaning the booths-- 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, when he came from Lodz, he was a very modern, non-observant Jew. And he thought that God is doing this to him because he-- because he is not practicing Judaism. So he promised, the first Jewish girl that he meets, he'll marry.

He comes to camp and meets me, OK? And he tells me this. He says he wants to marry me. And now, we're both in camp. We don't know if we're going to live or anything, but he tells me this. And so I introduce him to my girlfriend who works with me.

[CHUCKLING]

And I said, you suit each other much more than you and me. And I told everybody that I have a fiancÃ©, an American, because-- as to shake off. People were trying to get somebody, because people lost their families, and they wanted to have somebody.

Didn't you want somebody?

No, I didn't, because I think I already went through this once before. I guess maybe I was afraid of losing somebody and not to get to know somebody well enough. I don't know, but I-- 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 both of these couples are married, happily married.

So you got them married before you left for Czechoslovakia?

Before we left. Then when we left to Czechoslovakia, through Germany--

So you all went-- three women and their husbands?

No, just two.

Just her.

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're not married. So they were the first married couple, I think, in camp. I mean, you know?

Yeah.

So then we left, and we traveled with the Czechs about three days I think, because roads were bombed out in Germany and all kinds of things happened. And then we came to Pilsen.

To where?

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

Mm-hmm.

That's the same Pilsen. Mm-hmm. It's very close to the border. When we crossed the border on the trucks, we all got off of the trucks and kissed the ground. Then, they took us to a big hotel in Pilsen. It was kind of late by the time we got there.

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And I remember looking at the plush, red carpeting and velvet settees, all of the things. And we are dirty and out of camp, look like-- [CHUCKLES] And after so many days of transportation, going on trucks and walking and-- where 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. That 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. Kluski which is like dumplings, with meat sauce. Not much meat, but meat sauce. And we went to sleep. In the morning, they brought us coffee and rolls in bed.

You didn't get sick from eating it after being so starving?

No, we didn't get-- well, I don't think they gave us that much. But just the same, they treated us. Thinking of it, of how we must have looked and how we were treated, I think they're wonderful people to do that in a hotel.

And from there, now we are already in the Czech-- on Czech territory. The soldiers left us behind. They 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 going to take care of you there. Most of us went to Prague.

How did you know you didn't have a home anymore?

Well, I did. Well, but to get home-- you see, the war isn't--

[INAUDIBLE].

Yeah, we went to Prague. You see, first of all, we didn't have money. We didn't-- you had to go someplace to get some help. So we went to Prague, and they waited-- we came to a high school. They put us in a high school. We stayed there for-- the war-- still was clearing up after the war-- well, 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 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, the same way. I met a lot of people that I knew there, and, you know?

The meantime, the military were coming back from the Russian front, and they were stationed in Prague. I met a 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 to 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.

Were you looking for-- who were you looking for?

I didn't ask for anybody. I was just looking if I'll find somebody. I did find people that-- the way you look is you ask, have you seen such and such? Or if you knew somebody, do you know if 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-- well, he thought that he was in love with me, I didn't even know it, took me to the International House where people were living there from the United-- 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, because a young man by the name of [? Beir ?] from New York offered me the opportunity to marry him and go with him home, and then I can divorce him. [CHUCKLES]

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Of course, I didn't take his offer, because I thought, I'm free now, I don't have to do things like that. Though, 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 up some of their meat and protein food for us, because the doctor said that we need to be built up.

That was in Prague. Then, I went to Hungary. I was in Budapest, but that wasn't the same.

And why did you go to Hungary?

To get home. I was going to 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-- 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 bandana that 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, but except for one by the door or something that opens up, a seat.

And a Russian soldier was sitting there. And because it was dark and the lights were broken or whatever-- I don't know, there was no lights-- says to me, babushka, sit down. He gave me his seat.

And I sat there. And when the light came out, he saw I have a young face, I'm not an old woman. I got real frightened. He was coming at me, and I jumped off the train.

Hm, alone.

Alone. And then I got to Prague. I somehow got into Prague and took the-- well, I knew the language. And I took the regular buses and I got someplace where I got together with the rest of the people.

So you did-- it was dangerous. That's why a lot of women did not go at that time, 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 is alive. Maybe somebody came back. And if they would, they-- 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 have to hop from one train to another and hope that that railroad goes there or the train track-- 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, [INAUDIBLE], 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.

After all of this, it was like somebody sticking-- a friend, supposed to have 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 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 Romania at that time. Because through Romania-- Romania 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 at the--

Palestine.

So everybody, at that time, was going. And they also were giving a big sum of money. There was a Jewish agency there

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that was handing out money to all the people who-- who came back from the camp, 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, 1,000 whatever they have in Romania, which probably would be like $100, I suppose.

So I was going to go there. And again, I'm traveling with these three-- two young men, actually. One was younger than me, one was older, which I befriended on the way. It's kind of a protection not to be by yourself. And then we stayed wherever there was some place 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 Romania.

So early in the morning, I already heard that my husband is 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. I thought maybe some of them survived. So I was going to look for-- for my aunt and my cousins.

On your mother's side of the family?

Yeah, my mother's sister.

So I went there and came to my husband's house. And my brother-in-law was davening with his tfellin in. And there was a whole bunch of men, no women, except for my sister-in-law. And right away, they started talking that I'm getting married as soon as I walked in, in the house.

You knew him from before?

Kind of, not really. I knew him when we were kids, not well or anything. I used to play with his brother, the younger brother, because he's the same age.

What was the reunion like when you walked into the house?

Oh, they were happy to see me. And I think they planned everything out before I got there. They heard that I'm alive.

They knew you were alive. But they didn't know you were coming?

Yeah, they knew that I was in the next town. Somehow, it was very close, so, you know? 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 Romania because that's where I-- I want to go to Palestine.

So my brother-in-law, first of all, he pretended that he can't talk when he has the tfellin on. Then he took me in the garden for a walk, while he still has the tfellin on and can't talk. The meantime, the rest of the men and my husband took these two guys, hired for him-- them a guide and took them across the border to Romania.

So here I'm left, and my husband. And my brother-in-law says to me, you're family, and I'm not going to let you go two days before Shabbat. Where are you going to be for Shabbat? And you have to relax and you've been-- we already have an established home 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 type of thing.

And he says, Bill my brother is going to go with you to Romania. He already was there. He'll take you there. Why do you need to go with strangers? And I said, look, I'm not ready for marriage. I don't want to talk about it. But stay for Shabbat. OK, I'll stay for Shabbat.

Friday morning, my husband comes in, and I-- because there was a lot of men, there was no place for me to sleep except

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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, [NON-ENGLISH]-- which is an endearing word, right? He said, my brothers and I decided that we should get married. And I said, what? I haven't even been there 24 hours. And I said, tell your brothers that you can marry each other. I'm not marrying anybody.

[LAUGHTER]

Forget it. In the meantime, his brother, his older brother, who was-- he thought-- 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. My husband still says that's-- that she said it at some point. I know my father-in-law used to hold me on his lap, and he said, one day you're going to be my daughter.

But anyway, this is Friday. I can't go anyplace. There is no-- there is no-- I can't leave. But I figured, well, I'll just say no. And my older brother was asked to-- to court me, to go for a walk in the garden and stuff like that, so maybe if I talked to him I'll change my mind.

[LAUGHTER]

So we go in the garden, and they had a lot-- like an orchard-- walnut trees and 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. [CHUCKLES]

Like a monkey.

[LAUGHS] Like a monkey. I had a big laugh, and I-- no way. Then, they still had invited people from all over--

For the party.

--for the party, for Saturday night. Now, mind you, there were very few Jewish people here, but the men who got freed 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-- it was very disturbing to me. I didn't know what to do, whom to turn to. What do you do in that?

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? And stuff like that. And 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 from. 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 tried 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 we came there. And this man says-- and we talked to him. He says, you know, she needs a long vacation. She needs to go to a [? Koran, ?] which is a recovery place, you know, because I just got out of a horrible concentration camp.

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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. Or that's what they came for, I guess.

Now, I hear they want to get me drunk so I'll say yes. This is a Saturday. And you walk 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 wasn't.

[CHUCKLING]

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 tell the people, OK, she says no. You know, no is no.

But in the meantime, the people-- there was things to eat. People didn't have food. There was things to eat and to drink, so they stayed, still, a little bit longer. And I left the room. And I'd been in 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, they found my aunt's jewelry, and it's all going to 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 still in outside, and I hear a plate breaking. That means, in Jewish, a tnoyim. It's an engagement party. They break a plate and everybody yells, mazel tov!

[CHUCKLING]

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, in the water, when I was in the water. [CHUCKLES] Well, mind you, I didn't live through teenage years.

Right.

There was nobody older to tell me anything, how to behave or anything.

So for the next Friday-- Friday, the 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 was in love with me. And these two men both come because I got engaged.

And they come. There was no other place to go. There were no hotels, just where-- 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, [Personal name] aren't you going to congratulate me? I accepted that I'm engaged. And he reaches out, like that, and cries while he's doing it.

Oh, boy.

A soldier.

Yeah.

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And I couldn't figure it out. Then I find out that he and my brother-in-law made a bet when they were-- when I was 14 years old, which one is going to marry me-- he or he? My brother-in-law or him? So that's some--

Some story.

--story. And the other guy says, engagement don't mean anything. She's in love with me. And he's going to stay there, that Shabbat, at their house. Can't imagine how uncomfortable I was-- three men.

Yeah.

Anyway, finally 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. 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 can go to Palestine. And I wanted to go to Palestine all that time.

What was this fear of the Russians?

Well, first of all, you didn't have any freedom. At our wedding, they got into-- they took pictures, and I don't have one picture, because they were in every picture, and I left in the meantime. But, I mean, they were just-- you were just afraid of them. You were afraid of communism.

And they were also spies all the time. If we went in a restaurant and there was a Russian sitting behind us, we thought he was spying on us. We were afraid of going to Siberia. A lot of people did go that I knew. So there was that fear.

So when were you married?

Six weeks later. Anyway, we were married.

So the six weeks you spent at your brother-in-law's house?

Yes. No, in the meantime, I still wanted to go back to my hometown, so I'll have-- I thought, I'll go there, and I'll have time to think. But my husband followed me. There's no getting away.

Anyway, we got married. Oh, 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 that-- or people that, so far-- I didn't know that many that I know-- he is the best catch.

So it wasn't like I-- I just was not quite ready for getting married at the time. I didn't know where I am at, where I'm going to go, or what's going to 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, let's get married. Because what do you think? We don't have money for one hotel room. You think we'll be able to get two?

See, we were still on the old tradition that people don't live together before marriage.

Oh, sure.

So we got married. And then the High Holidays roll along. And we weren't about to leave there. When the holidays was over, I said, we are 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 Romania, because the flares were going up. But luckily, because they were still in the

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field-- the corn and the stuff like that-- you could hide.

So Saturday night, we took off. We went to Romania. In Romania, we came Sunday morning. And I took all of those things with me that the people from my town gave me, because those were precious things to me.

And went out, had some family there, and we stayed overnight there. Then we took a wagon and we traveled. It took us three weeks to get to-- to Germany back.

The reason it took us that long is because, by then, you had to have a passport already. And the money wasn't good. 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 anyway, we wanted to go-- we told them we wanted to go to Palestine. They said there is a kibbutz, that we'll probably be accepted. But they just accept unmarried people. So we went in there as unmarried. We lived separately for a while.

And you're pregnant.

And I'm pregnant. Until I told one woman that-- she was telling me that they called me the [NON-ENGLISH], and they called him the Czech, meaning I am a Hungarian and he's a Czech. And so they said, you're spending too much time with that Czech. [CHUCKLES]

Anyway, so it was that type of a thing in the beginning. Then when they found out, they gave us a room.

Now, where are you now? You're in a DP camp?

Now we are in a DP camp--

In Germany.

--in Germany.

Which city?

And this was in Zeilsheim um main by Frankfurt. And we are staying on a kibbutz [? yahut. ?]

And explain that. What do you mean?

A kibbutz [? yahut ?] means a mixture of people. You can be religious or non-- or free. Some people were having kosher food, some did not.

Who set up the kibbutz?

Well, some people who were Zionists set it up. Instead of being in camp in the same place, they set it up as a kibbutz. And people who had some professions or 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 when they come to Israel, so they can have a profession.

People were teaching different-- were learning different professions there. And we are also trying to sustain ourselves. And we practiced the things just like in a kibbutz-- the working, the dancing, the singing, the togetherness, you know? Not everybody separate.

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Who organized it? Some Zionists?

Some of the people who were there. And then they became, like, the elders of the things.

German people or?

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

What did you have to do to be accepted?

First of all, you had to be a Zionist. You had to be one of those people who was interested of going to Israel and 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 lived there. And my first child was still born while I was there. We had a curfew. The place was watched so nobody can go in or out. We had curfew.

What do you mean was stillborn?

No, no, when my daughter was born, I was still in that camp.

Oh, she was still there. Oh, OK.

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 Hoechst, which was, oh, I think it was about 4 or 5 miles. It was a long way. But they said that if I walk, I'm going to 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, the nurse, called the doctor and said that I'm unconscious for a long time, better do something about me.

And so they had to have permission from the UN. Well, I don't know if it's the UN. It was called the UNRRA. I think it has something to do with the UN. International-- yeah, I think it's the UN-- thinks that they had to take my baby in pieces. They said, the baby is dead, it's never going to be born. And they have the frau on their UNRRA team, the number, you know? Because they paid for the care of us, of me there.

And that's when I woke up. I was unconscious for a long time, but I woke up when I heard that they're going to take my child in pieces. And I started screaming so that they would hear me on the phone. Started screaming, they want to kill my-- my baby! I want a whole baby, not a baby in pieces.

So they performed-- they performed a C-section on me. And from what they told me, I was-- that 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 is their operating day, and I think the instruments weren't cleaned 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.

By the way, they went-- after the operation, because it was curfew there, my husband came Saturday morning. And the doctor who operated on me said that, your baby is dead. And my husband took her by the collar, by her jacket or whatever she had on, he said, she is not dead. My baby is not dead. You are 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, a little red bow in her hair. It was my baby.

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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-- outside, I think, on a table or whatever.

And the nuns go there to serve us very early in the morning, like 5:30 or something. Before they start their duties, they go to the chapel. And they walk by there, and they saw this baby lying on the table. So they picked it up, you know? And I think they felt like maybe they still can revive the baby.

They took the baby and wrapped it. And they rinsed her stomach, they said, with a 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 OK. 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 nurse would uncover me. And the doctors would make their morning rounds and just have a look from far away and go by. And nobody paid too much attention to me.

My husband would come every day and wipe my lips-- they were burned-- with a wet cloth. And there, they didn't give you any food if you didn't go to the bathroom first. That was the-- their policy. I don't know if it was just for new mothers or whatever.

But then when they came out-- when they came to take out my stitches, the seventh day, I think, they take out the first stitches? The same doctor who did the surgery, I think, came with-- with her little things where she puts the things. And she started taking out two and three stitches. And the thing-- 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. Nobody took-- cared 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, with all of-- took away the wet things. Covered me up, took me to-- 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 a 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, in there, and turned off 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 is three other women. I'm the fourth. And the doctor goes and she-- and they put in-- then they go and they put in drainage pipes in me. Then they used-- I don't know what they have now, they used to have glass. One on the top, 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 in control, 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 a day. 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 the kibbutz. There was nobody really to take care of her. Finally, he went, goes to see her, and she's all covered in rash. So he takes the baby home and doesn't know what to do with her or with what to feed her. And I don't know how he goes to buy mother's milk. We had no formula or anything to feed the baby with.

And it was in the end of May, so-- or in June, then it was already June-- 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 lived in 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. That's my-- of course, I didn't know, because he wouldn't tell me anything, 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 they would-- my husband, in a kibbutz-- and as I said, there wasn't very much-- would bring me food. My brother would go, and he sold his hat and whatever he had to get a chicken and have it killed and make me chicken soup or--

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

Yeah.

Yeah.

So that's the brother that lives now in Alameda. But he tried to help that way. So food was brought mostly from there every day. And my husband had to walk--

4 or 5 miles?

--miles, yeah. So all of this was going on, and they didn't know whether I'm going to get better. He had to go on the black market, first, and buy some alcohol. Sometimes it was rubbing alcohol. Sometimes it was regular whiskey of some type-- whatever there was available. Sometimes it was champagne.

Now, what they did with this alcohol is the nuns would mix it with eggs and put it in a teakettle, put it on my chest, and I just drank it down. The eggs were there so it wouldn't burn my throat.

Hmm.

So that kept the infection from getting worse. Then, one day the doctor examines me. She sees my belly is very big or whatever. They go put me back to sleep, and they're going to do more surgery on me.

While I was asleep, I was relaxed, and I emptied my bladder. They were going to operate. The reason was that, I guess, I was in pain, and it was painful to go on a bed pan or whatever.

And that caused the distention in your belly.

Yeah, so anyway, after then-- we 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-- 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 that was in contact with my family here-- a chaplain and a newspaper woman from New York,

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who was a correspondent in the war. And they, in turn, let my family know here. And they, I don't know how, got somehow penicillin.

These were your uncles, like, your mother's brothers?

Brothers. They got penicillin for me. Then they were giving penicillin every five hours. It wasn't the same as now. And so I got penicillin.

Now, the German doctors in 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 be 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 what 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 I was better to get out of there. And besides, they didn't have room for me.

Anyway, after five weeks, I got out of the hospital. And I came home, and my baby was-- weighed less than at birth at five weeks. Took her to the doctor. And the doctor told me, you have to nurse her, but if not, she'll die.

After five weeks, I didn't have anything to nurse with. And I had an infection. 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 the whole-- from that type of things, because I wanted to be able to nurse her. And I did nurse her for 10 months.

Really? The milk came back?

Yeah, 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 thinks the court started, and they were SS people who took care of me.

Wow.

I mean, the chief of staff is an SS man. So--

Did you sign?

No.

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