

Then believe it or not, I think I was very naive and very stupid. German girls came to-- we moved out of the kibbutz.

Why?

Because I had this baby and there was really not enough food for her there. And we thought that we are outside of the kibbutz. And we moved into Zeilsheim itself, a DP camp, that maybe if I cooked myself I could make it go longer or it would be better. I could get some fruit for her or something. So we moved out. And because we moved so late, there was very 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 every morning I washed the floor. 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 between the two. That was our things. We shared a kitchen and a bathroom between the three families. There was three families upstairs and three families downstairs. It was a duplex.

Food was very, very sparse. While we were in Zeilsheim in the kibbutz, our allotment was 900 calories a day. And that was stuff like powdered milk, powdered eggs, canned fish. Then we got bread. We didn't have the 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.

Hmm.

Anyway, we were hungry, plain and simple.

Yeah.

And because we kept kosher in 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 newspaper woman, Elizabeth [? Sacatoff, ?] 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 [Personal name] who used to nurse my child once in a while in the few weeks. Yeah.

Because they got to be close friends. So she would take my package and give whatever the other woman wanted to pick out for her. The rest came to me. I guess I didn't-- first of all in the beginning, I didn't know. 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.

When we lived in the DP camp, we also didn't have anything to feed the baby with. Now I weaned her and there is not very much to eat. And she wasn't a good eater either. So we bought 40 pigeons. Pigeons.

Pigeons, yeah.

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

Keeping pigeons and cleaning up after them.

Well, I mean and 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 we lived in this DP camp. We couldn't get any milk. If we got milk, it was usually skim milk. I remember going once for-- they said that they had some place oranges to sell. And 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 Germans we lived in, 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 was SS homes, or whatever.

But I remember General Eisenhower it was then. 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.

Hmm.

While we were living in it.

I never heard that.

Yeah. We wanted to go to Israel, the worst way to Palestine. We worked for it. We did everything in our power. We registered. We were going for all kinds of meetings with [INAUDIBLE] [INAUDIBLE] Israeli military. I even met Ben-Gurion there. And then of course he wasn't a president. He was just a short little man with the white flowing hair on him. But he came to camp, he came to the kibbutz where I stayed. You see they came all the time [INAUDIBLE] and people like him to choose the people who are going to go illegally first, who are military worthy.

They needed people but they needed people who are not going to 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, 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 13 of these people from our kibbutz heard that they are taking to the illegal ship some people to France.

So my brother-in-law was in bed already. By the way, when my two brother-in-laws came, this we shared a room with them. My first-- for five years-- I never lived alone. I mean in the same room. They lived in the same room with me. My brother-in-law heard about it. He jumped out of bed. Put one of his legs in his pants and ran with one leg in and one leg out. Got on an ambulance. They got on an ambulance because it was curfew, as I said before. And they took him to that ambulance. It was a Jewish ambulance driver. Took him to the train. And the train wasn't watched and so they got on.

Wow.

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 on that illegal ship. And they stayed there until and 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 what boxes they carried on. So that's how my brother got to Israel from things.

So even then, it was very difficult to go to Israel. But when we waited in Zeilsheim, 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 food we ate. Like I used to buy from the shochet the [YIDDISH] it was called. And that's the-- oh what is that called now-- like I think it's in the neck, the limp things.

Not the gizzard?

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

The [INAUDIBLE] or something.

Yeah anyway, because that is-- I mean it's edible. But it's--

--It's bitter isn't it?

Well you have to peel it. But it's also where the cancer starts I think. It's like in the lymph nodes things. That with our meat things.

Protein.

Protein. Yeah. So life in the things were very, very difficult. A lot of the Jewish women who want to have babies never had a baby.

Hmm.

When I went for my first prenatal examination, they had us they have me stand naked and wait in line to examine me. And then they looked at me and said you're fine. I was never examined before I had the baby, before my first child. But 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 taking blood from all the time and was completely disfigured or didn't grow because they wanted to find out. It was a twin. They wanted to reproduce a lot.

This was after the concentration camps, you mean in the DP camps?

No. This was in the concentration camps. But some of the things, these things that you heard about, yeah. We had-- oh by the way when I had the infection I 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 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.

Oh really?

Wow.

Now I would have never recognized him because he didn't have any teeth when I saw him. And he was very short, without shoes and everything. But then when he told me that he had a beautiful wife, I didn't believe him. And she was a beautiful woman. So all kinds of incidences happened.

I found people that when I was working in the SS kitchen, they had young boys who were-- they call them [NON-ENGLISH] who were runners, who would deliver food to the officers, in other words or carry messages. Now they would come. They 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 so that they could hide or eat it up before they got there. And I found people like that. And didn't recognize them because all at once people changed. They became like different people.

But this little man, all at once he looked like a normal human being with teeth and tall and different. And 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 because the same things are still going on in Germany. They don't like Jews. They don't like anybody else. And 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 because we waited for Israel to become a state. And then it came. The DP camp was emptying out. And the people were leaving every which way because it was an awful long time to raise a family that way and for 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.

1948.

Yeah. 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 going to go to Israel later, by the way, from here.

Did you come directly to California?

Yes.

How did you come? You left Germany and came--

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 are married. We had an affidavit. Then they had to have an affidavit that we're not going to be a ward of the state, that the family is going to provide for us, jobs, housing, and living expenses.

What did you have two uncles in California?

Three.

Three uncles, your mother's three brothers.

My mother's three brothers. And they sent things, that how much money they have and the saving, and that business, and that my husband would be employed, and that everything, we have housing. That way they let us come. Now I wouldn't come without-- one of my brother-in-laws went to Israel. But one still was with us. I wouldn't leave without him. So I told my uncles that they have to send him an affidavit too. It's a Visa.

Mhm.

So they did that. They had to pay for all the expenses, like for the ship, for the doctor bills, for the train, everything had to be covered. When we went to the American consulate, we were interviewed by FBI. If we are not communists or why were we in concentration camp? Why are we leaving? We were examined unbelievably in every which way. We don't have any diseases. So at that time when people came they had to be free of disease. Emotionally, I don't know, because that's another question. But then we came on a ship that was junked after we got off of it.

Where did the ship sail from?

From Bremen, from Germany.

To?

To New York. And it was a Navy ship, an old one. It was called Marina [? Madeline. ?] It was painted in gray inside and out. And I was sick the whole time. It took us three weeks to get from Bremen-- which I think it 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.

So did you come to Ellis Island?

No.

No.

No. We came to New York. The same newspaper woman who was in Germany waited for us.

Met you there?

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 then 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 newspaperwoman, but this other person-- she came with her husband. She was my aunt's cousin. And she uncovered my coat. Want to see if I have anything underneath. And she said to me, you look pretty OK.

She was puzzled. And I couldn't understand why she puzzled. I'm not-- oh my fingernails were done. And my hair looked OK. And I looked fairly decent. Actually I have a picture of me from before. I didn't look like somebody who comes out from a place like that. We went to a hotel. My family have to pay for a hotel too, to stay in New York. We went to hotel. And she ran straight to the telephone booth and calls my aunt. And it was at night. 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 I came here. My two aunts bought together a bottle of nail polish and polished their nails.

You mean in order to meet you?

So--

So you took the train from New York?

So we stayed in New York.

For a few days? Or--

Five days. And this newspaperwoman took us to see the Empire State Building. Couldn't go to 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 a train. She bought 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 didn't know. It's not kosher.

Oh because you didn't know the language.

I couldn't speak.

So that was all you knew.

Soup and coffee is in every language the same. Yeah.

So did you like it?

[LAUGHTER]

Well I ate it.

Just teasing.

I mean I didn't know.

Sure.

So when we came to Oakland--

To get off the train in Oakland, California.

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 him from pictures. And it's also because he looked a lot like my mother, one of my uncles.

So here they were so surprised. They looked for somebody different 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 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.

People had at that time had such a mistaken idea of what's [INAUDIBLE] like. I mean we were very backward. I'm not comparing it to the United States. But still we knew some things. And people were calling her now, is your niece here? And she said yes. But she's not a greener.

[LAUGHTER]

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 it's OK. They're the Marshalls, Larry Marshall.

Oh.

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. I just had one outfit but it matched, 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? So I think that was from that my mother would talk about it probably.

Miriam, let me ask you, how do you think your life has been affected by what you experienced?

Well, it's been affected. I don't know. I think if-- this was another thing that my family was a little bit upset that I was married-- because they felt that I would have been a good student and could have gone to school and become a professional person or whatever. But all in all, I think I'm happy with my family what 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. I'm not a very good speller. That holds me back a lot because I'm embarrassed about it. I can read any paper, any book, 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. It's 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 new comes, I like to see where it is.

And I don't know. I think I probably would have been a good student. I don't know what would 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.

Worth it to survive?

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 that what happened to my family and thousands, 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.

And 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's happened 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.

What about your religiosity through this?

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.

Somehow I think that we don't choose what's going to happen to us. Maybe we are destined. I don't know if you know the word beshert. It's a destiny of somebody of how they're going to 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 to give up on everything. And I am interested in history. I'm interested in-- actually I'm very interested for 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.