

Give me your verbal identification and start it up. Any time.

OK. Today is November 7, 1990.

Yeah.

I am Emily--

Do I have to look at you or--

No, no.

Oh, OK.

Don't worry about the camera.

Just relax.

Oh, OK.

Just talk to Emily.

Just relax.

Don't worry about the camera.

I just have to identify what we're doing. OK. Today is November 7, 1990. I am Emily Silverman, an interviewer with the Holocaust Oral History Project of San Francisco, California. Today, we are talking with Rachel Gordon. Assisting in the interview today are Denise Weitzel and Peter Gordon.

Good morning, Rachel. And can you tell me a little bit about where you're from?

Louder.

Can you tell me where you're from, and where you grew up, and about your family?

I was born in Lithuania, 1912, April the 10th. I lived most of my life, my younger life, on the border of Germany, near Tilsit, Ostpreussen, which was East Prussia. I got married there at the age of 19.

I had a son at the age of 21, 20 and 1/2. And we lived in this area when Hitler came in 1933 till 1938. 1938, we had to leave everything, and we choose to go back to Lithuania, where we stayed there till Hitler occupied, started the war to go towards these countries, towards Russia. So they stopped. They occupied Lithuania.

In 1941, we lived in Kovno, which is the capital of Lithuania. And they put us in a ghetto. This was in a suburban area of Kovno. We were all put in living quarters, several families together. Very tight. And then from there, we had to go for slave labor for the Germans.

Each day, we went in groups. And each day was a very difficult day. My son was about eight years old. And I had to leave him there in the ghetto. My husband was sick, so we tried to keep him, like, hiding, he shouldn't have to go to work.

And I used to go every day, miles of walking with guards behind us, with their bayonets. And we walked-- I walked all day long. And then in the evening, they brought us back to the ghetto.

In 19-- and then it started to eliminate and make the ghetto with maybe 100,000 people or so. Every day, there were less and less of us. In 1943, our group, small group, we were taken to a nearby camp which is called Shantsy, the name of the little town, little area.

In 1944, it came the liquidation of the ghetto and also the labor camp where I was in. And they took us to-- there were standing near Kovno freight trains, cattle trains. And they took us all into these camps, into these cattle trains.

And from there we drove probably three days. We don't know. We were all like cattle in a crowded-- there was no sitting space. It was all standing. No food, no facilities to go.

And they brought us to a stop. There they left off most of the women and children. There weren't too many children left, which were eliminated in the ghetto when they took out. They came in, the guards. And mostly they had health helpers, Lithuanian volunteers. Also from Russia, the Ukrainian. They enjoyed doing the job without even any orders to take.

And they took out one day all the children, except of a few left. And we have never seen them again. My son was the lucky one that he survived, and a few more. In 1944, when we came to Stutthof, this was a stop off from Lithuania to Dachau.

So they left mostly the men in the trains. And they took the women off, and some of them were children. But I didn't take my son. He was nine years old. 10 years old then.

And I decided-- it was a quick decision to make if he should go with me or he should remain with his father. Because his father was sent to Dachau. So we talked-- we talked it over, first that he may pass as a man to work with the men. With the women, he will be too big to be with women, which it was right.

So he remained in the train. And we had to say goodbye. And I start to cry, and my son said, Mother, don't cry. I have a feeling that we will see each other again. And it was true. I haven't seen his father again, but he survived.

So I was in this Stutthof. We were there six weeks. When we arrived there, they sent us to Entlausung, which is like to take a shower. In the other camps, showers were very well known. It was gas showers. But this was real showers.

So they took away our last belongings we had, and they gave us some clothes, like prison clothes. It was blue and gray stripes. One got a coat. One got a pair of pants and a jacket. One got a dress. But this was our new outfit to remain there.

We slept about four women in one bunk. Two this way and two the other way. And food of course, was the main problem. So after six weeks, when we came in to this Stutthof, outside we found a big stack loaded with glasses, one big stack with shoes and also clothes.

They had a crematorium, and most of the people, the clothes, and the glasses, and the shoes were from the people who were already gone. After six weeks, they decided to send us to working camps. We were 900 in our group.

They gave us clothes. If it fits or it doesn't fit, it doesn't matter. Some got shoes. I didn't get any shoes. And we had to walk quite a way, so I had blisters on the feet. Because it was in July, and it was very hot.

We walked quite a long walk. I cannot even tell how many miles or so. Till we came to a little camp. This was our working camp. We stayed there, and there were tents. Like we slept 10 in a tent.

Daytime, we had to go to work in the fields. Just it wasn't really any important work, but we had shovels. And we had to dig the ground for trenches, whatever they wanted. And in the evening, we came back to the same place, very worn out and tired and hungry.

So we got-- each tent got one bucket with food, soup, whatever it was. And we had to divide it. We ate two or three in one bowl. Each one took a sip. We didn't have any knives or forks or spoons.

I made a knife. We had a metal spoon, and I sharpened it on a stone, and it became-- the side became a knife. And this is the way it went. I cannot even recall how long we stayed in one camp, but they sent us from one to another, and quite several.

And then it went on August, September, October, November, December. In December, it was our last stop in a camp, which it was an old mill. And was like terraces, layers. In each, most of us laid on one level, the other on the other. At night, you had to go to the bathroom, there was no bathroom.

There was outside a big hall. And it was for everyone to go there. And then from there, this was the last step. They told us that they have to take us somewhere else. And it was wintertime, January. Full of snow, frost, and most of us were barefoot; didn't have any shoes, no warm clothes. But very unrealistic that very few died.

Yeah. I don't know. The will for life was so strong. Everyone thought, I will survive, and I will survive. Then when they took us-- this was the last walk, we had to walk very, very long walk. And January is the height of the winter in Europe.

And we met prisoners of war walking. They led them somewhere. I wouldn't know where. And then they saw us, that we could hardly drag our legs. They took off their scarves and threw it to us. They took some cans, conserve. And they had-- because the soldiers got better treatment, more or less, than we got. And they threw it to us.

And then they brought us in a-- to a place. It was like wooden area, and there were tents. Different tents. They were round, made out of plastic or veneer. They call it the Finland-- the Finland tents.

And there must have been also prisoners. We don't know if they were war-- Nazi prisoners or the war prisoners. It was empty. It looked like it must have been a military. And we got in there, and we lay down, and we were very tired and cold and hungry. And most of us fell asleep.

Then, early in the morning, one woman got up, and she looked out. And we didn't see any guards. The German guards disappeared. It turned out that the Russian soldiers, the Russian army was close, coming towards this area.

So the German guards didn't care what happened to us. They didn't even feel like killing anymore, and they ran away. So a woman then walked out. And she looked out. There were no guards.

And, of course, the aim was mostly food to survive. And she saw a big, huge army cattle with frozen food, which they left. If they had to go or they were told to go, whatever it happened.

And she started with her hands to shovel the frozen food and to eat. And then she came in, and she said, you know, I think we are free. There are no more guards around.

And we couldn't believe it. So we walked out. Nobody was there. So everybody left the tent, and we walked out. And soon enough, there was a soldier, a Russian soldier on a horse. A rider on a white horse. I called him the messiah, messiah on the white horse.

And we start to talk to him, or he to us. And he said, from where are you? What are you doing here? How did you survive? How are you still alive?

And he saw the way we looked, and he gave us some instructions to go this and this way. There is a warehouse, a warehouse with food, which the Germans left when they ran away. And most of us did go.

We took boxes with a cord, to load the cans of food, and just like a sled because of the snow. Some of them couldn't do it. There was no strength. And they told us we should go a certain direction. There is a train station. And over there, we will stay overnight. They will give us some food and shelter.

And then the following day will be different orders what to do with us. And where to send us. This is what we followed.

Some of them died. Very few, but some of them over-ate and they didn't make it.

And we stayed. The name of this place was [POLISH - Ciechocinek It used to be a Polish area near Danzig somewhere. And the Germans took it over during the war. And it was called Goringstadt, after this Nazi Goring. It was actually a resort area in the normal times.

And then we came there, it was empty houses. And we just took place, so many and so many just to lay down and to be there. There were lots of mattresses, which we cut and we made shirts and some clothes.

They had also a big, like a Entlausung oven. The clothes we had on was full of lice. So we had to put it in there in order to burn it, to be able to put it on back. And we stayed. We got jobs from the Russian military. They were there occupying the area.

We were provided with food. They didn't have a very good opinion about us. They accused us that we worked with the Nazis. This is the reason we survived.

They had in mind that we should all have been dead. But because we survived, we did something which it helped the Nazis, and this is the reason. The man, this rider on the white horse, was a Jewish man. And he gave us instructions to follow and to find a place to be, stay there in this area, Ciechocinek called.

Because the Germans called it Goring-Stadt. The Polish call it Ciechocinek which is that was a well-known resort in the time of the Poles. Over there, we had food. We did a little work. They gave us, the Russians, what to do. And then we met a group of Russian officers. And they were Jewish.

They were interested in our fate and our lives. And we had a discussion with them. I had a friend who is now in Israel for years. And she was a Russian stenographer, and she spoke fluent Russian. And we discussed our future fate, where to go, what to do.

And this officer told us he was a colonel. And he told us not to go back to Lithuania, because it's Russia now. He said, you cannot have worse in any other place. And then you will stay here and try a way out to go more West, so we will be able to be free and do what we like to do.

He gave us some work to do. He had his office, and he has quite a number of soldiers under his-- no? He was the head of their group. So we did. We were 15. Who wants to go with them?

So 15 of us decided to go. So we were loaded on trucks. And the war was still going on. And they went-- no, it's actually Lom. It's in Russia. Behind the lines, to go further to Berlin. This was the aim.

And they stopped during the traveling. The Germans left their homes and disappeared. They ran away. So the soldiers used to go in, and they looked mostly for valuables. We went down, and we took linen, and we took tablecloths, and we took blankets, and made it in a big pack and load it on the trucks.

And then the day came we arrived in Berlin. And this was in May. The war was still going on. We occupied, the Russians, East Berlin. And they gave us jobs. They nationalized-- there were meat factories in this area in East Berlin. It's called the Hafensee, the area.

There were three meat factories. They assigned me in one to work. And a friend of mine who is in Los Angeles, she was on the other one. We had shelter. We had food and whatever.

We didn't have clothes. We exchanged illegally for food with the German people who lived close by. So we could have some clothes and keep-- start a new, clean-- cleaner life.

And we stayed there about six months. The war was over. We heard that some people survived in the Bavaria area, like the camps Dachau and so. And each one hoped that their families will be alive.

I hoped, but I'm by nature a pessimist. My husband had bleeding ulcers. And I thought that he cannot survive, which it was true. My son was only 11 years old, so they will just get rid of the children, which they did. He was in Dachau the day when they made a selection and 130 boys my son's age, a year older, a year younger.

And my son, they pushed him aside. You can work. He looks strong. He's not very tall, but broad shoulders. And he looked older than his age. He and maybe five or six. This category. They remained, and they survived.

So I didn't know that, but I thought my son was too young to survive. And then, in Berlin, I took sick. I had to-- I needed hospitalization. I needed surgery. And I was very sick. And I didn't think that anyone-- I knew my brothers and parents are killed. And I didn't hope that my son will survive.

So my friend, who used to come to see me in the hospital, she said, you know Rachele, we have very good news. There are some men survived in the concentration camps in Dachau. But we don't know the names yet.

The doctor told her not to give it to me up front. Just to prepare. And I said, this is very good news. It's good to hear, but I don't have any hope that some of my family is a survivor. And she said, you never know. In a war time, always miracles happen.

And then the following day, she said tomorrow we will find out exactly. There is a list of names who survived. And the names are on the list. So when she came the next day and she waited how I will react, if it penetrated in my mind.

And I said, Sonia, is there any news? She said, of course. I was waiting you should ask. She said, we have lots of names. But she said, then there is a name, my name. My married name was [? Kobelkowski, ?] which my son changed here for Kobel. Shorter.

There is a name like this, but I don't know if it is your husband or your son, or-- she just. And she said, tomorrow we will know for sure. Then the following day, I didn't take too much to my mind because I was positive that it couldn't happen.

The way I put it, two and two together, that he was too little to survive. My husband was too sick to survive. Only you had to be very strong, very healthy to take it. And they didn't have to kill us. They just let us die from starvation and the conditions.

So the following day, my friend came. And she was still taking a test, how I will react. And I said, Sonia, did you hear more about the news? And she said, yes. There is a list, and there is a name of your son.

My son? And I thought to myself, she wouldn't tease me. She saw what kind of condition I was in. And this is not a teasing matter. So I said, really? She said, yes. Some several men are on the list here, too. And I said maybe she is telling me the truth. Can I-- when can I see him?

And she said, would you like to see him now? And she goes, walked. She walks toward the door. And I said, no, she couldn't play a game with me. It must be real. And I said, if it's real, I will not cry. I will be strong.

And the door opened. My son was 12 years old. He came in, and the whole staff of the doctors-- this was in a bombed hospital. In the basement was the hospital at the time, and all the doctors and all the nurses, they were standing to see what was going on, the reaction.

And he came in, and he came to me. And I saw it's him, and I saw it's true. And I said, is your father here? And he said, no. I have never seen my father, never talked about it, and he never told me anything. He knew that his father died in Dachau in a concentration-- in Lager II. The camps, the Lagers went I, II, and III, and IV in number.

And this was the meeting. And then when I was released from the hospital, he was there, too. And he adjusted. It was a different life. And we take the better. Very easier to adjust than to the bad things.

And after six months, we kept in touch with these Jewish officers. And they suggested-- because the Russians had an order to send all the refugees, the survivors to Russia, and not simply to go into a plane or train-- walking. And walking with cattle. They took the cattle from Germany to go to Russia.

And this colonel told us, I will arrange for you to cross the East German border from the Russian to the American zone. And he took a truck one night, and we loaded whatever possessions we had. And we went over to the American zone, which they had also like a DP camp, till we were a bigger number and they sent us to Bavaria.

Over there was the most meeting point from all the refugees, from all the survivors to come there. And then they put us in different camps. It's called DP camp. This man, this who helped us a lot, he lost a wife and two sons. And he was from Lithuania, too. But he lived in Russia, and he was a party man with the Russians. And he couldn't, but he did for us a lot.

And then I heard somebody told the story what he's doing, and they sentenced him to 10 years in prison. He made his time. And from there, he went to Israel. And my friend who lives in Israel, she told me that she met him.

We came to the American zone. And of course it was different. We were in a DP camp. We got shelter, food, which America sent through the Joint organization. We stayed there for four years. Four years.

My son was a restless young boy. Because he survived the concentration camp, he felt that he's a hero. He's strong. He can do things on his own. And he decided that he's going to Palestine. He does not want to go any other place.

We were waiting for a quota to go to America. And he made up his mind, and a few other boys, and a few adults. And they went illegal. This was a youth group to Palestine. They were on the Exodus. They were caught and put on the isle of Cyprus. This was in 1947.

Then, when Israel became independent, I don't know if you saw the movie Goldie. Ingrid Bergman played it. This is the way it went. They took the children first because they were caught by the British. And so my son came to Israel in 1948.

And he was in a kibbutz. He was restless. He didn't like this life either. Then Egypt and Syria started war with the young Israel. And he joined the army. He was almost killed.

And then after the war, we kept in touch. I was already in America in 1949. And we wanted to make him to come here. He hesitated, but after long pleading with him, promising him that he will have a easier life here, and if he doesn't like it, it's a free country. He can always go back.

And in 1952, at the age of 20, he came to America. I remarried in Germany, in the DP camp. And my second husband has also a son. He lost one son in Auschwitz, and one son is here. And this is Maury Gordon. And my son is Aaron Kobel.

What else would you like to know?

OK. I'd like to go back to your family in Lithuania before the war. Can you tell me more about if you had siblings and brothers, and what your family life was like?

I had three brothers. I was the oldest. I had two sisters. They died very little, young. Then I had three brothers. My oldest brother was six years younger than I.

And my second brother, when they-- during the war, when they were killed, my oldest brother was just newly married. He was 24. My second brother was 22. And my youngest brother was 18. They were all killed by the Lithuanians.

Can you tell me what your brothers' names were and how they were killed by the Lithuanians?

When Hitler came, they ran. It was in a small town, and they were all killed. And I was told. There are all the survivors from this area. A woman came, and she said they took them out in the woods, and they shot them. In a forest, yeah.

This in the 1930s?

My brothers. And so is my mother. And my father came to Kovno. I lived in Kovno, and this was already when the war started just. So when I saw him, and I said, how did you come in such a time? Aren't you afraid?

He said, I wanted to know how you are and what's going on. And he decided to go back home. At that time, they went by buggy and horse. And a few others. And going back, they caught them, and they killed them, torturing them and killed my father. This I know. And my brothers.

Say. My older brother was-- his name was David. My second brother was Nachman. And my third brother, the youngest was Meyer.

And what happened to the wife of the one that was married?

Also killed.

Killed also. What was her name?

I don't remember.

That's OK.

I don't remember.

So was your family observant Jewish or?

I would say conservative more, yeah. In the little towns in Europe, following their regular rituals, Friday night, festivals, Saturday, going to temple. And the young people did their things, because it was a modern little country.

How about your education? Up to what grade?

To gymnasium. It's like high school here. And this is what I had.

Did you experience any anti-Semitism in school? Did you experience any anti-Semitism in school?

No. I cannot-- because in Kovno we had a Lithuanian gymnasium, which Jewish could participate. And we had two Jewish gymnasiums. One specially leftwing Jewish Jewish, and the other one was Hebrew. We learned Hebrew speaking, the modern Hebrew.

So it was a Jewish school, where you were taught modern Hebrew, where you were taught Bible. But it was all from a modern perspective?

Yeah.

So the girls were able to study Torah?

Yeah.

Were they preparing you for aliyah to Palestine, teaching you Hebrew?

Some of them went. Some of them went, Chalutzim.

Pioneers?

Yeah. Uh-huh.

Were you a pioneer?

Yeah.

Were you going to go to Palestine?

I wanted to go. My parents objected. I was the only girl. And they didn't want it, because life there wasn't like it is even today. And this modern standard in Israel, life is very, very, very difficult. But at that time, I had friends who went. Worked very hard and gave their lives freely for the Jewish state.

You were a Zionist?

Mm-hmm.

So was it that your parents kept you back from being a Chalutza?

Yeah.

So you finished then the gymnasium in 12th grade?

Yeah.

And then how did you meet your husband?

So many years. I don't know. We met, and we were kind of distant relatives yet, some in the family. He was 10 years older than I was.

Did somebody make a shidduch?

No, no. We met. And it wasn't in Lithuania. It was on the borderline of Germany. He had a brother there, who lived there. And I went to visit There and we met, and then we got married there. Because my son was born in Germany, in Tilsit.

We lived like Oakland and San Francisco over the bridge. I always, all my entire life, I lived crossing a bridge. In Lithuania, I lived in Brooklyn, crossing the bridge to Manhattan. And in Oakland, crossing the bridge to San Francisco. Seems like I like bridges, and I like the smaller part of the town.

When you finished gymnasium, did you go to work right away?

Yes.

What type of work?

Yeah. I did-- I took some designing. And then when I got married, I didn't do it because I didn't need it.

How did your family-- what type of business or?

My father was a grain merchant, trading. You don't have it here, probably. But in those towns he used to buy from the farmers and sell it to the stores and bakeries and so forth.



He's like a middleman between the wholesaler and the retailer. Was it a family business?

Yeah.

And had that been the--

And strange. My second husband came from a family who his father had a flour mill. Mm-hmm.

So was this family business for a couple of generations, or was it something your father started?

No, my father started it.

And were your brothers in the business?

No. My oldest brother was a salesman in the biggest store we had, in hardware or whatever it was. And my younger brother still went to school. And my middle brother worked with my father.

Were you the oldest or the middle child?

I was the oldest.

And how many brothers did you have?

Three.

OK. So you were the oldest of the three?

Mm-hmm.

So after you got married, you didn't have to work anymore? What did your husband do?

We had a business, like-- it was a better not grocery, but we had all the delicacies and imported things from other countries. It was a very fine business, and we made a good living.

So up until--

This was on the German border. Memelgebiet, it was called.

Can you say the name of the town?

Memel.

Memelgebiet?

Gebiet is the area. It's like a county or--

So what happened to the business? When did you notice that--

We left it. We couldn't sell it. We had a big lot we were supposed to build a house. And somebody came to buy. They could. They said, don't buy it. Hitler is coming, and he will get it for free.

This is the way. So we left everything. And before the war started, we went to the wrong direction. We went to Lithuania.

And that's 1938?

From Germany. And then the Germans came in in 1941.

Can you tell me about some of the differences that occurred in the town you were living in that made you leave when the Nazis were coming to power?

We had friends, German people. We had neighbors. And with one couple we were very close. We used to go out and socialize. And then, all of a sudden, I saw a cold shoulder. And I said to my husband, you know, I cannot understand. Did I do something wrong? That Mrs. [? Rontgen, ?] when she sees me, she turns away.

And maybe sometimes you do something wrong or say something subconsciously. You really don't know what happened. So he said, why couldn't you ask her? Sure enough, I ask her. And I said, how come I see you are so cold and you were such a close friend?

And she said, we have to move with the wind. We have to go. You know, you cannot go against the wind, but you go with the wind. And we thought it was because they were afraid of having Jewish friends.

Was there any laws that had been in your town that was causing your old friends to stop?

In this area, Hitler was occupied with taking Poland, and Czechoslovakia, and all this, and Austria, and so. And here it was close to his area. He left it for last. And we didn't wait. When it was Kristallnacht, when they burned the synagogues, and so then we left everything and we went.

And was this also at the same time that your brothers and father were--

No, they lived in a smaller town. And they were there. And then we came to Kovno.

And when your brothers were killed by the Lithuanians, was this around the same time, like 1938 or 19--

They were born there. They lived there all their lives.

And these were Lithuanian anti-semites? Or the Lithuanians who killed them--

They called them partisans.

Partisans?

Yeah. And they loved it. And one told me, that Lithuanian. He said, oh, we waited a long time for this moment, to kill them.

So is this like a pogrom?

No, not a pogrom. They just killed because the Nazis gave the orders. And they were free to do whatever they want.

And this was-- what year was that? Do you remember?

This was in 1941.

Oh, 1941. OK. So when you move to Kovno, you left your business, and you left everything behind.

Yeah.

Did you have your son at this point?

Yeah.

OK.

So we went. We went to Kovno, which we went in 1939. And the Germans came in 1941. First, in 1940, the Russians came. So the Russian occupied Lithuania.

Do you remember Kristallnacht in Kovno? Can you tell me about it?

Of course, in 1938. We lived like Oakland and San Francisco. And we could see the fires burning. It was closer yet. And this was the end of all, time to leave and to go.

And where were you that day?

So we were in our home in Āœbermemel it was called, a little town. And we left the following day for Lithuania. It was maybe 100 miles or so.

So did you have to walk or?

No, no. We had a truck to go.

And you were able to take some of your belongings with you.

Yeah.

Now, when you got to Kovno in Lithuania, where did you live, and what was your life like up up until '41?

We had a business there. The same business we opened. And then the Russian came. We had to close it because there was no private business allowed. And a year passed by very fast. And then the Germans came, and everything was over.

And they took away your business.

It wasn't ours anymore.

OK.

Then they put us in ghetto.

Can you tell me more about-- do you remember the day that you had it-- were put into the ghetto in 1941?

This was in-- the Russia-- the Germans occupied Kovno in 1941 in June. And after a month's time, they arranged it already to take all the Jewish people from Kovno, to the big city, and put them-- they made their plans to put them in a ghetto.

And this was also over the bridge, a little town called Slobodke. Which in normal times, it was well known for yeshivas. Lots of Jews, of Hebrew yeshivas, people who studied for rabbis or whatever, this was the place they did.

So we had to move, and go, and leave everything, and just moved into tiny quarters, just to have a place to lay down or to make our home.

Did you share your tiny quarters with other families?

Yeah, we shared with a family from Czechoslovakia.

So they were bringing other people in?

They ran from-- Czechoslovakia was occupied before Lithuania. And they didn't know they went the wrong direction instead of going somewhere else, because lots of Jewish people from Kovno-- when the Russians occupied Kovno, Lithuania in 1940, and then when Hitler came, they went back to Russia.

So lots of Jewish people went with the soldiers. With a group they went to Russia. And the people from Czechoslovakia, from other countries, they came to Lithuania, which they picked-- at that time, Lithuania wasn't taken by the Nazis yet.

So we met about two single men. They were doctors. And a couple we shared the room the place with. He was an economist, and she was a teacher. Nice young people.

Do you know if they survived?

I don't know.

OK. Do you remember in September of 1941, there was an issue of something called Jordan permits, of getting permits to work, that the Judenrat had to give out to the Kovno ghetto in 1941. Do you remember anything about this?

To work for the Germans?

Right.

Yes, I was working for the Germans.

How did you get your working papers?

I didn't need working papers. They took us without papers. Only by the name, or not even the name and number.

Do you-- when the Germans started having their Aktion, or their round-ups--

Yeah, Aktion, yeah.

Do you remember one of the first ones on October 28, 1941?

In October was the big one.

Can you tell me more about that day and what happened to you and your family?

They-- we got orders to leave our places and come to this and this area. Early in the morning in October was the first snowfall. It was cold. My son was 10 years old, 10 and 1/2. And he was having the measles, without knowing that he had the measles.

We put on everything. We know that we go out of this place, we wouldn't be able to come back anymore. So I put all his clothes he had-- underwear several pairs, shirts, and sweaters, and a coat.

We came to this big place. It was an area, oh, we must have been maybe 100,000. I don't know. And we stood there for hours and hours and hours. And then, in the late afternoon, they came with a plan. They had the plan already, the Germans. To stand in line, let's say families, three, five in a family, father and mother and a couple of children.

And then the Germans-- right, left, right, left, right, left. They took a family, divided in two parts. And we didn't know which the right part, the right side will be. If the right side is good or the left side is good.

We had neighbors beside the couple. There was an old grandmother, and two daughters, and the daughters' two children. Because her husband was taken from the ghetto. 500 men were the first to taken out to send away. They never returned.

And we stayed with these people. And they were all sent on this side, and they never came back. We came back. We were the lucky ones, my husband and my son and myself. And this went on a whole day.

And then in the evening, when we came back to our place, we lived in a apartment building. It was a small apartment. And it was occupied by all the Jewish people. And then we came back. Half of them didn't come back.

And during the night, we heard shooting. They took them out. They dug big grave, a mass grave. And while they were walking, they were shooting them. Some of them weren't even dead, they fell in there. I have somebody I know who crawled out of the grave, yeah, to tell the story.

So and then the following morning, it was peaceful, quiet. Very little people. Everybody said the next move, we are in it. But it didn't happen that way.

Did this friend survive the war, the one who crawled out of the grave? Do you--

He died. No. No.

What was the name of the friend who gave you that report?

He had two young children like my son, and a sister, and a mother.

Do you remember her name or his name of the friend? Do you-- no, OK. What was your daily life like in the ghetto? Like, what type of work did you and your husband and your son do? How did you--

What I did?

In the ghetto, yes.

My husband did nothing. He was sick, and I had to hide him. Because the Jews-- they put Jewish people as police people, to lead the ghetto, to do the dirty work. And I had to hide my husband all the time when they used to come in the morning to knock on the door or the windows, to call that we have to be early to get up and to walk to go to work.

So I was the one who went to work. My husband didn't go.

How did you hide him? Where did you hide him?

Under the bed, or covered up, or I said he was already taken.

And what did your son do when you went to work?

Nothing. He was a little boy. I used to tell him, couldn't you take a book and read or write or so? So he said, what is the purpose of it? Tomorrow, they are killing us. I don't want to do anything. They will kill us. So why let him be free?

And what type of work did you do?

I worked in a German outfit in a kitchen. There were two cooks, because they had maybe 20 or more Gestapo. He was the head of the group, and he was really a murderer. So we went every day. So the men, some they did, they cut wood. The women cleaned the offices and they and the rooms.

I had the head of the post. His room, I had to-- his office I had to clean. I spoke German. So and it was easier. And one

day I remember like today. I was dusting and cleaning his office. And he had a big picture of Hitler, and it fell down.

So I said, this is the end of my life already. He thought maybe I did it on purpose, you know? I was shaking. And he was-- it seems he liked me, probably, in his own way. So he said, next time, I should be more careful. You know, he didn't look me in the face. He just-- next time, I should be more careful, you know?

And I worked in the kitchen to help the cooks to prepare the meals. They had hot meals twice a day for lunch and dinner. And to clean up. We were two women who did it. And the one cook was very sympathetic, and he used to let me have some food, what's left, like potatoes and underneath the potatoes. I had a big canister to bring it in into the ghetto for my husband, food, and for my son.

And at the gate in the ghetto, there were all the guards. Because the ghetto was barbed wire all around. You couldn't escape. And they used to search us. You know, if we bring in something, which we used to bring in some woods, too, on our-- like a backpack, to be able to warm up the apartment.

And this is the way I worked. And I took sick. And I was very, very sick for a long time. And then I came back to work. And they took me. The head of the Gestapo, he liked me. I did a good job. So he took me back.

And then we had order to move from the ghetto to a different camp, also in the area. So we had to go here. And there we did different work. I went to my same job, like by truck they used to load us. And my husband, when they are close by, there was a working place which he used to go.

And then when it came, the end in 1944, to liquidate all the camps in ghetto, this was where we went, to Germany, to the concentration camp.

Just to talk with you, to this camp, what's the name of this camp that you were working at?

In Lithuania?

Yeah.

This was called-- it's called according to the name of their little town, Shantsy. Shantsy. And this was near Kovno. Yeah, they made it as a camp.

And it was a labor camp?

Yeah.

And you would work there during the day and then go back to the ghetto at night?

Yeah. And meanwhile your son was still staying home or just staying in the apartment all day?

He was staying. Yeah, he was staying there. And one day in the camp Shantsy, I got up in the morning to go to work. And my husband was supposed to go to, because it was very close. So I said, you know, I think you should take Aaron along. Because it's no use of being in the camp all day long by himself. You take him, and he will help some. They let it go.

And I came back in the evening when we came back with a truck. They brought us back. And one woman was a Jewish actress. And she started to scream. And I said, what kind of acting is this? She said, don't you see? The children used to come to the gate, expecting their mothers or fathers to come back. There was no children.

You see, she said? There are no children at the gate. So we knew that something went wrong. And this was when my son came with my husband from work. The Aktion was already done. The children who remained in the camp were all taken out. There were no children anymore. A few of them.

The ones who hid survived?

Yeah.

How did your-- what did your husband do with your son at work?

He came from work, and then my husband was at the gate. And as we saw the picture was clear, so I said is Aaron gone? And he said, no. He's hiding under-- in their barracks, under the bed. We don't want-- the few children who were out at work.

So after that--

Yeah, they took us to Germany. This was the end.

This was just before the final liquidation of the ghetto.

Yeah.

They first took away the children and the sick and the elderly?

They did it in the ghetto, also. And they did it. I know a family who they came to take. They had only one child. And they came to take the child. And the mother said, no, I will go with him. So the German pushed her in in the truck also. She never came back, the both of them.

This was [? Janice, ?] an aunt.

Did you have any contact with the Judenrat or any connections to that in the ghetto? Did you have any connections to the Jewish police in the ghetto?

No, the Jewish police were afraid of their own lives, you know. So they got the job, and they did what they have to do. And that's it.

Did you have any connection or know anybody in the underground in the ghetto?

No.

Or the children that joined, the young people that joined the partisans afterwards?

Some of them went to the partisans, to the underground, but very few.

So what-- physically, did women stop menstruating in the ghetto?

In concentration camp, not in ghetto. When we went in the labor camps, the concentration camp none of us had the period. None of them. And then when I came to Berlin, after a few weeks, a more to say normalized surrounding, yeah, we had it.

Did you know of any women who gave birth in the ghetto?

No, not to my--

Do you know of any women who lost babies in the ghetto, miscarriages?

No.

When you were in the ghetto, did you or your husband consider doing any resistance work?

I didn't do anything. I cannot say I am a hero.

No, no.

I didn't work and did things for my survival. Just survived without crying.

And how much food were they rationing you in the ghetto, when you were living there? Well, like a loaf of bread a week, a day?

They gave us only a ration, a slice, a slice of bread for the day. So I always kept a little piece, just to keep to my lips, to feel that I have something. Never finished the whole thing. And after a day's work, they gave us a bucket of some soup.

In the morning, for a tent of 10, we got a bucket of chicory coffee, whatever it's called. So each one took a cup, and we washed ourselves in order, took a sip, and the rest we had to clean ourselves.

Was there a black market in the ghetto of--

The ghetto, I would say yes. But not in the concentration camp.

And did you or your husband or your son try getting stuff off of the black market in the ghetto?

No, not my son. He was too little. And in ghetto, what did we do? we sold some clothes to the Lithuanian people through the gate for a piece of butter or a chicken or something.

We gave away a coat, new, brand new Yeah, this is what we did. Mm-hmm.

Were there any cultural activities in the ghetto, like a choir or a band or anything like that that you remember?

Not in our ghetto.

What about religious observance? Did you or your family or any-- remember any other families trying to observe Shabbat, or kashrut, or the holidays, or anything?

No, nothing.

OK.

Nothing.

OK. So your final days in the ghetto, can you tell me about the day of liquidation, what happened to you and your family?

The liquidation of the ghetto?

Yes.

This was July. I wasn't in the ghetto anymore. I was in the camp, Shantsy camp. The rest of the people were in the ghetto. And, of course, the order was to leave. And they were waiting with trucks to take you to the trains. And then, in order to make sure that people didn't hide or remained or so, they burned.

They put fire on each and every barrack and every house. And the ghetto was mostly houses. To burn it. Some people, I



heard, escaped at night, while the ghetto was burning. But not too many. Most of them went, according to the orders.

So you were rounded up and--

Rounded up in Stutthof from Lithuania ghetto in Shantsy Lager. All was brought to Stutthof. And this was the first stop. They let out the women and some children there. Very few children. And the rest of the men were in the trains, and they were sent to Dachau.

When you were riding in the cattle cars from Kovno to Stutthof, what happened? Like, what happened each time you had to get off the train and they separated you?

This was the only transportation we had to Stutthof. From Stutthof, we always had to walk from one camp to another, from one labor camp to another. I understand that some people from the labor camps went on a boat, a little boat. It was divided by a river so. But we weren't in this area.

How--

We had [? gone. ?]

How did you save your son? Like, you said that you--

I didn't save him. He just-- he went with his father further. I went down. I was let off with most of the women to Stutthof. And my son went-- remained in the train with his father. And he went on to Dachau.

In the train route or the cattle cars to Stutthof, did people die? Did you lose any people along the way? I mean--

Some of them. A few jumped on the train. What happened to them, I don't know.

All right. Once you got to Stutthof, what type of labor did they make you do?

In Stutthof, we didn't do anything. They kept us there for six weeks. We had to report every day. They kept us sitting in a burning hot day outside in the sand on the ground. And they gave us, the first meal, a plate, a bowl of soup without spoons. We had to sip.

And it was poison ivy mixed with some flour. And nobody, as hungry as we were, we could not eat it. And we could not throw it away either. They watched us.

So in the sand, we dug some little holes. And little by little, we poured in and covered it with sand. It was impossible to eat it.

Did you share food with each other or anything or did--

Nobody shared anything. If you got your ration, when you were lucky to get whatever, even parents and children were enemies. Many grabbed, you know, like animal. It's hard to describe.

When--

Hunger is the worst part of suffering. Torture. When you are beaten up, it doesn't hurt as much. And I was.

When you were-- the six weeks that you were in Stutthof, were you with the same people that you had left with from the Kovno ghetto? Was there any other nationality, Jewish nationals there?

Yeah, Hungary. From Hungary. Lots of women. Their heads were shaved, and they looked terrible.

Your heads weren't shaved then?

No. And we don't even have a number.

And when-- were there any selection processes or Aktions will you were there in Kovno? I mean, in Stutthof? I mean, or did the whole group survive? Did they eliminate?

Our group, we were 900 women. Maybe two or three died on the way. And it was so cold and so. But otherwise, everyone-- and then after the liberation, when they got the food, they overate and they died. Quite a few. But the rest of them survived.

So from Stutthof, you then went on a march to different--

Different camps.

--camps.

Yeah.

So do you remember the first camp? You said you stopped at one camp. How far-- how long a journey did you have to make, and where did you go?

It was-- I remember-- I don't remember exactly the names of the camps. And Torun was the last. Torun was the last camp. It's more on the Polish-German area border.

And we were liberated not too far away. It was a day's walking in the snow till we got to this last camp, where we were liberated. We were left, abandoned by the Nazis, by the guards. And then the Russians came.

What type of labor did you do in these different camps?

In the camps? In one camp, I used to sew, to patch up some-- to take out from a coat a piece of material and make a mitten. You know, because you couldn't hold the shovel in our hand, because we dug frozen ground.

How much-- when you are hungry and when you are tired and sick, how much can you dig? But this was only a play for them to let us do. It wasn't a very active, important work. And in every camp, the same.

You sewed? You did sewing as a labor in every camp?

For the--

Were they German uniforms or were they--

No, no. Only for our prisoners, to make-- cut off a piece of blanket and make a pair of slippers. You know, we didn't even have yarn. We pulled the yarn from the blanket. It was the military blanket. You know, and the knife we had sharpened the end of the spoon, of a metal spoon.

So is this-- was this sewing, was this for the Germans or was this for yourselves?

This was sewing for ourselves, for our camp.

And that was the labor you were permitted to do?

In one, yeah. yeah in one camp.

What's the name of that camp they permitted that? Do you remember?

I don't know the names of the camps. [NON-ENGLISH] and Torun. I know these two. And the rest I don't remember.

So you were sewing out of anything that you could get a hold of, the blankets, the threads from your uniforms, just to make some clothing for protection or survival.

Yeah.

And--

The clothes were all shredded.

So only to sew up to cover the body. And the Germans did not punish you for this type of activity?

No, no. What type of labor did the Germans force of you to do when you were in the camps? Did they make you clean?

It wasn't anything with us. It wasn't anything important, what we did, really. Most of the time spent in the fields, to dig trenches.

For the German soldiers?

For the Germans, yeah.

So what you remember is from each camp is they would take you out, and you would be like labor units, digging up trenches?

Yeah.

And so you would get up in the morning. How would your morning-- how would your day go? You have roll call and then you were taken out into the field and then brought back in the evening?

Mm-hmm. And they watched us all day long, each move we made.

Did anybody try to escape?

There was no escape. And we weren't very, very-- I would say up to-- didn't have the guts. Who knows?

Did you make some really-- did you make some close friends from the women, the 900 women, they were going from camp to camp, did you have any special friendships?

Mm-hmm.

Can you tell me about them?

I have a friend. She's in Israel, and we became very close friends. And I slept with her in the same tent. So the first experience, it was in November. Very cold, freezing. And we slept like our bedding was straw, like in a pigsty.

And the people who laid in the center of the tent, they had more air. The ones who laid closer to the end, the hair used to freeze from the steam and the frozen air to the tent to them. So then I cut a piece from a coat, and I made a hat at night to sleep, so they should be warmer.

We stepped from the snow and from the dirt into our room, so to speak. And this is the way we-- full of dirt and lice.

You were barefoot?

I had a pair of men's shoes, but I didn't have any socks. So it rubbed my feet very bad. It was very-- some of them didn't have any shoes at all. And some of them got gangrene and passed away.

This special friend in Israel, did you meet in Stutthof?

No. I-- Stutthof? I don't know if I met her in Stutthof or in ghetto. I believe in Stutthof. Yeah.

Were you sharing a barracks together?

Yeah.

Did you share a barracks-- did you share a bed space together throughout your whole--

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Did you try to keep up each other's morale, or just-- it was just compassion--

There wasn't too many who were really optimistic. We had one woman, she was an author, a poetess. And she made a poem for the future, that we will survive. And our tent was-- we had at night, we closed it with buttons. There was no zippers in our time.

And she said, you know, when we will survive, and I have an uncle in America, and we will come to the uncle. I think I wouldn't ring the bell. I will just look where the buttons are to open the door, you know?

And then we didn't have any sofas to sit on. We didn't know what is this. I don't know what a sofa is. So we have to lay on the straw. Where is the straw where we were laying on? This was our carpet and bedding.

And, you know, there was times in the evening we used to talk and dream of liberation and better times. And this was all not really a reality for us. It was only a dream, which sometimes it happens, and which it happened. Not to all, but it happened. The survivors who survived, to them the dream came true.

And so when you would come back from your long day in the fields, you would, at night--

At night, we had got a bucket of soup. This was our dinner time. We ate. We were dirty, frozen, tired. And each one lay down. Some of them fell asleep, and some of them felt like talking.

We didn't know. We were cut off from the whole-- from the world. We didn't know any news. We didn't know anything what's going on. We didn't have any connections.

I want to just go back and say, the time you were in the ghetto and then in these camps, did you have any connections, like with relatives on the outside when you were in the Kovno ghetto? No information?

And then when you were--

When we were in a camp, I believe, I don't know. I don't remember which camp. So we heard about the tried assassination of Hitler, you know. But it didn't materialize. We got it through somebody the news.

How did you get the news?

Working in the fields from a outsider.

A peasant?

From a-- I believe it was a Polish person.

Mm-hmm.

So how many camps do you remember going to to get to your last camp? There was the camp after Stutthof.

It was Kovno ghetto. And then Shantsy. And then Stutthof. And then we went four camps, labor camps in Germany.

And the treatment was always the same in each camp? Or was there any difference with the Germans in the way you were treated or anything?

No, no, no.

Anybody show you any humility?

No.

Except for that time when you knocked down the picture of Hitler.

Yeah.

That was the only [BOTH TALKING] officer.

No.

So when you finally got to your last camp, you talked-- you told us a little about the day you were liberated, this friend went out.

I don't remember this camp, the name of the camp. But we were liberated in the night. We were brought to a place in the woods, in an empty barracks. And then I told you that one woman walked out in the morning. She had to go potty or so.

And she looked around. There was no Germans, no guards. So she tried a step further, and a step further till she saw a big kettle of frozen food. And she grabbed it. This was the main aim, you know.

And this was the day of liberation. Yeah, we realized that we are free from the Germans. And a new beginning. And we didn't know where. We knew it wasn't-- it will not be easy, but it's a step in the right direction. But we didn't know how it will turn out.

What do you think? You said that most of the women survived who were on your camp march with you, your 900 women about? What do you think kept them alive? Like, what kept up their spirits?

Of course, when you feel that you are not guarded anymore by Nazis, by murderers, you feel that there is hope. There is a new life. We don't know how to start, where to go, what to do, how life will be, and if you will find someone from your family, or you are alone, or you are the only survivor.

And this everybody was-- had in their minds. Will I find someone, or am I the only one, and what shall we do? We were still young. And I was 33. And we didn't make any plans where to go or what to do.

So with time, as the day, every day each day passed by, we came more to reality that life is here, and you have to work on it, and do, and plan what the outcome will be.

So then your messiah on the white horse showed up?

Yeah, I have written about him. Uh-huh. And he gave us instructions, where to get food, where to go, how to continue our-- that we had to go buy food in the deep snow, tired, hungry, worn out.

So you headed back to Berlin. And--

From there, no. From there, it was more closer in Germany. It's more East Germany. And he told us to go to this train station. And there we will be supplied with a piece of bread and some hot drink or so. And we will stay there overnight, laying on the floor, just to rest. And in the morning, to continue for another 15 mile walk to this Ciechocinek which it was the resort.

And over there they had a staff of Russian people, soldiers. And it was only military. And they will try to support us and to give us jobs or food or shelter.

At the train station and the rest stop on your way to Ciechocinek were those Russians giving out food?

Yeah.

And then you got to Ciechocinek and--

From Ciechocinek we-- I told you we got these officers, the Russian officers, which they met us and they talked to us. And if we are willing to go along with them, because the war wasn't ended yet, because we were liberated in 1945 in January. The war was over in May.

Did you try to get information at any point about your relatives or try send messages or anything when you were going from--

No.

--the train station to Ciechocinek to--

No. Till we came to Berlin and then the official war was over, and then people started to gather information. It was free. And people went looking for relatives all over because train rides were free for the refugees, for the survivors. And you could go because I was in Berlin.

And my son was liberated in Dachau, in Germany, in Bavaria. And he came looking for me in Berlin. So--

How did they-- how did survivors get-- did they give you little tickets, or you just told the train driver you're a survivor?

Yeah.

And they would give you a courtesy. And these were Germans.

This was--

Russians?

This was the Russian. No, the Russians were-- this was in Bavaria, American. The American army was in Bavaria. They liberated most of the people from Dachau.

What made your son decide to go to Berlin? How did he get to Berlin and to look for you there?

There were more men there, and people who are looking for relatives to find. And a woman who was [INAUDIBLE] husband and a son. And she left where we were liberated. And she was just going.

And when she saw the men and she saw a little boy, she said, what is your name? And then he told her the name. She said, you know, I have good news for you. Your mother is alive. I was with her, and she's in Berlin. So he aimed for Berlin.

And where did he get this-- in Bavaria, he got this information?

Yeah, he was in Dachau, yeah.

And this woman, was she a good friend of yours or just someone--

We were together in concentration camp.

Is this the good friend--

In Stutthof and in other camps.

This is the same friend who's now in Israel?

No, no, different.

So she passed on the-- and then your son--

She lived. I don't know if she's still alive, but she has two daughters. And they lived in Los Angeles. I met her a couple of times.

What type of illness did you have that you were hospitalized? What, did you have typhoid, or what caused you to be hospitalized in Berlin?

Oh, I needed surgery.

Surgery on?

I had a hysterectomy. And I was bleeding very bad. And I had to have the surgery there. So a German doctor had to operate on me. Can you imagine how it feels? So anyway--

Was this caused by all the stress you were under in the war?

I don't know. I don't know.

Then after you and your son got together, you went to the--

We were in the East Zone. We escaped to the West Zone, to the American zone. And then from there, we went to Bavaria, came to Munich. And over there were the central gathering place from all the victims who survived, from all the survivors.

And they were assigned in this camp and another camp. There were many, many areas which they settled the survivors and being taken care of through the Joint Distribution to provide us with food, with shelter, with clothes.

The Russians were taking the--

No, the Russians were in the East.

Right. You had left the Russian zone for the American Zone, because the Russians were taking the survivors back to Russia? What, were they using them as labor?

Yeah. We couldn't-- yeah, no. We couldn't stay there too long, because if we are from the Eastern Europe, we have to go back home. Now, "rodina" is homeland. And this what we were supposed, and under their conditions and they are orders, which it wasn't very pleasant. So we had to escape.

And this colonel gave you all the information about what was going to happen to the Russian-- to the Jews who were staying in the East Zone, in the Russian Zone? The colonel, the Russian colonel that helped you?

They weren't-- we deal-- actually, in my case, we dealt with the Jewish Russian. So and they were very sympathetic, and they were-- really, they planned our future to go to the American Zone, and to be there, which the most gathering and survivors were there. And from there, we will have been able to make our own plans for the future, which in Russia we wouldn't be able to.

Now, the person who gave you-- this Jewish-Russian who gave you this information, He was imprisoned for 10 years? Some-- what you said, stated earlier that one of the Jewish Russian officers that helped you along was imprisoned for 10 years.

Yeah.

What was his crime?

His crime? Because he helped us to escape from the Russians. And he helped us a lot.

And that was a crime?

Mm-hmm. Your friend in Berlin that tells you about your son, her name is Sonia?

Sonia, yeah.

Was she the same friend that was with you in Stutthof and all those camps?

Yeah, yeah.

Is she the one in Israel now?

Yeah. She is in Israel.

And so she--

I just got a letter from her. She visited me about 20 years ago.

And then in the DP camps, your son became a Zionist?

He became-- his dream was to build Israel, a Jewish land. He will be the doer. In any other country, he said, he told me it will be the same problem to destroy the Jews, except Israel. So he went.

And you didn't feel the same way? I mean, because earlier in your youth, you were a pioneer yourself.

Yeah.

And then your son was carrying out this dream, and that you felt that it would be better for you in America?

I really don't know. You know, at this age you don't think anymore what you were thinking when you were young.



Did you have any relatives or any friends in America that made you want to come?

America? Yes.

Relatives?

I had a uncle and an aunt from my mother's side. And I had some aunts and uncles from my father's side. But somehow the relationship wasn't very close.

Did you try at this point in Berlin, in the DP camps, to get information outside of your husband and son but any other relatives in your family, aunts, uncles?

Yes.

How did you go about getting that information?

Well, there were some people who were involved in searching for survivors.

Anybody survive in your family outside of your son?

Not that I know of.

Have you gone back to Yad Vashem or any of the archives or anything?

In Israel? In Israel? Yeah.

And did you look up and see what happened to Them

Yeah, yeah. There was no names. Mm-hmm.

How did you get to America after four years in the DP camp? What was your trip like? How did that happen?

We were near Munich. There was a camp called Feldafing. And we waited for our quota. Because the Lithuanian people had a very small quota. The Polish people had a larger quota.

And my husband, my second husband had brothers, family here. And they decided to send papers, affidavit, to come out. And it wasn't very fruitful for us.

So and we waited from 1945 to 1949 in this DP camp till finally we got our permission to go. And then we went to Munich and took a train, and we went to Bremen, Bremerhaven.

And over there we had a military ship. It wasn't a cruise ship. It was General Holbrook. And we were loaded on the ship. Took 10 days. 12 days.

And we arrived in New York. And we lived in New York about five years, and then my husband had a heart attack. And his son went to California. He had an uncle here. So he thought maybe California is better climate. And so in 1955, we decided to move from Brooklyn to California.

How did you meet your second husband?

In the DP camp. His first wife died shortly two weeks before liberation. And her parents lived in Kovno, in the same quarter I used to live. We never knew each other.

And then a friend of his, we lived in the same area. So they introduced me to him. And this was it.

And your son, he went off to Palestine. How did he get to Palestine? With the youth movement, or you said--

Whose son?

Your son went to-- he went in '47 to--

To Israel. And he came to New York in 1952.

Did he go-- when he was going to Palestine, because it was a difficult time to get to Palestine--

Yeah.

--did he go with, like, a youth movement? Which movement?

This was the Youth Aliyah number two. I don't know. They went by numbers. Yeah.

And did he have sort of to be smuggled in to--

No. They went with a ship. And the ship was being taken by the British, the Exodus. And then they put them on the Cyprus, this island of Cyprus.

And he was in a camp in Cyprus?

Yeah. For nine months.

And then--

And then Israel became independent. So they let-- first the children were taken.

I just have more questions. How do you feel about the German unification today?

Germany? What kind of feelings can I describe for Germany?

Well, not for Germany. Like, you're against it, for it? The two Germanys coming together.

I don't like it. Because Germany will become stronger. And this is not so good. This is my opinion. I don't know if I'm right. You know, I don't think if most of our people, the survivors, if they are very pleased with this reunification.

Do you think it could happen again?

Possible. Not for my time, perhaps. But generations to come, it may. Because most of them enjoyed it. They will go down in history not a very nice way, but they like it. They are not ashamed what their parents did. This is now second and third generation.

What do you think you personally-- how do you think you have changed from your experiences with the Holocaust in any ways?

I don't know. People change anyway. And with age people change, as life goes on. With all their experiences, good experiences, whatever happens, a person changes his different opinions and looks at life from a different angle.

And it's gone, it's gone. And the future is not really for-- at my age, there is not much future left. So I don't dig into it. And I don't really think what it will happen, what it will be. Because this is not for us to tell. Time does its own thing.

It is mostly-- it stays with the past more than with the future.

Did it affect your faith in any way, if you had any belief in God or no belief in God or in humanity?

Personally, no. I was always the same, maybe a little bit weaker in faith. But some people I know became strongly religious, and some people just went away from it. No beliefs at all.

And where do you stand?

Hmm?

Where do you stand?

I am still the same the way I used to be, I would say in beliefs. I believe in God. I believe it has to be that way. And some people say, why did God let us do all these things? But there is no answer. It could be questions but no answer for it.

And I don't know if his God's doing or God knows about what happened. We are the chosen. The Jewish people are the chosen. I don't know we are chosen. We have been chosen to suffer. And maybe because we are strong to survive.

We are not getting any bigger. We will always be a minority because as soon as we get a little stronger, we are being killed. So we will never take a major, a major number. But history will tell that we are survivors.

Do you, sir, do you have any questions you'd like to ask?

I do. Rachel, when did you first realize that you were hated as a Jew? Do you--

I cannot hear you.

When did you first realize, as a Jew, you were hated in your town?

That I'm--

What-- when did you feel anti-Semitism in your little town in Lithuania?

Oh. Oh, of course. Before the war, even. Yeah. There is not a Jewish area where Jews lived, mingled with the Gentiles there was not-- even in Israel, they have a great majority of non-Jewish people. But in European countries, big or small, there were always Gentile and Jews, very few Jews, more Gentile.

And it showed that nobody liked Jewish people, because Jewish people, I would say a clever little nation. Very ambitious, one way or the other. And the Gentile, in a small country, where there are farmers, ignorant people. And so they couldn't stand it.

Were there any pogroms when you were a child?

Not in mine-- not in my country. Not in Lithuania.

Not in the region.

No.

Was there ever to your grandparents or?

My grandparents were-- one set of grandparents were in Lithuania, and one was in Belorussia. And in a small town, and

there weren't. Their time, there was no pogroms.

Your whole education was always in a Jewish school?

Yeah.

So you never had to-- never experienced really interacting in a school level with non-Jews?

Oh. Mostly not.

Your three brothers were shot by local people.

Mm-hmm.

Was this organized, or was it spontaneous?

No, this was when Hitler occupied-- came in when the war started and Hitler occupied Lithuania. So there was only one aim-- to kill. And they volunteered to do this work for the Germans.

Were they shot as part of a larger group, or were they just taken from your house?

No idea.

No idea. Mm-hmm.

No. Only what I heard, that the last killings in my hometown, they took them to a forest, and they shot them just.

This is in 1941?

1941.

They were rounding up the whole town you think.

Yeah.

Trying to take them to a ghetto or?

This was a small-- this was a small town. There was no ghetto. You know, this was just the beginning. They didn't have to move from one area to another. They just liquidated. Some of them ran away and came to Kovno, to the ghetto. So this is the information I had.

That's where you got it.

Mm-hmm.

You found out.

There was always one in a thousand or one in a million.

Yeah.

She looked very Gentile, blonde. And she didn't look Jewish at all. And she struggled through it. Took her a long time to come into the ghetto. And she told the story of what happened in this town.

Were they-- were they doing this to neighboring towns, too?

Yeah.

When you were in these four or five different work camps, did you notice any of the women going out of their way to help other women?

[INAUDIBLE]

He was asking if, at your time that you were in the work camps, did any other women in your group are going out of their way to help each other?

No. Nobody helped each other. We want, if it was possible, to help themselves. But it is very difficult to describe. Because when you live in a normal time, in normal life, you have friends, and friends, when it comes to crisis or so, help each other.

In this particular case, even relatives, even close families, because we became vicious animals. And perhaps it is normal that way, to live to see your life ending before it began. And it is awful. Everyone has a strong drive for life, to be alive, to be a survivor. I will make it. Why should I help you?

And there wasn't even any possibilities of helping. There wasn't anything one can do for each other. Could do.

How about the morale? Like, you shared the story of the woman who shared her poem with everybody.

Yeah.

Were there any other--

Sometimes.

Making up songs. Do you remember any of that?

Yes.

Can you tell us one of the songs that you remember?

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. There was moments after-- one started and the other follows. And I said maybe it could be. It gives you a little morale. Maybe it will happen the way we would like to. Because this is the unknown. We don't know what tomorrow will bring.

I have a poem, and I-- you don't understand Yiddish.

But you can say it in Yiddish.

Yeah?

If you want to read it.

Sure.

Yes.

Do you have it with you?

Mm-hmm.

If you read it, read it on the tape. Got your [? bag? ?] OK?

Called "My Liberation," the way we were liberated by the Russians. Because each one has a different story to tell.

When--

And I wrote this-- I rewrote it because the paper was a little piece of scratch paper. And then it turned yellow already. So now I redid it. And this was torn, was the last stop. Called-- this is a day in camp, the way we started in the labor camp.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

When the moon started to fade away. This was early in the morning, you see the moon fading away.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

When a fresh snowfall in the morning when you walk out.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

[? "Fratog" ?] is early in the morning.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

The first one we greet the day.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

It's the same picture everywhere.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

We had to go, you know, five in a row when we went to work, and the guards behind us.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

We stepped on the fresh falling snow.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

The [? kirke ?] is the pick-hack, which it picks-- which you pick the ground. Pickaxe or whatever it's called. Yeah.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

Why does he hurt us? Why does he beat us? What sin do we-- did we do?

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

If you-- you can hurt us and beat us as much as you want if there is a pleasure in your animal's blood.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

My body is already used to it.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

We don't have any hope in any light. The ray of the sun, it means it has to be that way.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

We used to work till 3:00. Winter time, the days are short.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

The one day is going by, but more days like this to come.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

So [? "geheimnis," ?] I cannot translate it in English. The unknown for the future.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

We don't know what tomorrow will bring, but we have to leave it today.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

All around there is a fog. A nebel, nebel? It's a fog, yeah.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

Like smog, fog so thick you cannot escape.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

Because we cannot see the light through the fog.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

It's possible that it's not too long away, but nobody knows from which direction.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

Suddenly we will have a ray of light.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

And after this, more and more.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]

It may be full of sunshine, light and bright. But we have to be patient and wait for it.

So this was the morale we still had by a little future and a little hope, not knowing what tomorrow will bring.

Did you write that then or did you write it--

I wrote it then on a little scratch of paper. And then I rewrote it, and the paper got yellow. It's 50 years, 45 years.

So did you write this like-- how did you find-- where did you find the paper to write it on?

We had. We had little things which we exchanged for someone-- with someone in the field.

What did you exchange to get your paper to write on?

Margarine. A piece of margarine. From a needle sometimes.

And what did you use to write on that piece of paper? What--

Yes.