

--counterproductive. OK, so, Ellen, I'd say you can pick up in about 5 seconds.

Would you tell us about your visits as a child to Poland and what your feelings were as a Jew? And as--

The first time I came to Poland that I really recall walking on my own was when I was four years old. We came to Poland. We got out of the train. We traveled, I think, for three days in a first class compartment. And the porter came at night, making up the beds. I thought it was great fun.

And we arrive at the railroad station. And a relative picked us up and took the suitcases outside the station. And there was a buggy and a horse and a driver. And I refused to get into that horse.

I absolutely-- I threw a tantrum. I wanted a taxi. I would not get into a buggy with a horse. The horse was alive. The horse moved. And I wanted a taxi like I was used to.

Coming to my grandmother's house, it was a nice house, not as nice as what I was used to. But it was nice.

This is your mother's mother--

Mother. She had a store. She spoke Yiddish to me. She wore a wig. She was very religious. And she was always giving me candy, but I had to hide it. I wasn't supposed to eat so much candy.

There was a lot of ground around the house. And the ground was cultivated by the peasants. And they had a lot of huge, yellow cucumbers, which were then pickled and sold.

A little bit down the road, I had an aunt who cultivated poppies. I mean acres and acres of red poppies. And the poppy seeds were used, were dried, and used as poppy seeds, not opium.

The front of my grandmother's store faced out on one of the main streets, or larger streets. The street was not paved. It was raining. It was summertime.

And the peasants with their horse-drawn wagons would come and bring chickens. The chickens were alive. The feet were tied, but the chickens were alive. So with the tied feet they couldn't take off.

And when the unpaved road of the main street was mud and wet, the peasants would take off their shoes. They didn't wear stockings, socks. And they would walk barefoot. And I would stand there and look.

And the mud would ooze out through the toes, you know, in between the toes. And I thought that was very strange. People without shoes, I had never seen that before.

I remember going to my uncle's store, who lived in the center of town on the ring. And he had a hardware houseware store. And I remember my father scolding him that nothing had prices. The buckets didn't have a price. The brooms didn't have-- nothing had a price.

And my father had lived in Germany already too long and his mind was too orderly to comprehend that you went in and you bartered, you bargained. You didn't just pick up a bucket and said, oh, it's \$5. I pay you \$5. That wasn't done.

I know that my uncle had three sons. They were about 10 or 15 years older than I. And they were at the university. And they had trouble as Jews. They were standing in the last row for lectures, for instruction.

So my father and my uncle pooled their money, because they had much more money in Germany, and they sent the boys to study in Paris. One was a lawyer. One was an architect. And one was an engineer. No, one was a doctor, I take it back.

The architect fell of a building in Israel and was killed, very young. And the doctor went east with the Russian army. I don't know what became of him. He might have remained in Russia. He might not have. I don't know. But nobody of that family-- my mother had one, two, three, four sisters there. Nobody survived.

How many children in her family?

Eight.

Would you repeat the name of the town again.

Sambor, S-A-M-B-O-R-- it's not far from Ternopil.

So this was the-- at outbreak of the war, this was the portion that went under German control-- Russian control.

First under German control, then under Russian control. First the Germans settled. And then the Russians occupied it when they liberated Poland.

So during the division of Poland in 1939, it was under--

It was still under German rule.

I see.

Because I remember one of my uncles writing a postcard that he had to do forced labor and that the aunts were no longer in Sambor. And that was already fairly late. So it was under German occupation because the postcard had a German stamp.

Did you hear anything from your-- once the war commenced, was there any communication with your family, between the two, mother's family or father's family?

Yes, there was still-- as long as we could, we wrote, which I would say was probably until early 1941 or so. And the letters were really in very careful language. They were phrased-- my mother would write to her brother and said, how does Uncle Ivan feel? That means, are the Russians they or how are the Russians?

I once wrote a postcard, and I signed my name Cecilia Landau WW. WW is a German abbreviation for widow. So when my uncle got the postcard, he wrote back. I can see that only you are left.

They were little things that you try to cover up. And you got some communication. But--

Up until what time were you getting any kind of communications from any family members?

Oh, probably 1941, summer. And then I got one postcard out of Sambor in 1944, early, one single one.

Do you remember who it was from?

Mm, hmm. Mm, hmm. My uncle.

And what do you remember-- what did he write?

Well, he wrote that this aunt and this aunt and that aunt don't live here or are not here. And he was a very sick man. He had some spinal trouble. He couldn't stand straight. He was working he said.

In the town?

Yeah. I mean forced labor. There were considerable amount of Jews in Sambor. And he did not really give any details. It was an open card. It happened to slip through, which was unusual, but it did.

In the Lodz ghetto, so people were receiving--

In the beginning, we received some mail. And we could send out three or four postcards during the first two years. And then it ceased completely.

But in 1944 you did receive--

That one postcard came in. It was just unreal.

What is it dated from--

Yes-- 1944.

Yes. It had a current date. It only traveled a week.

Where did you go to get your mail? Did you go to a post office? Was there--

There was a post office. There were several post offices, sort of a little-- like a substation. I even remember seeing the letter carrier in the very beginning, which later on disappeared.

I don't know whether somebody called me or said to pick up a postcard, or whether somebody just dropped it by the house. That I don't remember.

Do you know anything of the history of Sambor since both of your parents were from there? How long the Jewish community was established there? And how big of a Jewish community it was, for example.

It was a large Jewish community. I believe before the war, or during the '20s and '30s, the town had 10,000 inhabitants. I think it's 10,000. There has been some dispute between 10 and 100, but I don't know for sure.

It had a community. I know that people who ran for political office would make a stop there. It had a Jewish community. It had a Jewish cemetery. It had a Jewish synagogue. The amount of Jews, I'm just not able to tell you how many.

Do for how many generations your family--

My family was there fore-- my mother was born there. My grandmother was born there. And her mother before her was born nearby.

So there is a story that my father's family came from Spain over Holland into Poland. But again, since they're not Sephardic Jews, I'm not sure that this is true. It could be. I don't know.

When was the last time you saw Sambor? As a child, I mean.

1935.

Did you celebrate holidays there?

Sometimes, if it happens to-- mm, hmm.

Was this a whole extended family kind of celebration?

Yeah. Yeah. With a lot of cousins and a lot of aunts and uncles.

Do you remember your holidays there and what they were like?

Well, they were very traditional. I remember before Yom Kippur my grandmother having a chicken, which you do-- I don't know. There's a Yiddish expression for it. I don't know what it's in Hebrew right now.

I remember going down to the river and emptying out the pockets. I mean very traditional things that you don't do or did not do in the Western countries. You sort of skipped by them.

Have you researched the fate of Sambor? Was the town deported?

Yes.

To where?

The town was deported to various camps. Most of them were killed even before they hit-- some before they hit Auschwitz, in small sub-camps like Chelmno, or whatever they-- you know, they had these vans that were gas equipped.

And there was really no-- I have not run across a group of people that really stayed to Sambor to very late and survived. I tried to go back. But there was a problem crossing the border into the Soviet Union into that area with an American passport from Poland. The next time, I'd probably tackle it in a different way. I tried, but it didn't work.

Now that town now is it Poland?

No. No. It's in the Soviet Union. They call it the Ukraine. But the language spoken there is Russian.

Oh, it's my understanding that the Ukraine was under Russian domination until 1941, June of 1941.

That's [INAUDIBLE].

Well, there is a slight difference geographically between the Ukraine and Galicia. Galicia like to call itself the Ukraine because it's adjacent. But it's not really the Ukraine because Sambor was German occupied.

OK, I'll just ask one final question before we move on about-- you kind of hit on. Where did you get-- when you came to the Lodz, you had a suitcase with you.

Yeah.

Did you wear-- do you remember the clothes you had and bought with you?

Yes.

Did they last you for all the five years?

No, they didn't. Yes, they did in a way because the Jewish tailors in Poland were very ingenious. They could take something that had gotten two sizes too small, turn it inside out, make it two sizes larger, and get you a new jacket. Essentially, yes, I wore pretty much the old clothing.

And what were the articles of clothing? Do you remember your clothes?

I had a winter coat, which was too light. So I wore two winter coats, one on top of the other. I had shoes, which were useless because in winter they just did not do well in snow. I had frostbite. I almost lost the toes.

I had a jacket and a skirt. And I had some blouses and a couple of dresses. And my mother had a leather hat box, you know, one of those round hat boxes out of the '20s. And eventually I took it to the shoemaker, and I had a pair of boots made. I paid him by giving him the leftovers of leather. That was his payment, and he made the boots.

And I haven't worn a pair of boots since. Even though the fashion here is for knee high boots, I wouldn't buy a pair of boots. I have worn boots, thank you.

What about your feet, your stockings? You didn't have pants. You didn't mention that had--

No, nobody had pants in those days. We had stockings. And you repaired them. You repaired them. They're full of these mending spots. And new stockings, I don't remember ever getting new stockings. For money, you could have gotten anything. For money or for food. But I didn't have either. And--

How did you bathe?

We didn't. You had a little bowl, a little shisl, like a little bowl. And you put some water in it. And you hope that there was no ice on top of it, because at night it formed a crust of ice. And you brought it up from the pump, which you pumped. And you sort of took the bowl and you washed yourself to the waist. And then when you're through with that, you watched the rest of yourself.

Did you brush your teeth? Was there any--

Yes, but there was no toothpaste. There was an old broken down toothbrush, because they don't last very long. And the teeth started decaying. And I lost fillings.

And I once went to a dentist. And she had a drill that was foot operated with a foot pedal. And, in fact, her daughter lives in Los Angeles. And she tried to repair it, but there wasn't really much she could do.

I mean to visualize now to live four or five years without a shower or a bath, it is absolutely inconceivable. But we did.

Was there a problem with lice?

Yes. Yes. And they carried typhoid. If you wore a sweater, let's say, a week or two weeks, if you turned it inside out, in the seams, the sleeve seams, the shoulder seams, you would see little white spots. And those were the eggs of lice. We had a lot of trouble, a lot of illness. I had typhoid and typhus.

They are two different diseases?

Yes. One is intestinal. And the other one is carried by lice, spots, sort of measly like.

OK, would you-- let's talk about the deportation. You had described your meeting Dr. Singer at the station with his entire family, including your friend, his daughter. And you boarded these cattle cars that were sealed. Could you explain what happened after that? The trip.

Well, the trip was stuffy. It was August. It was hot. There was a bucket on the train. But vague recollections whether they let us empty it or not.

Here we had this loaf of bread. But you really couldn't eat. And we speculated a great deal. Dr. Singer was a great optimist. And he believed things were going to get better. He was a Zionist. And he had a sense of humor.

And after three or four days, the cattle cars came to a stop. It was early in the morning. Probably the watch said probably 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. It was dark.

Did you stand the whole way?

No, we sort of crouched in corners. There wasn't much room. But we crouched sort of together.

And when the door opened, the first thing we saw was huge spotlights from a platform onto the train. We saw the SS and the dogs. And--

It was nighttime?

It was 4:00 in the morning, 3:00 in the morning. A lot of screaming, a lot of commands. And they hurried us out of the trains. And we were barely out when they said to drop the luggage, the suitcase, or whatever we had.

My friend dropped hers. I did not. And one of the SS came towards me with, I don't know, either a gun or a whip. And she tore it out of my hand and dropped it. I didn't want to give up my passport and my papers and my birth certificate. You can't live without it.

And almost immediately, they separated the men from the women. It took minutes, seconds. And we didn't even say goodbye to Oskar or to Irwin. I mean they were just on the other side.

And then they tried to separate the women again, the young ones from the old ones, the children from the--

There were still children at this point?

Oh, yes, there were still little children, two, three, four, six, any age, not a great deal, but some. And I remember a man in a striped uniform with a hat and an armband that read, "kapo," standing next to us. And my friend asked him in German, where are we? And he said, Auschwitz. She said, what's Auschwitz?

And he said, you never heard of Auschwitz? She said, no. It can't be. Yes. Then he asked, where do you come from? We said, from Lodz.

And he said do you know Luba. Do you know anybody named Luba? I'm looking for my sister. But I work as a sort of a policeman, a kapo, for the Germans. And we said, no, we don't know anybody. And he left.

And from that, after that separation, the young ones from the old ones, we went into another room. We went into a room, into barracks. And they asked to take off all jewelry, all watches, all clothing. And whoever didn't took a terrible beating, or worse. And there we stood naked, shivering in the heat. And then they took us to another barracks.

And something happened in front of us. We didn't know quite what. And the people in front of us sort of moved, moved ahead.

Were you all basically in a line?

Well, it wasn't really a line. It was a line and a line. The line was almost like a grouping. And when we were in the front line, we saw that the kapos were shaving the hair, all body hair.

And if you looked at the women once the hair was shaven, it was just-- it was a sight that was so terrible that it really didn't, at that moment, compare to anything we had seen. You saw those bowling balls with protruding ears and those frightened eyes. It was like something out of a nightmare.

They yanked Ellie out of line. They cut her-- she had long, black hair. They cut her hair.

And before I knew it, I was next. And the SS woman who gave the order to the kapo, who was essentially a prisoner, to shave my hair was short and blonde and squat and fat. And the uniform didn't fit. And she wore glasses.

And I hated her. I don't think I've ever hated anybody as much. I don't know whether she saw or whether she felt, but

she slapped me very hard. And I just reeled over to one side.

After the hair was gone, they pushed us through a sort of swinging door. And the top part of the swinging door was glass. In that one second I saw a reflection that was I, ears, an oval head, and eyes. It was nobody I knew. It was horrifying that sight.

There were some cold showers. We were sort of rushed through them. If you got a drop of water, yes. If you didn't, you didn't.

And at the other end, an SS woman started laughing. And she said, the gas chambers are overbooked tonight-- or today. We'll get you tomorrow. There's plenty of time. We had never heard of gas chambers. We didn't know what it was.

We were thrown a garment at random, just a piece of cloth, whether it was an apron or a dress, just one piece, no underwear, no stockings, nothing. And you put that thing on. Mine was black, and it had sort of a red trim on the top, very strange, very large. It was sort of like cotton.

And we were lined up again in groups of 5. And the fifth in our group, it was my friend Ellie and I and her mother and her aunt. And the fifth woman was the little woman named Alice from Vienna. And she got some wooden clogs. Nobody else had them. She had wooden shoes. You know these Dutch shoes?

And they started marching us. We didn't know that the camp was called Birkenau. Start marching us to the barracks. And we passed an orchestra with the conductor in an impeccable uniform with white gloves, conducting Beethoven. I think it was Beethoven.

And these people with shaven heads and in striped uniforms playing music. And then on the other side, we saw three chimneys with black smoke. And somebody whispered in back of us, the crematorium.

We didn't know what it was, why, what for, nothing. But we learned. We were crammed into the barracks. And the center of the barracks had a walkway. And on either side were sort of chessboard squares. And 5 people were allocated to a square. You could barely seat 5 people in a square. But we wondered what we were going to do at night because you can't sit forever.

So Ellie sat down against the back wall. She spread her legs. And the next person would sit against her until all five of us were in that position. And then we would lie down so everybody would lie on somebody's stomach. But you couldn't turn. You couldn't move.

Soup came in sometime in the evening, but no plates, no spoons, nothing. Some people scooped it into their hands, and it was running through the fingers. And somebody said to Alice, take off your shoes. Alice took off the wooden clogs. And Ellie took one and Alice took one, they stood in line. They filled them up with soup. And they ate the soup like animals out of the shoes.

Then they gave them to us. And we did the same. And then Alice put the shoes back on. That was the end.

The kapo in this barracks was a young woman, Jewish. I don't know whether she was from Hungary or from Poland. I really don't know. She yelled a great deal. And she ran around with a reed or stick. And anything in her way she would beat. And she took her orders from the Germans.

Because she was Jewish?

She was Jewish, yeah. But she had a supervisory position. And at night, she had a little cubicle at the end of the barracks. And there was a rumor that one of the SS came at night and spent the night with her every night. But it was a rumor. Because the barracks were dark, we did not know.

In 1946, rumor turned out to be true. She was in New York with that man. I met her at Altman's.

In the morning, they would round us up. And we would stand for Appell. And they would count us and recount us for hours and hours. It was freezing cold at 5:00 in the morning, or whatever. And by noon, it was boiling hot. My whole scalp was full of blisters from the sun, the ears.

And this went on for a few weeks, maybe two or three weeks. I'm not sure of the exact amount of days. And then we were told-- she told us that tomorrow morning Dr. Mengele will inspect. Procedure is you take off your dress. You carry it over the left arm. And you walk past that committee of three, Mengele and two others as fast as you can. And he'll indicate right or left.

So Ellie and I decided that I go first. She follows me. We go very fast. We don't look right. We don't look left, just almost run. I almost fell, but I made it. And he motioned me to one side, and Ellie to the same side.

Did you know what this meant?

No. They said selection. We later on found out it was either the hospital or the gas chamber or to a work camp. We were then marched to a new barracks. We were given shoes, regardless of size, just shoes. And we were given a coat that had a big yellow stripe across the front. But underneath the stripe, the fabric had been cut away. So if you wanted to run away and take off the yellow stripe, there would be no fabric.

Then we were loaded into cattle cars. And we were in those cattle cars I think for three or four days, again stop and go and stop and go. It was very, very hot. It was Indian summer.

And the top of the cattle cars had a small opening with barbed wire. And I climbed on Ellie-- it was so hot, we took our clothing off. Just couldn't stand it.

I climbed on Ellie's back. And I looked out and I said, Ellie, this looks like the vicinity of Hamburg. She got very angry. And she said, sit down, you're out of your mind.

I sat down. And we traveled another day or two. And we arrived in the evening at a siding. And the doors were opened from the outside. And the SS who waited for us, or the kommandant of this group of SS said, you are at [SPEAKING GERMAN], Hamburg. So Ellie looked at me and she said, well, you were right. Do you know anybody here? I said, not a soul. She said--

How long were you in Auschwitz?

A couple of weeks. So she said, so what good is it to you? So what good does it do you if you're here? What are you going to do with it? Nothing. It's the same thing as if you were in Poland. And she was right.

We worked for the first three weeks cleaning up shipyards that had been bombed at night by the Americans. And it was hard work. And we had a lot of cuts and infections. And I had a cut on the left hand. And one of the Germans, a corpsman, medical corpsman, lanced it. And he said, if you scream, heaven help you. So I didn't scream. I fainted.

And then they transferred us to another camp about 20 miles away. And there we worked on construction, temporary housing type things. And the treatment was harsh. The beatings were frequent. Two people died of beatings. Food was in very short supply.

And on the second day there, one of the SS came into the barracks and say, rumor has it that one person here is from Hamburg. Who? So since everybody knew I was the only one, I had no way of hiding.

And he said, you'll work in the office. You speak the language. You write the language. What's your name? Where did you live? Where did you go to school?

I worked in the office, which was not cold in winter, which was an advantage. But the SS were in a foul mood or the

kommandant whose private quarters were adjacent to the office, when he came through, we had to stand up. Whenever he was in a foul mood, he'd beat us. We were running around with bloody bruised legs, with swollen eyes and bruised faces. There was one other young woman who worked in the office.

Were you with any of your friends?

Yeah, with the Dr. Singer's daughter. She was my closest friend.

She went straight through with you?

Yeah. You know, people envied us. Our friends envied us. You sit in the office. You're not out in the cold.

We didn't have more food. We had the same amount of food, unless we stole something. And that was very risky and very difficult. We did twice. But-- and if I could spare something, I gave something away.

Ellie got very pale. She coughed a great deal. And she envied me a great deal. She was very angry that I was in the office and she was not. But there was nothing I could do. I couldn't say, tell the Germans take her to the office. In fact, I didn't even dare speak to him-- them.

When I showed her the bruises, she said forget it, that's nothing. So it's relative. If you hurt, you hurt differently than the other person.

There was one very low ranking SS guard who patrolled the perimeter, or rather the entrance of the camp. It had barbed wires and towers. But it only had 500 inmates.

And one day, he called and he said, pick up the rubbish here. And I picked it up. And he started talking. And he said, I hear you're from Hamburg. I said, yes.

He said, what was your name? Who was your father? And he said, I don't like this duty any more than you do. I was a communist before the war.

He lived in a very poor section of town. He lived in Altona. And we talked for a little while. Both of us were afraid.

And I said, I have a proposition. You find me a place to hide. You look the other way and get me some food. And I will sign over one of my father's houses-- I'm the sole heir-- to you. Well, he came back the next week. And he dropped a box of paperclips and made me pick them up so he could talk.

And he said, I checked you out. The houses are there. Your father was the owner. And I'm very tempted. I'm a very poor man. I'll never be a rich man. I was a lowly civil servant. And this is very tempting. And I said, all right, let me know.

Well, the weeks passed. We saw him. But he didn't stop. He didn't talk. And then one day he disappeared. He never came back.

And then the kommandant came into the office and he yelled, remove Wachtmeister Smith from the roster. He has a bleeding ulcer. He has been replaced.

So the man actually had a bleeding ulcer. And he had himself replaced, either legitimately or otherwise. But I never heard from him again until 1947 when he dug me up through the very efficient German system and wrote me a letter. Remember what you promised me?

And in 1947, I had a very short temper. And I tore up the letter. I wish I hadn't. And I threw it away.

We stayed in this camp until the end of March 1945. And then they suddenly put us on trucks. And when we got off the trucks, they made us walk. I really didn't walk very well by that time. I leaned on Ellie, and Ellie leaned on Sabina.

And we came through a gate. It looked similar to Auschwitz, watchtowers. And I looked on the right and the left, and there were huge mountains of shoes, just shoes, any color, any size, maybe 10 feet tall, mountains of shoes. No feet. No legs. Shoes.

They crowded us into a barracks. Somebody got the information that this was Bergen-Belsen. And that night, a woman screamed continually, no bunks. And she gave birth to maybe a half pound or pound large infant. The infant died immediately. She didn't even know she was pregnant.

In Bergen-Belsen, there was no water. There was hardly any food. They were open, not even ditches, open, huge pits with bodies, naked bodies. Most of them were decaying and green with a tremendous amount of typhoid.

There was no work to be done. I mean no work details, nothing. And we were there approximately, I would guess, two weeks, give or take.

And then one morning we saw the SS on the other side of the wire. And they had white armbands on the left sleeve. It didn't mean much to us. Anyway, everything was the same, maybe less food. But they didn't come into the camp. They, as a rule, didn't.

And by lunchtime we heard enormous noises. And then we saw tanks rolling in the main avenue. That was it. [CRYING] I started working for the English that afternoon.

Did you have any idea what was going on?

No. None. Nothing in. Nothing out. The British didn't know. They had no idea what they were finding.

And they were looking for interpreters because they had trouble with this multitude of languages. And I could manage a couple of them, not all of them. But at least with the Hungarian Jews, I could speak Yiddish. With the Polish Jews, either Polish or Yiddish. And with the Russians, I sort of spoke some Polish and some Russian. But they were not Jewish, the Russian prisoners.

And they had no idea what they would find. They weren't people-- at that night, they dispersed foodstuffs from the German warehouses. And there were 2-pounds cans of pork and fat. And being hungry, you open them and you eat. And by morning, you're dead.

And that's how we lost Ellie's mother. Ellie got very sick, and she couldn't even eat, by then had tuberculosis. She lost a lung in the meantime.

And for some reason, I had the common sense to ask the major for whom I worked for some biscuits. And I didn't eat the pork. And I just ate dry biscuits the first day, second day.

We went from barrack to barrack. And he wanted to talk to the people and wanted to know where they're from. And half of them couldn't even talk to them. It's too late.

There was a man who had a knife in his hand. He must have weighed all of 70 pounds. And he was slicing away at a corpse and eating the raw flesh.

It was unreal because you walked around, you could see it. I think the first order was to bring in water and food and to bury the dead and to get some hospitals opened. And while they made many mistakes, they also did a lot of good. I mean they tried.

I worked for them as an interpreter until they had to rush me out of Germany in December '45, sometimes a translator. Once I was asked to translate when they had caught a German who never was in the army, who never was an SS. After much interrogation, it turned out he was SS. He was stationed in Oranienburg.

And towards the end of the interrogation, the major took his gun out of his holster, released the safety and put it in front of me. I picked it up, but I couldn't shoot. I couldn't.

And then I asked him whether he's interested in the 42 SS from the camp near Hamburg. I had memorized the names and addresses from just doing the paperwork. And he said, yes, let's pick them up. We picked them up, except for two. And they were found in southern Germany.

They stood trial, I think, October 1945. They were convicted, various sentences. Some pleaded with me for intervention or mercy. They were so good, why couldn't I understand that. And two of them were sentenced to death, the two commanders.

And then some of their families made threats. We are going to get her. I was a witness at the trial.

I don't remember anything. I remember going in. I remember being asked whether I would speak English or German. I said English, please. And I don't remember a thing, nothing, blank.

This was the 42 SS at what camp?

At Sasel. And then when the threat started coming a few weeks later, the English War Crimes Division wrote a letter to the American embassy in Paris and said, help her to get out. They drove me and three other young women, first to Holland. The Dutch didn't want to let civilians in out of Germany.

So we turned the car around, drove through a riverbed, the Dutch shooting after us and entered Holland illegally. Then we went to Belgium, same day. We got to Brussels. And the captain who was in charge-- was a captain and the driver of the car-- knew some people in Belgium, in Brussels. And we spent the night there, although the lady did not want to have prisoners in her house. They were dirty. So we had to stay in the hallway.

And the next morning, the three girls remained in Brussels. And we crossed the French border. The French border was, compared to Holland or Belgium, almost elegant.

I had a so-called visa from a young officer in Bergen-Belsen, whose name was rather famous. His son used to be-- his father used to be cabinet minister. And he was just a young officer in the French army stationed in Bergen-Belsen. He made out a entry permit for me.

And the French when they saw his name, which was Francois-Poncet, they said, of course. Not this government, but the government before that, he was also a minister. But I've never seen him again.

And we drove as far as Lille. And in Lille, we parked the car. We were terribly hungry. And the three of us went into a small restaurant. And we had a terrible chicken dinner and some wine and an awful dessert that was sticky.

And someone in the corner was playing the accordion. And Captain Alexander and I had one foxtrot. I always thought he was very nice. But I knew he was engaged to be married. So I was not going to waste my time.

And we went-- came outside on the cobblestone. I mean it was a British Army car with the insignia, everything on it, numbers, gone. The little luggage I had was gone.

So we walked to the railroad station. He bought a third class ticket for me to Paris. And he said, when you get to Paris, get to the Jewish youth hostel. Don't get lost. You have enough French. Otherwise use any other kind of language.

And he put me into the compartment. I rolled down the window. And we talked for a while. We shook hands.

And I asked him, why did you do this? What made you take these chances? He said, he was a Jew. He lived in Berlin. He left in '36. And he got out in time. And we see each other every year.

And I arrived in Paris at 4:00 in the morning. And eventually, I found the youth hostel. And I knew some people there who had been at Bergen-Belsen.

And then I started the Catch-22 with the American embassy. We'll give you a visa if you bring us passage. But there was no passage. There were only empty troop ships or merchant marine ships going back. It cost \$600 to get a ticket. My uncle in Palestine sent the \$600. He also sent a certificate. And I had entry into Palestine.

And sooner or later, I had some money left. I bribed some people. I got the passage. And I got the visa in February of '46.

My family in Israel made the mistake to send a cousin, who was in the English army. And he put the pressure on to go to Palestine. And they also decided whom I was going to marry. And being--

You had two uncles in Palestine--

Well, my mother had a brother in Israel. There was lots of family at that time. And they all had gotten together and made the decisions for me. And that didn't work anymore. You know, I was 21 years old, and the decisions were going to be mine. I was not going to be told by aunts and uncles, now you do this, now you do that.

So I decided to go to America. My cousin sat on the train with me all the way to Bordeaux arguing. It didn't help. I went on the merchant marine ship to New York. It took 22 days. I left him behind. And he went back home.

The family was very angry. They at first didn't like. But then they changed their mind. And they thought I had made a great mistake. But I don't think I made a mistake.

I mean I wouldn't have minded living in Israel, on the contrary. But what I did mind is being told what to do. That I couldn't take.

Did you know who you were supposed to marry at all?

Yes, I knew. Very good looking, very stupid.

When did you first contact them? Or how did they find out that you had survived?

Three days after liberation, I asked the major, whether he would post a letter over his name. I would write the letter. He would mail it over his army number into Palestine. And he did. And I had an answer a week later. Because I knew the address, it was no problem.

I'd like to go back a little if we could to when you were working in the office, did you take it upon yourself to memorize--

No. But if you-- not consciously. If you have a roster of 40 names-- I also had a roster of 500 Jewish prisoners. But if you have a roster of 42 names with addresses and you keep writing it and rewriting it over a period of six months, it sticks. It-- it was just there, just like when you memorize a phone number that you use over and over.

And who is the commander, head of the office, who would be in the foul mood and--

Well, there were three of them. We started out with one, and then he was transferred.

And what was his name?

At this point, I'm pretty much over the names. I mean they're available in the German records. But 50 years, I don't retain them. I didn't want to retain them.

Then he was replaced with a second one, who was a very high ranking army officer before the war and then turned into SS. So he had an education. And he had some, what should I say, some basic background. But he was trained to behave a certain way. And he behaved accordingly.

And the third one used to be a gardener in southern Germany stuck into an SS uniform. He could barely read and write. And he was vicious. He had little brown, squinty eyes. And he was the nastiest of them all. He was vicious.

His son wrote me that his father had been convicted and so on and so forth. Would I please write a letter and intervene? Threw it away. I should have saved these. But in those days, you didn't think that way.

Mengele was also known for-- did you know anything about the medical experiments that were going on there or that had happened?

I heard about it in Auschwitz. There were rumors. There were rumors about twins and some of the other things. But I didn't see and I didn't hear. These were just whispered rumors.

Neither at Auschwitz or in Hamburg, you didn't hear anything about these?

No, they were just rumors that this was done. But--

You said you saw that people were beaten frequently. Were you beaten yourself?

Yeah.

Was this in the office or in front of people?

Yes. No-- well, if you committed a grave offense, like there was a Mrs. [? Crohn. ?] And she used to be the wife of the ghetto-- of one of the ghetto police chiefs. So she was not used to any kind of deprivation or any kind of hardship.

When she came to the work camp, she couldn't walk fast enough and she couldn't work fast enough. And she had a 15-year-old daughter. And she was very conspicuous. And the one thing you were not to be was conspicuous.

She had large feet. And her blonde hair, of course, was gone. She had a very-- bless you-- very grotesque face that rested on a sort of a funny neck and a strange figure, very uncoordinated. And one time, she walked out of line. You know, she didn't keep up the proper speed.

And the kommandant flew into a rage. And she had to kneel in the middle. And we had to stand around her. And he beat her mercilessly. I mean there was just nothing left but flesh and blood. It was just horrible.

In front of her daughter?

Yeah, mm, hmm.

And the daughter couldn't break ranks-- the daughter could not respond. If she responded, she would receive the same thing.

Same thing. We couldn't even pick her up. We had to wait till-- it was a little later. But I don't think she survived.

And her daughter?

Her daughter lives in Albany, New York. I've never seen it again. But I know people who have talked to her.

I'd like to go back to your entrance into camp. Were you aware of any selection going on as soon as you got off the train

and you were separated, the men on one side and the women on the other?

No, we just naively assumed that there was a separation between male and female. And the second selection between young and old, we assumed that the older ones would probably be treated a little more considerately or better or whatever.

So in effect, there were selections going on, but you weren't aware that--

The implications, no.

Was Mengele present upon your arrival?

If he was I wouldn't have known. Upon departure on that selection, we were told. And by then, we knew of him. And since we had to walk past him at 3 feet distance, you couldn't miss it.

Can you describe him?

Not really, because all I saw was a uniform. And I made it a point not to look right and not to look left. And he was on my right. And I didn't look. I mean I had a glance, but not to draw you a composite picture to take to the police station for identification, no.

It was dangerous to look at him?

It was. It was dangerous to look at any SS because they considered that provocation. So you didn't look.

You kept your face to the ground?

Mm, hmm. Mm, hmm.

Were there at that point in time-- or were you aware of many transports coming in during your stay in Auschwitz?

Not really. We were aware that the ghetto was being liquidated. The ghetto had 150,000 people, give or take. It varied. A transport had probably roughly 1,000 at a time.

So we knew they would be coming in. But there were not-- we were not mixed together. We were not-- we got no word from outside, nothing.

But were the chimneys always smoking?

During the time that I was there, yeah, they worked overtime.

Could you describe the chimneys and the smoke and the smell?

Well, first of all, I wasn't in front of them. I was at a distance. So all you could see is like a factory type chimney sticking up into the sky. And the smoke was black, very smelly and very black.

How far away were you?

Far enough away to-- close enough away to walk there, yet far enough away not to actually see the building. It was obstructed by other buildings.

How far apart were-- you entered Auschwitz, the camp of Auschwitz--

Actually Birkenau, which is part of Auschwitz.

How were they separated actually?

I didn't know. I found out in May. Auschwitz are old brick buildings, more or less prison-like. About 5 kilometers from there is a camp that is nothing but barracks surrounded by wire, the chimneys, and that's it. But, you know, miles of it, as far as the eye can reach. So--

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah. So they're totally two different entities in terms-- I think they housed permanent prisoners, political prisoners, they housed in the stone-type buildings. The Jews, which they either destroyed or sent to work camps or-- they housed in those barracks, which probably had to be built because they were just millions of them.

Can you remember your awareness? At what point in time did you become aware of what the purpose of this concentration camp was for?

A couple of days. And then you only had one choice. You could either hope or you could stop caring or you could walk to the wire and electrocute. Those were the three choices.

And most of us just vegetated. We didn't want to think. We didn't want to talk, nothing.

And for what would you be hoping?

A miracle. We didn't hope for our God because there was no God obviously. But for a miracle. Some unreal miracle. You know like I had hoped for a slice of bread of meeting Rumkowski. I'd hope for a miracle that maybe the English will fall out of the sky or something. I don't know.

Were you aware at this time in Auschwitz of the progress of the Allies against the Germans at all? Did you have any conception whatsoever--

No, I didn't even while I was in Hamburg back in the camp. I had no idea how close it was. I did not know that Holland and Belgium had been liberated I didn't know that Poland had been liberated, nothing.

See, people-- I once was at a camp that mainly housed men. I was taken along to do some translating. And I was sitting in the back of a truck tied to the rails. And there was a young man scrubbing the floor in prison uniform. He looked horrible. It was actually Neuengamme.

And he talked to me in a language I couldn't identify. And he couldn't understand me. He smiled. He had no teeth. And he kept saying, Krieg kaput, war finished. And I'd heard that for five years. I wasn't about to believe that one.

The SS who saw him fairly close, scrubbing the floor, hit them and pushed him away and scolded him, vile language, to bring clean water and to scrub better. And he took the bucket, and he came back-- I hoped he would come back-- 10 minutes later with clean water. And in his hand was a little ball of brown paper. And he sort of gave it a push next to my foot.

And I watched and watched and looked right and left. He smiled. And I smiled. And when I thought I was safe, I picked up the little piece of paper, stuck it in my pocket. And later on, I found out it was dry bread that had been half eaten and crumbled.

And this was in Neuengamme?

Yeah.

Did you ever find out his name?

No, there were thousands of people, thousands.

Did you ever-- you said you kind of-- did you give up or you weren't among those who were going to walk to the wire?

I had contemplated it. But then I said, well, let's wait a little.

Did you and Ellie, your friend, did you cheer each other up? Did you talk to each other? Did you make it a point to stay together throughout the day?

We made it a point to stay together. In fact, at one point, when we had numbers and names, they said, all-- line up alphabetically. Her name started with an S. So I just changed mine to an S. And she was very upset with me. And she said, what if they ask? I said, well, I just say I married your brother someplace along the line.

I knew that there were no records to really prove it. But it was still a chance I took. And that way we stayed together.

So during the day, you tried to work together and stay together.

We worked together as much as we could.

So in Auschwitz--

In Auschwitz, we stayed completely together. In Dessauer Ufer, we stayed completely together.

You were with her mother as well?

Her mother and her aunt. And then in Sasel, I was in the office and she was not. But we saw each other every night.

Now her father was Oskar Singer, was quite an elderly fellow, wasn't he?

Well, he wasn't that elderly, no. You must think of Oscar Rosenfeld.

I looked at the date and it said 1883, I believe, that he was born.

'83, it could be. No, '83, could have been '93. No, '83, definitely not. He was about the age of my father, give or take. He was in his 50s. No, he wasn't that old.

So at any rate, his wife must have been in rather good shape to have gone all the way, made it all the way to Bergen-Belsen.

Yes, she was. She was a very-- she became a very nervous woman, a very angry woman, very difficult. And she could have lived. She could have lived.

She could have lived by-- how do you mean that? She could have lived.

If she hadn't eaten those 3 pounds of pork and lard, she would have made it another three or four days and would have gotten some other food. She could have made it. But whatever somebody couldn't eat, she still took and ate, not only her own ration, everybody else's too. And that-- she just couldn't do it.

During this time particularly, were you ever blaming-- what were the things you've thought about sometimes, is evidence of anything? What were the things you--

I blame my parents for not going out of Germany when the going was still possible.

Did you think about it a lot or was it something that--

No, there was no point to it. It was too late. We could have all lived had we left. We could have all left at a given time. We didn't.

When your father obtained a visa, which he turned down because it was only a 3-day visa, was that for him alone?

No, for all of us, for all four of us.

At that point in time, that could have been the change-- turning point for you.

We could have gotten in the early '30s to Palestine.

So during the worst period of going from Auschwitz to the camps, the things you've thought about, did you ruminate about your past? Did you wonder what might have been? What where the--

No. No. The past was very far away, very distant. There was no point wasting energy on it. It would not come back. It would never be back. It was.

Did you know that? Did you make a conscious decision?

I knew that, yes.

You now that?

Yes. I didn't know whether there would be a tomorrow or a future. But I knew the past was gone. There was no retrieving it.

What do you think sustained your?

Age, youth. I don't know. A little bit of luck, some good friends, that's about it.

When you arrived in America, what happened to you?

I had a classmate who went to high school with me and who left for England in '39 and who stayed at our house prior to leaving. And she helped me. Her family took me in for two weeks. And she got me a job in a factory sewing gloves, which I hated. And I found a furnished room.

Where was this?

In New York.

In the City?

No, in Sunnyside, Queens. I made \$30 a week. And I paid \$5 on taxes, \$8 on rent, the rest on clothing, very little on food, the rest on clothing. I could live on a candy bar. But I needed clothing desperately.

Did you share with your experiences and what was the reaction?

Did people know--

No. No. No. Nobody knew. It was nobody's business.

Is something you didn't want to talk about it?

No, nobody asked me. Nobody really cared. And I didn't care to volunteer.

I'd like to go back just for a second to the day of liberation. It's been written that the British soldiers had no idea--

No--

When they came in.

No, they didn't.

Did the other-- did the other women around you, did they believe it? Was there--

Nobody believed it.

When did you know it was for real? When did you--

When they opened the-- well, first of all, they didn't let us out of the camp. They came in through the gate. And they asked for somebody to, please, speak English to them. And there were several of us who could. And then they asked questions. And then they told us that the Germans are gone, finished.

And then it sort of sank in. But it wasn't sort of a screaming, jubilant occasion. It wasn't. It was subdued.

It sounds like you were functioning and on your feet.

Sort of. I had two badly damaged kidneys. I was fighting, at the date of liberation, typhus. I--

Was that from dehydration?

No, I don't think so. I had kidney trouble already in the ghetto. I don't know what it's from. It's from the war, but not exactly what caused it.

I was on my feet, but that's about all you could say. My brain was working. My body was not functioning.

And I had a terrible, terrible trouble with, I don't know how you call it in English, these skin infections that go into huge boils that you have to lance. And they are caused in wars and from malnutrition. And you have them all over, on your neck, on your head, on your legs. It's very painful and very-- they leave horrible scars.

So these are the things that-- but compared to others, I was pretty much OK. You know, it's relative.

Where did you learn English?

I learned English in the-- bless you-- third or fourth grade. And I was very poor at it. And the English teacher who was English English called my parents to school and said, that kid is hopeless, get her a tutor, three times a week privately. And they did.

And after a year, I was straight A in English. It was no problem at all. I just said trouble catching on.

Did your parents speak English?

None at all. They spoke French, Polish, Russian. No English.

How did you keep up your English?

Well, I went to school until '41, and I used my English. I also had French and Latin, but not as much as English.

And once I had occasion in '45, I just decided to talk. It was more English than American. And I'm great at improvising. If a word-- if I miss a word, I will talk around it in any language, whether it's Polish or Hebrew or whatever it is. I'll talk around it.

You worked for the British army then at that point--

Mm, hmm.

Did they make you a soldier?

No, civilian employee.

You're a civilian employee. At that point, how long was it before you were taken out of Bergen-Belsen?

Well, I could have gone earlier. But I thought I would get papers directly to Bergen-Belsen to get out of there. I didn't realize that there really was no way of getting out of there because nothing went out of Germany. But I was waiting for my family to do something. I had two cousins in the army. So I assumed that somebody would take some action.

They took me out in December, November, December of '45, mainly because they were afraid somebody would kill me.

During that time, where did you live between the time of liberation--

They re-- well, not far from Bergen-Belsen was some permanent army housing, brick-type housing. It was sort of like you would imagine a college dormitory, individual rooms, and then a huge bathroom at the end and no kitchens. And they relocated us into that particular building.

There was--

One of those buildings. There were hundreds of them.

Did they have hot water? Or--

Yes, they did have hot water. They had toilets, but down the hall. And they put about six or eight people into one room.

After what you've been through, what was that like though? Was there still--

Well--

Was it a substantial improvement or were people still--

No, it was clean. It was very clean. There was food, not necessarily the food you wanted to eat. But very starchy food.

You had freedom. If you had a pass, you could get out of camp, which I did. I made friends with several English men and women in the English army.

How quickly did you regain your strength and your health?

My health I didn't regain for about 15 years. I needed a lot of work, including my teeth. Strength, superficially was back within a few months. I was bloated. I was about 150 pounds.

This is water?

The kidneys didn't function. The food wasn't right. But I did what I wanted to do. I worked. I did not want to go to doctors or to hospital. And I guess on a scale of 9 to 10-- 1 to 10, I probably came out 6 or 7 or 8 or something like that.

Now, why didn't you want to go to the doctors or the hospital?

Because there was this old fear still from the ghetto, if you were in the hospital, you were deported or something bad would happen. We could not imagine that a British Army hospital would be just what it was-- a hospital. We thought maybe they stack you up there one on top of the other and you just vegetate. So there was a great deal of mistrust, a great deal.

So, while you're speaking of distrust, and actually the whole emotional reaction to your experience, am I correct in saying that when you came to America and you didn't share this, that you were still not trusting?

No, I was very trusting. This was a country without prejudice, without discrimination, the country of the free. I trusted everybody.

And is that true? Did you find--

No. When I went for a job interview in Manhattan, I found out A Jew couldn't get a job, not in that particular office. So I was just devastated. I had not expected that.

Did you think about going to Palestine at that point?

No. No, not at that point. No. The family was too old fashioned, too European, too strong, both in numbers and opinions. And I really did not want to do battle.

You mentioned how they had all arranged everything.

Mm, hmm.

And you said you weren't going to do that. How much of that came from the fact you were 21? And how much of it came for the fact that--

It had nothing to do with 21, nothing at all. I could have been 17, and it wouldn't have made a difference.

Is it because after what all you've been through? You just--

Well, I lived on my own for five years. I'd been through hell and back. And while they were well-meaning and kind people, I could not have somebody control me to that extent. I'd been controlled for too long. I couldn't.

So you were living in New York. And you were working in a factory.

Mm, hmm.

And then what?

And then I met my husband at a party.

And how did that come about?

Somebody invited me for dinner, and he was there. And when he heard my name, he said, you were in the ghetto because somebody told him.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And I said, yes. And he said, did you meet the Eichengreens? I said, yes, I know them very well.

And one day we walked from Rego Park to Woodside. It takes about four hours. And I told him the story, just once, not a second time. And we went out a great deal. We went to concerts.

And then he said, go to school and learn to type. And I went to school and learned to type. And I took some college courses at Hunters College at night. But I still couldn't type. I just couldn't learn to type. I still type 100 words a minute, but with four fingers.

And then I got a job in an office, downtown Manhattan. They just wanted to be sure I knew English. And I said, I'll spell you any time. And I talked to the president of the company that used to make those electric trains. Lionel? That used to whistle. Probably your father played with it.

And I worked there. And they had a great many Jews in the office, practically all Jews. President was Jewish. And I became very friendly with the office manager. And she said, learn the Dictaphone. So I learned the Dictaphone.

And I had a very good job until 1949 when a friend of my husband's came from California to New York and said, come to San Francisco, I have a small factory. You work for me. So we packed up the car. We sold the two-room apartment and moved to California.

When did you get married?

'46. End of '46. And we moved to California. And in California, I worked for Westinghouse. And then I had the children, and I worked only a little bit part-time.

And then I went back to school, California College of Arts and Crafts. I did a lot of painting, a lot of art history. I loved it.

And when the kids were old enough to be till 3 o'clock in school, I went to Golden Gate College. And I got an insurance license and credentials. And I got a job. And I worked at that job-- well, between two jobs for 20 years. And I retired in '85-- '86.

And what was your husband's profession?

He was a businessman. He was in marketing. He had gone to school-- he had studied economics at the University of Brussels. And then he made the mistake and he went back to Germany. And he was arrested. And the family got him out with a forged visa to Cuba. And he was on one of the three boats-- one was turned back, the voyage of the damned, where he was on the one that landed the week before.

And he was a farmer in Cuba for two years. And then he came to New York. And he was drafted right away. And he was four years in the army overseas in intelligence. Of course, he speaks six languages, so he was intelligence.

You said that you didn't tell your children until they were much older.

When they took off for college, I told them where I was and when I was there, but no details.

Have they ever heard--

They've read them. They've read them. Once I've put them on paper, they've read them.

Do they ever--

They really don't, what should I say, they can't cope really with the past. The younger one was on a bike trip in Germany

when he was in graduate school. And he was in Munich. And the leader took them to Dachau. I said, did you find your grandfather's name? He said, yes, but he wouldn't talk.

The older one has been to Germany three times, once to Berlin, once to Kiel, and once, I think, to Konstanz on conferences. He's an economist. And he said, I can't relate to those people. They have to speak English because the language in economics is English. It's the only language that's spoken.

But he said, I can't cope with them. They obviously know I'm a Jew by that name. But nobody would dare and say something. And he goes in and out, a day, two days, out.

You mentioned that you've traveled--

Yeah, not to Germany.

But not to Germany.

Not to Germany.

But you've been back to--

I was in Germany back right after the war because I lived there.

But since you've been in America?

No.

Have you--

Been to Switzerland, France, Belgium, Holland, you name it, Scandinavia.

Have you been back to Poland too?

This May. It took me 50 years to go back. And it wasn't easy.

It took-- was it harder than you expected or easier than expected to go back? Or what were--

It was neither harder, nor easier. It was painful. The cemetery was painful. The ghetto was painful. The Jewish community of what exists of it, of the temples, of the synagogues, was pitiful. It was so-- it was not even a remnant. The poverty among the Jews is painful. Antisemitism is well in the life.

Was there a great deal of antisemitism as a child? Do you remember when--

Yes. Yes. This was one of the reasons my father said, Germany or France are much more civilized. And they don't have the pogroms that we have. And I want my kids to go up there. Well, he happened to have been wrong, but it was a good idea.

Do you remember-- did your father ever talk about the pogroms?

My mother did once. My mother, when I was quite young, told me that she was the youngest of eight children. She was very beautiful, small, black hair, brown eyes, white skin. And there was a warning in town, the Cossacks are coming, or there's going to be a pogrom.

So grandmother hid that youngest child, the youngest daughter. I guess the other one were hidden someplace else. I don't know. They hid the little one, must have been seven, in the kitchen stove. You know that old fashioned kitchen

stove?

And she told me that story. Now, I couldn't imagine what a pogrom was. I also didn't know what Cossacks were. I also didn't know what it means to kill Jews.

I listened to this. And then I said to my mother, it must have been summer. And she said, why? You couldn't have hidden in the stove otherwise.

So I had no concept. None. That came much later. I mean I didn't know about killing or persecuting.

What was your reaction to all the changes that occurred in Germany, like the Nuremberg laws?

Well, that was-- well, in a way it was frightening because you were exposed to it on a day-to-day basis. And the kids were harassed very much on street cars, on street corners. Yet it probably wasn't as frightening to me until 1939 as to some others because I still hid behind this foreign national.

And it gave you a false security. It gave you some larger food rations. But we were very aware of what was going on.

We did not wear a star until Poland lost the war. The other Jews did. We did not have to. So it was-- you were just fooling yourself. You were kidding yourself.

Were you subject to all the laws that the German Jews were subject to?

No. No, we did not have to hand in the silver. We did not have to hand in the gold. No, the Nuremberg laws did not apply to us until 1939.

I believe it was in 1939, all of the Jews in Germany had to change their name to Sarah and Israel--

No, didn't apply to us either, because we did not have German papers. So-- but the moment Poland lost the war on September '39, it was no difference. It's the same story. A Jew was a Jew.

Now, you started off in a Jewish school.

Mm, hmm.

Many German Jewish children were in--

Public schools--

Public schools and then were forced to--

They gradually-- we had an influx gradually of Jewish children. The later it got-- it started in '34 or '33. And the later it got, the small towns, the small, I wouldn't even say villages, small towns, very small towns, they had to take the children out immediately if they had four or five Jewish kids. The bigger towns, medium sized towns took a little longer. But eventually all kids had to get out of non-Jewish schools. And they were either, with their parents or without their parents, shipped into the larger cities to attend Jewish schools.

Were new Jewish schools created?

No, no, nothing. Nothing. They were closed, not created.

You mentioned your graduation. What was that like? Do you remember--

No, it wasn't like anything. You finished today. And tomorrow you didn't go back. That was it.

There was no ceremony? There was no--

There were very few of us in '41. And shortly thereafter, there was a law passed that the schools had to be closed permanently. So between that time and the time they had deported all the Jews, the kids had no education whatsoever, no schooling.

And as a high school student, children in the school, did you all talk about what was going on?

No, we only talked about going someplace, going to Palestine, going to Bolivia, even going to Madagascar. It was just a matter of going someplace wherever a door would be open.

So you-- so the children--

That was all that mattered. And the children were excited by it. It's exciting to go on a trip to go someplace.

I want to jump ahead for a second. There were something mentioned, it was an aside. The woman who was the kapo at Auschwitz--

Yeah.

You said you ran into her at Altman's.

Yeah, I was at Altman's, it must have been what, 1950, '51. In New York. And it was cold. It was fall. And I needed a pair of gloves. From California, you don't take gloves.

And I went into Altman's on Fifth Avenue. I was alone. I didn't go with friends. And I went to the glove counter, and I tried on gloves. And I couldn't decide whether to get red ones or black ones.

And there was a lady next to me, much taller than I, with very black hair, either natural or dyed, and sort of cut almost like a man's cut, very short, very striking, well dressed. And she was trying on gloves, and she smiled.

And I don't know why or what, but I turned and I looked at her. And she looked at me. And I said, Maya. It wasn't a question. It was a statement.

And she said, yes, how do you know? I said, Auschwitz. And she turned white. And she said, oh, I can explain, and, you know, I had to. And I wasn't really bad. And I didn't kill anybody. She just beat us. She didn't kill us. And it just sort of burst out of her that she really wasn't bad.

In English or in Polish?

No, in English. We spoke English. And I said, what about the SS that came at night to visit you? She didn't deny it. And then I looked at her hands and she wore a wedding band. And I said, you're married? She said, yes. I said, whom did you marry?

I don't know-- I'm not normally that fresh or that nosy. And she didn't answer. And she didn't answer. And I said, not the SS. And she said, yes. He followed me from camp to camp in occupied Germany. I couldn't get rid of him. He even followed me to New York. And then I decided that there was no point running away from him. He's really quite a decent sort. And we both have our past.

And I looked at her. And I said, do you have children? She said, no. I said, I pity them. I hope you never have them. And I turned and I walked.

And for the rest of the day, what did you--

Oh, the rest of the day, I just-- my girlfriend, I went back to my girlfriend's house in Manhattan. And she said, what's the matter with you? I said, I just saw a nightmare walking through Altman's. She said, put it out of your mind. It won't help. You can call up the FBI and report her if you want. And I said, no.

You also-- didn't you also ran into that jobs commissioner--

Yeah--

--on the street.

Yeah.

And you didn't want to do anything. Why was that?

A Jew is a Jew. To point a finger at another Jew is very hard for me. Some of us are guilty. Some of us are very guilty. Some of us are clean. Some of us are not so clean.

I got off that train. Maybe somebody went in my place. I don't know. I couldn't point a finger at another Jew. I might detest them. I might not like him. But unless he really killed another human being, I would not point a finger. I can't.

Did this woman and this man, did they have reason to fear you? I mean were there--

Yes--

--thing that you could have used truly--

Yes. Yes.

--make them deportable?

He definitely. He definitely. She, to some extent.

Then why did the jobs commissioner run? From shame?

Well, he drew up some lists for deportation. They came out of his office. He was very arrogant. He was very unpleasant, very unsympathetic. And you don't open a door for a 16-year-old and yell like a German. You just don't do that.

He was born in Hanover. He went to school in Hanover until he was about 18. And then he was pushed over the border in '38 to Poland. And he just thought the world was his.

And it turned out this way. His wife lived next door to us in the ghetto. She was married to a policeman. She divorced him. She married him. He came to New York. He changed his name. Do you what his name was?

In the ghetto?

Yeah.

That's a matter of record. Bernard Fuchs. I mean that's his sister was Dora Fuchs. I mean that's in the books.

Yes.

OK. That's a matter of record. He came to New York. He was a very good job, either import, export, I'm not sure. He lives out in a very affluent neighborhood. He has two children. He stays away from the Jewish community. He does not

give interviews. And if he does, his wife runs interference. She is a lot smarter than he is.

Is his wife a survivor?

Yeah, mm, hmm.

Does she know the truth about him?

Hmm?

Do you think she knows the truth about him or--

Oh, yes, she knew. She married him in the ghetto.

She married him-- she knew--

It was practical to marry him. I mean he had all the worldly needs that you needed at that time-- food and housing and clothing and-- no, she was very well off.

So he avoids interviews?

Oh, yes, Lucjan Dobroszycki set up an interview with them. And he came. And the moment he asked the question and Fuchs started to answer, his wife ran interference, to the point that you couldn't even talk. So Lucjan gave up. And he's pretty determined.

What happened to Dora?

Dora died. She married one of the Jakupovic brothers, the younger one, who also were ghetto administration. And she died after the war. Probably New York, I'm not entirely sure. But she was nasty. She was very sure of herself, very good looking.

She could not stand another woman in her presence. And once when I applied for a job in the offices, because I spoke German, she couldn't get me out there fast enough. She was not pleasant. But she was smart. She had a brain.

What was her job in the ghetto?

She was a right hand to Rumkowski, both in language and in execution because she could run interference with the Germans. And she could translate for him. And--

Do you think her looks had anything to do with it?

She was not a raving beauty. She was good looking, but not-- nothing exceptional. No, I don't think so. I think she just was very, very bright and very smart. And she had the ability to juggle the two languages that were needed at that point. And she was at the ghetto at the start, when it was first founded, whatever you want to call it.

For the record, not that I've run across any, but were there any Gentiles who helped any of the Jews in the ghetto? Or the--

There were no Gentiles in the ghetto.

But who helped in any kind of way or anything like this. Was there any kind of-- was anybody ever-- was there any ever mention of help--

You couldn't get near the barbed wire. If you came close too close to the barbed wire, they shot.

What about your family when it lived in Germany between the time when your father was deported and you were deported, was there any help from outside Gentile business friends at all?

No.

None.

There were two or three instances that you might construe as help. My father had a lawyer who took care of the real estate and things of that sort. And when they blocked our account and gave us \$100 a month to live on or whatever it was, he would sort of put in a bill for a plumber or something to smuggle some money out for us. It was our money, but we couldn't get at it. That was the sum total of help we got from him.

The man who packed our belongings and shipped them in huge, huge crates, sort of containers, to Israel, to Palestine, I wrote him a postcard from the ghetto. We left him also some money to set a stone on my father's grave, or the ashes, or whatever it is. And he sent 20 marks to the ghetto. After the war when I was in New York, he reminded me of it. And I sent more than \$20 worth of food to him.

And then when we worked in the shipyards clearing up, and I had this enormous infection on the left hand, the man who ran the canteen used to have a shop not far from the area where my father had the wine cellars. And he seemed to-- he said he remembered him. I don't know. It was a working class neighborhood. It was not a residential neighborhood. On the 1st of May, you saw red flags only, not a national flag-- until Hitler, of course.

He said he remembered my father, or my father once gave him a bottle of wine. I'm not sure. He took me into the kitchen for three days. And he made me eat everything that I could just possibly swallow, which was difficult because you couldn't eat. He didn't let me take anything out because it was dangerous.

And he gave me an old torn leather jacket. And I never saw him again. I don't have his name. And I think these are the only instances that I could tell you that even remotely resembled help.

Well, on the same vein, through the rest of your internment in the ghetto and in the concentration camps see any display of compassion whatsoever by SS?

There was in return for favors. The camp at Sasel had a Jewish camp leader. She was the head of the Jewish group. And she had one of the corporals of the SS from another camp come every week to visit and bring food but she paid for it in return.

How did she pay?

Oh, he locked up some-- they locked themselves up in some storage room or something, sex. There were occasionally some people who would, when we marched, that would drop an apple or something.

But was it dangerous for them to do so?

Probably. Probably. But the Germans are not known for courage, danger or no danger. That is not their strong point.

There was, I would say-- I can't say there was no compassion at all. But there was so little it was pitiful.

At the end of the war, were you embittered? Or were you just--

I was angry. I was terribly angry.

How did you deal with your anger? What did you do to--

I worked for the English and let them tell me when to be angry and not to be angry. That was easier. I was angry. I was terribly impatient. I walked into the police headquarters in Hamburg and asked them for a duplicate of a birth certificate, like city hall. And they said, come back tomorrow. I said, you're out of your mind. Not only do I want it today. I want it now. I give you 5 minutes.

Luckily, I didn't go alone. I went with an English officer. I said, slam the gun on the table. And he did. And I had my birth certificate. So--

You had a chance to work out some of your anger--

Some of my anger. I still don't like the Germans. I see them in an elevator in France or I see them in Italy in a restaurant in their noisy, ugly way, I still don't like them, especially my generation.

Have you been invited back by Hamburg?

Mm, hmm.

Will you go?

I did go for two days because my son was in Paris and he said, I want to see. So he came and he lasted one day. I didn't last that long. And we flew out into Paris. I couldn't. I couldn't last.

I couldn't stomach the people. The places I could cope with. I could not cope with today's bureaucracy. I could also not cope with Hamburg's Jews. I went to the synagogue. And I could not cope with them.

They are-- they're different. There are a lot of Iranian Jews there, some German Jews. On a national basis, they're assimilated, not on a religious basis. They have made their peace. I don't know whether they ever have heard about not forgetting. I'm not talking about forgiving. This is unforgivable. But about not forgetting.

The girl who worked in the office with me in the camps lived for 30 years in Hamburg. She married a Jewish boy from Poland. And she lived in Hamburg and had a child there.

There's something wrong with the people. When they picked us up at the airport, they picked us up with Secret Service. Now, I wanted to know whether I needed to be protected from the Germans or the Germans for me. That never was quite clear. But I do not like a guard. I don't like a guard any place. I take my chances.

The hotel was sort of a Holiday Inn type hotel. I figured if you invite somebody, you either put them up at the Fairmont or not at all. The mayor of the city is the brother of the conductor von Dohnányi-- was. He was a conductor of the-- he's a well-known conductor. He's well educated. His father was a German officer. He was killed in the overthrow attempt at Hitler, but he did not put in an appearance. Jews were not important enough.

His substitute made a statement to the effect that the past is past, and what happened happened. We can only sincerely trust that it won't repeat itself. I found that unacceptable. And I said so right then and there. I made more enemies than I made friends in one day.

You stood up. Was this after he spoke? Or how did you--

Yeah, I stood up afterwards. I refused to be filmed. Whenever the newsreel came near, I turned my back. I did not want to be on television.

I sat between two gentlemen at the luncheon, not that I could eat. I couldn't. One of them was a friend of Adenauer. He was instrumental in the peace treaty or financial arrangements between Germany and Israel. He knew Ben-Gurion. He knew everybody, anybody worthwhile knowing. He must have been in his 70s. He also went to school with a friend of mine in Berkeley. And he threw names around rather liberally. He died a couple of years ago.

My question to him was, what did you do from 1933 to 1945? And he didn't want to answer. And I didn't let go.

And he said, I sold sewing machine. And I said, and that from a Social Democrat or a communist in your youth, do you find that acceptable? I find that totally unacceptable. So that killed the conversation on the right side.

On the left side was a young man. And he was like, what do you call it, in city government, a councilman or something like that. His claim to fame was that his father was a high ranking officer, and he now married his Jewish girlfriend. He was probably 40-ish, probably 10 years younger than I was at the time, maybe a little older.

He lived in the suburb where one of the camps was. He was aware of it. He sent me a brochure that the teachers of the local high school had put together from the interviewing that they had done of the local population. It was full of errors, full of flaws. Even the diagram of the camp was flawed. I made corrections, and I sent them back. And I said, if somebody does research, why don't they talk to some Jews instead of some Germans. I never heard again.

You said about forgiveness, what is your stand on forgiving?

Forgiving whom?

Well, the Germans, your parents.

My parents, I've never accused of anything.

Never felt--

No--

Never felt resentment?

No. No. They did the best they knew how to do. There is no feeling of any kind of resentment.

The Germans, I try to keep an open mind towards the young ones, although it's difficult to do. I've met four of them recently in Berkeley. And the lack of knowledge and the lack of reading that they have done on the subject is appalling. The older ones, there is no forgiving, no forgetting, not for me.

But I don't hate. You can't live a life and keep on hating. But no forgiving, no forgetting.

You said you were angry. How long do you think you really carried a lot of anger with you?

I think it ceased the moment I hit New York. I got away from "them," in quotation marks. And there was no time. I was just too busy to adjust to work, to learn, to-- there was no time to be either angry or anything else.

And you still keep in touch with Colonel Alexander?

Of course. Of course.

Is your husband jealous?

No. They come here. He's married. They come here. We go there. His daughter stays with us when she comes.

And Ellie?

Ellie lives in a kibbutz in Israel. Ellie has no recollection of the past. If you ask her, do you remember our friend such much? Or do you remember the street going this way? No. No. Her answer is no. Nothing. But I think it's a defense

mechanism. I think she doesn't want to because once in a while it's something slips inadvertently.

Ellie's brother in England who defected from Prague after the war, he remembers. But he was very shallow, very fun loving, was a cute kid. He's still the same Irwin. We see each other. We say hello for old time's sake, but there's no substance. We have nothing in common.

And you kept in touch with Spiegel until he died?

Yeah, we-- well, we saw him 10 times. We went to Israel the first time in '63 with the children. He wrote me in Yiddish. I wrote back in English. He wrote about once a month. We phoned about twice, three times a year, the last time in January, I think it was, for his birthday.

We also have different memories. Some of the things he remembers, I don't and vice versa. He swears that he took me to the shoes factory in the ghetto. And he got me a pair of shoes I swear equally much that I never got a pair of shoes.

He also swears that he got to Auschwitz in October or November of '44 and he saw me in a rag pushing a wagon. I never pushed a wagon in Auschwitz. And I wasn't there in November of '44. So the mind after 50 years is strange.

We decided when I was there April a year ago that we'll just let it rest. I believe what I believe. He believes what he believes.

Does he end up with his wife?

No. She was killed in Mauthausen. He remarried a schoolteacher after the war, very nice woman. But she has Alzheimer's. She's very sick.

When we were there in April a year ago, we took a walk in the garden. And he said something-- and he speaks in a-- or he used to speak in a very low voice. And I said say it louder or walk on my right side, not on my left side. And he said, you still don't hear? No, I still don't hear. And he said, couldn't they fix it? I said, no, they couldn't fix.

He said, what actually happened? You were at the Gestapo and they beat you. Why did they beat you? I said, I was denounced. And he said, denounce? For what? I said, a radio. I never had a radio. Who would do such a thing?

And I looked at him a long time. And I said either I tell him now or I'll never tell him. I'll go with it to my grave. And I said, Renya, which was his first wife. He said, she did? I said, yes.

And he looked at me for a long time. And he said, she could do things like that. But I ask you for a favor. Forgive her. I didn't answer because she's dead. Whether I forgive her or not is immaterial to her. And to me, maybe I should. I don't know.

I understand that you are writing a book.

Yes.

What do you hope to achieve by writing your memoirs?

Just to tell-- the stories are all pretty much alike, yet they're all different. Just to tell one more story, I think. I don't write it for my kids, certainly not for my husband.

Will your children read it?

Yeah, my son, in fact, corrected one chapter. At least, he attempted. It's not his field. But he attempted. And then we disagreed, so-- but it was an interesting experiment.

I've given some chapters to some people whose opinion I would value, such as Elie Wiesel, Lucjan Dobroszycki, Cynthia Ozick. And the reaction has been very good. So I hope.

I also have a friend who is a professor of creative writing and literature. And she does some editing, which helps a great deal. You know, just the-- not the content, but just the mechanical parts. So maybe. I don't know. We'll see.

Well, I think that should do it. I think if your book is anything like your interview, it will be a wonderful book and a great addition to the literature. I want to thank you very much.

You're welcome.

Did you bring some photographs with you by any chance?

Mm, hmm.

Well, I'd love to get a few shots of those at the end here if that's possible. It takes us a few seconds to get the tape rolling here. You see on the screen-- OK, why don't you tell us who this is and when the take was?

OK, this is my mother and I in 1925.

And so where would that have been taken?

In Hamburg, Germany.

OK, very good. Rolling again. OK.

This is my sister Karin in 1936, her first school day in Hamburg, Germany.

And she would have been how old then?

Six years old.

Six years old.

And what is she holding?

On the first school day, European custom is when you are picked up from school, you get your picture taken and a huge tube full of sweets to make it a sweet school year.

And what is this? Who is this?

And this is I in Hamburg, Germany in 1930, first school day.

First school.

And the name of your school was? Israelische Madchen Schule, Karolinenstrasse.

OK. We're good. Sure, go ahead. Whatever--

I'll take this.

More family. OK. Tell us about this please.

This is 1926 with my parents in Poland. It is not at the beach in spite of the sand and the bucket that was in the

photographer's studio. It was just dummied up.

You were a year old here?

Just about.

OK. Very good. OK. Please--

This was, I believe, in Germany in 1929. I was about four years old.

OK. OK, so tell us about this.

This is my father in 1939 in Hamburg just before the outbreak of the war.

How old is he in this picture? Do you know?

Yes. He was born in '92. So he was 47 years old.

OK.

This is my sister in Hamburg in 1939. This is also in Hamburg. That's my picture in 1939.

All right, tell us about this, please.

This was taken in 1933 in Bad Schwartau in Germany just after Hitler came to power. It's my sister and I.

And where were you at this-- in this shot here?

I'm the taller one.

I mean, is this someone's house? Or--

That was in a resort in Bad Schwartau.

All right. Tell us about this, please.

This was in a park in 1939. I had just received a camera. And it was near Hamburg, Germany. And we were all dressed up. I think we were going to services. But I'm not sure.

And left to right, who--

On the right is my sister, my mother in the center, and I on the left.

You were eventually taller than your mother.

I really can't say because I was 16 when she died.